Wednesday, May 22
8:30am-9:30am
Opening Keynote

Ben Feller

From the Briefing Room to the Living Room: How to Make your Message Matter
The ability to inspire people to care about your story begins with a simple premise: It’s not what you say that matters. It’s what they hear. It’s not easy to pull off – but imagine how empowering it could be to understand what it really takes to move your audience into action. Ben Feller has made a career of connecting with audiences from the briefing room to the board room to the living room. He is the former Chief White House Correspondent for The Associated Press, having spent more than six years challenging Presidents Barack Obama and George W. Bush and chasing them around the world on Air Force One. He is now a partner at maslansky + partners, a communications firm where he specializes in creating language to ensure that audiences will listen, care, and act. Come for practical tips to help any government communicator succeed … and for some stories from the West Wing you won’t want to miss.

Ben Feller is a partner at maslansky + partners, the firm that finds exactly the right words to ensure audiences will listen, care and act. An award-winning writer during his distinguished career in journalism, Ben now specializes in moving organizations from how they are known to how they want to be known. As a strategic adviser, Ben has a distinctive ability to help companies by asking the right questions and distilling their stories with clarity. His business role follows a 20-year reporting career in which he was honored as a "master of deadline reporting" and served as the Chief White House Correspondent for The Associated Press. During the presidencies of Barack Obama and George W. Bush, Ben helped lead White House coverage for the largest news organization in the world. Ben is also a writing coach, event moderator, public speaker and the author of Big Problems, Little Problems, a children's book on conquering life's frustrations that reviewers have described as "simply extraordinary."
12:45pm-1:30pm
Lunch Keynotes- Donna Brazille and Doug Heye

Donna Brazille, Political Strategist and Author

Donna Brazille is a veteran political strategist, New York Times bestselling author, Senior Advisor at Purple Strategies, Chair of the J. William Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board, and sought-after Emmy- and Peabody-award-winning media contributor to such outlets as ABC News, USA Today, The Hill and theGrio.

She became the first African American woman to serve as the manager of a major party presidential campaign, running the campaign of former Vice President Al Gore. She previously served as interim Chair of the Democratic National Committee and of the DNC’s Voting Rights Institute. She is a current member of the DNC Rules and Bylaws Committee.


She serves as an adjunct professor in the Women and Gender Studies Department at Georgetown University and served as the King Endowed Chair in Public Policy at Howard University and as a fellow at the Institute of Politics at Harvard Kennedy School. She has lectured at nearly 250 colleges and universities on diversity, equity and inclusion; women in leadership; and restoring civility in American politics.

She is the proud recipient of more than ten honorary doctorate degrees from major colleges and universities, including her alma mater Louisiana State University. In October 2017, Ms. Brazile was the recipient of the W.E.B Du Bois Medal, Harvard’s highest honor in African American studies. Ms. Brazile was the recipient of a Daytime Emmy Award for Outstanding Daytime Program, Good Morning America (2016-2017) in connection with her work with ABC and she was a member of the Peabody Award-winning “Best Political Team on Television” on CNN during the 2008 election cycle.

She moonlights as an actress and is especially honored to have made three cameo appearances on CBS’s The Good Wife, and two cameo appearances on Netflix’s series House of Cards. She also
appeared as herself on BET’s Being Mary Jane. Most recently she played herself in the Zack Snyder film Army of the Dead. Ask her and she’ll tell you that acting, after all, is the key to success in politics.

Doug Heye, Founder, Douglas Media; TV Political Commentator; Former RNC and Congressional leadership communications director

Political veteran Douglas Heye has served in leading communications positions in the House of Representatives and United States Senate, the Republican National Committee and the George W. Bush Administration.

Regularly sought out by journalists and news anchors, Heye provides frequent analyses on domestic and international events. He was a CNN Political Commentator during the Trump years and is a Washington Post contributing writer, in addition to periodically writing on food and pop culture for a variety of publication. He is perhaps the only political commentator who regularly appears on every major cable news network.

As communications director for the Republican National Committee, Heye’s Democratic counterpart called Heye a “pro’s pro” in POLITICO for his handling of what CNN labeled “one of the most demanding jobs in Washington.” Of his ability to engage an audience during television interviews, POLITICO remarked, “when the red camera light turns on, Heye doesn't disappoint.”

As Deputy Chief of Staff for the Majority Leader of the House of Representatives, Heye garnered praise for his team-building, crisis communications and strategic planning abilities. Roll Call named Heye one of the “Fabulous 50,” noting his ability to "set the tone and frame the debate” as someone “in the room when decisions are made” in the Capitol. Despite the often combative nature of Capitol Hill, Roll Call praised Heye for, “Thinking things through and behaving graciously are the highly prized extras colleagues say he brought to the negotiating table.”

Heye often speaks to businesses, journalists and forums in the United States and internationally, including the United Kingdom, France, Poland and China, stressing the importance of bi-partisan efforts, when possible, and taking down the temperature of our escalating political rhetoric, while trying to help provide groups and clients with a peek both behind the political curtain and around the corner. He has participated in pro-democracy efforts in Jordan and Nigeria.

Heye gained notoriety as Sarah Silverman’s “blind date” for her Hulu comedy show, “I Love You, America.”

Committed to education and attracting young people to politics, Heye was a Fall 2015 Resident Fellow at the Harvard Kennedy School’s Institute of Politics, focusing on crisis communications. He serves on the Harvard Kennedy School/John F. Kennedy Library & Museum New Frontier Awards
Committee, helping identify a new generation of leaders with their commitment to public service. Heye was recently appointed to the Board of Visitors of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where he is a graduate.

Thursday, May 23

8:30am-9:45am
Morning Keynote

Robert L. Sumwalt
The Crisis: Now What? Managing through Effective Crisis Communications

An organization can face a crisis when you least expect it. A top official makes an off-the-cuff remark that blows up in the media. An IG report shows financial impropriety. The head of the agency is accused of sexual harassment. What happened to those classified documents? Sound familiar? Could this be your government agency? The truth is, most organizations may think they are ready, but when the crisis hits, they are woefully unprepared. The way you handle a crisis may make you or break you. Your organization may survive a crisis, but your career may not. This presentation offers real world examples of effective crisis intervention strategies. You can’t afford to miss this one.

Learning Objectives:
- Cite 6 crisis intervention strategies
- Recall examples from the presentation where something was done well
- Recall examples from the presentation where something was done poorly, and develop a strategy to not make similar mistakes

Robert L. Sumwalt is the transportation safety analyst for CBS News. Previously, he served on the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) from 2006 – 2021. Appointed by three US presidents and confirmed by the Senate on four occasions, Sumwalt served as NTSB chairman, vice chairman, and board member. In that role, he was on- scene spokesperson for 35 major transportation accidents, where he conducted over 100 press briefings, and did more than 200 one-on-one media interviews. He conducted live interviews on every major U.S. television network including The Today Show, NBC Nightly News, CBS Evening News, The Situation Room with Wolf Blitzer, and CNN New Day. He also conducted in-studio appearances on NBC’s Meet the Press, CBS’s Face the Nation, CNN’s State of the Union, Fox News Sunday, and ABC’s This Week with George Stephanopoulos.
12:00pm-1:30pm
Closing Keynote Session

Angela Tennison

AI in Government Comms: Are you a Pioneer or a Passenger?
Embark on a transformative journey into the heart of government communication as we unveil the remarkable synergy of visionary leadership and Artificial Intelligence (AI). In our session, "AI in Government Comms: Are you a Pioneer or a Passenger?", I'll share my personal odyssey from supporting a visionary leader to becoming a leader who recognizes the incredible potential of AI in shaping our future. Step into a world where we blend the power of human vision with the cutting-edge capabilities of AI. Through engaging stories and practical examples, you'll witness how embracing AI can propel you from a bystander to a visionary pioneer in government communication.

Learning Objectives:
• Discover Your Visionary Potential: Unearth the leader within you by reflecting on your journey, recognizing your unique strengths, and understanding how AI can amplify your impact on government communication.
• Charting the Course: Explore three pivotal ways AI can elevate government communication from data-driven insights to citizen engagement strategies. Gain insight into the potential consequences of delaying AI adoption.
• Empowering Your Leadership: Equip yourself with the knowledge and confidence to not only lead but also inspire change in government communication through AI. Your journey, from supporter to visionary, is a testament to the extraordinary possibilities that await.

Angela Tennison honed her leadership skills at the highest level in The White House. She was the first African-American woman to serve as White House Usher. In her role in the White House Executive Residence, she managed staff, logistics, and operations for the 44th President and First Family. Angela concluded her political appointment as the first Leadership Development Director at the US Department of Education. With two decades of diverse experiences in the public and private sectors, armed with multiple coaching certifications including the ICF PCC, Angela brings a unique perspective to developing leaders and helping them lead with a racial equity lens. Her style of leadership coaching is described as strategic and comprehensive, yet fun and compassionate. Angela is the founder of The Global Legacy Institute where she coaches high-level leaders and those on their way to lead and leave a life of impact they can be proud of.