

# SYBIL FRANCIS

President & CEO of  
The Center for the  
Future of Arizona



## 1 Why was The Center for the Future of Arizona founded?

CFA was born from a love for Arizona and a desire to help our state succeed. It all started in 2002, when Lattie Coor, outgoing president of Arizona State University, and I met to discuss how to build on his idea to create an organization that could help drive Arizona forward and make a lasting difference for all Arizonans. With Lattie's background in education and my passion and experience as a public policy specialist, we built CFA, a self-proclaimed "do tank" that brings Arizonans together to create a stronger and brighter future for our state.

## 2 What are some of the Center's biggest priorities?

CFA's vision is to achieve *The Arizona We Want*, where all Arizonans, now and in the future, thrive and enjoy sustained prosperity, unmatched quality of life and real opportunity. We listen to Arizonans to learn what matters most to them, share trusted data about how Arizona is doing in those priority areas, bring critical issues to public attention, and work with communities and leaders to solve public problems. Together with our partners, we advance major statewide initiatives to transform education, workforce and civic engagement.

## 3 The Center recently released *The Arizona We Want: The Decade Ahead* report. What do the findings tell us about Arizonans?

The voices of Arizonans, and what they want, matter. The report results are based on our unique partnership with Gallup and a comprehensive statewide survey of Arizonans across Arizona's vast geography and great diversity. What we found is that as Arizonans, we agree on much more than we disagree and that we want the same things, including a strong education system, quality, affordable healthcare, sustainable practices that protect our quality of life, and equity for all people.

## 4 What can everyday Arizonans do to help effect change?

The first step is to fully embrace and realize that we are in this together and we want the same things. The data from the Gallup findings show that Arizonans agree on 42 specific actions to take to make our state better. CFA has already heard from many leaders, community organizations and everyday Arizonans who are sharing the findings from the report, and will use them to inform decision-making and collaborate with others to address our greatest needs. You can learn about more ways to get started on our website.

## 5 How has COVID-19 affected your work?

This has been a challenging time for all Arizonans, and at CFA, we are committed to our work in the new normal and to staying true to our mission of bringing Arizonans together to create a stronger and brighter future for our state. We have advanced our mission on all fronts, including our work with Gallup and with our partners in education, workforce and civic engagement. The voices of Arizonans matter now more than ever and we are working to help those voices be heard.

## 6 What have you done during this time of change, both for yourself and as a leader?

I am very proud of our CFA team and grateful to them for their hard work this past year. Like everyone in our state — and in our country — our staff have experienced losses and stresses caused by the pandemic. We have worked harder than ever to advance our mission. In some ways, this has been one of our most impactful years, thanks to our dedicated staff. At the same time, as a leader, I know that it is important to recognize the stresses everyone is experiencing and find ways to help our staff recharge. I think we have been able to do that successfully.

## 7 When you talk to people outside of the state, what do you tell them Arizona has going for it?

I tell them what Arizonans tell us. Arizonans are proud to call this state home. They love and appreciate the state's natural beauty and stunning landscape. Our rich culture and heritage combined with our independent spirit and innovative thinking give a feeling of openness and possibility. These are just a few of the reasons why our state is experiencing one of the country's highest growth rates.

## 8 And what are some challenges we should be focused on?

We have come a long way, but we still have work to do. Our report findings spotlight challenges where significant disparities exist and where there are opportunities to ensure more Arizonans have a place in Arizona's success. The data prompts us to take a deeper look into the underlying conditions that create inequities across the board and to ask how we can support greater opportunity and quality of life for everyone. Certainly, our healthcare and K12 systems have been under stress, and the safety and well-being of frontline workers are top of mind, as well as issues around criminal justice and voting processes.

## 9 What do you see as the single most significant opportunity for Arizona in the coming year?

Arizonans are willing to work with others of different viewpoints to solve problems. Leaders in every sector and in communities across the state have an important role to play in doing just that. Our Gallup findings provide a framework for community discussion on what brings us together and where we have opportunity to improve. As Arizonans, we can come together with the knowledge that we agree on much more than we disagree and recognize that the national narrative around division and polarization is not reflective of reality, at least not in Arizona.

## 10 What would *Frontdoors* readers be surprised to learn about you?

I was raised by a French mother in a bilingual family and spent all my summers growing up living with my French grandparents just outside of Paris. I play the flute, and in some professional circles, am known as an expert in nuclear weapons history and became that in the course of earning my Ph.D. in political science from MIT. I majored in chemistry at Oberlin College, am a bit of a science geek and am passionate about doing my part to make the world — and Arizona — a better place for all. I love movies and hiking with my husband Michael, and doing anything with my daughter Alana.

To learn more about The Center for the Future of Arizona, go to [arizonafuture.org](https://arizonafuture.org).

**A strong education system that supports the success of every child is key to Arizona's future. Here, Phoenix Union High School District students meet with district staff to share ideas.**

