



# 2023 Georgia Broadband Summit

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## Herschel Arant



Herschel Arant is the Sr. Vice President of Energy Supply and External Services with Central Georgia EMC where he has worked for the past 19 years. Herschel has over 25 years of experience in the area of T&D engineering and system operations. He holds a Bachelor and Master of Science in Electrical Engineering from Georgia Tech and an MBA from Georgia State University. Herschel is a member of IEEE and a registered professional engineer in the State of Georgia.

## Alice Bennett



Alice Bennett is the Associate State Director for Advocacy for AARP Georgia. Bennett has been with AARP Georgia for seven years. She is based out of AARP Georgia's state office in Atlanta where she is responsible for working with elected representatives to advance legislation that will benefit AARP's key constituencies.

Bennett has a long and accomplished career that predates her years working for AARP Georgia. She worked on issues like voting rights and affordable health care with the NAACP in North Carolina. She also spent more than a decade as a community organizer with Helping Empower Local People. In that capacity, Bennett led campaigns dealing with education, transportation access for seniors and HIV testing programs, among others.

## Steven Ferguson



Steven Ferguson is a highly regarded IT leader with 27 years of industry experience. As the Chief Information Officer for the Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG), he manages a talented team of IT professionals to support TCSG's technical education, adult education, economic development, and workforce development initiatives across 88 campuses in the state.

## Catherine Fleming



Catherine Fleming is Director, State Government Affairs, for Charter Communications in the state of Georgia. She joined the company in September 2016 and represents Charter before state and local government and administrative agencies. Prior to Charter, Catherine was employed by the Georgia Municipal Association where she lobbied on legislative issues relating to municipal governance and environment and natural resources. Catherine earned a bachelor's degree from Davidson College and resides in the Buckhead neighborhood of Atlanta with her husband Ted, two young sons, and standard poodle.

## Oneisha Freeman



Oneisha Freeman is a respected leader in the field of digital inclusion, with over two decades of experience in the technology industry. As the Digital Connectivity Manager at the Georgia Technology Authority, she is a part of the broadband team and is responsible for spearheading efforts to ensure equitable access to the internet and technology for all Georgians regardless of their zip code or economic status.

Oneisha is an Atlanta native whose career in technology began in 1998 where she worked as a Technical Support Analyst for a fintech company. Since then, she has worked tirelessly to close the digital divide through various nonprofit organizations, where she developed programs and built partnerships that helped community members build their technology skills, gain access to devices, and connect to the internet.

Oneisha holds a Bachelor degree in Marketing and a Certification in Digital Equity. This unique combination of education, certification, and practical experience gives her a valuable perspective on the intersection of technology, policy, and community development. Oneisha is a proud veteran who served in the United States Army Reserves as an Automated Logistical Specialist. She is also a devoted wife and mother of two sons.

## Carla French



Carla French is currently President/CEO of TruVista Communications. Prior to her current role, she was President/COO of TruVista and, in her career, has held several executive roles in sales strategy, operations, P & L management and direct sales. Her last role with AT&T was Sales Vice President –Signature Client Group.

Over her 20 plus years in technology and communications, Carla has accumulated an impressive record in sales, strategy development/execution, engineering and operations. Her leadership skills have also aided the companies she has worked with during transformational changes caused by acquisitions (AT&T purchase of BellSouth) and significant reorganizations.

Carla is also active in other areas. She has served with many community and professional organizations through the years and is most currently active on several boards: Chester County Economic Development Authority, The Medical University of South Carolina, Charlotte Regional Business Alliance, South Carolina Telecommunications & Broadband Association and the Georgia Telecommunications & Broadband Association.

Carla holds a B.S. in Business Administration from the University of Tennessee.

## Ernesto González



Ernesto González currently serves as Business Development Manager / ACCIONA Business Accelerator at the Latin American Association. He holds a master's degree in International Relations from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University in Boston, and a master's degree in Public Administration from the Metropolitan College of New York. In addition, he possesses bachelor's degrees in Philosophy from the Salesian University of Rome in Italy and the University of Chile. He is also certified in Project Management from New York University. Over a period of 10 years, he served as senior policy advisor at the United Nations Headquarters in New York City, where he worked for the diplomatic delegations of Argentina, Guatemala and Chile.

## Rich Johnson



As Assistant Vice President of Legislative & Regulatory Affairs, Rich Johnson leads AT&T's Legislative & Regulatory Affairs team that develops and implements the company's statewide legislative and regulatory efforts throughout the state. Through engagement and collaboration with policymakers, regulators and community organizations, Rich helps educate and advocate for key technology deployments and investments that will support greater connectivity across Georgia.

Rich directs and manages the company's engagements with members of the Georgia's General Assembly, the Georgia Public Service Commission and state agencies. Additionally, Rich manages AT&T's political giving and political action committee.

Previously, Rich served as the AVP of External Affairs, where he was responsible for managing AT&T's External Affairs team and their efforts with local government.

## Jamal Lewis



Driven by the desire to improve access to resources in underserved and underrepresented communities, Jamal Lewis' current role as Economic Opportunity Manager for the Partnership for Inclusive Innovation (the Partnership) allows him to help create opportunities for those who are often under-resourced. Understanding that inclusion is an imperative struggle, Jamal is focused on igniting and equipping current and future innovators with the financial and social capital, partnerships, and resources conducive to creating shared economic and community success.

In this role, Jamal has spearheaded the distribution of an astounding \$2.4M in funding to Economic Opportunity (EO) projects. The impact of this funding has been monumental, as EO projects have not only thrived but also secured an impressive \$13M in additional project funding since receiving PIN's support. The entrepreneurs served by these projects, predominantly from underserved and underrepresented communities who often face significant barriers to capital and other resources, have defied the odds and secured a remarkable \$3.5M in funding.

Jamal is an active member of the Georgia Economic Developers Association and Urban League of Greater Atlanta – Young Professionals. Most recently, he was appointed to the Digital Connectivity Advisory Committee of the Georgia Technology Authority. He frequently shares his insights on economic development and inclusive entrepreneurship on various platforms, including B The Change Georgia, Atlanta Startup Podcast and the International Conference on Business Incubation.

## Venus R. Lockett



Venus R. Lockett is a pathfinder, connector, and convener passionate about empowering others, and she has spent over a decade in the financial empowerment arena. She is committed to establishing pathways to help all Georgians live financially capable and secure lives through education, application, and accessibility. She has extensive experience building collaborative coalitions, initiating and driving transformative programs, fostering strategic partnerships with community hosts and resource providers, and supporting their work to help build strong, resilient, and inclusive communities.

An advocate for Bank On programming since 2010, Venus joined the Atlanta leadership team in 2017 as a volunteer to help bring the Bank On program to the City of Atlanta. Bank On aims to ensure everyone can access safe and affordable bank or credit union accounts and affordable financial services.

After volunteering on the initiative for almost two years, Venus joined the City of Atlanta's Special Projects Team in the Mayor's Office of Innovation and Performance in 2019 as a Bank On Fellow to fulfill the need for dedicated leadership. In early 2020, Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms announced the official launch of Bank On Atlanta as a city program during a press conference hosted by the Mayor at Atlanta City Hall. Venus became the program manager in early 2021 after completing her fellowship.

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## Michell Morton



Michell Morton is Deputy Director of Digital Equity at the Department of Commerce's National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA). Michell has been in the thick of the digital equity work for years now, working on the Connecting Minority Communities Pilot Program and as advisor and regional specialist on 3 new historic Digital Equity Act Programs. Before that, she was in the District of Columbia's Office of the Chief Technology Officer.

## Jessica Simmons



Jessica Simmons has served as Deputy CIO and Executive Director of the Georgia Broadband Program at the Georgia Technology Authority (GTA) since 2021. Prior to joining GTA, she served as a Deputy Commissioner at the Georgia Department of Revenue and Chief of Staff at the Georgia Secretary of State's Office.

## Amy Stone



Amy Stone is a professional working in the field of Planning and Economic Development based in Northeast Georgia. She graduated with a degree in Landscape Architecture from the University of Georgia and has experience in city planning, real estate development and project management in both the public and private sectors. Amy is a Broadband Consultant at the Georgia Department of Community Affairs.

## Kenneth Sumpter



Kenneth Sumpter has a background in architectural engineering, general construction, real estate, and digital technology. He is a consultant with Empower Southwest Georgia, Inc. on its initiative to enhance digital equity and adoption throughout the target community of fourteen counties in southwest Georgia. He is serving his third year as Mayor of the City of Fort Gaines.

## Bob Swiggum



Bob Swiggum leads strategic K-12 connectivity and infrastructure planning, support and initiatives for Georgia's schools and districts by leveraging partnerships and coordinating with districts to increase connectivity and infrastructure for districts, schools, educators, families, and students.

## Jen Wade



Jen Wade has over a decade of experience in grants management and administration. She has successfully created and administered a diverse portfolio of grant programs for the state of Georgia and as well several private sector grant programs ensuring compliance with funding guidelines and regulatory requirements.

She has spent the last 2 and a half years at the Governor's Office of Planning and Budget, directing over 10 billion dollars in grants for the state of Georgia to include Coronavirus Relief Funds, American Rescue Plan State Fiscal Recovery Funds, Capital Projects Funds, Emergency Rental Assistance, Homeowners Assistance Fund, Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund, and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). During her time at OPB, Jen established and implemented a diverse portfolio of programs including but not limited to broadband infrastructure, water-sewer infrastructure, housing, victim's services, public health, and economic impact grants.

## Julie Walker



Julie Walker is Georgia's State Librarian and Vice Chancellor for Libraries and Archives, University System of Georgia. She held professional positions in library systems in Athens, Georgia, Charlotte, Winston-Salem and Asheboro, North Carolina. Julie holds a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and the Master of Library Science degrees from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Julie currently serves as president of the Chief Officers of State Library Agencies (COSLA). She is past president of the Georgia Library Association. She is a graduate of the University System of Georgia's Accelerated Leadership Academy, USG's Executive Leadership Institute and Leadership Athens. Julie is a member of the Board of Visitors of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's School of Information and Library Science, the advisory board of Valdosta State University's School of Library and Information Science, and the advisory committee of the University of Georgia's Certified Public Manager program. Julie serves on Governor Kemp's newly created Georgia Council on Literacy.