

## Philanthropy In The Age Of COVID-19

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The global COVID-19 crisis raises questions for a number of areas and philanthropy is certainly involved in this. Whether it be funding for medical treatment and research and care for vulnerable groups, a number of needs proliferate. A noted expert in how philanthropy works talks about the issues.

*The following commentary comes from Susan Winer, chief operating officer and co-founder at Chicago-based Strategic Philanthropy, a global philanthropic advisory firm. Susan is a regular contributor to Family Wealth Report's pages and is a member of our editorial advisory board.*

*The topic here is self-explanatory: how should philanthropists address the coronavirus pandemic and the massive dislocations it has caused? So many questions for the wealth management industry are thrown up by the virus, aka COVID-19, and this news service intends to discuss these, as appropriate, in coming weeks.*

*The editors are pleased to share these views and invite readers to respond. The usual editorial caveats apply. Email the editors at [tom.burroughes@wealthbriefing.com](mailto:tom.burroughes@wealthbriefing.com) and [jackie.bennion@clearviewpublishing.com](mailto:jackie.bennion@clearviewpublishing.com)*

We have been fielding numerous calls from clients and from financial and legal advisors on behalf of their clients to talk about the impact of the confluence of a global pandemic, tumbling stock market and potential recession, and the scrambling by world leaders and health officials to get ahead of the coronavirus which has been ahead of us thus far. For the first time everything appears to be grinding to a halt; travel has slowed significantly, unless by car. Everything is being canceled or closed: concerts, theaters, museums, conferences, meetings, schools and offices. Employees are working from home and people are afraid to go out to restaurants and other public places.

We are being asked what happens to the most vulnerable populations; seniors, economically disadvantaged, physically challenged, those living hand to mouth, paycheck to paycheck. The full impact of what is happening hasn't even hit. For larger companies with the resources to weather the current storm, there may be belt tightening, hiring freezes and salary freezes, but business will, with some adjustments, continue as usual.

But for a significant number of people; low income, hourly workers, immigrant populations and others who are part of or on the fringes of the disenfranchised population it won't be, can't be "business as usual". They face the potential of serious disruption to their lives; loss of income, hence purchasing power, loss of jobs, hence reduced productivity. On a more intangible level, erosion of the emotional and physical condition of a growing population. All of this will inevitably result in further, and longer-term damage to an already fragile economic environment.

For many people the only port in the storm is the nonprofit community, organizations which are on the ground and providing much needed support to a growing number of people. And it is this sector that is increasingly and rapidly being challenged. A large nonprofit had to cancel their annual dinner and the president of the organization was deeply troubled because the dinner accounted for 35 per cent of their annual budget. The chair of the board of a community-based food depository said that they are already seeing an uptick in the number of people calling or walking in seeking help with rent, food and childcare because of school closures and reduced wages. She said they may have to close their doors by June if they can't meet their budget numbers.

Every day we receive notifications of fundraising events canceled because of health concerns and the expedient toll of these cancellations on society is no longer anecdotal, it is serious. The "a light in the tunnel" may well be philanthropic dollars. But many funders have no idea how to begin, nor what the best course of action might be.

What should or could the philanthropic community do? What is the role of funders and those with the resources to make a difference? Is there a role? How can trusted advisors help their clients address emerging and mounting problems?

I thought it would be helpful to provide a perspective and some resources you can share with clients, ways in which they can help organizations and communities continue to do the work of making this world a better place. By starting that conversation with your clients you can make a significant difference for a great many people.

### **What advisors can do**

-- Start by reviewing the funds your clients have available for charitable gifts. Are there additional funds, outside of their charitable vehicle(s) that could be made available? Discuss using non-cash assets; real estate or art for example in lieu of cash.

-- If your clients are already supporting organizations, suggest they ask their grantees what their communities or constituents need. What are the organization's priorities right now?

-- If they have been funding specific programs or initiatives, suggest they consider making an unrestricted general operating gift so the organization can continue to deliver on their services and programs. Alternatively, they could provide funds to help community-based organizations and nonprofits prepare and enhance their crisis planning and emergency readiness so they can maintain operations and avoid disruptions in critical services and programs.

-- Be an information resource for your clients. The following list provides important information that donors can use to better understand how to target their funds to achieve the greatest impact and provide desperately needed support.

### **Information to share with clients**

-- Center for Disaster Philanthropy and Others: COVID-19 Coronavirus: How Philanthropy Can Respond  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CQUKaCvGEHk&feature=youtu.be> also

-- The Center for Disaster Philanthropy has excellent information. Tell your clients to regularly check back for anything new <https://disasterphilanthropy.org/disaster/2019-ncov-coronavirus/>

-- The Council on Foundations has a robust page of information that is constantly being updated  
<https://www.cof.org/news/philanthropys-response-coronavirus-outbreak>

-- The National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy <https://ncrp.org> is a good source of information about how to partner with organizations and other funders

Finally, encourage your clients to use all of the philanthropic tools available, beyond grant making to achieve the greatest and most immediate impact. Foundations, for example, can leverage their considerable convening power to help community stakeholders, business leaders, and public sector leaders collaborate to ensure a coordinated and comprehensive response.