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Executive Summaries

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Executive Summaries

Volume 14, Issue 2: Philanthropy's Response to the Crises of 2020

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Out of Crisis, Learnings Shape Future Grantmaking

Stacie S. Cherner, M.A., M.S.W., Jim Joseph Foundation

Like other philanthropic organizations during the early weeks of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Jim Joseph Foundation took steps to loosen grant requirements, support CEOs and leadership teams, and provide funding for emergencies and innovations. Another area that required flexibility was in the re-examination of learning plans to take advantage of the “forced experimentation” imposed by the pandemic lockdown. In March 2020, the foundation paused ongoing research and evaluation projects to determine the extent to which the pandemic and economic crisis would impact the quality of the data, and then crafted new learning questions and plans to take advantage of the opportunities in the moment. It pivoted to redeploy resources to assess how the internal foundation team responded to the crisis, how grantees pivoted to online programming, and how the crisis and online programming were experienced by target populations.

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Immediate Needs and Systemic Solutions: Harnessing a Collective Crisis Response by Regional Philanthropy Alongside Systemic Change

Clotilde Perez-Bode Dedecker, M.A., Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo; and
Nancy M. Blaschak, M.B.A., Consultant

The Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo, the John R. Oishei Foundation, the Health Foundation for Western & Central New York, and United Way of Buffalo & Erie County convened funders in western New York to respond collectively to the COVID-19 crisis. While emergency funding was the first priority for the group of more than 60 foundations, they also wanted to innovate and strengthen the region's ability to face the future. Proactive systems-change initiatives were quickly launched to address public policy and develop a robust regional food system. A “request for ideas” sought out visionary concepts from nonprofit leaders that were collaborative, included multiple sectors, and addressed persistent challenges by centering race and lived experience. Grants were awarded to develop concepts in housing and homelessness, health equity, education, arts and culture, substance use disorders, criminal justice, digital literacy, and refugee services. This transformational work continues with implementation funding for the majority of the plans, which were selected with community input.

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How a Community Foundation's Disaster Framework Guided Rapid Pandemic Response

Steven W. Mumford, Ph.D., University of New Orleans, and Isabel Barrios, B.A., and Kellie Chavez Greene, M.F.A., Greater New Orleans Foundation

As intermediaries between donors and local communities, community foundations are well-positioned to lead transformational disaster response. Through its experience with Hurricane Katrina and subsequent disasters in the region, the Greater New Orleans Foundation developed a flexible disaster framework that emphasizes four broad principles — resilience, sustainability, civic participation, and equity. This article describes how the foundation is applying that framework to respond to COVID-19 and concurrent disasters in ways that mitigate immediate harms while laying the groundwork for an equitable long-term recovery.

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Respectful Tribal Partnership: What Philanthropy Can Learn From the Navajo Nation's Collaborative Response to the COVID-19 Crisis

Nancy Petersen, M.S., Karletta Chief, Ph.D., Toni M. Massaro, J.D., and Nikki Tulley, M.S., University of Arizona; Crystal Tulley-Cordova, Ph.D., Navajo Nation Department of Water Resources, and Jonelle Vold, J.D., University of Arizona Foundation

The COVID-19 pandemic's disparately harsh impact on Indigenous peoples is now well known. U.S. death rates normalized by population, for example, have been far higher for Native Americans than for the white population. This article describes a successful model for collaboration among a tribal nation, funders, and subject-matter experts to address a critical problem — access to clean water for Navajo families — based on respecting the leadership and values of the Navajo Nation and born from the pandemic crisis taking place there. Collaborating partners were connected by honor and respect for the Diné — “The People” — as the Navajo call themselves. This model can be replicated by funders working with multiple experts, agencies, and governments to continue to meet community resilience challenges that do not retreat with the pandemic and to promote equity and justice in any philanthropic venture.

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Diving Deep on Equity and Power: Exploring Shifts in Philanthropic Practice With the Iceberg Model

Sonia Taddy-Sandino, M.P.I.A., Engage R+D; Kim Ammann Howard, Ph.D., James Irvine Foundation; and Lori Nascimento, M.P.H., The California Endowment

Confronting questions of systemic racism and the fallout from a pandemic requires a look inward at the practices, policies, structures, mindsets, and cultural norms that govern how foundations operate. The experience of The California Endowment and the James Irvine Foundation shows what can be learned from this period of crisis and disruption. This article illustrates how each funder used the iconic iceberg model as a tool to move beyond surface-level responses to explore eight tangible, equity-focused changes in the way they practice philanthropy. This article also reflects on what it takes to shift norms, structures, and power in ways that lead to equitable outcomes and embed equity throughout an organization — and what gets in the way.

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