

**Breakout Session 2 - Session 2: Women in the Workforce**

The Future is Female: Women Leading Change



Delegate Julie Palakovich Carr

Julie Palakovich Carr has represented District 17 (Gaithersburg and Rockville) in the Maryland House of Delegates since 2019. She serves on the House Ways and Means Committee, where she chairs the Revenues Subcommittee and leads initiatives to ensure tax fairness. Her primary legislative work also focuses on expanding access to voting, improving roadway safety, and strengthening early education.

She currently serves as the Chair of the Montgomery County Delegation and as Secretary of the Transit Caucus. She previously served as a Deputy Whip, as Vice Chair of the Legislative Review Committee for the Maryland Legislative Latino Caucus, and as Vice Chair of the Montgomery County House Democratic Caucus. Before joining the General Assembly, Julie served two terms on the Rockville City Council, advancing policies to promote public health, roadway safety, and environmental protection.

In 2025, Julie was named one of Maryland's Top 100 Women and was previously recognized as a Leading Woman by the Daily Record. With a master's degree in biology, Julie is the only biologist with an advanced degree in the Maryland General Assembly. Her background in science policy, including work on Capitol Hill and with the American Institute of Biological Sciences underscores her commitment to science-informed decision making and her evidence-based approach to policy development.

Julie is married and is proud to have her son enrolled in public school.



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Angela Franco

Angela Franco is the President and CEO of the Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce (MCCC) in Maryland, where she leads the region's business community in shaping policy, fostering partnerships, and advancing programs that drive economic growth and opportunity. Under her leadership, MCCC serves as a strong and trusted advocate, representing Montgomery County at the local, state, and federal levels to ensure a prosperous and sustainable future.

Previously, Ms. Franco served as President and CEO of the DC Chamber of Commerce, where she positioned the Chamber as a leading voice for businesses across the region and developed innovative programs to support growth and advocacy. She also played pivotal leadership roles at the DC Health Benefit Exchange Authority and the Greater Washington Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, revitalizing organizations and strengthening their impact. Earlier in her career, she held senior management positions in Bogotá, Colombia.

A recognized leader in the Washington metropolitan area, Ms. Franco has been named to the Washington Business Journal's Power 100 list in both 2022 and 2023 and Women Who Mean Business in 2021. She also contributes her expertise as a Board Member for the Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives and Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce Foundation, Co-Chair of Leadership Council for the Kid Museum, and Ex-Officio Board Member for Junior Achievement of Greater Washington.

Ms. Franco is a graduate of both Leadership Montgomery and Leadership Greater Washington. She earned a Master of Science in Finance and a Bachelor of Arts in Business Administration.



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Karen Sippel

Karen Sippel is the Managing Director of the Maryland Women's Business Center, a program at Rockville Economic Development, Inc. She brings decades of strategy and leadership experience at entrepreneur support organizations, nonprofits, and global corporations.

Karen joined REDI after co-founding and serving as Managing Director of the African Women Entrepreneurship Cooperative (AWEC), a capacity building program that empowers entrepreneurs with access to high-quality business management lessons and mentorship opportunities. Under her leadership for five years, this 12-month hybrid learning program directly impacted more than 1,000 women business owners across 52 African countries, enabling them to increase revenues, improve business management skills, and hire more employees.

Prior to creating AWEC, Karen built a career that spanned communications, marketing, and business management. For more than 15 years, Karen led communications campaigns at the world's largest public affairs firms and venture capital-funded tech startups. In between these roles, she founded and led two successful small businesses.

Karen is a (nearly) lifelong resident of Maryland and volunteers extensively in her community serving youth-focused organizations.