JAMES W. BURNS LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

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Brian Bowman was born and raised in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Having served as Winnipeg’s 43rd Mayor, he is one of Manitoba’s best known and respected political figures.

Brian earned his Bachelor of Arts (Advanced) from the University of Manitoba in 1996 and his Juris Doctor from the University of Toronto in 1999. He was Called to the Manitoba Bar in 2000. Brian then worked in private practice with two prominent Winnipeg law firms from 2000 – 2014, during which time he specialized in the areas of privacy, access to information and social media law. He has been acknowledged by The Canadian Privacy Law Review as one of Canada’s “leading privacy law authorities” and has been a frequent legal speaker, media commentator and author. Brian has served as Chairperson of the Canadian Bar Association’s National Privacy and Access Law Section as well as the Manitoba Bar Association’s Technology and Intellectual Property Law Section.

Brian is Métis and a proud citizen of the Manitoba Métis Federation. In 2014, he was first elected Mayor of Winnipeg (Canada’s 6th largest municipality) in a landslide victory, becoming the first Indigenous Mayor of a major Canadian city. In 2018, he was re-elected for a second term in office with an increased plurality and number of votes.

Under his leadership, Mayor Bowman guided the City’s response to the global pandemic, transformed its reconciliation and human rights efforts, while delivering more than $2.5 billion in tri-level government funding for infrastructure to support Winnipeg’s steady population growth. He spearheaded new accountability measures - including the creation of the City’s first Integrity Commissioner position - and Open Data/Open Government initiatives, which were recognized by the Intelligent Community Forum when Winnipeg was named the “World’s Most Intelligent Community”. Mayor Bowman delivered eight (8) balanced budgets and oversaw the creation of the City’s first ever four (4) year multi-year balanced budget process and Asset Management Plan. He founded Winnipeg’s One Million Tree Challenge, with the goal of planting one million new trees before Winnipeg’s population reaches one million residents. He was an active member of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) Big City Mayor’s Caucus and served as lead inter-governmental representative for the City of Winnipeg, which included regular dialogue and collaboration with the Prime Minister of Canada, Premier of Manitoba and Indigenous government leaders. His legacy includes national leadership for reconciliation, providing a steady hand during the global pandemic, restoring trust and integrity in Winnipeg’s municipal government and successfully building the foundation for a more inclusive city of one million residents.

More recently, Brian has been serving as Vice-President, Sustainability and Social Impact for Great-West Lifeco, where he is providing leadership to increase collaboration and coordination in global operations in Canada, the U.S. and Europe. He is developing a global sustainability and social impact strategy, working on reconciliation efforts in Canada and addressing similar challenges in the United States and Europe, while strengthening and building relationships with community partners.

Brian has lived and worked in Australia and Mexico City. He is a recipient of Queen Elizabeth II’s Platinum Jubilee Medal and the Manitoba Bar Association’s Community Involvement Award. He has volunteered for numerous organizations and has served as Chairperson for the Winnipeg Art Gallery, the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce and the University of Manitoba’s Alumni Association.

Brian is married to Tracy Bowman. Together, they are raising their two sons, Hayden and Austin.
Charles is the Deputy CFO, Chief Accounting & Control Officer, Great-West Lifeco. Graduating from the University of Manitoba with a Bachelor of Commerce Degree with Distinction, and a designated Chartered Professional Accountant, Chartered Accountant – Charles Henaire was one of the youngest CAs in Manitoba to receive his FCPA, FCA designation.


Charles exemplifies a commitment to excellence and encourages innovation, not only in business, but also within the community & volunteer work. He continues to be involved in his community and profession and was the first recipient of the Early Achievement Award from the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Manitoba and the Deloitte Alumni Leadership Award. Charles has been involved in the following organizations: Past President of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of MB (CPA Manitoba), Past Board Member & Past Chair of the Audit Committee of the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants (CPA Canada), current board member for Yes Winnipeg Investor Council and past Board member of The Manitoba Museum and Crown Corporations Council of Manitoba (this organization oversaw 5 provincial government Crown Corporations). Charles currently is a member of the Canadian Accounting Standards Board (AcSB) and Chair of the AcSB Implementation Group for IFRS 17 (new Insurance Contract Standards for Canada).
Chris Minaker was born in Brandon, Manitoba, but spent significant time in the United States (Pittsburgh) and southern Ontario (Brantford and Kingston) during his formative years. He graduated from The University of Winnipeg with a dual degree in Business and Conflict Resolution and went on to earn an MA from Royal Roads University in Victoria. While at The University of Winnipeg, he served as president of the Students’ Association and his achievements included creating a new home for the Indigenous Students’ Centre.

Chris is currently Vice President, Policy and Engagement with the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce. In this role, he is responsible for developing the Chamber’s policies and advocacy priorities, as well as the government relations and community engagement strategy. Previous to this, Chris held the role of Associate Vice-President, External Relations at the University of Winnipeg for seven years, where he worked extensively with community organizations, businesses, and governments to strengthen partnerships and relationships.

Minaker’s professional career began at Volunteer Manitoba where he helped to establish the Leadership Winnipeg program in partnership with the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce. Chris also worked with the Manitoba government for close to nine years as a Project Director in the ministries of Agriculture, the Civil Service Commission, Families and Housing, Federal-Provincial Relations, and Executive Council, which is a key link between the political side of government and the professional civil service.

Minaker is married and has two beautiful children who are the centre of his world.
Dr. Watson is the Vice President (Academic) Red River College. Christine joined RRC in 2013 and has held the role of Vice-President, Academic since July 2016. She is currently leading the College’s Academic Transformation in educational design and delivery.

Christine has worked in senior administration, leadership, teaching and research for the last 20 years, holding administrative and teaching positions at Kwantlen Polytechnic University, University of Regina and First Nations University of Canada.

In terms of her own educational background, Christine holds a B.A. English (Honours) from University of British Columbia, a M.A. (English Literature) from Queen’s University, and a Ph.D. in English Literature from University of Queensland (Australia). Dr. Watson is also a member of the James W. Burns Leadership Institute Advisory Board.
Colin is Executive Vice President, Senior Portfolio Manager, Director - Wellington-Altus Holdings Inc. Colin joins Wellington-Altus as Executive Vice President, Senior Portfolio Manager and as a Director of the firm. He began his wealth management career in 1992. In addition to serving high net worth and institutional clients, Colin also spent many years in executive management at his prior firm managing the Manitoba and Saskatchewan regions and was on the advisory committee that set policy and strategy for over 1200 advisors and over $120Billion in assets. Colin is a former finalist for the IDA Distinction Award, an award given to investment professionals who represent excellence in the profession. In 2019 he was recognized as one of the top 50 (#11) Advisors in Canada by Wealth Professional Magazine. Colin is a Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA) and also has a B.Comm. (Honours – Finance) from the Asper School of Business at the University of Manitoba. He has completed executive education programs from the Wharton School of Finance at The University of Pennsylvania and the Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto as well as numerous industry programs. He is committed to lifelong learning and in 2018 completed the Institute of Corporate Directors Course (ICD.D).

Colin’s community work includes:
- Chair, Associates Asper School of Business
- Advisory Board, James. W. Burns Leadership Institute, University of Manitoba
- Advisory Council and Major Donor Member, United Way Winnipeg
- Campaign Chair, 2017 United Way Winnipeg
- Past member of the Board of Governors Winnipeg Art Gallery
- Past Member of the Finance Committee for Sport Manitoba

Colin resides in Winnipeg with his wife and two young daughters.
Cordella Friesen is President & CEO of the YMCA-YWCA of Winnipeg which has been a charity and community-based organization in Winnipeg for 144 years. The YMCA-YWCA of Winnipeg is the largest childcare provider in Manitoba, operates Camp Stephens, and has four dedicated community hubs that serve in the areas of mental health, fitness, aquatics, newcomer programming, employment services and community play. Cordella has over 20 years of leadership experience in the government and non-profit sectors, and describes herself as radically optimistic and hopeful for people. Her truest goal is to try and make Winnipeg better one day at a time.
Born and raised in Manitoba, Dan studied higher education and public policy, receiving a Ph.D. from the University of Manitoba in 2009. Prior to moving to the University College of the North (UCN) in 2012, Dan worked for the Government of Manitoba, and has also held various senior leadership positions in the Royal Canadian Navy (reserve) where he continues to be an active Lieutenant-Commander. At UCN, Dan was appointed in 2012 as Dean of Arts and Science, and in 2014 he became Dean of the newly created Faculty of Arts, Business, and Science. In September 2015, Dan was appointed, and continues to serve, as Vice-President Academic and Research at UCN.
Diane Gray was appointed President of PrairiesCan on October 31, 2022. Ms. Gray is a recognized leader with extensive experience in business development and trade. Prior to her appointment, Diane was the founding President and CEO of CentrePort Canada Inc., the largest inland port in North America.

From 1995 to 2009, Ms. Gray held three portfolios for the Province of Manitoba, serving as Deputy Minister of Finance; Federal-Provincial and International Relations; and Trade.

Ms. Gray chairs the James W. Burns Leadership Institute and serves on the boards of the Public Policy Forum of Canada and the Associates of the Asper School of Business.

Ms. Gray holds a Masters of Public Administration from the University of Manitoba.
A proud member of Skownan First Nation, Diane Roussin is an Anishinaabe community leader passionately committed to the pursuit of mino bimaadiziwin (the good life) for all families and children. Working tirelessly at the local, regional and national levels to promote Indigenous People's values and ways of knowing, being, doing and feeling, she has led many avant-garde initiatives. Currently the Project Director of the Winnipeg Boldness Project, Diane is a driving force in establishing and leading the first and longest serving Indigenous Social Innovation Lab in Canada that seeks large-scale systems of change for children and families in Winnipeg.

Diane is a key pacesetter in the creation of a robust Indigenous Innovation ecosystem in Canada and holds many influential roles including: Chair of the Indigenous Innovation Initiative Council with Grand Challenges Canada; member of the inaugural Indigenous Innovation Advisory Council with Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies; and member of the inaugural Council of Aunties for the Fireweed Fellowship, the first national Indigenous Entrepreneurship Accelerator.

Her Board of Directors commitments are geared toward forging new ground and include: The Winnipeg Foundation where she seeks to create space for Indigenous philanthropy; the Winnipeg Art Gallery that hosts Quamajuq, the largest public collection of Inuit art in the world; North Forge Technology Exchange, Canada's largest non-profit fabrication lab; and Animikii Inc., a leading Indigenous technology company.

Diane is a TEDx speaker on the topic of Indigenous Social Innovation and is recipient of the Governor General's Meritorious Service Medal, recognized for Outstanding Indigenous Leadership. She is a recipient of the Manitoba Women Trailblazers Award by the Nellie McClung Foundation. Diane holds both Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Social Work Degrees.
Ernest Kwan
Assistant Deputy Minister Digital, Organization and Transformation – Government of Manitoba

Ernest is an adaptive, people-centric digital leader trained in systems thinking and sustainability principles galvanized in collaboration, research, evidence, and innovation. Ernest has a sincere interest and care for the state of society, its growing interdependence on technology, and its effect on people and planet. Ernest has spent over 20 years in the Information Technology and Operational Technology sectors in a multitude of technical and leadership roles. This includes full stack development, solution architecture, project and program management, operational management, and executive management across a number of industries such as energy, automotive retail, telecommunications, utilities, and government.

Currently, he is the Assistant Deputy Minister of Digital, Organization and Transformation with the Government of Manitoba’s Department of Families. He is responsible for leading and supporting initiatives that work towards improving outcomes for all Manitobans through collaboration and partnerships, digital transformation, and program and policy advisory and research. Manitobans rely on a number of services provided by the department that include but are not limited to child and youth services, Manitobans living with disabilities, employment income assistance, addressing homelessness, poverty reduction, and community services.

Prior to this role, he was the Head of the Data and Analytics Branch at the City of Winnipeg’s Water and Waste Department where he was responsible for founding, architecting, developing, and sustaining the governance, methodologies, people, processes, architectures, and technologies to transform the utility’s data assets into accurate, trusted, and assured insights to enable evidence-based decision-making.

Ernest has a strong passion for giving back to the community, particularly as it relates to children, families, and vulnerable populations through his volunteer board efforts with Manitoba Housing and Renewal Corporation (MHRC) and with local community organizations such as Univillage Preschool and Infant Centre Inc., and in the past with the West Central Community Program (now known as Evermore Gather Grow Lead Inc.).

Ernest also serves as an Advisor/Contributor to Urban AI, a global think tank that federates an international ecosystem and multidisciplinary community that carries out research and experiments around ethical modes of governance and sustainable uses of urban artificial intelligence. Urban AI is inspired by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and seeks to help citizens, public decision-makers, and corporations to embrace urban AI solutions.

Ernest earned a Bachelor of Science, Bachelor of Commerce (Finance and Management Information Systems), and a Masters of Business Administration (Sustainability) from the University of Manitoba. He is a certified Project Management Professional (PMP) and Prosci Change Practitioner, and holds a number of certifications in DevOps, DataOps, FinOps, and Information Security, Compliance and Identity Management. His multidisciplinary background has honed and broadened his critical thinking, interpersonal relationships, and worldview.

Ernest is happily married to his wife (a NICU nurse whom he is super proud of) and has two daughters (1 yo. and 3 yo.) that were born at the opposite ends of the COVID pandemic and are a bundle of joy. Naturally an introvert, Ernest is a lifelong learner and has an endless supply of humility. He likes to help, bring people together, and make better
Heather Block began her career as a Social Worker, graduating with a BSW from the University of Manitoba. (And while the PSL program didn’t exist then, she was on her faculty’s student association and probably would have loved this opportunity!)

Prior to joining United Way Winnipeg, she worked with a few community organizations, coincidentally funded by UW, including The Laurel Centre and Andrews Street Family Centre. She joined the UW Winnipeg staff team in 2010. During her time with UW, she has been involved in the launch of Peg (Winnipeg’s community indicator system), the 211 MB website, and strengthening our community engagement work, and the development of the last few strategic plans – to name a few. At the beginning of Covid-19, she moved to the Donor Relations & Resource Development department, where she currently supports our Indigenous Relations work, the Labour program, our engagement team, and training for our department’s staff team.
Kathy is former Dean, ICT Programs/ Executive Director, CyberWave - the Cybersecurity Technology Centre of Excellence, Manitoba Institute of Trades and Technology, and for more than a decade, Kathy was at the helm of Tech MB (formerly ICTAM) and brings with her a remarkable blend of subject matter expertise, leadership skills, and relationship-building ability.

Under her leadership, Tech MB has become the leading voice of the ICT industry in Manitoba. Kathy has brought ICT training to youth—an example of which is MITT’s partnership on PTEC with Tech MB. She also advocated for greater representation of women in technology, showcased how vital ICT is to Manitoba’s economic wellbeing, and spearheaded signature events such as Innovators and DisruptED, which bring educators and employers together to create a vision for the future of work.

The advancements Kathy has orchestrated over the past couple of decades in Manitoba’s ICT sector have made her one of its most recognized and respected thought leaders and ambassadors—locally, nationally, and abroad. Those in the business community who have met or worked with Kathy know how adept she is at finding innovative ways to combine learning with employment opportunities, and creating a community of thinkers and doers united by the common purpose of making Manitoba the kind of place where big ideas collide with technology to create exciting new opportunities.

Kathy is exactly the kind of leader MITT sought to helm its ambitious vision for the centre of excellence.
Keren is an Agile Change Advisor, Former CEO at Harvest Manitoba, M&A Strategist & Board of Directors Member with a passion for implementing positive, lasting change within an organization. Currently leading a Transformation practice rooted in 5 C’s: Courage, Cognizance of bias, Culture, Collaboration & Conviction. Proudly leveraging a background in child welfare, healthcare, manufacturing & community engagement after spending 3+ years leading Harvest Manitoba, one of Canada’s most visible & impactful non-profit organizations as CEO.

She has helped numerous organizations across Canada & the US to successfully navigate and implement transformation initiatives at the highest levels. From small non-profits to publicly traded companies with large-scale M&A’s affecting thousands, she has brought one consistent mindset to each organization a servant leadership approach.

Simultaneously stable and dynamic, she has sat on numerous Boards of Directors, guest-lectured at various universities, and has been featured in or contributed to media outlets and publications including CBC News, Global News, Winnipeg Free Press, The University of Manitoba Press, Business Insider & beyond.
Kirk has been with Red River College for over 15 years, serving in a number of leadership roles throughout this time. As Dean of a dual portfolio which encompasses Business, Information Technology and Creative Arts as well as Hospitality and Culinary Arts, he is responsible for twenty-three distinct programs across four campuses. Kirk’s academic portfolio is comprised of Business and Commerce, Design, Animation, Creative Communications, Information Technology, Hospitality and Culinary Arts. As Dean, he is responsible for more than 2700 indigenous, domestic and international students, who are supported by 200 dynamic faculty and staff.

Prior to his current role, Kirk has held positions as Director and Dean for Red River College’s School of Continuing Education. While in these roles, Kirk was responsible for the development and oversight of more than 70 part-time, evening and online programs. As a senior leader in this area, Kirk focuses on developing and delivering programs that prepared industry and adult learners with the knowledge and skills required to meet the demanding and ever-changing needs of today’s employers. Kirk has proud to have had the opportunity to lead a number of pilot initiatives at Red River College including Transforming Futures and Raising Hope, which provide educational opportunities to non-traditional students and students with significant barriers.

Kirk’s primary focus is and has always been, high-quantality relevant programming which exceeds the expectations of students and industry. Utilizing an educational background that has focused on political science, computer programming, business analysis and education, he is an innovative and agile academic leader. Over the next year, Kirk and his team look forward to leading the development of four new dynamic programs for Red River College’s new state of the art academic Innovation Centre.
Lianne Huberdeau is an HR executive and leader with 20+ years’ experience driving transformation and leading high-performance teams in the Technology Sector. Her career began in software testing, where she then leveraged her interests in planning and transformation to become a Project Manager via the Red River College PM Diploma. Leveraging her diploma, PMP certification and project delivery experience, she transitioned to leading a Project Management Office and entered Senior Leadership. Her continued interests in people, culture and strategy helped her pivot to the world of Human Resources where she then accelerated her career to the executive level. In this role, she applies continuous process improvement, projectization, organizational change management and technology innovation to the entire HR function. She attributes many of her recent professional accomplishments to her time in the MBA program at the Asper School of Business (Leadership & Organizations, Spring 2023).

One of her more rewarding and fulfilling experiences was participating in the Asper Case Competition program, where her team placed in the top 3 in all their select competitions along with being the 1st MBA team to ever win and represent Asper on the international stage.

Outside her professional life, she is a busy mom of two kids and a new puppy and volunteers on a nonprofit board, where she holds the position of Chair of the Governance and Nominating committee and member of the Strategic Planning Committee.
Sana is a graduate from the Faculty of Science at the University of Manitoba, and an enormous advocate for the communities she serves.

She is a seasoned speaker across the globe, with some of her most memorable engagements being across the non-profit sector, hackathons, youth STEM events, and a morning show in Pakistan. Over the years, Sana continues to serve in executive positions on local, national, and international Boards – ranging from philanthropy, sports, youth, and IT. She spent the early part of her career working directly with student leaders across the University of Manitoba campuses on student-led initiatives. Now with over a decade of diverse experiences, Sana serves as a Senior Advisor with the Government of Canada.

As an immigrant to Canada, she brings a diverse perspective and passion to everything she does professionally, and personally. If transparent and truthful discussion/mentorship is your style, you are in for a treat with Sana!
Dr. Sarah Whiteford is currently the Assistant Deputy Minister of Early Learning and Child Care with the Province of Manitoba. She previously served in leadership roles across several government departments, covering the spectrum of education from early childhood through to K-12 and post-secondary, as well as having experience with Treasury Board Secretariat. Throughout her career, Sarah has worked to build partnerships in designing policy solutions, to improve outcomes for individuals and communities.

Sarah holds a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Political Studies from Queen’s University, a Masters and a PhD in International Relations from the University of St Andrews, as well as a Masters in Public Administration from the University of Winnipeg/University of Manitoba. She has taught university courses in public policy and Canadian government, and has research and applied interests in policy discourses and design.

Sarah is a second-generation Canadian of Korean and Scottish heritage, and believes strongly in the importance and value of diversity in leadership. She lives in Winnipeg with her partner Jeff and their two young children.
Mr. Raj Patel has an extensive background and involvement in the financial industry both in Commercial and Corporate banking for the last 18 years. Mr. Patel joined RBC in 2014 and was appointed to the role of Vice President, Commercial Financial Services in 2017. He is responsible for a diversified team that covers the industry sectors of Real Estate Development/Private and Public REITS, Construction Services, Public Sector, Supply Chain and Transportation. Outside of RBC, Raj currently serves on the Board of Directors of the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce and is the current Chamber Chair for 2020/21. He is also a member of the United Way Winnipeg Board of Trustees. He is a passionate member of the Asper School of Business Equity, Diversity and Inclusivity (EDI) Task force and a member of the James W. Burns Leadership Institute Advisory Board beginning in the fall of 2021. Raj earned his Bachelor of Commerce (Honours) degree from the Asper School of business, University of Manitoba and his MBA from the University of Phoenix (Vancouver campus).
Tanjit Nagrabi brings to the role of CEO her experience in government relations, not-for-profit management, and community leadership. She is skilled in strategic planning, advocacy, and public relations.

Tanjit has served on many community boards, including the University of Manitoba Board of Governors, University of Manitoba Senate, and she is also a former President of the University of Manitoba Students’ Union (UMSU). Through her involvement at her alma mater, Tanjit was instrumental in introducing the universal bus pass program and flexible health and dental coverage for 20,000+ members. As well, she was the driving force behind a $2.4 million expansion to the childcare center and implementation of a 10-year plan in support of student research opportunities, scholarships, and bursaries.

Tanjit continues to be involved in the community through volunteerism with local resource centers and community centers.

Tanjit holds a B.A. in Political Science and an MBA in Leadership and Sustainability from the University of Manitoba. As a lifelong learner with a commitment to ongoing professional education, she recently became a CPHR (Chartered Professional in Human Resources) Candidate.
Tim is manager - Northern Workforce Development Centre at University College of the North (UCN) in Thompson, Manitoba. The University College of the North is an institution devoted to community and northern development and reflects the Aboriginal reality and cultural diversity of northern Manitoba.

Tim has a history of over twenty (25) years of successful mining and manufacturing management positions involving production, engineering, design, frontline supervision, maintenance upgrades, safety, purchasing and environmental programs in Manitoba. Tim has a passion for helping people achieve their goals through education and training and is very pleased to be a mentor within PSLP.

He has worked with the new Northern Workforce Development Centre at UCN, located in, since August 2018 years, where he is responsible for leading the Centre, an initiative that is tasked to provide training across a variety of Industrial sectors, leading to employment opportunities and Business Partner efficiencies.
Tim is the Chief of Staff to the CEO at Great-West Lifeco, a position he has held since 2018. He has been with the company since 2016 when he joined as the Director, Media & Public Affairs. Prior to joining Great-West Lifeco, Tim worked in various roles for the federal government in Ottawa, including in the Prime Minister’s Office and for numerous federal ministers. Tim holds a bachelor’s degree in political economy and business from Concordia University of Edmonton.