

Speaker Biographies



Gigi Antoni, President/CEO

Out of School Time (OST), Coalition Building, Collective Impact, Leadership, Parent/Family Engagement, Research/Evaluation/Quality, Imagination/Creativity/21st Century Skills, Service-learning, Fundraising, Advocacy, Working with At-Risk Teens, Professional Development, Arts Integration, Summer Camp

Giselle “Gigi” Antoni is president and CEO of Big Thought, one of the nation’s leading nonprofits devoted to providing creative learning programs that help kids imagine possibilities, excel academically and contribute to their communities. Gigi leads the organization in developing groundbreaking partnerships, including Thriving Minds, a citywide initiative that joins the City of Dallas, the Dallas Independent School District and more than 100 other organizations, with Big Thought as managing partner. She was also instrumental in forming a partnership with the North Texas Super Bowl XLV Host Committee to implement SLANT 45, one of the largest communitywide service-learning programs for children in NFL history. In July 2011, The White House named Gigi a “Champion of Change” which recognizes community members doing outstanding work in their fields.

Sought out by cities and school districts throughout the U.S., Gigi has lectured nationally about successes in the arts and education fields. She has also served on numerous local, state and national committees, boards and juries. Nationally, she has worked with the President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities Coming Up Taller Awards; the National Endowment for the Arts; The Partnership for Arts, Culture and Education; The Kennedy Center Imagination Celebration; and the National Working Group of the Arts for Learning organization. On the state level, Gigi has worked with The Texas Commission on the Arts: Arts-in-Education Working Group; The Texas Coalition of Quality Arts Education and the Dallas Assembly. In 2010, she was honored with the National Arts Leadership Award from the National Guild for Community Arts Education. In 2005, Gigi was selected for the prestigious Local Hero award, given by Bank of America. She is a Fellow of the British-American Project, which creates sharing and exchange between top young leaders from each country.

Her alma maters are Stephen F. Austin State University, the University of Texas at Arlington and the Drama Studio London at Berkeley where she graduated with distinction.



Margie Johnson Reese, Vice President of Programs

Out of School Time (OST), Coalition Building, Collective Impact, Community Engagement, Leadership, Imagination/Creativity/ 21st Century Skills, Service-learning, Cultural Affairs, Professional Development, Arts Integration, Summer Camp

During her 30-year career as an arts management professional, Margie lead a broad range of large-scale projects in West Africa, Los Angeles and Dallas in addition to consulting across the United States. Currently, Margie serves as vice president of programs for Big Thought, where she oversees the development of high-quality in school and out of school time enrichment programs for students in the Dallas Independent School District. Prior to joining Big Thought, Margie served as a grant maker for the Ford Foundation in their Office for West Africa as the program officer for media, arts and culture; served as general manager for the City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs; and worked as director of the Office of Cultural Affairs for the City of Dallas. Margie is a former president of the International Theatrical Arts Society in Dallas, Texas. She is a long-time member of the board of directors of Americans for the Arts, a fellow of the Salzburg Global Seminar and a recent presenter at the World Summit on Culture in Johannesburg, South Africa. Margie holds a bachelor’s degree in speech and theater from Washington State University and a master of fine arts in theater from Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas.



Jessica Malek, Vice President of Knowledge and Innovation

Research/Evaluation/Quality, Imagination/Creativity/ 21st Century Skills

Jessica leads Big Thought's knowledge development and dissemination arm, which includes research and evaluation, knowledge sharing and the development of new program initiatives. She has worked in the North Texas community for more than 15 years as a nonprofit administrator, arts educator, program developer and artist. Before her tenure at Big Thought, she held a number of key administrative positions at such esteemed arts institutions as the Dallas Theater Center, SMU Meadows School of the Arts and TITAS. Jessica received a bachelor's degree in theater arts from Texas A&M University. In addition to her work at Big Thought, she also serves as a board member and executive producer for Project X, an interdisciplinary performing arts company located in Dallas' design district.



Nancy Webb, Vice President of Organizational Advancement

Fundraising, Advocacy

Nancy has served as vice president of organizational advancement since 2001. She is responsible for an annual contributed income goal of more than \$13 million and for developing the organization's endowment (Big Thought Endowment Fund). She holds a bachelor of fine arts in dance performance from Texas Christian University in Fort Worth, Texas, and a master of science in arts administration from the University of North Texas in Denton, Texas. While pursuing her graduate degree, she danced professionally with and served as company manager for the Dance Theatre of the Southwest. After receiving her master's degree she moved to Dallas and continued to dance professionally and remained active in arts administration, writing grants along with volunteering and assisting with the coordination of several nonprofit's special events. Previous to her position at Big Thought, she was a fundraising consultant and executive director of the Partnership for Arts, Culture and Education. Over the course of her life she has lived in 11 cities, including three years in Frankfurt, Germany. German is her second language.



LeAnn Binford, Director of Creative Learning Workforce

Professional Development

As creative learning workforce director, LeAnn oversees the organization's professional development services and relationships with more than 100 partner organizations. In her previous position as director of education for the Dallas Symphony Orchestra (DSO), LeAnn was a leader in establishing the citywide ArtsPartners collaboration and is credited with developing innovative programs at the DSO which have served as models for the industry, including Young Strings and DSOKids.com. She regularly appears as the pre-concert speaker for the DSO and serves as an advisor and mentor at Booker T. Washington High School for the Performing and Visual Arts. In addition to a term as co-chair of the League of American Orchestras' Education Leadership Committee, she served on the Superintendent's Advisory Committee for Partnerships for the Dallas Independent School District and as president of the board of directors of the Partnership for Arts, Culture and Education. A graduate of the arts management M.B.A./M.A. program at Southern Methodist University, LeAnn also holds bachelor and master of music degrees in piano performance from Texas Tech University where she studied with William Westney.



Jennifer Bransom, Director of Program Accountability

Research/Evaluation/Quality

Jennifer is the director of program accountability at Big Thought, a position she has held since 2001. In this role, she has overseen major research and evaluation projects and forged partnerships locally and nationally to develop educational resources for practitioners. She has co-authored several publications with Dr. Dennie Palmer Wolf about the power of community members to evaluate and improve standards of quality based on commonly valued outcomes: *More Than Measuring* (Big Thought), *We Are Each Other's Business: The Place of Partnership in Smart Education Systems* (chapter in City Schools, Harvard Press), and *360 Degrees of Literacy* (Harvard Family Research Project). Through a partnership with the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, she co-produced *the Afterschool Training Toolkit for the Arts*, a print and online staff development resource. Prior to her time at Big Thought, Jennifer worked in the fields of education and the arts. As a museum educator she held positions at the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, American Architectural Foundation and Dallas Heritage Village. It was her experience building programs for both museums and universities (including American University and Southwestern University) that led to her current interest in working with teachers and administrators to develop resources and evaluations that provide for on-going learning and growth.



Greg MacPherson, Director of Out of School Time

Afterschool, Out of School Time (OST)

Greg oversees the Thriving Minds after-school program for Big Thought, having joined the organization in September 2010 after spending three years with the City of Dallas Office of Cultural Affairs (OCA) where he worked with the Thriving Minds initiative and other community programs, including Free Night of Theater. Prior to the OCA, he was the director of performing arts and marketing for The Classics Theatre & Art for Children in Plano, Texas and also worked in numerous capacities for Theatre Three Inc. in Dallas, Texas. Greg is a founding ensemble member of Second Thought Theatre, based in Addison, Texas, and served two seasons as an executive ensemble member, co-producing the company's shows. Greg currently co-produces the annual Battle of the Bands competition for Richardson's Wildflower! Music and Arts Festival.



Erin Offord, Director of Community Engagement

Parent/Family Engagement, Community Engagement

Erin brings more than 15 years of experience in the field of community service and community organizing. Erin holds a bachelor in liberal arts from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette where she also helped establish the inaugural National Service AmeriCorps program. She is currently the director of community engagement and has been instrumental in developing relevant family programs for parents and children, parent education workshops and citywide community networks focused on shared vision and community collaborations. Her area of work and knowledge has been shared nationally, including the Access, Equity and Quality in Arts Learning conference hosted by The Wallace Foundation, Arts Education Partnership, and the Heinz and Hewlett foundations, as well as the 71st annual Conference for Community Arts Education. Erin serves on many community event committees throughout the city and received a "Turner 12 Summer of Choice" honor for mentoring local high school students.



Lisa Lee Schmidt, Instructional Specialist

Working with At-Risk Teens, 40 Developmental Assets and Spark!

Since 1993, Lisa has designed and taught theater, dance, storytelling, digital storytelling and creative writing workshops for Big Thought. Lisa graduated with honors from Southern Methodist University with a bachelor of fine arts in theater. Lisa received the "National Young Audiences Staff Member of the Year" award. Lisa was a 1999 "Herb Albert Award" nominee for her work on Creative Solutions, a theater job-skills and visual art training program for youth on probation. Creative Solutions received the President's Committee on Arts and Humanities "Coming Up Taller" award in 1994. Lisa now teaches a series of courses at SMU introducing art students to the profession of teaching artistry. She works with the creative learning workforce team at Big Thought, recruiting and training novice teaching artists, as well as continuing her work in program design. Lisa is also a professional actress and director, receiving numerous Dallas Critics Forum awards for her work.