

## COVID-19 Giving Data: New Report

09.17.20 | Linda J. Rosenthal, JD



On March 31, 2020 – just about two weeks into the catastrophe that has enveloped the world – staff writer Dan Parks of *The Chronicle of Philanthropy* interviewed nonprofit heavyweights to gain their assessment of what it might take to survive this crisis.

Brian Gallagher, CEO of United Way Worldwide, characterized the COVID-19 crisis as “a slow-moving hurricane” hitting every country in the world simultaneously.” Although early data showed that in those first days, “donors responded quickly” by “stepping up their giving,” he said that “private giving ... can’t possibly make up” for what American society including its (now vulnerable and hurting) nonprofits would need.

According to preliminary data available at the time, giving by foundations stood at “\$2 billion worldwide and climbing.” Congress had enacted a “\$2 trillion stimulus law” on March 27th with “important benefits for nonprofits, but it’s not nearly enough.”

Goodwill Industries International CEO Steve Preston had served in HUD during the financial crisis of 2008. Comparing that crisis – which “was largely confined to the housing and financial industries” – to the COVID-19 pandemic that “is hobbling nearly every part of the economy,” he said that the impact “is much more widespread, immediately.” He added that he didn’t “think any level of philanthropic giving” would “fix this problem over the next 90 days.” It will need a “... much bigger response. Nobody’s seen anything like this before.”

### *Philanthropy Steps Up*

Over the next few months, there were many anecdotal and news reports about the nature and extent of philanthropic giving. This information has been valuable but it’s best to rely on hard data. That’s where a newly published, 20-page joint report by Candid and the Center for Disaster Philanthropy (CDP) comes in: Titled *Philanthropy and COVID-19 in the first half of 2020*, it presents facts and

figures through about July 7, 2020.

In *COVID Giving Beats Most Other Disasters* (September 1, 2020), staff at *The NonProfit Times* write: “Although not a complete picture of the global philanthropic response, due to the ever-changing response to the pandemic, the report offers some insight into ‘funding flows’ so far.” Data shows that just short of “\$12 billion was awarded for COVID-19 relief globally during the first half of 2020....” Of course, that reference to the “first half of 2020” in the report title is a bit misleading since philanthropic activity related to the pandemic didn’t begin until about the middle of March.

In her Foreword to the Report, CDP’s president and CEO, Patricia McIlreavy, acknowledges the “central role that governments and the United Nations hold in the coordination of preparedness and response activities within any major crisis.” But she particularly lauds the “critical contribution of philanthropy” to the pandemic relief.

“As the pandemic continues to ravage the globe, with millions of confirmed cases and hundreds of thousands of lives lost, philanthropy has provided a consistency of hope,” she explains, adding: “[P]hilanthropic donors were generous. Not only did they give with exponential generosity but they also demonstrated a willingness to challenge their own restrictions on accessibility to their funds.”

## *Key Giving Data*

Researchers pinpointed “more than \$11.9 billion awarded for COVID-19 globally,” with corporations giving more than two-thirds of the funding. In addition, “community foundations awarded more grants than any other grantmaker type (49 percent of total awards).” Moreover, high-net-worth people made gifts of at least \$1.6 billion, and a “combined \$452.9 million was donated to COVID-19 response through the donor-advised funds of Fidelity Charitable, Schwab Charitable, and Vanguard Charitable.”

But “proportionately little institutional funding was explicitly designated for specific populations and vulnerable communities.” That needs to be substantially improved. Longer-term funding needs to go to the most affected areas around the world.” So far, this distribution has been lacking.

The report authors offer some suggestions for continued “effective giving” based on flexible and innovative practices adopted already by some funders. These include:

- Provide unrestricted support
- Expand on existing giving
- Support local nonprofits and information—in the U.S. and internationally—that focus on communities of color and other vulnerable populations
- Give to (rapid response) funds
- Partner with other funders
- Fund land trusts (for long-term housing recovery needs)

## *Conclusion*

Of course, this is interim data. There will be a follow-up report in February 2021. “The Center for Disaster Philanthropy and Candid will continue to track the COVID-19 crisis, its impacts, and disaster

giving. This report presents the first step on that journey.”

Until then, Candid will provide the latest funding data on its coronavirus special issue web page.