

## A Celebration of Freedom and Justice 2025 Honorees

# Darren Walker

President,  
Ford Foundation



Darren Walker is president of the Ford Foundation, a \$16 billion international social justice philanthropy. Under his leadership, the Ford Foundation became the first non-profit in US history to issue a \$1 billion designated social bond to stabilize non-profit organizations in the wake of COVID-19.

Before joining Ford, Mr. Walker was vice president at the Rockefeller Foundation, overseeing global and domestic programs. In the 1990s, he was COO of the Abyssinian Development Corporation, Harlem's largest community development organization.

Mr. Walker co-founded both the US Impact Investing Alliance and the Presidents' Council on Disability Inclusion in Philanthropy. He serves on many boards, including the National Gallery of Art, Carnegie Hall, the High Line, the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History & Culture, Committee to Protect Journalists, Ralph Lauren, Bloomberg Inc. and PepsiCo.

Educated exclusively in public schools, Mr. Walker was a member of the first Head Start class in 1965 and received BA, BS, and JD degrees from the University of Texas at Austin. He has been included on numerous leadership lists including Time's annual "100 Most Influential People," Rolling Stone's "25 People Shaping the Future" and The Wall Street Journal's "2020 Philanthropy Innovator of the Year." He is the recipient of 16 honorary degrees, including Harvard University's W.E.B. Du Bois Medal. In 2022, he was awarded France's highest cultural honor, the Commander of the Ordre des Arts et des Lettres, for leadership in the arts. In 2023 he was also appointed by Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II to the Order of the British Empire for services to UK/US relations. In 2024, President Joe Biden awarded Mr. Walker the National Humanities Medal, which honors individuals or groups whose work has deepened the nation's understanding of and engagement with history, literature, languages, philosophy, and other humanities subjects.

# Laura Burstein

**Director, Capital  
Litigation  
Communications  
Project**



Laura Burstein is the founder and director of the Capital Litigation Communications Project (CLCP). Since 1996, Ms. Burstein has designed and implemented media strategies for death penalty cases in state and federal courts, including more than 20 U.S. Supreme Court cases. Ms. Burstein and her CLCP colleagues have helped legal teams gain relief for dozens of death row clients, including many who were innocent, and have led numerous high-profile clemency campaigns.

Ms. Burstein plays a crucial role within the death penalty abolition movement, connecting attorneys, advocates, and unlikely allies with the media. She and her colleagues have helped propel the death penalty issue to front-page news, educating journalists, decision makers, and the public about the racism, arbitrariness, and other flaws endemic to the capital punishment system.

CLCP was established in 2007 with the support of renowned attorney George Kendall at the law firm of Squire Patton Boggs.

Prior to CLCP, Ms. Burstein directed communications departments at two national policy organizations, Institute for Policy Studies and The Justice Project, and served as a senior media relations associate at the social justice public relations firm Fenton Communications.

Ms. Burstein is a co-recipient of the Light of Justice award from Texas Defender Service (2017), the Defender of Innocence Award from the Mid-Atlantic Innocence Project (2010), and the Social Justice Advocacy Award from Bleakhouse Publishing (2009). She shared in two top PR industry awards, The Silver Anvil and the Bulldog Reporter, for her work on environmental issues and was one of the "Top Ten Media Heroes of the Year" (1994) for her work with Haitian refugees.