ILLINOIS ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND SMALL BUSINESS GROWTH ASSOCIATION STATE CONFERENCE

URBANMAIN

The Real Main Street Urban & Rural “Makers & Doers”

May 17-19, 2023
Hyatt Place Champaign-Urbana

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ILINOIS PTAC

Illinois Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity
SBA U.S. Small Business Administration

Illinois Entrepreneurship & Small Business Growth Association
International Trade Center
WELCOME, ATTENDEES!

2023 IESBGA CONFERENCE

Thank you for all you do to educate and counsel the entrepreneurial sector. We’re proud to be associated with such an impressive roster of business advisors!

After the conference, we hope you’ll remember to include the SBA 504 Loan Program in your arsenal of resources. This program expands capital access for America’s small businesses and fills a market gap in long-term financing. The interest rates with 504 Loans are fixed for the life of the loan, and the terms extend as long as 25 years. That’s why the 504 Loan Program is extremely successful in helping small businesses kick-start growth and advance to the next level in an affordable way!

*Growth Corp is honored to serve as the new host location for the Illinois SBDC for Central Illinois!*

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The Illinois Entrepreneurship and Small Business Growth Association would like to thank the 2023 Conference Sponsors:

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Illinois Procurement Technical Assistance Centers (PTAC)
U.S. Small Business Administration
Growth Corporation — Platinum Sponsor
GrowthWheel International, Inc. — Gold Sponsor
Champaign County EDC — Gold Sponsor

Certification Hours
Certification hours will be available for each session. A listing of all participants registered prior to May 10th will be available in each general session and workshop. To receive credit for attending the session, please initial next to your name. If your registration was received after May 8th, please print your name on a blank line provided at the end of each sheet.
WednesDay, May 17, 2023

9:00 AM Registration / Check-in

9:00 AM–10:00 AM IESBGA Executive Committee Meeting
   Ballroom

10:30 AM–12:00 PM Illinois SBDC Advisor Board Meeting
   Ballroom

11:00 AM–12:00 PM IESBGA Committee Meetings
   Ballroom

12:30 PM–1:45 PM General Session I — Welcome, Annual IESBGA Meeting and Lunch
   Ballrooms A / B / C / D

1:45 PM–2:15 PM Break

2:15 PM–3:45 PM Session I Workshops

1) What’s New in the GrowthWheel World
   Elizabeth Binning, GrowthWheel International
   Ballroom A

   With new updates coming out every month from GrowthWheel, it can be tough to keep up with the
   latest and greatest. In this session we will review software updates from the past year and look at the
   roadmap for the year to come. Also, advisors will get the opportunity to exchange best practices and
   engage in a brainstorm about future features they would like to see.

   A former SBDC Director, Elizabeth Binning, Head of Training and Learning with GrowthWheel, advised entrepreneurs for 19
   years. Elizabeth has many professional designations including Society of Human Resources Senior Certified Professional, Prosci Certified Change
   Manager, NASBITE Certified Global Business Professional, and InBIA Incubator Manager. Today she trains business coaches and advisors from
   around the world and presents at various international conferences. With a lifelong interest in how people and organizations change,
   Elizabeth earned her master’s degree in Counseling Psychology and worked in various entrepreneurial support organizations. During the
   eight years she worked at Bradley University, Elizabeth worked with a number of business outreach centers including the Center for Executive
   and Professional Development, Leadership Development Center, and the Turner Center for Entrepreneurship. She then served as the Director of the Illinois Small Business
   Development Center at Illinois State University for eleven years. Elizabeth has served on many
professional boards including as President of the Illinois Entrepreneurship and Small Business Growth Association from 2009-2011. She served her community on various boards as well, including the Economic Development Council of Bloomington-Normal, Professional Women of McLean County, Bloomington-Normal YMCA, Lake Bloomington Association, Easter Seals' TimberPointe Charitable Foundation and McLean County Chamber of Commerce. In September 2006, the Pantagraph newspaper named Elizabeth one of the "20 under 40" most influential community leaders in McLean County. In 2007 she was nominated for both the YWCA Women of Distinction and McLean County Chamber of Commerce Athena Award. As the lead trainer in North America, Elizabeth creates content for monthly webinars, GrowthWheel’s online certification academy, and various conferences presentations.

Facilitator: Brett Whitnel

2) Advantage Illinois
Robert Owens, Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity
Ballroom B

The Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) has a program called Advantage Illinois. This program is a participation loan program that assists small businesses with obtaining financing when they have obstacles such as no or insufficient cash flow history, equity or collateral shortfalls, or negative net worth, to name a few. Additionally, DCEO participates with these approved lenders to help the borrower obtain a lower rate than they could otherwise.

Bob Owens has worked in business development for nearly twenty years. He owned and operated his own investment firm while assisting his producers build their own practices. He developed successful agencies across the country as a mentor and business coach. He most recently joined DCEO in 2023 as a Business Development Specialist helping small businesses throughout the State of Illinois obtain financing through a variety of lenders.

Facilitator: Jo Ann DiMaggio May

3) Understanding Cultural Differences
Diana Alfaro, Edwin Tumlos and Michelle Lura White, IL Dept. of Commerce & Economic Opportunity
Matthew Simpson, IL Office of Minority Economic Empowerment
Ballroom C

A panel discussion on understanding what should be taken into consideration in marketing, outreach, establishing, and maintaining relationships while providing technical assistance services to different communities and demographics. What are some best practices that can be implemented to bridge the gap? How can we ensure we meet the needs of the communities we serve?

Diana Alfaro, Latinx Business Development Manager for the Illinois Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity – Office of Minority Economic Empowerment (OMEE) is an equity driven individual. At the state, she has spent her time supporting and empowering marginalized owned businesses such as minorities, women, persons with disabilities, veterans, Arab/MENA, and LGBTQIA+. Positioned with a strong focus on Latinx/o/a and Hispanic owned businesses. Diana has created initiatives and modules that have been replicated to assist in strengthening the business ecosystem. She works on conducting intentional outreach, serving as a bridge for business owners, creating programs, and removing systemic barriers. Diana is passionate about supporting small businesses as
they are vital in building a strong economy. Diana is a detailed oriented, well-organized, and quality driven professional with a proven record of over seven years of experience with community outreach and twelve years of experience in federal regulation compliance. Diana has a Bachelor's of Arts in Political Science and Latin American/Latino Studies and Master's of Science in International Public Service from DePaul University.

**Matt Simpson** is a father and Community Development Strategist based in Rockford, Illinois. He has 13 years of experience working in economic development, neighborhood level community development and public administration. His passion for entrepreneurship and business development lead him to the role he occupies today – African American Business Development Manager with the IL Dept. of Commerce and Economic Opportunity.

**Edwin Tumlos** is the State of Illinois’ first full-time liaison to Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI)-owned businesses in the newly created position of AAPI Business Development Manager, in the Office of Minority Economic Empowerment (OMEE) of the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO). With over 15 years as a government administrator, an MSC from Northwestern University, and former business owner, Edwin is an experienced leader and an entrepreneurship advocate. Prior to joining DCEO, Edwin was an Assistant Commissioner in the City of Chicago’s Department of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection (BACP), where he managed the grant programs for business service organizations of the Small Business Advocacy Unit, specifically the Neighborhood Business Development Centers (NBDC) and Chicago Business Centers (CBC). Edwin’s experiences also include having been the Co-Owner of Sala Café in Chicago, and was a Personal Banker and Corporate Trainer for The First National Bank of Chicago. As a Filipino immigrant, who grew up in the Austin neighborhood of Chicago, Edwin is passionate about programs and initiatives that support the needs of historically underserved communities. He is a Board Member for Volunteers of America (VOA) Illinois, a three-time Chicago Marathon finisher and currently resides in Chicago with his wife and daughter.

**Michelle Lura White.** As the state's liaison to women-owned businesses, Michelle is also an economic equity strategist and cross-sector business resources connector. Prior to joining DCEO, Michelle worked on developing an app prototype and was accepted into The Founder Institute, the world's largest pre-seed accelerator program. Michelle has spent over 15 years across different sectors, industries, and roles as a behind the scenes intrapreneur, initiator, strategist, adviser, project manager, organizer, fundraiser, Fortune 500 marketer, and legislative liaison in Chicago, Milwaukee, and Springfield. Michelle is also a former Concordia University Wisconsin’s Batterman School of Business advisory board member. As a bi-racial, multicultural Filipino American woman, Michelle grew up in a farm village near Starved Rock State Park with her late grandfather, parents, and sister.

**Facilitator:** Ericka White

**4) New World of APEX Accelerators (DoD OSBP Updates)**

Darryl Thomas and Rebekah Piatt  
Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity 
Ballroom D

The total number of small businesses in the Defense Industrial Base (DIB) has declined over the last decade, creating a problem for the Department of Defense (DoD), our nation's security, and our economy. Mr. Farooq Mitha, Director of DoD’s Office of Small Business Programs, said "We risk losing mission-critical domestic capabilities, innovation, and strong supply chains. To respond to this, the
department is working to strengthen our small business supply chains, increase competition and attract new entrants.” The APEX Accelerators, with an expanded mission, are being viewed as field offices to help DoD accomplish this mission. DoD has several programs in place to help innovators, entrepreneurs, and small businesses become part of the DIB. They are the Mentor-Protege Program (MPP), the Rapid Innovation Fund (RIF) Program, the APEX Accelerators, and the Indian Incentive Program. This session is designed to give you a better understanding of how these programs will work together and leverage other critical DoD resources to help Illinois businesses. Key areas discussed will be name change including logo and branding guidelines, mission and vision statements, and metrics and goals tracking.

**Darryl Thomas** has been the Program Manager of the Illinois APEX Accelerator since 2016. He is responsible for administering the State of Illinois’ cooperative agreement with the Department of Defense (DoD). He oversees the program and fiscal operations of the 9 Illinois APEX Accelerator offices throughout the state. Darryl recently finished his 3-year presidency term with the Association of Procurement Technical Assistance Centers (APTAC), which represents a network of over 90 APEX Accelerator programs. During his presidency, Darryl was instrumental in the funding partner transition from the Defense Logistics Agency (DLA) to DoD. He also assisted with the launch of APTAC University, a platform that allows APTAC to train and educate its members on current procurement standards and best practices. Darryl began his career in state government in 1991 as a Transportation Compliance Auditor with the Illinois Commerce Commission. In 1994, he became the first employee hired by the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) for its new First Stop Business Information Center. First Stop is a single, statewide resource for entrepreneurs and existing business owners who have questions or concerns about state and federal business requirements, business assistance programs, and the regulatory process. He went on to serve as the First Stop Program Manager for 10 years before joining the Illinois APEX Accelerator. Darryl is a 1990 graduate of Western Illinois University with a Bachelor of Business in Transportation Physical Distribution (now Supply Chain Management). Prior to graduating from WIU, he completed internships at 2 Fortune 500 Companies in Illinois.

**Rebekah Piatt** has been the Program Assistant of the Illinois APEX Accelerator, since January 2020. She assists in administering the cooperative agreement between the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) and the Department of Defense (DoD). She also helps oversee the program and fiscal operations of the 9 centers located throughout the state. She started as an intern and was provided the internship through the University of Illinois – Springfield (UIS) Graduate Public Service Internship (GPSI) Program. GPSI provides interns the opportunity to simultaneously experience a public sector internship while earning a master’s degree. In April 2021, Rebekah was awarded the Brain T. Milbrandt Memorial Award for Excellence, which recognized her distinguished excellence in leadership and performance as a GPSI intern. Prior to joining he program, she worked as a Universal Banker for 4 years and completed an auditing internship with a mid-size firm. Rebekah holds a Bachelor of Arts in Accountancy and is finishing up her Master of Arts in Accountancy, both from UIS.

**Facilitator:** Darryl Thomas
1) Towards a Manufacturing Renaissance
   Dan Swinney, Manufacturing Renaissance
   Ballroom A

   A presentation on the importance of the manufacturing sector, the challenges it faces—and programs to address those challenges. These challenges include finding and retaining the talent required for advanced manufacturing as well as the challenge of aging owners of manufacturing companies with no successor. Both challenges offer great opportunities.

   Dan Swinney graduated from the University of Wisconsin in Madison with a BA in history in 1967. In 1970, he moved to Chicago and entered the world of manufacturing. Dan worked for 13 years as a machinist. He organized Steelworker Local 8787 at G+W Taylor Forge in Cicero. Taylor Forge closed in 1983. Dan then founded Manufacturing Renaissance (MR) in response to the massive plant closings in the Chicago area. MR is a not-for-profit that develops innovative approaches to retaining manufacturing companies as a foundation for community development. We believe manufacturing is the essential foundation of a modern society. As such, the development of our manufacturing sector must be profoundly tied to social inclusion. Dan writes and speaks regularly for organizations interested in promoting advanced manufacturing and its intersection with public interests.

   Facilitator: Chettha Saetia

2) Rural Grocery Access—Retention and Creation
   Sean Park, Western Illinois University, Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs
   Ballroom B

   We will discuss the common needs of rural grocery store owners in Illinois and how to assist them. We will also discuss the creation of food access businesses in food deserts, as well as some upcoming Illinois Legislation designed to assist local food production and food access in the state.

   Sean Park is the current manager of the Western Illinois University’s Value Added Sustainable Development Center and the Illinois Cooperative Development Center. He has been a small grocery store owner for 10 years, an SBDC advisor for six years, and has worked on the Rural Fresh Markets Project since 2018. He has also taught economics, business development, and leadership courses at the collegiate level.

   Facilitator: Brett Whitnel

3) Trends in Domestic-Focused Companies that Affect International Aspirations
   Michael Stubbs, Illinois SBDC ITC at Bradley University
   Ballroom C

   Some business trends arise in domestic-focused companies prior to companies with international aspirations having an interest in applying these trends overseas. For example, due to popular shows like Shark Tank, more companies are interested in considering intellectual property protection (e.g., patents, trademarks, and trade secrets) for their product and services. In this presentation, we will discuss U.S. intellectual property protection as it relates to extraterritorial applications, and
other international implications arising from this recent trend. We will also briefly cover other trends with international implications, as time permits.

Michael Stubbs holds a joint appointment as the Director of the Peoria NEXT Innovation Center and Director of Technology Commercialization for the Illinois Small Business Development Center within the Turner Center for Entrepreneurship at Bradley University. The centers have a shared mission to promote business startup and growth. Mr. Stubbs manages the overall operations and strategy of Peoria NEXT; and as Director of Technology Commercialization, facilitates the commercialization and acceleration of technology generated by the region’s manufacturers, businesses, academic community, technology research centers, and entrepreneurs. Throughout his career, Mr. Stubbs has pursued opportunities with a focus on innovation. Prior to joining Bradley University, Mr. Stubbs was a Managing Director of FTI Consulting, Inc.’s Forensic and Litigation Consulting Practice. As part of the company’s Intellectual Property practice in Chicago, IL, Mr. Stubbs gained eight years of experience in assisting companies and universities with intellectual property engagements, including valuing patents and other intellectual property. Throughout this experience, he has assisted companies in the medical device, pharmaceutical, agriculture, handheld device, consumer electronics, and automotive industries, among others.

Facilitator: Jim Ryan

4) SBIR/STTR Support Through the Illinois FAST Center
Cheri Soliday, University of Illinois Research Park
Ballroom D

Join this session to learn how your small business clients can access free resources, support, and expertise from the Illinois FAST Center that can help them to prepare and submit applications for Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) and Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR) grants. SBIR & STTR grants are highly competitive, awarded by various federally funded research agencies, and are aimed at encouraging domestic small businesses to engage in research & development of advanced technologies that have potential for commercialization. Depending on the federal agency and award phase, SBIR/STTR programs award anywhere from $100,000 to $1.5 million – and they do not take equity or request a matching investment. The mission of the SBIR/STTR program is to support scientific excellence and technological innovation through the investment of Federal research funds in critical American priorities to build a strong national economy. During this session, Cheri Soliday will share various types of Illinois FAST Center training opportunities, tools, and other resources that can help your clients to develop proposal strategies and to draft proposal applications. Cheri will also share the Illinois FAST Center client case management model which helps to ensure that we direct your clients to the appropriate resources and/or expert consultant to meet their SBIR/STTR goals. Client case management may also include referrals for free advisory meetings, funded by other grants, with professional consultants that can provide guidance and insight on technology entrepreneurship, business development, or commercialization. For more information on resources that serve Illinois technology based entrepreneurs, visit:

https://go.illinois.edu/IUINTBE and https://go.illinois.edu/ILFASTCenter
Cheri Soliday provides program leadership, development, and execution for a portfolio of sponsored projects that provide support, services, and outreach activities that advance entrepreneurship, innovation, and economic development throughout the state of Illinois. Primary vehicles for these services include the SBA-funded Illinois FAST Center, the University of Illinois EDA University Center, and the EDA-funded Illinois University Incubator Network (IUIN). Through the Illinois FAST Center, Cheri provides client case management for Illinois startups seeking information, training, or assistance in pursuing Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) funding. She also collaborates with various ecosystem partners to produce and deliver SBIR/STTR training webinars, workshops, and proposal preparation programs. Through the EDA University Center, Cheri partners with various University of Illinois colleagues, units, programs, and labs – as well as industrial and economic development advocates – to provide entrepreneurship, innovation, and economic development support to underserved or capacity-strained regions in Illinois. Through the IUIN, Cheri cultivates, connects, and convenes university incubator leaders and practitioners in partnership for the purpose of serving and growing the Illinois ecosystem. Prior to joining the Research Park at Illinois, Cheri provided outreach and program management for multi-university research consortia funded by the U.S. Department of Energy that focused on cybersecurity & resiliency for energy delivery systems ($18M and $28M); and a research center focused on multicore and parallel computing funded by Microsoft and Intel ($10M). Cheri also had the honor of investing in the academic and professional development of students via roles at two community colleges in East Central Illinois. She has a B.S. degree in Advertising and an M.S. degree in Management and Leadership.

**Facilitator:** Theresa Ebeler

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<tr>
<td>5:30 PM-7:00 PM</td>
<td>Networking Reception — Hyatt Place Main Lobby</td>
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<td>7:00 PM</td>
<td>Dinner on your own</td>
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THURSDAY, May 18, 2023

7:30 AM-9:00 AM   Registration/Check-in

8:00 AM-9:00 AM   Hotel Breakfast (if staying in hotel)

8:00 AM-9:00 AM   IESBGA Coordinating Council Meeting

9:00 AM-10:30 AM  Session III Workshops

1) Engaging Hispanic Businesses
   Ballroom A
   Netza Roldan, Binational Institute of Human Development & Impormex USA Marketing Group
   Belinda Guillen, New American Welcome Center, University YMCA
   Maria Ramos Aguilar, Illinois SBDC at Western Illinois University, Quad Cities

Overview of small business statistics in Illinois, including the total number of Hispanic-owned businesses, employment, revenue, and industry distribution, with a focus on their economic impact and growth trends. Immigrant business data in Illinois, including challenges faced by Hispanic immigrant entrepreneurs such as language barriers, access to capital, and navigating regulations, and strategies for addressing these challenges. Understanding cultural and linguistic nuances within the Hispanic community, including language preferences, communication styles, family dynamics, and business practices, and how these nuances can impact business strategies and engagement efforts. Best practices for dealing your market profits within the Hispanic segments, including conducting market research, identifying target markets based on cultural and linguistic factors, tailoring marketing messages and channels, and developing culturally relevant products and services that meet the needs of Hispanic customers. Conclusion: Effectively engaging Hispanic businesses in Illinois requires not only understanding the small business statistics and immigrant business data, but also recognizing and addressing the cultural and linguistic nuances with the Hispanic community. By defining your market profile within the Hispanic segments and tailoring marketing and outreach efforts accordingly, businesses, organizations, and policymakers can better connect, engage, and serve the Hispanic business community, leading to increased business success and economic prosperity. This presentation will provide valuable insights, best practices, and strategies to enable stakeholders to effectively engage and support Hispanic businesses in Illinois.

Netza Roldan is the President of his own consulting company, Impormex USA Marketing Group, an integrated consulting firm specializing in International Market Development, Public Relations and Market Development. He is also currently the CEO of a non-governmental organization, the Binational Institute of Human Development, and its programs. Legal & Immigration Center and Casa Mexico USA, which were established to develop and implement programs for the immigrant community. Though legal assistance and business development, the organization facilitates the assimilation process to ease the immigrants path into mainstream society. As a dynamic senior marketing professional, Netza has comprehensive and extensive experience in strategic planning, project development, management and implementation, sales initiatives, major account management and product launches, increasing profits. He is recognized as a pragmatic, goal-driven leader, disciplined in applying business analytics and consumer insights to maximize effectiveness and turn around results. He has built a reputation for effectively orchestrating successful campaigns, among diverse stakeholders. His broad experience, both in the private and public sector, has given him a proven track record of increasing profit margins,
opening up new markets, ensuring customer satisfaction and identifying creative business opportunities in very competitive markets. He has founded a few non-governmental organizations, such as the Council for Mexican American Business Development and the American Tango Institute, producing entertainment, education and health programs through music, art and dance, through Argentinian tango. From 2010 to 2013, he was the representative of the Government of Mexico City in Chicago, promoting services to immigrants from Mexico City tourism and medical tourism to the state. Investment and bilateral programs between our two cities and states, like that of the Chicago Sister Cities International.

**Belinda Guillen** is the Immigrant Family Services Manager for the New American Welcome Center (NAWC) at the University YMCA. From Puebla, Mexico, she arrived three years ago to Champaign when her husband was relocated to Danville from the same company in Mexico. Belinda initially joined the NAWC team in February 2020 as a volunteer Community Navigator, connecting with local immigrant communities, implementing outreach and education programs, and providing accompaniment to Champaign County's immigrant community impacted by immigration policy. In her current role as staff, Belinda leads a team of community workers striving to welcome immigrants into the community and connect them to critical information and resources, including supports for immigrant-owned businesses.

**Maria Ramos Aguilar** is a Strategic Business Advisor. She has more than a year of experience in research and evaluation of business performance and development of solutions for its optimization. Master in Community and Economic Development through WIU QC. Well versed in identifying and building on business strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Superior performance in business analysis, guides business entrepreneurs to develop strategic plans to meet business objectives and drive growth.

**Facilitator:** Ann Friederichs

2) **Establishing Community Relationships Through the Lens of an Incubator**

Carlos Ortega, Elevate CCIC, Inc.

**Ballroom B**

Building a successful incubator like Elevate requires a deep understanding of the community and its needs, as well as strong partnerships with local organizations and stakeholders. In this presentation, I will share my experience in building Elevate from inception to becoming a successful incubator and community hub. The first step in building Elevate was identifying a need in the community. As an community we recognized the challenges faced by many new business owners in the early stages of their venture. With this in mind, we set out to create a space where entrepreneurs could access the resources and support they needed to succeed. This involved conducting extensive market research, engaging with local business owners, and identifying gaps in the local entrepreneurial ecosystem. Once the need had been identified, the next step was to establish partnerships and secure support from local organizations. This involved reaching out to key stakeholders in the community, such as government agencies, economic development organizations, and industry associations. Building these partnerships required a clear understanding of the value that Elevate could offer to the community, as well as a clear vision of the incubator's goals and objectives. To validate the need for Elevate and secure buy-in from potential partners, we focused on developing a strong business case that highlighted the benefits of the incubator. This included demonstrating the potential economic impact
of the incubator on the community, as well as outlining the resources and support that would be available to entrepreneurs. In addition to securing partnerships, building Elevate also involved working closely with the community as an incubator. This meant creating a space that was welcoming, accessible, and responsive to the needs of local entrepreneurs. To achieve this, we leveraged the partnerships established to curate a community of entrepreneurs, mentors, and industry experts. This community provided a wealth of knowledge and experience that could be tapped into by new business owners. One of the key benefits of Elevate’s community-driven approach was the ability to showcase the curated entrepreneurial community that had been established. This involved hosting events and workshops that brought together entrepreneurs, investors, and other stakeholders in the community. By creating these opportunities for collaboration and networking, Elevate became a hub for entrepreneurship in the community, attracting a wide range of entrepreneurs and business owners. In conclusion, building a successful incubator like Elevate requires a deep understanding of the community, strong partnerships with local organizations, and a commitment to working closely with the entrepreneurial community. By identifying a need in the community, securing partnerships, and leveraging those partnerships to create a community-driven incubator, Elevate was able to establish itself as a valuable resource for local entrepreneurs. I hope that my experience in building Elevate will provide insights and inspiration to other centers looking to create successful entrepreneurial ecosystems in their communities.

Carlos Ortega is currently working as the Executive Director of Elevate CCIC, Inc. (Elevate), a local 501 (C) 3 nonprofit organization dedicated to assisting entrepreneurs in East Central Illinois. I have successfully helped write grants to obtain over $920,000 for community initiatives, including Elevate. Previously, I was a Peace Corps’ Fellow at Western Illinois University (WIU) where I graduated with a Masters in Political Science. While at WIU I was a Graduate Assistant for the Small Business Development Center (SBDC). At the SBDC I helped organize a new online mentoring program called SBDC Advantage, which connects rural communities to resources and technical assistance through the SBDC via an online platform. I also assisted in developing a pitch competition with the city of Macomb, IL. Prior to my studies at Western, I was a Peace Corps volunteer for four years working in fields of public health, economic development, and teaching. I lived for one year in Kenya and three years in Namibia. I integrated well and effectively understood the people of both countries while learning about the international development process. My previous experience working in the Illinois State Senate gave me the political background for understanding local and state governments. My years of experience have helped me adapt to constantly changing situations and has also given me respect for those with different opinions from my own. I am avid about Community and Economic development and believe that all people can succeed when given the right tools.

Facilitator: Ute Westphal

3) ITC Stakeholders Roundtable
Ballroom C

An update on all partners, including EXIM, US Commercial Service, and OTI, followed by a roundtable discussion about how to deepen relationships, increase collaboration and build a strong export support ecosystem.
4) **PTAC/APEX Accelerator Roundtable—Peer Mentoring**

Dr. Theresa Ebeler, Illinois PTAC/APEX Accelerator of Western Illinois University, and
Dr. Ileen Kelly, Illinois PTAC/APEX Accelerator of College of DuPage

Ballroom D

This session will share strengths and capabilities among PTAC/APEX Accelerator centers. This working session will compile, filter, and file individual strengths and contributions to the network and identify resource gaps to be filled.

**Dr. Theresa Ebeler** is the Center Director for the Western Illinois University APEX Accelerator. She has been with the Illinois Small Business Network since 2001, serving roles as an SBDC Center Director, PTAC Center Director, and advisor. As Center Director, she works with local businesses on government contracting, including federal and state certification programs. Over the last several years, she has provided education and resources to SBA’s "Boots to Business" program at Scott Air Force Base. Dr. Ebeler delivers customized training and assistance based on industry needs. She enjoys meeting and learning from the businesses that she has the opportunity to assist through the APEX Accelerator. She serves a wide range of companies in government contracting. Whether it be a family-owned Brazilian coffee distributor that roasts coffee in St. Clair County, Illinois, an Air Refueling Tanker, or a local paving business, it is never dull at her center. Dr. Ebeler received her Ph.D. from Saint Louis University in 2021. Her research records neighborhood redevelopment efforts in the City of St. Louis. This project is the first formal effort to capture a unique mix of military, financial, and social resources for urban redevelopment. On a personal note, she's married to her high school sweetheart of 20 years and has a 13-year-old and a nine-year-old. She enjoys beekeeping with her children and the outdoors with her family. Of course, her family keeps her very busy with all their activities in golf, swimming, soccer, track, and other school events.

**Dr. Ileen Kelly** came on board July 2019 as the Illinois PTAC Program Manager. She brings to the table over 10 years of providing Leadership and Capacity Building training for both small businesses and non-profit organizations. She spent over 10 years in the workforce development arena across multiple industries assessing and providing training for both incumbent and future workforce. She also spent over 25 years in marketing, advertising and public relations – Managing the public message for national clients and brands. Her primary responsibility is to advise clients to grow their business through local, state and federal government contracting which includes certifications.

**Facilitator:** Keli Krueger-Huhra

**10:30 AM-10:45 AM** Break

**10:45 AM-12:15 PM** **Session IV Workshops**

1) **Building Your Brand and Business with Video**

Franklin Rivera, V2M2 Group, Inc.

Ballroom A

Video has taken over, as more and more platforms are prioritizing videos over images. Video has always been the most popular medium, as we witnessed television taking over radio, and companies paying big dollars to run ads on both the television and internet. However, as video creation and distribution has become more accessible to the general public, with mobile phones becoming mini studios, and social media being the top distribution channel, it is possible for anyone to create videos
and distribute them to promote and grow their business. In this session, participants will take away:

- Why is video so important for business growth? We will look at statistics on videos to include conversion rates and video use.
- How to determine the right kind of video and platforms for the greatest visibility for your business.
- The correct settings for your phone/camera to record video for social media.
- How to get comfortable creating videos and sharing them.
- The best tools for recording and editing videos.

Franklin Rivera is the Founder and CEO of the V2M2 Group, Digital Marketing Agency. He has been creating a wide range of videos for clients and himself for the past 15 years. He has shot and edited wedding videos, corporate videos, and short form social media videos. His videos have well over 100k views on YouTube, LinkedIn, Instagram and TikTok, where he shares content including software reviews, marketing tips, motivational talks and examples of his video work. Locally, Franklin has produced videos for 360 Youth Services, the Naperville Marines, Office Evolution, Trelleum Real Estate, The Centered Life, John Pcolinski for Judge, Sweetwaters Coffee and Tea, and Badge Brew Coffee Roasters. Other work includes Medstar Labs, Mayor Richard Irvin, the Oswego Fire Protection District, the Autosmart Dealership, Juno Logistics, Manilow Suites, Oswego High School, and O'Canada Soapworks in Canmore, Alberta.

Facilitator: Ute Westphal

2) Benefits of Cash Flow Analysis
Paul Savage, and Kristina Vidal, ProfitCents
Ballroom B

Leveraging the ProfitCents platform to build cash flow models. Start by exploring the types of models and best practices to building within ProfitCents. Once in the model, explore how changes in business performance impact cash flow. Explore scenario planning and leveraging industry data to forecasting. Expand beyond the financial statement and move to loan analysis, providing companies with an understanding on how changes in debt affect cash flow, while also stress testing new loan opportunities. Finally, review a income-based valuation, seeing how cash flow changes move the dial on your business value.

Paul Savage joined ProfitCents in March 2013 and oversees the implementation and client success to all ProfitCents customers. Paul works extensively with SBDCs, ensuring that advisors receive the training and resources needed to provide proactive advisory services, enabling business owners to succeed. Paul has an extensive background in operations and financial analytics and is currently completing his MBA at East Carolina University.

Kristina Vidal has been with ProfitCents since February 2017. As a Senior Customer Success Manager, her expertise lies in innovating new processes and skillfully enhancing customer service strategies to maximize customer retention and growth. Through continuing education courses, virtual and onsite training sessions and speaking engagements, she has worked with advisors across the country to help build their consulting relationships with their business clients, and help them gain insight to optimize their impact and improve their clients' financial performance. She enjoys travelling, spending time in the gym, and trying new restaurants in her hometown of Raleigh, North Carolina.

Facilitator: Jo Ann Di Maggio May
3) **ITC Network Roundtable**  
   Ballroom C  

This open exchange will allow the Illinois SBDC ITCs to network, exchange ideas, discuss resources and share best practices among colleagues. The roundtable will provide an opportunity for the network to review the current challenges and opportunities presented and discuss how to grow more strategically.

4) **PTAC/APEX Roundtable—Getting to Know IMEC**  
   Kristy Johns, IMEC: Illinois Manufacturing Excellence Center  
   Ballroom D

IMEC is a team of improvement specialists dedicated to providing manufacturers in Illinois with the tools and techniques to excel and compete globally. The experienced hands-on team at IMEC works closely with its clients to plan critical business improvements in all areas of their organization from: Leading their Company, Planning for Success, Growing their Business, Improving their Operations, Focusing on their People, and Deciding with Data. With more than 50 full-time staff and partners positioned statewide, IMEC delivers the local expertise to not only plan and strategize, but to implement and evaluate the effectiveness of client improvements. In fact, IMEC assists more than 1,800 companies each year with successful business improvement projects. As a result, IMEC has demonstrated a return on investment that exceeds 19:1. This is made possible as organizations become more effective and efficient.

**Kristy Johns** is the VP of Marketing at IMEC. She views their department at an extension of their talented field team. We provide tools and resources to help the team identify prospects, provide customer service, nurture accounts and spread the IMEC message. With over 15 years of experience in strategic marketing, including project management, campaign development, digital marketing, graphic design, CRM integration and brand development, I have worked with clients across multiple industries, from small organizations to Fortune 500 companies. My expertise in strategic planning and implementation has helped them expand their markets and product offerings to a new or existing customer base. This also resulted in award-winning campaigns that helped to increase brand awareness. Ultimately, these organizations were able to increase efficiency and profitability through their sales channels.

**Facilitator:** Theresa Ebeler

**12:15 PM-12:30 PM**  
**Walking Break**

If you need to use the hotel shuttle to the Illinois Terminal, please let Jackie know as soon as possible so she can arrange it through the hotel.

**12:30 PM-1:45 PM**  
**General Session II**

Illinois Terminal  
Lunch and Keynote: **Dionne Baux, Main Street America**

As Vice President of Urban Development, Dionne plays a key leadership role to expand technical service offerings to neighborhood commercial districts, lead the retention and growth of **UrbanMain (UM)** and Main Street America (MSA) City Coordinating Programs, the UM Network and designated UM districts.
Specifically, Dionne works to build economically vibrant neighborhood commercial districts and community leaders through MSA's UM Main Street Approach. Prior to this role Dionne served as the Director of UrbanMain an initiative developed by MSA four years ago to broaden its offerings and engagement in urban neighborhood commercial districts. Dionne has over two decades of experience in project coordination in the fields of urban economic development and commercial district revitalization. She has extensive expertise engaging community stakeholders, identifying, and implementing projects in conjunction with community-based organizations, government institutions, and real estate development, as well as supporting capacity building opportunities. Before joining MSA in 2016, Dionne served as Senior Program Officer for Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) Chicago where she managed economic development initiatives for the Chicago office, developed and led the award-winning Business District Leadership program and the nationally recognized Smart Communities demonstration. Before LISC Chicago, Dionne served as a Financial Planning Analyst for the City of Chicago's Department of Community Development where she administered the Tax Increment Finance Interest Subsidy program for developers, rehabilitation grant programs to eligible Chicagoan residents and small business owners. Dionne holds a master's degree in public administration from Roosevelt University and a bachelor's degree in communications from the University of Illinois at Chicago. Dionne is a board member of the Small Business Anti-Displacement Network: a community of practice committed to preventing small business displacement in gentrifying neighborhoods. Dionne also serves as an advisor board member to the Center of Technology in Government, University of Albany, SUNY IMLS research project "Enabling, Smart Inclusive and Connected Communities: The Role of Public Libraries" to provide strategic advice to the research team. She has also served on several ULI Advisory Service Panels across the country. Locally, Dionne serves in an advisory board capacity to several entities in Chicago such as the Community Law Project, and Equiticity. She also serves as a committee member for Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) Economic Development Committee and Metropolitan Planning Council (MPC) Transportation Committee.

1:45 PM-2:00 PM Walking Break

2:00 PM-3:30 PM Session V Workshops

1) Part 1: Neoserra and You
   Jenny Malloy and Ericka White, Illinois SBDC Network—Lead Center
   Ballroom A

   What is Neoserra? In the first session, we will discuss what Neoserra is and it's applications. We will cover daily and monthly tasks as well as system features. Some of the topics that will be covered include calendar utilization, linking contacts to client records, postbox, session types, and knowledge base. Open discussion and time for Q & A. This presentation is divided into two sessions.

   Jenny Malloy is the Data Integrity Manager for the Illinois Small Business Development Center Network at the Lead Center. She has 20 years of business experience with a background in customer service, data analysis, project management, and procurement. She likes to analyze processes to increase work productivity and assist others. She is motivated by the importance she places on accurate data and the client experience.

   Ericka White serves as the State Director of the Illinois SBDC Network. The network is hosted by the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity and is one of 64 SBDC programs across the country. Since joining DCEO in 2000, Ericka has held several positions within the organization, including those in legislative grants, fiscal operations, and most recently, Assistant State Director for
the SBDC program. She has also served as program manager for three statewide tax credit programs and as manager of the First Stop Business Information Center, a centralized location for businesses and entrepreneurs to receive detailed information on regulations and permitting requirements. In her present position, Ericka provides leadership to one of the largest SBDC programs in the nation consisting of 40 hosted service center sites and 8 satellite locations. Ericka, born and raised in Springfield, is a three-time graduate of the University of Illinois system, earning her undergraduate degree in Business Administration (BS), her first graduate degree in Business Administration (MBA), and a second graduate degree in Legal Studies (MA). Ericka was recently appointed to the Women’s Business Ownership Council for the state of Illinois, actively volunteers for several state and local organizations and participates in various community task forces dedicated to promoting economic growth.

Facilitator: Ericka White

2) Getting Grant Ready
Angie Hatfield Marker, Community Foundation of East Central Illinois, and Breaden Belcher, City of Urbana
Ballroom B

What does it mean to be grant ready? Local leaders from the Community Foundation of East Central Illinois and City of Urbana Community Development Services Staff are teaming up to share information and go-to tips that will empower advisors as they assist clients applying for grants. The session, presented in panel format, will address:
- The basics of applying for grants & understanding grant proposal terminology;
- Strategies for building relationships with grant funders;
- How to easily transition a business plan into grant application format;
- How applicants can increase their chances of getting a grant.

The session will include presentations and a panel-format Q & A session. Advisors will come away with a better idea of how to walk clients through applying for a grant, and preparing successful grant applications.

Angie Hatfield Marker joined the Community Foundation staff in 2018 as the Development Director. She became its President and CEO in June of 2021 and oversees the development, grant-making, expansion and leadership activities of the Community Foundation. Born in Danville and raised in Champaign, Angie is a proud graduate of Centennial High School. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Speech Communication from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She also won four Varsity I Letters while working as a student equipment manager for the University of Illinois football team from 1999-2002. She graduated with honors with her Master’s Degree in Nonprofit Management in 2020. Angie has more than 20 years of sales, marketing and development experience. She is the Board Chair of the Association of Fundraising Professionals of East Central Illinois and serves as a member of the Board of Directors for the Alliance of Illinois Community Foundations. She is a former member of the Urbana Business Association Board and Crisis Nursery Board. Outside of work, her interests are many and varied. She enjoys cooking (and eating!), gardening, reading, traveling and spending time with her family and friends. Angie and her husband, Dan, live in Champaign with their sons, Johnny (11) and Dean (10).
Breaden Belcher serves as the Community Development Coordinator in the City of Urbana Grants Management Division. In this role, he administers grant programs from various federal and state agencies including the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the State of Illinois Department of Human Services, and the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO). Breaden also manages the City of Urbana’s Youth Services Grant Program, a competitive funding opportunity that provides $100,000 annually to local non-profits that offer community-based programming and services for low-income Urbana youth. Since January 2022, Breaden has served as Chair of the Champaign County Continuum of Service Providers to the Homeless, a consortium of over 40 homeless service providers, faith-based organizations, government agencies, and housing advocates that coordinate the county-wide response to homelessness. Breaden has a Master of Arts in History, and is a former member of the Champaign County History Museum Board of Trustees. When he’s not working, Breaden enjoys spending time in nature, and taking advantage of the many great restaurants CU has to offer!

Facilitator: Madeleine Wolske

3) International Supply Chain Volatility
Kimberly Kirkendall, CPA, International Resource Development, Inc.
Ballroom C

The pandemic has exposed the vulnerabilities of the global supply chain. Combined with the US-China trade war, and China’s closure, more companies are trying to navigate and evolve their operations in supply chain or business development. The session provides insights into the current trade environment, trade restrictions, impacts, and supply chain evolution in the next decade.

Kimberly Kirkendall is a frequent guest lecturer at universities and speaks for industrial organizations around the world. She consults with multi-national companies on international operations through IRD. She is a Beachhead Advisor for New Zealand Trade & Enterprise helping NZ companies with intl trade, distribution, and manufacturing. She is the host of the podcast International Trade Resources where she interviews experts in international trade. ITR also offers trade training for small and startup companies. As President of IRD for over 20 years Kirkendall has run thousands of projects helping companies to improve their international operations. Our multi-national clients have challenging border trade questions in multiple aspects of business; incorporation / international trade / supply chain optimization / fraud & risk assessment / liquidation & sale of entity / market & channel development. Kirkendall provides leadership during times that stress a company’s operation. IRD will develop and re-engineer processes in multi-country environments. Whether you are importing or exporting, the FDI is inbound to the US or outbound, and wherever management is headquartered - we help to resolve cross border problems.

4) Best Practices Using Illinois APEX Accelerator Resources
Darryl Thomas and Rebekah Piatt
Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity
Ballroom D

Illinois APEX Accelerator members about valuable resources that you should use daily. To further break this down, Illinois DCEO provides the centers with several resources such as APTAC, Center Connect – Google Drive, EZGovOps, Neoserra BidMatch, Proxity, etc. The intent is to discuss the opportunities and challenges of using each one through the experiences of the practitioners who utilize them. This feedback can also assist in analyzing the value of having multiple resources if consolidating would avoid overlapping features and deploy the funding elsewhere.
Darryl Thomas has been the Program Manager of the Illinois APEX Accelerator since 2016. He is responsible for administering the State of Illinois’ cooperative agreement with the Department of Defense (DoD). He oversees the program and fiscal operations of the 9 Illinois APEX Accelerator offices throughout the state. Darryl recently finished his 3-year presidency term with the Association of Procurement Technical Assistance Centers (APTAC), which represents a network of over 90 APEX Accelerator programs. During his presidency, Darryl was instrumental in the funding partner transition from the Defense Logistics Agency (DLA) to DoD. He also assisted with the launch of APTAC University, a platform that allows APTAC to train and educate its members on current procurement standards and best practices. Darryl began his career in state government in 1991 as a Transportation Compliance Auditor with the Illinois Commerce Commission. In 1994, he became the first employee hired by the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) for its new First Stop Business Information Center. First Stop is a single, statewide resource for entrepreneurs and existing business owners who have questions or concerns about state and federal business requirements, business assistance programs, and the regulatory process. He went on to serve as the First Stop Program Manager for 10 years before joining the Illinois APEX Accelerator. Darryl is a 1990 graduate of Western Illinois University with a Bachelor of Business in Transportation Physical Distribution (now Supply Chain Management). Prior to graduating from WIU, he completed internships at 2 Fortune 500 Companies in Illinois.

Rebekah Piatt has been the Program Assistant of the Illinois APEX Accelerator, since January 2020. She assists in administering the cooperative agreement between the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) and the Department of Defense (DoD). She also helps oversee the program and fiscal operations of the 9 centers located throughout the state. She started as an intern and was provided the internship through the University of Illinois – Springfield (UIS) Graduate Public Service Internship (GPSI) Program. GPSI provides interns the opportunity to simultaneously experience a public sector internship while earning a master’s degree. In April 2021, Rebekah was awarded the Brain T. Milbrandt Memorial Award for Excellence, which recognized her distinguished excellence in leadership and performance as a GPSI intern. Prior to joining the program, she worked as a Universal Banker for 4 years and completed an auditing internship with a mid-size firm. Rebekah holds a Bachelor of Arts in Accountancy and is finishing up her Master of Arts in Accountancy, both from UIS.

3:30 PM–4:00 PM Networking Break

4:00 PM - 5:30 PM Session VI Workshops

1) Neoserra and Economic Impact
   Jenny Malloy and Ericka White, Illinois SBDC Network—Lead Center
   Ballroom A

   In this session, economic impact collections will be covered, including Neoserra survey creation and distribution.
**Jenny Malloy** is the Data Integrity Manager for the Illinois Small Business Development Center Network at the Lead Center. She has 20 years of business experience with a background in customer service, data analysis, project management, and procurement. She likes to analyze processes to increase work productivity and assist others. She is motivated by the importance she places on accurate data and the client experience.

**Ericka White** serves as the State Director of the Illinois SBDC Network. The network is hosted by the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity and is one of 64 SBDC programs across the country. Since joining DCEO in 2000, Ericka has held a number of positions within the organization, including those in legislative grants, fiscal operations, and most recently, Assistant State Director for the SBDC program. She has also served as program manager for three statewide tax credit programs and as manager of the First Stop Business Information Center, a centralized location for businesses and entrepreneurs to receive detailed information on regulations and permitting requirements. In her present position, Ericka provides leadership to one of the largest SBDC programs in the nation consisting of 40 hosted service center sites and 8 satellite locations. Ericka, born and raised in Springfield, is a three-time graduate of the University of Illinois system, earning her undergraduate degree in Business Administration (BS), her first graduate degree in Business Administration (MBA), and a second graduate degree in Legal Studies (MA). Ericka was recently appointed to the Women’s Business Ownership Council for the state of Illinois, actively volunteers for a number of state and local organizations, and participates in various community task forces dedicated to promoting economic growth.

**Facilitator:** Ericka White

### 2) Intellectual Property Protection and Chat GPT—opportunities and risks

**Alan Singleton**, Singleton Law Firm, P.C.

**Ballroom B**

Protecting intellectual property through patents, trademarks, trade secrets and contracts can be an important matter for many small business. The basics of these tools will be covered, including real world examples. AI and Chat GPT can enhance understanding of these topics, but their use can also present risks in and of themselves. Attendees will gain valuable insights into best practices and common pitfalls of IP protection tools and their interaction with AI and Chat GPT.

**Alan Singleton** provides legal services to early stage and emerging business clients with respect to corporate law, securities law, mergers and acquisitions and intellectual property law matters. For over thirty years he has assisted entrepreneurs in selecting and organizing appropriate entities and obtaining capital. He has formed business entities such as limited liability companies, subchapter S corporations, subchapter C corporations, professional corporations, and not-for-profit corporations, including private foundations. Mr. Singleton has also assisted clients in mergers and acquisitions and in implementing stock option programs. A member of the patent bar, Mr. Singleton has represented clients in patent and trademark prosecution and licensing. He has significant experience and expertise with technology commercialization. Mr. Singleton has negotiated term sheets, stock purchase agreements and debt purchase agreements for clients to secure funding from venture capital firms and angel investors. He serves as an Entrepreneur in Residence at EnterpriseWorks, the business incubator located in the University of Illinois Research Park. Mr. Singleton earned a B.S. in Geology from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and a Juris Doctorate from the University of Illinois College of Law in 1991. He is president of Singleton Law Firm, P.C., which is located in Research Park at University of Illinois.

**Facilitator:** Brett Whitnel
3) **Cottage Food: Growing Business From Home**
Kelly Lay, Meadow Lane Farm
Ballroom A

Changes to Illinois Cottage Food Law in 2022 created new avenues for home-based food businesses to thrive across the state. Local Food Advocate Kelly Lay of Meadow Lane Farm will share an overview of current cottage food law, provide resources available to navigate starting a cottage food business, and discuss support needs of new & existing cottage food businesses as they grow.

**Kelly Lay** has been an active local food advocate since 2017, when she discovered her small home based cake baking business was technically operating illegally! Kelly ceased baking and began advocating for change locally, even joining her local City Council as an Alderwoman. In 2020 and 2021, Kelly worked with other local food and farm business owners in the Food Farmer Caucus (organized by Illinois Stewardship Alliance) to write and pass new Cottage Food legislation: The 2021 Home To Market Act. At the behest of Illinois Stewardship Alliance, Kelly led a team of producers, health departments, non-profits, and other stakeholders to write the 2022 Illinois Cottage Food Guide. When Kelly is not advocating for local businesses, food and rural communities, she operates her own Cottage Food business, Meadow Lane Farm, crafting and selling unique jams, syrups, shrubs, sugars, infused honey, and related products. Kelly is also the full time Local Foods Program Manager for The Land Connection, working to educate the public on the importance of supporting local food and farmers.

Facilitator: Andy Pham

4) **Doing Business with GSA: Train the Trainer**
Warren J. Blankenship, GSA/FAS/Office of Information Technology
Michelle Chandler, GSA/FAS/Information Technology Vendor Management Office (ITVMO)
Sandra Sermons, General Services Administration
Gail Smith, U.S. General Services Administration
Tara Lea Wetli, U.S. General Services Administration
Ballroom D

Zoom Link: [https://wiuzoom.us/j/98612594423](https://wiuzoom.us/j/98612594423)

**Warren J. Blankenship** serves as the Program Manager for the IT Government-wide Category within the Office of Information Technology Category (ITC) in GSA’s Federal Acquisition Service (FAS). The Federal Acquisition Service provides buying platforms and acquisition services to Federal, State and Local governments for a broad range of items from office supplies to motor vehicles to information technology and telecommunications products and services. As an organization within FAS, ITC provides access to a wide range of commercial and custom IT products, services, and solutions. Mr. Blankenship presides over 13 government-wide IT contract vehicles, generating almost $50B in annual spend and are designated as Best-In-Class (BIC) by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). He is responsible for ensuring category management maturity based on Spend Under Management (SUM) principles as well as priorities outlined in the President’s
Management Agenda (PMA), the Federal Data Strategy (FDS), the SECURE Technology Act (STA), the FY20 IT Government-wide Category Management plan and other areas designed to highlight successes at both the government-wide and agency-wide level. Additionally, his role entails bringing awareness to agencies regarding the technology life cycle and its impact on the acquisition process. Previously, Mr. Blankenship served as the Director of IT Schedule 70 Governance Division where he was responsible for the overall direction of the organization’s acquisition workforce with respect to policy, guidance and procedures and their applicability under the larger Multiple Award Schedules (MAS) Program. Additionally, he led the charge in training needs for the acquisition staff and serves as the organization’s liaison with other GSA policy offices, other Government agencies and the Office of Federal Procurement Policy (OFPP). Prior to that appointment, Mr. Blankenship served as the Deputy Director of IT Schedule 70 Business Programs within ITC. In this role, Mr. Blankenship was responsible for fostering the image and brand of the program. He led a cadre of staff that focused on strategic initiatives as well as customer and vendor support with regard to the overall mission and vision of the Center. Some of the functions included meeting with customers to assist with program needs and requirements, assisting current vendors with training and marketing to ensure successful Schedule contracts and researching new and emerging technologies that could be incorporated into the program. He was also responsible for driving business volume and developing revenue forecasts that ultimately sought to keep the program sustainable and primed for growth. Previously, Mr. Blankenship served as the Deputy Director, IT Schedule 70 Operations in the Office of IT Schedule Programs. In this capacity, he was responsible for over 5,000 contracts with annual sales revenue of $15 Billion along with leading a diverse workforce that included developing, coordinating, and revising a wide variety of GSA and Government-wide procurement policies and for reviewing proposed changes to existing regulations and determining whether they should be addressed. These policies and regulations had far-reaching implications for all acquisitions throughout the Federal government. Mr. Blankenship has held numerous leadership roles throughout GSA and served as an Agency Expert in GSA’s Office of Government-wide Policy where he crafted various sections of the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR). Mr. Blankenship is also a very active member in the DC Chapter of the National Contract Management Association (NCMA). He has served on the Executive Committee Board since 2009 and has served in the role of Vice President of Membership for two years and most recently serving as Chapter President for his second term. Mr. Blankenship possesses over 25 years of experience in the field of contracting. Aside from GSA, he has been employed with such agencies as the Department of Energy (DOE), the Department of State, National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Mr. Blankenship holds a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Mass Media and Communications from the University of the District of Columbia (UDC) and a Master of Arts Degree in Business Communications from American University (AU).

Michelle Chandler is a Procurement Analyst / IT Category Small Business Branch Manager with the IT Vendor Management Office (ITVMO). Michelle joined GSA July of 2006 as an 1102 Contract Specialist under the Pathways Intern Program within GSA Federal Acquisition Services (FAS) Division which focuses on procuring goods and services for the federal government. Prior to joining GSA Michelle worked for DOD as a Program Manager of the Air Force Materiel Command (ALC) managed military aircraft, weapons systems, and Cryptographic equipment in support of the warfighter. Michelle served in the U.S, Navy in communications and maintained the Navy's communications systems on submarines, surface ships, aircraft, and onshore.
Sandra Sermons began her Federal service as a Contract Specialist at the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) Federal Acquisition Service (FAS). Her primary responsibility involves administering complex, high dollar contracts. One of Sandra’s most rewarding projects involves serving as the unofficial Section 508 tester for some of GSA’s numerous applications. This helps to facilitate GSA’s ongoing commitment to support all customers by providing Section 508 Compliant solutions.

Gail Smith is a Contract Specialist in the Information Technology Category (ITC) of the Federal Acquisition Service (FAS). Gail began her career with the General Services Administration in 2019 with the Utilization and Donation Division. In her current role, Gail reviews and awards eOffers and contract modifications in support of the Multiple Award Schedule (MAS) program.

Tara Lea Wetli is a Senior Contracting Officer and Team Lead in the Information Technology Category (ITC) Services Division 3, Branch B (QT2F1C). Tara joined GSA July of 2015 as an 1102 Contract Specialist. Prior to joining GSA, Tara was a federal government contractor, specializing in project management and financial analysis. In 2020, Tara received her Master of Business Administration with a specialization in Project Management from Capella University. When she is not at work, Tara enjoys spending time with her family and friends, traveling and trying new restaurants.

Facilitator: Theresa Ebeler

5:15 PM  Dinner on your own

Enjoy an escape room at C-U Adventures in Time and Space and choose from six immersive adventures that will test your wits, bravery, and teamwork. Your team has one hour to find clues, solve riddles, discover secret passages, and SAVE THE WORLD. After enjoying the award-winning gaming experience, feel free to grab food from the wide variety of restaurants in downtown Urbana. Finish the night with a beer or soda from 25 O’Clock Brewery, a curated wine flight from Analog, or enjoy live music outside at the Rose Bowl Tavern—all within a 6-min walk.  COST: $25/person

OR

Discover over 45 locally-owned restaurants that helped us win Midwest Living’s Greatest Midwest Food Town. From award-winning BBQ to artisan-baked goods, we have something for every palette in the heart of Downtown Champaign! A representative from Visit Champaign County will be onsite to assist with questions, recommendations, directions, etc.
FRIDAY, May 19, 2023

8:00 AM-9:00 AM  Check-in / Networking

8:00 AM- 9:00 AM  Hotel Breakfast (if staying in hotel)

9:00 AM-10:00 AM  General Session III
Ballrooms A / B / C / D

10:00 AM-10:15 AM  Break

10:15 AM-11:00 AM  General Session IV
Ballrooms A / B / C / D
Certificate Presentation & Program Excellence Award
IESBGA Wrap-up
Keli Krueger-Huhra, IESBGA President

11:15 AM-12:00 PM  General Session V
Ballrooms A / B / C / D
Illinois SBDC Network Updates
Ericka White, State Director, Illinois SBDC Network

2023 IESBGA Planning Committee
Keli Krueger-Huhra, Chair
Brooks Crawford
Theresa Ebeler
Amy Lambert
Jean Lin
Jo Ann Di Maggio May
Shawna Mayer
Andy Pham
Rebekah Piatt
Jim Ryan
Chettha Saetia
Darryl Thomas
Brittney Wallace
Ute Westphal
Ericka White
Brett Whitnel
Madeleine Wolske

2023 IESBGA Coordinating Council
Keli Krueger-Huhra, President
Amy Lambert, Vice President
Andy Pham, Secretary
Marti Wieland, Treasurer
Kevin Lust
Jo Ann Di Maggio May
Adrienne McFarland
Rhea Steele
Jim Ryan
Ute Westphal
Brett Whitnel
Ad Hoc
Ericka White
Darryl Thomas
Jackie Welch