Dear Friends,

On behalf of Grand Valley State University (GVSU), I’m pleased to invite you to join the dialogue at the Dorothy A. Johnson Center’s 5th National Summit on Family Philanthropy in Ft. Lauderdale this coming January 28–29, 2019. I attended the last Summit, held in San Francisco in 2017. The experience of meeting so many people focused on investing philanthropic dollars wisely across generations was remarkable. It was a lively two days, filled with valuable insights and “best practice” guidance relevant to work in family philanthropy, whatever that might be for the donors and others who attend.

But I also came away from my Summit experience thinking: Could there be a better university to create and host a “family philanthropy summit?” I think Grand Valley State University is uniquely positioned to do so. GVSU, now nearly 26,000 students strong, is one of 15 state, or public, universities in Michigan. Its genesis in 1960 can be traced to business leaders in the Grand Rapids area, many of whom had family and corporate foundations that helped propel Grand Valley’s remarkable growth. As is the case in so many states, public support for higher education — through state budgets and allocations — has shrunk. Yet GVSU has continued to grow — and that growth would not be possible without philanthropic investments by leading families in the Grand Rapids and West Michigan area. Put simply, the success of GVSU is a perfect example of what smart family giving can accomplish.

The National Summit is a great example of this as well. The Summit is organized by GVSU’s Johnson Center, and led by Michael Moody, who holds the Frey Foundation Chair for Family Philanthropy at the Center. Both the Center and the Chair were endowed by some of the founding families that have invested in GVSU since the 1960s. Their visionary family giving now benefits not only a region and a state, but donors and philanthropic institutions across the country (and beyond) — not just through the Summit but many other field-leading programs of the Chair and the Center as well.

I hope you will consider attending the Summit in Florida in January, both to contribute to the interactive dialogue and to glean useful ideas and insights to help advance your own family’s philanthropic legacy. This year’s Summit theme of “Donor Journeys and Why They Matter” will give all of us the chance to reflect on where we’ve been in our own giving, where we are going, and how the stories of others offer fruitful lessons we can build on.

Warmly,

Mary Kramer
Chair, Board of Trustees
Grand Valley State University