



Merita Irby

Partner

Co-Founder, Forum for Youth Investment (1998-2021)

Merita Irby is a nationally recognized master facilitator who supports catalytic leaders in taking a youth-centered, big picture approach to planning and action. Working at the national, state, and local level, Merita focuses on creating and supporting collaborative tables for cross-systems planning and action.

Merita works with leaders in school districts, governmental departments, community collaboratives, and non-governmental organizations nationwide, helping them tackle real-world complexities by developing lenses and decision-making frameworks that are “whole child / whole community” – youth-centered, science-informed, and equity-focused. Countless communities and initiatives across the country credit Merita as instrumental in their work to build cross-sector collaboratives that engage young people and communities in action-oriented, asset-based solutions.

Merita began her career as a classroom teacher in Central America and in urban schools in the United States. Exploring the intersection of school, family and community supports, she worked at Stanford University on a five-year study of community-based urban youth organizations, and co-authored *Urban Sanctuaries: Neighborhood Organizations in the Lives and Futures of Inner-City Youth*.

At the Center for Youth Development and Policy Research, Merita directed a multi-site study on school collaboration with youth organizations. This was where she first began working with her long-time creative and strategic partner, Karen Pittman, who she then joined in starting the President’s Crime Prevention Council, chaired by Vice President Al Gore. At the International Youth Foundation, Merita led the facilitation of the foundation’s Global Partner Network and worked with Karen to develop a U.S. strategy that would eventually give rise to the Forum for Youth Investment.

Merita and Karen co-founded the Forum for Youth Investment in 1998. Throughout the Forum's history, Merita played multiple programmatic and operational roles most recently leading the Forum's Big Picture Approach Training & Consulting. Merita launched Big Picture Approach Training & Consulting to connect national thought leadership with on-the-ground coaching, training and consulting. From 2019 to 2021, Merita served as the managing director of the Readiness Projects, created and coordinated by the Forum, the National Urban League, and the American Institutes for Research to engage national and local leaders in efforts to dramatically changing the odds for youth by committing to upend inequities, embrace science-informed strategies, and accelerate progress.

Merita received her master's degree in Public Policy from the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. A notable public speaker and author, Merita also serves on a number of boards and advisory committees.