

# The Power of the Entertainment Industry

An Interview with Nicole Sexton, President and Chief Executive Officer, Entertainment Industry Foundation (EIF)

**EDITORS' NOTE** *Nicole Sexton has been in her current role with EIF since October 2017. Prior to this, she was the Chief of Staff of the Central Park Conservancy after having served as Executive Outreach Director of The ONE Campaign. Additionally, she helped to establish the FEED Foundation as its first Executive Officer and has remained on the Board. Sexton received her education at Yale University, Georgetown University and Southern Methodist University.*



Nicole Sexton

**INSTITUTION BRIEF** *Founded in 1942, the Entertainment Industry Foundation (eifoundation.org) is a multifaceted organization that occupies a unique place in the world of philanthropy. By mobilizing and leveraging the powerful voice and creative talents of the entertainment industry, as well as cultivating the support of organizations (public and private) and philanthropists committed to social responsibility, EIF builds awareness and raises funds, developing and enhancing programs on the local, national and global level that facilitate positive social change.*

**Will you discuss the history and heritage of the Entertainment Industry Foundation and how EIF has evolved?**

We are celebrating our 80th anniversary this year, and I am pleased to say that EIF is providing support just as our founders, Samuel Goldwyn, Humphrey Bogart, Joan Crawford, James Cagney, and the Warner Brothers, envisioned in 1942. They committed to use the power of the entertainment industry to help those in need. In the early days of

EIF, that included granting to wartime agencies like the USO and helping to eradicate polio. Today, we have created campaigns that focus on disaster relief, health, educational and social issues. The pressing issues of the day may have changed, but our commitment to philanthropy and the reliability of our community to step up in times of need remain firmly in place.

**How do you define the mission and purpose of the Entertainment Industry Foundation?**

EIF is the entertainment community's trusted partner in philanthropy. By mobilizing and leveraging the powerful voices and creative

talents of the entertainment industry and cultivating the support of organizations and philanthropists committed to social responsibility, EIF builds awareness and raises funds, developing and enhancing programs on the local, national, and global levels to facilitate positive social change.



Nicole Sexton with Maria Shriver

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In addition, EIF helps artists, athletes, and influencers expand their philanthropic footprint by providing fiscal sponsorship services that increase their impact and leverage their platforms for social good. These philanthropic partners have launched programs to combat the immediate needs created by the coronavirus while also addressing perennially important causes like equality, social justice, public health, mental wellness, disaster relief, inclusion, and youth advocacy.

**Will you highlight the Entertainment Industry Foundation's programs and areas of focus?**

Defy:Disaster is the entertainment community's collective and immediate response to natural disasters. It is dedicated to providing aid to survivors and communities affected by natural disasters to help them recover and rebuild. Defy:Disaster has responded to more than 40 natural disasters, including wildfires, hurricanes, and the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020, the program and its fund partners supporting disaster response granted over \$14 million to more than 100 organizations.

Delivering Jobs was created to forge one million employment and leadership opportunities by 2025 for the 81 percent of adults with autism, intellectual and/or developmental differences who do not have a paying job. Our collaboration with Autism Speaks, Best Buddies, and Special Olympics challenges all businesses to identify ways they can incorporate people with neurodifferences into their diversity and inclusion plans to build the workforce of the future. Our aim is to ensure that this population has access to a minimum of one percent of all employment and leadership opportunities and to empower Human Resources professionals to invest in the long-term success of all employees.

The EIF Careers Program (EIFCP) aims to create a more diverse talent pipeline into film and television careers. In collaboration with Crewvie, a global hiring platform of entertainment professionals, and with funding from the James Irvine Foundation and Best Buy Foundation, EIFCP presents qualified talent for entry-level roles from esteemed career pathway programs like Hollywood CPR, ManifestWorks, L.A. Mayor Eric Garcetti's Evolve Entertainment Fund, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences' Academy Gold Rising, and the Television Academy Foundation. As founding partners, NBCUniversal, Sony Pictures Entertainment, Disney General Entertainment,

and WarnerMedia are looking to EIFCP to hire and advance candidates of color, those from low-income communities, and women.

Stand Up To Cancer raises funds to accelerate the pace of cancer research, providing new therapies to patients quickly and saving lives now. By leveraging the assets of the entertainment industry, SU2C generates awareness and educates the public about cancer prevention, early detection, and treatment options. SU2C's collaborative, scientifically rigorous, treatment-focused research model has revolutionized cancer research helping more people with cancer become long-term survivors.

**How critical are metrics to measure the impact of the Entertainment Industry Foundation's work?**

Successfully hitting campaign targets is meaningless if it does not help us achieve our vision and translate into positive change for our partners and those they serve. We strive to build measurement tracking that assesses the impact of our campaigns by creating processes that allow us to collect more data consistently over time.

**The Entertainment Industry Foundation has an experienced and engaged board of directors. How valuable is it in leading EIF to have such a strong and supportive board?**

EIF's Board of Directors is comprised of influential and philanthropically committed leaders from the creative community. In times of crisis, they create a pathway for collaboration for our entire industry. In 2020, as high school graduation ceremonies across the country were canceled due to the pandemic, EIF, XQ Institute, and the LeBron James Family Foundation hosted a joyful, one-hour prime-time special paying tribute to the Class of 2020. The nation's biggest media companies joined forces to celebrate their achievement. Broadcast outlets ABC, CBS, FOX, and NBC, with social media and streaming platforms Facebook, Instagram, PEOPLE, and YouTube, simulcasted the show on Saturday, May 16, 2020, to honor more than 3 million high school seniors across the country. Graduate Together: America Honors the High School Class of 2020 was nominated for a prestigious Peabody Award, recognizing it as some of the most compelling and empowering content released in broadcasting and streaming media during 2020. Without the leadership among



*Nicole Sexton with Lin-Manuel Miranda*

our Board, this memorable event would not have been possible. Throughout the years, blockbuster television specials, made possible by our Board, have raised millions of dollars for people in need around the world.

**Did you always know that you were attracted to this type of work and that this was your passion?**

I've always been attracted to campaigning as a way to mobilize public concern to achieve a community or political goal. It is a public motivational exercise. When I realized the power of collaborative campaigning as an instrument for social change, I was hooked. By convening multiple organizations concerned about an issue, larger audiences become engaged, creating the opportunity for lasting social change. There is no better work.

**What are your key priorities for the Entertainment Industry Foundation as you look to the future?**

We must substantially grow our team to build capacity and expertise, including new sector knowledge and skills in impact measurement, operations, and technology. Our plan to perform increasingly cross-cutting and systemic work also requires us to integrate our teams and develop greater collaboration across our staff.

As we offer more sophisticated and collaborative services, we will need to build more robust systems and processes that enable us to communicate more effectively between teams, manage relationships, serve partners and track outputs and outcomes. ●