



# Prospective Ridger Guide

## 2024



**2024 Conference:**  
July 21-25  
Unicoi State Park  
Helen, Georgia

# Welcome!

Dear Community Service Leader,

I'm delighted by your interest in the Blue Ridge Institute. We think we have a good thing going here, and hope you will join us as we approach the Institute's 100th year of service to leaders like you.

That's right—100 years!

Ours is a group—we call ourselves 'Ridgers'—committed to each other, to help each other become the leaders we all aspire to be, to help each other grow, to pick each other up when we stumble, and to ensure that we prioritize our own health and well-being.

The following pages provide a glimpse of who we are, what we do, and how you might benefit from becoming a Ridger. We envision a thriving national network of transformative leaders driving equitable social change. In service to this, we provide **growth, connection, and renewal** for community service leaders. In doing so, we are committed to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA).

I encourage you to learn more about us by visiting us at [www.blueridgelears.org](http://www.blueridgelears.org). After 97 years, unique traditions emerge. We honor ours, consider them sacred (and sometimes quirky!), and welcome your interest in becoming a fellow Ridger.

If you hold an executive-level position in a community service organization, report directly to the CEO or Executive Director, or if you are retired from such roles, and if what you read speaks to you, connect with your nominator or you can self-nominate. Or, if you'd like, contact me directly at [info@blueridgeleaders.org](mailto:info@blueridgeleaders.org) or by phone at 336-269-9577.

Thank you!



Allison Gant  
Executive Director

# The BRI Experience

First and foremost, *we are a community*. Some of us lovingly refer to the Ridger community as our ‘family of choice.’ We are intergenerational-retirees and veteran leaders who share our experience and wisdom with those new to leadership, our children and grandchildren share in the experience through the Youth Leadership Academy (more later!) to highlight a few examples.

We offer year-round opportunities to learn and renew, so that you become the leader you aspire to be. Our signature offering is an annual conference held the last week of July. For most new Ridgers, this is their first experience with the Institute. Beyond this conference there are multiple opportunities to learn with each other, and to renew throughout the year.

These opportunities take the form of:

## Virtual Gatherings

- Roundtables
- Coffee chats
- Happy hours
- Book clubs
- Year-round professional development
- Health and wellness opportunities

*“BRI helps me be a better leader and a better person. I am thankful every day for BRI.”*

– Richard LaPratt

## Regional Gatherings

We host in-person events periodically in areas where a large number of Ridgers live and work.

## Private Facebook Forum

BRI has a very active private Facebook Forum, where Ridgers continue conversations, share successes, as well as ask for and offer advice.



# Annual Conference

Every July, without fail we gather to learn and renew in a relaxing environment. This is not your overly corporate conference.

## Learn

We feature internationally acclaimed speakers like **Joan Garry**, **Vu Le**, **Dan Pallotta**, **Dr. Kim Hires**, and **Sister Simone Campbell** to name but a few.

Not only do we learn from these luminaries, they also mix and mingle with us, allowing for the kind of access and interaction you won't find at other conferences.

## Renew

However you prefer to recharge, it's likely that we've made time and space for it. You have ample options to engage with others, be it self-directing your own experience taking advantage of the many options the park provides. Or opt into something we've organized, be it for exercise, reflection, play, or all of the above.



*"If I designed a retreat for nonprofit leaders, it would look a lot like BRI."*

–Vu Le

# Friends & Family

We welcome your friends and family! In fact, friends and family are a big part of the Ridger community. There are numerous opportunities for Ridger guests to take part in all aspects of the conference experience—from learning sessions, rejuvenation activities, the President’s Ball—you name it, kids and other guests are welcome to participate (except for the President’s Ball, of course, that’s for adults only 😊).



## Youth Leadership Academy

For future leaders ages 4-13, we offer the Youth Leadership Academy, which we cleverly refer to as YLA.

Under expert guidance, former YLA participants plan and implement a dynamic program that sets the foundation for youth leadership in a fun-filled atmosphere.



AND, while the adults are attending the President’s Ball, YLA counselors have a fun event planned for the youngsters.



### BRI DEIA Statement

BRI is a family of choice. Our fiercely welcoming annual conference serves as a place to learn, lead, and renew, with opportunities to build connections, make friends, and network with champion colleagues. Quirky “Ridgers” create a safe space for all who attend. We connect throughout the year in various ways with the same intentions as our annual gathering.

As racial inequities and injustices continue, BRI strives to be increasingly intentional with reflective humility to effectively support and engage “Ridgers” and the communities they serve. We reflect the myriad of identities they serve, often rooted in communities of color, abilities, genders, sexual orientations, ages, socioeconomic status, and their intersections that commonly lead to marginalization.

Our organization was founded to create social change. We adamantly condemn injustices and systematic inequities woven into the fabric of our nation. As we move forward as leaders, we are committed to continuing the legacy of community uplift, power sharing, and intentional listening to co-create a brighter kinder world.



# Join Us

Thank you for spending a bit of time to learn more about BRI and the Ridger community. If you're interested in joining us, and if you hold an executive-level position in a community service organization, report directly to the CEO or Executive Director, or if you are retired from such roles, connect with the person who nominated you and hear their story. You can also explore our website, and join our public Facebook community for service leaders. Likewise, you can follow us on LinkedIn.

You are doing incredibly difficult work, and the demand for strong, resilient leadership in the community services sector continues to increase. BRI offers support, learning opportunities, and life-long friendships. I sincerely hope you will consider applying.

The process is simple. When you visit our website, click 'Join BRI' under the 'Membership' tab.

Finally, please **contact us at [info@blueridgeleaders.org](mailto:info@blueridgeleaders.org) or 336-269-9577** if you'd like to know more or discuss any aspect of BRI and the Ridger experience.