



September 23, 2014

Members of the Council on Foundations,

On behalf of the Council's Board of Directors, I am glad to have the opportunity to address the Council's membership. We hope that today's webinar helped inform your understanding of some of our major efforts.

I officially became Chair of the Board in June. In making this transition, I have reflected on my relationship with the Council as a member. I wish to take a moment to share that, and to speak about the Council's most recent past.

My relationship with the Council began 23 years ago when I attended the Council's Institute for New Staff. Over the years, Council conferences, committee volunteerism, and the old *Foundation News and Commentary* helped me connect with the field of philanthropy. More than any other organization, the Council allowed me to consider myself a member of a profession, as opposed to feeling like an interloper from higher education.

The Council bound me to a field of practice, helped me understand private foundation rules, and introduced me to colleagues who became friends and confidants – allowed me a sense of belonging to something larger than the Jessie Ball duPont Fund.

I also learned a good deal about community foundations, corporate giving, and how best to lead in local places, especially across those things that divide us. The Council has been the place I go to maintain hope and passion in a troubled world, inspired by the work of others.

Six years ago, my relationship with the Council radically changed when I was elected to the board. I was now in part responsible for the Council's successes and failures. I had no idea what was coming.

During my first full board meeting in June 2008, I learned from Bridgespan that the organization faced some serious challenges. According to the report, the Council was losing its competitive edge, evidenced by a dynamic and growing set of infrastructure groups. Our imbalanced business model was too dependent on wealthy foundation largesse, and our operation had become grossly more expensive than that of our major competitors.

Despite our strong reputation and history of achievement, all of these challenges led Bridgespan to conclude that the Council would be out of business within 15 years.

Three months after my first meeting, the economy collapsed. The Council had trouble adapting quickly to members whose assets were being negatively affected by what turned out to be an economic tsunami, and consequently had trouble considering Bridgespan's findings.

It's six years later. As I look back, I see a great deal to celebrate.

Two years ago, we hired Vikki Spruill to tackle our challenges head on. I've worked closely with Vikki since she became CEO. I can tell you that her passion for organized philanthropy has no limit, and may actually exceed my own. Her determination to increase the Council's effectiveness led her to develop a bold vision for member engagement, notably around significant issues of major import; reinvigorated the Council's legal, tax policy, and government relations work; and led us to make organizational changes necessary to secure the future of the Council for another generation. Make no mistake: the Council is stronger today than it has been since the economy collapsed.

For the first time in over a decade, we developed a business plan that directly addresses the root causes of Bridgespan's concerns.

We have a restructured organization – one designed to more meaningfully engage members around the work they do rather than around running the Council.

We have a restructured and nimbler staff with deep expertise in philanthropy.

We restructured the board, designed to govern the organization, not administer it.

We launched a new high-tech platform with the help of the First Lady and the Chair of the American Red Cross. We refreshed our website. Helped pass the America Gives More Act through the House of Representatives, which includes measures that foundations have wanted for many years. Despite its ultimate outcome during this Congress, we know debate about significant tax reform is here to stay. I promise you that the Council's efforts on behalf of all its members will not wane; we are in this for the long haul and will fiercely defend and promote charitable giving.

All year long, we have commemorated the community foundation centennial and developed research that will position community foundations for continued success.

Indeed, we have much to celebrate.

Yet, despite two years of significant Council accomplishment, we sometimes hear repeated inaccurate information, falsehoods, and misperceptions, all questioning what the Council is up to. It's no mystery: we are up to strengthening the Council on Foundations, to advance the

field. I encourage everyone today to ask any questions you may have, raise concerns you have about our approach, and give us the opportunity to clarify and set the record straight.

The philanthropic field continues to face significant external challenges. We all need to be mindful of those challenges. Let's focus our energy on addressing those challenges and on developing meaningful collaboration to serve a larger public purpose.

I will close by underscoring that the story of the Council is the story of its members. The organization reflects the broader values, professional aspirations, and desire for significant and enduring community change shared by our members and found throughout the philanthropic sector.

We are up to the challenges we face, and like all of you, we will continue to focus on the positive impact we are making in communities across the country.

Kind Regards,
Sherry Magill
President, Jesse Ball DuPont Fund
Chair of the Board of Directors, Council on Foundations