

Innovation for the Next 100 Years

An Interview with Judith Rodin, Ph.D.,
President, The Rockefeller Foundation

EDITORS' NOTE Dr. Judith Rodin joined the foundation in 2005 and was previously President of the University of Pennsylvania and Provost of Yale University. Dr. Rodin has actively participated in influential global forums, including the World Economic Forum, the Council on Foreign Relations, Clinton Global Initiative, and the United Nations General Assembly. She is also a member of the African Development Bank's High Level Panel and a



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board member of the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa. In November 2012, New York Governor Andrew Cuomo named Dr. Rodin to Co-Chair the NYS 2100 Commission on long-term resilience following Superstorm Sandy. Dr. Rodin was the first woman named to lead an Ivy League institution and is the first woman to serve as The Rockefeller Foundation's president in its 100-year history. A research psychologist by training, she was one of the pioneers of the behavioral medicine and health psychology movements. Dr. Rodin is the author of more than 200 academic articles and has written or co-written 12 books. She has received 18 honorary doctorate degrees and has been named one of Crain's 50 Most Powerful Women in New York three years in a row. Dr. Rodin is a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania and earned her Ph.D. in Psychology from Columbia University.

ORGANIZATION BRIEF The Rockefeller Foundation (www.rockefellerfoundation.org) is one of the world's leading philanthropic organizations. Marking its centennial in 2013, the foundation supports and shapes innovations to strengthen resilience to risks and ensure more equitable growth around the world. The foundation accomplishes these goals through initiatives to address climate change in poor communities, strengthen global health systems, catalyze the field of impact investing, mobilize an agricultural revolution in Africa, and shape smart, sustainable transportation policies in the United States.

What is the heritage of The Rockefeller Foundation and how have you worked to maintain it since coming onboard in 2005?

John D. Rockefeller invented modern American philanthropy with his view of it being a global endeavor. Carnegie and Rockefeller

were working at the same time and doing extraordinary thinking – there is a lot of dialogue between the two of them. Rockefeller wanted to cure problems at their root cause and search for finalities. He said, “Don't put Band-Aids on weeping wounds.”

So he tried to differentiate his view of philanthropy from his view of charity, though he was an extraordinarily charitable person and tithed all his life.

He viewed philanthropy as searching for the cause and working towards the solution of problems.

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He also had an enormous perspective on the world, so some of his earliest philanthropy was global. That was a differentiator and for a long time, the foundation was giving more foreign aid than the U.S. government.

When I came onboard in 2005, we were looking towards our centennial and we thought it was a critical moment to ask, as Rockefeller was trying to solve the problems of the 20th century, what are the problems of the 21st century and how can we direct our attention, philanthropic resources, and influence towards solving some of those problems?

The world is so deeply interconnected and things happen at a more accelerated pace, so there are more people in more places moving more quickly with ideas moving more quickly.

Globalization was being debated and we didn't want to decide whether it was good or bad but instead look at what is both good about it and what problems are being produced by it.

Of the good things, we decided to make sure that more people in more places around the world gain the opportunity to take advantage of those good things. This led to a real focus on equitable growth.

We also wanted to recognize that not every bad thing can be predicted or even mitigated, so we want to make sure we're building resilience against those shocks that are going to come, be it climate related or financial.

So against Rockefeller's original mission, which hasn't changed, we reframed our goals towards building greater resilience and more equitable growth, and defined the issue areas that we see as most compelling within those two goals.

What are the issue areas you defined and how do you maintain a broad focus that makes sure you have the desired impact?

We have developed a sophisticated internal scanning function and we work with external partners to do scenario planning. We do a lot of forecasting and scanning for global trends, so that within each of the issue areas, we can choose where the dynamic opportunities are, because they're vast in terms of the world's problems, particularly with a global perspective.

We're developing initiatives that are at the intersection of critically important properties and that have some dynamic movement where we can create a tipping point or a strategic advantage.

The four issue areas we chose are:

- revalue ecosystems, where our perspective is helping identify the role that natural systems play in human, economic, and personal/social well-being, which is different than a conservation approach;
- advance health, where we focus on promoting advances and incentives that increase both nutrition and overall wellness;
- secure livelihoods, working to improve opportunities for more people in more places around the world and what specific interventions are needed, such as jobs and security;

• transform cities, as there are now more people living in cities than in rural areas for the first time in the world and we're seeing the increasing explosion of population in cities largely in the developing world. Most of those cities are not prepared for the kind of demographic growth they are experiencing. We're looking at how we can transform cities to take advantage of all of the things that attract people there and build into them opportunities for growth that is more equitable while also building resilience in those cities.

In areas of the world such as Africa, do you need to have people on site or are you partnering in the region?

We have an Africa office in Nairobi; we have a Southeast Asian office in Bangkok; and we have a conference facility in Italy to touch Europe. In each of those, we have trained staff and a lot of intervention capacity to run projects from the ground.

Except for those locations, when we're in a country deeply, we either find a project management grantee or co-locate with a grantee.

What metrics have you put in place to track impact?

We have built a robust evaluation capacity here for two reasons: for starters, in philanthropy, we don't want to wait until the end to know how it's working. We're learning, along with the grantees and often with the beneficiaries, what is working. We can then make mid-course corrections if things aren't working. We can also tell whether the environment has changed in any way that is making us want to do main course corrections or whether the on-the-ground work somehow isn't achieving what it was expected to achieve.

The only way that works well is if you set clear goals at the outset. If we want to impact one million lives in Africa through technology related jobs, we know our goal and our target population, so we know what we're measuring.

We also want to understand the output so, in the shorter term, we'll evaluate if the training programs are effective and if the global multinationals or governments are hiring these kids. Once you are clear about your goal, your metrics are easy.

The second reason we monitor and measure is because philanthropic capital ought to be risk capital, so we want to take greater risks. These are tax-privileged dollars and we don't have the short-term factors that other sectors do, so we should take more risks.

At the size and scale of the foundation, how important has it been to maintain an innovative culture?

The tagline for our centennial is "Innovation for the Next 100 Years," which builds on our belief that so much of what The Rockefeller Foundation did in the prior 100 years was to push the leading edge of innovation.

It helped create the field of public health because it recognized and innovated around the idea that not all illness could be solved by medical solutions alone. Education and sanitation were also involved; all things that now seem so obvious to us.

It also involved innovation in the green revolution with the idea of what you could achieve initially by cross-breeding wheat, but backed by the innovation of recognizing that you could take that and convince governments to change their practices regarding land-use patterns and property rights in certain countries.

So the focus of the foundation has been to think about products, processes, markets, and organizations as potential targets for innovation. We have elevated and animated that today in three ways:

- we're looking for and funding innovators and innovation;
- we're trying to turn innovation practices on ourselves and how we operate;
- we're trying to help transfer the really strong learning in innovation, particularly in innovation processes, that are being developed in the private sector to the social sector.

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We're excited to deepen people's understanding about resilience as the critical buzzword for the next century. It means understanding how to rebound more quickly, how to fail more safely, and not take the whole system down, be it a financial or climate shock.

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What do you do differently to build successful relationships in other countries?

We do a lot of listening; we don't think that all the great ideas come from within these walls. We want to be open to the ideas of everyone, especially the beneficiaries but also the governments.

A lot of foundations don't partner with government. They feel their funding of an NGO is in opposition to what government is doing.

But The Rockefeller Foundation's approach includes partnering with every sector. Sometimes those sectors are our funding partners and sometimes they're our grantees. We both give money to governments and also partner with government on projects. But we

also partner with the private sector to effect change and impact lives. This flexibility has made us a trusted entity.

Is the talent still coming into this industry the way you had hoped?

Yes. Even in business schools, the students are seeking out more opportunities to enter social enterprise.

Also, we create entrepreneurs here. Good people move on to other organizations, but I take pride in our being a launching pad.

We've also been working on accelerating the field of impact investing or double bottom line investing, so we're getting a lot of people that might normally go to an investment bank coming here to work on that piece of it.

At the meta level, more people are looking to blend their social and financial goals, so this is a great place to be.

What is your focus to make sure the foundation continues on the right track?

We recently completed a year-long analysis on changes in the global trends and on aligning the organizational structure to the goals we're trying to accomplish. It will now be critical to implement that strategic and organizational realignment, so just as we monitor and evaluate the work, we're monitoring and evaluating ourselves.

Our resilience work was initially conducted with Asian Cities Climate Change Resilience Network and also involved work we were doing in Africa on building resilience to climate change, particularly among poor rural communities.

However, we have also found the opportunity to approach it at home. We were deeply engaged with New Orleans after Katrina; we're currently working with the folks that have received Gulf Coast restoration money on building resilience along the entire Gulf Coast; and I was asked by Governor Cuomo to chair his commission on New York State's recovery from Superstorm Sandy.

We're excited to deepen people's understanding about resilience as the critical buzzword for the next century. It means understanding how to rebound more quickly, how to fail more safely, and not take the whole system down, be it a financial or climate shock.

Too often we think more about disaster recovery and too little about how to rebound when the disaster occurs by building in advance.

Do you ever step back and celebrate the foundation's success?

The centennial is a celebration but also it's about using everything we have learned to contribute even more over the next 100 years.

We're producing six books, each written by a historian, and we have an amazing archive center. The books will focus on the history of Rockefeller's philanthropy and impact in agriculture and health. They'll be less about the man and more about the interaction between what philanthropy could produce in terms of accelerated change and the issues that were occurring in each decade of the last century. We can really learn from our history for a successful second century. ●