

2026 WEPAN Award Winners

Dr. Keon Vereen, G3I Enterprises

Advocates and Allies Award

Dr. Sonia Garcia, University of Georgia

Inclusive Culture and Equity Award

Center for Excellence in Faculty Advancement

University of California - Merced

Betty Vetter Award for Research

Sunny Myers, AUNTIE Tech Collective

Industry Trailblazers Award

Dr. Tiffany Smith, AISES

Betty Vetter Award for Research

GFSD, AISES, AAC&U, and Hexalign

Strategic Partner Award

Dr. Tremayne Waller, Virginia Tech

Bevlee A. Watford Inclusive Excellence Award

ASCE San Jose Younger

Member Forum Girl Day

WEPAN and DiscoverE

Girl Day Award

Dr. Amy Freeman, Penn State University

Distinguished Service Award

Bethany Farmer

Ashley Garcia

Sharika Kellogg

Dr. Ashley Huderson, ASME

Educator's Award

Dr. Heather Metcalf

Dr. Stephani Page

Virginia Rhodes

Noelia Sanchez

President's Award

Dr. Dominique Pittenger, Univ of Oklahoma

Educator's Award

Dr. Sheila Ross, MSOE

Founders Award

Dr. Ershela Sims

Outstanding Leadership Award



2026 WEPAN Awards



Presented at the ASEE Annual
Conference and Exposition
June 22, 2026

ABOUT THE AWARDS

WEPAN Awards honor key individuals, programs, and organizations for accomplishments that underscore WEPAN's mission to advance cultures of inclusion and diversity in engineering education and professions. WEPAN Award honorees demonstrate extraordinary service, significant achievement, model programs and practices, and exemplary work environments.

ABOUT WEPAN

WEPAN was founded as a non-profit educational organization in 1990. It is the nation's first network dedicated to advancing cultures of inclusion and diversity in engineering higher education and workplaces. WEPAN connects people, research, and practice, offering powerful initiatives, projects, and professional development that equips advocates with the tools needed to create sustainable, systems-level changes that allow ALL in engineering to thrive.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

WEPAN would like to thank the 2026 WEPAN Awards committee for their work in organizing this event. WEPAN would also like to thank all of the award nominators for recognizing the work that the honorees have done to foster environments where talent can excel and innovation can flourish.



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ADVOCATES AND ALLIES AWARD

Dr. Keon Vereen

Founder and Principal Consultant, G3I Enterprises



Dr. Keon Vereen is an accomplished aerospace engineer, STEM education leader, and the Founder and Principal Consultant of G3I Enterprises, where he advances science and engineering through equity-driven, sustainable solutions. He earned his Ph.D. in Aeronautics & Astronautics from the University of Washington as an NSF Graduate Research Fellow. His doctoral research focused on high-power plasma thrusters for active space debris removal and deep-space propulsion, contributing pioneering advancements in space sustainability and electric propulsion systems. Dr. Vereen's leadership and impact have been recognized through many honors, including selection as a McNair Scholar, George Dragseth Endowed Fellow, and the inaugural Husky 100 list, celebrating University of Washington students making transformative contributions in research, teaching, and community engagement.

BETTY VETTER AWARD FOR RESEARCH

Center for Excellence in Faculty Advancement

University of California - Merced



The Center for Excellence in Faculty Advancement (CEFA) is a 12-research university consortium dedicated to advancing fair, valid and equitable promotion and tenure (P&T) policies. CEFA research has shown that faculty are often systematically disadvantaged in P&T based on their demographic background or research focus. CEFA research points to pathways and structural interventions that can improve consistency and policy alignment in P&T decisions.



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BETTY VETTER AWARD FOR RESEARCH

Dr. Tiffany Smith

Director of Research and Career Support, AISES



Dr. Tiffany Smith served as Director of Research and Career Support for AISES, where she advanced culturally grounded research, mentorship, and pathways for Indigenous students and professionals in STEM. Since joining AISES in 2021, she played a pivotal role in developing initiatives including the Rematriation Program, AUNTIE Tech Collective, and multiple national research collaborations. A citizen of the Cherokee and Mvskoke Nations, Dr. Smith earned BA, MEd, and PhD degrees from the University of Oklahoma, with her award-winning dissertation recognized by NASPA as Dissertation of the Year. A nationally respected scholar and leader, she presented widely, chaired NASPA's Indigenous Peoples Knowledge Community, and was named a NASPA Foundation Pillar of the Profession. Her legacy continues through the students, scholars, and communities she uplifted.

BEVLEE A. WATFORD INCLUSIVE EXCELLENCE AWARD

Dr. Tremayne Waller

Director of Graduate Student Programs, Center for Engineering Excellence & Discovery, Virginia Tech



Dr. Tremayne "Trey" Waller serves as Director of Graduate Student Programs in Virginia Tech's College of Engineering, where he works to support students in navigating graduate education. Through the A Step to the Doctorate Institute, CEED Graduate Ambassadors, the Synergy Conference, and the Exemplary Pathways Partnership, he helps expand access to graduate opportunities. He has helped secure nearly \$2.5M to grow mentoring initiatives and advance institutional change.

DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD

Dr. Amy Freeman

Director of Millennium Scholars Program and Associate Research Professor, Penn State University



Dr. Amy Freeman is the director of the Penn State Millennium Scholars Program, and associate research professor of engineering. Prior appointments include associate provost at Tufts University and assistant dean in the College of Engineering at Penn State, where she served for 17 years, managing over 30 different initiatives designed to retain and empower students in engineering. She is a past president of WEPAN and NAMEPA, a co-founder of CoNECD, and a recipient of the Presidential Award for Excellence in Science, Mathematics and Engineering Mentoring (PAESMEM).

EDUCATOR'S AWARD

Dr. Ashley Huderson

Senior Director of Programs, American Society of Mechanical Engineers



Dr. Ashley Huderson is an experienced leader and advocate with over 15 years in STEM outreach, curriculum design, and academic training. She has led programs aimed at fostering an inclusive climate for STEM students, working with government agencies, non-profits, and academic institutions. As the head of Programs at ASME, she leads the team that oversees ASME's global initiatives that support aspiring engineers. Previously, she served as a STEM and CS Equity Policy Advisor at the U.S. Department of Education, where she shaped national strategies to enhance STEM education.



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EDUCATOR'S AWARD

Dr. Dominique Pittenger

Associate Professor and Director of the Women in Engineering Program, University of Oklahoma



Dr. Dominique M. Pittenger is a teaching-focused Associate Professor in the Gallogly College of Engineering at The University of Oklahoma (OU). She earned her Ph.D. in General Engineering from OU in 2012, with an interdisciplinary emphasis on civil engineering, business, and construction. She has held industry and academic roles in transportation engineering, consulting, research, and education. She advances the participation of girls and women in STEM through K20 initiatives, serving as director of the OU Women in Engineering Program. She co-directs OU Career Development for Engineers and Scientists, teaches undergraduate and graduate courses, and supports faculty through training and proposal collaboration. Outside the classroom, she serves as an OU Faculty Fellow, leads the OU Engineering Living Learning Community, and advises the OU student chapters of the Society of Women Engineers and Girls Who Code.

FOUNDERS AWARD

Dr. Sheila Ross

Department Chairperson, Professor, and Associate Vice President of Academic Retention, MSOE



Dr. Sheila Ross is Chairperson of the Electrical, Computer, and Biomedical Engineering Department and Associate Vice President of Academic Retention at the Milwaukee School of Engineering. Dr. Ross has served as President of WEPAN and has been serving on the board of directors since 2020. She also served as the Conference Chairperson of the 2017 WEPAN Change Leader Forum. Her current area of research is the application of Universal Design for Learning in engineering curricula.

INCLUSIVE CULTURE AND EQUITY AWARD

Dr. Sonia Garcia

Assistant Dean for Advancement and Community Development, University of Georgia



Dr. Sonia Garcia serves as Faculty and Assistant Dean for Advancement and Community Development in the University of Georgia College of Engineering. Since 2022, she has led transformative efforts to expand access and student success, raising over \$1M in external funding, including an \$850K NACME Block Grant and corporate support for the Engineering Academic Boot Camp. She collaborates with faculty and staff to design high-impact, practitioner-engaged programs that advance academic excellence and workforce readiness.

INDUSTRY TRAILBLAZER AWARD

Sunny Meyers

Founder and Strategy, Program, and Engagement Advisor, AUNTIE Tech Collective



Sunny Myers is a technologist and proud member of the Lumbee and Sappony tribes of North Carolina. She serves as Senior Employee Experience & Belonging Partner at Fastly, working at the intersection of culture, strategy, and employee engagement. With experience in engineering, program management, and ops, she drives initiatives that strengthen workplaces and business impact. Sunny founded the AUNTIE Tech Collective and serves on several STEM nonprofit boards expanding access to tech careers.

STRATEGIC PARTNER AWARD

GFSD, AISES, AAC&U, and Hexalign



GFSD, AISES, AAC&U, and Hexalign have partnered with WEPAN to form the Empowered STEM Entrepreneurship Collective and deliver the Synergize Innovator, Gatebreaker, and Summit programs. This collaboration expanded WEPAN's reach, pooled critical resources, and secured both Stage One and Stage Two prizes from the SBA's 2024 Growth Accelerator Fund Competition. Funding from Qualcomm, the Henry Luce Foundation, and NSF enabled integration of models from the WEPAN Accelerator, AAC&U's Convergence Program for BIPOC women in STEM, AISES' Rematriation leadership development program for Indigenous Women in STEM, and GFSD's fellowship and entrepreneurship initiatives into a concerted and collaborative effort for change. The partnership has supported hundreds of undercapitalized STEM innovators, and allowed WEPAN to have a profound impact on the lives, careers, and sense of community of participants.

WEPAN AND DISCOVERE GIRL DAY AWARD

American Society of Civil Engineers San Jose Younger Member Forum Girl Day in collaboration with the San Jose Women's Club and Mineta Transportation Institute



Engineers Week – Girl Day empowered nearly 150 middle- and high-school girls to explore civil engineering through hands-on learning, teamwork, and mentorship. Students asked questions, shared ideas, and discovered how engineers shape communities. They designed, estimated, and built balsa-wood bridges, testing creativity, problem-solving, and collaboration. The day concluded with a visit to SJSU, where students explored campus spaces and imagined future STEM pathways.

WEPAN PRESIDENT'S AWARD

Bethany Farmer

WEPAN Staff Honoree



Bethany Farmer is the Associate Library Director at Lincoln Memorial University and former librarian at WEPAN, where she supported STEM initiatives and collaborative research. Her work focuses on advancing inclusive library services, fostering partnerships, and expanding access to information.

Ashley Garcia

WEPAN Staff Honoree



Ashley Garcia, J.D. is a communications strategist, currently serving as Special Assistant to the CDO at Ocean Conservancy. She served as WEPAN's Marketing and Communications Manager from 2021 to 2025, where she led the marketing and communications strategy development and implementation for WEPAN, ARC Network, and ACCESS+. Prior to joining WEPAN, she was the account manager for the Florida International University Office to Advance Women, Equity & Diversity (AWED), planning and executing communications strategies for AWED and FIU ADVANCE, FIU's National Science Foundation Institutional Transformation project.

Sharika Kellogg

WEPAN Staff Honoree



Sharika Kellogg joined WEPAN as Executive Assistant to Dr. Ershela Sims and quickly became boots on the ground, helping drive meaningful change alongside the dynamic leadership team. A mother of four adopted boys, Sharika is a student, budding author, entrepreneur, travel advisor, and fractional CMO. She leads multiple ventures, including nonprofit, re-WHY-Her Foundation, supporting families raising neuro-spicy children.

Dr. Heather Metcalf

WEPAN Staff Honoree



Dr. Heather Metcalf is a computer, mathematical, and social scientist, educator, advocate, and strategist with over a decade of experience leading mission-driven nonprofit organizations dedicated to intersectional gender equity, systemic change, and innovation in STEMM. Dr. Metcalf is Program Officer for the AUNTIE Tech Collective, a multigenerational AISES initiative that supports Indigenous womxn, non-binary, and two-spirit people in tech. Dr. Metcalf is also Co-Founder and Head of Research for Hexalign, a consulting company that supports marginalized STEM innovators while working with organizations to address the root causes of marginalization, and is a consultant for Qualcomm's inclusive invention initiative, The Inventor's Patent Academy.

Dr. Stephani Page

WEPAN Staff Honoree



Dr. Stephani Page is a nationally recognized leader advancing STEM education, research training, and workforce innovation. As a national strategist, she leads initiatives impacting hundreds of institutions and thousands of scholars. A policy contributor and former NIH and AHA trainee, Dr. Page is celebrated for shaping inclusive, high-impact pathways for the next generation of STEM leaders.

Virginia Rhodes

WEPAN Staff Honoree



Virginia Rhodes is a project and operations professional dedicated to improving systems, strengthening partnerships, and advancing inclusive engagement. Currently serving as a Senior Project Manager at IUAA and previously as ARC Network Project Director at WEPAN, she leads cross-functional collaboration and data-informed initiatives that enhance experiences and drive meaningful impact. Her work is driven by a strong commitment to equity, access, and continuous improvement.

WEPAN PRESIDENT'S AWARD

Noelia Sanchez

WEPAN Staff Honoree



Noelia Sanchez is a branding and digital strategist specializing in helping nonprofit organizations leverage content marketing to increase their impact, elevate their voice, and better connect with their communities. Noelia's insight into design, automation, and growth marketing has helped shape projects such as the NSF-funded ARC Network: A STEM Equity Brain Trust. Through strategic consulting, digital development, and content creation, Noelia works closely with organizations to help amplify their visibility and increase their influence and impact.

OUTSTANDING LEADERSHIP AWARD

Dr. Ershela Sims

WEPAN Executive Director



Dr. Ershela Sims is the Executive Director of WEPAN. She previously served in several roles at the SC Governor's School for Science and Mathematics, including Interim President and Senior Vice President for Virtual and Outreach Programs. Previously, Dr. Sims was the Dean of Engineering and Technology at the North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics. She has 25 years of experience as an industry engineer and K-20 researcher, educator, and administrator. She holds a BSE in BME from Duke University and PhD in BME from the UNC at Chapel Hill. She is a lifetime member of the National Society of Black Engineers. Her accolades include the NSBE Dr. Janice A. Lumpkin Educator of the Year Golden Torch Award, National Science Teachers Association Vernier Technology Award and the NC School of Science and Mathematics Exceptional Contribution in Teaching through Scholarship and Keeper of the Dream awards.