



Hope Through Philanthropy

It's a true honor to join The Philanthropy Roundtable as president.

This year has been a challenging and deeply painful one for our country and our world. In the midst of a global pandemic and economic strain, we have also faced rising tensions, increased polarization, injustice, rioting, and violence. While our hearts may feel heavy, I know there is reason for hope. During this time of crisis, I have been inspired by the beautiful stories of neighbors helping neighbors—in large and small ways. You have invested in vaccines and treatments to combat covid-19, delivered food to the elderly, helped schools pivot quickly to online education, supported families who lost the ability to work, and engaged in meaningful dialogue about racism, antisemitism, and groupthink. Even in moments of darkness and evil, the generous, thoughtful, caring spirit of so many Americans shines through.

Over the last seven years, as a member of the Roundtable's philanthropic community, I have been fortunate to be introduced to many of you. This is a network of compassionate, committed philanthropists who cherish liberty, opportunity, and personal responsibility, and the ideals that unite us as Americans. Many of you have dedicated your lives to finding solutions to complex problems in your communities and around the world. You have provided educational opportunities to children and families of all backgrounds, and empowered individuals to find dignity and fulfillment through work. Through your commitment, generosity, and passion expressed through your giving, you have touched countless lives, including mine.

Joining the Roundtable is deeply meaningful to me on many levels. My first introduction to the philosophy of liberty

was through my stepfather ("dad" to me). Born in rural Indiana, he was no stranger to poverty and hardship. His father was in prison, his mother deserted him at age 15, and he was told by his teachers he was "not college material." Two events changed the course of his life: A kind family took him in and mentored him, and he discovered *Atlas Shrugged*, the book that helped shape his personal philosophy. Against all odds, he became the first in his family to go to college. As he built a family and career, he lived, through his words and actions, the ideas that had lit a fire within him: the power of human spirit to reach its unique potential, the importance of individual liberty and personal responsibility in these pursuits, and the obstacles created by government overreach.

During my career in the nonprofit world, I had the opportunity to share those principles with others facing challenging circumstances in the communities we served. It was invigorating to see individuals flourish as they embraced education, opportunity, and their strengths and passions.

At the Snider Foundation, I worked with a multi-generational family board to build a mission-driven, professional foundation centered on the vision of our founder Ed Snider. Adam Meyerson and the team at The Philanthropy Roundtable were invaluable to me. As I sought out best practices, they introduced me to a network of peers who willingly shared knowledge and ideas about how to build operational capacity, improve governance, and maximize impact through strategic grantmaking. The Roundtable elevated and inspired our work. I was incredibly honored to be asked to join the Board of Directors last year. To join in this new capacity as president is humbling.

In this salient moment for our country, we are all facing difficult questions. It is a time for reflection and

authentic dialogue so that we can identify the root of our most complex problems and seek effective solutions. Philanthropy is essential during times of crisis and otherwise—it allows us to be innovative, entrepreneurial, and nimble. From long-term strategies to improve education and workforce readiness to emergency grants for disaster relief, philanthropy plays a unique and crucial role in a strong civil society. It operates from the premise that communities are capable of solving problems, and that there are no one-size-fits-all approaches. What works in a rural community in Ohio may be completely different than in an urban Philadelphia neighborhood. At the Roundtable, we celebrate agency and ingenuity, and seek to inspire others to action.

We also work to protect philanthropic freedom—the right of donors to give their charitable assets how and where they choose. We believe this is essential to strengthening our free society.

Adam Meyerson, my esteemed predecessor and our president emeritus, leaves an incredible legacy and a talented team at the Roundtable. I know I have huge shoes to fill. I look forward to personal conversations with each one of you in the coming months and years, and continuing to learn from and with each other. I would like to learn more about how the Roundtable can be of service to you, and would welcome your feedback.

Until we meet again, be safe and well.

All my best,

Elise Westhoff is president of The Philanthropy Roundtable.