



WEDN

Women's Economic
Development Network

LEARN AND LEAD 2026

Grandover Resort & Spa
1000 Club Road
Greensboro, NC 27407

Thursday, February 26, 2026
Grandview Ballroom

3:00pm Opening Remarks

CRYSTAL MORPHIS, Founder & CEO,
Creative Economic Development
Consulting

**3:15pm National and Regional Labor Market
Update**, DR. LAURA ULLRICH,
Director, Economic Research, Indeed

**3:50pm Strengthening the Workforce: Child
Care Strategies, Family-Forward
Certification, and Talent Attraction**
TIFFANY HENRY, Director of Economic
Development, Jackson County, NC
CECELIA THOMPSON, Executive
Director, Action Greensboro

**4:35pm Transforming Educators, Empowering
Students - STEMmersion**
MICHELLE MCDONALD, Deputy
Director, Dorchester County Economic
Development

5:05pm SPARK!
**Why Housing is Economic
Development**, EMILY JESSUP, Attorney,
Sanford Holshouser Law Group
**NCEDA Foundation: Building Leaders
Today for Stronger Communities
Tomorrow**, BLAIR KENNEDY, NCEDA
Foundation Director of Programming
and Resource Development
Child Care Counts, KATIE BOSWELL,
Executive Director, Onward New River
Valley
**Engaging Existing Industry: Beyond the
Site Visit**, MERIDITH BERGER, Director
of Existing Industry Services,
Greensboro Chamber of Commerce

5:30pm Structured Networking

6:00pm Reception

7:00pm Dinner

Friday, February 27, 2026
Grandview Ballroom

7:30am Breakfast

8:00am Opening Remarks

CRYSTAL MORPHIS, Founder & CEO,
Creative Economic Development
Consulting

**8:15am Uptime: A Practical Guide to Personal
Productivity and Wellbeing**
LAURA MAE MARTIN, Executive
Productivity Advisor, Google

**9:15am The Industrial Commons: Rebuilding a
Diverse Working Class Based on
Locally-Rooted Wealth**
JENNA RAE GRAYSON, Director of
Business Transitions, The Industrial
Commons

9:45am Break

**10:10am Reclaim Your Time: Everyday AI Skills
for Impact**
REBECCA AKBEN, AI Literacy Consultant

**12:20pm Lunch, Table Conversations
Industrial Real Estate Market Update**
DIANNE JONES, Managing Director,
JLL Business Location and Economic
Incentives

1:45pm Closing Comments
CRYSTAL MORPHIS, Founder & CEO,
Creative Economic Development
Consulting

2:00pm Adjourn

Things to Know:

- Hotel check-in is at 4:00pm.
- Thursday dinner is assigned seating. Look for your table number on your name badge.
- Drop off gently used career clothes donations at registration.



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SPEAKERS



REBECCA AKBEN
AI Literacy Consultant

Rebecca Macy Akben is an AI literacy consultant and educator who helps leaders and organizations use AI responsibly and effectively. She designs and leads curricula, workshops, and custom GPTs for educators, professionals, and community leaders. Her work focuses on making AI accessible, ethical, and empowering, particularly for women and underrepresented groups. Rebecca holds two master's degrees and has led AI literacy initiatives at Elon University and across North Carolina's business and nonprofit community.



JENNA RAE GRAYSON
*Director of Business Transitions,
The Industrial Commons*

Jenna Rae Grayson is the Director of Business Transitions at The Industrial Commons, guiding businesses as they shift to cooperative ownership models. Her work focuses on community and economic development in Appalachia, with expertise in business retention, strategic partnerships, and organizational development.



TIFFANY HENRY
*Director of Economic
Development, Jackson
County, NC*

Tiffany Henry is the Economic Development Director for Jackson County, NC, where she focuses on strengthening the local economy and improving the quality of life. Her work includes expanding broadband, advancing housing access, and leading efforts to reopen a shuttered childcare facility to support working families. Tiffany brings both professional expertise and personal commitment to building a stronger, more inclusive future for rural communities.



DIANNE JONES
*Managing Director,
JLL Business Location and
Economic Incentives*

Dianne Jones serves as a Managing Director under the Business Location and Economic Incentives practice in the Carolinas. Based in Charlotte, North Carolina, she specializes in assisting clients with full-service site selection and incentives negotiations across the Southeast.



LAURA MAE MARTIN
*Executive Productivity
Advisor, Google*

Laura Mae Martin is the Executive Productivity Advisor at Google and the author of UPTIME: A Practical Guide to Productivity & Wellbeing. She coaches Google's top executives on the best ways to manage their time and energy and sends out a weekly productivity newsletter that reaches over 60,000 employees. During her fifteen-year tenure at Google, Laura has worked in sales, product operations, event planning, and now executive coaching.



MICHELLE MCDONALD
*Deputy Director, Dorchester
County Economic Development*

With more than 15 years of experience in economic and workforce development, Michelle McDonald is a recognized leader in business recruitment, site selection support, and strategic industry engagement. As Deputy Director of Dorchester County Economic Development, she leads efforts to attract new investment, recruit high-quality employers, and support the expansion and retention of existing businesses across one of South Carolina's fastest-growing regions.



CECELIA THOMPSON
*Executive Director,
Action Greensboro*

Cecelia Thompson serves as Executive Director of Action Greensboro. Action Greensboro, together with the Chamber of Commerce, serves as the city's primary economic and community development agency. In addition to her role at Action Greensboro, Thompson serves on the boards of the North Carolina Early Childhood Foundation and Union Square Campus.



DR. LAURA ULLRICH
*Director, Economic Research,
Indeed*

Dr. Laura Ullrich is Director of Economic Research in North America at the Indeed Hiring Lab. Prior to joining Indeed, Laura served as a Senior Regional Economist and Senior Manager at the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond, primarily focused on research related to higher education and workforce dynamics.



CRYSTAL MORPHIS
*Founder & CEO, Creative
Economic Development
Consulting*

Crystal formed Creative Economic Development Consulting in 2012 to provide innovative and creative solutions to economic development challenges.



economic development consulting
www.creativeedc.com

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