



Leading Change Locally: How Community Foundations Are Addressing the COVID-19 Crisis

By Joan Allmaras, Philanthropic Services Specialist

Community foundations are some of our [nation's oldest](#) and most trusted charitable organizations. They operate in every state in the country, providing support to rural and urban communities alike. While they vary widely in size—both in assets and service area—they all have strong networks and trusted relationships in the communities they exist to serve.

These networks and relationships are especially crucial when an unexpected crisis, like a [wildfire](#), [hurricane](#), or the [COVID-19 pandemic](#), arrives. Community foundations are uniquely positioned to both determine and address the most immediate needs of the community. In dynamic situations like this one, community foundations can easily pivot to direct funds where needed most. They can also maintain distributions from emergency funds to address long-term recovery efforts after the immediate crisis has faded from the news cycle.

According to the [Community Foundation Public Awareness Initiative](#), nearly \$312 million has been mobilized through community foundations alone to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. Across the country, community foundations have activated longstanding emergency response funds or established new COVID-specific funds, and many have already issued rapid-impact grants. Below are some important efforts that community foundations have launched to address the unique challenges created by COVID-19 in their areas:

- In [Washington](#) and California, sites of the first major outbreaks in the United States, community foundations that serve [cities](#), [counties](#) and other [specific geographies](#) established relief funds almost immediately. These funds have proven to be efficient vehicles to coordinate public, private and philanthropic resources.
- The [Greater New Orleans Foundation](#), while also managing a relief fund, is leveraging its existing relationships in the community to assist nonprofits with free business continuance planning.
- As New York City has emerged as the epicenter of the COVID-19 outbreak in the United States, the [New York Community Trust](#) is issuing grants on a weekly basis. In addition, in partnership with the Nonprofit Finance Fund, NYCT has launched a separate fund to provide no-interest loans to nonprofit organizations in New York City to help cover increased expenses and decreased revenue during the pandemic.
- The [Philadelphia Foundation](#) launched the PHL COVID-19 Fund with contributions from a number of local partners, including the United Way of Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey, the City of Philadelphia, corporations, nonprofits and family foundations. The formal grant application process has been eliminated, and grants will be made collaboratively among the partners. The Philadelphia Foundation has also compiled resources for donors, nonprofits and virtual volunteering in one location.
- The [Pittsburgh Foundation](#) established the Emergency Action Fund with initial donations from local family foundations and the United Way of Southwestern Pennsylvania. These partners have also committed to additional coordinated grantmaking in line with their mission areas.

Leading Change Locally: How Community Foundations Are Addressing the COVID-19 Crisis (continued)

- The [St. Louis Community Foundation](#) has set up two distinct funds in response to the pandemic. One will direct funding to nonprofit organizations providing direct services to affected individuals and families; the other will provide short-term financial relief to small businesses and their employees.
- The [Communities Foundation of Texas](#) is managing the Get Shift Done for North Texas Fund. The fund raises money to aid hourly employees in the hospitality industry who are out of work during business closures. In return, the workers fill a gap by serving volunteer shifts at nonprofits providing meals for those in need.

While the examples above are certainly not exhaustive, they represent the tailored strategies employed to respond to the particular needs of individual communities. To find your local community foundation or to provide support for a particular geographic area, visit the [Council on Foundations](#) website. In addition, the [Community Foundation Public Awareness Initiative](#), [Giving Compass](#) and the [National Center for Family Philanthropy](#) have a wealth of information for donors.

As always, NPT stands ready to help you help others. Contact us at (888) 878-7900 or npt@nptrust.org with any questions.

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