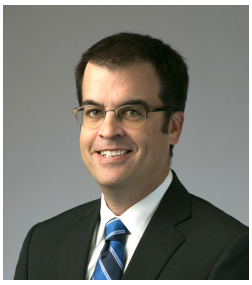
2026 CALAFCO Annual Conference

October 21–23, 2026 | Panelist Bios



Scott Brown, District Manager, Reclamation District No. 1000

Mobile Workshop Presenter: Wednesday, October 21

Scott L. Brown serves as the General Manager of Reclamation District 1000 (RD 1000), the flood control and reclamation district responsible for protecting more than 53,000 acres of land in the Natomas Basin and surrounding areas of Sacramento County. In this leadership role, he oversees district operations, flood risk management programs, infrastructure maintenance, capital improvement projects, regulatory coordination, and long-term planning efforts that support public safety and regional development.

Brown is a civil engineer and water resources professional with decades of experience in flood control, water resources, irrigation, and infrastructure management. Before joining RD 1000 as General Manager, he held senior leadership positions in the engineering consulting industry, including Principal at Larsen Wurzel & Associates and Engineering Manager with WSP | Parsons Brinckerhoff, where he managed water resources and flood control projects throughout California. He earned a Bachelor of Science in Civil Engineering from California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. As General Manager, Brown works closely with the RD 1000 Board of Trustees, government agencies, developers, and community stakeholders to maintain and improve the district's levee system, pumping facilities, and drainage infrastructure. His focus is on ensuring reliable flood protection, supporting responsible growth within the Natomas Basin, and maintaining the district's commitment to fiscal responsibility and operational excellence.



Lisa Kaplan, Sacramento City Council Member

Mobile Workshop Presenter: Wednesday, October 21

Councilmember Lisa Kaplan represents District 1 for the City of Sacramento, including North Natomas and portions of Robla. The councilmember has been a public servant well over two decades. She began at the California State Capitol serving several Assembly members shortly after graduating from McGeorge School of Law in 2000. She was an active member of the Natomas Rotary and then elected as a Trustee to the Natomas Unified School District where she served for 20 years including 12 years as an elected delegate to the CA School Board Association. Councilmember Kaplan has served on multiple boards and committees, including 11 that she currently sits on, and she has owned her own law firm since 2011. Councilmember Kaplan wears many hats as a wife, mother, Councilmember, and an attorney to name a few but she always finds time for her family and the needs of her community. She has a deep passion to serve, to collaborate and to help improve the lives of others through her dedication, hard work, and a listening ear. Her experiences and challenges throughout her life have helped guide the tenacious woman she is today. Always ready to fight for what's right and for those without a voice.



José Henríquez, Executive Officer, Sacramento LAFCO

Mobile Workshop Presenter: Wednesday, October 21

Lunch and Keynote Introduction: Thursday, October 22

Breakout Session Presenter: Telling it Straight: Delivering Tough News About a Project Concept, Thursday, October 22

José has more than 20 years of LAFCO experience, and currently serves as the Executive Officer of Sacramento LAFCO, boldly going where few have gone before in the world of local agency formation. He was previously the Executive Officer at El Dorado LAFCO. He is also Adjunct Faculty at Sacramento State University, where he enjoys engaging with the next generation of leaders, much like a visiting professor at Starfleet Academy. In his off-hours, José explores strange new worlds with his wife (mostly on Earth, for now) and diligently protects his prized collection of models, many of which may or may not include starships, from three feline intruders known only as Menace, Mischief, and Mayhem. Like any good captain, he maintains a balance between diplomacy and defense when it comes to his territory.



Joe Serrano, Executive Officer, Santa Cruz LAFCO

What is LAFCO? Presenter: The Game Show, Wednesday, October 21

Breakout Session Moderator and Panelist: California Public Utilities Commission 101: Where State Regulation and LAFCO Intersect, Thursday, October 22

Breakout Session Presenter: Fire Services Under Pressure: What Should LAFCO be Watching?, Thursday, October 22

Joe Serrano earned a double major in Finance & Accounting from Cal State University, Fullerton and has more than 18 years in LAFCO experience. He began his LAFCO career as an intern for Orange LAFCO in 2008 and was their analyst until 2013 before he started expanding his LAFCO knowledge with other LAFCOs, including San Bernardino, San Diego, and Monterey. He has been the Executive Officer of Santa Cruz LAFCO since 2019.



Shane Stark, Commissioner, Santa Barbara LAFCO

What is LAFCO? Presenter: The Game Show, Wednesday, October 21

Shane Stark, a Philadelphia native, built his career on values of hard work, integrity, and service instilled by his parents and education at Friends' Select School. With more than 50 years in law and 35 years as a local government attorney, he served cities, counties, and districts, including 21 years with Santa Barbara County (14 as County Counsel) where he oversaw significant LAFCO matters such as the Goleta incorporation. Since 2015, he has served on Santa Barbara LAFCO, first as an Alternate and now as a Public Member and contributes his time as a board member of the League of Women Voters of Santa Barbara. Now happily retired, Shane limits his practice to pro bono work and enjoys curating humorous and creative pieces from his career, while continuing his commitment to lifelong learning. Above all, he values the opportunity to advance best practices and promote orderly government through his role with LAFCO.



Paula de Sousa, Partner Best, Best, & Krieger LLP

What is LAFCO? Presenter: The Game Show, Wednesday, October 21

Legal Counsel Roundtable Facilitator: Thursday, October 22

General Session Presenter: AI and Local Government: What LAFCO Leaders Need to Know, Friday, October 23

Paula C. P. de Sousa is a partner in Best Best & Krieger LLP's Special District practice group, based out of the firm's San Diego office. Paula joined BBK upon graduating from the University of the Pacific, McGeorge School of Law. Paula practices in most areas of public agency representation, including the CKH Act. Paula serves legal counsel to San Bernardino LAFCO, assistant legal counsel to Orange LAFCO, and serves as general counsel to several special districts in San Diego County (agencies providing sewer and water services). S

he advises CALAFCO as assistant general counsel, assists in drafting legislation on CALAFCO's behalf, and regularly advises other public agency clients with respect to LAFCO-related issues. She is the primary author of several "white papers" utilized by LAFCOs and public agencies throughout the state on changes in law impacting changes of organization and reorganizations.



Rosario Rodriguez, Chair, Sacramento County Board of Supervisors

Conference Opening Welcome: Wednesday, October 21

Growing up, Rosario Rodriguez learned about the value of hard work, the power of education, the importance of giving back – and the commitment to treat people with respect and dignity while demanding accountability and results. Those are the values that propelled her to become a healthcare executive, entrepreneur, restaurant owner, community leader, City Councilwoman and Mayor. Rodriguez was elected to the Folsom City Council in 2020. S

he previously served as a board member for the Folsom Chamber of Commerce, the Twin Lakes Food Bank, and the Folsom Economic Development Corporation. As a small business owner, Rosario understands the challenges businesses face and the need to partner with them to help them thrive with the support of the community and city government.



Wendy Root Askew, Chair, CALAFCO and Monterey County Board of Supervisors

Conference Opening Remarks: Wednesday, October 21

Balancing Competing Priorities Moderator: Housing, Agriculture, Infrastructure, and the LAFCO Perspective, Wednesday, October 21

Wendy Root Askew serves as Chair of the California Association of Local Agency Formation Commissions (CALAFCO) and Chair of the Monterey County Board of Supervisors. A fourth-generation Central Coast resident, Wendy is recognized for her strategic leadership, consensus-building, and unwavering belief that government works best when it is transparent, innovative, and focused on improving people's everyday lives. Throughout her public service, Wendy has championed effective governance and innovative solutions to complex social challenges. She has led efforts to expand access to healthcare, advance housing solutions, protect reproductive freedom, strengthen behavioral health systems, and champion climate resilience. Beyond her county responsibilities, Wendy is President of the Women's Leadership Network of the National Association of Counties, Chair of the NACo Medicaid and Behavioral Health Subcommittee, and co-chair of the CSAC Coastal Counties Regional Association. She is also the past Chair of the Transportation Agency for Monterey County and Monterey County LAFCO. Wendy believes that effective leadership is grounded in integrity, curiosity, and optimism.



Chris Little, Chair, Sacramento LAFCO

Conference Opening Welcome: Wednesday, October 21

Chris Little is a third-generation Sacramentan who brings experience in real estate, public policy, community service, and regional advocacy as the Sacramento LAFCO Chair and has been a Public Member since 2015. With nearly 15 years of experience in the greater Sacramento real estate industry, he served as President of the Sacramento Association of REALTORS in 2013 and was named REALTOR of the Year in 2016.

He also serves as a State Director and holds leadership roles within the California Association of REALTORS. Chris earned a degree in Political Science, with a focus on public policy, from the University of Oregon and a Master's in Real Estate from REALTOR University. He is passionate about thoughtful, long-range planning and helping shape the future of local governments and special districts to meet the needs of a growing Sacramento region.



Dr. Thomas Pogue, Executive Director, CBPR University of the Pacific

Beyond Growth Presenter: What's Next for LAFCO?, Wednesday, October 21

Thomas Pogue is Executive Director of the Center for Business and Policy Research at the University of the Pacific, where he has led regional economic, demographic and policy research across Northern California for more than 15 years. His work includes demographic and economic forecasting, regional and sustainable economic development, workforce development, innovation systems, and technological change. He also serves as Associate Director of North Valley THRIVE, contributing to its research, policy, and strategy activities.



JD Hightower, Executive Officer, San Joaquin LAFCO

Beyond Growth Moderator: What's Next for LAFCO?, Wednesday, October 21
Regional Caucuses and Elections Facilitator: Thursday, October 22

A Point Loma High School graduate and Fresno State Bulldog, JD brings extensive planning and public service experience across Southern and Central California. His career spans roles with the North County Transit District, the cities of Vista and San Marcos, the Rincon Tribe, and San Joaquin LAFCO, where he served as Executive Officer during the incorporation of Mountain House.

His Central Valley work has focused on cost-effective green projects, including San Joaquin County's first agricultural easement, three downtown Specific Plans (Escalon, Lodi, and Riverbank), two general plan updates (Riverbank and Manteca), and lead roles on the SR 120 realignment and McKinley Avenue/SR 120 Interchange. Additional projects include Low Impact Development drainage standards, SR 108 corridor relinquishment, Transportation Enhancement Activity grants, and Orchard Valley mixed-use development standards. The California Energy Commission recognized his work with an ACES award for energy-saving subdivision design, and SJCOG acknowledged his success bringing competitive federal grant dollars to the region. He also designed a natural drainage solution where conventional engineering could not feasibly serve the area. Making the Central Valley the greenest place in the world remains his driving passion.



Jim Simon, Principal at RSG

Beyond Growth Presenter: What's Next for LAFCO?, Wednesday, October 21

Jim joined RSG in May 1990 and has served as a Principal since 2001. Jim has overseen RSG's LAFCO services for the past 25 years, including incorporation fiscal studies in San Joaquin, Placer, Fresno, and Imperial Counties, large-scale annexation studies in Butte, Contra Costa, Sacramento, and San Mateo Counties, and other reorganizational and management studies.



Bernadette Austin, CEO, CivicWell

Beyond Growth Presenter: What's Next for LAFCO?, Wednesday, October 21

As Chief Executive Officer of CivicWell, Bernadette Austin leads a nonprofit organization with a 40-year track record of supporting leaders working toward a more sustainable and resilient future. Previously, Bernadette was Executive Director of the UC Davis Center for Regional Change. Currently, she is President of the California Planning Roundtable and First Vice President of SAFE Credit Union. Bernadette holds a Master of Science in Community Development from UC Davis.



Katie Simmons, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer, Butte County

Balancing Competing Priorities Presenter: Housing, Agriculture, Infrastructure, and the LAFCO Perspective, Wednesday, October 21

Katie Simmons is a Deputy Chief Administrative Officer for Butte County in Northern California. She oversees long-term wildfire recovery programs, emergency management, hazard mitigation planning, and regional economic development. Katie recently completed a Policy Fellowship with Stanford University on wildfire recovery. She lives in Chico, CA, with her family.



Cheryle Hodge, Principal Planner, City Of Sacramento

Balancing Competing Priorities Presenter: Housing, Agriculture, Infrastructure, and the LAFCO Perspective, Wednesday, October 21

Cheryle is a Principal Planner/New Growth Manager with the City's Community Development Department. In her current City position, her work is related to citywide growth, including City boundary changes (annexations), the Natomas Basin Habitat Conservation Plan, working with wildlife agencies, conservation groups, and various government agencies. She has more than 30 years of land use and environmental planning experience. Her career has been in both the public and private sectors with a wide array of experience ranging from city, county, and regional planning. She has also previously served as a Planning Commissioner in southern California for the cities of Laguna Niguel and San Juan Capistrano. She has a degree in Sociology from California State University of Long Beach and is LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Certified.



Maryam Bral, Ph.D., P.E., Assistant General Manager, United Water Conservation District

Balancing Competing Priorities Presenter: Housing, Agriculture, Infrastructure, and the LAFCO Perspective, Wednesday, October 21

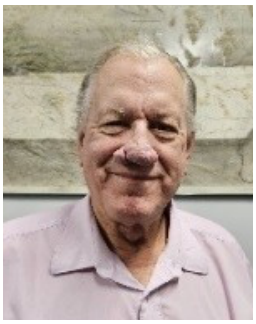
Dr. Maryam Bral is United Water Conservation District's (District) Assistant General Manager and Chief Dam Safety Engineer, with more than 25 years of experience in water treatment and water resource management. A member of the District's executive management team, she leads strategic initiatives and provides direct oversight of the Engineering, Water Resources, and Operations and Maintenance departments. Dr. Bral holds a Ph.D. in Civil Engineering from the Technical University of Denmark (DTU), where her research focused on membrane filtration and artificial recharge of humic groundwaters. She also earned a master's degree in civil engineering and a bachelor's degree in chemical engineering from DTU. Following her doctoral studies, she served as a postdoctoral research fellow at Queen's University of Belfast in Northern Ireland.



Shannon Costa, Executive Officer, Butte LAFCO

Regional Caucuses and Elections Facilitator: Thursday, October 22
Breakout Session Introduction: What Your Reports Are Really Saying: And the Questions You Should Be Asking, Thursday, October 22
Breakout Session Presenter: Disadvantaged Unincorporated Communities: What Have We Learned?, Thursday, October 22

Shannon is a lifelong resident of Butte County with more than a decade of experience in the planning field, including five years with Butte LAFCO. She holds a degree in Geography from Chico State University and brings a strong background in land use and local government.



Gary Thompson, Executive Officer, Riverside LAFCO

Regional Caucuses and Elections Facilitator: Thursday, October 22

Gary Thompson began his service as Executive Officer in May 2019, following five years as City Manager for the City of Jurupa Valley. He brings more than 20 years of local government experience, with expertise in the formation, management, and financing of municipal agencies, as well as municipal policy development.

Thompson has also worked in a consulting capacity with several LAFCOs throughout California, supporting municipal service reviews, sphere of influence updates, incorporation fiscal analyses, and special studies. In addition, he has a 30-year career as a civilian employee with the U.S. Department of the Navy, supporting the maintenance and modernization of naval combatant ships and submarines, and holds a B.A. in Business Administration from California State University, Long Beach, and an A.S. from Long Beach City College.



Alicia Meyer, Senior Internal Auditor, Sacramento Municipal Utility District

Breakout Session Presenter: What Your Reports Are Really Saying: And the Questions You Should Be Asking, Thursday, October 22

Alicia Meyer is a public policy professional with more than 15 years of experience conducting and managing government audits. She has extensive experience writing and editing complex audit reports and providing writing and editing training to government auditors. Meyer previously worked at the California State Auditor's Office and currently serves as an auditor at the Sacramento Municipal Utility District, where she conducts performance and compliance audits. S

he holds a Master of Public Administration from California State University, Chico, a B.A. in Political Science with a minor in English from the University of California, Davis, and a certificate in copyediting from the University of California.

Wilson Tsai, Program and Project Supervisor, CPUC

Breakout Session Presenter: California Public Utilities Commission 101: Where State Regulation and LAFCO Intersect, Thursday, October 22

Wilson Tsai is the Program and Project Supervisor for the CPUC's Water Division's Large Water Section and has worked with both small and large water utilities since 2018. With over 10 years of experience working for the CPUC, he has a broad range of experience in electric, water, and wildfire safety regulation. Since 2016, he has been a licensed professional mechanical engineer with the State of California.



Jennifer Capitolo, Executive Director, CWA

Breakout Session Presenter: California Public Utilities Commission 101: Where State Regulation and LAFCO Intersect, Thursday, October 22

Jennifer Capitolo is the Executive Director of the California Water Association (CWA), which represents the interests of almost 90 California Public Utilities Commission-regulated water utilities that provide reliable, high-quality drinking water utility services to 6 million people throughout California.

CWA provides a forum for sharing best management practices, a means of promoting sound water policy to legislators and regulatory agencies, and opportunities for educating the public on the protection and efficient use of water resources. Jennifer represents drinking water utilities in the State of California before the Public Utilities Commission, the State Legislature and Office of the Governor, the State Water Resources Control Board, Department of Water Resources, other state agencies, and multiple industry groups.



Clark Alsop Partner, Best Best & Krieger LLP

Breakout Session Facilitator: Legal Counsel Roundtables, Thursday, October 22

Clark H. Alsop is a partner in Best Best & Krieger LLP's Municipal Law practice group in Ontario. Clark is legal counsel for the Local Agency Formation Commission for San Bernardino County. Clark was also the long-time legal counsel to the California Association of Local Agency Commissions.

He has extensive experience with local government in private and public practice, serving as general counsel, county counsel and city attorney. Clark is active in various organizations, including the Public Law Section of the State Bar of California, the San Bernardino County Bar Association and the Greater Inland Empire Municipal Law Association. Clark speaks at various educational seminars regarding land use, environmental and LAFCO law, including courses at the University of California, Riverside, on the Subdivision Map Act.



California Assembly Majority Leader Cecilia Aguiar-Curry
Lunch and Keynote Address, Thursday, October 22

In November 2016, Cecilia Aguiar-Curry was elected to the California Assembly to represent the 4th District, which includes all of Napa, Lake, Yolo, Colusa Counties and part of Sonoma County. Cecilia grew up in western Yolo County and has long served her community. After going to school and working in the Bay Area for several years, she moved back to her hometown of Winters, where she almost immediately became active in the local community and a regional leader on several issues. She first served as planning commissioner and then was elected to the city council, eventually serving as the first female mayor of Winters. While growing up, Cecilia was surrounded by agriculture. As a youth, she cut apricots in the packing shed and helped her father in the walnut orchards in the area. She is still involved in local agriculture to this day as she and her brothers own an 80-acre walnut orchard. After earning a degree in business administration from San Jose State University, she launched a consulting firm that specialized in public outreach with government agencies.

As mayor of Winters, Cecilia oversaw improvements in the downtown area and worked to improve local schools, including securing computers for every sixth grader in the city. She also brought broadband internet to rural communities, built senior housing, and helped the area to become an agricultural and food innovation hub for the region. With the understanding that employment is central to any successful community, Cecilia helped bring a PG& E training facility to Winters that provided hundreds of jobs for local residents. Cecilia was also involved in efforts to create the Berryessa Snow Mountain National Monument in the inner California Coast Ranges that was proclaimed by President Obama in 2015. She currently resides in Winters a block from her childhood home with her longtime partner, Larry Harris, and has a stepson and two grown daughters.



Whitney Szentesi, Public Communications Manager, City of San Luis Obispo
Breakout Session Presenter: Strategic Public Engagement: A Plan for Any Scenario, Thursday, October 22

Whitney Szentesi is the Public Communications Manager for the City of San Luis Obispo, where she leads the citywide communications program within the City Manager's Office. She serves as the lead Public Information Officer for the City's Emergency Operations Center and advises the City Manager and leadership team on strategic communications. Szentesi manages media relations, social media, crisis communications, and public engagement, bringing over a decade of experience, including work as a journalist and nearly seven years with the County of San Luis Obispo Public Health Department during the COVID-19 pandemic. She holds a bachelor's degree in journalism from California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, and has received multiple awards recognizing her professional contributions and community engagement.

Rob Fitzroy, Executive Officer, San Luis Obispo LAFCO
Breakout Session Moderator: Strategic Public Engagement: A Plan for Any Scenario, Thursday, October 22



Breakout Session Moderator: Telling It Straight: Delivering Tough News About a Project Concept, Thursday, October 22

Rob Fitzroy is the Executive Officer of the San Luis Obispo Local Agency Formation Commission, where he oversees agency operations and supports strategic decision-making on local government organization, service delivery, and regional planning. He brings extensive experience across the public and private sectors, with expertise in land use planning, CEQA analysis, budgeting, and government administration. His background includes roles in environmental consulting, a decade with the County of San Luis Obispo as Assistant Director of the Planning and Building Department, and service as Community Development Director for the City of Arroyo Grande. Fitzroy holds a bachelor's degree in Environmental Science and Political Science and a Master's degree in Public Policy from California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, and is known for his collaborative leadership and commitment to public service.



Amanda Ross, Principal, South Fork Consulting, LLC and Civicbound

Breakout Session Moderator: Fire Services Under Pressure: What Should LAFCO be Watching?, Thursday, October 22

Ms. Ross is an award-winning regional planning professional. She earned a Master of City and Regional Planning degree with Distinction from California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. She has worked in the LAFCO arena for 10 years as a consultant and founded South Fork Consulting in 2020. In 2025, Ms. Ross and her partner launched CivicBound, a project management software tool built specifically for LAFCOs. Ms. Ross currently consults with numerous LAFCOs and special districts throughout northern California, specializing in on-call staff contracts and service reviews.



Lewis Broschard, Fire Chief (ret.), Contra Costa Fire Protection District

Breakout Session Presenter: Fire Services Under Pressure: What Should LAFCO be Watching?, Thursday, October 22

Chief Broschard retired in May of 2026 as the Fire Chief of the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District, an all-hazards Metro fire agency serving over 750,000 residents and 13 cities, after more than 35 years in the fire service. The Fire District has an operating budget of $400M and over 650 full-time members. During his 7 years as Fire Chief, he directed the efforts to annex two fire districts, establish a contract for service with a city, and successfully integrate these agencies and their members. New fire stations were constructed, services were expanded, staffing levels were increased, new programs were implemented to improve emergency response and wildfire mitigation, and ISO ratings were improved with the annexations helping to accrue fiscal and operational sustainability and service level consistency across much of the county. Chief Broschard developed strong labor-management relationships within his organization, as well working to build a close working relationship with the LAFCO EO for Contra Costa County, which improved the understanding and efficiency of the LAFCO processes. He holds a BA from UC Davis and an MBA from JFK University and is a CSAC Credentialed County Executive.



Jeffrey Small, General Manager, Capitol Public Finance Group, LLC

Breakout Session Presenter: Fire Services Under Pressure: What Should LAFCO be Watching?, Thursday, October 22

Mr. Small serves as General Manager of Capitol Public Finance Group, LLC, where he has worked for 21 years. He has over 35 years of experience in public finance, specializing in municipal finance, financial feasibility studies, revenue measures, impact fee nexus studies, development mitigation, fire district reorganizations and annexations, financial policies, long-term liability modeling, property tax and assessment structures, and debt issuance services. He is a SEC Registered Municipal Advisor Principal (Series 50 and 54) and an inactive member of the California Bar Association. He holds a B.A. from the University of Arizona and a J.D. from the California Western School of Law.



Gay Jones, Commissioner, Sacramento LAFCO

Breakout Session Presenter: Fire Services Under Pressure: What Should LAFCO be Watching?, Thursday, October 22

Sacramento LAFCO Commissioner Gay Jones has represented Special Districts on her commission since 2004, has served on the CALAFCO Board of Directors since 2006, and as a Director with the Sacramento Metropolitan Fire District since 2000. Commissioner Jones is a retired Captain with the Sacramento Fire Department (1981-2006) and served as a Peace Corps Volunteer for 6 years prior to entering the Fire Service. She also volunteers with several local associations and on advisory councils.

Kai Luoma, Executive Officer, Ventura LAFCO

Breakout Session Presenter: Telling it Straight: Delivering Tough News About a Project Concept, Thursday, October 22

Breakout Session Presenter: Legislative Update: What LAFCOs Should Be Watching, Friday, October 23

Kai joined the Ventura LAFCO in 2007 and has served as Executive Officer since 2014. Before joining LAFCO, Kai was a senior planner for the City of Santa Clarita, where one of his responsibilities was overseeing the city's frequent annexation proposals. He has also been a planner with the City of Roseville, Nevada County, and San Joaquin County. Kai holds a bachelor's degree in geography and a master's degree in public administration.



Adriana Romo, Deputy Executive Officer, Los Angeles LAFCO

Breakout Session Presenter: Telling it Straight: Delivering Tough News About a Project Concept, Thursday, October 22

Adriana has served as the Deputy Executive Officer (DEO) of LA LAFCO since 2017. In this role, she assists with office administration, financial management, annual budget development, coordination of the annual audit, and human resources management. Prior to joining LA LAFCO, Adriana served as an Analyst at Riverside LAFCO for 15 years. Throughout her LAFCO career, she has processed numerous organizational changes and reorganizations, including an incorporation, several dissolutions, a consolidation, multiple requests for proposals (RFPs), and municipal service reviews. She holds a Master of Public Administration degree with a concentration in Water Resources Management from California State University, San Bernardino.



Paul Novak, Executive Officer, Los Angeles LAFCO

Breakout Session Moderator and Panelist: Disadvantaged Unincorporated Communities: What Have We Learned?, Thursday, October 22

Paul Novak has over 30 years of experience in local government and land-use planning. He has served as Executive Officer of the Los Angeles County LAFCO since 2011, overseeing boundaries and service territories for 88 cities and 91 special districts. CALAFCO recognized him as its Outstanding LAFCO Professional in 2017 and for his work drafting SB 938 (Hertzberg). Prior to LAFCO, he served as Planning Deputy to Los Angeles County Supervisor Michael Antonovich and was founder and principal of Novak + Associates, a land-use planning firm. He also serves as a consulting Zoning Hearing Officer for the cities of Pasadena and San Marino and is a former adjunct professor at USC's Sol Price School of Public Policy. He holds a B.A. in political science from Claremont McKenna College and a Master of Real Estate Development from USC and is a member of the American Institute of Certified Planners.



Phoebe Seaton, Co-Director and Attorney at Law, Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability

Breakout Session Presenter: Disadvantaged Unincorporated Communities: What Have We Learned?, Thursday, October 22

Phoebe Seaton is the Co-Founder and Co-Executive Director of Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability along with Veronica Garibay. Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability. Leadership Counsel, a community-based advocacy organization, works alongside community leaders and partner organizations to improve environmental quality, economic resilience, and access to opportunity in lower-income communities and neighborhoods in the San Joaquin Valley and Eastern Coachella Valley. Leadership Counsel advocates at the local, regional, and statewide level on the interrelated issues of land use, energy, transportation, water and wastewater, housing, agriculture, and climate change through the lenses of environmental justice, equitable investment and development, civil rights, and government accountability.

Phoebe grew up in Berkeley, California and attended Berkeley High School. She stayed in Berkeley to attend UC Berkeley, where she received a B.A. in History. She then spent time in Guatemala, working to address human rights violations, and went on to complete her J.D. at the University of California at Los Angeles. Phoebe joined CRLA, Inc. following law school and worked at the organization's Delano office prior to launching the Community Equity Initiative, a program designed to address critical infrastructure and service deficits in low-income, unincorporated communities in California.



Joseph King, Technical Director, George Mason University Rapid Prototyping Research Center

General Session Presenter: AI and Local Government: What LAFCO Leaders Need to Know, Friday, October 23

Joe King is a seasoned national security and technology leader with extensive experience supporting defense research, advanced communications, and test and evaluation initiatives. His work focuses on bridging emerging technology, leadership, and real-world mission needs, with a particular emphasis on AI, innovation, and strategic technology integration. King holds a Bachelor of Science in Strategic Technology Leadership and Communication from George Mason University and an Executive Certification in AI Business Strategy from the Johns Hopkins University Whiting School of Engineering.



Jennifer Stephenson, Executive Officer, Calaveras, Plumas, Lassen, Modoc, and San Benito LAFCO, Co-Founder, Policy Consulting Associates

General Session Moderator and Panelist: AI and Local Government: What LAFCO Leaders Need to Know, Friday, October 23

Jennifer is a co-founder and principal of Policy Consulting Associates, where she is responsible for the overall direction of the projects, regional and municipal research analysis, and financial analysis. Her technical expertise includes benchmarking, performance evaluation, municipal budgeting, survey design, statistics, and economic modeling. She has also co-authored incorporation studies, annexation studies, and infrastructure needs assessments. Jennifer is Executive Officer of Calaveras, Plumas, Lassen, Modoc, and San Benito LAFCOs. Jennifer earned her master's degree in Public Policy from Pepperdine University, where she was a Forstmann Scholar.



Geoff Neill, Senior Legislative Advocate, Nielsen Merksamer, LLP

General Session Presenter: Legislative Update: What LAFCO Should Be Watching, Friday, October 23

Geoff Neill is Senior Legislative Advocate at Nielsen Merksamer, LLP, representing clients before the Legislature and Governor's administration. Before joining Nielsen Merksamer, Mr. Neill was a lobbyist with the California State Association of Counties (CSAC), where he worked on a range of issues including the state budget, taxes, broadband, government technology, elections, economic development, and transparency laws. He began his career at the California Special Districts Association (CSDA) and has spoken at conferences, conventions, webinars, and university classrooms around the state and in Washington, D.C., on a wide variety of issues. Mr. Neill has more than 20 years of experience in and around state politics and has served on a variety of commissions, councils, and advisory bodies. He currently serves as a board member for the Special District Leadership Foundation and on the California Emerging Technology Fund's Board of Expert Advisors. Mr. Neill was born and raised in California and currently lives in Sacramento with his family.



Jimmy MacDonald, Principal Consultant, California State Assembly Local Government Committee

General Session Presenter: Legislative Update: What LAFCOs Should Be Watching, Friday, October 23

Jimmy MacDonald is the Principal Consultant for the Assembly Local Government Committee, and works on issues related to local government finance, water, and others. He has worked for the Legislature since 2016, starting in the Senate Governance and Finance Committee and moving to the Assembly Local Government Committee in 2018.



Anton Favorini-Csorba, Chief Consultant, California State Assembly Local Government Committee

General Session Presenter: Legislative Update: What LAFCOs Should Be Watching, Friday, October 23

Anton is the chief consultant for the California Senate's Local Government Committee, where he has analyzed bills related to land use authority and local government organization, powers, and duties for over 10 years.

Prior to his work with the Committee, he spent five years advising the California Legislature on water policy and budgetary matters with the Legislative Analyst's Office and served in the office of a City Councilmember in his hometown of Pittsburgh, PA. In his free time, he enjoys visiting the parks and vineyards of northern California with his wife and two young children.