

SPEAKER BIOS



Marie Knight
Knight Leadership Solutions

Marie has spent over 34 years in Parks and Recreation, Youth Development, and Municipal Government professions. She has worked for numerous cities, and retired from the City of Huntington Beach as the Director of Organizational Learning and Engagement.

During her municipal government career, she has lead teams in excess of 1,000 staff, managed annual operational budgets over \$56 million dollars, and had oversight of over \$100 million dollars in capital improvement projects. She has overseen Programs and Services, Park Maintenance, Animal Care, Marinas, and even Cemeteries! Through the years she has created several award-winning programs and services and is a recipient of the California Parks and Recreation Society Coveted Leadership Award, and a four-time Presidents Award recipient. Currently Marie is the owner of Knight Leadership Solutions, specializing in coaching, training, facilitating, speaking and behavior assessment for teams and individuals. Marie is a member of the Maxwell Leadership Certified Team and affiliated with Municipal Resources Group in Northern California.



Jacquie Nunez
Journeys to the Past

Jacquie is a descendent of the Acjachemen Nation, a local indigenous tribe. Basket weaving was an important part of the Acjachemen culture; these baskets sustained her people for thousands of years. Her work as a teacher and storyteller reflects her heritage by also weaving ancient practices of being still and present into every moment of life. Jacquie presents a contrast of present day chaotic choices with the beauty of village life by encouraging us to work with our hands, gather our truth, and remember everyone's individual beauty. Jacquie teaches leadership and techniques to remind us we are stronger than we believe, that the ups and downs of life are the foundation of our own character, and of creating a beautiful community together by celebrating the gifts of Mother Earth.



Jamie Lai
City of Yorba Linda
Director of Public Works, City Engineer

Jamie has over 20 years experience in the public and private sector working on projects ranging from local neighborhood improvements to innovative, high-profile developments. She has a diverse public works background in traffic and transportation, development services, Capital Improvement Projects (CIPs), transit planning, design, landscape assessment districts, grant management, waste management, fleet and operations & maintenance. She also has extensive experience working on large scale commercial, mixed-use and residential developments. Major infrastructure projects include the recently opened Yorba Linda Public Library and Cultural Arts Center, the Anaheim Regional Transportation Intermodal Center (ARTIC), Anaheim Resort Area projects, as well as numerous mixed use, commercial and residential projects. Jamie is focused on excellent customer service, fostering partnerships, and working as a team to achieve results.

Prior to joining Yorba Linda in 2019, Jamie worked at the City of Anaheim, Orange County Public Works and the private engineering sector. She received both her Bachelor's degree in Civil Engineering and Master's degree in Civil Engineering, specializing in Transportation Planning, from the University of California, Irvine. She is a licensed Professional Civil Engineer in the state of California.



Priya Sodha
Innergem
CEO & Founder

Priya Sodha is the CEO and founder of Innergem, a coaching and training company focused on empowering individuals and teams to re-imagine work. She is an Executive Trainer and Confidence Coach who speaks on topics such as communicating with confidence, identifying your professional brand, self-advocacy, and mindfulness based topics. Most recently she spoke on the topic of burnout to attendees at the Women of Silicon Valley in May 2022, where she presented to over 200 individuals on how to build resilience through changing times. She also holds her Master's degree in Organization Change from the New School in NYC and certification as an #IamRemarkable facilitator with Google.

In addition to facilitation and coaching, Priya is a global speaker. She brings in her experience and engages her audience through storytelling. You can also find Priya teaching fitness classes such as zumba and yoga, or spending her free time with her partner Larry and puppy Zuri. Priya will be speaking with us on her signature topic, which includes addressing Imposter Syndrome and confidently stepping into your voice to communicate your value. She uses her personal story and experience to inspire and re-ignite confidence in her audience.



Sonya Young Jimenez
City of Los Angeles
Department of Recreation and Parks Superintendent of Venice Beach and West Region

Sonya has been employed in recreation since 1999, working in over nine recreation facilities and serving various communities throughout Los Angeles. She's been married to Jay, her high school sweetheart, for 17 years, and is the mother of Maximus, age 14, Emma Jo, age 12, and fur baby Chiclé. Sonya received her Bachelor's degree in Human Development with a minor in Women's Studies, and also her Master's degree in Public Policy administration from Cal State Long Beach (Go Beach!!) Sonya has worked in the field of Emergency Management for five years; during that time she has trained co-workers and community volunteers in emergency preparedness. This training has included mental health, resiliency, working with people with disabilities, access and functional needs, shelter management, and numerous other aspects of emergency management.

Throughout the Covid 19 pandemic, Sonya oversaw the sheltering of unhoused individuals throughout the City of Los Angeles, and served as the Department Duty officer, managing the Department Operations Center for an over 147 day activation, and collaborating with various departments and partner agencies throughout the city and county. Currently Sonya is the Superintendent of the West Region and Venice Beach in the Department of Recreation and Parks for the City of Los Angeles, where she serves as the department training coordinator, training hundreds of employees yearly. Sonya started the department hiking club, where she invites everyone to go on city hikes once a month. She is an active member of Women in Leisure Services, XKP, and now serves as the National Vice President. She considers herself a lifelong learner, and enjoys hanging out with friends and family, playing volleyball, and watching football with a cold beer.



Ellen Medalle
City of Costa Mesa
Human Resources Analyst

Ellen Medalle is a native of Salinas, California; the salad bowl capital of America! Ellen graduated with a degree in management with an emphasis in human resources from Webster University. Her career spans 30+ years in both private and public sectors. Ellen started her career at the Housing Authority of the County of Monterey as their HR manager. She then joined the Orange County Fire Authority where she managed recruiting, benefits, employee and labor relationships. When she retired in 2017, she was recruited by the City of Costa Mesa and serves as an HR analyst, administering their employee benefits, as well as health and wellness programs. Ellen enjoys traveling along with hiking and spending time with family and friends.



Lydie Gutfeld
City of San Bernardino
Director of Parks, Recreation and Community Services

Lydie Gutfeld has worked in local government for the past 30 years. She has been fortunate to work for agencies such as Beverly Hills, Irvine, Mission Viejo, and is now the Director of Parks, Recreation and Community Services for the city of San Bernardino. Lydie's experience in parks and recreation is extensive as she has worked diligently to engage, empower and enhance park and recreation services throughout the nation. Her resume is impressive as she has developed and implemented policies, programs and services to create community engagement. She has served on numerous boards, including the Presidential Series for the California Park and Recreation Society State Board and the National Women in Leisure Services Board of Directors. She was the recipient of the Helen I Pontius National Award of Merit in 2019 for her service and dedication to the field of Parks and Recreation and in honoring female leaders. Lydie finished her MPA at Cal State Fullerton with honors in 2017 and was named the Lead Fellow in the City Managers Fellowship Program. She speaks nationwide to cities and special districts about emotional intelligence, leadership, program development, and creating impact in communities. Her passion is speaking to parks and rec professionals about the ability to love what you do and do what you love. She is a business owner and a proud mom of three and resides in Anaheim Hills.



Thank You!
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