

Speaker Biographies

Blenda Riddick, Director, Corporate & Government Affairs, United Airlines Chairwoman, CCSNJ Transportation & Infrastructure Committee

Blenda Riddick is a seasoned government affairs specialist with twenty years-worth of combined federal, state and local expertise. She joined United in 2011 and assumes a leadership role in New Jersey for United's Newark hub and Ohio state legislative issues for the company's station in Cleveland; managing relationships with key external political and business stakeholders to advance corporate/business and legislative interests for the airline.

Prior to joining United, Blenda spent five years as associate state director handling federal policy issues, all statewide elections and grassroots activities for the AARP, New Jersey state office in Princeton. She also served as a senior associate with the DC based government relations lobbying firm Cassidy & Associates, where she assisted a host of vanguard clients from 1999-2005. From 1995-1999, she worked for U.S. Senator Frank Lautenberg, as a constituent services representative in his Newark office for two years then as his chief legislative correspondent in Washington, DC.

Blenda is the Chairwoman of the Chamber of Commerce Southern New Jersey's Transportation & Infrastructure Committee. She also serves on the Board of the Greater Newark Convention & Visitor's Bureau, and recently completed her board term for the Alice Paul Institute in Mount Laurel, New Jersey.

Blenda received her B.A. in Women's Studies & Puerto Rican Hispanic Caribbean Studies, with concentrations in Political Science from Douglass College, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey in 1994.

Sasha Johnson, Managing Director Regulatory and Policy, United Airlines

Sasha Johnson joined United Airlines in 2015 as Managing Director for Regulatory and Policy based in Washington, DC. Sasha leads United's engagement with the Administration and Washington stakeholders. Prior to joining United, Sasha spent six years as an appointee with the U.S. Department of Transportation and the Federal Aviation Administration where she served in a variety of roles including chief of staff to FAA Administrator Michael Huerta. Before joining the Obama Administration, Sasha spent 11 years as a political journalist with CNN in Washington where she covered campaigns and elections.

Jeff Sassinsky, President, Fovea Aero Systems LLC

Combining his aviation experience with his high technology expertise, Jeff founded Fovea Aero Systems, a drone services and innovation company.

As an avid pilot, Jeff has been involved in aerospace for decades, from working as a commercial pilot flying jets to a camera person in news helicopters. As a serial entrepreneur, Jeff has created value and grown businesses in a wide variety of fields. Fovea Aero was among the first FAA licensed commercial drone operators in the United States and is changing the way many companies and government agencies undertake their inspection, construction and security endeavors.

Jeff is a graduate of The University of Pennsylvania with a degree in systems engineering, is a drone advocate, and has spent his career working alongside and supporting the world's largest companies and government agencies.

Howard J. Kyle, Chief of Staff to the County Executive, Atlantic County

Howard Kyle has more than 30 years of substantive experience in the area of public policy and public administration. He currently serves as chief of staff to Atlantic County (NJ) Executive Dennis Levinson. In this capacity he has played a leading role in issues pertaining to economic development, education, land use, tourism, workforce development and human services.

In December 2010 he was appointed by Governor Chris Christie to the Board to the New Jersey Casino Reinvestment Development Authority. He also serves on the Board of Directors of the Greater Atlantic City Chamber and the Atlantic County Economic Alliance. The ACEA is a newly formed nonprofit organization dedicated to business retention, business growth and business attraction.

Kyle has been actively involved in the development of a state of the art Aviation Research and Technology Park (ARTP) in Atlantic County and also serves as the County Executive's representative on the Aviation Research and Technology Park Board of Trustees.

His previous positions included service as executive to the President of Atlantic Cape Community College and director of government for the Atlantic County Improvement Authority. During his tenure with the ACIA he was actively involved in the efforts to build the new Atlantic City Convention Center and to construct related improvements. He also served as department head of Planning and Economic Development and as deputy department head of Social Services for Atlantic County Government.

He was born and raised in Atlantic City and served in the United States Air Force. He is a graduate of Rutgers University - Camden where he also earned a Masters Degree in Public Policy.

Carole M. Mattessich, Esq., Director of Economic Development, Cape May County

Carole Mattessich holds a B.A. in Government from Trinity College in Washington, D.C, and a law degree from Catholic University Law School, where she was editor-in-chief of the Law Review. She served as law clerk on the United States Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit before working at Milbank Tweed, a Wall Street law firm. She specialized in business law.

Ms. Mattessich also has worked as a journalist, and on three occasions her reporting was awarded for excellence by the New Jersey Press Association. She has taught courses in both law and journalism at Rowan University and Cumberland County College.

After several years assisting Cape May County with economic development projects, in April 2016 she was designated the County's Director of Economic Development. The County is about to open its first technology incubator under her guidance.

Ira Weissman, President, Idea Innovations, LLC

Ira Weissman, a Lean Six Sigma Black Belt, has over 40 years of experience in project and program management, quality and training. He brings with him a passion for non-profit work, where he has spent over 20 years in high-level volunteer positions and has also been a volunteer coordinator for a non-profit coordinating agency. Ira has merged his Lean Six Sigma knowledge and his passion for non-profits by writing the chapter Operational Excellence in Non-Profits for the book Driving Operation Excellence (www.drivingoperationalexcellence.com).

Ira's background includes being the curator and director of the Air Victory Museum, a member of the Tuskegee Airmen's National strategic planning committee, a board member of the Non-Profit Development Center of Southern NJ, a member of the Diocese of Camden's Community Relations Advisory board, and co-founder and chairperson of the Camden Youth Aviation Program.

Currently, Ira is working with Greg Derham of the Garden State Education Group to create the Aviation Maintenance Academy of Southern NJ.

Ira's consulting firm Idea Innovations, LLC seeks to help businesses, government agencies and non-profits become more effective, efficient and successful.