Thank you, Ann, for that welcome, and for your leadership and service to the GIA board.
And I’d like to second your thanks to the Tufts Health Plan Foundation for their support of this conference.
Good morning, everyone, and welcome to Boston.
I am John Feather, CEO of Grantmakers In Aging, and I’m delighted you’re here for our 2017 annual conference.
For those of you live Tweeting, that’s hashtag #GI Aging17.
As many of you know, it’s traditional at this point in the conference for me to discuss “the state of aging.”
Today, I want to reflect on the power of COMMUNITY.... Because for us as funders, the idea of BUILDING and RE-BUILDING COMMUNITY can inform every aspect of our work.
Focusing on COMMUNITY can help us forge new and deeper partnerships – find more meaningful metrics -- and increase our impact on the issues we care about.
I began thinking about this earlier this fall, while those terrible hurricanes were pounding the Caribbean, Florida, much of the Southeast, and Texas, including my hometown of Houston. Because Houston sits on a flat plain, it has always been prone to flooding. That is why my mom decided we would move to Bellaire – a place that did not flood.
This is Bellaire High School -- my high school -- which had never flooded in the 65 years since it was built, until Harvey.
To give you some perspective, this building sits on a mound 8 feet ABOVE street level.
During those difficult days, we saw a lot of stories about disaster.
Some made you sick... like vulnerable older people, trapped in floodwaters, or suffocating in killer heat.
Some were more hopeful. The point is, disasters are a particularly harsh reminder of the fact that we CANNOT go it alone. That we are all in this together, and that we NEED community.
GIA members know this – which is why so many of you contributed generously to the rescue efforts (as did GIA) and will continue to be instrumental in the long-term rebuilding effort.
But not all damage comes from weather, and rebuilding is not just about bricks and mortar. As Abraham Lincoln observed, when he was the Republican nominee for the U.S. Senate from Illinois, “A house divided against itself cannot stand.”
These days our community seems to be splintering in MANY ways -- politically, economically, racially, internationally, and socially.
So how should we, as funders, respond to this erosion of trust? We can do what we do best ---
Maximize the unique ability that so many foundations have, to bring people together in their community.
Make sure everyone is heard. Offer neutral ground and a nonpartisan approach. Make it possible to try out promising ideas, including risky ones.
And whether we are setting funding priorities or selecting partners and grantees, let’s remember the power of community.
Because a strong community doesn’t just happen. It takes work and it needs our support.
Certainly this is true as we get older. Community is an incredibly important factor in supporting healthy, purposeful aging ...which is why this theme runs through much of what we’ve been doing at GIA.
Take the example of ReFraming Aging. This project was conducted by the FrameWorks Institute, commissioned by the Leaders of Aging Organizations, and funded by nine GIA members.
Using social science research techniques, ReFraming Aging explores public perceptions of aging and then helps those of us in the aging field learn to communicate more persuasively, to try to change ageist policies and attitudes.
For most of us, this is a NEW way of speaking and writing and it takes some getting used to. So I’m very pleased to announce that GIA will now be offering “ReFraming Aging for All” communications training.

Through full or half day trainings, we can offer practical help for you and your grantees in mastering this important new approach, which I believe has the power to help us carry out our mission much more effectively.

There will also be a breakfast event this Friday where you can learn more about this offering, and everyone is welcome to attend. If you’re ready to sign up for training, please contact our director of membership and programs, Maria Gonzales-Jackson.
In other work, GIA has also been looking at aging in RURAL communities.
This map of the continental United States shows in green the places that the Census considers to be “rural.” About 95 percent of the land mass. Truthfully, you can stand in the middle of any big city in America and you are only one or two counties away from rural areas.
Rural communities have many strengths – they tend to be close-knit and self-reliant, and they are noted for multi-tasking and doing a lot with a little. But they often get overlooked.
Successful grantmaking in rural communities also requires a somewhat different approach. So we’ve created a new resource — *New Frontiers for Funding: An Introduction to Grantmaking in Rural Aging* — which is full of examples of successful programs and tips from funders and others who know the space well. And we’re working to build a network of funders interested in rural projects, with support from Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies.
Many rural communities also face some pretty daunting challenges—including physical and social isolation, poor transportation, health care shortages, and the opioid epidemic. We have not turned away from those challenges.
So we’ve produced a second guide for funders and others who want to help, called *Heartache, Pain, and Hope – Rural Communities, Older People, and the Opioid Crisis*. 
Our NEXT big piece of rural work will look at one of the most common problems facing older people everywhere, and that’s transportation.
In May, GIA will host a one-day summit on improving rural transportation. We are holding it in conjunction with the University of California at Berkeley, and the CITRIS Center there.
We plan to explore the amazing possibilities for innovation in transportation and how they can be applied to this problem. This will include driverless vehicles, the ride-sharing movement, and more. Thanks to the May and Stanley Smith Charitable Trust for their support of this event, and if you would like to get involved as well, please let me know.

It should be a fascinating day full of new ideas and I promise you’ll be hearing much more as details become available.
For the past few years, GIA has also been involved in the age-friendly communities movement. We call them great places to grow up AND grow old.
Our work on Community AGEnda helped accelerate age-friendly initiatives in five metro areas around the country.
Now we’ve added New England to that list, working with the Tufts Health Plan Foundation to provide technical assistance and practical tools for smaller communities that want to get started in age-friendly work.
This is actually a global movement, with its roots in the World Health Organization. So, with a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, we’re also looking around the world -- to find successful international age-friendly programs that can be developed here. Our focus is one of the most universal needs – housing. In particular, housing that also provides supportive services.
Finally, a few thoughts a little closer to home. GIA is a community in its own right, and, with your help, we’ve had a great year, including 10-percent growth in our membership – our biggest increase ever.
In many ways, this conference is OUR best community-builder. So if you’re a regular, please take the opportunity to welcome a first-time attendee or strike up a conversation with someone you’ve never worked with. I guarantee it will reward you both.
In closing, I want to thank you for the important work you do. We have a unique opportunity to create fundamental change – by reframing the way older people are viewed and treated, and strengthening our communities in the process. I look forward to working with you to make that a reality.

I’m delighted to tell you that this time next year, we will be meeting in Memphis, Tennessee, with the Plough Foundation as our premier local sponsor, so mark your calendar now – October 17th to 19th, 2018.

And now, before we hear this year’s Brian F. Hofland Lecture, I’d like to introduce Nora Moreno Cargie, president of the Tufts Health Plan Foundation, vice president for corporate citizenship at Tufts Health Plan, and a member of GIA’s board of directors. Nora?