

WAB Board Member Biographies 2026

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Marcela 'Xela' Garcia

Milwaukee



Marcela “Xela” García is a Xicana artist, cultural strategist, and public servant working at the intersection of arts, education, and community leadership. She serves as the Executive Director of Walker’s Point Center for the Arts (WPCA) in Milwaukee, WI, where she advances youth arts education, cultural equity, and community-rooted creative practice. From 2021–2025, she served as an elected member of the Milwaukee Public Schools Board of Directors, bringing her experience in arts administration, education, and philanthropy to public service. A double graduate of the University of Wisconsin–Madison, Xela holds an MA in Arts & Creative Enterprise Leadership and a BA in English Literature with Chicana/Latinx Studies. Her leadership has been recognized nationally and statewide, including BoardSource’s National Emerging Nonprofit Leader Award, Wisconsin’s Most Powerful Latinos, the Milwaukee Business Journal’s 40 Under 40, and the Arts + Culture Leaders of Color Fellowship with Americans for the Arts. She has also been named a finalist for the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Research Fellowship with the Association of Arts Administration Educators. Her civic and arts advocacy spans local, state, and national arenas. She is a mayoral appointee to the City of Milwaukee Arts Board, a gubernatorial appointee to the Wisconsin Arts Board, and represents Wisconsin on the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies Board of Directors, where she currently serves as board secretary. Xela is also co-founder of Raíces Revolucionarias an arts-based collective uplifting Latinx mujerxs and cultural power across Milwaukee’s barrios.

Jayne Herring, Secretary

Kenosha



Jayne Herring is a fused glass artist who teaches fused glass workshops in southeast Wisconsin and northern Illinois. Her work can be found in Kenosha's "Lemon Street Gallery." She is the coordinator of the Racine Art Guild's Starving Artist Fair--the largest juried art fair in the tri-county area. Jayne is president of the Racine-Kenosha Master Gardeners Association and cheers on her fellow members' knowledgeable creativity in the garden.

Karen Ann Hoffman

Stevens Point



Karen Ann, citizen of the Oneida Nation, is a beadwork student of Samuel Thomas and Lorna Hill of Niagara Falls, Ontario, Canada. She holds a Masters Degree in Human Development from the University of Wisconsin -Stevens Point. Her Thesis was “Iroquois Raised Beadwork as a Symbol of Cultural Identity. Karen Ann’s award-winning Beadwork has been displayed at the Mitchell Museum of the American Indian in Evanston, IL; the Bergstrom-Mahler Museum in Appleton, WI; the Eiteljorg Museum of Indianapolis, IN; and the Wisconsin History Museum in Madison, WI. Her works are in the permanent collections of the Smithsonian Institution -NMAI, the Indianapolis Children’s Museum, and the State of Wisconsin. Karen Ann was a member of the Skanikwat Project, Nakuru, Kenya, Africa. The project, led by Samuel Thomas, used tribal beadwork as a medium to foster peace across languages,

racess, religions, and continents. Karen received a 2020 National Heritage Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts, she is a 2022 United States Artist Fellow, and she is a recipient of a 2024 Fellows Award from the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters.

John W. Johnson

Madison



John serves as Policy Advisor for the State Superintendent at the Department of Public Instruction for the State of Wisconsin. John has held leadership positions at the DPI for 23 years; previously serving as Deputy State Superintendent, director for Literacy, Mathematics and Academic Standards, and the Communications Director in the Office of the State Superintendent. As Deputy State Superintendent, he provided state-wide leadership for education and libraries and was the chief operating officer at the department. Through his leadership of state academic standards, John directed revision of standards in Arts and Creativity resulting in adoption of new sets of standards (K-12) in Art and Design, Music, Dance and

Theatre. John served for over fifteen years in schools as a history, social studies, and special education teacher, learning coordinator, and assistant principal. He supervised the arts and music departments at West High School in Madison for five years. John taught graduate courses in Educational Leadership as an assistant professor and lecturer for ten years. In celebration of the Wisconsin Arts Board's 50th Anniversary, John began and co-led the Wisconsin Arts Celebration project for schools. He has served on numerous boards of directors, including for the WASCD (Wisconsin Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development), Wisconsin Literacy, Inc., and the Grace Presents concert series in Madison. He earned his undergraduate degree in history from Georgetown University, and his three graduate degrees, including a doctorate, from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He lives in Madison with wife, and they have three daughters, all participating in the arts.

Brian Kelsey, Chairperson

Fish Creek



Celebrating his 19th season as Managing Director of Peninsula Players Theatre, Brian reflects on his extensive professional journey, which has taken him through various sectors across the United States and Europe. With expertise spanning operations, finance, marketing, and public relations, Brian serves as a versatile leader within the organization.

Brian's dedication goes beyond his role at Peninsula Players Theatre. He previously held the position of president at the Peninsula Arts and Humanities Alliance and currently contributes as a member of the Marketing Committee of the Women's Fund of Door County.

Moreover, he currently chairs the Wisconsin Arts Board and actively participates in state-level tourism initiatives, serving on the Joint Effort Marketing Grant Committee. His contributions play a vital role in advancing cultural and tourism endeavors statewide.

As a journalism graduate from Marquette University, Brian takes pride in sharing his business acumen with his community, particularly acknowledging Peninsula Players Theatre for igniting his passion for the arts during his childhood.

Brian's tenure epitomizes a harmonious blend of professional expertise, community engagement, and personal fulfillment. His unwavering dedication is evident in his efforts to enhance both the arts and tourism within his community and across the state.

Susan Lipp

Madison



Susan is the Chairman of the Board of Full Compass Systems, Ltd., a national leader in professional audio, professional video, A/V, lighting and musical instrument sales. Full Compass is one of the largest woman-owned businesses in the state of Wisconsin, with over 200 employees. In the early 1970s, Susan created the Wisconsin Community Theatre Association and served as Chairman of the Board for four years while also sitting on the Board of American Theatre Association as Governor of Region 3, representing five states. In the 1990s, she created the Board of Directors of the South Central Wisconsin Chapter of the American Diabetes Association and chaired that board for five years while also chairing the National Board of the Society of Non Profit

Organizations. Susan presently sits on 9 boards (7 Arts related) and runs many fundraisers for non-profit organizations every year. She has been recognized by the UW School of Music for her work in the support and development of the UW-Madison Jazz Program, by the Foundation for Madison Schools as a Distinguished Community Partner, and along with her husband, Jonathan, is an Overture Center for the Arts Local Legend. The Lipps have won a host of awards including the 2017 Musical Merchandise Review magazine's Music Industries Lifetime achievement Award, the Madison Area Music Association Lifetime Achievement Award, the U.S. Small Business Administration SBA 100 Award, the Governor's Trailblazer Award, the NAMM (National Association of Music Merchants) Support Music.com Award, the Association of Fundraising Professionals Lifetime Achievement Award, and the NAWBO Entrepreneur of the Year Award.

Tyler Marchant

Stevens Point



Tyler is a freelance Director/Playwright and Professor of Acting/Directing at the University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point. In addition to his freelance work, Tyler previously served as the Associate Artistic Director at the multiple award-winning Off-Broadway theatre Primary Stages in NYC. Tyler directed the World Premiere of Freud's Last Session at Barrington Stage Company before it made its commercial Off-Broadway transfer where it ran for nearly 800 performances and won “Best Play” by the Off-Broadway Theatre Alliance. The production toured to successful sit-downs in Chicago, Los Angeles, Houston and Detroit. Other favorite productions include the World Premiere of the musical Anne of Green Gables at the Lucille Lortel Theatre in NYC; Drowned World at the Old

Vic/New Voices; Constellations at Theatre Lila; ART at Milwaukee Chamber Theatre; and Outside Mullingar and Every Brilliant Thing at Forward Theatre. Tyler directed Reykjavik by Pulitzer Winner Richard Rhodes for the Ministers of the United Nations. The production starred Richard Easton and Jay O. Sanders and included a video address by Mikhail Gorbachev. Tyler is a member of the Society of Stage Directors and Choreographers (SDC).

Dinorah Márquez Abadiano

Milwaukee



Dinorah Márquez Abadiano was born in Mexico City and moved to El Paso, TX at the age of 10, where she began her classical music training. Upon graduating from Northwestern University with a major in American Studies and a minor in International Studies from the University of Florence, Italy, she became Assistant Press Secretary for Chicago Mayor Harold Washington. She continued her musical activities and went on to receive a master's degree in music from the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee and founded the Latino Arts Strings Program (LASP). Launched in 2002 at the United Community Center in Milwaukee, the LASP has become a model for music and heritage education. Over the years, the LASP has received: the Presidential "Coming Up Taller Award," the "National After School Innovator's Award," and has been designated one of the "Best Communities for Music

Education" in the country by the NAMM for the past eight years. Márquez has been recognized as: "Milwaukee Artist of the Year" by the Milwaukee Arts Board, "Music Teacher of the Year" by the Civic Music Association and the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra, "Educator of the Year" by the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, and one of "Milwaukee's 20 Most Creative People" by Milwaukee Magazine. She received Wisconsin's "Martin Luther King Heritage Award," and the "Eddy Award" given by the Wilson Center for the Performing arts to individuals who enhance the level of arts education in the Milwaukee area. In 2023 Milwaukee Magazine granted her the "Arts Advocate Betty Award" for helping to build and expand Milwaukee's arts scene, and the UWM Alumni Association granted her the Distinguished Alumni Achievement Award. Dinorah is an alumna of the National Association of Latino Arts and Culture's Leadership and Advocacy Institutes where she received training in arts advocacy. She feels honored to have been appointed to the Wisconsin Arts Board by Governor Evers and is happy to advocate for the arts ecosystem in our state. Dinorah sees music and heritage education as tools for advancement and social justice. She is humbled that so many have seen fit to recognize the value of this work. Mostly she feels blessed to work with the wonderful students, families, and team of the Latino Arts Strings Program.

William 'Bill' Mitchell

Lancaster



Bill Mitchell is a multi-disciplinary artist whose sculptures, land installations and mixed media artworks have been exhibited in public spaces, galleries, and museums regionally and nationally. He is Gallery Director for Ripple Artspace in Platteville, WI a community run non-profit art center exhibiting artists from across the country. He lived and worked as an artist and landscape designer in Chicago until relocating to Grant County, WI in 2012, where he helped run an organic garlic farm with his wife Angie. With a passion for environmental design his woodworking company Readapted LLC produced sustainable garden furnishing for architects, designers, and builders for over a decade. Bill taught design at Northern Illinois University and landscape design at Northwestern University. He received a BFA in 1989 and MFA in 1993 from Northern Illinois University.

John H. Potter

Hudson



Potter is a freelance stage director. He retired in 2020 after serving as the chief executive officer of The Phipps Center for the Arts in Hudson, Wisconsin, for over 35 years. He was responsible for the artistic and fiscal management of a performing and visual arts organization with over a \$1.3 million annual budget. Potter produced over 280 plays and presented over 680 concerts for the center. He planned and managed 34 Annual Fund campaigns; a campaign for the repair and enhancement of the Wurlitzer theater pipe organ; an ongoing endowment fund campaign, now over \$3.5 million; and capital campaigns for \$1.4 million and \$4.26 million.

He was a peer review panelist numerous times for the Minnesota and Wisconsin Arts Boards. He serves on the executive committee of the Wisconsin Arts Board, to which he was appointed by the governor in 2016. He is the treasurer and past chair of ArtReach St. Croix, of which he has been a board member since 2020. In 2025, he joined the Hudson Area Library Foundation Board of Directors. He also served on the University of Wisconsin-River Falls Chancellor's Advisory Council for 15 years. In addition, he served as chair for the Hudson Area Chamber of Commerce & Tourism Bureau, as well as president for the Rotary Club of Hudson. He received the Marie Blakeman Award for outstanding community service from the Chamber of Commerce in 2020.

Potter previously was a member of both the administrative and artistic staffs of The Playwrights' Center and the Guthrie Theater. He received his M.F.A. in Acting from the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities and his B.A. in Theater and Drama from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Lynn Richie, Vice Chairperson

Land O' Lakes



Founding member of Land O Lakes Arts/LOLA and the first Treasurer, Lynn has a diverse background. Lynn was one of the founding members of the Mercer WI Community Development Group and a member of the Iron County WI Development. She was the branch manager with Northern Highland State Bank until moving to Illinois where she was a small business owner. After moving back north she had a small business as a Personal Chef. Lynn often teaches culinary art classes at LOLA. Lynn was honored as Woman of the Year by the Kate Newcomb Business and Professional Women's

Organization of Minocqua, WI. She is a retired board member and Past Board President of LOLA. Lynn was the chair of the Wisconsin Arts Board's 50th Anniversary Celebration Task Force. She enjoys engaging in community development, the arts, reading, traveling, and, of course, cooking.

Jennifer Schwarzkopf

Fitchburg



Jennifer has been passionate about the visual, musical, and culinary arts since she was a child. She is a trained Chef focused on the culinary arts - creating experiences, introducing new flavors to diners, and sharing love via every creation. Her childhood in the American South coupled with her Chilean heritage together influence her palette and culinary style.

Jennifer has served the greater Madison community in many capacities, including serving as Domestic Abuse Intervention Services' (DAIS) Community Champion, an artist of one of 2018's Bucky on Parade statues (Bucky de los Muertos), and serving on numerous boards including

YWCA of Madison, Rape Crisis Center of Dane County, International Breast Cancer Research Foundation, and Junior League of Madison.

Jennifer lives with her family in Fitchburg. She is honored to proudly serve at the pleasure of the Governor on the Wisconsin Arts Board.

Kristin Tjornehoj

Hudson



With more than three decades of experience in music education and community leadership, Tjornehoj brings a deep commitment to arts access and excellence to the Board. Tjornehoj served 32.5 years as Professor of Music at the University of Wisconsin–River Falls and worked in the Hudson Public Schools prior to that.

Tjornehoj also founded and currently works for St. Croix Sounds Music Society, leading concerts and events across the St. Croix Valley and beyond. As Director of the Three Rivers Concert Band, she forms, prepares, and guides an ensemble that tours Europe as an ambassador of music. Since 2014, she has coordinated historically informed, insight-driven performance trips and collaborations with partner organizations.

Tjornehoj’s service extends beyond performance and education into health, arts infrastructure, and regional philanthropy. She has served on the HealthPartners Board of Directors since 2018 (including four years as Quality of Care Committee chair and current membership on the Finance Committee). A founding member of the Phipps Center for the Arts and ArtReach St. Croix, she contributed nearly two decades on the Phipps music committee. As a Community Impact Committee member for the St. Croix Valley Foundation and chair of the Music Education Committee she helps advance sustainable support for music programs. As an active Wisconsin School Music Association participant, she has held numerous committee and board roles. Tjornehoj brings her broad institutional knowledge and collaborative leadership to the Wisconsin Arts Board.

LaShawndra Vernon

Milwaukee



LaShawndra Vernon is a dynamic force in arts advocacy and nonprofit leadership. As the Research and Project Managing Consultant for Creative States Coalition, she drives state and local action for creative sector growth. She also serves as the Arts & Culture Consultant for the Greater Milwaukee Foundation and brings expertise in fiscal management, philanthropic advising, and lobbying. LaShawndra is a lecturer at the Helen Bader School of Social Welfare, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. LaShawndra, founder of Pryme Solutions LLC, drives policy and social change through innovative programs. A multidisciplinary artist and lecturer, she builds and shares power within communities towards a brighter future.

Matthew Wallock

Madison



Matthew is a passionate ambassador of the arts and committed proponent of Wisconsin's creative economy. He comes to the Wisconsin Arts Board with an insider perspective, having interned for the organization in 2003 while majoring in Arts Management at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. Following his work with the Arts Board he earned a law degree at the University of Wisconsin Law School and currently works for the State of Wisconsin as the Deputy Director of Communicable Diseases. He is a collector of contemporary street art and enjoys spending time with his wife, Holly, two children,

Liam and Aoife, and dogs, Forest and Fern.