DAY 1 February 17, 2025



11:00AM

Check-in/Lunch

Brewer Hegeman Conference Center University of Central Arkansas



11:45AM

Welcome

Grace Rains, Conductor/Startup Junkie





12:00PM

Opening Session: Interactive Ecosystem Building Session

Tiffany Henry, Arkansas Capital Corporation Shelby Fiegel, Center for Community and Economic Development

12:45 PM

Coffee Break & Transition to Breakout

Sessions





1:00PM

Breakout Sessions: (select one session)

- The Power of Metrics: How to Quantify the Impact of Your Entrepreneurial Support
- From Classroom to Startup: Bridging the Gap Between Students and Entrepreneurial Resources
- Empowering Rural Innovators: Strategies for Supporting Entrepreneurship in Rural Communities





DAY 1 February 17, 2025



2:00PM

Coffee Break & Transition to Breakout Sessions

2:15 PM

Breakout Sessions: (select one session)

- Policy Gaps and Opportunities: How Arkansas Can Strengthen Its Support for Entrepreneurs
- Narrating Success: How to Tell the Story of Your Work and Its Economic Impact

3:15 PM

Coffee Break & Transition to General Session

3:30 PM

General Session: State of the Ecosystem

Shunquetta Cunningham
Jeff Amerine
Douglas Hutchings
Benito Lubazibwa
Moderated by: Grace Rains

5:00 PM

Happy Hour & Trivia

Arnold Innovation Center

1201 Oak Street Conway, AR





DAY 2 February 18, 2025



8:00AM

Breakfast & Coffee Opens

McCastlain Ballroom University of Central Arkansas

Optional: Collaboration Meetups

- Commercialization Meetup
- Capital Access Meetup
- Business Support in Rural Communities Meetup
- General Networking Meetup

9:00 AM

Welcome & Day 2 Kickoff

ESO Summit Planning Committee

9:15 AM

Keynote: Empowering Startups: Microsoft for Startups and Emerging AI Trends in Retail and Consumer

Goods

Shish Shridhar, Global Retail Lead,

Microsoft for Startups

10:15 AM

Coffee Break & Transition to Breakout

Sessions

10:30 AM General Session: Building Better **Ecosystems: Addressing the Gaps for**

Entrepreneurs

Harvey Williams, Delta Dirt Distillery Emily Young, Brainstorm Agency Moderated by: Madhav Shroff, Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation

11:15 AM

Break & Lunch Buffet Opens

Economic Development Commission Moderated by: Esperanza Massana

1:00 PM

Closing Remarks



BE A SUMMIT CHAMPION

We'll give away 4 prizes to our Summit champions at our wrap up - here's how you can participate:

SOCIAL BUTTERFLY

Share about the ESO Summit on socials. Use #ESOSummit2022 as you post about the summit - selected at random, but the more you tag before Friday at lunch, the better your chances to be the Social Butterfly!

BLACKOUT BINGO BOSS

Your name tag doubles as a bingo card! As you meet and network with individuals from organizations across the state, mark those organizations off on your bingo card. Submit your "blackout" card at lunch on Friday for a chance to be the Blackout Bingo Boss!

MOST INQUISITIVE

Ask questions and participate in discussion throughout the summit to be selected as the most inquisitive!

TRIVIA MASTERMIND

Battle it out and win trivia night!



SPEAKER BIOS



SHELBY FIEGEL, PCED
DIRECTOR OF THE CENTER FOR COMMUNITY
AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL ARKANSAS

Shelby Fiegel is the Director of the University of Central Arkansas Center for Community and Economic Development (CCED) and the Community Development Institute (CDI). She is an Honors graduate of Arkansas State University and holds a degree in public relations. Shelby is a certified Professional Community and Economic Developer (PCED), designated by the Community Development Council, and is a 2016 graduate of CDI.

She currently serves as Chair of the Community Development Council, Ex Officio (previously served as Vice President of Membership and as Vice President of Technology) for the Arkansas Community Development Society Board, co-chair of the Delta Population Health Institute Advisory Board, and is a member of Arkansas Economic Developers and Chamber Executives. Shelby is a regular Arkansas Municipal League City & Town contributor and former Conway Historic District Commissioner. She has also completed the Mid-South Basic Economic Development Course. In 2017, Shelby received the New Professional Award from the Arkansas Community Development Society.

She is a graduate of the 2017 inaugural class of the Conway Area Leadership Institute (CALI), graduate of LeadAR Class 19, Certified Strategic Doing Workshop Leader, Certified Gallup Strengths Coach, and graduate of Leadership Arkansas Class 18. She also serves as a speaker at many regional and statewide conferences and training programs, such as: the Community Development Institute Central, Community Development Institute Central: Louisiana, Mid South Basic, and the Arkansas Public Administration Consortium (APAC).



GRACE RAINS CONDUCTOR

Grace Rains is the Executive Director at the Conductor, a public-private partnership between the University of Central Arkansas and Startup Junkie Consulting that drives innovation, entrepreneurship, and economic empowerment in Arkansas. In her role, Grace guides the strategy and execution of Conductor programming. She oversees the ARise program, a statewide program for tech and tech-enabled founders, the 75Strong, a statewide program to grow entrepreneurial developers across the state, and collaborates closely with entrepreneurs and stakeholders to cultivate an inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem across Arkansas. Grace attended the University of Central Arkansas for both her undergraduate degree and Master of Business Administration. She is a 2021 graduate of Leadership Arkansas and a 2022 recipient of Arkansas Business's 20 in their 20s. Previously, Grace served as the Executive Director of the Ark Angel Alliance, the state's first angel investing network.



TIFFANY HENRY
ARKANSAS CAPITAL CORPORATION

Tiffany Henry works at Arkansas Capital Corporation, a non-profit community development financial institution that empowers entrepreneurs and stimulates regional economic development among underserved communities. She leads the EDGE Initiative: Education to Develop and Grow Entrepreneurs, which aims to increase entrepreneurship at higher education institutions and rural communities. Tiffany has served as an ESHIP Champion with the Kauffman Foundation, co-State Coordinator for Global Entrepreneurship Week Arkansas, and was the founding board member of 1 Million Cups Russellville. She also served on the provisional council of the Ecosystem Builders Leadership Project, a national initiative working to formalize the profession of ecosystem building.



ESPERANZA MASSANA CRANE
DIRECTOR, SMALL BUSINESS AND
ENTREPRENEURSHIP
DEVELOPMENT DIVISION AT THE AEDC

Esperanza Massana Crane is the Director of the Small Business and Entrepreneurship Development Division at the Arkansas Economic Development Commission (AEDC). In this role, she leads the agency's strategic efforts to foster growth within Arkansas' small business and entrepreneurial ecosystem, driving initiatives that support innovation, economic development, and statewide business expansion.

Massana Crane began her career at AEDC in 2013 as a project manager on the Business Development team before being named Director of Marketing in 2016. She served as the director of the Minority and Women-Owned Business Enterprise Division from 2021 to 2023. She currently serves on the boards of the Central Arkansas Library System, the Little Rock Sister Cities Commission and the UALR College of Business Advisory Council. In 2022, the Women's Foundation of Arkansas selected her as its Woman of the Year in Business for its Power of the Purse Awards. Massana Crane is also a graduate of Leadership Greater Little Rock Class XXX and a graduate of Leadership Arkansas Class XII.

Originally from El Salvador, Massana Crane holds both a bachelor's degree and an MBA from Harding University, which recognized her as its 2022 Outstanding Young Alumna. She speaks fluent Spanish and German, as well as intermediate French. She lives in Little Rock with her husband Christopher and son Sebastián.



CLINT O'NEAL

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ARKANSAS
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

Clint O'Neal is the Executive Director of the Arkansas Economic Development Commission. Clint has 17 years of economic development experience and is passionate about making a difference by helping communities win economic development projects and helping companies to be successful in Arkansas. Clint started his economic development career in 2007 as a Project Manager at AEDC. He served as the Vice President of Business Recruitment for the Missouri Partnership starting in 2011 before moving back to his home state in 2018 to be the Deputy Director of Global Business at AEDC. Clint was named Executive Director by Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders in January 2023. He serves as a member of the board of directors for the Arkansas Economic Developers & Chamber Executives, the Arkansas Economic Development Foundation, the Arkansas Institute for Performance Excellence, and the Arkansas Workforce Development Board. He also serves as Governor Sanders' Designee to the Delta Regional Authority.

Clint is a graduate of the Economic Development Institute at the University of Oklahoma and is a Certified Economic Developer through the International Economic Development Council. He holds a Master's degree in Community and Economic Development from the University of Central Arkansas. Clint and his wife, Heather, live in Conway with their four children: Chloe, Ellie, Ava, and Caleb.



NATHAN OHLE
PRESIDENT AND CEO, IEDC

Nathan Ohle is an internationally recognized expert in economic development and serves as President & CEO of the International Economic Development Council (IEDC), the world's largest organization for economic developers. Named a 40 Under 40 Rising Star in economic development, he has held leadership roles at the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) and the Department of Commerce, where he oversaw policy and external affairs, led the White House Rural Council and Community Solutions team, and played a key role in the Detroit Federal Working Group. He also launched the first-ever Office of Philanthropic Engagement at the Commerce Department, bridging partnerships between federal agencies and the philanthropic sector. Prior to IEDC, he was CEO of the Rural Community Assistance Partnership (RCAP). Under his tenure, RCAP's budget and team almost tripled, expanding work in economic development, access to safe drinking water and sanitary wastewater, and disaster recovery for rural and tribal communities across the country. He led RCAP's operations and strategic planning, serving more than 3.4 million rural and tribal residents in 2020. Before moving to Washington, DC, Nathan served in the non-profit sector and as the Board Relations Liaison for the Michigan Economic Development Corporation. Nathan holds degrees from Michigan State University, serves on multiple nonprofit boards, and is an active community volunteer. He resides in Falls Church, Virginia, with his wife and two children.



BENITO LUBAZIBWA
CEO, REMIX IDEAS



In addition to building platforms like the Arkansas Black in Business Directory, Benito has spearheaded innovative efforts such as the Imani Fund, which has deployed over \$700,000 in microloans for Black entrepreneurs. He founded the Black Founders Summit, the Black Ownership Movement Bus Tour, and the 1899 Project, which established the Pine Bluff Black Chamber of Commerce and launched initiatives to transform Pine Bluff's entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Benito's leadership has earned him numerous awards, including the Advancing Equity Award and the John H. Johnson Business and Entrepreneur Award. A Magna Cum Laude graduate of the University of Central Arkansas, Benito is committed to disrupting poverty cycles and fostering community growth through entrepreneurship.



JEFF AMERINE
FOUNDER & MANAGING DIRECTOR
STARTUP JUNKIE CONSULTING, LLC

Jeff is nationally recognized for the creation of lasting venture ecosystems, and co-authored in 2021 the Amazon bestselling book, Creating Startup Junkies – Building Sustainable Venture Ecosystems in Unexpected Places. Jeff has held senior leadership positions in nine startups and multiple Fortune 500 companies including American Freightways and FedEx Freight. He has made more than 90+ venture investments. Jeff now leads Startup Junkie Consulting, and co-leads Innovation Junkie and Cadron Capital Partners. Jeff served as Associate Vice Provost, Research and Economic Development, and Director of Technology Ventures at the University of Arkansas until leaving to pursue Startup Junkie Consulting full-time in 2015. Jeff served as an adjunct professor of entrepreneurship at the Sam M. Walton College of Business at University of Arkansas from 2009-2024. Jeff graduated from United States Naval Academy in 1984, served as an Air Force Officer for 6 years, and holds a Master of Science in Operations Management from the University of Arkansas.



DOUG HUTCHINGS
DIRECTOR, ARA ACADEMY

Douglas was named the ARA Academy's first Director in July of 2019. He is a Hendrix graduate with a Masters and Ph.D. from the University Arkansas, and he is widely known for his active leadership in the state's entrepreneurial community. Working closely with noted entrepreneurship educator Carol Reeves at UA, founding a solar energy technology company, and mentoring countless startup teams, Douglas has become a respected voice in Arkansas. His unique status as a citizen in both the business and academic communities brings authenticity, experience and vision to this important leadership role.



SHUNQETTA N. CUNNINGHAM

CEO AND LEAD CONSULTANT,

KHARIS GROUP CONSULTING

Shunqetta N. Cunningham is the CEO and Lead Consultant at KHARIS Group Consulting and the Founder and Chairwoman of the Annual Nonprofit Summit of Northeast Arkansas. Through KHARIS Group, a social impact agency, she empowers nonprofits with strategic training, coaching, and grant writing services, promoting the belief that nonprofits can and must be profitable. Shunqetta is deeply committed to community engagement. She is a graduate of Leadership Jonesboro, a 2019 World Woman Fellow, and the Arkansas Connection Coordinator for Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated. Her dedication has earned her numerous accolades, including the 2023 Top 100 Women of Impact in Arkansas, the 2024 Woman InspireHER Award, the 2023 Talk Business NEA Women in Business Honoree, and the 2024 TOP 15 Mosaic Trailblazers Award, among others. She has been widely recognized for her exemplary leadership, service, and commitment to social impact. In 2018, Shunqetta founded the Over-A-Cup Initiative, a nonprofit that fosters connections and empowers minority women-led businesses in Arkansas. Under this initiative, she launched the L.E.A.P. Business Academy in 2023, which has graduated 21 entrepreneurs to date. Shunqetta has trained thousands of leaders in the realm of service and strategy, but nothing beats her most important mission-being a wife to her husband Sanford and mother to five amazing children.



SHISH SHRIDHAR
GLOBAL RETAIL LEAD, MICROSOFT
FOR STARTUPS

ShiSh is the Global Lead for Retail with Microsoft for Startups and manages a portfolio of disruptive startups with cutting edge innovations to accelerate the digital transformation of the Retail Industry. ShiSh helps Startups scale through the assets & resources available through Microsoft including engineering, sales and research.

ShiSh has been with Microsoft for 28 years and is deeply passionate about solving business problems using Data & Al as a competitive asset.

ShiSh has worked with the Retail Industry for two decades and engaged with the top retailers and brands in the world helping with their digital transformation journeys.

ShiSh is part of Rethink Retails Top 100 Influencers for 2022 as well as the Retail Technology Influencers Top 100 list. Shish is on the Advisory Board of the Retail Transformation Center at George Mason University and is a Professional Advisor at the Foster School of Business at University of Washington. In his spare time, ShiSh dabbles with IoT, Ham Radio and Location Tracking as well Ocean Navigation. LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/in/shishs

twitter: http://twitter.com/5h15h



JENNIFER FOWLER

DIRECTOR OF ARKANSAS NATIONAL
SCIENCE FOUNDATION EPSCOR

Jennifer Fowler is the statewide program director of Arkansas NSF EPSCoR, and principal investigator for the current Track-1 project, Data Analytics that are Robust and Trusted (DART, OIA-1946391). Jennifer is passionate about science and innovation, and enjoys creating opportunities for learners of all ages. After attending the Arkansas School for Mathematics, Sciences, & the Arts (ASMSA), she obtained her bachelor's degree in Biology from the University of Arkansas, Prior to her promotion to PI/PD, she served for 7 years as the Director of Education, Outreach, & Diversity for Arkansas NSF EPSCoR and the Center for Advanced Surface Engineering, where she implemented a variety of programs and activities to broaden participation in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). She is currently pursuing her PhD in Molecular Biosciences at Arkansas State University with an emphasis in machine learning. Her thesis research involves evaluating machine learning approaches to identify possible genetic markers for types of cancer. She was recently elected to the EPSCoR/IDeA Foundation Board of Directors. Jennifer serves as both a Team Coach and Director of Partner Engagement for National Al Campus, a novel workforce program developed at Arkansas State University to provide foundational skills training in artificial intelligence and machine learning. She also volunteers with Girl Scouts Diamonds of Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Texas as a member of the Board of Directors and the Founding Chair of the council's DEIA committee, and the ASMSA Board of Visitors.



JAKOB MICHAELIS
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER,
DAVE CREEK MEDIA

Jakob Michaelis is a seasoned marketing expert with over two decades of experience, having cracked the code on turning disconnected marketing efforts into profitable, seamless customer journeys. As the Chief Executive Officer at Dave Creek Media, Jakob has helped hundreds of businesses achieve measurable success by implementing a proven marketing framework that connects businesses to their best customers.



ALISON WILLIAMS
COALITION MANAGER, ARKANSAS
STARTERS COALITION

Alison has spent her career navigating government at both state and federal levels. After more than twenty years in public service and electoral politics, she knows good policy when she sees it, how to sustain it, and how to change it when necessary.

Alison opens doors with ease. She loves challenges that require non-traditional relationships to make a real difference, and she's not afraid to call on her more than two decades of contacts to make policy personal.



KARAMA NEAL NEAL FIRM

Karama Neal, PhD is the principal for the Neal Firm which provides consulting and mediation services. Her practice is built on 15 years of experience in personal and rural development finance and prior work in academic, corporate, philanthropic, nonprofit, and government sectors. Her mediation practice is focused on families with heirs property. In 2021, she launched the Heirs Property Information Project which grew out of a statewide grassroots organization she started in 2013 to promote passage of the Uniform Partition of Heirs Property Act. The legislation was passed with no dissent in 2015. Arkansas was the fifth state in the US to pass this legislation.

Previously, she was the Biden Presidential appointee to serve as Administrator of Rural Business—Cooperative Service, an agency of the US Department of Agriculture, Prior to that she served as President of Southern Bancorp Community Partners, a CDFI loan fund and financial development organization promoting economic mobility in rural Arkansas and Mississippi.

Dr. Neal's first career was in the basic biosciences and she has taught at the high school, college, and graduate levels. After graduating from the historic Little Rock Central High School, She earned a BA in biology at Swarthmore College and later a doctorate in genetics from Emory University and a master's in bioethics from Loyola University Chicago. She also completed executive education in impact investing at the University of Oxford Said School of Business. Additional information is available at www.nealfirm.co.



JANELL OWENS REEVES
CENTER DIRECTOR, ARKANSAS
SMALL BUSINESS AND TECHNOLOGY
DEVELOPMENT CENTER

Janell Owens Reeves has dedicated over seven years to empowering small businesses in rural areas through her role as the Director of the Arkansas Small Business and Technology Development Center (ASBTDC) at Southern Arkansas University. Having lived in small communities throughout her life, including towns in Arkansas, Louisiana, and Texas, Janell deeply understands the challenges and opportunities faced by rural entrepreneurs.

As the 2023 recipient of the Ambassador of the Year award, Janell has been recognized for her exceptional efforts in promoting ASBTDC throughout her region and the state through outreach, media, online content, and thought leadership. Additionally, she serves on the Arkansas Veteran's Administration Business Readiness Review Board, contributing her expertise to support veteran-owned businesses.

Janell holds an MBA from Southern Arkansas University and has received multiple accolades, including the 2022 America's SBDC - Arkansas SBTDC State Star and the 2020 SBA Arkansas Small Business Development Center of the Year. She actively contributes to economic and community development through board memberships and leadership roles in organizations such as the Arkansas Community Development Society and the Capital CDC Loan Review Committee.

As an advocate for entrepreneurship and rural economic growth, Janell continues to assist business owners in achieving their goals by leveraging her expertise, lifelong connection to small communities, and passion for community impact.



LATANYUA ROBINSON

Latanyua is active in community and economic development throughout Eastern Arkansas. Self-described as a serial entrepreneur, Latanyua is the Founder & President of Latrobe LLC, a consulting firm focused on the career readiness, commercial readiness, and community readiness for individuals, businesses, and institutions (www.LATROBELLC.com). LATROBE LLC has been providing management consulting in industrial manufacturing and transportation since 2010. In 2019, the business evolved into a consulting firm that operates transactional businesses to provide livable wage job opportunities. The Mission of LATROBE LLC is to advocate for Economic Empowerment thru Education + work Experience + Entrepreneurship.

In her role as the East Arkansas Regional Director of FORGE FUND, Latanyua will help to expand the organization's services and impact with a focus on the underserved communities in the Delta Region of Eastern Arkansas. Working with FORGE allows her to live her version of the Golden Rule: to build upon her experiences as a small business owner to help others access capital for their businesses, doing the things she wished someone would have done for her when starting a business.

Her life's motto: To whom much is given, much is required.



VERONICA OZURA
SEVIER COUNTY ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR

Life long De Queen resident, Veronica Ozura currently serves as the Sevier County Economic Development Director. A 2006 De Queen High School graduate, Veronica went on to earn dual bachelor's degrees in Psychology and Sociology from Arkansas Tech University in 2010. Veronica also holds 2 Masters degrees: M.S, School Counseling from UCA & M.S. Clinical Mental Health from Texas A&M – Texarkana .

Throughout her career, Veronica has focused on community wellness initiatives and helping families and community members connect to resources to meet their needs & full potential. Her experience with victim response task forces in multiple counties, along with her years in professional school settings at the college and high school level have equipped Ms. Ozura with the necessary skills to effectively identify and solve problems. Veronica holds a strong passion for fostering community growth and civic engagement.



KRISTI SMITH
YOURECONOMY

At YourEconomy, Kristi's role is a mix of data nerd and economic storyteller. Her favorite part of the job is helping economic developers to see the trends in their communities and explore how the data illustrates the impact of programs. Kristi previously served the Wisconsin Small Business Development Center (SBDC) as a consultant to entrepreneurs in rural communities. She started, grew and sold two businesses of her own – a technology consulting company and a retail candy store. Kristi holds a Master of Arts degree in Government from New Mexico State University.



MARLA JOHNSON
TECH ENTREPRENEUR-INRESIDENCE. UALR

Marla Johnson is a tech entrepreneur and business leader with more than 30 years of experience in technology innovation, company building, and digital transformation. She has a proven track record in leading innovative companies and pioneering the use of new technology to accelerate business value. She has spoken and coached via workshops and keynote addresses in 33 states and Canada on how to benefit from emerging technologies.

In November of 2024 she became Tech Entrepreneur-in-Residence at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock where she is bringing her experience across multiple industries with amazing innovators on the UA-Little Rock campus, both faculty and students. She is expanding tech entrepreneurial programs, certifications, and commercialization services to increase the University's economic impact in the greater Little Rock area. She is focused on mobilizing advances in Al for good on the campus and beyond.



APRIL HEARNE
DEPARTMENT CHAIR OF BUSINESS AND IT,
PULASKI TECHNICAL COLLEGE

Originally from a small town in Southeast Missouri April Hearne is an Associate Teaching Professor of Entrepreneurship and Department Chair of Business and IT and University of Arkansas-Pulaski Technical College. She is also the facilitator for the City of Little Rock's BUILD Academy which is a free small business incubator offered to small business owners within the city limits. She has owned and operated several small businesses over the years but she says her greatest accomplishment is as wife of almost 20 years to Dustin and Mom to 7-year old Savanna.



PHIL SHELLHAMMER
U OF A OFFICE OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP &
INNOVATION

Phil Shellhammer is the Executive Director of the Office of Entrepreneurship and Innovation (OEI) at the University of Arkansas, where he leads efforts to support students, faculty, and the broader Arkansas community through entrepreneurial education and experiential learning. Drawing from his extensive corporate experience at Sam's Club, Best Buy, and Procter & Gamble, he has mentored hundreds of entrepreneurs across industries such as outdoor recreation, healthcare, retail, and emerging technologies. His expertise in strategy, merchandising, pricing, and business development helps founders navigate the journey from ideation to launch.

Phil holds a BS in Mechanical Engineering from the University of Cincinnati and an MBA from Harvard Business School. Outside of work, he enjoys camping, hiking, cycling, and outdoor photography. He also serves on the boards of Arkansas Athletes Outreach (AAO) and Students Acquiring Knowledge through Enterprise (SAKE), using his expertise to support youth and business leadership development.

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