

Digital Skills: Gateway to Opportunity Speaker Biographies

Co-Hosts



Andrea Sáenz, Chicago Public Library

Andrea Sáenz serves as First Deputy Commissioner for Chicago Public Library. She leads program design and evaluation and support strategy, innovation and organizational development. Before joining the Library, Andrea served as chief of staff to the Chicago Public Schools CEO, as policy advisory to the Assistant Secretary of Career, Technical and Adult Education at the US Department of Education in Washington DC, and executive director of the Hispanic Alliance for Career Enhancement (HACE). Andrea completed her graduate studies as a fellow at the University of Pennsylvania Fels Institute of Government. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Latin American Studies from Scripps College and a Master's degree in public administration from the University of Pennsylvania.

Andrea is from Quito, Ecuador and grew up in Los Angeles. She was a 2010 Broad Resident and a 2008 Leadership Greater Chicago Fellow. She serves on the boards of the James Dyson Foundation, Blair Thomas & Company, Instituto del Progreso Latino, the Professional Diversity Network, and the Maker Ed Educator Advisory Committee.



Patti Constantakis, Digital Promise

Patti has a long-held commitment to innovation, technology and education and has spent the bulk of her career in the educational technology field largely working with adult learners. Prior to Digital Promise, Patti was the Director of Product, Content and Curriculum at GreatSchools.org and was responsible for several large parent education initiatives that included developing digital media components, implementing on-the-ground workshops and events, and managing community-based media campaigns. Prior to GreatSchools, Patti worked with several start-ups, developing and implementing e-learning courseware, online educational games, and mobile apps for a variety of

audiences. Patti earned her PhD from the University of Texas at Austin in communications, with an emphasis in Spanish-language media and Latinos in the U.S. She received her master's degree in Radio, Television, Film, also from the University of Texas at Austin, and a dual bachelor's degree in journalism and Spanish from New Mexico State University.

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Session One: Why are digital skills important and how do we equip adults with digital skills?



Philipp Schmidt, MIT Media Lab

J. Philipp Schmidt is Director of Learning Innovation at the MIT Media Lab, where he leads the ML Learning initiative, teaches courses, and conducts research on learning communities. He is also a cofounder and board member of Peer 2 Peer University (P2PU), a non-profit organization that provides access to online higher education through public libraries. Philipp served on the founding board of the OpenCourseWare Consortium and co-authored the Cape Town Open Education Declaration. He has received Shuttleworth and Ashoka and MIT Media Lab Director's fellowships.



Deborah Bennett, Polk Bros. Foundation

Deborah E. Bennett a Senior Program Officer at the Polk Bros. Foundation, where she is a program area leader for workforce development, affordable housing, community economic development and safe communities. Deborah held several positions at Shorebank Corporation and also worked as an economic development planner at the UIC Center for Urban Economic Development. Deborah has a bachelor's and master's degree in economics from Stanford and Kent State Universities, respectively. In 2010 she was awarded an Association of Black Foundation Executives fellowship. She is a board member of the Chicago Low-Income Housing Trust Fund and is on the leadership committee of the Preservation Compact and the Chicagoland Workforce Funders Alliance.



Joseph Higgins, Comcast NBC Universal

Joe Higgins is the director of external affairs and community investment for Comcast in the Greater Chicago Region. Serving Metro Chicago, Illinois, northwest Indiana, southwest Michigan, Mr. Higgins is responsible for advancing the community investment strategy, strengthening diversity commitments, and leveraging broadband opportunity programs for the region. At Comcast, Mr. Higgins is responsible for the Internet Essentials program, Leaders & Achievers Scholarship program, Comcast Cares Day, the United Way Campaign, the Comcast Digital Connectors Program and the Comcast Foundation. Mr. Higgins received his Bachelor of Arts Degree in Communication and Journalism from Western Illinois University. Currently he sits on the executive board for the North Northwest Suburban United Way, The United Way of Metropolitan Chicago's Campaign Cabinet, and the Community Review Panel for the 21st Century Solutions Grants for NBC Universal.

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Juan Salgado, Instituto del Progreso Latino

Juan Salgado has been the President and CEO of Instituto del Progreso Latino (Instituto) since 2001. Juan has led Instituto through a period of national award winning recognition and historic organizational growth spurred by a focus on creating partnerships, enhancing core competencies, leading innovation, providing quality services, and participating in targeted advocacy. Under his direction, Instituto has established national best-practice educational and workforce models and earned the 2009 National Council of La Raza Affiliate of the Year. In 2011 the White House recognized Juan as one of 13 people nationally serving as Champions of Change for social innovation in their communities. His qualities as a committed leader earned him a 2005 fellowship in Leadership Greater Chicago. He has a Master's degree in Urban Planning from the University of Illinois at

Urbana-Champaign and a Bachelor's degree in Economics from Illinois Wesleyan University. In May 2013, Juan received an Honorary Doctorate in Humane Letters from Illinois Wesleyan University and is a graduate from the Harvard Business School Owner President Manager program. In 2015, Juan was awarded the prestigious MacArthur genius award.



Heidi Silver-Pacuilla, U.S. Department of Education, Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education

Heidi is the Branch Chief for Applied Innovation and Improvement in the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education in the U.S. Department of Education. She has served in this role for over four years, guiding the grants and contracts supported by the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act's national leadership fund and providing leadership in the Office on issues of technology integration for teaching and learning. She is passionate about integrating technology into adult teaching and learning and has her doctorate in adult literacy and learning. Her team oversees national activities that deliver professional development and technical assistance to adult education practitioners. The flagship site where these efforts are accessed is LINCS.ed.gov. Heidi also takes the lead in OCTAE on issues of digital literacy and technology innovations.

How ready are adult educators, instructors, and community based organizations to use technology to facilitate digital learning?



Sharon Bush, Grand Victoria Foundation

Sharon Bush is the Elgin Program Director and Senior Program Officer. As the Elgin Program Director, Sharon develops and implements the Foundation's place-based grantmaking and community improvement initiatives in Elgin, Illinois. As a senior program officer, she works across the Foundation's primary grantmaking areas and works with staff to develop and implement strategic initiatives. Sharon brings to the Foundation important experience with developing and leading collaborations. Sharon is the President of the Literacy Funders Network. She co-chairs the Donors Forum Leadership in Philanthropy committee and is chair of Chicago African Americans in Philanthropy. She also serves on

the board of directors of Mikva Challenge.

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Matthew Muench, The Joyce Foundation

Matthew Muench is a Senior Program Officer in Joyce's Employment Program, where his grant making seeks innovative and business-centered approaches to helping underprepared adults acquire the skills and credentials they need to get good jobs and advance in careers. In addition, he manages the program's Innovation Fund, which aims to identify or generate and then scale innovations with transformational potential. Current areas of interest in this portfolio include adaptive learning technologies; alternative financing mechanisms such as social impact bonds; and behavioral science-inspired interventions. Mr. Muench's professional background was in the aerospace and defense industry, as a consultant providing strategic and tactical advice to Fortune 200 firms, with especial focus on market entry and growth strategies, opportunity identification, and M&A. Mr. Muench holds degrees from The University of Michigan (MBA), London School of Economics (MSc), and Tulane University (BA).

Lunch Speaker



Charles Adler, founder Center for Lost Art, co-founder Kickstarter.

I'm a Kickstarter co-founder, designer, and lifelong nomad. Born in the U.K., raised in the U.S., living life exploring the world. I'm part Designer, Information Architect, Graphic Designer, DJ, Cyclist, Runner, Husband, and now Father. Previously I founded the now defunct web-based arts magazine Subsyistence as well as Source-ID, a multi-disciplinary design studio. Since 1994, much of my work has centered on supporting independent artists. Additionally, I'm a passionate runner, cyclist and outdoorsman. Nature heals.

Session Two: Idea swap from other places



Larry Britt, Providence Public Library (RI Family Literacy)

Larry Britt is a Technology Specialist and Teacher at RI Family Literacy (RIFLI). He has taught ESL, Citizenship Preparation, Workplace Readiness and Basic Computer Skills to immigrant learners. Before joining RIFLI and the Adult Education Community, he worked as a technology trainer at financial institutions for 25 years. He has had a computer on his workplace desk for the past 40 years. His career has come full circle as he's taken on a technical role at RIFLI as well as his responsibilities as RI Statewide Coordinator and Proctor Trainer for Northstar Digital Literacy Assessment and active participation on the RI Adult Education Technology Advisory Committee. He has a BA from Harvard University.



Karisa Tashjian, Providence Public Library (RI Family Literacy)

Karisa Tashjian is the Director of Education for the Providence Public Library and the Rhode Island Family Literacy Initiative (RIFLI). She currently serves as a member of the Rhode Island Department of Education Technology Advisory Committee for Adult Education and is a Board Member of the New England Literacy Resource Center. She has served as a Civics Teacher, Technology Coordinator, Curriculum Developer and Tutor for various literacy organizations. She has a MEd in ESL and Social Studies from George Washington University and a BA from Clark University.

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Jennifer Kobrin, Mayor's Commission on Literacy, Philadelphia

Jennifer Kobrin joined The Mayor's Commission on Literacy in September of 2013, where she is Director of myPLACEm and Digital Initiatives. As lead on the myPLACEm program, she coordinates a city-wide system of adult education, which places over 2,500 learners annually into adult literacy and ESL programming and tracks their progress through a central database. In her current role, she also focuses on issues relating to the digital divide in Philadelphia. She manages the KEYSPOt program for the Commission, which consists of a network of 50 public access computing centers across Philadelphia. Jennifer also directs myPLACEm Online, a series of online courses for adult learners.

Prior to joining The Commission, Jennifer was Senior Director at Foundations, Inc., where she designed professional development and technical assistance for K-12 educators, focusing on afterschool and expanded learning. Jennifer has an M.S.Ed. from the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education.



Brandon Lindsey, Seattle Goodwill

Brandon Lindsey is the Program Development Manager at Seattle Goodwill where he works to design, develop, and implement new job training and education programs. He has overseen the implementation of Goodwill's Digital Literacy Initiative to incorporate technology education as key component to all of Goodwill's programs. An important part of this initiative has been to embed iPads into Goodwill's ESOL and GED classes. Mr. Lindsey has taught computers, life skills, job search, and ESOL both domestically and abroad.



Rebecca Ryan, Saint Paul Public Library

Rebecca Ryan manages Saint Paul Public Library's busiest branch: Rondo. She has worked inside and outside of library buildings for the past twelve years, with extensive experience in community engagement, particularly in regards to digital literacy and inclusion. Early literacy, cultural programming for adults and children, and STEAM learning are some of her areas of expertise. Rebecca also managed the Sun Ray Library, which won a community action award for Environmental Initiatives in 2016. She holds a Master's of Library and Information Science from Saint Catherine University.