Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you, Scot, for that gracious, generous introduction.

I would like to thank the Funders’ Network board, Ben Starrett and his outstanding team, and the conference co-chairs—fabulous hosts, both—Mary Skelton Roberts and Orson Watson.

Congratulations to my friend Pat Jenny from the New York Community Trust—our outstanding Nicholas P. Bollman Awardee.

Congratulations to the Funders’ Network on this, the 15th anniversary of your founding.

For a decade and a half, this inspired, impressive group has wired together a web of national and place-based funders linked by our dedication to smart growth and more sustainable development.

Your extraordinary legacy of accomplishment can be seen in communities across America—region by region, city by city, neighborhood by neighborhood, block by block.

And so, thank you, all.

I’m delighted to see so many old friends—and a few new ones—at the forefront of this work.

And I’m looking forward to a candid conversation about where we are—as a sector and a society—and about how we move forward, for and with the people and communities we’re committed to serving.

One of these communities, of course, is right here:

Greater Boston—home to 7.5 million people.

The Boston metro is one of America’s most historic, affluent, vibrant regions. Home to the Big Dig, Boston Pops, and the Boston Marathon. It's one of the country’s highest-end housing markets, too.

Say what you will about Boston—and as a New Yorker, I can say plenty—but this region is blessed with good governance, an accessible, reliable infrastructure, and strong institutions—from schools and hospitals, to arts spaces and cultural places, to manufacturing and commercial hubs. Of course, not everyone has access to these extraordinary assets—or even to basic ones.
But in strong, resilient, well-resourced communities like Boston, organizations like many of yours are helping to fill the gap.

From our friends at the Barr Foundation and Massachusetts Smart Growth Alliance to the Citizens’ Housing and Planning Association to the Massachusetts Affordable Housing Alliance, you are doing remarkable work—and making a meaningful difference.

But, if you'll indulge me for a moment, let’s contrast Boston with another icon of American urbanism—and another city that I love.


In Detroit, communities are suffering, ostensibly because of the same forces and factors that help Boston flourish.

What Boston has in infrastructure and governance, Detroit has been lacking.

What Boston has in robust civil society, Detroit has gone without, during the recent past anyway.

In Boston, the for-purpose sector is worried about gentrification and about newcomers pushing vulnerable communities out. Rightly so.

In Detroit, vulnerable populations are trapped on the inside. In Detroit, our challenge is inviting newcomers in.

And yet, for all of the differences between Boston and Detroit, in our abbreviated tale of two cities underserved communities in both places are actually facing a similar challenge—the defining challenge of our time: Inequality.

Inequality in access, in opportunity, in condition.

Historic inequality—when it comes to race, when it comes to culture.

And what this inequality has meant, in turn, is not only that some people are rich, almost beyond comprehension, but that others remain unconscionably poor.

What it has meant is that justice is rationed, that representation is distorted, that opportunity is denied.

Think about this in a slightly more concrete way.

Today, the geography of poverty and opportunity has been upended and we in turn face a new spectrum of challenges ourselves.

We all understand in the abstract that the “reoccupation” of the central city is pushing out the people who used to live in vibrant urban cores.

But for so many of us, this isn’t some sterile theory.
Because these are places where we lived and worked for years.

Places like my old community on 138th Street.

Here’s what we know from social science: people move where they can find jobs, affordable housing, and the services they need to lead their lives.

And in many regions—including, increasingly unaffordable neighborhoods like Midtown, Detroit—these places aren’t in the hearts of cities. Not anymore.

As a result, people’s challenges are compounded by lengthy and costly commutes to work and by a lack of reliable, affordable public transportation, and by an absence of basic health care and social services that are more fully available and established in today’s vital and vibrant neighborhoods.

What we’ve seen at the Ford Foundation is that as communities are driven out of their neighborhoods, America is starting to look more like the rest of the world.

After all, America never has held a monopoly on pushing poor people to the margins. This is a global phenomenon.

As our “innovation” focuses more on making cities more appealing for boomers and millennials and less on the low-income communities that used to call them home, the American experience is increasingly bifurcated—some enjoying gain and others increasingly enduring pain.

And this is one of the many reasons why we, the American people, especially in communities of color, see less social mobility than at any time in recent memory.

It’s why the rungs on the ladder up feel further and further apart.

And so, here in this hall, we need to see ourselves as part of a global movement to even out inequality until there is equality—to fight injustice until there is justice.

We cannot only look at what’s happening in the United States for inspiration and ideas.

We have a lot to learn from courageous visionaries in other parts of the world, too.

Now, leaders from many walks of life are calling for solutions—in housing, transportation, economic and workforce development.

In education and health care.

In numerous other areas.

From the President to the Pope, inequality has been at the top of the mind and, in some cases, high atop the agenda.
Here in this room, today, we have hundreds of champions for equality and justice. Thought leaders and agitators who are trying to promote inclusive economic growth.

We applaud your efforts. We admire and appreciate your work.

Because we know that we all have to pull together if we are going to address our complex problems.

And you’re already illuminating the path forward.

There is the Metropolitan Planning Council of Chicago, which works to strengthen cooperation among multiple actors on matters of mutual interest, like creating affordable housing.

You provide a forum for public, private, and civic actors to come together on regional initiatives—and then set aside the competition for resources that we’ve too often seen in communities that share a regional home.

On the West Coast, we have the Bay Area Transit-Oriented Affordable Housing Fund, a regional development fund that provides financing for affordable housing and other vital community services near transit.

And from a policy standpoint, the Urban Institute’s fantastic initiative, *Work Support Strategies*, is devising effective new ways to streamline the processes through which states and counties provide a range of benefits to families.

All of these innovators—and many of you are here—are offering new ideas, and new best practices.

You’re offering important lessons about what a more effective effort to expand opportunity and eradicate poverty can look like.

And it’s guidance we’d be well served to heed.

But before we invite Scot back to the stage and before we open the dialogue, I want to bring this full circle and offer just one closing thought:

Delta Airlines.

Today, Delta Airlines offers eight direct flights from Logan to Detroit.

And I hope you’ll either take one of them or an alternative flight to Detroit from wherever you call home.

Boston is a unique place—a special, seminal place in the psyches of all Americans.

Its people and neighborhoods need our support, as do people and neighborhoods all across the United States and around the world.

But for those of us who care about social justice—for those of us who care about environmentally sustainable, socially equitable, economically prosperous regions, Detroit is where the action is.
Detroit is where we need experimentation and innovation, where we need new partnerships and greater leverage, where we need to incubate new ideas, and then work in common purpose with policymakers to put them in place and give them a try.

Because, as many of us have said before, “As Detroit goes, the country goes.”

As you know, at Ford, we're matching words with action on this front.

We and The Kresge Foundation are contributing to what we hope will be a balanced, workable plan for recovery and renewal as are our partners:

- The Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan;
- The William Davidson Foundation;
- The Fred A. and Barbara M. Erb Family Foundation;
- The Hudson-Webber Foundation;
- The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation;
- The McGregor Fund; and
- The Charles Stewart Mott Foundation.

Our plan is based on a big, creative idea.

We’re optimistic about its prospects for success, because this effort builds on the longstanding work of many funders, including the Skillman Foundation.

We believe—with every fiber of our being—that our contributions married with those from the state and others will help the city emerge anew.

And, at the same time, our focus on Detroit represents a larger point, too.

Because, yes, this is meaningful for Detroit, but it also is a metaphor for what philanthropy ought to be doing.

Taking risks.

Taking on complicated challenges that others cannot solve on their own.

Stretching and pushing forward.

Leaving our comfort zones in our dust.
We, as members of the Funders’ Network, are enormously privileged. We are the stewards of precious and rare social-venture capital and we owe it to ourselves to earn that privilege and to demonstrate with action that we are worthy of it.

This is our challenge. In Detroit and in cities across America and around the globe.

Let’s meet it. Let’s master it.

Together.

And with that, Scot, shall we get our discussion started?

Welcome once again. Thank you, all, very much.