

COVID-19 RELIEF AND RECOVERY FUND

SUMMARY REPORT



Princeton Area

COMMUNITY
FOUNDATION

A COLLABORATIVE RESPONSE



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*Promoting philanthropy to
advance the well-being of
our communities forever.*



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MESSAGE FROM OUR LEADERSHIP

We are filled with gratitude.

Early in 2020, as a new, deadly virus began spreading across the globe, we could not have imagined what would come to pass. The virus would kill more than 6 million people worldwide. It would change all our lives in so many ways: illness, isolation, job loss, virtual schooling. But in those early days, we understood that our most vulnerable neighbors would likely be the ones most devastated by it.

In March, as we began sheltering in place, the Community Foundation's Board of Trustees voted to establish the COVID-19 Relief and Recovery Fund. Because we have been part of this region for 30 years and have forged solid community partnerships with our donors, fundholders, other foundations and corporations, we were able to turn to them and knew they would not hesitate to join us.

Within three days, we raised more than \$1 million and worked to streamline our grantmaking process so we could respond swiftly and fairly. By the first week in April 2020, we began to issue grants on a weekly basis to support our nonprofit grantee-partners who risked so much to serve others in need.

Thanks to the continued generosity of our community and the collaboration of several of our grantmaking funds, we awarded more than \$3.5 million to help more than 70 nonprofits provide essential services, including food distribution, childcare, and mental health services. Our fundholders magnified our impact by providing \$1.8 million in additional support to COVID-related work, both locally and nationally. We could not have done this work without the incredible support from hundreds of donors, especially our leadership supporters: Betty Wold Johnson, George H. and Estelle M. Sands Foundation, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, The Bunbury Fund at the Community Foundation, The Burke Foundation, the Fund for Women and Girls, and Princeton University.

We are also grateful for our friends in the nonprofit community. In those early days of the pandemic, when masks and other personal protective equipment were in short supply, they came together to help so many of our neighbors in need, providing food, housing support and other essential services. They continued this work today and have helped thousands of our communities' most vulnerable residents.

The pandemic moved us to communicate better and reorient our collective focus. It inspired generous and synchronous collaborations with other funders across the state, including the Community Foundation of New Jersey, the Community Foundation of Southern New Jersey, and the New Jersey Pandemic Relief Fund. It led to the creation of the New Jersey Arts and Culture Renewal Fund, created with a lead gift from the Grunin Foundation and led by a steering committee of statewide funders.

Today, we present this report to share how, to date, our COVID-19 Relief and Recovery Fund has made an impact in our community and the lessons we learned along the way. Today, we are better funders because we have worked to improve our processes and respond more nimbly. We have learned more about the needs of our nonprofits and the communities we serve. We are taking these lessons to heart, so we can be a better and more effective funder in the future. We also want to learn how we can continue to support our nonprofit partners as they help vulnerable communities, already coping with social inequities, live with this new reality.

The nation and the world have made advancements in our fight against COVID-19, and we remain vigilant as the virus mutates. Gratefully, we are in a different place today. Together, we have made an incredible difference in the lives of the most vulnerable among us and remain committed to collaborating to continue this work.

Sincerely,

Eleanor, Sonia, and Jeff



Eleanor Horne, Trustee Emeritus,
Phase I Core Evaluation Team Chair



Sonia Delgado, Board Chair,
Phase II & III Core Evaluation Team Chair



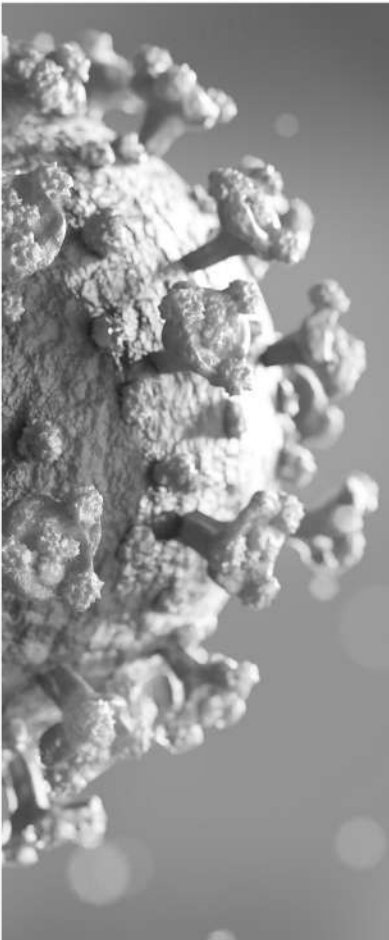
Jeffrey M. Vega, President & CEO

We at the Princeton Area Community Foundation, along with billions across the globe, were grasping for information and news that could inform our work, our decision-making processes, and ultimately our response to the COVID-19 pandemic before we knew what it would become. There were so many unknown and uncertain factors regarding the virus, its spread, and what would become its global reach. What we could be certain of was that families in our area were going to be impacted and we needed to be prepared to support the organizations that were on the ground equipped and ready to respond.

In early March we were having internal discussions about our response to the outbreak and by March 31, 2020 we were virtually convening an internal team made up of board members and fund advisors later dubbed the COVID-19 Core Evaluation Team. The group moved quickly into response and action. This group was a tangible way for people to help and respond to what otherwise felt like a helpless situation.

The group of people at the table evolved over time, but the purpose of the work was never lost: reduce barriers for our nonprofit partners to access funding, have conversations with experts to inform our work, and make decisions quickly so that the organizations on the ground doing the work were resourced.

We listened, learned, and evolved.



RAPID EVOLUTION

EXPEDITING PROCESSES

The pandemic presented a need for expedient and decisive action, even when we were not seeing the road ahead very clearly. We mobilized quickly to set up new processes that would allow us to get funding into the hands of direct service organizations responding to the crisis. We announced the start of the COVID-19 Relief and Recovery Fund and within three days we raised \$1 million. Within a week we put together a brief grant application that would make it easy for organizations to apply for funding to support their response to COVID-19 on-ground, in neighborhoods and within our region. Our grantmaking decisions were condensed from an average of 6 months to approximately two weeks from the time in which an application was submitted, to the time a decision was rendered. We expedited payments electronically, reducing the time it would take to provide funding.

We reached out to our hundreds of donor advised fund (DAF) holders and asked them if they wanted to participate by contributing their dollars to the COVID-19 Relief and Recovery Fund. Some did, and others opted to make direct grants to organizations in our community -- some to organizations they had funded in the past, others to those that we were funding to leverage our financial commitment.

In our first phase of funding, we received many requests from organizations primarily focused on combating food insecurity. We worked diligently to fund initiatives focused on food distribution, while encouraging collaboration and pressing for open communication among grantees to reduce duplication and increase access to healthy, and culturally appropriate food distribution networks. We encouraged the work of a food stakeholder group that convened weekly to assess needs and coordinate distribution of food. After Phase I, we held a convening to hear directly from our grantees about what they needed from us. The information and feedback that we received directly informed our Phase II funding cycle. After Phase II, we conducted interviews and had transparent conversations with our grantees to learn about the processes, and their needs, and how we could continue to grow in partnership. Those conversations directly impacted our Phase III funding cycle.

During COVID-19, a total of 22 funds developed in New Jersey to provide pandemic relief. The COVID-19 Relief and Recovery Fund had a total of three phases over the span of 16 months. In that time, the Community Foundation, The Bunbury Fund, Fund for Women and Girls, and our DAFs disbursed over \$5 million to support food insecurity, basic needs and social welfare, physical health, mental health, and counseling services, children, education, and youth support, housing and rental assistance, and capacity building. Expediency, in our response and processes, would not have been possible without our strong board and staff leadership.

LEADERSHIP

Without the leadership, support, and trust of our Board, led by Anthony “Skip” Cimino, who served as Board President at that time, our approach may not have been as bold, transparent, and swift. This emergency pressed us to respond quickly and to operate on high alert. Our successful approach to implement the COVID-19 Relief and Recovery Fund is due in great part to the strong leadership of our board and staff.

On March 16th, Governor Murphy announced aggressive social distancing measures to mitigate the further spread of the COVID-19 in New Jersey. That same day we had an emergency board meeting where our President & CEO, Jeffrey M. Vega, asked the board to invest \$250,000 in the COVID-19 Relief and Recovery Fund. The staff and board then went to work immediately fundraising to grow the fund’s size. We are grateful to the people who gave money to our COVID-19 Relief and Recovery Fund, knowing that we were close enough to the community that we’d use their gift wisely. The Community Foundation was able to award a total of \$5,405,547.17 in collaboration with other community grantmaking and donor advised funds.

Our leadership team kept their ears to the ground as the pandemic evolved and needs changed. The Community Foundation received over 200 applications across all three grant cycles and the COVID-19 Core Evaluation Team members were thorough in their review and processing. Without their dedicated leadership we would not have achieved the level of impact that we desired.

WHAT WORKED ABOUT THE COVID-19 GRANTMAKING PROCESS AT THE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION?

“**THE PEOPLE MADE THE PROCESS.**

- Eleanor Horne, Trustee Emeritus

“**WE TRUSTED EACH OTHER.**

- Marygrace Billek, Director of Human Services for the County of Mercer

“**IT WAS MAGIC!**

- John Hatch, Co-Founder, Trenton Arts Endowment

“**GOING THE EXTRA MILE.**

- Sonia Delgado, Board Chair

“**HUMANITY OVER DATA.**

- Jeanne Besser, Board Trustee

These quotes are from COVID-19 Core Evaluation Team members.

COLLABORATION

None, and we mean none, of this work would have been possible without the unprecedented levels of collaboration that we experienced from the very beginning of the pandemic. We had internal, external, and cross-sector collaborations that deeply impacted our reach and our impact.

Internally, at the Community Foundation, our various funds had partnered and collaborated before, but not at this level. The Bunbury Fund, Fund for Women and Girls, and our Community Impact/Burke Foundation Legacy Grants were pooled together and streamlined into a single application process to reduce the burden for organizations seeking funding across streams. Their collaboration played a huge role in our collective success. All the funds were also represented in our COVID-19 Core Evaluation Team.

The Community Foundation is home to hundreds of donor advised funds. Our DAF fundholders recommended \$2,643,674.61 in COVID-19 related grants, including more than \$800,000 to our own COVID-19 Relief and Recovery Fund, in 2020 and 2021. We were in constant communication with our DAF fundholders: notifying them about the developments of the COVID-19 Relief and Recovery Fund, letting them know what grants were being made so they could make additional contributions directly if they wished, and ensuring that they were informed about what was happening on the ground, so they were making informed decisions with their philanthropic contributions. Their support made up almost half of what the Community Foundation was able to release to the organizations serving communities through this crisis.

By the end of March 2020, the New Jersey Pandemic Relief Fund (NJPRF) was born, and they hit the ground running, with the support of major celebrities. As of the date of this report, the NJPRF has raised over \$65 million and allocated over \$56 million of it to over 500 organizations in New Jersey. We were able to communicate with them actively about our grantee pool and provide insights for their decision making. It was a critical partnership that led to significant dollars flowing into our region in support of the amazing nonprofits we have in our communities.

We also collaborated with other funding partners across the state, such as the South Jersey Community Foundation and Community Foundation of New Jersey (which was hosting NJPRF.)

When we received applications for organizations in their area, we would reach out to see if they were thinking about funding them and vice versa. We knew our networks, who to call to leverage funds, and when to share information with others. We also knew when to ask for help from our partners and advice from our grantees. People knew they could call us too.

In 2020, we were asked to host the New Jersey Arts and Culture Recovery Fund (NJACRF). NJACRF was created with a lead gift from the Grunin Foundation and is a public private partnership proudly supported by several foundations across the state, along with several government entities. It was clear that without financial support to arts and culture organizations New Jersey may have lost some anchor organizations, including some in our region. While arts and culture organizations weren't providing immediate relief, many serve as an outlet of creativity, inspiration, and healing. Since its inception, the NJACRF awarded nearly \$4.5 million in grants to organizations statewide, and earlier this year, it changed its name to the New Jersey Arts and Culture Renewal Fund to signal the Fund's support of a strong comeback for smaller arts and culture organizations and funding for a sustainable future.

We have learned so much about the power of collaboration, particularly in response to such a pandemic emergency. New partnerships were formed. Nonprofit partners came together to solve challenges and have started to collaborate in more effective ways, strengthening partnerships that were already existing. As we reflect on this time at the Community Foundation, we know one thing for sure, collaboration is now integral to our DNA, and we will never do our work the same way again.

TIMELINE

● March 13, 2020

As the President of the United States of America declared a nationwide emergency. The COVID-19 Relief and Recovery Fund was announced. Within weeks, \$1.5 million was raised for the Fund.

● March 31, 2020

First official COVID-19 Core Evaluation Team meeting was held virtually to review applications submitted to the COVID-19 Phase I grant cycle. Review meetings were scheduled for two times per week at 7am.

● April 16, 2020

Community Foundation announces that 30 grants were awarded from the COVID-19 Phase I grant cycle, totaling \$719,644.

● June 23, 2020

Community Foundation announces that an additional 22 grants were awarded from the COVID-19 Phase I grant cycle, totaling \$351,599. **A total of \$1,071,243 was awarded in Phase I to 52 organizations.**

● August 21, 2020

Community Foundation begins accepting grant applications for COVID-19 Relief and Recovery Fund Phase II. A streamlined application process provided applicants with collaborative funding from the COVID-19 Relief and Recovery Fund, the Bunbury Fund, the Community Impact Grants/The Burke Foundation Legacy Grants, and the Fund for Women and Girls.

● November 30, 2020

COVID-19 Relief and Recovery Fund Phase II closed. **A total of \$2,068,094 was awarded in Phase II to 64 organizations.** This phase had a collaborative funding approach from the four aforementioned funds at the Community Foundation.

● February - June 2021

Prior to launching the COVID-19 Relief and Recovery Fund Phase III, the Community Foundation engaged community members and organizations to better understand existing needs in the region. Intelligence gathered informed the focus of COVID-19 Relief and Recovery Fund Phase III funding.

● July 2021

Outreach was conducted to organizations providing services in the focus areas that emerged from the internal analysis after Phase II was completed. **A total of \$474,000 was awarded in COVID-19 Relief and Recovery Fund Phase III to 26 organizations.**



THE ART OF STRATEGIC GRANTMAKING

For some time now, we have been assessing our grantmaking and analyzing our efforts to align dollars with capacity, collaboration, and expertise. Our first move in this direction was with the development of our All Kids Thrive initiative which pulled our financial resources alongside a multi-stakeholder funding approach to target one particular indicator, chronic absenteeism. Our COVID-19 Relief and Recovery Fund gave us a second opportunity to implement a strategic grantmaking approach for high impact.



We were able to reflect some very important questions throughout our COVID-19 grantmaking phases. What holds a community together? Are there trusted organizations that community members turn to when in need? Are there programs that make the difference between surviving and thriving? These questions and more were contemplated throughout the grant approval decision-making by the members of the COVID-19 Core Evaluation Team.

What we learned is that in a crisis, the endpost is constantly moving. Without a finite end, we must be prepared to continue the work for as

long as we are needed. We also learned that bringing in issue area experts is invaluable; both to enhance our learning and support our partners on the ground.

We don't have all of the answers and we know that we still have a long road ahead. But, we are more committed than ever to defining our strategic grantmaking for the future of our communities, through a human centered approach. To tackle the seemingly insurmountable, oftentimes systemic and intersectional challenges that our neighbors face every day.

IMPACT

There are several factors that we would attribute to our success in grantmaking during COVID-19 that we believe can be replicated in future emergencies and many of which can be integrated into routine grantmaking practices, both for the Community Foundation as well as other foundations and philanthropic entities.

1 INTERDISCIPLINARY DECISION-MAKING BODIES

Enough cannot be said about the wonderful group of volunteers that came together to form our COVID-19 Core Evaluation Team. What made them successful, beyond being passionate and committed to supporting our communities, was that they all brought a distinct lens. If we were to replicate in the future, here are the archetypes we would seek out:

- existing fund leadership for their familiarity with the organizations and the communities they serve
- director-level government representative(s), preferably in social service delivery or other impacted sectors
- issue area experts with knowledge in areas relevant to the emergency at hand

2 REDUCTION IN BUREACRACY

We shortened our grant application, reduced the attachment requirements, and ultimately streamlined the application so nonprofits could apply for grants from several funds through a single point. This significantly reduced the barriers to entry for organizations, particularly smaller nonprofits with limited or no dedicated development staff.

3 EXPERTISE FOR US AND OUR GRANTEES

In an ever-evolving landscape around public health guidance and recommendations, it was critical that we had access to experts that could inform our work - not just in direct response to the health needs in our community, but to the broader things impacted like unemployment, housing, childcare, and more.

4 TRACK IMPACT FROM THE BEGINNING

In an emergency it can be difficult to prioritize data tracking to evaluate impact. For the COVID-19 Relief and Recovery Fund, we were fortunate to have the support of the Community Foundation staff who could track, sort, and analyze data for themes and hotspots. As we moved across phases of grantmaking, it was very helpful to review the data and have it in a digestible format that allowed us to make informed decisions.

5 CONSTRUCT A CLEAR PROCESS

Early on we decided that everyone would review every proposal. We also decided what our meeting time and frequency would be. Lastly, we had distinct roles for staff and evaluation team members in preparation for the meetings. The separation of roles gave everyone a part in the work and made it easier for us to hold each other accountable.

6 GO BEYOND WORDS ON A PAGE

It was critical that we were willing to reach out to applicants for additional information, to ask clarifying questions, and to simply have a conversation about what their needs were. We made phone calls; lots of them. This both reminded us to take a human centered approach to our work, as well as to gather information that was oftentimes crucial in decision-making for the larger group.

7 COLLABORATION AND MORE COLLABORATION

We were not the only foundation in New Jersey that was trying to deploy dollars to our nonprofit partners. It was a critical part of our fundraising efforts to have conversations with other funders about their interests and capacity, funds both inside and outside of the Community Foundation. Through this collaboration of grantmaking efforts we were able to better support our communities and leverage resources that allowed them to focus on the needs and work ahead, rather than on fundraising to make the work possible.

8 COMFORT WITH DISCOMFORT

We held each other accountable in our definitions of relief, recovery, and rebuilding. As a team, we committed to centering honesty and transparency. There was a deep and mutual respect that supported us navigating, at times uncomfortable conversations, for the greater cause and work at hand.

9 MORE OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

In their entirety our COVID experiences have made us better funders and more collaborative partners. Never satisfied, we also see opportunities for improvement. Among them are seeking a better balance between barebones applications and reporting, with the opportunity to collect and apply useful information and insights about community needs, efficient service delivery, and models that result in the greatest impact and efficiency. Also, we will find ways to balance being nimble by relying on a small group of decision-makers with involving more trustees and community representatives in grantmaking so they benefit from the powerful learning acquired by evaluating grant applications.

A LOOK AT THE NUMBERS

74

UNDUPLICATED
ORGANIZATIONS RECEIVED
FUNDING FROM THE COVID-19
RELIEF AND RECOVERY FUND

143

TOTAL GRANTS ACROSS ALL
THREE PHASES OF THE COVID-19
RELIEF AND RECOVERY FUND

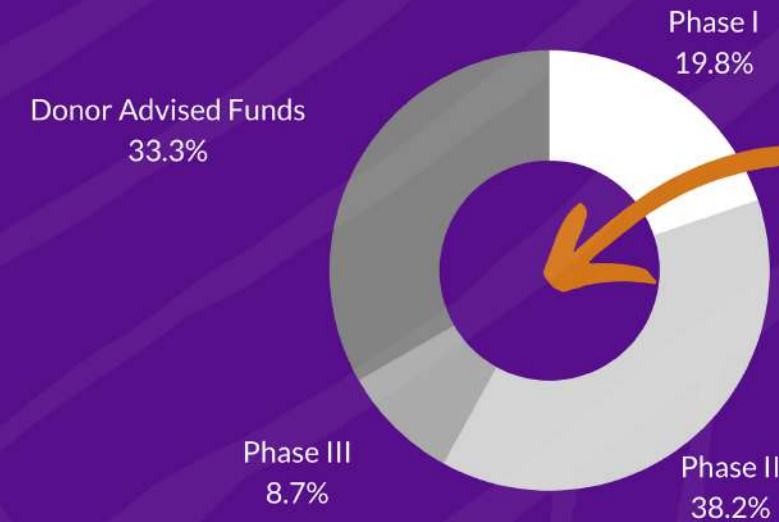
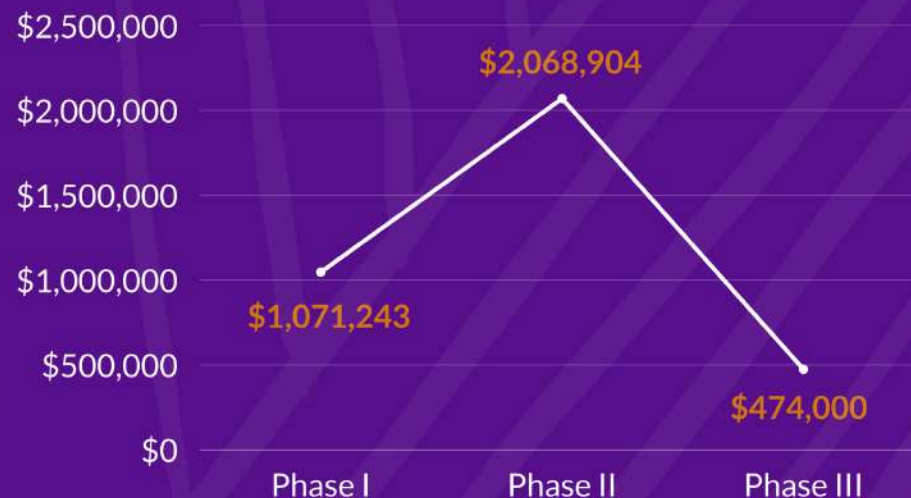
\$2,643,674.61

TOTAL DONOR ADVISED FUNDS
DISBURSED, WHICH INCLUDES
MORE THAN \$800,000 IN GRANTS
TO OUR OWN COVID-19 RELIEF
AND RECOVERY FUND

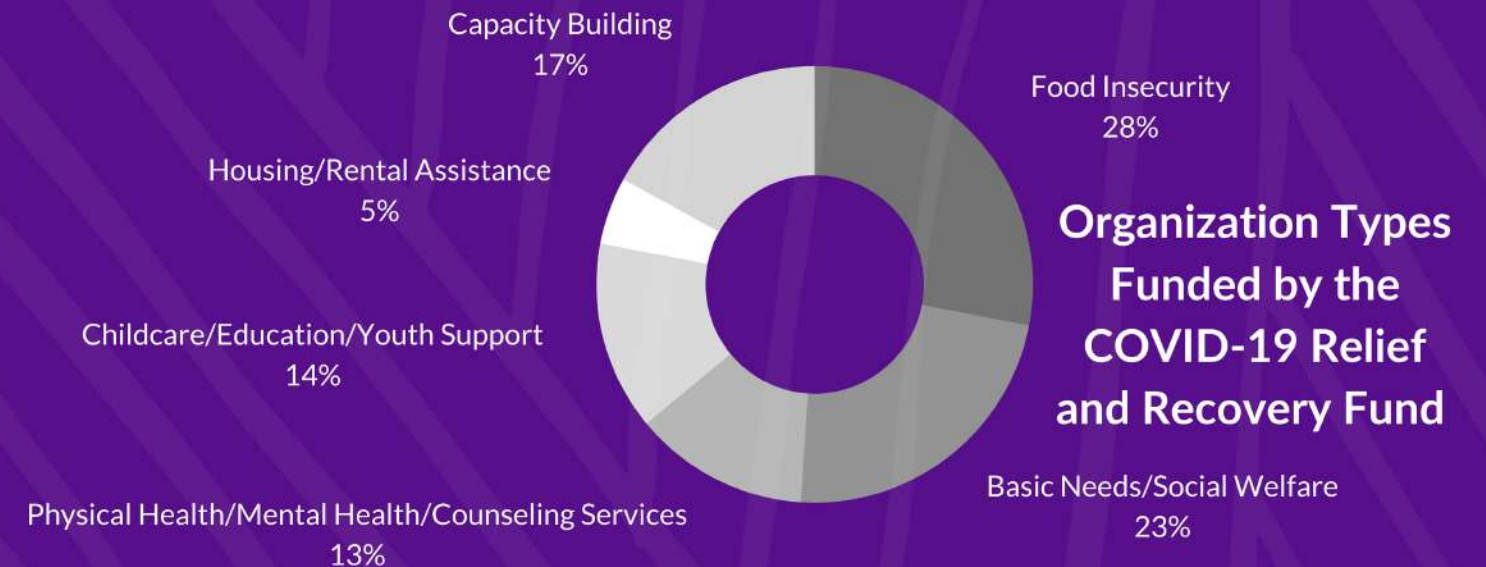
217

TOTAL GRANTS DISBURSED
DIRECTLY FROM DONOR
ADVISED FUNDS

Amount Awarded
in Each Phase



\$5,430,547.17* = total
philanthropic funding
awarded in collaboration
with other community
grantmaking funds



*These figures do not include grants awarded through the NJ Arts and Culture Renewal Fund, which has provided almost \$4.5 million in funding to date.

GRANTEE HIGHLIGHTS



RENTAL ASSISTANCE

needs by funding a collaboration between the Housing Initiatives of Princeton and Arm In Arm. The organizations were able to centralize an intake process that would provide funds from both organizations without tenants having to apply to both organizations.

They raised a collective pot of funds for assistance, and maintained separate funds that could be utilized for specific geographic areas, particular income brackets, and more. Their collaboration also led to an increase in inter-agency staff communication, both for client support as well as resource sharing.

Both grantees, Princeton Children's Fund and the collaboration between Arm In Arm and HIP benefited from the support of the pre-existing Princeton Housing Stability Coalition. This pre-existing collaboration between service providers and government partners provided a space to discuss challenges, leverage funds for clients, and identify additional services for individuals and families in need.

Rental assistance for existing and mounting arrears were something that we knew we wanted to support with the COVID-19 Relief and Recovery Fund. In Phase I we were able to support the efforts of the Princeton Children's Fund, alongside other local funders and donors, as they developed the Coronavirus Emergency Relief Fund (CERF). The goal was for residents to be able to stay in their homes and to maintain access to utility services that enabled students to be connected to school and allowed all residents to be connected to food resources during the pandemic.

Their efforts included canvassing, flyering, and direct landlord engagement. By creating relationships with larger landlords they were able to decrease approval times and oftentimes negotiated arrears to be reduced, which saved more funds for the next family applying for support.

In total the Princeton Children's Fund provided rental, mobile phone, internet, and/or utility assistance to 413 households from March - August 2020.

In Phase II, the Community Foundation continued supporting rental assistance



WARMING CENTER

Just as we can acknowledge that collaboration was critical to our success in grantmaking, we also note that service provider collaborations made work on the ground more successful and ultimately more impactful. In the case of the Rescue Mission and the Trenton Areas Soup Kitchen there was already a long standing collaboration that was leveraged and strengthened during COVID-19.

By August 2020, it became clear that COVID-19 wasn't going away as quickly as we all had hoped. So these two organizations sprang into action, preparing for what would be the first full winter with COVID-19 in our communities. Rescue Mission leveraged staff and space in their building, and the Trenton Area Soup Kitchen provided meals and art, developed by some of their patrons in their visual arts programming, to outfit the space.



The Rescue Mission was able to offer a space, but it was not equipped with restrooms, which was a necessary component for serving hundreds of individuals per night. With support from the COVID-19 Relief and Recovery Fund, the Rescue Mission was able to have bathrooms installed before freezing temperatures hit Mercer County.

That winter they served and engaged a lot of people who had not been engaged before or who, for an extended period of time, had not come to the Rescue Mission. They were successful in keeping a lot of people out of the cold and harsh winter elements. On top of that they did it in the middle of a pandemic while adhering to COVID-19 protocols, to ensure safety for the staff and the patrons.

It was a welcoming space where people could sit and eat safely with the plexiglass at the table, but still have a meal together. While at the warming center patrons could connect with needed programming and services, charge electronic devices, contact loved ones, and address basic hygiene before heading back out.

Their joint success at serving 1,234 unduplicated clients, with over 10,000 touch points, over a five month period (December 2020 - April 2021), was a testament to their strong partnership. The warming center was open 24/7 during those five months and served as a warm, safe place for people seeking shelter.

At the center of their collaboration was a deep trust, mutual respect, and admiration stemming from their longstanding commitment to the same populations.

FOOD RESOURCES

The Trenton Health Team has been convening and collaborating with local area social service providers since its inception in 2010. What began as a consortium of area hospitals working together to address long-term health solutions has evolved into an organization that has honed its convening and integrating skills to support the broader public health landscape in Mercer County.

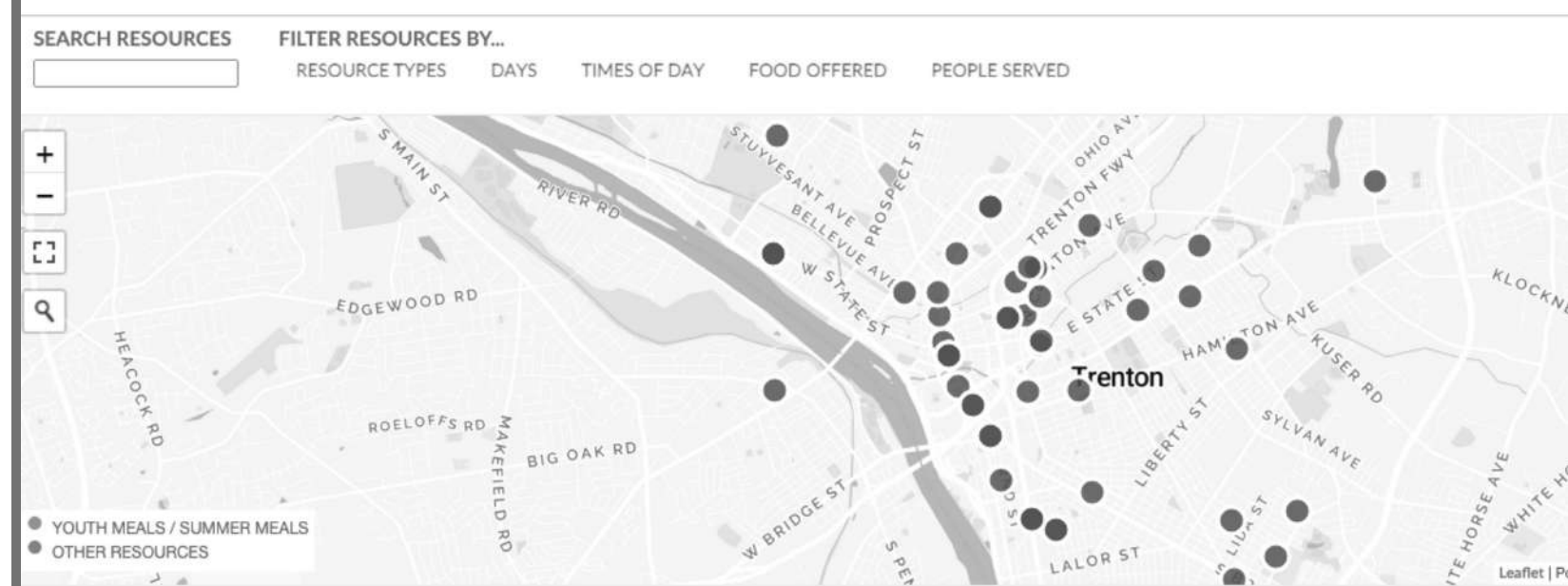
In February 2019 a subgroup, the Trenton Food Stakeholders, was formed from the Community Advisory Board that would focus on food insecurity, support and ecosystems in Mercer County. The subgroup comprised of over 50 organizations was successful in the early stages of the pandemic in coordinating resources for members to reduce duplication and increase impact.

Building on a pre-existing framework they

were able to convene on a weekly basis to review community needs, organizational resources and capacity, as well as opportunities to leverage each other's work. The Trenton Food Stakeholders subgroup is co-chaired by Trenton Health Team staff and Joan Healy, the Family and Community Health Sciences Sr. Program Coordinator Supervisor at the Cooperative Extension of Mercer County, Rutgers New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station.

Beyond collaboration, the subgroup members have a long-formed sense of trust that is rooted in their shared commitment to improving food access in Trenton. With the support of the COVID-19 Relief and Recovery Fund, the Trenton Health Team had the resources to convene the Trenton Food Stakeholders bi-weekly at the height of the pandemic to identify gaps, coordinate service delivery, and leverage capacity.

Pushing the work further, the Trenton Health Team, with the support of the Trenton Food Stakeholders, developed an online free food resource mapping platform that offers real-time mapping and calendar data for people to find food resources near them.



Some of the more visible impacts of COVID-19 included food insecurity, housing instability, unemployment, and remote learning for youth. Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) which are "potentially traumatic events that occur in childhood (0 – 17 years old)" according to the Center for Disease Control can have negative lasting impacts, some less visible. Just a few months into the pandemic the Foundation for Education Administration (FEA), the professional learning division of the New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association, developed a blueprint to address ACEs and trauma in NJ schools by focusing, not on the negative aspects, and instead approaching it with Healing Centered Engagement.

The initial implementation phase of the blueprint was funded by the Community Foundation, Burke Foundation, Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, New Jersey Health Initiatives and the NJ Pandemic Relief Fund. School districts were invited to apply for participation in the program to receive training, coaching, and implementation support. The applicants were required to demonstrate commitment alongside two community partners. The comprehensive model and approach included mental health first aid training, the design and training of a new ACE Interface curriculum, and ongoing coaching.

Between April and June 2021, the FEA was able to train 26 schools representing all aspects of the state and all ages, including a special services school district. The first year of the program culminated in an action plan, developed individually by each school, to implement their learnings and identified additional training/learning areas to support their plan implementation in the future.

HEALING CENTERED ENGAGEMENT

All but one of the original schools are currently participating in the second cohort, which provides a stipend for implementation of the action plan alongside ongoing coaching and technical assistance.

The Community Foundation was able to provide a grant to the FEA that would develop a second cohort of schools to participate in the training, specifically in Mercer County. This support has also provided clear pathways for the FEA to target all schools and early childhood development centers within the City of Trenton, as well as four other schools in the county.

To date over 2,000 individuals have been trained, including trusted messengers from the communities where the participating schools are located. Next on the agenda, the FEA plans to offer trainings on the Healing Centered Approach to community organizations in Trenton, particularly those that are engaging with youth and their families.





As we reflect on our work with the COVID-19 Relief and Recovery Fund in the first 18 months of the pandemic, we are able to pinpoint some areas that we would enhance if there ever were a need to form a rapid and strategic grantmaking response to an emergency. We share this both in evaluation of our work, but also hopefully in support the entire philanthropic sector.

In some of these areas we feel that we did meet the moment, but want to put them forth with intentionality for the future, lest we forget how important and critical some of these components were to our success.



We did not have a nonprofit executive represented on our core decision-making team. We believe that their on the ground knowledge could have been invaluable to our discussions.



Frame all of the questions on the grant applications utilizing the lens of frontline staff that need funds and don't have time to write it all down. Follow up with phone conversations, as needed.



Listen to the needs that emerge from trusted partners. Don't try to anticipate the need or assess it from arm's length. Call people and ask them what they need, before opening our grant rounds.



Understand that conflict can be really healthy, particularly when making decisions that can ripple and have lasting impacts.



We met many new grassroots organizations that are neighborhood-based and had not been previously on our radar. We need to reach deeper in getting to know our ecosystem.



Listen, listen, listen. Listen to each other and to those who know the work intimately either due to service delivery expertise or lived experience.

LESSONS LEARNED

FACING THE FUTURE

There is a need for our ecosystem of nonprofits, foundations, and government partners to be collaborating before the next emergency strikes. Some additional things we learned and will continue to bring to the forefront of our work:

- a strong and capable staff is a must (they led us and supported us);
- the trust we had been building for years amongst board members made it easier;
- a spirit and propensity for collaboration should be pre-existing and long-standing;
- access to information on the ground in communities, from other funders throughout the state, and from local government can only improve outcomes;
- seek feedback along the way from partners and grantees;
- keep the sense of urgency high;
- be intentional about going outside of the organization to gather information, no silo;
- information gathering from prospective grantees should be second nature, we need to pick up the phone and call them;
- dedicating the time required to the process requires discipline and focus;
- leverage other dollars to ensure our grantees are resourced to do the work;
- create flexible rules, be adaptable; and
- nonprofit capacity building is such a critical component to our collective success.

As we think to the future of our grantmaking we will reflect on all of our lessons learned. It is critical that we continue to build the bench of leadership within our board and our staff so that we feel equipped a team that is capable of achieving what needs to be done. We also urge other grantmakers to consider an assessment of what is needed for them to respond quickly in a crisis, like COVID-19. Are there policies that could be adopted now for emergency response? Are there allocations that can be made for future emergencies? Are there gaps in capacity that can be plugged now?

In the months and years ahead we will be asking ourselves these critical questions to inform our strategic planning, our strategy as a convener in our region, and as a community foundation that holds significant social capital in our state. We have various resources beyond the financial ones and we must grow our capacity to utilize and leverage them for the benefit of our communities. What is clear is that we cannot wait until the next calamity to plan strategies and map our ecosystems.

We remain committed to learning, to collaboration, and to being a part of something bigger than ourselves.



COVID-19 CORE EVALUATION TEAM MEMBERS

Atiya Weiss, Executive Director, The Burke Foundation
Eleanor Horne, PACF Board Trustee Emeritus, Phase I Core Evaluation Team Chair
Isabel Zisk, Co-Chair, The Fund for Women and Girls
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CASA for Children of Mercer & Burlington Counties
Calvary Baptist Church (the Chubby's Project)
Capital Area YMCA
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WE MAKE: Autism At Work
Womanspace Inc.
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YWCA of Princeton

A large, stylized graphic of a crowd of diverse people, composed of many small, colorful squares, each containing a simplified illustration of a person's face. The crowd is arranged in a way that it appears to be rising from the bottom of the page, creating a sense of growth and community. The background is white, and the crowd is made up of various colors including blue, green, yellow, orange, red, and purple.

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