Moderator and Speaker Bios

Georgia Grantmakers Alliance Summer Meeting
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Kristin Bernhard
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As Education Policy Advisor to Governor Nathan Deal (R-GA), Kristin manages the Governor’s policy initiatives from pre-kindergarten through post-secondary education. Through budget analysis, legislative advocacy, research support, and program management, she works to advance his vision of a more educated Georgia. Her responsibilities include representing the Governor on Georgia’s Alliance of Education Agency Heads, serving as the Governor’s lead on implementation of Georgia’s $400M Race to the Top federal grant, and assisting with “Complete College Georgia,” an initiative to produce an additional 250,000 postsecondary credentials in the state by the year 2020. Prior to her appointment to her current role, Kristin worked for Governor Sonny Perdue in both his policy and communications offices. A graduate of the University of Georgia, Kristin also studied at Keble College at Oxford University, and she is currently pursuing a law degree at Georgia State University.
Tjuan Dogan
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Tjuan Dogan serves as Corporate Citizenship and Corporate Affairs Manager for IBM in Georgia. Her work focuses on community and employee relations, government affairs, corporate social responsibility and philanthropic programs. Prior to joining IBM, she served as Senior Program Officer with The Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation and Program Officer with the Southern Education Foundation. She also has prior experience with City Year and Merck. She is a native of Greenville, SC, and earned her Ph.D. in education at the University of South Carolina (USC). She completed a year-long fellowship at Harvard Business School after earning her Ph.D.

Tjuan is a 2011 Leadership Georgia alumna; and a 2010 alumna of the Education Policy Fellowship Program through the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education. In 2008, she was selected for the Marshall Memorial Fellowship and traveled throughout Europe for a month with 20 other leaders from across the United States to study economic, political and community conditions abroad. She is an alumna of the Southeastern Council of Foundation’s Hull Fellows program and serves as faculty with the Essential Skills and Strategies for Grantmakers course. She was named the USC College of Education Alumna of the Year in 2007.

Tjuan is on the board of Cool Girls, an organization dedicated to the empowerment of girls; serves on the Neighborhood Fund Advisory Committee with the Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta; and is a board member for the Georgia Leadership Institute for School Improvement. She is member of Impact United Methodist Church in Atlanta; loves travel, live theater, patio gardening and making stained glass art.
Louis J. Erste
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Mr. Erste has been Charter School Division Director at the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) since March 2010. He directs Georgia’s charter school program, provides policy leadership and guidance to the State School Superintendent, GaDOE senior leadership, and the State Board of Education.

Erste served as Chief Operating Officer, Executive Vice President, and Regional Vice President for Mosaica Education, Inc. (MEI) in Atlanta, New York City, and Columbus, Ohio from 2004-2010. He was responsible for developing and overseeing the management of charter schools throughout the U.S.

From 2001-2004, Erste served as Chief Operating Officer (COO) of the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) in Washington, DC. He led transformation efforts including the DCPS Business Plan for Strategic Reform and reconstitution of schools and central office, and the creation of DCPS’s first performance-based budget.

Erste served as a Consultant to the Council of the Great City Schools in Washington, DC, from 2000-2006, where he worked with the Los Angeles Unified School District, the Milwaukee Public Schools, the School District of Philadelphia, and the San Francisco Unified School District.

From 1995 to 2000, Mr. Erste served as Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Advisor to the CEO, Chief of Staff, Chief Operating Officer (COO), and Senior Advisor to the Superintendent at the Cleveland Municipal School District (Ohio) during Federal Court-ordered State control and the creation and implementation of mayoral governance.

Erste was Assistant Director and Research Director at The Citizens League Research Institute and The Citizens League of Greater Cleveland in Ohio from 1987 to 1995, where he directed major citizen studies on such issues as public school reform, Cleveland Public School finances and decentralization, and Ohio education governance.

Erste served as Adjunct Professor at Cleveland State University (CSU) in Ohio from 1987 to 2001, where he taught graduate and undergraduate research methods and statistics, and comparative politics in the College of Urban Affairs and the College of Arts and Sciences. He was teaching assistant, research assistant, and computer programmer at CSU from 1978-81.

From 1986 to 1995, Erste served a Survey Research Consultant, conducting studies for the President’s Blue Ribbon Commission on Defense Management (The White House), The Anniston Star (Alabama), and various local governments in Ohio.
Erste was Senior Research Analyst at Market Opinion Research (MOR) in Detroit, Michigan, from 1985-86, where he conducted custom survey market and public attitude research for clients in the media, consumer, and social sectors. He was also a Computer Programmer at MOR from 1984-85.

Erste worked as teaching fellow, lecturer, adjunct lecturer, research associate, research assistant, administrative assistant, Correlates of War Project director, Computer Assistance Program director, and computer programmer at the University of Michigan from 1981-84.
As president and trustee of The Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation, Penelope McPhee directs the Foundation’s strategic focus on fostering opportunities for children and youth and enhancing the quality of life in Atlanta and beyond. One of the largest family foundations in the region, the Blank Foundation has made grants of more than $250 million since its inception.

Penny joined the Blank Family Foundation in 2004, from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation in Miami, where she led the $1.8 billion foundation’s grant-making programs. A national leader in the arts, she launched Knight’s national Arts and Culture Program in 1990 and became vice president and chief program officer in September 1996.

Penny has had a distinguished career as an author and television producer. Her television documentaries and performance programs have won five Emmys, as well as prestigious awards from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and the National Association of Television Program Executives. For seven years she was on the staff of WPBT, Miami’s public broadcasting station, where she launched its cultural affairs department and served as executive producer of cultural programming.

She is also a noted author whose pictorial history of the civil rights movement, “Martin Luther King Jr. A Documentary: Montgomery to Memphis,” was recognized in 1980 as one of the “Best Books of the Decade” by the American Library Association. Her 1986 book, “King Remembered,” received the New York State Martin Luther King Jr. Medal of Freedom. Georgia Trend magazine included Penny in its 2012 list of “Notable Georgians.”

In 2008, she was elected to the YWCA of Greater Atlanta’s Women of Achievement and selected by Business to Business magazine as a woman of achievement. She currently serves on the boards of the Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, Voices for Georgia’s Children, the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, the Woodruff Arts Center and the Atlanta Committee for Progress. Regional and national board service has included the Council on Foundations, the American Red Cross Georgia Disaster Campaign Cabinet, The Southern Regional Business Council and the Southeastern Council of Foundations. She is a past president of Grantmakers in the Arts, a national affinity group of arts funders.

Penny has a master’s degree from the Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia University, and graduated with honors from Wellesley College, where she received her bachelor’s degree in English and theater arts. She and her husband, Raymond H. McPhee, a retired film and television producer, have one daughter, Cameron Brook McPhee.
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Will Pinkston is a communications consultant working in national and state K-12 and postsecondary education reform. He formerly worked as managing director of advocacy for the State Collaborative on Reforming Education (SCORE), a nonprofit group founded by former U.S. Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist. Before that, he served as senior advisor to Tennessee Governor Phil Bredesen, helping develop landmark policy reforms including the state’s successful bid in the federal Race to the Top competition and the state’s nationally recognized Complete College Tennessee initiative. Pinkston, a former reporter for The Wall Street Journal and The Tennessean, specializes in taking the complex language of public education and translating it into easy-to-understand messages for the public and key stakeholders. Pinkston is a founding board member of Nashville Prep charter school and serves on the board of the Tennessee Student Assistance Corp., which oversees financial aid for students attending public colleges and universities. On August 2, voters elected Pinkston to a four-year term on the Nashville School Board to help lead one of the nation’s largest urban school systems. A Nashville native, Pinkston earned a bachelor’s degree from the University of Tennessee at Knoxville.
Dr. Lynn Plunkett is the Superintendent of Floyd County Schools in Rome, Georgia, her hometown. After a career that spanned from Florida to other parts of Georgia, she returned to Rome almost 10 years ago as Assistant Superintendent and was named Superintendent five years ago. Under her guidance and leadership, Floyd County Schools was the sixth and largest school system in Georgia to be awarded Charter status. They were the first Charter system to receive accreditation under the new AdvancEd (SACS) standards and she is responsible for the establishment of the Floyd County College and Career Academy which serves as a model for other academies in Georgia and surrounding states.

Lynn is active professionally both locally and nationally. She is a governing board member of the American Association of School Administrators and a board member of the Georgia School Superintendent’s Association. She is a member of State School Superintendent, John Barge’s Transition Team, an ad hoc member of the Georgia Education Funding Committee and a member of the Career Ladder Task Force with the Professional Standards Commission.

A 2006 graduate of Leadership Rome, Lynn has been an active member of the Rome/Floyd Chamber of Commerce. She has built a culture of cooperation and partnership with the business and industry community moving the school system and school programs to the forefront in the future community planning.

In Lynn’s spare time, she and her husband, Ron enjoy travel, camping and bike riding. They have two daughters, Brandi and Brooke. They are the proud and doting grandparents to Beau and Elana. With her retirement right around the corner, Lynn looks forward to cheering on her grandchildren at lots of ball games, schools programs and dance recitals.
Danny Shoy, Jr.
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Daniel Shoy, Jr. joined the East Lake Foundation in 2010 and currently serves as the Deputy Executive Director. He provides oversight and support for the programs and partnerships funded by the East Lake Foundation ensuring that all programs consistently deliver results that help East Lake residents build brighter futures. He serves as the executive staff representative for the Foundation’s external stakeholders.

Prior to joining the East Lake Foundation, Daniel worked for 9.5 years with The Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation. During his tenure with the Blank Family Foundation, he worked on its youth-development and education grantmaking focused on supported youth during their K-12 experience and transition into the postsecondary pipeline.

Daniel has 17 years of experience working in the nonprofit sector, specifically with organizations focused on national and local service and youth development. In addition to working for the East Lake Foundation and The Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation, he has worked for the Atlanta Outward Bound Center, City Year San Jose and Hands On Atlanta. Through these organizations, he has gained a keen appreciation for national and community service initially as an AmeriCorps member then as a staff member leading programs in schools and communities. He contributes his personal and professional growth to leadership programs including the United Way’s VIP, LEAD of Leadership Atlanta, the Association of Black Foundation Executives and the Southeastern Council of Foundation’s Hull Program in which he was a fellow then later chairman of the Hull Committee for several years.

Daniel has served on an array of national and state education boards, committees and task forces including the Grantmakers for Education Board, the Emory University Board of Governors and the Georgia Department of Education’s Race to The Top Advisory Committee.

Daniel speaks Italian and Spanish and enjoys international travel, photography and running. A native of New York, Daniel earned a B.A. degree in History from Emory University in 1995.
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John White began his career in education as a high school English teacher in Jersey City, NJ. He then worked for TFA New Jersey and went on to become executive director of TFA-Chicago where he doubled the number of teachers recruited to work in South Side and West Side schools and established one of the most innovative principal training programs in the country. In 2006, White was recruited to New York City where he served as Deputy Chancellor of Talent, Labor and Innovation and helped oversee much of New York’s Race to the Top plan, including overhauling the city’s teacher effectiveness system. In 2011, White became Superintendent of the state-run Recovery School District in New Orleans where he worked to revamp failing schools, implement a city-wide enrollment process, and developed a program to monitor charter schools statewide. He is a 2010 member of the Broad Superintendent’s Academy, received a B.A. in English with distinction from the University of Virginia, and earned a Master’s Degree in Public Administration from New York University.