



**OUR STATE OF  
GENEROSITY**

Powered by the Johnson Center for Philanthropy



**JOHNSON CENTER**  
AT GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY

Dear Reader,

When 1972 dawned, Michigan's philanthropic sector was significant, but largely unorganized. The sector was divided into subsectors of health, education, human services, arts and culture, and religion, none of which communicated well with the others. Michigan's government did little to encourage its givers and its volunteers. And higher education in the state, which had taught about the business and government sectors for years, offered no courses of study on the philanthropic, nonprofit, or voluntary sectors. By the end of 2012, Michigan had created four organizations: the Council of Michigan Foundations (philanthropy); the Michigan Nonprofit Association (nonprofits and volunteerism); the Michigan Community Service Commission (coordinating state and federal government with nonprofits and volunteers); and the Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy at Grand Valley State University (teaching and research about philanthropy, nonprofits and volunteers). These organizations serve as an interlocking infrastructure for Michigan's critically important social sector and have become national leaders in the understanding, growth and improvement of philanthropy, nonprofit services, volunteerism and supportive public policy. How Michigan "went from 0 to 60" in the innovative creation and pacesetting operation of this infrastructure is not just interesting history; it is critically important to the future prosperity and quality of life of all 9 million Michiganders. The story of these 40 years of bold and persistent experimentation must therefore be captured, told and understood by current leaders in order to assure future national leadership and continued statewide success.



I was born in a nonprofit hospital; educated in public schools, a private college, and a private university; was married in a church; have used nonprofit human services when adopting children; partake of exhibitions at public museums; enjoy wilderness areas preserved by public-private partnership land conservancies; and will probably die with the aid of a nonprofit organization like Hospice. These nonprofit organizations, supported by philanthropic dollars and sustained by volunteers, are utterly central to the high quality of my life. And their health is utterly dependent on the effective operation of the infrastructure organizations that support them, such as the Council of Michigan Foundations, the Michigan Nonprofit Association,

# Letter from the Editor

the Michigan Community Service Commission, and the Johnson Center for Philanthropy at GVSU.

In Michigan, as in the rest of the United States, we turn to the Private Sector to create wealth. We turn to the Public Sector to create law and order. We turn to the Social Sector to create the very fabric of our lives. And to maximize the performance of Michigan's Social Sector, we turn to the four infrastructure organizations to protect, coordinate, and promote all the good that Social Sector organizations can do.

George Santayana famously said that "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." In the case of the development of Michigan's four infrastructure organizations, however, those who cannot remember the past that created and nurtured them are condemned to lose their current effectiveness. Current leaders MUST understand why the infrastructure organizations were founded, how they were nurtured, the ways in which they have collaborated, and the reasons they have taken the reins of national leadership in their fields. If current leaders don't learn these lessons, they will fritter away 40 years of painstaking development, and risk having to start from scratch in recreating these vital infrastructure institutions. OSoG captures the central lessons, and shares them with all--not only Michigan's nonprofit and philanthropic leaders--but also their counterparts all across the nation.

We don't need to remember all of the lessons OSoG has preserved, or everything it has to teach us, so long as we don't mind a future in which we are a poorer, meaner, and more selfish State.

In 1862, Abraham Lincoln said that "We shall nobly save--or meanly lose--the last, best hope of earth." In Michigan, on a smaller scale, we face the same choice today. We could squander by forgetting and discarding the enormous and hard-won achievements of the past 40 years--but far better to remember, understand, preserve and nurture them for a future made brighter by the gifts we have inherited from the past. OSoG makes possible that remembrance, understanding, preservation, and nurturing, and therefore brightens the future for us all.

Best,



Joel

