
PARTICIPANTS

Mark Baldassare is president and CEO of the Public Policy Institute of California, where he holds the Arjay and Frances Fearing Miller Chair in Public Policy. He is a leading expert on public opinion and survey methodology, and has directed the PPIC Statewide Survey since 1998. He is an authority on elections, voter behavior, and political and fiscal reform, authoring ten books and numerous reports on these topics. He often provides testimony before legislative committees and state commissions, and regularly hosts PPIC's Speaker Series, a public forum featuring in-depth interviews with state and national leaders. He holds a PhD in sociology from the University of California, Berkeley.

Steven A. Merksamer is the senior partner of Nielsen Merksamer Parrinello Gross & Leoni LLP. He was elected to PPIC's board of directors in 2009 and became board chair in 2018. He served as the chief of staff to Governor George Deukmejian and the special assistant attorney general of the State of California. He has also served as a California deputy attorney general, assistant to the lieutenant governor of California, and assistant to the Speaker of the California State Assembly. He was appointed by President Reagan to serve on the President's Administration of Justice Task Force, the President's Export Council, and the National Commission on Presidential Scholars. He is a member of the board of directors of the California Chamber of Commerce and the Stevenson School, and is a past chairman of State Law Resources, Inc. He is an honors graduate of Claremont McKenna College and received his law degree from the University of the Pacific, McGeorge School of Law.

Ann O'Leary is chief of staff to Governor Gavin Newsom. Prior to joining the governor's office, she was a law partner at Boies Schiller Flexner LLP, where she focused her practice on representing tech companies, philanthropies, and nonprofit organizations, and led numerous pro bono efforts. She brings decades of experience in government, politics, social policy, and nonprofit leadership. She served as senior policy advisor to Hillary Clinton's 2016 presidential campaign. She co-founded the nonprofit Opportunity Institute to continue her work as senior vice president of Next Generation, where she launched the national early childhood education initiative "Too Small to Fail" in collaboration with the Clinton Foundation. Earlier in her career, she was a deputy city attorney in San Francisco; executive director of UC Berkeley Law's Center on Health, Economic and Family Security; the legislative director for Senator Hillary Clinton; and a policy advisor with the White House Domestic Policy Council under President Bill Clinton. She has served on numerous nonprofit boards, including KQED, the San Francisco Bay Area's NPR and PBS affiliate; the Center for Educational Excellence in Alternative Settings, which works to equip incarcerated young people with the skills they need to be successful; and the East Bay Community Law Center, which provides free legal services to low-income community members. She holds a BA from Mount Holyoke College, an MA in education policy from Stanford University, and a JD from UC Berkeley School of Law.