

Participant Bios

JOSEPH AYALA

Joey Ayala was born and raised in Clearwater, FL along with a handful of siblings. His family has been in the Tampa Bay area for a few generations. He is a new father and a veteran of the U.S. Navy with a background in linguistics, international affairs, and international intelligence. After graduating from the University of South Florida with a Bachelor's in public health, his interest in sustainability and food systems peaked. He is now in the last semester of his master's program at Columbia University where he studies and conducts research at the intersection of climate science and policy.

BETTE BILLIOTT

Bette Billiot was born and raised in Dulac, LA, and currently resides in East Houma, of Terrebonne Parish. She is the daughter of Sandra Francis and the late Jerry Billiot. She has three sons, Jacy, Gabriel, and Colby. Bette is currently working for Sierra Club as a Field Organizer, and Housing Louisiana as a part time Community Organizer. She is a co-facilitator of a Bioneers Intercultural Conversations tribal youth group. Bette has been an advocate for the Gulf South on land, water, air, and industry issues affecting her home state to issues all across the gulf coastal communities. Bette joined the council in hopes of bridging the gap of communication between her district and the tribe. She hopes to gain more community input and youth participation. She believes you must lead by example and involvement is key. Her passion is driven by wanting to make her children proud, the ability to travel, connecting with community, sharing her culture, educating the youth, and being a voice for those now who were never asked the question back then, "How will this affect you?".

BETH BUTLER

Beth Butler is a lifelong community organizer of low to moderate-income families. Beth has worked with the community-centered non-profit organization, ACORN, in several southern cities and has been based in New Orleans since 1980. She has been with "A Community Voice-Louisiana/ACORN" since 2009. Beth loves organizing working people for social and environmental justice, and loves family, friends, and life.

CASI (KC) CALLAWAY

Casi Callaway is the first Chief Resilience Officer in the State of Alabama and serves the City of Mobile by creating inclusive, risk-aware, and forward-focused solutions to current and future challenges. Callaway focuses on building resilience into systems and removing barriers so the team can focus on ensuring all community members are poised to thrive in the face of increasing challenges in the environment, climate, and economy.

She grew up in Mobile, received her degree from Emory University, and moved to Washington, DC where she organized and lobbied on environmental legislation at the local, state, and

federal level. Callaway came home to advocate for Mobile Bay spending 23 years growing Mobile Baykeeper into a 20-member team with a \$1M budget and a host of environmental wins.

Callaway earned several leadership awards over her career and currently serves as the Co-Chair for the Southeast Sustainability Director's Network - more than 100 communities across ten southern states. She is a certified floodplain manager and provides insight to a variety of audiences on climate, resilience, and environmental issues as well as leadership and team building.

DEBRA CAMPBELL

JEFF CARNEY

Jeff Carney is a registered architect and certified city planner working at the interface of housing, neighborhoods, and ecosystems with a focus on climate change adaptation. He is associate professor in the School of Architecture at the University of Florida, director of the Florida Institute for Built Environment Resilience (FIBER), and director of the Florida Resilient Cities program (FRC). Jeff's work in Florida is focused on the resilience of communities achieved through transdisciplinary and community engaged design processes. His current projects include a U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development funded effort to design post-disaster modular housing, and an FRC project to assist the panhandle City of Port St. Joe to recover from Hurricane Michael that is supported by the Jessie Ball Dupont fund. Previously, Jeff was the director of the LSU Coastal Sustainability Studio (CSS) where he led the development of the Louisiana Resiliency Assistance Program (LRAP) that continues to assist communities throughout Louisiana; additionally, he led the design and fabrication of the 10,000sf permanent exhibition for the LSU Center for River Studies called "shifting Foundations" which told the story of coastal Louisiana's changing landscape and the new paradigms in protection and restoration needed to create a more sustainable coast. He co-directed his team's award-winning submission for the Changing Course competition entitled "The Giving Delta," that reimaged Louisiana's ecological systems and coastal communities in the context of climate change. Shortly before moving to UF Jeff initiated and led the project "Inland from the Coast," a three-year grant supported by the Gulf Research Program of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Jeff's work has been exhibited at the Venice Biennale and his projects and scholarship have been published widely. His projects have been recognized through awards including the 2018 AIABR Rose Award winner for the Shifting Foundations exhibit; the 2016 New York Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects Merit Award, for "The Giving Delta"; the 2014 APA Planning Excellence Award for Education, for the Louisiana Resilience Assistance Program; the 2012 ACSA Collaborative Practice Award, for the Coastal Sustainability Studio; and the 2011 EDRA Great Places Awards in Design Research for "Measured Change: Tracking Transformations on Bayou Lafourche." Jeff teaches undergraduate and graduate level architecture studios and multi-disciplinary seminars on resilience design and planning at the

building, neighborhood, and regional scale. Jeff received his bachelor's degree in architecture from Washington University in St. Louis and master's degrees in both architecture and city and regional planning from the University of California, Berkeley. While at Berkeley, Jeff was awarded the Branner Fellowship to conduct a year-long research project to study the evolution of modernist neighborhood-scale urbanism in Europe, South America, and Asia, an experience which continues to shape his work today.

ANGELA M. CHALK

Angela M. Chalk, MSHCM, Community Advocate, Founder and Executive Director of Healthy Community Services. Not only does she do the work in her immediate community, she travels often to learn more as well as raise more awareness about creating and growing green communities through sustainability initiatives that provides residents and business owners with an understanding of urban storm water management techniques, how the drainage system of New Orleans works, improving the water quality of Lake Pontchartrain as well as how green infrastructure reduces subsidence by increasing the water table levels.

RENEE COLLINI

Renee Collini, Ph.D., Director of the Gulf Center for Equitable Climate Resilience at The Water Institute, brings years of experience in providing tools and support to federal, state, and local entities pursuing adaptation and resilience strategies.

As director of the Gulf Center for Equitable Climate Resilience, Renee draws from on-the-ground experience working in underserved communities and navigating federal, state, and local governmental processes and systems to help support effective and equitable climate resilience planning and action in communities across the Gulf Coast.

Prior to joining The Water Institute, Renee served as a coastal climate resilience specialist with Mississippi State University and Sea Grant in the northern Gulf of Mexico for almost a decade, facilitating the flow of information between researchers and decision-makers to improve science application. As the lead of the Program for Local Adaptation to Climate Effects: Sea-Level Rise, she integrated a multi-state network of stakeholders, researchers, NGOs, and state and federal agencies to build tools, programs, and projects to address gaps in sea-level rise observing, research, and decision-making. She has collaborated on projects and efforts that have improved coastal community and environmental resilience and has led development of tools and programming that have been applied throughout the Gulf and across the United States. Collini is a recognized leader in resilience across the Gulf of Mexico and is serving as an author on the Fifth National Climate Assessment Coastal Effects Chapter.

Collini received her bachelor's degree in biology from the University of Texas at Dallas, master's degree in marine sciences from the University of South Alabama and her Ph.D. from Mississippi State University was focused on human sciences.

CHRISTOPHER DALBOM

Christopher Dalbom is a Senior Research Fellow at Tulane University Law School and the Director of the Tulane Institute on Water Resources Law and Policy. Prior to coming to Tulane, Christopher served in the Peace Corps in El Salvador and studied cultural geography in Louisiana and Virginia.

Since graduating from Tulane Law School in 2012, he has filled multiple roles at the Tulane Institute on Water Resources Law and Policy. Now, as Director, he leads the Institute's vision and planning & supervises and coordinates the work of postgraduate fellows and student researchers. Christopher brings to bear extensive work on a wide variety of legal and policy issues.

Additionally, he is Assistant Director of the Tulane Center for Environmental Law, a member of the Summer Externship Faculty, Deputy Faculty Director of the Tulane Master of Jurisprudence in Energy & Environmental Law program, and an Adjunct Assistant Professor who teaches Water Law and Policy and the Seminar on Coastal and Wetlands Law. He's been called the "Kai Ryssdal of water policy."

DERRICK EVANS

GORDON JACKSON

Gordon Jackson serves in a dual role in South Mississippi and the state overall within the Environmental Justice Initiative. He's Environmental and Climate Justice Committee Chair of the Mississippi NAACP State Conference. He also serves as President of the Board of Directors for Steps Coalition, a community redevelopment organization based in Gulfport/Biloxi that is currently serving the three lower counties of Mississippi: Hancock, Harrison, and Jackson. Gordon is deeply involved in Steps Coalition's Resilient East Biloxi Initiative, helping with several community-led projects geared toward fostering a regeneration and revitalization of the East Biloxi community and is helping address several environmental issues connected with various local branches of the Mississippi State NAACP.

PAMELA JENKINS

Pamela Jenkins is a Research Professor of Sociology at the University of New Orleans (Emerita). She is a faculty member of UNO's Center for Hazard Assessment, Response and Technology. Her latest book with Steve Kroll Smith and Vern Baxter, *Left to Chance*, documents the recovery of two African American neighborhoods after Hurricane Katrina. Since retirement,

she has been part of research projects analyzing impacts of sea level rise and the Louisiana coast, including View from the Coast and Making Sense of a Place at Risk. She is currently working on her second book about the recovery efforts from Hurricane Katrina, tentatively titled Sundays at Pam and Ed's.

CLEO G. JOHNSON-MCLAUGHLIN

Ms. Cleo Johnson-McLaughlin is based in Houston, TX and has 35+ years of experience in community organizing, nonprofit capacity building, policy, and government programming. Ms. Cleo is the founder and President of Black United Fund of Texas, which was established in 1987 in Houston's 5th Ward as an administrative, programmatic, and fiscally responsible 501(c)3 nonprofit organization.

REVEREND DR. RUSSELL MEYER

The Rev. Dr. Russell L. Meyer (rmeyer@floridachurches.org) is the Executive Director of the Florida Council of Churches and Interim Pastor of St. John's Lutheran Church, Jacksonville FL. He heads up the Florida Faith Advocacy Office and convenes the Florida Interfaith Climate Actions Network, founded in 2014. He is a co-creator of the Transformative Learning Community, St. Petersburg, Florida, which promotes conversational leadership to manifest collective wisdom and encourage emergent possibilities for greater community collaboration. He currently is helping to design a convening of nonviolence and pro-democracy movements to imagine Mutual Peace: Beyond Violence.

He is active statewide in addressing policies and systems that deny Floridians, whether newly arrived or from families of multiple generations in the state, access to health, education, opportunity, fair treatment, a clean environment, and basic dignity.

Rev. Meyer is a founding member of various justice coalitions, including a faith-based community organization, a police reform initiative, an equity in education policy group, a climate action collaborative, a refugee advocacy alliance, a national unity through mourning movement, and a transformative learning community. Active from Canada to Cuba in multi-faith relationships, he pursues concerns that matter towards making people whole. He grew up in Nebraska and Kansas. Ordained in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, he has served churches in New York, Maryland, South Carolina, and Florida.

He has led numerous faith workshops on interdenominational understandings, interfaith declarations, community organizing, social justice, immigrant support, and Cuban religious life. He is regularly invited to provide a faith perspective on major public issues of the day from climate change to criminal justice reform and immigrant rights. He is active with frontline community organizers and has provided leadership for some of the largest police reform marches in Florida. His doctoral work is in applying social field theory to generate conversations

among heterogeneous groups that lead to new collaborative actions. His ministry extends throughout church and society. He believes God has provided abundantly so that all may thrive and that the Church rightly champions a moral economy.

Over the years the necessity of reimagining our economic order has become the most critical part of my Christian reflection. Too many suffer impoverishment, whether materially or spiritually, from the great divorce of God's economy from human affairs. We languish in need of seeing how our inextricable relationship with one another requires a Beloved Economy for the Beloved Community. Through a Great Dialog on the circulation of abundance, we could witness a society in which all thrive.

MARLA NELSON

Marla Nelson, Ph.D., holds the Freeport Professorship in Urban & Public Affairs. Dr. Nelson is an Associate Professor in the Department of Planning and Urban Studies at the University of New Orleans where she teaches and conducts research in local economic development, community development and urban revitalization. Nelson's recent work on New Orleans addresses planning and policy interventions to deal with vacant and abandoned property and the difficulties city officials have faced in translating the desire for a safer, better city into policies that could direct a just redevelopment. She has published in *Cityscape*, the *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, *Economic Development Quarterly*, the *Journal of Urban Affairs*, the *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, *Planning Practice and Research* and *Urban Studies*.

Active in local and national organizations, Nelson is member of the national and Louisiana chapters of the American Planning Association (APA), the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP), Planners Network, the Urban Affairs Association Governing Board and the Vacant Property Research Network Advisory Board and serves on the board of two community-based organizations in New Orleans. Nelson received her B.A. in economics from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst and her MCRP and Ph.D. in urban planning and policy development from Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey.

JANE NGUYEN

Jane Nguyen is the Branch Manager for Boat People SOS's Gulf Coast Branch which consists of AL and MS offices. She holds a master's degree in public health and health promotions from the University of Southern Mississippi. Her professional journey began in disaster and emergency management, honed during her tenure at the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). It was through this experience that she forged a deep-seated commitment to community advocacy and empowerment. Joining Boat People SOS was a natural progression for Jane, where she discovered a platform to channel her passion into tangible action. Over the past decade, she has dedicated herself to addressing the social and health inequities faced by

underserved and marginalized communities across the Gulf Coast region. Jane's leadership is characterized by her unwavering dedication to providing direct services and advocating for systemic change. Her approach is holistic, recognizing the interconnectedness of health, social, and economic factors in community well-being.

MAIDA OWENS

Maida Owens is a folklorist who has directed the Louisiana Division of the Arts Folklife Program since 1988. She is a founding member of the Bayou Culture Collaborative, an initiative of the Louisiana Folklore Society. Through monthly online gatherings and working groups, the BCC connects those interested in the intersection of traditional culture, the arts and science in the face of Louisiana's land loss and environmental changes. Her focus is on the impact of migration upon our cultures in the face of coming disruption. To support Louisiana's traditional cultures, the Folklife Program offers funds to support Passing It On workshops to help tradition bearers share their knowledge with their community.

KRISTINA PETERSON

Kristina Peterson, PhD, helped to create the Lowlander Center to address the complex social and environmental impacts of the climate crisis with the inclusion of local communities and their vast knowledges. 'Think globally, act locally' for just and sustainable future is a guiding principle of her work. As an applied social scientist who has spent her life as a community activist for sustainable just communities mostly through long-term holistic community-based responses to disasters, she has helped create large scale networks of community/regional responses for large national disasters including technological-environmental, acts of racial violence, economic upheaval, and weather events. Her years of justice work within the disaster mitigation field have contributed to the creation of and being a founding board member of both the National Hazards Mitigation Association and the Gender and Disaster Network. Her justice work includes multiple dimensions of safe natural and built environment, holistic planning, adaptation, and resettlement. She has been working on ways to address and decolonize outcomes from the Doctrine of Discovery through forms of restorative justice and, land stewardship, climate adaptation land trusts and the rematriation of land. Peterson is an advocate for a federally created Department on Climate Adaptation similar to the 1934 Resettlement Administration which would have cabinet status. Peterson is part of the Rising Voices Changing Coast -NSF COPE program, and continuing dialogue with the UN Rapporteur on internal displacement and justice.

ELDER ROSINA PHILIPPE

Elder Rosina Philippe has lived her entire life in her tribe's ancestral lands in and around the Plaquemines Peninsula of southern Louisiana. She is a member, current Council Elder, and Indigenous Knowledge Holder of the Atakapa-Ishak/Chawasha Tribe of Grand Bayou, Louisiana. Elder Philippe helped to create the First Peoples' Conservation Council (FPCC) in

2012, served as its President from 2018-2022, and helped to secure its participation in the 2012 National Climate Change Assessment. She has been a Board member of the Lowlander Center since 2016 - Present. In 2022, Elder Philippe received her second Award from the Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana. She is a tireless advocate for environmental justice as part of the Rising Voices Center for Indigenous and Earth Sciences (risingvoices.ucar.edu) through the National Center for Atmospheric Research (NCAR). Elder Philippe is currently a member of the National Environmental Justice Advisory Council to the US Environmental Protection Agency.

VELIKA THOMAS

Velika Thomas is currently serving as the Financial Officer at the Black United Fund of Texas (BUFTX) in Houston, Texas since 1998, Velika has played a pivotal role in managing funds and providing financial management for 30 non-profit organizations. Her leadership and coordination have been instrumental in overseeing company financial planning, debt financing, and budget management functions, ensuring compliance with accounting principles while raising and dispersing over \$1M in funds through various channels.

In addition to her financial stewardship, Velika is pursuing a degree in nursing to address healthcare injustices. Committed to bridging the gap in healthcare access for underserved communities, Velika's decision to pursue nursing reflects her unwavering dedication to promoting health equity and serving those in need. She has also received a grant from the American Association of University Women (AAUW) to further her education and assistance to women who have been abused, showcasing her commitment to advancing women's empowerment and addressing societal challenges.

Velika's expertise extends beyond financial management; she actively engages in policy development, human resource management, and funds procurement, garnering grants from notable entities such as the EPA, Houston Endowment, and General Motors. Her proficiency in program development and evaluation, coupled with her supervision of clerical staff, underscores her comprehensive approach to organizational leadership.

While at BUFTX, Velika has demonstrated her versatility in roles such as Paralegal at the Law Office of Sufian & Passamano, LLP, and Co-Owner of Aunt Bea's Restaurant, where she ensured operational efficiency and guest service excellence. Her commitment to community service is further exemplified through her roles as Program Director at Phoenix Outreach Youth Center and Director of Childcares, where she established non-profit childcare businesses and oversaw operational compliance.

Outside of her professional endeavors, Velika is deeply involved in her community, facilitating workshops and training sessions to empower women and aspiring entrepreneurs. She is also a

dedicated member of the Cooks for Christ ministry at her church, enjoys kickboxing, training for marathons, and cherishes spending quality time with her husband and blended family of seven children and five grandchildren.

Velika Thomas's career is characterized by her unwavering commitment to fostering economic empowerment, social justice, and community resilience. Through her strategic leadership, innovative problem-solving, and dedication to serving others, she continues to make a tangible impact, leaving a lasting legacy of positive change in the communities she serves. Her journey in nursing school further solidifies her dedication to addressing healthcare disparities and promoting well-being for all.

DR. E. DEETTE SMYTHE

Dr. Elizabeth deEtte Smythe has more than 30 years of experience in chemical and civil-environmental engineering applications to water resources, surface water quality, hydrology, environmental chemistry and chemo-dynamics (fate-and-transport of pollutants in the environment). Her work has been documented in more than 100 publications & presentations and has facilitated the development of modeling equations and protocols that have improved the predictability of pollution impacts in order to protect vulnerable populations throughout Louisiana and the Gulf Coast.

Dr. Smythe has over 30 years of experience in a wide variety of stormwater management, water resources, engineering research, and management roles throughout the US. She provides a combination of technical skills in coastal, water quality and engineering support; and extensive agency experience and contacts (FEMA, NFIP, USACE, USFWS, USGS, NOAA-NWS, NRL, EPA, DoD, LDEQ, LDWF, LDH).

Dr. Smythe's primary expertise is in pollutant assessment and water quality fate-and-transport modeling. Her project experience in water resources management for rivers, lakes and coastal waterbodies has involved wastewater treatment and regulatory compliance strategies; wastestream characterization; water quality assessment and modeling; TMDLs and wasteload allocations; and water quality sampling for biological, chemical, and physical constituents.

This modeling, assessment and regulatory expertise has provided stakeholders with the technology and information needed to identify and implement constructive, practical and often pro-active solutions to coastal restoration, flood & hurricane protection and water quality management problems.