CHAIR & PRESIDENT MESSAGE

The Overbrook Foundation, along with many of its partners in the field of philanthropy, continues to support organizations bending the arc of history toward justice. However stubborn and resistant and slow the pace of change may sometimes seem, the Foundation is dedicated to its mission to advance human rights and conserve the natural environment. Now well into its eighth decade of private philanthropic engagement, The Overbrook Foundation grantmaking program, while remaining progressive in nature, evolves to support the most important issues of the era. This year again, the climate crisis and the threats to our democracy remain at the top of the Foundation’s agenda.

The Democracy Crisis

In the short term, the country faces state and national elections in November. Nonpartisan efforts to get out the vote, educate voters, reduce voter suppression and protect the voting process will be supported by Overbrook grantmaking in 2020. However, the challenges to democracy extend beyond any concerns about the 2020 election cycle and efforts to ensure full participation by eligible citizens in this year’s voting process.

Over the coming decade, the Foundation is committed to ensuring the fullest participation of the Rising American Electorate, the rapidly growing group of unmarried women, people of color and young people who together constitute a majority of voting-eligible citizens. The U.S. is rapidly shifting to becoming a majority-minority country; i.e., a country where the population is less than 50% white. This shift has already occurred in Hawaii, New Mexico, California, Texas and Nevada. Over the next decade Maryland, Georgia, Florida, Arizona, New York, New Jersey, Mississippi and Louisiana are likely to become majority-minority with the entire country predicted to make that transition by 2043.

This shift in power offers opportunities for democracy in America, and the Foundation’s grantmaking will support the efforts of grantees during the transition. Traditional centers of power in the U.S. will fight to maintain their domination. Battles over the census, gerrymandering and efforts to encourage or suppress voting will be a continuing theme throughout the coming decade. Enormous flows of money into the political system will distort the political process and limit the ability of less resourced candidates to successfully compete in elections. The likelihood of political parties using historical racial animus to pit groups against each other is high. Attacks on minorities are almost certain to grow. Underrepresented groups will continue organizing to demand full participation in the American democratic process.

The Climate Crisis

At the same time, the planet faces the threats created by the climate crisis and the rapidly closing window of opportunity for reducing, at least, its more extreme impacts. The Foundation’s Environment Program seeks out solutions to environmental challenges ranging from flooding caused by rising seas and more violent storms to extreme drought and the massive forest fires
science now confirms are on the horizon—or, as in the case of 2019 fires in Australia, California, the Amazon, Congo and Siberia, have already occurred. A national consensus must be forged quickly if the U.S. is to contribute to solutions to the climate crisis.

**The Role of The Overbrook Foundation**

Where does The Overbrook Foundation play a role in facing these existentially critical challenges to the country? Its longstanding mission to “support organizations advancing human rights and conserving the natural environment” stands as a call to use its resources to tackle these challenges to the environment and to our democracy. Both the Human Rights Program and the Environment Program have recognized the important leadership of youth-led organizations and movements in addressing these challenges. The Foundation will continue to support the efforts of young activists who are committed to human rights, social justice, and global efforts to slow the pace of the climate crisis. Of particular note in 2019 was the unprecedented collaboration across activists, movement leaders, community leaders and organizations during this most difficult period.

As we move into this next decade Overbrook’s Directors will decide how the Foundation can most effectively direct its key resources—money, staff and reputation—to further its mission. Beginning in 2020, Staff and Directors will begin a review of existing programs and an exploration of possible modifications for the Foundation’s grantmaking over the next several years. Overbrook will continue its support of current initiatives as Board and staff move through the planning process to determine future focus areas. While the Foundation continues to discourage letters of inquiry, it remains very interested in learning about organizations and projects that could be candidates for future Foundation grantmaking and collaboration. Staff will continue to invite proposals on a limited basis as opportunities believed to clearly match Foundation priorities are identified.

The Foundation’s Board and Staff are committed to the continued support of its Human Rights and Environment Program grantees whose work boldly advances social justice and environmental sustainability in this moment when their work and communities are facing such great threats.

Sincerely,

Isaiah Orozco

Chair of the Board of Directors

Stephen A. Foster

President and CEO