

February 2, 2022

Honorable Alejandro Camporreale Mundo, President
UPR President Search and Consultation Committee
Governing Board, University of Puerto Rico (UPR)



Dear Members of the Search Committee,

Letter of recommendation for Dr. Alexandra Medina-Borja

As a [former IBM executive](#) who has worked closely with Dr. Medina-Borja for over a decade, I whole-heartedly recommend her for the role of President of UPR. I see many of the same qualities in her, that I see in my colleague Dr. Paul LeBlanc, who is President of SNHU and led their growth and renewal from a small regional school to one with national and international recognition. Dr. LeBlanc and I worked on an education-oriented NSF grant together in the 1990's. Both of these extraordinary people have the ability to inspire others with their contagious deep love of learning new things, excellence in executive leaderships and administration skills, including making the hard decisions required for innovation and change to get things done, high ethical and fairness standards built into all their interactions with others, whether the stakeholders are from industry, academia, or government, and a true passion for helping the next generation who might get left behind in a fast-changing world.

In 2006, we met when Dr. Medina-Borja was starting her faculty career in Industrial and Systems Engineering and she had founded the International Service Systems Engineering Research Lab at the University of Puerto Rico. Her scholarly contributions to the science of service systems are well documented and impressive. I was leading IBM Global University Programs and looking for a UPRM student at CMU to give a scholarship for IBM's service science program, which I co-founded and lead with colleagues at IBM. Dr. Medina-Borja had the knowledge and network to help the search succeed. She advocates for an interdisciplinary approach that combines deep expertise from engineering, management, social sciences, economics, computer science, cognitive science, art & design, and more. Her convergent approach to solve important unsolved problems in society is vital.

In 2012, Dr. Medina-Borja started a rotation as a program director at the US National Science Foundation (NSF) in the engineering directorate. It was then that NSF leadership started to explore developing a program for smart service systems in the translational innovation space. Due to her expertise in the area, she became one of the program officers assigned to develop this funding opportunity. In these initial stages of the program, I served as an industry adviser and witnessed both her scholarly skills, as well as her leadership and administrative expertise to get important things done quickly. This was an uphill battle – and while she met a lot of resistance – her ability to inspire others won the day! The successful program ran for over 4 years, funded over 40 highly interdisciplinary awards totaling \$40 million dollars. Her work with the Directorate for Education and Human Resources at NSF has also led to programs for the Future of Work at the Human-Technology Frontier, STEM Education, and the Future of Education.

In all these years of working closely together to advance national innovation and education agendas, I have been most impressed with Dr. Medina-Borja's high ethical and fairness standards. She spends time helping all who reach out for help – she goes the extra mile to ensure fairness in all her dealings with others.

One last point of character is Dr. Medina-Borja's drive and commitment to the next generation as well as those that innovative change might leave behind. In a fast-changing world, many are at risk of being left behind if they are not shown positive role models of how the future is open to everyone. In ways large and small, her attention to detailed statistics comes up naturally in conversations, showing her passion for making sure groups are not left behind. As a reviewer of NSF grant proposals, for

innovation programs she runs, I have seen a focus on the data related to fairness and inclusion of historically under-served populations. Innovation that will benefit all, not just some seems to be a true driving force in the programs she pioneers, establishes, and leads to successful, impactful outcomes.

In sum, I whole-heartedly support Dr. Medina-Borja for President of UPR. In my roles at IBM over two decades as an executive, working with universities from around the world, I see the range of qualities of the most successful university presidents in Dr. Medina-Borja. These qualities are rare and hard to find in one person. I am sure she will make an outstanding President of UPR. Please feel free to contact me for additional information.

Sincerely yours,



Dr. James (“Jim”) C. Spohrer

Former IBM Executive (1998-2021; now retired)

Board of Director, International Society of Service Innovation Professionals (ISSIP)

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