

MAY 7-8, 2025

TLC *2025*

**THOUGHT
LEADERSHIP
CONFERENCE**

Capacity. Culture. Connection.

WELCOME

Partners and Community Members:

Partners and Community Members,

Now in its eighth year, the Intercultural Relations Institute is proud to collaborate with innovative thought leaders from across the country and dedicated regional partners to host the 2025 Thought Leadership Conference. We are also grateful for the support of our generous community sponsors, whose names can be found here:

<https://thoughtleadershipconference.com/sponsors/>

This two-day conference is focused on building capacity, shaping culture, and strengthening connections among leaders in business, education, and nonprofit sectors. Our shared goal is to cultivate a connected culture—one that empowers individuals and organizations to grow, collaborate, and lead with purpose.

Attendees will engage with pressing topics and real-world solutions alongside local, national, and international thought leaders in areas such as intercultural leadership, organizational development, and collaborative innovation. This experience is designed to inspire, equip, and connect leaders committed to long-term impact.

This program booklet contains a full schedule of events, breakout session descriptions, and speaker bios. Thank you for being part of this journey toward building a more connected and impactful community.

With appreciation,

Tessa R. Sutton, Ph.D.

President – Intercultural Relations Institute





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CONFERENCE GOALS

Business • Community • Education

Why host the Thought Leadership Conference?

Social Innovation

Driving social innovation through intercultural education, leadership development, and community engagement.

Connected Culture

Catalyzing cooperation among business, education, and community leaders to build a connected culture where all can belong, contribute, and thrive.

For the Greater Good

Leading, engaging, and working together with others in the community in service of the greater good.

Conference Goals

The most valuable future workforce leadership skills will not be technical alone—they will be unique to humans.

- **Inspire** joint decision-making to foster vibrant relationships among business, community, and education sectors.
- **Provide** applied tools, methods, trends, and systems from informed Thought Leaders.
- **Raise awareness** about collaboration and the power of innovation in the school, community, and business sectors.
- **Expand** knowledge and develop skills to create inclusion in organizations, spark innovation, and act strategically in the community.

Growth Goals for Attendees

Capacity. Culture. Connection.

- **Build** leadership skills for today's evolving workforce.
- **Strengthen** self-awareness and discover strategies for leading with purpose and impact.
- **Understand** how organizational culture shapes team dynamics, morale, and results.
- **Explore** how collaboration and connection influence positive workplace and community climates.
- **Learn** about demographic shifts—both global and local—and why intercultural leadership matters more than ever.
- **Gain** insights into innovation across business, education, and nonprofit sectors.
- **Recognize** how schools, businesses, and communities are interconnected—and how we grow stronger together.
- **Expand** cultural understanding and the ability to lead effectively across differences.



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YOUTH SCHOLARSHIP

GOLF OUTING

SEPTEMBER 22, 2025

ELBEL GOLF COURSE



HEADLINE SPEAKER | FEATURED SPEAKERS

Keynote Speaker | Continuing the Conversation
Thursday, May 8 at 6:00 p.m.
Morris Performing Arts Center

Lex Gillette **USA Paralympian, Athlete + Motivational Speaker**

Lex Gillette is a world-renowned Paralympic track and field athlete for Team USA. Specializing in the long jump, he holds five Paralympic medals, four world championships, and the current world record. Lex is the only totally blind athlete to surpass 22 feet in the event. Losing his sight as a child, he refused to be defined by darkness, finding strength through his mother's support. His story has been featured by ESPN, Sports Illustrated, and USA Today Sports, and he was inducted into the ADN Hall of Fame in 2015.

A sought-after keynote speaker, Lex inspires audiences to see beyond obstacles and embrace vision over sight. His mantra—"There is no need for sight when you have a vision."^{®1}—drives his journey of resilience and success. Lex's presentations are powerful, emotional, and transformative, challenging audiences to unlock their potential. **His mission is clear: to Teach... People... To... See.**



FEATURED SPEAKER | Wednesday, 8:45 a.m.

Marc Hardy, Ph.D. **Sharing Fire, Owner**

Marc Hardy, Ph.D. has taught at Indiana University, Indianapolis, the University of Notre Dame and has taught nonprofit leadership and Butler University. Hardy is a graduate of the Ph.D. program in Philanthropic Studies at the Lilly Family School of Philanthropy at Indiana University. He has led several nonprofit organizations and was the Executive Director of a private operating foundation. Marc has served as a board member of several nonprofit organizations, including a term as President of the National Speakers Association of Indiana.

An actor, director and playwright, he is the Past President of the Indiana Theatre Association. He is co-author of two books, "Only the Best on Customer Service," and "Only the Best on Leadership" as well as several articles on management and leadership. Voted one of the top three speakers in the country during the "World Championship of Public Speaking," he has spoken to more than four hundred groups in the U.S., Canada, Costa Rica, Puerto Rico, Mexico, Kenya, Ghana, Ukraine, and the Caribbean.



FEATURED SPEAKER | Thursday, 8:30 a.m.

Tammi Davis **Obama Foundation, Director of Business Diversity and Workforce Development**

Tammi Davis is a third-generation legacy of the Civil Rights Movement. She was born into the work of justice, equity, diversity and inclusion and has continued the work in her own right for over 20 years. With the experience of working in the public, private and non-profit industry sectors, Tammi brings a panoramic perspective to the depth and breadth of her expertise in developing policies, programs and initiatives that engage under-represented and under-served communities in contracting and employment opportunities.

Tammi is the Director of Business Diversity and Workforce Development for the Obama Foundation in Chicago and leads the construction-related diversity efforts in building the Obama Presidential Center. She supports other business teams to ensure that the mission of the Foundation is met and manages the Project's strategic DEI partners to ensure that the diversity goals are met. She has created best-in-class diversity and inclusion programs that have led to the increased engagement of local, minority and women residents and businesses in both the project's and organization's supply chain.

Tammi holds a Master's Degree in Public Affairs from Indiana University and a Bachelor's degree in English from Jackson State University. She is an Ordained Deacon at Christ Baptist Church and serves as the Central Region Social Action Committee Chair for Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc.



Advocating, promoting and funding initiatives to enrich learning experiences for students and staff of the South Bend Community School Corporation



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CONFERENCE AGENDA: DAY 1

Wednesday, May 7, 2025

8:30am	Welcome Tessa R. Sutton, Ph.D.	Discovery Ballroom South
8:45am	Featured Presenter: Sharing Fire: A Philanthropic Approach to Leadership that Ignites the Possibilities in Others Marc Hardy, Ph.D.	Discovery Ballroom South
9:15am	Building Psychological Safety: Leadership Strategies for a Thriving Organization Larry Huff, Ed.D., Sarita Stevens, Ph.D.	Discovery Ballroom South
10:00am	Discovering the Connection Between The Subconscious Brain And Your Mind Darlene von Behren, Ed.D.	Discovery Ballroom South
10:45am	Leading with Balance: The Intersection of Leadership and Self-Care Kimberly Green Reeves, MPA	
11:30pm-1:00pm	Lunch Break: Connect-Discover-Dine In the City	
1:30pm	Building Bridges: Community, Courage, Collaboration, and Trust Amish Shah	Discovery Ballroom South
2:15pm	The Evolution of Financial Literacy: Community Impact Panel Derrick Wesley, Melannie Denise Cunningham, Gudelia Sours	Discovery Ballroom South
3:00pm	Closing Summary	
3:30pm	Glocal Highlight Story: Kenyan Youth Leadership Collaboration Tessa R. Sutton, Ph.D. (*), Shaban Varajab	Discovery Ballroom North
4:00pm	The Power of Telling Stories: Building a Connected Culture Experience Tessa R. Sutton, Ph.D., Shaban Varajab	Discovery Ballroom North
6:00pm	Meet & Greet Leadership Showcase	Doubletree Hotel - Atrium

CONFERENCE AGENDA: DAY 2

Thursday, May 8, 2025

8:00 a.m.	Welcome Tessa R. Sutton, Ph.D.	Century Center - Discovery Ballroom South
8:30 a.m.	Featured Speaker: Innovation as Problem Solver Tammi Davis	Discovery Ballroom South
9:15 a.m.	MORNING BREAKOUT SESSIONS	<i>Locations Vary - Check schedule on pg 12</i>
11:45 a.m.	LUNCH BREAK (on your own)	
12:00 p.m.	Jam Session at Music Village in the Community	The Music Village
1:15 p.m.	AFTERNOON BREAKOUT SESSIONS	<i>Locations Vary - Check schedule on pg 12</i>
4:00pm	Worldview Religion and Peace Perspectives Panel Mana Derakhshani, Ph.D., Kendra Key	Century Center - Discovery Ballroom South
5:00pm	Meet and Greet with Lex Gillette	Century Center
6:00pm	FREE COMMUNITY EVENT: Thought Leader Awards Continuing the Conversation: No Need For Sight When You Have a Vision Book Signing with Lex Gillette	Century Center - Bendix Theatre

Growing Tomorrow's Leaders



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Proud to Support the Thought Leadership Conference

Breakout Sessions: Thursday, May 8, 2025

9:15 – 11:45 a.m.

Collective Generosity: Participatory Giving Circle

Mandy Sharp-Eizinger

Doubletree Hotel - Notre Dame Room

Bridging Gaps: Education, Workforce, and Community Partnerships for Economic Growth

Tiffany (Reddick) McDaniel

St. Joseph Public Library - Classroom B

Some Things Up! Leadership Begins with You

Chris Cartwright, Ed.D.

Doubletree Hotel - Bethel Room

Build the Board to Launch Your Mission

Kevin Deary

St. Joseph Public Library - Classroom D

Emotional intelligence for Resilience in Challenging Times

Anita Rowe, Ph.D.

Doubletree Hotel - Salon A

Exploring the Subconscious Brain's Influence on Your Mind: Behaviors, Actions, Beliefs and Choices

Darlene von Behren, Ed.D.

Doubletree Hotel - Indiana Room

Leadership Stories: Cultivating Civility and Connection in the Workplace

Thresette Briggs, DDI, MBA

Doubletree Hotel - Saint Mary's Room

1:15 – 3:45 p.m.

Championing Youth Through the Arts

Drake Shrader

St. Joseph Public Library - Classroom D

Leadership Stories: Cultivating Civility and Connection in the Workplace

Thresette Briggs, DDI, MBA

Doubletree Hotel - Saint Mary's Room

Some Things Up! Leadership Begins with You

Chris Cartwright, Ed.D.

Doubletree Hotel - Bethel Room

Culture as a Catalyst: Building Inclusive Organizations & Communities

Melannie Denise Cunningham

Doubletree Hotel - Indiana Room

Emotional Labor: Fostering Connection Without Burnout in Polarized Times

Annette Benson, Kris Acheson-Clair, Ph.D.

St. Joseph Public Library - Classroom B

Inclusion as a Culture Change Process: A Strategic Approach

Tessa R. Sutton, Ph.D., Anita Rowe, Ph.D.

Doubletree Hotel - Salon A

Sharing Fire: A Philanthropic Approach to Leadership that Ignites the Possibilities in Others

Marc Hardy, Ph.D.

Doubletree Hotel - Notre Dame Room

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Thank You!

Thank you to the following Thought Leadership Conference partners and sponsors!





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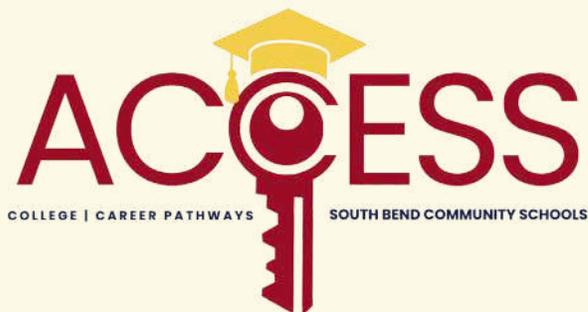
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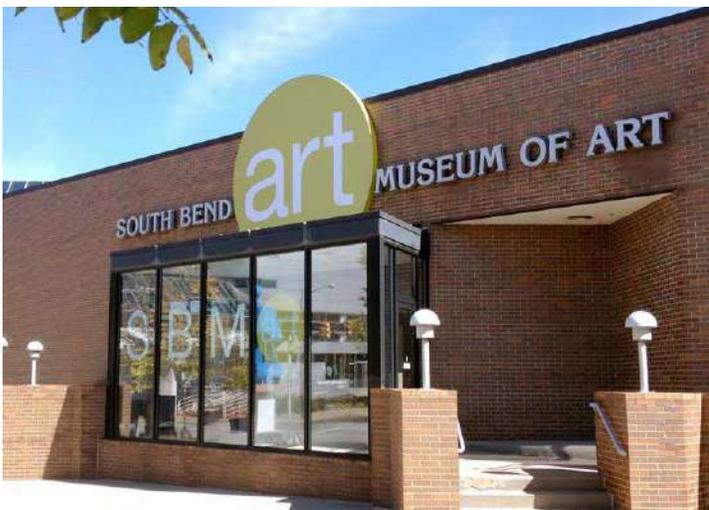
SOUTH BEND, INDIANA

While in South Bend -

Howard Park is a beautiful area with a riverwalk to enjoy views. We have a museum “campus” on the western edge of downtown that includes the History Museum and the Studebaker Museum. South Bend also boasts a handful of galleries and retail shops, as well as music venues such as Merriman’s Jazz Playhouse.

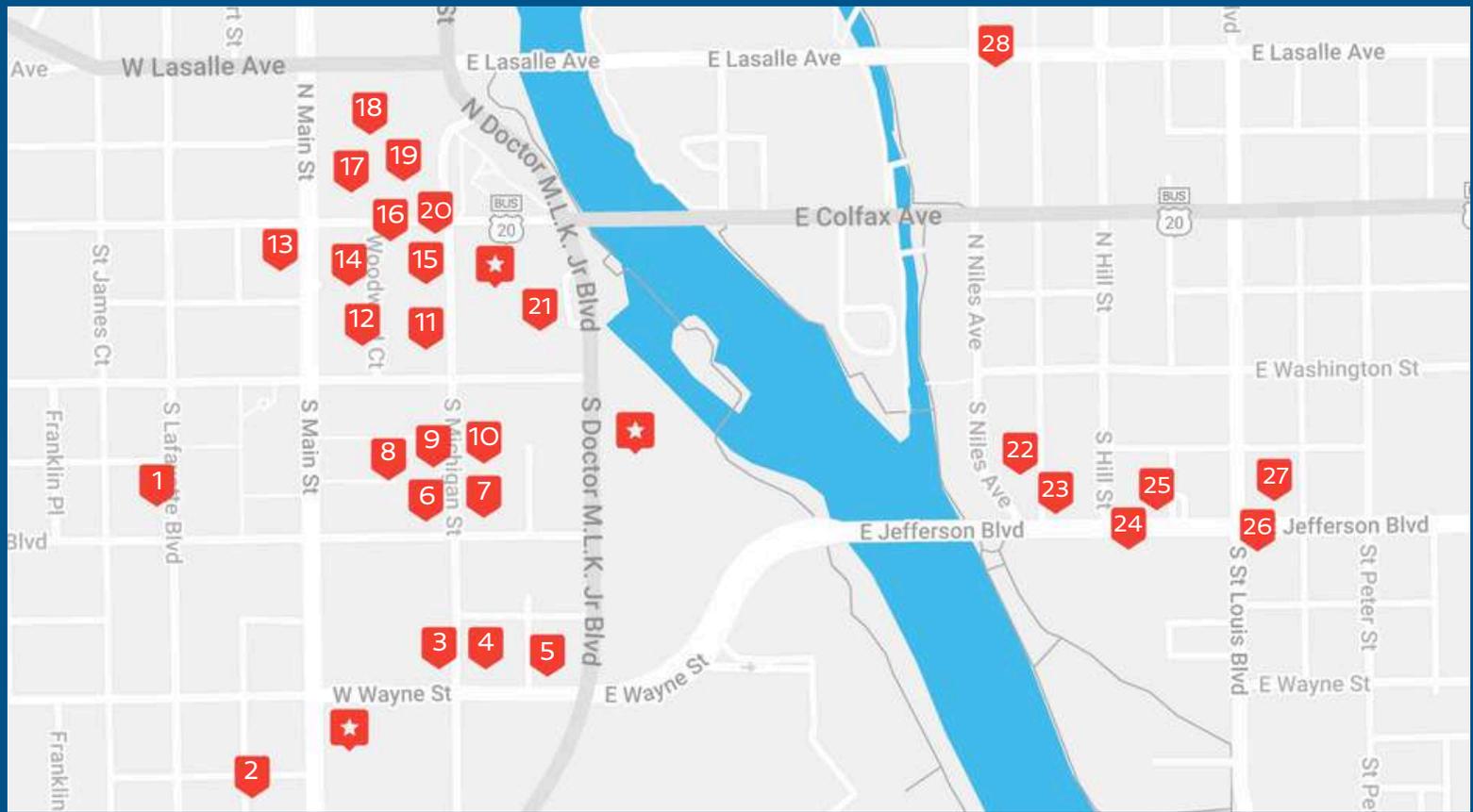
- **Howard Park** | visithowardpark.com
- **The History Museum** | www.historymuseumsb.org
- **South Bend Museum of Art** | southbendart.org
- **Studebaker Museum** | www.studebakermuseum.org
- **Merriman’s Jazz Playhouse** | www.merrimansplayhouse.org

VIEW MORE
PLACES TO VISIT
IN SOUTH BEND



Welcome to South Bend!

DOWNTOWN RESTAURANT MAP



- | | | | |
|---|--|---|---|
| 1 L Street Kitchen
131 S Lafayette Blvd.
Breakfast/Lunch/Dinner | 9 Linden Grill
119 S Michigan St
Lunch/Dinner | 17 Lasalle Grill
115 W Colfax Ave
Dinner | 24 Howard Park
Public House
602 E Jefferson Blvd.
Lunch/Dinner |
| 2 Brew Werks
321 S Main St
Lunch/Dinner | 10 Chocolate Cafe
122 S Michigan St
Breakfast/Lunch | 18 LKT
116 1/2 W. Colfax Ave.
Dinner | 25 The General
609 E Jefferson Blvd
Breakfast/Lunch |
| 3 Dainty Maid
231 S Michigan St
Breakfast/Lunch | 11 Cafe Navarre
101 N Michigan St
Dinner | 19 Fat Bird
103 W Colfax Ave
Lunch/Dinner | 26 The Cellar
702 E Jefferson Blvd
Lunch/Dinner |
| 4 CJ's Pub
236 S Michigan St
Lunch/Dinner | 12 El Rancho Viejo
123 W Washington St
Lunch/Dinner | 20 Cool Runnings
129 N Michigan St
Lunch/Dinner | 27 Barnaby's Pizza
713 E Jefferson Blvd
Lunch/Dinner |
| 5 Early Bird Eatery
117 E Wayne St
Breakfast/Lunch | 13 Fiddler's Hearth
127 N Main St
Lunch/Dinner | 21 Baker's Bar & Grill
123 N St Joseph St.
Breakfast/Lunch/Dinner | 28 The Lauber
504 E Lasalle Ave.
Lunch/Dinner |
| 6 Bruno's Pizza
131 S Michigan St
Lunch/Dinner | 14 Woochi
119 N Michigan St
Lunch/Dinner | 22 The View Tavern
515 E Jefferson Blvd
Lunch/Dinner | |
| 7 Chicory Cafe
105 E Jefferson Blvd
Breakfast/Lunch/Dinner | 15 Ciao's Catering
123 N Main St
Dinner | 23 Howard Pork
521 E Jefferson Blvd.
Lunch/Dinner | |
| 8 PEGGS
127 S Michigan St
Breakfast/Lunch | 16 Cinco 5 International
112 W Colfax Ave
Lunch/Dinner | | |



94.5%
Graduation
Rate

2023-24 School Year Results

684

Students
Received
Diplomas

10,189
College Credits
Earned

186
Career &
Technical
Certifications

\$1.9m
Annual savings to
ECS families in
College Credits
Earned



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2025 THOUGHT LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

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