

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 25, 2015

CONTACT:
Emily Gardner
emily@spitfirestrategies.com
804-519-5915

The Nathan Cummings Foundation Taps Sharon Alpert as Next President and CEO

Accomplished foundation leader brings decades of experience working across sectors to link environmental and social justice goals and a deep commitment to family philanthropy

New York, NY – Sharon Alpert will become the Nathan Cummings Foundation’s fourth president and first female leader, announced Adam Cummings, the foundation’s board chair. Ms. Alpert comes to the 25-year-old multi-generational family foundation from the Surdna Foundation, where, over 11 years, she rose from associate program officer to program director to her current position as the vice president of programs and strategic initiatives. She will assume her role as president and CEO of the Nathan Cummings Foundation, and ex-officio member of the board of trustees, in November 2015.



“In our search for a President and CEO, we looked for a leader who will foster a culture of collaboration, advance our strategic direction, and reflect a personal passion for our mission,” said Cummings. “In Sharon, we found all three. Her decades of experience, keen focus on creative and collaborative philanthropy, and excellent management abilities will move the foundation forward into the next phase of our work.”

Ms. Alpert has more than 20 years of experience in the philanthropic, environmental, and community development fields as well as the private sector. She began her career supporting leaders doing groundbreaking work on environmental justice. Throughout her career, she has worked to encourage collaboration among diverse stakeholders and foster interdisciplinary solutions. Under Sharon’s leadership, Surdna refreshed strategies across all of its programs, redesigned its grants management office, and launched a new communications department. She also drove new board initiatives to transform program oversight and expand mission-related investing.

“The Surdna Foundation’s significant loss is the Nathan Cummings Foundation’s extraordinary gain,” reflected Jocelyn Downie, Chair of the Board of Directors of the Surdna Foundation. “Sharon has been a wonderful partner for the Board throughout her time at Surdna. Where Surdna is now with respect to a strong sense of mission, a clear vision for our programmatic strategies, and a flexible but steady dedication to our strategic plan is in no small measure a testament to Sharon. We will miss her a great deal but are truly delighted that she is moving to lead a foundation we respect so much.”

--- more---

Ms. Alpert's decades of work at the intersection of inequality and environmental issues make her a natural fit to lead the Nathan Cummings Foundation's efforts to build a socially and economically just society. The foundation provides approximately \$24 million in grants annually to efforts aimed at addressing inequality and climate change, with approaches focused on arts and culture, constituency building, disruptive ideas and religious traditions, and contemplative practices. The foundation also supports a fellowship program that annually grants three visionaries \$100,000 each to turn an inspired idea in the field of social or economic justice into a game-changing reality.

"I am deeply honored to be chosen to lead the Nathan Cummings Foundation in finding solutions to systemic inequality, addressing the causes and impacts of climate change, and exploring the intersection between the two," said Ms. Alpert. I look forward to working with the foundation's impressive board, dedicated staff, and innovative fellows and grantees to build on their 25 years of courageous and progressive work."

Ms. Alpert said that in the past months, she has had thoughtful and inspiring conversations with the foundation's board about partnering with grantees and other funders, taking risks, learning from both success and failure, and dreaming big.

"Now, more than ever, the field needs models of family foundations that strive to use all their resources to make a meaningful impact," she said. "It has been a privilege to work with the Surdna board and staff for over a decade to support sustainable communities, guided by the principles of social justice, and it is thrilling to be able to carry that experience forward with a foundation committed to those same values."

While leading the Sustainable Environments program at Surdna, Ms. Alpert focused her work on improving people's lives through innovative solutions to environmental problems. She supported leading organizations working on climate change, green jobs, energy efficiency, and transportation, including many of the Nathan Cummings Foundation's current grantees. During her tenure, she helped seed and grow groundbreaking coalitions and networks, including the Urban Sustainability Directors Network, the first peer-to-peer network of city sustainability leaders from across North America, and Energy Action, a national coalition of youth leaders focused on solving the climate crisis.

"Sharon is one of the most visionary and effective leaders working in philanthropy today," said Billy Parish, founder of Energy Action and co-founder and CEO of Mosaic, a solar energy finance company. "She made catalytic early investments in youth climate organizing, green jobs, and clean energy policy work that helped expand and diversify the movement for climate solutions and led to meaningful carbon reductions."

Nathan Cummings Foundation board members said that in their search for a new president, they were committed to finding a leader who would bring vision and a diverse perspective to the work. The board of trustees also prioritized finding an energetic and dynamic leader who would connect with members across the multi-generational Cummings family. Ms. Alpert was chosen from a deep pool of qualified candidates after a thorough, national search led by Koya Leadership Partners, a national executive search firm serving clients in the nonprofit sector.

--- more ---

“The Nathan Cummings Foundation has made an outstanding decision by selecting Sharon Alpert to be its next president,” said Darren Walker, President of the Ford Foundation, where Ms. Alpert began her career in philanthropy as a program associate. “Her consummate grace, boldness, and keen intelligence will serve the institution well in the future. I look forward to working with her in this new position and to learning from her as I always do.”

Ms. Alpert earned a master’s degree in public administration and a bachelor’s degree in agricultural, resource and managerial economics, both from Cornell University. She serves as a trustee of the Funders Network for Smart Growth and Livable Communities. She lives in Brooklyn, New York, with her husband and two children.

Located in New York City, the Nathan Cummings Foundation is a national grantmaking organization that has made \$425 million in grants over the past 25 years. The foundation is rooted in the Jewish tradition and committed to social justice and democratic values, including fairness, diversity and community. It seeks to build a socially and economically just society that values nature and protects the ecological balance for future generations, promotes equitable health care, and fosters arts and culture that enriches communities.

###