

# TCDEIR October 17<sup>th</sup> meeting @ Alight

## Speaker bios

[Mike Klein](#) | Guest speaker

Dr. Mike Klein is an Associate Professor at the University of St. Thomas and Chair of the Department of Justice and Peace Studies. He teaches undergraduate courses on Leadership for Social Justice, Justice and Peace Studies, and seminars on vocational discernment, art and social change, and the history of social movements. Dr. Klein also teaches graduate courses on critical education in social movements and the pedagogy of Paulo Freire.

In 2007, Dr. Klein received a Bush Foundation Leadership Fellowship for doctoral research on ritualizing leadership for democratic decision-making and action. He also completed the James P. Shannon Leadership Institute in 2011, and consults with the Neighborhood Leadership Program at the Amherst H. Wilder Foundation.

Dr. Klein is also a muralist and sculptor. As a community-oriented artist, he recognizes the power of art to hold space for difficult conversations, express intersectional identities, clarify community priorities, and even heal.

In addition to journal articles and book chapters, Dr. Klein is the author or editor of five books including, [Democratizing Leadership: Counter-hegemonic Democracy in Organizations, Institutions, and Communities](#), published in 2016.

[Maryan Abdinur](#) | Panelist

Maryan Abdinur is the Community Relations Officer for the Sustaining Environmental Systems funding area at the Mortenson Family Foundation and sits on the newly formed Alight US Advisory Council. Maryan brings deep knowledge and direct experience to ensuring all Minnesotans have equitable and sustainable access to healthy land and water.

Maryan grew up in a farming and camel nomadic community in East Africa, known to her and her people as Arlaadi ("our lands/the lands"), known today as central/southwest Somalia and eastern Kenya. Maryan's work is highly influenced by the knowledge and memories of the Arlaadi, its people, and the teachings of her grandparents. These influences instilled a passion in her for just stewardship of the land and the dual belief that the wellbeing of the earth is essential to individual wellness – as individual wellness is essential to the wellness of the whole.

Prior to joining the Mortenson Family Foundation, Maryan led the Hope Community Inc. Food, Land and Community program and was a member of the City of Minneapolis's Green Zones Policy Recommendations Design Team. Maryan also served two terms on the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency's (MPCA) Environmental Justice Advisory Group.

Maryan currently serves on the boards of Philadelphia Community Farm in Osceola, Wisconsin, a Somali women wellness collective in Minneapolis, and an energy research organization based in Kenya and Somalia. She lives in St. Paul with her family, where they enjoy growing food, cooking, reading, hiking, and storytelling together.

### [Mauricio Montes de Oca](#) | Panelist

Mauricio Montes de Oca has advocated for diversity, equity, and community empowerment, working in the medical translating and interpreting community for over 20 years. As a certified medical interpreter, Mauricio bridges communication gaps and ensures equitable access to healthcare services. His proficiency in both Spanish and English has enabled him to connect with individuals from various backgrounds, enhancing patient care and understanding.

Originally from Mexico City, Mauricio moved to the United States when he was 16. He often shares about his experience as an English language learner in the public school system and how it shaped his passion for innovation in cross-cultural communication.

Mauricio began his career as a medical interpreter at the University of Minnesota Medical Center-Fairview, founding the Comunidades for Engagement, Advancement and Development ERG at Fairview Hospital, and eventually training hospital and clinic staff to understand the role of the interpreter and share ideas for how to better serve patients who require spoken or sign language interpreters.

Today, Mauricio and his wife, Karla, own Montes de Oca Solutions Group, empowering organizations to build stronger, more resilient communities through collaboration and understanding. Mauricio also serves as president of the Upper Midwest Translators and Interpreters Association (UMTIA) and holds certification in the PERMAH Wellbeing survey, a testament to his commitment to holistic wellness and fostering thriving communities. Mauricio is also passionate about the development of the interpretation profession and has been working on the development of and advocacy for laws that better meet patients' and interpreters' needs.