



How Businesses Can Advance Manufacturing's Future through Collaboration with Workers

Speaker Biographies

Ted Castle founded Rhino Foods, a Burlington, VT-based certified B Corporation that employs over 250 people. The company manufactures bakery-style ice cream inclusions and frozen snacks for distribution across North America and Europe. Rhino Foods operates on the principle of "Impact the Manner in Which Business is Done" through its Financial, Customer and Supplier, Employee, and Community initiatives. The company and Ted have received numerous accolades, including the Hal Taussig B the Change Award, Vermont Small Businessperson of the Year, and recognition on Forbes' Small Giants list. They've also earned awards for workplace innovation from organizations like Beta Gamma Sigma, Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility, and the Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program. In 2018, Ted established the Rhino Foods Foundation to promote "Innovative Workplace Practices that Champion Employee Financial Stability and Make Good Business Sense." The Foundation's initial focus was to spread the Income Advance (an employer sponsored small dollar loan) concept, that Rhino co-created, nationwide. The Rhino Foods Foundation continues to grow the reach of this concept while also working with employers across the country to transform the way they think about and support their workforce.

Lexi Champion is the National Director of Women MAKE America at The Manufacturing Institute, the nonprofit workforce development and education affiliate of the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM). In this role, she leads initiatives aimed at closing the gender gap in manufacturing, empowering women to excel and take on leadership positions in a traditionally male-dominated field. Prior to joining The Manufacturing Institute, Lexi spent eight years at Stand Together, where she held multiple positions, including directing grantmaking efforts to support nonprofit organizations addressing poverty in their communities. She also worked in fundraising and events, where she developed donor stewardship and engagement strategies while managing giving societies to enhance philanthropic impact. Lexi earned her B.A. in International Affairs from the University of Georgia, where her dedication to social change was ignited. Originally from Athens, Georgia, she now resides in Arlington, Virginia.

Elisabeth Jacobs is Associate Vice President at the Urban Institute, as well as co-founder and deputy director of WorkRise, a research-to-action network on jobs, workers, and mobility. Her previous roles include founding senior director at the Washington Center for Equitable Growth, fellow at the Brookings Institution, and senior policy advisor appointments with the United States Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions as well as with the United States Joint Economic Committee. Jacobs is a nationally recognized expert on family income and earnings instability, low-wage employment and job quality, and labor market mobility. She is the author of numerous publications bringing rigorous evidence to a broad audience of policymakers and practitioners, including her most recent book: *Moving the Needle: What Tight Labor Markets Do for the Poor* (with Katherine S. Newman), published in April 2023 by the University of California Press. Jacobs is an elected member of the National Academy for Social Insurance, a founding member of the American Enterprise Institute–Brookings Paid Family Leave



Working Group, and a member of the Leadership Group for Benefits21 at the Aspen Institute. She holds a BA from Yale University, and an MA and PhD from Harvard University, where she was a fellow in the Multidisciplinary Program on Inequality and Social Policy at the Kennedy School of Government.

Felipe Juan is a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Center for an Equitable Economy and Sustainable Society (E2S2). His primary research focuses on labor and urban economics. Specifically, he focuses on equitable access to unemployment insurance and how eligibility requirements impact unemployment benefit recipiency rates. He also works on topics related to workers and economic mobility, as well as the role technology has in an equitable workforce. He is also passionate about and has worked on various topics related to disability, retirement, immigration, and health. He received his PhD in economics from Howard University, his master's in international political economy from the University of Texas at Dallas, and his bachelor's in economics from St. John's University in New York City.

Tanu Kumar is Co-Director at the Urban Manufacturing Alliance (UMA), a national non-profit that works to transform manufacturing ecosystems into drivers of just and equitable development. Tanu leads UMA's Inclusive Workforce pillar of work, which advances solutions to addressing barriers to equity and inclusion in the manufacturing workforce. She has extensive experience collaborating with nonprofits, government agencies, and community-based organizations on urban planning and equitable economic development initiatives. In previous roles, she led resiliency and revitalization planning projects statewide at the NYS Office of Planning, Developing, and Community Infrastructure, and served as a Senior Planner for Economic Development at the Pratt Center in Brooklyn, NY. Tanu received a Master's in Urban Planning from Cornell University.

Nichola Lowe, PhD is a professor in the areas of urban and regional planning and community economic development at the Humphrey School of Public Affairs. She is also the director of the Master of Urban and Regional Planning (MURP). Lowe's research focuses on the institutional arrangements that lead to more inclusive forms of economic development, particularly the role of local policy and practice in aligning industry innovation and equity. In addition, her research explores the link between innovation and local knowledge, especially the mediating factors that enhance the knowledge contribution of actors traditionally viewed as peripheral to processes of innovation, industrial upgrading, and climate resilience. Prior to joining the Humphrey School faculty, she was a professor and interim chair of City and Regional Planning at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.