

UNPRECEDENTED CRISIS, UNPRECEDENTED *collaboration*

WNY COVID-19 COMMUNITY RESPONSE FUND

The brightest light guiding and inspiring the Community Foundation in 2020 was the incredible generosity of our clients and partners.

It became clear in mid-March 2020 that we were facing a health crisis of epic proportions in every corner of Western New York. As a community convener, the Community Foundation rapidly responded with our partners at The John R. Oishei Foundation, Health Foundation for Western and Central New York, United Way of Buffalo and Erie County, Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation and the Peter and Elizabeth C. Tower Foundation, to bring together the funding community to stage a coordinated and regional philanthropic response through the WNY COVID-19 Community Response Fund.

Weekly calls were initiated to ensure the group, including dozens of funders, was receiving up-to-the-minute information on needs in the community and to ensure the collective response was coordinated through a racial equity lens. What happened in rapid succession is testament to the collective generosity and willingness of hundreds of foundations, corporations and individuals to support our region through one of the darkest years in recent memory.

The next few pages detail the Fund's two simultaneous approaches to grantmaking to address the immediate needs in our community and fund solutions to long-term challenges exacerbated by the pandemic.

To see a complete list of the funders, visit [WNYResponds.org](https://www.wnyresponds.org).

60+
FUNDING
PARTNERS

\$9.5 million
raised as of December 31, 2020



**\$8
million**

granted in 2020 to
support organizations
**servicing all
eight counties
of WNY**



100+
foundations, corporations and
community leaders and
1,900+
individual donors

Basic Needs Emergency Grants ▾

Moving Forward Together Initiatives ▶

Top needs covered:



Emergency Response Grants

The first priority when the WNY COVID-19 Community Response Fund launched was to ensure funds were distributed as efficiently and effectively as possible to organizations serving on the frontlines of responding to the crisis. Less than two weeks after publicly announcing the establishment of the WNY COVID-19 Community Response Fund, \$4.5 million was granted to 74 organizations serving the eight counties of Western New York. These organizations were addressing immediate needs in our community in the areas of food, housing, healthcare, childcare, mental health, transportation and other emergency services.

By the end of May, the Fund awarded nearly \$7 million in grants ranging from \$500 to \$300,000 to approximately 400 organizations.

While dispersing the immediate response grants, it became abundantly clear that grassroots organizations were also playing an important role during the COVID-19 crisis and needed a different level of support. Recognizing that, a team was convened in each county to rapidly deploy resources to small urban and rural organizations to support needs ranging from stocking community food pantries to supporting infrastructure needed to meet increased demand for mental health services.

GRANTEE THANK YOU NOTES



YWCA Niagara Frontier | “The YWCA of the Niagara Frontier staff adapted to serving the needs of our community in many ways with the support of a WNY COVID-19 Community Response Fund grant. Our school staff quickly adjusted planning summer care programs and sending virtual connections to the kids and Child Protective Services and local police, and District Attorney’s office liaison staff began checking in remotely with their clients and continuing to get new referrals. The safehouse staff has been taking care of a family and doing a lot of sanitizing and cleaning. Our 19 families of women and children living at Carolyn’s House were given face masks and hand sanitizer.”

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Food Closet | “The grant dollars that we received from the WNY COVID-19 Community Response Fund were used to purchase additional food for the St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Food Closet. On occasion, we have to supplement certain food items that are not available through our food bank supplier. Specifically, this grant was used to purchase 779 pounds of food and we were able to provide an additional 649 meals for the attendees of our food pantry.”

–Nicole Drozdiel, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Food Closet



Solutions FOR A BRIGHTER FUTURE

MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER

In June 2020, the WNY COVID-19 Community Response Fund decided to expand its response to the pandemic and look toward recovery by inviting stakeholders to strengthen key systems through new solutions.

At the end of 2020, approximately \$1 million was granted to support these five efforts, with much more to come in 2021 and 2022 as progress in these endeavors continues.



Basic Needs Emergency Grants

Moving Forward Together Initiatives



Connecting Food Systems

Ensuring that everyone has access to good quality food—and that we support our local producers—has been a critical need during the COVID-19 crisis. A community-focused, regionally coordinated planning effort, facilitated by the WNY Foundation, was launched to find solutions called Food Future WNY. It has united stakeholders, representing diverse aspects and perspectives of the region's food system. Together they are working with a national team of food system experts to address long-term food insecurity in Western New York.



Sourcing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Sourcing reliable and affordable vendors for PPE was a challenge from the start with COVID-19. By working with local nonprofit Visually Impaired Advancement (VIA), a coordinated effort was created to source and purchase PPE to ensure nonprofits had the equipment they needed to safely serve our community. In 2020, more than 100 nonprofits were able to purchase reliable and affordable PPE through this effort.



Developing Public Policy

The Fund awarded a grant to the Partnership for the Public Good to embark on a yearlong public policy and advocacy initiative. In partnership with the nonprofit sector, and with significant input from the community, this effort is focused on making changes to public policy at local and state levels to address the long-term impact of the COVID-19 crisis. For example, the team is advocating for permanent changes to expand telehealth coverage.



Achieving Digital Equity and Inclusion

Our service delivery system has completely changed during the pandemic to one that is far more reliant on virtual and electronic communications. The Fund has convened an initiative, facilitated by the Peter and Elizabeth C. Tower Foundation, to bring together over 55 stakeholders, similar to the food system effort, to collectively work on solutions to bridge the digital divide through equity and inclusion in both urban and rural areas of Western New York.

Encouraging New Ideas



In June, a Request for Ideas (RFI) process was launched to surface collaborative solutions from nonprofit leaders to address challenges our community is facing. The response exceeded all expectations and 14 grants were awarded encompassing 300 partners to plan and/or implement these solutions in a wide array of sectors from housing and homelessness to improving digital literacy.

HOUSING



Live Well Erie Housing Taskforce's Stability Program

The Live Well Erie Housing Taskforce is working to create a comprehensive, full-service set of housing stability reforms in Erie County. By addressing the long-standing, systemic issue of housing instability in Erie County, the plan is to redress the structural barriers within our community to stable housing access. The taskforce is comprised of leading experts from the nonprofit, public and private sectors who are working collaboratively to address the critical issues of housing inequity, housing instability and the availability of quality affordable housing in our region. The taskforce believes that addressing housing instability in Erie County requires race conscious interventions that focus on the needs of individuals, while seeking to effect larger policy change.



RACE MATTERS



Systems Change to Improve Health Outcomes

The Community Health Center of Buffalo is addressing racial equity in healthcare and equity for vulnerable populations. The focus is on Erie and Niagara County residents of color who are disproportionately impacted by institutional and systemic factors contributing to poor health outcomes. Activities will be grounded in the cross-sector collaboration needed to effect systems change. This initiative is taking a regional approach to identify barriers, measure biases, and develop solutions, including public policy changes to address institutional and systemic racism.



A team from the Community Health Center heads out in a mobile van to bring COVID-19 healthcare to a neighborhood on the east side of Buffalo.

You can learn about the ideas moving forward into the implementation stage by scanning this QR code with the camera on your phone or by visiting www.wnyresponds.org.



The Community Foundation is incredibly grateful for the generosity of Western New York and the community's willingness to work together to address this crisis, which has affected us all in unprecedented and unimaginable ways.