

# The Florida Philanthropic Network

## Organizing and Nurturing Philanthropy

On a bright Miami morning in June 2000, the chief executives from seven significant foundations in Florida met with one another over breakfast. They had just attended Governor Jeb Bush's first (and last) Conference on a Civil Society – a meeting that stressed the need for government, the independent sector, and the business sector to work together to address problems in the state.

“As we chewed over what had transpired at the conference,” says Hodding Carter III, president of the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, “it became clear that we needed a vehicle to speak for and to philanthropy in Florida – to provide a focal point for building the philanthropic sector, explaining its mission to opinion leaders and the public, and adding value to the state’s anemic dialogue about the nonprofit sector’s good works and necessity.”

Says David Odahowski, president of the Edyth Bush Charitable Foundation, “We [the funders] also were tired of going to national meetings, and having those be the few times we ever saw each other. We kept hearing about how collaborative other foundations (in other states) are, and we knew something had to be done in Florida.”

Thus was born the Florida Philanthropic Network (the Network), a coalition of the seven founding foundations, with a mission “to build philanthropy in Florida; encourage conversation among nonprofits, businesses and government about the state’s needs; and promote informed decision-making on critical public policy issues facing the people of Florida.” Each of the seven made a major grant over three years to establish the organization and two other partners – the Blue Foundation for a Healthy Florida and Darden Restaurants Foundation – also have provided significant support.

Notes from the Field asked several board members of the Network a series of questions about its work and expected impact in Florida. The following is a compilation of their responses.

**NFF:** *What conditions or circumstances would you say created the need for a “philanthropic network”?*

**Ruth Shack, president, Dade Community Foundation:** There are seismic changes at play in the relationship among the three sectors of Florida’s civic society. While government and business have clearly

stated their goals, the third sector, the nonprofit sector, has been assigned the role of providing a quality of life for the state's residents, in essence doing what no one else will.

**David Odahowski, president, Edyth Bush Charitable Foundation and current FPN chair:** I think that's right. The FPN was created out of need and timing. Florida is the fourth largest state in the United States, soon to be the third largest, with a population of 16 million people, growing to 25 million. The needs of Floridians grow each and every day, due to the unbridled growth, the lack of a modern taxation system based on a service sector economy, legislative term limits, and a lack of community on an individual and organizational level, and this includes the nonprofit sector and philanthropy. These needs and the potential for foundations to do more collectively than separately are the circumstances that created the FPN.

**Sherry Magill, president, Jessie Ball duPont Fund:** For the most part, Florida's public policy creation process omits any participation by the nonprofit or independent sector. In many ways, funders and organizations are responding to growing human need that is going unmet, but the public and its elected officials have unrealistic expectations of organized philanthropy and individual giving. The members of the Network feel the need to understand better what changes are occurring in Florida, what our capacity is, what we can and cannot do. We think the policy discussions could be enhanced with better information and better, more thoughtful, debate based upon research and not upon perceptions or ideology. We think

organized philanthropy has a leadership role to play in organizing this research and debate. Someone must inform the people's discretion and the policy-makers' discretion.

*NFF: How would you define the work of the FPN? How do its purpose and goals differ from, say, the Philanthropy and Nonprofit Leadership Center at Rollins College?*

**Hodding Carter III, president, John S. and James L. Knight Foundation:** Simply put, the Network wants to be the come-to and go-from place for developing philanthropy in Florida, to become the source and sponsor of valuable information for public discussion and governmental decision-making about the nonprofit world, and to contribute to the state's civic health in cooperation with the private and public sectors.

**Odahowski:** I see the purpose and goals of the FPN and a place like the Rollins College Center as complementary. The Network is a

Organizing and  
Nurturing  
Philanthropy

small group of foundations with objectives, but it cannot accomplish them on its own. The Center is a permanent place within Florida's oldest college to provide executive education to nonprofit and philanthropy, promote and provide research impacting Florida's nonprofits, and to act as a "neutral space" for individuals, nonprofits, philanthropy, public policy decision-makers, researchers, and others, to provide the infrastructure to Florida's nonprofit sector to be effective, efficient, and to be advocates for their organizations, locally and statewide.

**NFF:** *Who benefits from the work of the FPN?*

**Shack:** All residents of the state benefit from the nonprofit sector's work in improving the critical systems in the state, be it the provision of social services, the enhancement of education, security, or the support of the arts.

**Magill:** Also, municipal government, individual foundations, and nonprofits that use the public's money in the form of federal, state, and local government funds will benefit from the research the Network is generating.

**Odahowski:** But I think we may have to wait for a few more years to see such widespread effects.

At this time, the people who

benefit the most from the Network are the staff and trustees of foundations in Florida. Through the Network, we hope to show the staff and trustees of other foundations in the state that philanthropy is not just an inheritance, but also a legacy. Philanthropy need not be passive; it can be responsive, forward-thinking, and even a little edgy at times - on the issues facing the citizens of our state.

**NFF:** *What would you consider to be the greatest challenge the group has faced in establishing the Florida Philanthropic Network?*

**Magill:** I'd say the biggest challenge has been distinguishing between being a regional association of grantmakers (a RAG) - whose focus is primarily on grantmaking processes and best practices - and a group of Florida-based foundations that are



*Among the founders of the Florida Philanthropic Network are: (l-r) David Odahowski, Edyth Bush Charitable Foundation; Sherry Magill, Jessie Ball duPont Fund; Hodding Carter III, John S. and James L. Knight Foundation; Ruth Shack, Dade Community Foundation; and Steve Marcus, Health Foundation of South Florida.*

Photo by Laura Evans

concerned about how we protect and strengthen the sector, and how we encourage critical investment in the people of Florida, in an environment of welfare reform, devolution, and privatization.

**Carter:** We also have faced challenges in melding together our different organizational cultures, maintaining focus, and producing work products that our potential partners, the media, and the public will find to be valuable.

**Odahowski:** I've found the greatest challenge to be the actual creation of the organization and its ideals – and then “selling” that to our foundation trustees, other foundations, nonprofit organizations, public policy decision-makers, researchers, and interested citizens. The reaction has been positive, and often a good deal of surprise that Florida has not done this before.

**NFF:** *What do you perceive to be the risks involved as the Network matures, if any?*

**Odahowski:** We run the same risks that any start-up organization faces. Will we be able to maintain the ideas, energy, and resources to make a noted difference in the role of philanthropy in Florida? The power of inertia is almost overwhelming. In the book *From Good to Great*, this is called the “hedgehog effect.” If the Network keeps pushing upon the flywheel long enough, even though it may not appear to be making headway, once the fly wheel takes off, the momentum produces considerable results.

**Shack:** At some point in the not too distant future, the Network will need to open its membership, will need to be more accountable to the full philanthropic field and to the nonprofit sector. That openness invites differing points of view, challenges to the Network's status, and potential for a slipping away of the founders' intent.

**Magill:** The potential political fall-out in a state that is fragmented and highly politicized could be difficult.

**Carter:** As we continue, we run the risk of losing sight of our mission or, perhaps more likely, failing to attract the critical mass we need to have a significant impact on our stated objectives.

**NFF:** *What, if any, reservations did your board have about investing resources to establish the Network?*

**Shack:** Questions about advocacy, lobbying, and our speaking for all community foundations were raised, but the board overwhelmingly supported the concept and have applauded the intended results.

**Carter:** To this moment, the board has expressed no reservations, in large part, I expect, because our investment thus far has been relatively small as measured against our annual grant outlays.

**Odahowski:** There were plenty of reservations about providing funding to the Network. The Edyth Bush Charitable Foundation is the smallest private foundation in the Network. They asked why we should be part of a statewide effort when the problems of Central Florida are so great and we can barely take care of our own local needs. There was also a question of what the Network would take on as its issues and how they would be promoted, and how much time we would need to devote to it. Money was actually the least of the problems. Ultimately, however, we knew that the timing and the issues facing Florida were growing each day, and the Network offered us a way to promote a common statewide agenda, with philanthropy as an ally and participant, not just an observer.

**Magill:** The duPont Fund board had none. They see a direct link between the implications of devolution and shrinking public dollars and the public's expectations of the duPont Fund. They know well that the Fund can never sustain public programs, and that our proper role is one of catalyst. They worry that policymakers and elected officials see private money as the sustainable dollar, when we know otherwise. Helping educate the public and policymakers about what our capacity is, what our proper role is, and what we've learned over time about what works and what doesn't; as David said, they considered these outcomes worth the risk.

**NFF:** *What would you consider to be the Network's greatest success or accomplishment to date?*

**Magill:** I think it's an accomplishment that we came together in the first place. And our greatest success so far has been the Urban Institute report and conference on revenue maximization.

**Carter:** I agree. It's been a success that we have held together, navigated some rough water, and have managed to underwrite a couple of valuable undertakings.

**Odahowski:** The greatest success of the Network has been starting a statewide conversation about the role and responsibility of the nonprofit sector. It began with seven foundations, and now there are nine. It had its beginnings in small, safe, and secluded rooms, and now has moved to larger, public venues where others will test our opinions and our motives. It began with anecdotal observations, and now we have the beginnings of a research agenda.

**NFF:** *What progress would you like to see the Network make over the next few years?*

**Carter:** I want us to achieve greater clarity of common purpose and more consistency of action.

**Shack:** To have remained faithful to the original goals and to have kept the executives of each foundation at the table is a great

## *The Florida Philanthropic Network*

*The Florida Philanthropic Network began as an informal coalition before incorporating in January 2003. In summer 2003, David Odabowski was elected chair of the board, succeeding Joann Lighter, who had served as chair during the Network's early years.*

*In June 2003, the Network released a report it commissioned from the Washington, DC-based Urban Institute called "The Disposition of Federal Dollars in Florida's Social Services: Informing a Federal Funding Maximization Strategy." In November 2003, the Network will*

*release Philanthropy in the Sunshine State, a comprehensive look at statewide individual and foundation giving. (See [www.fpnetwork.org](http://www.fpnetwork.org))*

*The Florida Philanthropic Network welcomes as partners foundations committed to promoting the best interests of all Floridians. The Network is not a membership organization, but a group that has accepted the challenge of providing leadership for philanthropy in Florida. Partners are expected to contribute a minimum of \$5,000 (grant or gift) to help defray the Network's operating expenses.*

### *Founding Members*

*Allegheny Franciscan Foundation  
Joanne Olvera Lighter, president and chief executive  
Clearwater, Florida*

*Edyth Bush Charitable Foundation  
David Odabowski, president and chief executive  
Winter Park, Florida*

*Dade Community Foundation  
Ruth Shack, president  
Miami, Florida*

*Jessie Ball duPont Fund  
Sherry Magill, president  
Jacksonville, Florida*

*The Blue Foundation for a Healthy Florida  
Susan Towler, executive director  
Jacksonville, Florida*

*Health Foundation of South Florida  
Steven E. Marcus, president and chief executive  
Miami, Florida*

*John S. and James L. Knight Foundation  
Hodding Carter III, president and chief executive  
Miami, Florida*

*John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation  
Florida Office  
David Harris, director of regional policy and Florida  
philanthropy  
Jupiter, Florida*

### *Partners*

*Darden Restaurants Foundation  
Patricia DeYoung, assistant director and administrator  
Orlando, Florida*

accomplishment, and at the same time a huge challenge for the future. There is no other entity speaking for the state's third sector; we need to become sophisticated, clear in our message, and effective in our actions.

**NFF:** *If the governor or the legislature asked, "Why should we pay any attention to the Florida Philanthropic Network?", what would be your response?*

**Shack:** "Mr. Governor, as you continue to privatize government, as you look to business to assume many of government's responsibilities, that which government won't do, that which business can't do will fall to the safety net of the civic society - the nonprofit sector. We represent that sector. Our boards are comprised of business people connected to the several communities in the state and we have relationships with government at all levels. It is to your advantage to use us and our expertise, our ability to study, compile, and provide critical information."

**Magill:** "Mr. Governor, if you have any interest in the future health and welfare of Floridians, and if you're serious about public-private partnerships being the wave of the future, it's important to listen to what one of your major partners has learned about human communities and about what kind of resources it brings to the table."

**Carter:** "We are an honest broker of information about matters of intense public relevance and the potential inspirer of significantly higher independent sector financial participation in problem-solving around those matters."

**Odahowski:** "You need to pay attention to every serious effort to synthesize the needs and the hopes of Floridians. The Florida Philanthropic Network is just that kind of effort. It is unique because Florida has not had a collective resource for the explanation of the issues affecting nonprofits. That, by their very nature, nonprofits provide the social goods and services that business and government cannot or will not provide is also a reason why you should listen to the Network and similar groups."

**NFF:** *What have you learned from your participation in the FPN that has informed how your foundation approaches its grantmaking and non-grantmaking work?*

**Carter:** We've learned that it is easier to talk about partnership and cooperative action than to achieve it, but that even limited success is worth every minute of the effort.

**Odahowski:** It is often easier to begin a journey alone, but in the new reality of post-9/11 Florida, we all recognize that the journey that we are on to improve the lives of Floridians is threatened by domestic as well as international events. If we use our resources successfully, we will make progress and hopefully complete the journey we set out on to improve our own foundations, the Network, and the human condition in Florida.

**Shack:** The joy of working with like-minded colleagues around the state strengthens what we have been doing in the Miami-Dade community and validates our belief that non-grantmaking work is a value added.

**Magill:** One of the ways the FPN aligns with the duPont Fund's focus areas is by helping to "organize and nurture philanthropy." If we haven't learned anything over the past ten years, we've learned that the duPont Fund can't make anything stick by itself. Our natural partners are other foundations, and eventually individual donors who have not yet decided permanently on how to give their dollars away. So, the Network allows us to know intimately, let's say, some of the best funders in the state. Together, we've carved out big ambitions, and our determination to get to know other thoughtful people laboring in this vineyard, I think, is one that will help us learn about how to make better, more strategic investments. These dollars are just flat-out too precious to waste.

Organizing and  
Nurturing  
Philanthropy

notes  
from  
the  
field

*Jessie Ball duPont Fund*

One Independent Drive, Suite 1400

Jacksonville, FL 32204

904-353-0890 - 800-252-3452

Facsimile: 904-353-3870

[www.dupontfund.org](http://www.dupontfund.org)

*President*

Sherry P. Magill

*Program Staff:*

Sally Douglass

Sharon Greene

Edward King Jr.

*Credits:*

This issue of Notes from the Field was written by

Tracy Constantine of CCGI, Inc., Durham, NC,

and edited by Mary Kress Littlepage of

KBT & Associates, Jacksonville, FL

Design provided by

Glenn Ivie Advertising, Art & Design, Jacksonville, FL

Printing by The Hartley Press, Inc., Jacksonville, FL



One Independent Drive, Suite 1400  
Jacksonville, FL 32204  
904-353-0890 - 800-252-3452  
Facsimile: 904-353-3870  
[www.dupontfund.org](http://www.dupontfund.org)