



# ANNUAL REPORT 2025



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# LETTER FROM LEADERSHIP



As we look back on 2025, one word captures the year: momentum. This year, Leadership Columbus' impact showed up everywhere, from packed rooms to quiet conversations, from formal programs to one-on-one moments of gratitude. Again and again, we heard the same thing: Leadership Columbus matters.

We celebrated the graduation of the Signature Program Class of 2025, a class defined by both caliber and commitment. From the energy of the Welcome Reception to the intentional reflection at graduation, it was clear that participants feel honored to be part of this experience and ready to step into their roles as community trustees.

We also expanded how leaders experience our city. We piloted Columbus 360, a behind-the-scenes immersion for leaders new to Columbus, and launched the Impact Lab, professional development for nonprofit organizations and their teams. The response to both was immediate and affirming. Nearly 20 organizations reached out about the Impact Lab in its first month alone, confirming what we had heard all along: this work was needed.

2025 was also a year of reconnection. We officially launched our alumni program and welcomed graduates back through curated experiences. Everyone had a great time at the Best Party Ever, where we came together to honor Councilmember Lourdes Barroso de Padilla and the Honorable Janet Jackson. Their words, and the community in the room, reflected Leadership Columbus at its best: celebratory, connected, and purpose driven.

We strengthened our organization from the inside as well. Collin Ries was promoted, we welcomed Claire Levin to the team, and six exceptional new members joined the Board, including a newly created city-appointed seat. One board member shared that when their appointment was announced, people came out of the woodwork to congratulate them and share how Leadership Columbus had shaped their lives, a powerful reminder of this organization's reach and reputation.

Refining our focus has allowed us to channel our energy into what truly drives impact, setting us up for even greater success ahead. As we look ahead to 2026, we are energized by what's possible. The collaboration and trust already forming within the Class of 2026 remind us that the future of Columbus is in good hands.

Thank you for believing in this work and for being part of a network that continues to shape our city. We can't wait to keep building momentum together.

With gratitude,

**Ryan Aguiar** (SP '21)  
Board Chair

**Kate Bauer** (SP '17)  
Executive Director

# THE MISSION BEHIND LEADERSHIP COLUMBUS

## MISSION

The mission of Leadership Columbus is to develop, connect, and inspire diverse leaders who serve as catalysts in building a strong and vibrant community.

## VISION

A Columbus full of inclusive and transformative opportunities for diverse leaders who relentlessly pursue professional and personal development, civic engagement, and community impact both individually and collectively.

## VALUES

Commitments of Leadership Columbus as a Community Trustee:

- Lifelong learning and the growth that comes with it
- Build trust through integrity
- Seek and share information, perspectives, and experiences
- Invest in relationships and collaborations
- Contribute to community solutions, growth, and culture

## STAFF



**Kate Bauer (SP '17)**  
*Executive Director*



**Claire Levin (SP '26)**  
*Alumni Engagement &  
Marketing Manager*



**Collin Ries**  
*Director of Learning &  
Program Management*

# 2025 AT A GLANCE

# 51

## 51 Years of Leadership

Celebrating more than five decades of developing Central Ohio's community trustees



## Signature Program Class of 2025

56 leaders graduated from the Signature Program, ready to make an impact across Central Ohio



## Impact Lab Launched

Free professional development workshops designed to strengthen local nonprofit capacity



## Alumni Membership Program Created

Connecting, developing, and inspiring our network of 3,500+ alumni



## Columbus 360 Pilot

Introduced new leaders to the heart of Columbus through immersive city experiences and local connections

# \$37,469

## Community Impact Project Consulting

Through skills-based volunteerism, the Class of '25 helped local organizations save critical dollars



## CEO of the Year

Kate Bauer recognized by *Columbus CEO* for her visionary leadership



## Best Party Ever

Honored trailblazing leaders in a night celebrating community trustees



## Growing Digital Community

Our vibrant digital community highlighted alumni making a difference in the nonprofit sector

# CEO OF THE YEAR AWARDS



In 2025, Leadership Columbus celebrated a milestone moment of regional recognition when our Executive Director, Kate Bauer (SP '17), was named Small Nonprofit CEO of the Year by *Columbus CEO* magazine.

For our organization, this honor felt deeply personal. Kate's leadership is rooted in purpose, curiosity, and a genuine belief in the power of people to strengthen our community. Her selection reflects not only professional excellence, but also her unwavering commitment to Leadership Columbus' mission to develop, connect, and inspire diverse leaders across Central Ohio.

— — — — —  
We need people who care about our community now more than ever... It's always been critically important, but in our current environment, it's critical to our city's success. Kate is leading with empathy and braveness, and she's having fun doing it.

**Kelly Clifford Riehl** (SP '18)  
*Immediate Past Board Chair, Leadership Columbus*

The CEO of the Year awards, presented annually by *Columbus CEO*, recognize leaders whose vision and integrity are shaping the region's economic, civic, and social future. To see Kate recognized among this group was especially meaningful, and even more so because she was joined by fellow Leadership Columbus alumni.

The 2025 honorees included Habiba Bankston (SP '20), Carlie Boos (SP '24), and Ilaria Rawlins (SP '17), each celebrated for their leadership and lasting impact within their organizations and beyond.



Together, these recognitions tell a larger story. They reflect the strength of the Leadership Columbus network and the ripple effect of leaders who remain deeply connected to central Ohio.

Our alumni continue to lead with purpose, compassion, and distinction across sectors, demonstrating the enduring impact of Leadership Columbus and the power of a community built on shared values and collective leadership.

# SIGNATURE PROGRAM

Now in its 51st year, the Signature Program is more than a leadership experience, it's a journey that transforms how participants see themselves, their city, and the role they play in shaping its future. For over five decades, the program has brought leaders into the heart of Columbus, connecting them with the people, neighborhoods, and stories that make our community thrive.

Through monthly site visits, hands-on experiences, and candid conversations with civic and community leaders, participants gain fresh perspectives, stretch their thinking, and discover new ways to lead with courage and purpose. The program evolves each year, adapting to the changing realities, challenges, and opportunities facing the city and its leaders.

## COMMUNITY IMPACT

At the heart of the Signature Program is the Community Impact Project (CIP). Partnering with local nonprofits, participants provide tailored, capacity building support at no cost, helping organizations advance critical work while applying their leadership skills. These projects create lasting impact for organizations, leaders, and the broader community, demonstrating the power of connection, collaboration, and intentional leadership. Many participants remain engaged long after the program ends, serving as volunteers, donors, and board members.

I had a wonderful Signature Program experience learning alongside some incredible classmates, guided by Leadership Columbus' seemingly tireless staff through deliberate, dynamic, and at times challenging programming that both opened my eyes to issues facing our city and inspired me by spotlighting the intrepid community leaders already facing them head on.

To call the Signature Program a 'growth' experience does not begin to do it justice.

**George Stevens** (SP '25)

I once heard the saying, 'Your network is your net worth,' and my experience in the Signature Program of Leadership Columbus brought that truth to life. Being part of a cohort of individuals from diverse walks of life, all committed to being part of the solution to our community's most pressing challenges, was both humbling and energizing.

This program challenged me, inspired me, and affirmed the power of collective leadership.

**Ugochi N.O. Akoi** (SP '25)



**91%**

report the program helped them identify and grow in their personal leadership strengths\*



**100%**

have a stronger understanding of Columbus' civic, social, and economic landscape\*



**96%**

feel more empowered to take on a leadership role in their community\*



# CLASS OF 2025

**Ugochi N.O. Akoi**  
**DeWyan Allen**  
**Hailey Allison**  
**Carolyn Appelhans**  
**Jeff Bartolozzi**  
**Marissa Bond**  
**Kristin Chek-McChesney**  
**Elena Chiappinelli**  
**Blythe Coons**  
**Brandon Cowan**  
**Kathryn Cullen**  
**Margaret N. Del Col**  
**Andrea Devier**  
**Dave Dixon**  
**Cassie Ferguson**  
**Natalina Fickell**  
**Michael Fisher**  
**Rachel Gold**  
**Kelly Green**

**Devon Henry**  
**Jerod Hickey**  
**Donovan Jones**  
**Kyle Kaufman**  
**Justin J. Kocher**  
**Marie Kuess**  
**Kyle Landau**  
**Todd Lisowski**  
**Erin Maggied**  
**Mike McCullough**  
**Mike Messina**  
**Kelly J. Mills**  
**Shadeja Nelson**  
**Aren Olson**  
**Luka Papalko**  
**Natalie Parscher**  
**Tracy Perry**  
**Amanda Pierce**  
**Alex Powers**

**Chris Reaster**  
**Miya Reyes**  
**Nisaa Robinson**  
**Shannon Salvadore**  
**Jenna Saponaro**  
**Heather Sever**  
**Rebecca Sheehan**  
**Sarah K. Squillante**  
**George Stevens**  
**Hilary Stone**  
**Simon Teed**  
**Marshall Troxell**  
**Melinda Vonstein**  
**Amber Wacker**  
**Kee'Vona Starr Walker**  
**Kelly Widenhofer**  
**Bret Wilson**  
**Amanda Alvarez Wright**

## COMMUNITY IMPACT PROJECT PARTNERS

**Buddy Up for Life**  
**Community Refugee and Immigration Services**  
**Community Shelter Board**  
**Office of the Franklin County Public Defender**  
**Little Bottoms Free Store**  
**Ohio Victim Witness Association**

**Student Success Stores**  
**The Patriots Education Fund**  
**Treats 4 The Streets**  
**We Amplify Voices**  
**Women of Color Retail Alliance**

# IMPACT LAB

Launched this year with the support of the Wolfe Associates Fund, the Impact Lab provides free, accessible, high-quality professional development to nonprofit teams across Central Ohio, reflecting Leadership Columbus' commitment to continuously adapting to the evolving realities of our region.



2025 has been a particularly challenging year for nonprofits. The *2025 State of the Sector* report from the Human Service Chamber of Franklin County found that more than 77% of local organizations cannot meet growing demand for their services, and over 90% face rising operational costs, with staffing and leadership shortages adding to these pressures.

The Impact Lab addresses these challenges through free workshops that strengthen leadership capacity, build organizational infrastructure, and equip nonprofit teams to navigate complexity, limited resources, and staff

burnout. Participants leave better prepared to retain talent, align teams around mission priorities, and sustain impact during times of uncertainty.

By supporting nonprofits at a critical moment, the Impact Lab is investing in the resilience and long-term health of Central Ohio's sector, ensuring organizations can continue to thrive and serve our community when they are needed most.

## WORKSHOPS

- Coaching: Bringing out the Best in Others
- Fundamentals of DiSC®
- Nonprofit Board Governance Training
- SL II: Concepts
- Time Management



There is no better antidote to compassion fatigue and burnout than investing in our mission-focused culture.

This grant-funded investment in our team at SVFS with high-quality professional development is making a significant impact on our retention and strengthening our mission, which allows us to continue serving 6,000 youth and families a year.

**Susan Lewis Kaylor**

*President & CEO, St. Vincent Family Services*



**93%**

plan to apply what they learned\*



**100%**

gained practical tools they can use immediately\*



**95%**

found the workshop relevant to their professional development\*

# ALUMNI MEMBERSHIP PROGRAM

In 2025, Leadership Columbus launched our Alumni Membership Program, creating a space for our 3,500+ alumni to stay connected, grow, and extend their impact across Central Ohio.

This program reminds our alumni that leadership development does not end with Signature Program graduation. Through professional development, service initiatives, and networking opportunities, alumni continue to support one another and the community, building on the foundation laid during their Signature Program experience.

By fostering these connections, alumni membership ensures that the Leadership Columbus network remains a vibrant, collaborative force, proving that our community is strongest when our leaders work together.



“

I joined the Alumni Program to hold onto the connection and growth I experienced during the Signature Program Class of '25 (*Best Class Ever!*). In just a short time, I've taken a public speaking master class, volunteered at a community event, connected with fellow alumni through the listserv, and attended a show at a local theater.

The accessibility of meaningful opportunities like these is why I see so much value in staying involved.

**Jenna Saponaro (SP '25)**

“

It has been a joy to send team members through the Signature Program, to see their excitement through all the learnings, and re-live vicariously through them.

For me, the Alumni Program has provided a direct way to personally remain engaged and benefit from ongoing alumni-focused points of connectivity, professional development, and engagement with Leadership Columbus, bringing learning and networking opportunities well beyond graduation.

**Dan Sharpe (SP '15)**



**110**

alumni members



**19**

alumni events took place in 2025



**346**

alumni event attendees

# MEET OUR ALUMNI MEMBERS

## LIFETIME

**Ryan Aguiar** (SP '21)  
**Kate Bauer** (SP '17)  
**Elena Chiappinelli** (SP '25)  
**Kelly Clifford Riehl** (SP '18)

**Cindi Englefield** (SP '14)  
**Rachel Heine** (SP '22)  
**Jennifer Peterson** (SP '16)  
**Tyler Schleich** (SP '15)

**Randy Schoedinger** (SP '98)  
**Kylie Whitman** (SP '22)

## ANNUAL

**Sathu Alagappan** (SP '22)  
**DeWyan Allen** (SP '25)  
**Hailey Allison** (SP '25)  
**Robbie Banks** (SP '07)  
**Lindsay Barber** (SP '24)  
**Alison Barret** (SP '05)  
**Jeff Bartolozzi** (SP '25)  
**Charly Bauer** (SP '17)  
**Meg Berno** (SP '24)  
**Andrew Bojko** (SP '06)  
**Conner Brintlinger** (SP '20)  
**Joe Bull** (SP '10)  
**Dave Cherry** (SP '08)  
**Andee Cochren** (SP '23)  
**Joe Codispoti** (SP '16)  
**Blythe Coons** (SP '25)  
**Brandon Cowan** (SP '25)  
**Amber DeBarr** (NxGen '15)  
**Margaret Del Col** (SP '25)  
**Jay Delaney** (SP '20)  
**Andrea Devier** (SP '25)  
**Sarah Eilerman** (SP '22)  
**Shana Eiselstein** (SP '16)  
**Khisha Fallon** (SP '08)  
**Cassie Ferguson** (SP '25)  
**Natalina Fickell** (SP '25)  
**Amy Fleenor** (SP '20)  
**Jess Fleming** (SP '21)  
**Ted Geer** (SP '22)  
**Andrew Glenn** (SP '18)  
**Kelly Green** (SP '25)  
**Ben Heigel** (SP '24)  
**Adam Herman** (SP '20)

**Emerald Hernandez-Parra** (SP '17)  
**Chris Hune** (SP '02)  
**Diane Hurd** (SP '20)  
**Allyson Irving** (SP '24)  
**Olivia Karp** (SP '22)  
**Kyle Kaufman** (SP '25)  
**Robert Kidder** (SP '24)  
**Candace Klepacz** (SP '20)  
**Josh Kliner** (SP '22)  
**Justin Kocher** (SP '25)  
**Jennifer Koma** (SP '15)  
**Brian Krichbaum** (SP '12)  
**Carli Lanfersiek** (SP '15)  
**Jennifer Lehe** (SP '19)  
**Jeremy Leifel** (SP '20)  
**Shelly Lewis** (SP '13)  
**Erin Maggied** (SP '25)  
**Kass Matt** (SP '02)  
**Christina McLemore** (SP '20)  
**Megan Melby** (SP '14)  
**Kelly Mills** (SP '25)  
**Angela Mingo** (SP '12)  
**Kelly Mitchell** (SP '98)  
**Elizabeth Murch** (SP '21)  
**Paul Naumoff** (SP '04)  
**Nicholas Newnham** (SP '21)  
**Julie Nidiffer** (SP '23)  
**Kelli Nowinsky** (SP '18)  
**Christina O'Keeffe** (SP '18)  
**Jen Patterson** (SP '20)  
**John Paull** (SP '20)  
**Alex Powers** (SP '25)  
**Peter Protopappas** (SP '20)

**Brandon Reese** (SP '23)  
**Laura Repasky** (SP '22)  
**Nisaa Robinson** (SP '25)  
**Ryan Rupp** (SP '20)  
**Shannon Salvadore** (SP '25)  
**Jenna Saponaro** (SP '25)  
**Brittaney Schmidt** (SP '24)  
**Michael Schottenstein** (SP '21)  
**Adrienne Selsor** (SP '06)  
**Heather Sever** (SP '25)  
**Kevin Seymour** (SP '23)  
**Dan Sharpe** (SP '15)  
**Jeremy Siegfried** (SP '08)  
**George Stevens** (SP '25)  
**Hilary Stone** (SP '25)  
**Kristina Stuecher** (SP '21)  
**Amanda Swanson** (SP '21)  
**Lisa Swartzwelder** (SP '05)  
**Bridget Tharp** (SP '18)  
**Jacqueline Thompson** (SP '93)  
**Shiloh Todorov** (SP '14)  
**Emily Toney** (SP '16)  
**Wendy Tressler** (SP '23)  
**Marshall Troxell** (SP '25)  
**Amber Wacker** (SP '25)  
**Regan Walsh** (SP '09)  
**Andy Wasserstrom** (SP '20)  
**Matthew Whisler** (SP '23)  
**Kelly Widenhofer** (SP '25)  
**Andrea Wilkins** (SP '21)  
**Ryan Wilkins** (SP '11)  
**Amanda Alvarez Wright** (SP '25)  
**Mark Zuzik** (SP '24)

# SNAPSHOT OF ALUMNI EVENTS

Through the alumni membership program, we provided opportunities for alumni to connect through events ranging from Columbus Crew matches and neighborhood gatherings to professional development workshops, class reunions, nonprofit volunteer connections, beverage swaps, and visits to local art galleries.

“

The Membership Program creates space for alumni to reconnect, network, and simply enjoy time together while also rediscovering how our shared Leadership Columbus experience continues to shape our perspectives and leadership styles. Every conversation reminds me how powerful the program is in developing leaders who are thoughtful and eager to lift others along the way.

Whether it's connecting at a neighborhood gathering or cheering on the Columbus Crew, we continue to learn from one another, strengthen our ability to impact the community, and keep the Leadership Columbus spirit alive long after graduation.

**Angela Mingo (SP '12, Former LC Board Member)**



# LC ALUMNI OUT & ABOUT SUPPORTING NONPROFITS



Columbus Foundation Open House



Columbus Metropolitan Club Forum



Flying Horse Farms  
Campfire



Experience Columbus  
TourismUS



Columbus Metropolitan Library  
Celebration of Learning



Association of Fundraising Professionals  
National Philanthropy Day



Franklin Park Conservatory Hat Day



BalletMet Nutcracker Ball

# COLUMBUS 360

Columbus 360 is a two-day immersive experience designed to help new-to-Columbus executives and their partners feel genuinely at home. As Columbus evolves and growth outpaces other Midwest cities, Columbus 360 helps executives quickly connect, contribute, and thrive in the community they now call home.

Participants experience Columbus not as visitors, but as emerging community members. Through behind-the-scenes access to cultural, civic, and business institutions, guided neighborhood and food tours, and curated sessions on local resources, history, and strategic opportunities, executives gain an insider's perspective on what makes Columbus unique.

More than an orientation, Columbus 360 builds confidence, belonging, and connection. Executives who feel connected to their city are more likely to succeed and stay in their roles. Columbus 360 strengthens executive retention and satisfaction, enhances leadership performance and civic engagement, and elevates corporate reputation and community presence. Columbus 360 inspires executives to see themselves as part of the city and actively shape the community around them.

Grateful for such a thoughtful and impactful program. From the engaging presentations and meaningful conversations to the small, delightful touches throughout, it was truly a standout experience.

**Amanda Kubinsky**

*Senior Director Human Resources, Bob Evans Farms, Inc.*

I walked away with new insights, meaningful connections, and a deeper appreciation for the work Leadership Columbus is doing.

**Noe Arceo**

*Vice President Talent Acquisition & Workforce Development, OhioHealth*



## EXPERIENCES

- Presentation on growth and regional opportunities
- Exploration and dining at Columbus' landmark establishments and hidden gems
- Guided tours of the city's unique attractions
- Behind-the-scenes visit to a local sports team facility
- Overview of Columbus' bike trails and greenways
- Meet-and-greet with Columbus City Councilmembers
- Immersive neighborhood and food tour
- Introduction to the city's arts and culture scene

# BEST PARTY EVER



Leadership Columbus celebrated an inspiring evening with this year's *Best Party Ever*, recognizing the Honorable Janet Jackson and Councilmember Lourdes Barroso de Padilla. Alumni, community leaders, and friends gathered to honor these trailblazing leaders whose work continues to shape Central Ohio.

The energy in the room reflected the vibrancy of our community and the enduring bonds formed through Leadership Columbus programs. The evening highlighted not only the extraordinary contributions of Janet and Lourdes but also the strength and spirit of our alumni network. It was a reminder of the power of community, the joy of reconnecting, and the inspiration of being part of a shared leadership journey.

## HONOREES

**Janet Jackson**  
Honorary Graduate  
LC Board Member 2004-2006

Janet Jackson has spent decades opening doors and inspiring others to lead. From her pioneering roles in law and civic leadership to her service on Leadership Columbus' board, she has consistently broken barriers and set a standard for inclusive leadership.

**Lourdes Barroso de Padilla**  
Hall of Fame Awardee  
Signature Program Class of 2008

Lourdes Barroso de Padilla has been a champion for equity and opportunity in Columbus. A proud Leadership Columbus alum, she has advanced representation, inclusion, and community engagement through her work in city leadership and nonprofit advocacy.



# DONORS

## \$50,000 & ABOVE



WOLFE ASSOCIATES FUND

A fund of



## \$10,000 - \$49,999



The Meuse Family  
FOUNDATION

A fund of



THE COLUMBUS  
FOUNDATION



## \$5,000 - \$9,999



FIFTH THIRD



## \$1,000 - \$4,999



Wagner Family  
Charitable Foundation

## IN-KIND SUPPORT



# BOARD OF TRUSTEES

## EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE



**Ryan Aguiar (SP '21)**  
*American Electric Power  
Board Chair*



**Kelly Clifford Riehl (SP '18)**  
*Installed Building Products  
Immediate Past Board Chair*



**Rachel Heine (SP '22)**  
*Columbus Metropolitan  
Library  
Vice Chair*



**Andrew Glenn (SP '18)**  
*Fifth Third Bank  
Treasurer*



**Amber DeBarr (NxGen '15)**  
*Relevate Health  
Secretary*



**Lindsay Baker**  
*Huntington National Bank*



**Jay Delaney (SP '20)**  
*The Ohio State University*



**Terri Gehr**  
*Gehr LLC*



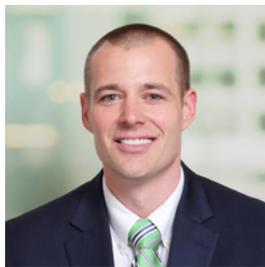
**Shey Jin (SP '22)**  
*CoverMyMeds*



**Shelly Lewis (SP '13)**  
*Mount Carmel Health System*



**Jennifer Reimer**  
*OhioHealth*



**Tyler D. Schleich (SP '15)**  
*EY*



**Ralph Smithers, Jr.**  
*Encova Insurance*



**John Tannous**  
*City of Columbus*



**Ryan Wilkins (SP '11)**  
*Wilkins Collective*

## STAY CONNECTED

 /company/leadership-columbus

 Leadership Columbus

 @Leadership\_Columbus



### **Leadership Columbus**

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[www.leadershipcolumbus.org](http://www.leadershipcolumbus.org)

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