

US Funders' Response to COVID-19:



**Zeta
Metis
Advising**

Key themes and advice from online research

Introduction

To help funders consider how to address COVID-19 and its impact over time, Zeta Metis Advising conducted online research of publicly available information about:

- Disaster philanthropy overall and
- US funders' response to COVID-19 to date.

This document highlights **cross-cutting themes from a review of 39 online resources**.¹ By sharing the main themes, the intention is to highlight promising philanthropic practices and collective advice and to help make this information clear and useful to funders. It is intended as initial knowledge **for funders' staff to discuss and use** as relevant to their unique organizational and constituent context.

Key Themes

Across the resources reviewed, COVID-19 promising practices and advice to funders fall into five overall categories:

1. Recognize the different phases of a disaster and disaster philanthropy;
2. Understand the ongoing and evolving impact and needs from COVID-19;
3. Determine and clarify your priorities and focus as a funder;
4. Consider and refine potential approaches to help; and
5. Reflect on key advice and lessons learned from past and recent efforts.

1. Recognize disaster phases

Multiple resources highlighted that it is important for funders to consider the different phases of a disaster overall and COVID-19. [FEMA](#) describes five mission areas or phases of a disaster. While across the resources reviewed the number of phases and their names differed somewhat, the four main phases of COVID-19 for funders to consider are:

- Preparedness
- Response
- Recovery

¹ This analysis includes resources as of April 3, 2020. This is an initial, moment in time review and analysis. It is not comprehensive. There may be some key resources inadvertently excluded. The final section of this document lists all resources analyzed along with some additional ones organized by specific topic area.

- Resilience/Reimagine

The [Chronicle of Philanthropy's Three Phases of Nonprofit Needs](#) provides clear descriptions for the last three phases. As of April 3rd, some consider the US to be in the response phase for COVID-19 depending on the specific geographic location. Multiple resources stressed that each disaster phase has different needs and then requires different considerations and approaches from funders.

2. Understand ongoing impact and needs

Multiple resources noted that it is important for funders to understand their constituents' specific needs (i.e., grantees, other nonprofits, partners, community members, etc.) including how COVID-19 has impacted them to date and what they want and need from funders right now. The resources also stressed that it is important for funders to consider the following:

- Needs will change over time and with each disaster phase - Multiple resources highlighted that it is important for funders to continue to ask and listen to constituents about the impact on them and their changing needs over time.
- Consider burden on already overwhelmed people and organizations - Some funders and associations have already surveyed nonprofits to understand COVID-19's immediate impact on them and their needs. Recently, on Twitter multiple philanthropy and evaluation leaders shared stories and concerns about nonprofits being overwhelmed with numerous survey requests when they are in the midst of dealing with COVID-19 and its personal and professional impact. Funders could consider reviewing recently collected data by other funders or associations, partnering on any new data collection efforts, and/or conducting only targeted constituent conversations to ensure that they truly understand impacts and needs.
- Share back what you learn to help build trust and transparency - Multiple resources highlighted and modeled that funders should share back with constituents what they learn about the ongoing impact and needs related to COVID-19. This will help funders build and expand trust and relationships with their constituents. Funders can also use that information to help frame what they will be doing to help address those needs. For example, the [Walter & Elise Haas Fund's](#) initial step was a blog post about their immediate actions and thoughts about COVID-19 which included a link to their COVID-19 internal protocol document. A week later they shared results from their constituent survey and what they will be doing to help address their constituents' needs.

3. Determine your priorities and focus

After understanding the impact and needs to date, it is important for funders to carefully consider their focus and priorities right now. With COVID-19, the needs are more than one

funder alone can address. Multiple resources highlighted that coordination, partnership, and/or advocacy with other funders, government agencies, associations, businesses, and others are vital. An individual funder needs to consider what it is seeking to accomplish in the short-term and the longer-term and, related to that, who/what it most wants to help and how. For example, a funder could prioritize its existing grantees to try to help them adjust and survive this moment in time. A funder could focus on supporting new organizations that are not current grantees such as food banks. A funder could focus on supporting lost wages or other supports for individuals (e.g., artists, service industry workers, etc.). There are many other focuses and priorities funders could take depending on their overall mission, values, and constituents. A March 5th webinar by the [Center for Disaster Philanthropy](#) highlighted five core ways that philanthropy can respond to COVID-19:

- Support community safety nets (e.g., food banks, income replacement for lost wages);
- Help with preparedness (e.g., enough supplies and medication, etc.);
- Provide risk communications support (e.g., for staff, grantees, etc.);
- Support technology solutions in support of social distancing (e.g., file sharing, video communication platforms, etc.); and/or
- Support small businesses (e.g., technical assistance/consultant support, emergency grants, loans, etc.).

Finally, while funders may focus their help in a specific way during this phase of COVID-19, it is also important for them to consider how and if their priorities and focus should change over time as impacts and needs as a result of COVID-19 evolve over time.

4. Consider potential approaches

Multiple resources highlighted how funders are already pursuing or planning to pursue one or more of the following four approaches to help address COVID-19:

- a. New flexibility
- b. Giving more
- c. Partnership
- d. Communication and advocacy

To date over 520 funders have signed the [Council on Foundation's A Call to Action: Philanthropy's Commitment During COVID-19](#) which signals their intention to pursue many of these approaches. In addition, nine philanthropic-serving organizations signed a [Statement Encouraging Increased Giving in this Time of Crisis](#). The following table highlights examples to date for each overall approach.

Overall Approach	Specific Strategy Examples	Funder Examples ²
New flexibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With existing grants/grantees - convert project grants to unrestricted grants, modify funder initiatives/programs to be relevant and useful to grantees at this moment in time, remove matching requirements, accelerate payments on already approved grants, not holding grantees responsible if project deliverables must be postponed or canceled • With new grants/grantees - new grants as unrestricted as possible • With all - decrease and/or delay what is asked of them (e.g., reporting requirements, site visits, etc.) 	Robert Sterling Clark Foundation Eisner Foundation
Giving more	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide automatic, additional funding to current/recent grantees (with no new application/request) • Create and/or contribute to emergency response funds and/or loans programs • Increase funder's payout percentage 	Bonfils Stanton Foundation Libra Foundation
Partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner with other funders to create/expand collaborative funds, conduct shared data collection efforts, problem solve and share promising practices, and/or conduct capacity building activities 	NYC COVID-19 Response & Impact Fund Barr Foundation
Communication and advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearly and actively communicate with grantees, partners, and other constituents about funder's thoughts and response • Clarify and confirm commitment for current grant awards and initiatives • Coordinate with other funders, government agencies, intermediaries, and others on preparedness, response, and related local, regional, and federal advocacy efforts 	Heinz Endowments Field Foundation of Illinois

To learn more about how other specific US funders are responding to COVID-19 to date, the [National Center for Family Philanthropy](#) has an interactive US map with funders' responses and/or emergency funds. In addition, the [Community Foundation Public Awareness Initiative](#) has a list of community foundations' responses by state.

² Some funders/collaboratives listed as an example for one overall approach are also pursuing another overall approach. The links are to each foundation/fund's announcement of their response to COVID-19.

Emergency/rapid grantmaking:

Multiple resources noted specific advice for rapid response and/or emergency fund grantmaking which include:

- Provide clear and transparent guidelines such as information about the grant purpose, eligibility, and how decisions will be made;
- Develop a simple application process that is easy for applicants to complete and for the funder(s) to review quickly;
- Process applications and make awards quickly; and
- Operate from a place of trust and belief in the people/organizations applying for and getting grants.

In addition, with so many people working from home, two resources stressed the importance of procedural flexibility such as offering multiple grant payment options (e.g., check, Venmo, wire transfer, etc.) and not requiring both staff and board member signatures.

5. Reflect on existing advice and lessons learned

Across the resources reviewed, there were several, consistent lessons learned and advice for funders as they consider their response to COVID-19. Some of the advice echoes key themes in earlier sections.

Commit for the long-term: Multiple resources highlighted that funders need to commit for the long-term. Most disasters and especially COVID-19 will take a significant amount of time to address the response, recovery, and resilience/reimagine phases. The community overall and nonprofits will need funders' long-term commitment and support. With COVID-19, the true impact is not yet known. Multiple resources encouraged funders to be generous and take risks over time. This could mean increasing giving and reconsidering their payout percentage.

Listen to local leaders: Multiple resources stressed that funders should trust and empower local leaders. As the Council of Foundation's Call to Action notes, funders should "Commit to listening to our partners and especially to those communities least heard, lifting up their voices and experiences to inform public discourse and our own decision-making so we can act on their feedback. We recognize that the best solutions to the manifold crises caused by COVID-19 are not found within foundations."

Consider equity: Multiple resources highlighted the need for funders to carefully consider equity in their response to COVID-19. While this disaster impacts everyone, resources noted that it will exacerbate existing challenges and inequities facing marginalized and underrepresented communities and individuals. To emphasize this need for funders to consider equity, the United Philanthropy Forum issued a joint statement with many of its

regional grantmaker association and philanthropic-serving organization members to [Keep Equity at the Forefront in Philanthropy's Response to the Coronavirus](#).

Partner: One funder will most likely not be able to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on even a small number of grantees and a small community. The impact of COVID-19 is already significant and growing. Multiple resources stressed that funders, government agencies, businesses, nonprofits, and others should come together and collaborate on efforts to best support communities, organizations, and society overall.

Communicate and coordinate: Many funders already play an important role as community leaders. Multiple resources noted that funders should model clear and transparent communication during this crisis. This could include funders sharing what they are learning, highlighting how they hope to help, providing helpful information and resources, and being even more responsive to their constituents.

Continue to iterate: As noted earlier, the needs and impact from COVID-19 will evolve over time. Multiple resources stressed that funders should remain nimble and responsive. They should give unrestricted funding and be flexible overall. They should also ask, listen, and adjust their approach over time based on new and evolving impact and needs. This includes learning from emerging promising practices and field learning for how to best address COVID-19's impact.

Do you want more information?

The following resources are the most comprehensive resources reviewed and offer additional, specific advice for funders to consider:

- Center for Disaster Philanthropy: [Disaster Philanthropy Playbook](#)
- Community Foundations of Canada: [When Disaster Strikes: A Guide for Community Foundations](#)
- National Center for Family Philanthropy: [Leadership in Difficult Times: Guidance for Donors and Giving Families](#)
- Bridgespan Group: [Opportunities for Philanthropic Response to the Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Crisis](#)

Virtual Communication & Engagement

In the last few weeks, many funders and their grantees and partners have shifted to virtual work with individual staff working from home. Virtual communication and engagement are new for many people and organizations. Below are some of the most relevant and useful resources to help funders with this new way of working and for them to potentially share with their grantees and partners as relevant.

Virtual teams:

- Nonprofit technology expert Beth Kanter offers the most comprehensive, clear, and helpful advice for [Running Effective Virtual Meetings & Facilitating Engagement](#). Her website also includes tips about virtual check-ins, virtual brainstorming, and specific technology/platforms.

Virtual engagement and programs:

- Individuals and organizations have already started to embrace virtual programming. For example, there are multiple, interesting examples in [Cleveland](#), [New York](#), and [San Francisco](#).
- There are a wide range of considerations and platform options when shifting engagement and/or programs online. CMX has [A Comprehensive List of Tips, Tools, and Examples for Event Organizers During the Coronavirus Outbreak](#). In addition, depending on the platform selected there are a number of helpful resources including Zoom's [Best Practices for Hosting a Digital Event](#), Vimeo's [How to Plan a Virtual Event](#), TechBoomers's [How to Host a Watch Party on Facebook](#) (video), and USA Today's [Netflix Party. Here's how it works.](#)
- Finally, if an event needs to be canceled instead of moved online or postponed, Springboard for the Arts offers helpful [Principles for Ethical Cancellation](#).

Resources List

This section includes the full list of resources reviewed organized by the below topic and sub-topic areas:

1. Disaster philanthropy & funders' responses to COVID-19
 - a. Disaster philanthropy overall
 - b. COVID-19 responses & advice to date
 - c. Rapid response/emergency fund lessons & advice
 - d. Resources targeted for grantees/nonprofits
2. Virtual communication & engagement

3. Other resources/resource lists

Thirty-nine of these resources (indicated with an *) were analyzed to identify any key themes across them. These specific resources were identified by if they were frequently cited by reputable sources within the philanthropic field, represent perspectives of groups of funders, and/or provide particularly clear and useful information/perspectives/advice targeted to funders. As noted earlier, this is an initial, moment in time review and analysis of key resources as of April 3, 2020. It is not comprehensive. There may be some key resources inadvertently excluded.

1. Disaster philanthropy & funders' responses to COVID-19

Disaster philanthropy overall:

- Center for Disaster Philanthropy: [Disaster Philanthropy Playbook](#)*
- Center for Effective Philanthropy: [Relationships Matter when Communities Need Support Most](#)*
- Council on Foundations: [Disaster Philanthropy](#)*
- Philanthropy New York: [Philanthropy & Hurricane Sandy](#) (page 47 - 53 includes specific lessons learned)*
- Putnam Consulting Group: [After Disaster Strikes: 8 Strategies for Supporting Disaster Recovery Efforts for the Long Term](#)*
- Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors: [Giving Strategically After Disaster: Ten Points to Consider](#)*
- For community foundations:
 - Community Foundations of Canada: [When Disaster Strikes: A Guide for Community Foundations](#)*
 - Forbes: [10 Ways Community Foundations Are A Best-Bet For Disaster Giving](#)
 - FSG: [How Community Foundations Can Better Coordinate Responses to Disasters](#)

COVID-19 responses & advice to date:³

- Arabella Advisors: [Looking Toward Philanthropy's New Future](#)*
- Bridgespan Group: [Opportunities for Philanthropic Response to the Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Crisis](#)*
- Bridgespan Group: [What Philanthropy Can Do Today to Support Grantees Through the Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Crisis](#)*
- Candid: [Foundations and the Great Recession: context for our current crises](#)*
- Center for Disaster Philanthropy: [COVID-19: Approaches for Funders](#)*
- Center for Disaster Philanthropy: [COVID-19 Coronavirus: How Philanthropy Can Respond](#) (March 5, 2020 webinar slides)*

³ This list does not include links to some of the funder examples in the key themes section of this memo.

- Center for Effective Philanthropy: [recent blog posts](#)*
- CFLeads: [Connecting with community foundation peers during the COVID-19 pandemic](#)
- Chronicle of Philanthropy: [Help for Nonprofits During the Coronavirus and Uncertain Economic Times](#) series (includes articles with advice to funders and/or nonprofits – for example, an opinion piece from Nonprofit Finance Fund’s CEO “6 Steps for Grant Makers to Take Now to Ensure Nonprofits Recover From Coronavirus Spread.” Also includes some articles with specific fundraising and donor relationship considerations and advice.)*
- Chronicle of Philanthropy: [Now Is the Time for Philanthropy to Give More, Not Less](#)*
- Chronicle of Philanthropy: [9 Leading Nonprofit Groups Urge Foundations to Dig Into Endowments to Support Charities](#)*
- Chronicle of Philanthropy: [How This Crisis May Upend Grant Making for Good](#)*
- Community Foundation Public Awareness Initiative: [Community Foundations Nationwide Launch Coronavirus Relief Efforts](#) (lists US community foundations’ responses to Covid-19 by state)
- Council on Foundations: [A Call to Action: Philanthropy’s Commitment During COVID-19](#)*
- Council on Foundations: [Funder to Funder Call: Sharing Approaches to COVID-19 Community Response](#)*
- Council on Foundations: [Community Foundation CEO Roundtable: The New Normal – COVID-19](#)
- Exponent Philanthropy: [Lean Funders Are Adjusting Their Grantmaking to Respond to COVID-19: Week of March 23](#)*
- FSG: [COVID-19—Seven Things Philanthropy Can Do](#)*
- FSG: [Foundations: Use Your Balance Sheet to Help](#)*
- FSG: [Pandemics and Perpetuity](#)*
- Human Systems Dynamics Institute: [Decisions in the Age of COVID-19](#)
- Inside Philanthropy: [Why Should It Take a Pandemic to Bring out the Best in Philanthropy?](#)*
- National Center for Family Philanthropy: [Leadership in Difficult Times: Guidance for Donors and Giving Families](#)*
- National Center for Family Philanthropy: [COVID-19: Response and Recovery Resources for Giving Families](#) (includes interactive US map noting specific COVID-19 response funds by geographic area.)
- NCRP: [My Favorite Funder Responses So Far to COVID-19](#)*
- Nonprofit AF: [10 archaic and harmful funding practices we can no longer put up with](#)*
- Nonprofit Quarterly: [COVID-19: Using a Racial Justice Lens Now to Transform Our Future](#)*

- Philanthropy New York: [COVID-19 Updates & Resources](#)*
- Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors: [Responding To COVID-19: Suggestions and Recommendations for Donors as of March 2020](#)*
- Stanford Social Innovation Review: [Rethinking Social Change in the Face of Coronavirus series](#)
- Trust-based Philanthropy Project: [Philanthropy Needs To Trust Nonprofits Now More Than Ever](#)*
- United Philanthropy Forum: [Joint PSO Statement: Keep Equity at the Forefront in Philanthropy's Response to the Coronavirus](#)*
- Related to the arts and culture sector:
 - Grantmakers in the Arts: [A Call for Building Deep Resilience in Arts Funding: The future of our field post-coronavirus](#)
 - Alan Brown: [A Sector in Peril: Philanthropy's Role in Responding to COVID-19](#)
 - Adrian Ellis: [Not a Pretty Picture: Shuttered arts institutions will find a way out of this crisis. But it won't be easy.](#)

Rapid response/emergency fund lessons & advice:

- Center for Disaster Philanthropy: [Setting Up A Disaster Fund](#)*
- Connect US Fund: [Rapid Response Grantmaking: A Tool for Grantmakers](#)*
- NCRP: [Lessons for Foundations on Rapid-Response Support at the Front Lines of Democracy](#)*
- Springboard for the Arts: [So You Want To Start An Emergency Relief Fund](#)*
- Whitman Institute: [4 Lessons in Rapid Response Grantmaking](#)*
- Whitman Institute: [8 Lessons in Collaborative Rapid Response Grantmaking](#)*

Resources targeted for grantees/nonprofits:

- Board Source: [What Nonprofit Board Members Should Be Doing Right Now to Address the COVID-19 Situation](#)
- Chronicle of Philanthropy: [4 Ways to Engage Major Donors During the COVID-19 Crisis](#)
- Communications Network: [Coronavirus Crisis Comms Triage Kit](#)
- Nonprofit Finance Fund: [COVID-19 Tools and Resources for Nonprofits](#)

2. Virtual communication & engagement

Teams & Convenings:

- Beth Kanter: [Running Effective Virtual #Nonprofit Meetings: 9 Best Practices for Facilitating Engagement](#)
- Fast Company: [How to have a virtual meeting that's not painful \(and actually productive\)](#)

- Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors: [Internal Communications for Philanthropy: Maintaining Community in a Time of Isolation](#)
- Zoom: [Ideas for Creating a Sense of Culture, Community Amid Social Distancing and Work-From-Home Mandates](#)
- Advice from specific organizations:
 - EngageR&D: [How We Work from Home](#)
 - La Piana Consulting: [WFH – Work from Home is The New Normal](#)

Programs:

- CMX: [A Comprehensive List of Tips, Tools, and Examples for Event Organizers During the Coronavirus Outbreak](#)
- Of/By/For All: [3 Things You Can Do to Build Community in a Time of Coronavirus](#)
- Springboard for the Arts: [Principles for Ethical Cancellation](#)
- About specific platforms/modes:
 - Zoom: [Best Practices for Hosting a Digital Event](#)
 - Vimeo: [How to plan a virtual event: Expert insights from the Vimeo team](#)
 - TechBoomers: [How to Host a Watch Party on Facebook](#)
 - USA Today: [Netflix Party lets friends have movie nights while social distancing. Here's how it works](#)
 - NPR: [How To Keep Making Your Podcast ... Even If You're Stuck At Home](#)
- Some recent examples:
 - Cleveland.com: [Social Distance learning: Music and dance schools, Science Center and others keep kids virtually engaged in time of coronavirus](#)
 - [Seattle Symphony](#)
 - [Bay Area events you can stream while sheltering in place](#)
 - [Things to Do in N.Y.C. This Weekend While Staying Inside](#)

3. Other resources

The following resources offer particularly comprehensive lists of other links and resources connected to COVID-19.

- Candid (formerly Foundation Center & Guidestar): [Coronavirus](#) (includes data about giving connected to COVID-19)
- Center for Disaster Philanthropy: [Disaster Philanthropy Playbook – Further Reading](#) (lists specific reports by issue area including the arts and culture and housing)
- Council on Foundations: [COVID-19 Resource Hub](#)
- National Council of Nonprofits: [Nonprofits and Coronavirus, COVID-19](#)
- Philanthropy Massachusetts: [Disaster and Emergency Relief Resources](#) (includes COVID-19 and other recent disasters)
- Related to the arts and culture sector:

- Grantmakers in the Arts: [COVID-19 \(Coronavirus\) and Arts Funding: Update and action items](#)
- Association of Performing Arts Presenters: [What APAP is doing in response to the COVID-19 pandemic](#)
- [Arts Ready](#)
- Fractured Atlas: [Emergency Resources for Artists in the Wake of COVID-19](#)
- [National Coalition for Arts' Preparedness & Emergency Response](#)
- New England Foundation for the Arts: [COVID-19](#)