



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**WILLIAM PENN FOUNDATION EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR LAURA SPARKS  
TO TRANSITION TO HIGHER ED LATER IN THE FALL**

***Sparks to Serve as First Female President of  
The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art in New York City***

**PHILADELPHIA, PA – September 14, 2016** - The William Penn Foundation today announced that its Executive Director, Laura Sparks, will be transitioning out of her role at the Foundation to serve as the first female President of The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art in New York City. Sparks will remain as Executive Director of the William Penn Foundation until later in the fall to ensure a smooth transition. Then, Shawn McCaney, Director of Creative Communities & National Initiatives for William Penn, will serve as Interim Executive Director for the Foundation until a permanent director is named.

“On behalf of the board, I want to thank Laura for her incredible leadership over the last four years, as Executive Director and as Chief Philanthropy Officer,” said William Penn Foundation Board Chair Janet Haas. “Laura’s passion for this work has inspired our staff and board, fueled the growth of our organization, and strengthened the impact of our work in the community. Importantly, our financial health is strong and our staff is well positioned to continue to achieve great things for the region. Laura has been a key part of this Foundation and we will miss her greatly. While we are sad she is leaving, we support her as she fulfills a long-held dream to lead an educational institution.”

“I am profoundly grateful to have had the opportunity to lead the William Penn Foundation in its critical mission, and to have collaborated so closely with the Haas family and Foundation board and staff,” said Sparks. “The Haas family’s devotion to advancing the public interest has been a gift to this region, and I am grateful for their genuine partnership and proud of what we have accomplished together.”

The Foundation’s steadfast commitment to Philadelphia continues in its work across its grantmaking areas of Creative Communities, Great Learning and Watershed Protection.

The William Penn Foundation has been a key supporter of important educational issues such as the Fair Funding for Public Education campaign, which led Pennsylvania to pass a funding formula to direct funds to school districts based on student needs. The Foundation also recently awarded \$15 million to the Fund for Quality, which by January 2021 will create 1,500 additional, high-quality, early education seats and makes progress on Philadelphia’s efforts toward universal pre-k.

In its public space work, the William Penn Foundation recently partnered with the Knight Foundation to launch *Reimagining the Civic Commons*, an effort to create greater connectivity across the city and establish high-quality public spaces in neighborhoods adjacent to Center City. This pilot program inspired a national launch of *Reimagining the Civic Commons* which rolled out in four other cities last week, with \$20 million in support from national funders. The initiative also played a meaningful role in highlighting the importance of high-quality public spaces across city neighborhoods, now a priority of Mayor Jim Kenney's administration as part of the Rebuilding Community Infrastructure Initiative.

In its work to help protect our region's water resources for future generations, the William Penn Foundation has awarded more than \$60 million since 2013 to help improve water quality across the region. The effort, known as the Delaware River Watershed Initiative, is quickly gaining recognition as a national model for conservation.

Sparks added, "This work and progress is only made possible because of our amazing grantees, who work day in and day out to create important change that makes the world a better place, opening doors for people without access to our most important opportunities, and protecting our environment for future generations. They have been the heart and soul of our work and will continue to be the force that drives change in the years ahead."

"We will work closely with Laura and Shawn to ensure a smooth transition," said Haas. "Shawn has been at William Penn for 13 years, has led key national initiatives for our organization, and oversees one of our largest grant portfolios. The work we do is possible thanks to the tireless efforts of our expert staff, and we are truly thankful for all they do to further the mission of the Foundation and support the important work of our grantees in the community."

### **William Penn Foundation**

The William Penn Foundation, founded in 1945 by Otto and Phoebe Haas, is dedicated to improving the quality of life in the Greater Philadelphia region through efforts that increase educational opportunities for children from low-income families, ensure a sustainable environment, foster creativity that enhances civic life, and advance philanthropy in the Philadelphia region. In partnership with others, the Foundation works to advance opportunity, ensure sustainability, and enable effective solutions. Since inception, the Foundation has made nearly 10,000 grants totaling over \$1.6 billion. The Foundation's assets totaled approximately \$2.3 billion as of December 31, 2015.

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