

The COVID-19 Crisis is a Racial Justice Issue & our Response must Prioritize the Power of Black, Indigenous, Latinx & Other People of Color

The COVID-19 virus does not discriminate -- it can infect anyone. However, when an indiscriminate virus is unleashed in a country where racially unjust systems have long decided who lives, who dies, who thrives and who just gets by, the impact is anything but equal. As data disaggregated by race trickles out from state and local health agencies, it has confirmed what many of us not only feared but also anticipated: Black, Latinx and other people of color, who are the people of the global majority, are disproportionately dying from COVID-19.

A racially disparate impact necessitates a racially equitable response -- one that prioritizes the leadership of Indigenous, Black, Latinx, and other people of color to respond to the immediate needs in their own communities, bolsters resilience in the face of this crisis, and builds power to push for long-lasting systemic change. With this in mind, we, the undersigned funders who believe in reimagining philanthropy as a just, racially equitable transition of power and resources, have coordinated approximately \$2 million in sustained funding and \$500,000 in rapid response funding to date to organizations led by people of color in the Washington, DC region based on the following commitments:

1. Supporting underfunded organizations led by people of color

Organizations led by people of color are traditionally underfunded; therefore, they are less likely to have reserves and are more likely to be unsustainable after an economic crisis. We challenge the notion that the nonprofits that can weather an economic downturn are the "best." Rather, they have not suffered from decades of systemic underinvestment from local and national funders. **We commit to designating funds to organizations, projects, groups and collaboratives that are led by Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and other people of color, who are using an intersectional lens, and have operating budgets of under \$1,000,000.**

2. Solidarity with organizers, base builders and advocates

The philanthropic sector and the individual donors who support nonprofits are less likely to support the work of community organizing, base and power building and advocacy. We believe that more investment in organizations and groups that do this important work is imperative to address the issues that precipitated this crisis and the fallout to come. **We commit to supporting those who have been organizing, advocating, and building power with communities of color before, during and in the wake of this moment.**

3. Focusing hyperlocally

In times of crisis, your neighbors -- those living and working in proximity to you -- are often your first responders. We believe community care and mutual aid are vital responses in this moment and their structures will have lasting benefit beyond this crisis. **We commit to focusing this support toward groups working in hyperlocal ways, for example, the neighborhood, block or building level.**

4. Prioritizing disproportionately impacted industries and workers

Prior to the COVID-19 crisis, the District of Columbia already reported the highest Black unemployment rate in the country, and Virginia had a wider gap between Latinx/Hispanic and white unemployment than any other state. In the month of March, unemployment in the Greater Washington region, like the rest of the country, skyrocketed. Restaurant

workers, domestic/care workers, hospitality workers, sex workers, day laborers, and those dependent on the formal and informal gig economy lost their livelihoods in the wake of COVID-19 -- sectors where people of color make up the majority of workers and frequently have few worker protections. **We commit to supporting organizations and groups with sector-specific priorities to increase the resiliency of our region's disproportionately impacted industries, many of whom employ large numbers of people of color.**

5. Taking a multi-pronged approach

Philanthropic institutions' support must be as nimble and diverse as the evolving challenges our partners and their constituents face. Organizations are in the midst of shifting strategies and they are experimenting with digital organizing, conceiving of new fundraising plans and devising new engagement methods in a year with big priorities, including civic engagement and the Census. Our support is crucial. At the same time, we ask funders of social service and large-scale advocacy organizations to realign their resources in support of grassroots groups. **We commit to a multi-pronged, innovative approach to address the needs of organizations led by people of color to develop new capacities and shift their strategies.**

6. Operating with trust

Philanthropy is a sector created and maintained by inequity and an imbalance of power, and we recognize our role in maintaining inherited practices that hinder our ability to be at the forefront in achieving racial justice. **We commit to reimagining the relationship between funder and grantee partner, operating through a [trust-based approach](#) that is transparent, streamlined, flexible and removes unnecessary barriers that disproportionately impact grassroots groups and organizations led by people of color.**

As funders coordinating this effort, we pledge to act as advocates for these groups and invite our philanthropic peers, both locally and nationally, to part ways with business-as-usual philanthropy to meet this moment, which is anything but usual. Here are steps you can take right now:

1. Get the support you need from funding peers with experience in racial justice grantmaking. Organizations like Neighborhood Funders Group and Association for Black Foundation Executives can help. For local support, reach out to any of the signatories on this letter for opportunities to plug in.
2. If you do not have the relationships or capacity to deploy funding quickly to grassroots groups, rely on trusted intermediaries such as Diverse City Fund and Emergent Fund, who have a history of funding systems-change work driven by people of color-led grassroots organizations.
3. Extend your influence beyond grantmaking by contributing your time, expertise, and voice. We have formed sub-committees focused on civic engagement, healing justice and capacity building. We are especially inviting national foundations with regional offices in the Washington, DC region to join us.
4. Finally, attend the trust-based philanthropy webinar hosted by the Washington Regional Association of Grantmakers on Monday, April 20th at 11 a.m. to learn how to reimagine your philanthropy. Information can be found here: [trust-based-philanthropy-during-times-crisis-and-beyond](#)

In solidarity,

Yanique Redwood, PhD, MPH
President and CEO
Consumer Health Foundation

Board of Instigators
Diverse City Fund

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Director
Emergent Fund

Julia Baer-Cooper
Philanthropic Advisor
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Tonia Wellons
President and CEO
Greater Washington Community Foundation

Daniel Solomon
Donor Adviser to Greater Washington
Community Foundation

Nat Chioke Williams
Executive Director
Hill-Snowdon Foundation

Dara Johnson
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Horning Family Fund

Nicola Goren
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Jennifer Lockwood-Shabat
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Hanh Le
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Weissberg Foundation