



ILCMA Winter Conference 2025 Speaker Bios

GISELLA AITKEN-SHADLE

Dr. Aitken-Shadle serves as the Chief of Equity and Human Rights for the City of Dubuque. She is a certified John Maxwell Executive and Corporate Trainer, Speaker and Coach and an EQ Coach through Six Seconds. Prior to her work for the City, she served as District Adult Education and Literacy Development Director for Northeast Iowa Community College. Gisella completed her Doctor of Education degree in Leadership for Organizations at the University of Dayton. In addition, she serves on the board of the United Way of Dubuque Area Tri-States. She formerly served on the board of the Dubuque Multicultural Family Center, the Equity Committee of the Dubuque Community School District, and the Greater Dubuque Development Corporation. She was named a 2021 Rising Star by the Dubuque Telegraph Herald.

BETSY ALLEN-MANNING

Betsy is featured on FOX, CBS, ABC, NBC, and TEDx and is an internationally recognized leadership speaker, best-selling author, researcher, and company culture expert. She is the founder of Destination Workplace™, an award-winning firm specializing in leadership development, talent retention, and creating workplace cultures that attract and engage high-performing teams.

With expertise in human behavior, experience leading at 5-star hotels, and a proven track record of training over 15,000 leaders and teams—from small businesses to global powerhouses like Toshiba, Aflac, Baylor Health, and the U.S. Department of Defense—Betsy delivers data-driven strategies to help organizations succeed.

Her mission is to help organizations develop a workplace culture with purpose, accountability, and loyalty, transforming them into employers of choice. Whether you're looking for corporate leadership training, employee retention strategies, or workplace culture transformation, Betsy delivers proven research and solutions that work.

CARLEE ALM-LABAR

Carlee is the Chief of Staff for Strong Towns. Carlee has become a champion for strong communities and civic engagement through her work in Lafayette, Louisiana. She has held senior leadership roles in local government and nonprofit organizations. When she's not with her husband, Will, or dog, Jozy, she spends her spare time volunteering with a variety of local organizations that build connections between people and empower local residents. Carlee graduated Magna Cum Laude from Northwestern

University and holds a master's degree in Public Administration from Louisiana State University.

CORI BURBACH

Cori was appointed assistant city manager in September 2017. As assistant city manager, she assists the city manager in directing the day-to-day operations of the City government, acts as city manager in his absence, and exercises general supervision over all functions and activities of the City when acting for the city manager. An additional major responsibility of the position will be creating a more data-driven, high-performance organization focusing on outcomes and not outputs and including cross-departmental cooperation and integration with performance measurement and evaluation. Cori previously served as the City's sustainable community coordinator since September 2009. Before being named sustainable community coordinator, Cori worked in local governments in Iowa, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania and Delaware.

DAVID COOK

David has served as the first Executive Director of the Intergovernmental Personnel Benefit Cooperative (IPBC) since July 2013. Previously David worked in local government throughout Illinois for 29 years and retired as the Village Manager of Hinsdale in 2013. David has a Bachelor of Science degree in Accounting from Eastern Illinois University. David has previously served as Chairman of the Illinois Metropolitan Investment Fund and President of the Illinois Government Finance Officers Association. He currently resides in Lake Villa, Illinois along with his husband Brian.

LOWELL CROW

Lowell graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1984 and has over 30 years' experience in the Navy where he served as a Surface Warfare Officer and retired as a Navy Captain. He then proceeded into City management where he served for eight years' experience in local government in the State of Illinois and retired from City Management in 2022.

After Lowell served as the City Manager in Centralia, Illinois, he became the first City Manager for Freeport, Illinois and then served as the City Administrator in Monmouth, Illinois. During his time in Freeport, he also served on the Board of Directors for Illinois City and County Management Association (ILCMA) and as the Downstate President for ILCMA in 2017. In 2019 he was awarded Illinois Service to the Profession award.

Lowell has a Bachelor of Science degree in Applied Science from USNA, a Master of Science in Military Arts and History from the Marine Corps University and a Master of Public Administration from Old Dominion University. His service awards include Legion of Merit (three Awards), Defense Meritorious Service Medal (Two Awards) Navy Meritorious Service Medal (three awards), Joint Commendation Medal, Navy Commendation Medal (five awards) and Navy Achievement Medal (Five Awards).

Lowell is currently serving as President of the Greater St Louis Chapter of the USNA Alumni Association, Secretary of the O'Fallon Illinois Rotary Club, Assistant Director for Southern Illinois for the Veterans Golf Association and as one of the Blue and Gold Officers for Southern Illinois. He lives in O'Fallon, Illinois.

JASON CUMMINGS

Jason is an advocate in the cloud and emerging technology space. At Google Public Sector, he leads Local Government, K-12 and Higher Education for Illinois. Jason cultivates relationships with leaders to understand their strategic goals and where they are on their transformation journey. He finds joy in being a thoughtful collaborator who can bring the full power of Google to help government institutions harness cloud technology to drive outcomes that can optimize operational effectiveness and enhance the delivery of services to their residents.

JOHN DUROCHER

John is a Navy Vet, having served onboard the USS Paul (FF-1080) as a Lieutenant Junior Grade from 1984-1986 serving primarily as the Electronics Materials/Warfare/Intelligence Officer. He received his MPA from NIU in May of 1989 and started his first manager's job in the Village of Montgomery at that time as their first Administrator. Following stints at the City of Wilmington (again their first administrator), the Northwest Water Commission (Executive Director), and finally the Village of Indian Head Park. He is now serving as a Senior Advisor to this great association and as the Interim Village Administrator for Forest View, Illinois. His superpowers include sarcasm and causing ropes/lines/cords to get tangled in his presence.

ELLIOT EISENBERG

Elliot Eisenberg, Ph.D. is an internationally acclaimed economist and public speaker specializing in making economics fun, relevant and educational. Dr. Eisenberg earned a B.A. in economics with first class honors from McGill University in Montreal, as well as a Master and Ph.D. in public administration from Syracuse University. Eisenberg is the Chief Economist for GraphsandLaughs, LLC, a Miami-based economic consultancy that serves a variety of clients across the United States. He writes a syndicated column and authors a daily 70-word commentary on the economy that is available at www.econ70.com.

Dr. Eisenberg has spoken hundreds of business groups and associations, serving as keynote speaker on topics including economic forecasts, economic impact of industries such as homebuilding, consequences of government regulation, and other current economic issues. Dr. Eisenberg has been invited to testify before lawmakers and is often asked to comment on proposed legislation. His research and opinions have been featured in Bloomberg Businessweek, Bureau of National Affairs, Forbes, Fortune, and many other publications. He is a regularly featured guest on talk, and public radio.

Dr. Eisenberg was formerly a Senior Economist with the National Association of Home Builders in Washington, D.C. He is the creator of the multifamily stock index (the first

nationally recognized index to track the total return of public firms principally involved in the ownership and management of apartments), the author of more than 100 articles, serves on the Expert Advisory Board of Mortgage Market Guide and is a regular consultant to several large real estate professional associations, financial institutions and investment advisory groups.

Elliot's interests include walking at least five miles a day and reading as many newspapers as he can get his hands on. He loves ice hockey and talking economics with crowds large and small!

MEGAN FORRISTALL

Megan is a Public Affairs Specialist for Social Security covering 17 offices in Northern and North Central Illinois. She is based in Peru, Illinois and has been with the agency for almost 20 years.

REBECCA GILL

Rebecca has worked in the public sector retirement plans business for over 30 years focusing on retirement savings and financial planning for public sector employees. Currently serving as Vice President of Institutional Sales at MissionSquare Retirement, Rebecca leverages her extensive experience to promote governmental supplemental retirement plans, including 457(b) deferred compensation plans, 401(a) defined contribution plans, and Health Reimbursement Arrangements (HRA's) – all with the goal of helping public employees have a more secure financial future.

During her career, she has served as a subject matter expert on Health Reimbursement Arrangements and has assisted plan sponsors and union groups through the process of plan design. Rebecca is a Certified Retirement Counselor and holds several industry-related licenses and designations, including FINRA Series 6, 7, 63, and 65, as well as Life, Health, and Variable Annuity Insurance Designations.

She has a Bachelor of Science in Applied Communication and a Bachelor of Arts in Interpersonal and Organizational Communication.

In addition to her professional achievements, Rebecca is actively involved in volunteer work, supporting causes such as the Inflammatory Breast Cancer Network Foundation.

RON HOLIFIELD

Ron served almost two decades in City Management, including Assistant City Manager in Plano, Texas, as well as City Manager in Garland, DeSoto, Farmersville and Sundown, and on the City Manager's staff in Lubbock, Texas. In 1996, he left city management and purchased Government Relations Specialists, where he provided strategic marketing consultation for many of the leading corporations in America, including Space Imaging, American Express, IBM, Xerox and over 50 other Fortune 500 companies, as well as NASA.

In 1999, Ron sold that company and founded Strategic Government Resources to specialize in Recruiting, Assessing and Developing Innovative, Collaborative, Authentic Leaders for local governments nationwide.

Today, Ron speaks at over 50 state and national conferences and workshops each year and remains high profile in the city management profession. SGR is the third largest local government executive search firm in the nation, operates the second largest local government job board in the nation, and provides live and online leadership development to more local government executives and midlevel managers than any other company in the nation.

Ron holds a Bachelor of Arts in Government from Abilene Christian University and a Master of Public Administration from Texas Tech University.

DOUG KRIEGER

Doug was hired as the City of Naperville's City Manager in December 2008. Doug had previously served as the Director of Finance for the City of Naperville for five and a half years. Prior to joining the City in 2003, Doug spent nine years with PricewaterhouseCoopers, LLC and Coopers & Lybrand LLP in the Audit and Business Assurance Services group. Doug's specialization during that time was in the governmental, manufacturing and casino gaming sectors. Doug also spent two years as a Telecommunications Consultant for Booz Allen & Hamilton in the firm's Falls Church, Virginia office, working with various federal agencies. Prior to that, Doug served as a naval officer in the submarine service of the U.S. Navy. Doug received a Bachelor of Science degree with Merit in Political Science from the U.S. Naval Academy and his MBA with concentrations in Finance and Accounting from the University of Chicago. Doug has lived in Naperville for the last 31 years and has two children.

SCOTT LESNICK

Scott is a Global Leadership Keynote Speaker. He presents powerful keynotes, training and interactive sessions at 40+ events a year and is an author. Also, Scott earned his CSP - Certified Speaking Professional from the National Speakers Association. Only 12% of speakers world-wide have this designation! Scott is also a Certified Virtual Presenter.

Scott recently presented at TEDx. And, he's run the equivalent of 2X around the planet. That's 50,000 miles!

In addition, Scott spent 24 award-winning sales and management years at Shaw Industries a Berkshire Hathaway Fortune 500 company.

Scott served as the Dean of the Academy for Professional Speakers in 2016-17. He is a graduate of The University of Miami, Florida.

His memoir, "Kidjacked – A Father's Story" and his book Lifejacked: Life Lessons on Leadership were published to critical acclaim.

GENE LEYNES

Gene has been at the forefront of smart city innovation for more than a decade within the City of Chicago's Department of Technology and Innovation. Since 2023 he has led the charge in developing the city's AI Policy framework as co-author of Chicago's first AI Roadmap. Gene also represents Chicago in the GovAI Coalition and was a contributing author on the creation of the AI Policy and AI Policy Manual templates published in March 2024.

Gene established the AI Committee within the City of Chicago in 2024, bringing together innovators and thought leaders across departments and sister agencies. He champions the ethical, sustainable, and innovative use of AI and machine learning and is passionate about ensuring that AI serves as a force for good in urban environments.

Before joining the City of Chicago, Gene consulted in actuarial science and risk management, and later in data science. He holds a degree in Mathematics from DePaul University and a Master of Business Administration from the University of Chicago.

MICHAEL PEGUES

Michael is the Chief Information Officer for the City of Aurora, Michael leads the IT Department, overseeing a strategic plan for technology services in Illinois' second-largest city. He champions technological advancement, enhancing cybersecurity, driving economic growth, nurturing STEM education, and improving services for residents and businesses. He manages a \$10 million budget and leads a team of over 45 professionals. His leadership in Smart Cities initiatives underscores Aurora's resilience and security globally.

MEAGHAN PRICE

Meaghan has worked at IMRF for the past 10 years. She started as a Member Contact Center Representative, worked as an Employer Compliance Associate, and now as a Member Education Counselor.

KATHLEEN YANG-CLAYTON

Dr. Kathleen Yang-Clayton is an applied scholar of organizational change and performance management in the public sector. She has taught at the University of Chicago and the University of Illinois at Chicago, holding faculty and administrative leadership positions in higher education and nonprofits. She is a Senior Research Fellow at the Great Cities Institute and a member of several national initiatives that integrate public administration and equity, including the Kettering Foundation, the National League of Cities, and the International City/County Management Association. Her current work focuses on the operationalization of equity practices inside of large public organizations. This work aims to increase the public's trust in government and improve government performance. Dr. Yang-Clayton graduated from the University of Chicago with her undergraduate degree in political science and doctorate in sociology, the University of Arizona with her masters in Agricultural and Natural Resource Economics and is a proud graduate of the

Chicago Public Schools. Dr. Yang-Clayton has published scholarly and professional articles on organizational change and has worked with over 20 local government entities to improve government performance within an equity framework. She holds numerous certifications including those in emotional intelligence coaching and community based participatory action research.