

Lee Pelton

Lee Pelton is the CEO & President of The Boston Foundation, one of the nation's leading philanthropic organizations with \$1.8 billion in assets. He joined the Foundation in June 2021, after serving as President of Emerson College (2011-2021) and Willamette University (1998-2011).

In May 2023, he ranked #3 on Boston Magazine's annual list of the most influential people in Boston, following Maura Healey, the newly elected governor of the Commonwealth and Massachusetts Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley.

Pelton has positioned The Boston Foundation, one of the nation's first and most influential community foundations, as an agent for social change by centering equity in its programs, grantmaking and civic leadership. Under his leadership, the Foundation's defining ambition is to achieve equity, which first involves acknowledging and then seeking to eliminate the structural and underlying causes of outcome disparities for historically marginalized communities.

A signature Boston Foundation program is its Racial Wealth Partnership, established in late 2022, as part of the Boston Foundation's commitment to close racial wealth gaps in Greater Boston and the region by expanding homeownership by people of color. The Partnership is a broad-based group of more than 40 members representing sectors including banking and finance, housing, issue advocacy, government, healthcare, life sciences and education.

As a college president for 23 years, he led with a core belief that higher education must serve to deepen students' appreciation of humanities. He

believes that the nation still looks to colleges and universities to solve its most pressing problems and, as such, college and university presidents have an obligation – in addition to broad mission driven duties on their campuses – to engage in the larger society. To Pelton, nurturing the humanistic spirit also goes hand in hand with confronting and trying to solve the urgent moral and social problems of the moment.

Pelton has combined authentic leadership, civic engagement, and a deep commitment to social justice with his skill and vision for growing institutional capacity and effectiveness. The result has been a legacy of stronger, more diverse institutions that have expanded opportunities for students. Along the way, Pelton often has been recognized as a civic and education leader, both regionally and nationally.

While a college president, Pelton emerged as a powerful national voice on social issues and the value of liberal arts education. In the aftermath of the Sandy Hook mass shooting, he gathered over 250 college and university presidents to sign a letter asking President Obama to assist in establishing common-sense gun legislation. He has been active nationally and written widely in support of affirmative action, beginning with the 2003 Michigan University and Law School Supreme Court cases. Pelton has advocated for college in prison initiatives, seeing firsthand at Emerson College's prisoner education programs that policy inadequacies hamper their effectiveness.

Following the murder of George Floyd in May 2020, Pelton's essay *America is on Fire*, reflects powerfully on the significance of Floyd's death with a frank and honest reference to his own experiences in America. His essay quickly and widely spread, having reached an audience of more than 6 million people

around the globe. Forbes Magazine placed it the top of its list of the five most noteworthy writings that appeared after the George Floyd incident.

Pelton began his academic career at Harvard University, where he earned a Ph.D. in English literature with an academic focus on 19th-century British prose and poetry. He taught English and American literature at Harvard and served as senior tutor at Winthrop House. He later served on the Harvard Board of Overseers and as a vice-chair of its executive committee. After Harvard, Pelton served as dean of the college at Colgate University and Dartmouth College. He graduated from Wichita State University, located in his hometown.

He has been awarded three honorary degrees and he enjoys a very long list of awards and recognitions for educational excellence and social justice, including, among many:

- A Living Legend by the Boston Museum of African American History in 2021
- Inducted by the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce into its Academy of Distinguished Bostonians in 2020.
- Governor's Award from Mass Humanities (2020)
- Appearances on the "Most Influential" and "Most Powerful" rankings at the Boston Magazine and the Boston Business Journal for multiple years.