



Meet our Keynote Speakers



Ray Almgren is the Chairman of FIRST in Texas and the Vice President of National Instruments. Almgren has held positions in applications engineering, marketing, and R&D. Much of his career has concentrated on growing the use and adoption of NI LabVIEW, the company's industry-leading software. Almgren has also pioneered the company's efforts in engineering education with a goal of inspiring students to pursue education and careers in technical fields. He has built a worldwide team focused on academic and university relations and initiatives including the adoption of LabVIEW as the software that powers the LEGO® MINDSTORMS® NXT robotics system and the adoption of the NI CompactRIO platform by FIRST Robotics. He also serves on numerous advisory boards for schools of engineering, including those at the University of Texas (UT) at Austin, Southern Methodist University, Purdue University, and Tufts University. In 2004, Almgren was named an Outstanding Young Engineering Graduate of UT Austin and, in 2005, received the Outstanding Young Texas Exes Award, presented by the UT Austin alumni association.



Evan Smith is the CEO and co-founder of The Texas Tribune, a nonprofit, nonpartisan digital news organization recently called "one of the nonprofit news sector's runaway success stories" The Tribune's deep coverage of Texas politics and public policy can be found at its website, texastribune.org, in newspaper and on TV and radio stations across the state, and in the print and online editions of the Washington Post. Since its launch in 2009, the Tribune has won international acclaim and numerous honors, including nine national Edward R. Murrow Awards from the Radio Television Digital News Association and three general excellence awards from the Online News Association. Previously Evan spent nearly 18 years at Texas Monthly, including eight years as Editor and a year as President and Editor-in-Chief.



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Donna Howard has served in the Texas House of Representatives since 2006. She is a member of the House Appropriations Committee, and sits on its Article III Subcommittee which oversees education spending in the state budget. Donna is also a longtime member of the House Higher Education Committee – on which she currently serves as Vice- Chair – and the House Administration Committee. Donna was elected to the Eanes ISD board in West Austin for the 1996-1999 term. She now serves as a board member of the Expanding Horizons Foundation, supporting low-income housing and education.



John Howard has been the Senior Manager of Global Public Policy & Government Affairs at Dell for the past 5 years to develop and advocate for Dell's global public policy priorities, manage Texas and local government relations, and host visiting government delegations. He has previously been Federal Environmental Executive; Senior Associate Director for the White House Council on Environmental Quality as well. Howard has had 27 years of experience in the federal, state, and private sectors providing legal, policy, and strategic counsel to leading businesses and organizations.