



M. Caroline Crowder - Moderator

Caroline Crowder is an experienced economic development professional who thrives on building collaborative and inclusive ecosystems involving many diverse actors across government, academia, and public and private industry.

Caroline presently serves as the Executive Director of GrowCo Columbia, implementing the Boyd Community Innovation Center's (BCIC) charter to foster an inclusive and robust startup community through activities that inspire new founders, provide programming to support founders at different stages of their journey, and events that showcase the region's entrepreneurial successes.

She was previously appointed as the Global Alliances Director for eduCLaaS Global, a digital skills accelerator headquartered in Singapore. Caroline oversaw the firm's global expansion strategy and developed a pan-Asia Digital Skills Coalition with an objective to reskill 1 million talents in APEC/AEC economies within four years while including external stakeholders including 2,300 SMEs, 115 international employers, and 165 higher education institutions across 18 economies.



Sean McCrossin – Drip and Scoopy Doo

Sean McCrossin has lived in Columbia for roughly 13 years where he currently owns and operates Drip and Scoopy Doo (both located in 5 points).

In addition, he has owned and operated 3 record stores, a record label and 2 additional coffee shops.

Food and music are deep passions of his and he has said "I don't have any tattoos but if I did, I would have on one arm a chicken and egg and on the other arm the stones and the Beatles".

Sean is particularly passionate about his community and youth education, having experienced firsthand the difference that organizations in human services can make. In his youth, he was a participant in the Big Brothers Big Sisters program and later became a big brother of his own. In addition, he served on the board of United Way when he was located in Greenville, NC. He feels that the role United Way and its affiliates serve can help give a child a chance to see that they are bigger than the situation they may find themselves in. He knows that opportunities with United Way, its partner agencies and beyond can provide safe spaces for youth and adults alike to thrive.



Amy Beth Franks – The Gourmet Shop

Amy Beth Franks has called Columbia home for 17 years after moving here from Summerville to attend the University of South Carolina. Upon graduation, she took a position in the South Carolina Governor’s Office. In 2011, the FPA recruited Amy Beth where she first served in an administrative role and then as Executive Director from 2013 to 2019.

In February 2019, Amy Beth announced her resignation from the association and shared news of her purchase of Five Points’ longtime business, The Gourmet Shop. She has a core belief that business owners, residents and city officials should be working in unison to help promote a healthy, fully functioning neighborhood ecosystem.

Outside of Five Points, Amy Beth enjoys serving her community through volunteerism with several local charities and non-profit organizations. Currently she sits on the board of directors for the Contemporaries of the Columbia Museum of Art and is an active member of the Junior League of Columbia.



Dr. Laura Boccanfuso – Van Robotics

Laura Boccanfuso is the Founder and CEO of Van Robotics, a social robotics company dedicated to supporting educators and students with personalized learning tools using AI. Laura received her PhD in Computer Science and Robotics from the University of South Carolina and later worked at Yale at the Child Study Center and Social Robotics Lab, as a faculty researcher. Her career has focused on developing interactive, adaptive software that drives how robots support learning. Most recently her work at Van Robotics focuses on creating highly engaging robot tutors to accelerate learning for many different types of learners. Laura has been recognized by companies like McKinsey & Company, TIME Best Inventions, SuperCharger Ventures, and Siemens Digital Industries Software. She also received the 2022 SC Women in Business Award and was named Top 10 Most Influential Women in Technology by Analytics Insight.



Tzima Brown – Sunrise Artisan Bath and Body Shop

Tzima Brown was born and raised in Washington DC, the only girl born into a family of boys. She is a mother and a Yaya (a cool word for grandmother) Prior to moving to SC she worked at The Pentagon in Washington DC and lived in Europe for several years prior to that. Since moving to SC she has worked for the SC Dept of Corrections and eventually left to open and operate a local bookstore. She has also opened and operated a yoga studio, the Midlands first Raw Food Restaurant and hosted a show called Evolve for nearly 12 years until Covid forced her to choose between her two passions, talk radio and soapmaking. She is the owner and creator of Sunrise Artisan Bath and Body located in the heart of 5 Points where everything is handcrafted. She recently went back to radio and now hosts a new radio talk show called "Small Business Saturday" that spotlights local small businesses, entrepreneurs and local experts. Some consider Tzima to be a serial entrepreneur. Tzima would say no to that, she has simply never been afraid to reinvent herself, change course and create new experiences.



Dr. Shirley Ann Smith – Author of *Navigating the Labyrinth: Teacher Empowerment Through Instructional Leadership*

With a career in education spanning more than 40 years, Dr. Smith has been an elementary and middle school teacher as well as a university undergraduate and graduate instructor. She has led curriculum reform efforts at the state and national levels and created and produced digital resources including online courses, teleconferences, video modules, and virtual field trips used globally. She is a past Fulbright Specialist awardee in the area of technology integration and a past fellow at NASA's Digital Lab. Currently, she is an independent contractor advising schools how to improve teaching and learning using brain-based research. She has a Ph.D. in Education from the University of South Carolina.