

## 2021 Creative Aging Institute Speaker Biographies

### Keynote Presenter



**Ashton Applewhite**  
**Activist and Author, *This Chair Rocks: A Manifesto against Ageism***

Ashton Applewhite is a leading voice in an emerging movement dedicated to dismantling ageism and honoring age as a vibrant and necessary aspect of diversity. The author of *This Chair Rocks* and a TED mainstage speaker, she reveals the untapped possibilities of late life—in our communities, at work, and in ourselves.

Applewhite asks us to question the status quo and challenge the economic and social forces that frame some lives as more valuable than others. As it's not ethical—or legal—to allocate resources by race or sex, as she points out, "weighing the needs of the young against the old is equally unacceptable. Period." Her book, *This Chair Rocks: A Manifesto against Ageism*, charts Applewhite's journey from apprehensive boomer to pro-aging radical, debunking the countless harmful myths and stereotypes about aging along the way. The manifesto was listed as one of the "100 Best Books to Read at Every Age" by *The Washington Post*, and named one of "10 Books to Help You Foster a More Diverse and Inclusive Workplace" by *Forbes*.

In her accompanying talks, Applewhite looks at ageism from a variety of angles: from discrimination in the workplace to the cost of the all-American myth of independence and the misinformed portrayal of older people as burdens to society. And with her funny, straight-talking approach (showcased on the TED mainstage, where she received a standing ovation), audiences realize the often-overlooked benefits of advanced age, and the need for greater age diversity in our public and private lives.

In 2018, Applewhite was named a member of the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts's "100" list. She was also recognized on the PBS site Next Avenue's annual list of 50 Influencers in Aging as their Influencer of the Year. She has been acknowledged by *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, *NPR*, and the American Society on Aging as an expert on ageism, and has written for *Harper's*, *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, and the *Los Angeles Review of Books*. Applewhite speaks widely, at venues that have ranged from universities and community centers to the Library of Congress and the United Nations.

## Presenters and Panelists

(In alphabetical order)



**Kelly Barsdate**  
**Chief Program and Planning Officer**  
**National Assembly of State Arts Agencies**

Kelly Barsdate joined NASAA in 1991. She is the chief architect of NASAA's strategic plan and oversees NASAA's member service portfolio, including research activities, member education programs, communications, state technical assistance and special initiatives.

Kelly leads NASAA's State Arts Agency Boot Camps, an intensive leadership development program designed for state arts agency executives. She draws on deep knowledge about the state arts agency field to advise and train state arts agency staff, council members and constituents on public value fundamentals, effective advocacy, strategic planning, program design and evaluation practices. She has managed collaborations with the National Governors Association, the National Conference of State Legislatures, the National Center

for Charitable Statistics, Grantmakers in the Arts, the National Endowment for the Arts and other policy partners. Kelly has authored numerous monographs on arts policy, including NASAA's Practical Advocate series, *Why Should Government Support the Arts?*, *A State Arts Agency Performance Measurement Toolkit* and *A State Arts Agency Strategic Planning Toolkit*. She is the editor of NASAA's Policy Briefs and is a contributing editor of the peer-reviewed *Journal of Arts Management, Law and Society*. She holds an Executive Certificate of Facilitation from Georgetown University, a Change Leader certification from the state of Utah, and a degree in English from Oberlin College. Prior to joining NASAA, Kelly was a researcher at Educational Research Services Inc., where she focused on school demographics, multicultural education and program evaluation. Her arts background includes studies in clarinet performance, arts education and orchestral conducting at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music as well as community based training in dance and ceramics. Born and raised in Alaska, Kelly is a keen birdwatcher and avid amateur naturalist.



**Christina Bixland**  
**Education Director**  
**Ping Chong + Company**

Christina Bixland (she/her) is the education director at Ping Chong + Company (PCC), where she leads PCC's arts education programs in partnership with New York City schools and arts/community organizations around the country, elevating and celebrating learner voices through documentary and devised theatre. A veteran arts administrator, she served as director of education at the Flynn Center in Vermont for more than a decade, curating world-class performances, designing arts training programs, integrating the arts into K-12 schools, offering professional development for educators and 70+ teaching artists, and founding and directing the Flynn Youth Theater Company. Bixland has taught and created curricula in association with arts institutions across the Northeast, including The New School for Drama, Stella Adler Studio of Acting, Broadway Workshop, Luna Stage and New Victory Theater. Throughout her career she has championed access initiatives, like subsidized ticket programs, training scholarships, sensory-friendly performance adaptations, and arts programs for neurological patients and older adults. Bixland holds a B.A. in theatre from Bryn Mawr College, and studied musical theatre at Carnegie Mellon University.



**Teresa Bonner**  
**Executive Director**  
**Aroha Philanthropies**

Teresa Bonner brings more than 30 years of professional experience in philanthropy, foundation and nonprofit leadership to her role as executive director for Aroha Philanthropies. She is a frequent presenter on philanthropy as well as on creative aging, including sessions at the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies, Grantmakers in the Arts, Grantmakers in Aging, Americans for the Arts, Philanthropy New York and the American Society on Aging. Bonner previously served as director of the U.S. Bancorp Foundation, where she managed \$20 million in Foundation grant making annually and led the company's community relations activities; the Piper Jaffray Foundation; and two nonprofit organizations, Milkweed Editions and the Library Foundation of Hennepin County. Arts and cultural programs have long been a major focus of her professional experience and a personal passion. She is a principal in Family Philanthropy Advisors.



**Pam Breaux**  
**President and CEO**  
**National Assembly of State Arts Agencies**

Pam Breaux joined the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA) in 2015. As president and CEO, she works with the association's board of directors and staff to advance NASAA's policy and programmatic mission to strengthen America's state and jurisdictional arts agencies. A native of Lafayette, Louisiana, Breaux has held leadership positions at the local, state and national levels. While in Louisiana state government, she was secretary of the Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism (CRT), assistant secretary of CRT (overseeing its cultural development portfolio), and executive director of its state arts agency (the Louisiana Division of the Arts). During her time at CRT, Breaux developed and led Louisiana's cultural economy initiative and spearheaded the successful UNESCO inscription of Poverty Point State Historic Site (an ancient Indian site) as a World Heritage site. Before working in state government, Breaux was executive director of the Arts and Humanities Council of Southwest Louisiana and managed southwest Louisiana's Decentralized Arts Funding Program. She has served on the boards of the U.S. Travel Association, NASAA, South Arts and the Louisiana Board of International Commerce. Breaux is currently a member of the U.S. National Commission on UNESCO. She graduated from McNeese State University with a B.A. in English and earned an M.A. in English and folklore from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette.



**Elisa García-Radcliffe**  
**Arts Learning Manager**  
**Arizona Commission on the Arts**

Elisa García-Radcliffe (they/them) is an arts administrator, educator and movement artist who lives in Phoenix, Arizona. Elisa has over twelve years of experience working as a dance educator in the Phoenix Union High School District. Through their involvement in public education, they've witnessed firsthand how important access to quality creative and cultural activities are for students. They have a strong belief that dance and art can and should be grounded in the community it serves. Elisa is currently the Arts Learning Manager at the Arizona Commission on the Arts, overseeing the Arts Commission's comprehensive slate of Arts Learning grantmaking, programs, partnerships, and strategic initiatives. They serve as a board member for RE:FRAME Youth Arts Center, a place for and by young folx to artistically resist the decentering of their power, rights, and identities.



**Cory Michael Herman**  
**Director**  
**Alliance Stage Company**

Cory Michael Herman (he/him) is director of the Alliance Stage Company in New York City. New York directing credits include *The Storm* (starring Alison Fraser & Sharna Burgess), *Mulberry Street*; *Against All Odds* (Mazer Theatre), *Curtains Up!*; *[Im]Perfect Comedy* and *Chatterton Country Club*. Herman assisted Charles Messina in the world premiere, Off-Broadway run of *A Room of My Own* (starring Ralph Macchio & Mario Cantone) as well as the staged reading of *The Wanderer: The Story of Dion*. He established Sirovich Senior Theater, an acting group for senior citizens, which has run for more than a decade downtown at the Educational Alliance. In his early career, he codirected P.R.I.D.E. Youth Program's National Vocal Team, worked as a production assistant on the music video *I've Got the Music in Me* (Jordin Sparks), and performed under contract for the Walt Disney Company.



**Heather Ikemire**  
**Chief Program Officer**  
**The National Guild for Community Arts Education**

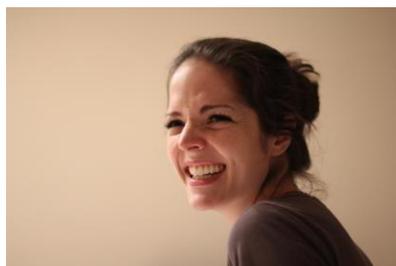
Heather Ikemire (she/her) is chief program officer at the National Guild for Community Arts Education. In this position, she works collaboratively with staff to shape and implement a strategic vision for the Guild's conferences and trainings, networks, publications and communications that align with its mission to ensure all people have opportunities to maximize their creative potential. Her current work weaves together varied life experiences as a theatre artist, educator, storyteller, writer, researcher and collaborator and is grounded in a deep belief that creative agency can lead to systemic change. Ikemire has spearheaded numerous Guild programs and partnerships over the past 14 years, including a large-scale, multiyear, cross-sector Creative Aging Initiative resulting in a 37% percent increase in Guild member organizations offering creative aging programming from 2017 to 2019. She has a B.A. in English literature from Vassar College and a Ph.D. in theatre with a concentration in theatre for youth from Arizona State University's School of Film, Dance and Theatre.



**Beth Kowalczyk**  
**Chief Policy Officer**  
**Ohio Association of Area Agencies on Aging**

Beth Kowalczyk is the chief policy officer for the Ohio Association of Area Agencies on Aging (o4a). In this role, she ensures that the Ohio Area Agencies on Aging and the older Ohioans they serve have a voice at the Ohio Statehouse, with members of Congress and with state and federal agencies such as the Ohio Departments of Medicaid and Aging and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, through the legislative and regulatory process. She serves on the boards of the HealthPath Foundation of Ohio and the

Ohio Coalition for Adult Protective Services. Prior to joining o4a, Kowalczyk was the bureau chief for Family Assistance Policy at the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services. She was responsible for developing and implementing policies and overseeing grants for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), refugee assistance and foodbank programs. Kowalczyk started her career with Southeastern Ohio Legal Services representing low-income Ohioans in civil matters such as domestic violence, housing and consumer issues and then moved to the state capital to join the Ohio State Legal Services Association (now known as the Ohio Poverty Law Center) as the statewide legal services advocate and expert on public assistance and workforce development programs. Kowalczyk also serves as a member of city council in Worthington, Ohio. She is a trained Reframing Aging Facilitator. Kowalczyk has a bachelor of arts degree from Kent State University and a juris doctorate from New York University School of Law. She was admitted to the Ohio Bar in 1993.



**Carly McCollow**  
**Teaching Artist**  
**Ping Chong + Company**

Carly McCollow (she/her) is an educator & facilitator in New York City and a graduate of New York University's Tisch School of the Arts. She has collaborated closely with Theater Mitu, and worked as a teaching artist with BAM, Arts for All and The Moth, where she was a lead coach in storytelling work with the National Aphasia Association. Her reflections on that work are published in *The Word Escapes Me: Voices of Aphasia*. With the Healing Arts Initiative, McCollow developed a photography workshop with residents of Jewish Home and Lifecare. Inspired by the healing potential of storytelling and documentary theatre, McCollow received her M.S.W. from the Silberman School of Social Work at Hunter College. She has since served as the program director of after-school programs in Lower Manhattan with Educational Alliance, and facilitated professional development workshops around social and emotional development, trauma-informed work, racial justice, and restorative processes with Ramapo for Children and Girls Leadership.



**Elizabeth Merritt**  
**Vice President for Strategic Foresight and**  
**Founding Director, Center for the Future of Museums**  
**American Alliance of Museums**

Elizabeth Merritt is the American Alliance of Museums's vice president for strategic foresight and founding director of the Center for the Future of Museums (CFM), a think tank and research and development lab for the museum field. She studied ecology and evolution as an undergraduate at Yale and received her master's degree in cell and molecular biology from Duke University. Her museum career has included working in a children's museum and in natural history and history museums, and she is a graduate of the Getty Leadership Institute's Museum Management Program. Prior to starting CFM, Merritt literally wrote the book on museum standards and best practices as director of the Alliance's accreditation and excellence programs. She notes

this was perfect preparation for her current role as agent provocateur—challenging museums to question assumptions about traditional practice and experiment with new ways of doing business. Merritt is the author of the Alliance's annual *TrendsWatch* report and works with museums around the world to help them build a better tomorrow.



**Annie Montgomery**  
**Director of Education**  
**Lifetime Arts**

As director of education, Annie Montgomery leads the design and delivery of Lifetime Arts's many professional development and education efforts. She facilitates trainings for a wide range of practitioners including teaching artists, librarians, arts organizations and funders. Recent engagements include Maryland State Department of Education, Brooklyn Public Library, New York State Council on the Arts Training for Senior Service Organizations and Teaching Artists, the Wyoming State Arts Council, and Delaware Librarian and Teaching Artist Training. Montgomery has presented at several national conferences, including the National Guild for Community Arts Education, Grantmakers in the Arts, the American Alliance of Museums, American Alliance of Theatre Educators, The Creative Center at University Settlement,

LiveOn NY and the National Assembly of Arts Agencies. As a teaching artist, Montgomery has taught numerous creative aging memoir and performance workshops throughout the New York City metropolitan region in public libraries and community settings. Additionally, she was a teaching artist for more than 20 years with such organizations as The New Victory Theatre, Disney Theatrical Productions, Creative Theatrics, and (Out) Laws and Justice. Montgomery is a faculty member at The New School College of Performing Arts, where she teaches the full-year required course, Collaborative Research Studio – The Teaching Artist. She is an active theatre artist as an actor, director and playwright. Montgomery received her bachelor's degree in acting from Boston University and her master's degree in educational theatre from New York University.



**Susan Oetgen**  
**Arts Learning Projects Director**  
**National Assembly of State Arts Agencies**

Susan Oetgen joined the NASAA staff in 2014. Her responsibilities include directing the annual Professional Development Institute on behalf of NASAA's Arts Education Working Group, facilitating mentorships for new state arts agency arts education managers and maintaining the arts education managers' peer-to-peer network. During her tenure, Susan has supported the creation of the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in the Arts Subcommittee of the arts education peer group, and represented NASAA as facilitator and point person for the Arts Education Partnership's national Equity Working Group. In 2017, Susan codesigned and managed NASAA's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Mentorship pilot program. Since

2018, Susan's arts learning portfolio has included coordinating the biannual Mid-Atlantic Teaching Artist Retreat and directing NASAA's creative aging projects. For more than 15 years, Susan has served as an arts manager, facilitator and teaching artist with a variety of arts and education organizations, including Everyday Arts for Special Education, Oregon Cultural Arts Coalition, President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, SchoolTalk, Wyoming Arts Council, and Young Audiences Arts for Learning. She holds a bachelor of arts degree in theology with a specialization in the religions of the African diaspora from Georgetown University, a master of music degree in classical vocal performance with a specialization in Latin American vocal music from the Catholic University of America, and a graduate certificate in advanced skills in conflict analysis and resolution from George Mason University.



**Maura O'Malley**  
**CEO / Co-founder**  
**Lifetime Arts**

Maura O'Malley leads the development of Lifetime Arts's national programming models, training programs and resources for creative aging stakeholders including teaching artists, librarians and senior service professionals. With nearly 40 years' experience in arts management, including program design and implementation, arts education, development and community cultural work, she has informed policy and created innovative programming for adults and children with premiere arts and educational organizations including the New York City Department of Education, Studio in a School Association and Young Audiences/New York. Named a 2017, "Influencer in Aging," by PBS Next Avenue, O'Malley contributes to the continued development of the creative aging field through cross-sector initiatives with major national partners including the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies, the American Alliance of Museums, the National Guild for Community Arts Education, Teaching Artists Guild and others. She is a proud member of the National Advisory Board of the Teaching Artists Guild as well as a member of the steering committee for the National Guild of Community Arts Education Creative Aging Network. O'Malley graduated from Pratt Institute with a bachelor of fine arts degree in painting and earned a master of public administration degree in arts policy and planning from New York University's Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service.



**Jane Paccione**  
**Managing Director of Collective Impact**  
**San Antonio Area Foundation**

Jane Paccione is the managing director of Collective Impact at the San Antonio Area Foundation. She leads the Successfully Aging and Living in San Antonio (SALSA) initiative and is passionate about promoting equity and inclusion for older adults and people with disabilities in the community. Paccione is a trained Reframing Aging Facilitator and leads the San Antonio Reframing Aging movement to reframe the public's perception of aging. She earned a master's degree in public administration from the University of Texas at San Antonio.



**Elizabeth G. Shapiro**  
**Director of Arts, Preservation and Museums**  
**Department of Economic and Community Development,**  
**State of Connecticut**

Liz has had the pleasure of serving as the Director of Arts, Preservation and Museums since August 2018. In this position, she directs and coordinates the work of the Connecticut Office of the Arts, the State Historic Preservation Office, and the four historic sites and museums operated by the SHPO; the Henry Whitfield State Museum (Guilford), the Prudence Crandall Museum (Canterbury), the Eric Sloane Museum (Kent) and Old New-Gate Prison & Copper Mine (East Granby). Prior to her position with the state, Liz spent six years as the Executive Director of the Connecticut League of History Organizations, the professional networking and support organization for volunteers and professionals working in public history in Connecticut. Liz served as Executive Director of The Sharon (CT) Historical Society for twenty years and has worked as a consultant to nonprofit organizations in the areas of governance and strategic planning. She has worked in various capacities at The Museums and Gallery at Babson College, Wellesley, MA, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA, and The Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia, PA. Liz is a former board member and president of the Connecticut League of History Organizations and the Light Opera Company of Salisbury (CT) and currently serves as a board and/or steering committee member for Connecticut History Illustrated, the Connecticut State Museum of Natural History, New England Foundation for the Arts, and the Connecticut Digital Archives. Liz attended Haverford College and received a Masters' degree in History Museum Studies from the Cooperstown Graduate Program.



**Laura Smith**  
**Chief Advancement Officer**  
**National Assembly of State Arts Agencies**

Laura Smith joined the NASAA staff in 2002. As chief advancement officer, she oversees all fundraising undertaken on NASAA's behalf. She works closely with the board of directors, the Development Committee and staff to identify opportunities for public agencies, individuals, foundations and companies to support NASAA's mission. In addition to her fundraising responsibilities, Smith staffs the Nominating Committee, which identifies candidates for NASAA board and committee service, and the NASAA Leadership Awards Task Force. She also advises NASAA members and partners on development and governance issues, and represents NASAA and state arts agencies in key philanthropic forums and networks. She is a certified meditation teacher and has been introducing mindfulness as a leadership skill since 2015. Before joining NASAA, Smith served with the National Mentoring Partnership, the American Architectural Foundation and the Weisman Art Museum in Minneapolis. She has served as a board member or advisor to various nonprofits, including Women in Film and Video, Skewed Visions (a Minneapolis-based theatre company), and the National Governors Association. She currently mentors new fundraisers through the AFP-DC Mentoring Program, and serves

on the board of Minds, Inc., which teaches mindfulness and social emotional learning practices to D.C.-area teachers, students and parents. An avid knitter and birdwatcher, Smith's arts background includes degrees in English (B.A.) and liberal studies (M.A.), training in piano and creative writing, and an abiding love of craft.



**Courtney Surmanek**  
**Teaching Artist**  
**Ping Chong + Company**

Courtney Surmanek (they/them/Court) is a cultural organizer, educator, joker, multidisciplinary artist and third-generation New Yorker. Surmanek's work with elders began at the Lowline on the Lower East Side in 2015, where they developed an intergenerational oral history program. They have trained extensively in creative aging with Lifetime Arts, TimeSlips, and University Settlement's Training Institute for Artists in Healthcare and Creative Aging. Surmanek has also developed creative aging projects for New York City (SU-

CASA) and Virginia senior living communities. They earned their M.F.A./M.S. in theatre: directing and public dialogue and urban planning at Virginia Tech, and have been a visiting fellow at Skidmore College's MDOCS Storytellers' Institute, a social practice artist-in-residence with ProjectArt, a fellow at The Performance Project at University Settlement, and EmergeNYC fellow at the Hemispheric Institute for Performance & Politics, as well as a member of the Broadway Advocacy Coalition and a member of Reimagining Dementia: A Creative Coalition for Justice.



**Zoe van Buren**  
**Folklife Director**  
**North Carolina Arts Council**

Zoe van Buren is the Folklife Director at the North Carolina Arts Council, a Division of North Carolina's Department of Natural and Cultural Resources. She holds an MA in Folklore from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and a BA from Vassar College. Before joining the Arts Council in 2017, she worked with the Music Maker Relief Foundation serving elder roots musicians across the South. In her work with the Arts Council she oversees the North Carolina Heritage Awards, Traditional Arts Programs for Students, and Folklife Apprenticeships to support the continuation of the state's community-based cultural practices.