

## MICHIGAN DELEGATION



**The Honorable Gretchen Whitmer**  
**Governor of Michigan**

Governor Gretchen Whitmer is a lifelong Michigander who is focused on getting things done that will make a real difference in people's lives. As governor, she has signed over 900 bipartisan bills and four balanced, bipartisan budgets to deliver on the kitchen-table issues, grow the economy, and create good-paying jobs in every region of the state. Since the governor took office, she has worked across the aisle to empower Michigan's economic development and brought critical supply chains home from China to Michigan.

The governor has made the largest education investments in state history four years in a row, delivering the highest state per-student funding ever, increasing on-campus mental health resources, and helping hire thousands more qualified teachers. Additionally, the governor has expanded low or no-cost childcare to 150,000 kids and enrolled 35,000 four-year-olds in affordable, high-quality pre-K. Governor Whitmer has also protected clean water for every community, investing \$4 billion to upgrade drinking water infrastructure and replace lead service lines, supporting 57,000 jobs. Her leadership has been fiscally responsible, as she has made progress without raising taxes by a dime. She cut taxes for small business owners, paid down nearly \$14 billion in debt, and brought the state's rainy-day fund to an all-time high of \$1.6 billion. Governor Whitmer achieved this progress alongside three dynamic elected statewide leaders: Lieutenant Governor Garlin Gilchrist, Attorney General Dana Nessel, and Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson.

Governor Whitmer and her husband Dr. Marc Mallory live in Lansing with Kevin and Doug, the First Dogs of Michigan. Her daughters, Sherry and Sydney, are undergraduates at the University of Michigan. Her three stepsons, Alex, Mason, and Winston all live in Michigan as well. Governor Whitmer earned a bachelor's degree and law degree from Michigan State University.



**Quentin L. Messer, Jr.**  
**CEO, Michigan Economic Development Corporation**

As MEDC CEO and President and Chair of the Michigan Strategic Fund, Quentin is charged with implementing and executing MEDC's core mission of business development and attraction, community development, providing access to capital and enhancing Michigan's image and brand with a focus on building a strong and equitable economy for all Michiganders. His responsibilities include managing the administration of all programs, funds, personnel, contracts, and

other administrative functions of MEDC.

Quentin is a member of Governor Gretchen E. Whitmer's cabinet and serves on the boards of the American Center for Mobility, Michigan Israel Business Accelerator, International Economic Development Council (IEDC) and Oklahoma University's Economic Development Institute (OU EDI) and is a member of the Michigan Council on Climate Solutions. He was named by Financial Times as a member of the 2021 Agenda Diversity 100, Crain's Detroit Business, 50 Names to Know in Government (2021), Biz New Orleans CEO of the Year (2020), Biz New Orleans Businessperson of the Year (2019), by Consultants Connect as one of North America's Top 50 Economic Developers (2020, 2019) and by Ebony Magazine for its Ebony Power 100 as a Power Player (2018).

Immediately prior to joining MEDC, Quentin was President & CEO at the New Orleans Business Alliance which, under his leadership, became one of fewer than 80 accredited economic development organizations worldwide (AEDO). Quentin also previously served as the Assistant Secretary for Louisiana Economic Development, (LED) Louisiana's department of economic development. Quentin is an alumnus of the Boston Consulting Group and O'Melveny & Myers LLP and a degree recipient from Princeton and Columbia Universities.



**Zack Pohl**

**Principal Deputy Chief of Staff, Executive Office of the Governor**

Zack Pohl is principal deputy chief of staff for Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer, where he serves on the governor's executive team and manages the federal affairs, legislative affairs, policy, communications, and scheduling divisions of the governor's executive office. He is a veteran of state government with nearly two decades of experience working in senior leadership roles on the country's most competitive gubernatorial, congressional, and nonpartisan issue campaigns. Zack is a graduate of Michigan State University and lives in Okemos, Michigan with his wife and two daughters.



**Ben Marchionna**

**Chief Innovation Ecosystem Officer, Michigan Economic Development Corporation**

Ben was announced by Governor Gretchen Whitmer in 2024 as Michigan's first-ever Chief Innovation Ecosystem Officer. His charter is to build a community of innovation - across founders, universities, corporations, investors, and government - and make Michigan a place where innovators and entrepreneurs are seen, heard, and work together to drive us forward.

Previously, Ben led technology innovation and business development teams at Electra.aero, an aerospace and defense hard-tech startup near Washington, D.C., where he played a pivotal role

in advancing the world's first hybrid-electric aircraft for dual-use applications. Before Electra, Ben built the global operations team at SkySpecs, a clean energy startup headquartered in Ann Arbor, where he led-from-scratch the product development and scaling of autonomous robotics and AI-based software solutions into 26 countries.

Ben's career began at the Lockheed Martin Skunk Works, the renowned national security innovation factory in the Mojave Desert. During his tenure, he contributed to numerous groundbreaking aircraft development programs and graduated from Lockheed Martin's prestigious Engineering Leadership Development Program.

Ben holds a B.S.E. in Aerospace Engineering from the University of Michigan and an M.S. in Product Development Engineering from the University of Southern California. He is the Chair of the University of Michigan's Aerospace Industry Advisory Board, a Board Trustee and Associate Fellow of the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics, and a founding nonprofit Board member of the Los Angeles County Air Show.



**Brian Connors**

**Director of Greater Asia Investment Promotion, Michigan Economic Development Corporation**

As the State of Michigan's chief advisor for East Asia and Southeast Asia, Brian has coordinated ten Governor's trade and investment missions, establishing partnerships with corporations, governments, and industry groups. His work to attract foreign direct investment has resulted in more than \$4.5 billion in economic impact in Michigan.

Brian holds a B.A. in Asian Studies from Williams College and a Master of Public Policy from the Harvard Kennedy School.



**Amanda Eisbrenner**

**Business Development Advisor, Michigan Economic Development Corporation**

Amanda Eisbrenner is a Business Development Advisor in the Regional Development division at the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC). In her role, she works with businesses located in Michigan to foster economic development through expansion opportunities, capital investment, and other business development activities. She is assigned to relationship management on behalf of the State of Michigan for Japanese-owned businesses and serves as

the account manager for Japanese OEMs, Tier 1s, and other key automotive, engineering, and technology companies across the state. Amanda supports in-market activities in Japan

including executive leadership trips and Governor travel. Most recently, she joined the delegation for Governor Gretchen Whitmer's first visit to Japan in 2023.

Prior to the MEDC, Ms. Eisbrenner has held roles with the University of Michigan-Dearborn's Business Engagement Center, Michigan Community Resources – a Detroit-based nonprofit providing pro-bono and low-bono business services, and Wayne State University's College of Engineering. Additionally, Ms. Eisbrenner has worked and lived in a variety of international education settings including South Korea, Taiwan, and Saudi Arabia. She earned a Master of Public Administration from Wayne State University and Bachelor of Arts from Michigan State University.



**John Clark**

**Senior Japanese Business Advisor, Michigan Economic Development Corporation**

Mr. John Clark is the Senior Japanese Business Advisor at the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC). Mr. Clark is an established pillar of the Michigan-Japan business community. He has held executive positions at numerous Japanese automotive suppliers, including Nissan (Global Head of Connected Car Services Strategy and Marketing), Domo (Vice President), Aisin (President of North American Sales), and Niles Parts (Executive Vice President). He has simultaneously held

leadership positions at industry and community organizations including the Japan Business Society of Detroit Foundation (President 2015-2022), the Asian Pacific American Chamber of Commerce (Board Member 2018-2022), and the Society of Automotive Engineers International Foundation (Board Member and Trustee 2014-2017). He has been a featured speaker at SAE World Congress, NAIAS, Detroit Institute of Arts, and Tokyo CxO seminars and summits. He received his Bachelor's in Japanese from Brigham Young University. He is a near-native speaker of Japanese and a native speaker of English.



**David Coulter**

**County Executive, Oakland County**

David Coulter leads Michigan's second-largest county and has served in that role since August 2019.

As Executive, Coulter has presented balanced budgets every year that have passed with bipartisan support and has maintained the county's coveted AAA bond rating. He spearheaded a successful campaign to enact a countywide public transportation system and helped establish a Housing Trust Fund to increase the

inventory of affordable housing units in the county.



He has also invested in programs to help adults get the education and training they need for successful careers and to assist small businesses in gaining access to county, state and federal resources, as well as initiatives to improve and expand physical and mental health services for all Oakland County residents.

Prior to serving as County Executive, Coulter brought a wealth of local government and executive experience to the job. He represented Southeast Oakland County on the Board of Commissioners from 2002-2010 before being elected Mayor of Ferndale, where he served until 2019 when he was appointed Oakland County Executive. He was elected to four-year terms in 2020 and 2024.

While he was Mayor of Ferndale, Coulter served as the Director of External Relations for the Children's Foundation of Michigan, formerly the Children's Hospital of Michigan Foundation. He also served as the Executive Director of the Michigan AIDS Fund which funded HIV prevention programs.

Coulter was raised in St. Clair Shores and graduated from Bishop Gallagher High School in Harper Woods. He earned a bachelor's degree from Michigan State University and an Executive Education Certificate from the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.



**Mark Behnke**  
**Mayor, City of Battle Creek**

Mark A. Behnke is the Mayor of Battle Creek. He was elected in November 2020 as Mayor, in the city's first direct election in over 60 years since the Charter was changed and allowed for a vote of the citizens instead of the City Commission. Mr. Behnke has supported a direct election of the Mayor for a long period of time. He previously served as the city's Mayor in 2000, in 2007, and again from 2017 to 2020.

A strong believer in responsive and transparent city government, Mr. Behnke is focused on working with Battle Creek's school districts and strengthening the city's neighborhoods to attract new business and home investment. Among his goals for the City of Battle Creek are establishing opportunities and extending a hand up for the homeless and less fortunate by working with others to produce job opportunities and affordable home ownership.

In 2019, Mr. Behnke participated in the Grassroots Exchange Network-Japan (GEN-J) Invitation Program, organized by the Japan Foundation Center for Global Partnership. He was accompanied by the former City Manager of Battle Creek Rebecca Fleury and Joe Sobieralski, President & CEO of Battle Creek Unlimited, the city's economic development partner. The group visited Tokyo and Aichi.

Mr. Behnke graduated from Saint Joseph's College in Rensselaer, Indiana in 1980. He is married to Gerardyne (Geri) Drozdowski and they have two children.



**Shin Sasaki**

**President, AISIN Technical Center and FT Techno of America**

Shin Sasaki was named president of ATCA, Northville, Mich., and FTTA, AISIN's 950-acre test track and proving ground in Fowlerville, Mich. Sasaki also maintains his position as executive vice president of North America OE Sales and Energy Solutions at AWA, Northville, and executive officer of AISIN Corporation in Japan.

Sasaki joined AISIN in 1993 to work in automatic transmission design for European automakers and has since been involved in powertrain engineering and development at AISIN companies in Asia, Europe and the United States. He's held a number of executive positions including deputy executive general manager of the Powertrain Product Division, executive officer of Powertrain and Electrification Development, and president of AISIN AW Technical Center of America in Ann Arbor, Mich. Sasaki replaces Tatsuya Iwatsuki, who retired.



**Joe Rohatynski**

**Vice President, AISIN**

Joe Rohatynski serves as the Vice President of Corporate Communications and External Affairs at AISIN World Corp. of America, a leading Tier One automotive supplier headquartered in Northville, Michigan. With extensive experience in public relations, particularly within the automotive industry, he has been instrumental in shaping AISIN's communications strategies and fostering relationships with stakeholders. His role involves overseeing corporate communications, media

relations, and community engagement initiatives. Rohatynski has also been actively involved in promoting AISIN's presence at major industry events, such as the Detroit Auto Show, where he has represented the company and highlighted its technological innovations.



**Robert (Bob) Townsend**

**Vice President of Corporate Communications, Corporate Services, and Government Affairs; DENSO International America**

Robert Townsend is vice president of Corporate Communications, Corporate Services and Government Affairs at DENSO's North American headquarters in Southfield, Michigan. In the role he is responsible for overseeing external affairs (government & community Affairs), strategic communications and campus operations.

Townsend joined DENSO in 1996 as a Safety, Health and Environment specialist. He was responsible for coordinating the development and implementation of a system-consistent ISO 14001 program for DIAM and all North American DENSO manufacturing operations.

In 2000, Townsend was promoted to SHE section leader where he guided the development of DENSO's North American Environmental Action Plan. In 2002, he was appointed manager of SHE and directed the development of DENSO's second North American Environmental Action Plan, charged with Ecovision 2015. Townsend became senior manager of SHE in 2003, where he established DENSO's product organization Substance of Concern to ensure compliance with environmental requirements, reinforcing the elimination of hazardous substances in our products and promote product recyclability.

In his current role, Townsend leads North America Government & Community Affairs, North America Corporate Communications, North America Sustainability and DENSO International America, Inc. Facilities Operations.

Prior to working at DENSO, Townsend worked with an environmental consulting company as an environmental specialist and safety program manager. Townsend received his Bachelor of Science degree in Biology with a minor in Occupational Safety and Health from Grand Valley State University in Allendale, Michigan.

Townsend leads DENSO's Environmental Management Committee, North American External Affairs Committee and North American Safety Committee. He is vice president of the DENSO in North America Foundation and board member of the Southfield Community Foundation. Townsend is an active member of the Original Equipment Suppliers Association; Environment, Health and Safety Counsel; the Automotive Industry Action Group; National Manufacturers Association; Michigan Manufacturers Association; Regional Detroit Chamber of Commerce and Southfield Chamber of Commerce.



**Nick Sitarski**

**Vice President of Integrated Vehicle Systems, Toyota Motor North America**

Nick Sitarski is Vice President for the Integrated Vehicle Systems division at Toyota's North American R&D headquarters in Michigan. He leads a team of more than 200 engineers and technicians. He oversees work on advanced driver assist system (ADAS) and automated driving system (ADS) technologies in North America in the areas of research, advanced development, evaluation, production implementation, and post-production quality assurance. Additionally, Sitarski has responsibility for design and evaluation of body electronics and functional and lighting systems. He joined Toyota in 2005 and has held multiple positions, both as an engineer and leader, related to the development, evaluation, and commercialization of new electrical parts and systems. During this time, Sitarski has been awarded 18 patents from the United

States Patent and Trademark Office. Before TMNA, Sitarski worked at SY Systems Technologies as a Systems Engineer. He is a native Michigander and earned a Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering and a Master of Science in Engineering Management, both from the University of Michigan-Dearborn, where he is a member of the College of Engineering and Computer Science Visiting Committee. Sitarski also serves on the board of the Michigan Economic Development Foundation (MEDF), a position he has had since 2021. He earned a Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering and a Master of Science in Engineering Management, both from the University of Michigan-Dearborn, where he is a member of the College of Engineering and Computer.



**Joe Sobieralski**

**President & CEO, Battle Creek Unlimited**

Joe Sobieralski joined the Battle Creek Unlimited (BCU) team in December of 2015, as Vice President. Sobieralski oversees all aspects of BCU's operations including domestic and international economic development and its strategic plan for positioning Battle Creek as the premier location for businesses to develop, expand, and relocate utilizing the unique asset of the Fort Custer Industrial Park. Focusing on generating investment and job growth, Sobieralski works closely with the City of Battle Creek, Battle Creek Tax Increment Finance Authority, Michigan Economic Development Corporation, local community stakeholders, and business owners to achieve these goals. Sobieralski is a proud graduate and alumni of both Michigan State University (MSU) and Western Michigan University (WMU). He holds a Bachelor of Arts from MSU and a Master of Public Administration from WMU with a concentration in Local Government Administration.





**Jennifer Owens**  
**President, Lakeshore Advantage**

Jennifer Owens serves as President of Lakeshore Advantage, the economic development organization for Allegan and Ottawa Counties in West Michigan. Jennifer is responsible for setting the vision and strategy of the organization. She delivers business retention, expansion, and attraction services while providing overall leadership to the organization. Since joining Lakeshore Advantage in 2013, she has landed numerous major business expansion and attraction projects successfully.

Jennifer has more than 20 years of leadership experience in marketing, communications, business retention, expansion, and attraction working in various state and local economic development positions throughout Michigan. Prior to Lakeshore Advantage, Jennifer held leadership positions at Southwest Michigan First and Consultant Connect. In addition, Jennifer held key positions at Ann Arbor SPARK and the Michigan Economic Development Corporation.



**Kelly Sexton**  
**Associate Vice President for Research - Innovation**  
**Partnerships and Economic Impact, University of Michigan**

As Associate Vice President for Research – Innovation Partnerships and Economic Impact, Kelly provides visionary and strategic leadership of U-M's innovation, corporate research and technology commercialization activities, including overseeing Innovation Partnerships. In this role, she supports and encourages university-wide programs for intellectual property development, innovation and engagement with business and

venture communities in the region, across the nation and around the globe. Prior to her arrival at U-M in 2018, Kelly was the Assistant Vice Chancellor for Technology Commercialization and New Ventures at North Carolina State University, where she co-founded an alumni angel investor network to provide a new source of funding for university startups and spinouts.

Kelly holds a B.S. in Biochemistry and Molecular Biology from the University of Georgia and a Ph.D. in Molecular Pathology from the University of California, San Diego where she was supported by a fellowship from the California Breast Cancer Research Foundation. Kelly completed her postdoctoral studies at Stanford University where she was awarded a fellowship from the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation. Kelly serves as co-chair of the U-M Roundtable on Innovation and Entrepreneurship, on the Board of the Michigan Venture Capital Association, and as Chair of the Ann Arbor SPARK Board of Directors.



**Robert Corder**

**Vice President of Attraction, Battle Creek Unlimited**

Robert Corder joined the Battle Creek Unlimited (BCU) team in April of 2017, as Vice President of Attraction and Development. Focusing on generating investment and job growth, Robert works closely with local and international community stakeholders and business owners to achieve these goals. Robert brings to BCU his extensive knowledge and experience for promoting foreign trade and investment along with his success record for the development of companies allowing them to evolve and grow.

In his most recent role with Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) based out of Chicago, Illinois, Robert wore a wide variety of hats from recruiting companies to creating marketing materials to public speaking. Before joining JETRO, Robert spent three years in Japan as an English teacher on the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Program. Prior to living in Japan, worked for a large accounting firm in Washington, D.C. as a pension compliance auditor. Robert attended American University in Washington, D.C. where he earned a Bachelor of Arts in International Relations, focused on Japan. He serves on the Board of Directors at the Japan America Society of Chicago and is active in the JET Program Alumni Association (JETAA). Robert was part of the first group selected to participate in the TOMODACHI-Mitsui & Co. Leadership Program in 2013.



**Alan M. Weber, EdD**

**Managing Vice President of Business Development, Detroit Regional Partnership**

Alan M. Weber is Managing Vice President of Business Development at the Detroit Regional Partnership (DRP), a leading economic development nonprofit organization serving the 11-county Detroit Region. Weber is responsible for the day-to-day leadership and execution of the DRP's business development programming. In this capacity, he promotes Metro Detroit as an ideal location for corporate investment and helps domestic and international companies explore,

invest, and create jobs in the Region.

Drawing on his extensive experience in developing international and domestic business attraction programming, Weber and his team travel globally to attract investment to the Detroit Region. Over the last five years, the DRP Team has supported over a hundred companies in finding success in the Detroit Region.

Weber's proactive and innovative approach to business attraction has contributed to the Region's economic development success throughout his career. Before joining the DRP, he held several similar roles in Michigan, including Economic Development Director for the City of Novi and Senior Manager of International Business Development for Oakland County's

Economic Development Corporation. Over his career in Michigan, Weber has helped companies invest more than \$7 billion and create over 10,000 jobs.



**Michael Abdallah**

**Business Development Manager, Oakland County**

Abdallah leads the county's national and global business attraction efforts, focusing on sectors such as mobility, defense, advanced manufacturing, and digital technology. His responsibilities include fostering relationships with industry leaders, supporting local businesses, and promoting Oakland County as a prime location for investment and growth.

Abdallah has nearly two decades of experience in economic development and business attraction. Prior to his current role, he held various positions within Oakland County's Economic Development Department, contributing to initiatives that enhance the county's economic vitality. His leadership has been instrumental in programs like Project DIAMOnD, which supports small manufacturers in adopting advanced manufacturing technologies.