

ESTHER C. LEE



Esther Lee is the President and CEO of Refraction, an innovation hub in Northern Virginia, focused on fostering innovation and entrepreneurship by nurturing and mentoring startups and high-growth companies. Prior to joining Refraction, Esther served as Secretary of Commerce and Trade for the Commonwealth of Virginia, where she oversaw 14 state agencies, responsible for economic development, job creation, innovation and entrepreneurship, small business, tourism, trade, housing, community development, and labor policies for the state. In that role, she led Virginia's successful bid for Amazon's second headquarters.

Esther also served as Global Chief Marketing and New Business Officer at Burson-Marsteller, one of the world's largest strategic communications firms. As a member of the firm's Executive Committee, she led its marketing, thought leadership, and new business strategies and advised major clients like Coca-Cola, Marriott, and AIG.

In 2009, President Barack Obama appointed Esther as Senior Policy Adviser to the U.S. Secretary of Commerce. She created and led the Office of Innovation and Entrepreneurship and the National Advisory Council on Innovation and Entrepreneurship (co-chaired by AOL founder Steve Case). She also launched the White House "Startup America" initiative, organized the Presidential Summit on Entrepreneurship, and served on the White House Urban Policy Council and Middle Class Task Force.

Before her government service, Esther was a seasoned executive with over 15 years of experience in technology, media, and finance. She served as Chief Marketing Officer for half of CIT Group (Fortune 500 financial services firm) and led strategic marketing and business development at AOL/Time Warner and Siemens. She started her career as a business and technology journalist at CNN.

Esther has been Vice Chairman of the Fairfax County Economic Development Authority, member of the Fairfax County Economic Advisory Commission, board member of Virginia Is for Entrepreneurs, term member of the Council on Foreign Relations, Aspen Ideas Festival Scholar, and co-founder of the Council of Korean Americans. She received an A.B. in economics from Harvard and an MBA from MIT's Sloan School of Management.