

Corporate Peer Discussions on Food Access Response During COVID-19

Summary of Best Practices on Corporate Response

Virtual convenings held on March 25 and March 27, 2020

Convening Organizations: ACCP, CECP, COF, and POL

Association of Corporate Citizenship Professionals (ACCP), Council on Foundations (COF), Chief Executives for Corporate Purpose (CECP), and Points of Light (POL), which collectively represent more than 400 of the most socially and environmentally responsible global companies, are joining forces to support leaders of corporate purpose and to advocate for the field by convening dialogue on relevant solutions and to share best practices. While some companies are still assessing their response, we have already seen hundreds of corporations respond to the COVID-19 crisis with courage and determination. Their leadership sets an example for the sector to follow. In the sessions on Food Access Response During COVID-19, 61 member companies participated.

Best Practices for Addressing Food Access in COVID-19 Crisis

Conduct a needs assessment: Many companies are well-positioned to help in the COVID-19 crisis because of their long-standing community partnerships. The first step in responding is to check in with their nonprofit partners (through calls or sending a quick survey) in order to assess the situation and needs. Do nonprofits need flexibility to make changes to their grant agreements, and/or do they now need additional support? Ask nonprofits about their financial reserves, as some may need emergency funding. Others may have larger endowments, but the crisis is still impacting their operations and they need to adapt to new reality. In addition to providing funding, companies can help nonprofits to connect to other sources of funding available during the crisis.

Loosen restrictions on funding for nonprofits: In many cases, companies are unleashing restricted funds by changing programmatic grants to general operating funds, removing reporting requirements, converting sponsorships to donations, and/or accelerating timeline for funds to be deployed for relief. Council on Foundations has provided a sample addendum to a grant from program to general operating support.

<https://www.cof.org/content/sample-agreement-converting-project-grants-general-operating-support>

Provide new funding: Rather than diverting planned grants to emergency relief, many companies are making the case for additional funds and resources for investment. For these companies, the COVID-19 funding is incremental, in order to not further destabilize nonprofits. Some are accessing funds from other budgets (marketing, etc.)

Phased approach to philanthropy: Given that the COVID-19 crisis is evolving rapidly and likely going to last for a while, many companies are taking a phased approach to their giving. This is consistent with companies approached their giving after the financial crisis of 2008, and also a best practice in relief funding for natural disasters.

Phased approach to COVID-19 funding:

- 1) **Immediate** - Companies are moving quickly to meeting needs of food insecure communities;
- 2) **Intermediate** – In subsequent months, companies seek to address a broader set of community needs, taking into account where the gaps are after other relief packages (from government, etc.) are known;
- 3) **Long-term** - Finally, it's important to keep in mind long-term recovery, strengthening supports and offering help with capacity building, economic growth and sustainability, and building resilience.

Global and Hyper-Local Giving: On the issue-based peer-to-peer calls, companies indicated that they are taking a stratified approach to their funding, based on their own geographic footprint and stakeholders.

- 1) **Global Response** – Companies are investing in large global agencies and funds such as WHO COVID-Solidarity Response Fund, Give to Asia, CDC, Center for Disaster Philanthropy (CDP), Red Cross, Charities Aid Fund and Global Food Bank Network for giving to international food banks.
- 2) **Local & National Response**– Companies are looking to organizations like Feeding America, Direct Relief, Second Harvest, Catholic Charities, Meals on Wheels, Americares, and Salvation Army to connect organizations addressing food insecurity across the US. In key markets where they have a geographic presence, companies are giving to food banks & organizations on the ground, often utilizing funds created through United Way, Mayor’s funds, and community foundations. Companies are asking also Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) and volunteer councils to recommend local nonprofits for direct grants.

Additional Investment areas:

- 1) **Focus on helping vulnerable populations:** New challenges are emerging due to the complexity of this crisis, and some companies are focusing on addressing these intersectional issues. For example:
 - **Elderly** as an at-risk population for the COVID-19 virus, the elderly’s food deliveries can be made less frequently and include multiple days of food, with more frozen.
 - **Last-mile delivery and food bank infrastructure** are working with local nonprofits that ensure food is getting to where it needs to go.
 - **Homeless shelters** have higher demand due to rising unemployment and an increase in domestic violence during quarantine. Need for more child-care because children not going to school.
 - **Immigrant communities** dependent on hourly wages in cleaning, childcare, and construction are vulnerable and likely not eligible for federal relief if undocumented.
 - **Blood banks** are seeing a decrease due to social distancing.
- 3) **Helping nonprofits to adapt and collaborate** – Companies are adept at shifting strategies and many nonprofits now have to deliver their services in new ways or bring their services out to the community. Companies can use their expertise to help their nonprofit partners to pivot to fulfill their mission in new ways. Companies can also leverage their convening power to provide a community of practice for grantees working on food access to coordinate implementation efforts.
- 4) **Small business relief funds** – To ensure viability after the COVID-19 shutdown, companies are investing in CDFIs, restaurants (National Restaurants Association Foundation Employee Relief Fund), entrepreneurial relief funds, and funding survival or crisis coaching for small nonprofits to:
 - Complete an outbreak cash flow analysis
 - Learn about available disaster relief funding
 - Consider opportunities to create alternative income streams (online, etc.)
 - Consider whether remote working is a viable option for your staff (and, if yes, identify the best tools to make remote working function smoothly)
 - Think about down-time improvement opportunities
- 5) **Employee relief funds** – emergency funds focused to assist those in need of individual help. *(A separate set of company calls was held on this topic, and a summary of resources is forthcoming on that topic).*

Unique Assets: In addition to grant funding, companies are taking inventory of unique assets they can deploy to help. In the Food Insecurity area, for example:

- Direct donations of meals/food for those with restaurants in their supply chain

In other areas of COVID-19 relief, companies are:

- Creating a self-administered at-home test for diagnosing COVID-19 virus.
- Manufacturing hand soap in factories, distributing product to communities in need.
- Donating PPEs for medical workers to be safe, when it is part of their supply chain, or making donations to those producing them. Redeploying PPEs from China and other areas where need has plateaued.

- Medical companies are focusing on preventing and treating COVID-19 in homeless populations.
- Tech companies are providing computers and wifi hotspots to fill the distance learning gap in under-resourced communities.
- Data analysis of where virus spreading for nonprofits to reference for decision-making.
- Donation of books through FirstBook to avoid a slide in learning for students who are out of school.
- Providing customers with relief (*i.e.*, Energy company not disconnecting customers for non-payments.)

Employees are the backbone of commerce, and companies are engaged in many ways to provide relief and credible information to employees about how to stay safe during uncertain times, by:

- Continuing to employ workers, and sub-contractors when possible.
- Giving additional bonuses to hourly and part-time workers in factories producing food.
- Marc Benioff of salesforce.com has encouraged CEOs to take a '90-day no layoff' pledge.
- Provide employees with information and resources available if they need help.
- Working closely with Talent & Culture, HR, and Diversity & Inclusion team to create community throughout the company and be a light for engagement by telling positive stories at this difficult time.
- Providing best practices and resources on adjusting to working remotely (including learning resources for children who are now at home).
- Working with ERGs focused on neurodiversity and mental health to provide tools for self-care.

Mobilizing Employees who are well and wanting to help by providing:

- Virtual volunteerism and safe opportunities to volunteer in areas such as capacity building, financial capability work, thanking donors, fundraising, digital transformation, tech infrastructure, mobile resources, visiting with elderly virtually, etc. IT workers can help nonprofits and legal team in this crisis, as well.
- Other virtual volunteering resources shared on the calls include:
 - [Points of Light](#) virtual volunteer opportunities
 - [All for Good](#): Points of Light's database of thousands of volunteer opportunities
 - [GenerationOn](#) volunteer opportunities
 - [Create the Good](#): Initiative by AARP
 - [BeMyEyes.com](#) – an app that connects blind and low-vision people with sighted volunteers and company representatives for visual assistance through a live video call.
 - [MissingMaps.org](#) - an open, collaborative project in which you can help to map areas where humanitarian organizations are trying to meet the needs of vulnerable people.
 - [7Cups.com](#) – be a volunteer listener in this emotional support app.
 - [Translators without Borders](#)
 - [Bookshare](#) – ebooks for people with reading barriers. Volunteers scan and proofread, describe images, and provide support for Bookshare® teachers and families.
- While it can be a challenge, companies must try to balance the message of how to safely volunteer while following the guidelines of safe distancing in order to stay healthy.
- One company removed the 501c3 requirement for service time so that employees could use their Volunteer Time Off (VTO) time do shopping for a neighbor, story time over facetime, or find other ways to help individuals in their communities. Or, employees can help within the company with relief programs.

Matching gift incentives – companies are broadening eligible organizations (if previously restricted) and increasing the corporate match for organizations providing relief to COVID-19 (to 2:1 from 1:1, for example). Some companies are making this increased matching gift policy permanent, others have a time after which the policy will expire.

Adapting Communications – When providing a recommendation to executives, it is recommended to present a menu of actions that can be pursued right now with specifics on how to execute. Some leaders may hesitate to transition their program grants to general operating grants, but companies that have for many years supported

grantmaking in the areas of sustainability and building resilience have found that investments in these areas, like training, fundraising, tech upgrades, etc., have yielded the most meaningful stories and strengthened partnerships.

While it can be difficult to make or increase community investments at a difficult economic moment, when there could be cuts to your company, it is important to remember the responsibility to all stakeholders of the company. The way in which your company makes difficult decisions will be remembered long after this crisis. Supporting community partners will be a key part of that perception.

Coordinated response – In order to ensure money is getting where it's needed most, companies are mobilizing existing partnerships and aggregating capital in public space for capacity building (ex: 25 companies in Baltimore, working through an intermediary). Many public policy teams are participating in weekly conference calls with funders and public leaders in their key geographic areas to discuss and coordinate ongoing COVID-19 responses.

COVID-19 Resources from each partnering organization:

- ACCP: [COVID-19 Blogs](#)
- CECP: COVID-19 Resources [Recap for CEOs](#) and [Recap for CR Leaders](#)
- COF: [COVID-19 Resource Hub](#)
- POL: [COVID-19 Action Plan](#)