We Are Stronger, Woven Together
Facing COVID-19 and looking to the future

In 2019, The Community Foundation adopted a new ten-year strategic plan with a commitment to take on systemic issues that have historically been barriers for many in our community. This plan, which was informed by conversations across our region, focuses on five priorities: Thriving Communities; Regional Cooperation; Economic Opportunity for All; Overcoming Persistent Poverty and Equity and Inclusion.

In 2020, so much has changed, both from the global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the joined voices of our communities calling for greater racial equity and justice.

The importance and the urgency of the priorities we committed to in our strategic plan have been magnified by the events of this year. For the Community Foundation, as for so many others, COVID-19 has been a crisis like no other.

Thanks to the strong commitment from our supportive Board of Directors, generous donors and nonprofit partners in the months since the pandemic began, we have been able to shift our focus, ensuring that critical needs are met across our region, especially for the most vulnerable members of our community.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Since mid-March, we have raised more than $2.7 million from generous donors to support the Foundation’s grantmaking funds that are providing relief to the organizations on the frontline of the crisis: The Birmingham Strong Fund, the Business Relief Fund, our Community Endowment Funds, Catalyst Funds, and our Emergency Response Fund. In addition, our donor advised fundholders have contributed $1.6 million in COVID relief grants.

$3,094,395 TOTAL GRANTS for COVID Response

$1,493,500 From Foundation Competitive Grants

$1,600,895 Grants from Donor Advised Funds

$2,709,524 Total COVID related support raised from 711 donors

For More Information
Learn more about our COVID-19 relief efforts or make a donation at CFBHAM.ORG/COVID-19-RESPONSE
Covid-19 Response: Supporting our Community in Crisis

MARCH

The first case of COVID-19 in Alabama was confirmed on March 13 triggering a statewide shutdown presenting unprecedented challenges to the entire community. The Foundation moved quickly to respond to the crisis:

- On March 16 we activated our Emergency Response Fund to help meet critical crisis needs. Our Board of Directors approved a challenge grant to seed the fund.
- The Foundation suspended the regular competitive grant cycle and dedicated our 2020 discretionary grantmaking dollars to COVID crisis relief.
- We partnered with the City of Birmingham to launch the Birmingham Strong Fund for small businesses.
- Our staff quickly transitioned to working remotely.
- We surveyed our nonprofit partners to help guide our first phase of emergency response grantmaking.
- We launched weekly community calls on COVID response and related issues and began sending weekly video and e-mail updates to community partners.

April

On April 1st, the Community Foundation opened the first phase of our COVID-19 Emergency Response grantmaking. We received more than 250 survey responses from partners about the impact of the growing crisis on organizations and the communities they serve. The overwhelming consensus was that nonprofits were struggling to meet urgent and increased community needs and we needed to act quickly.

The determination was made to accept grants on a rolling basis so funds could be distributed weekly. Grants were awarded in two categories: Rapid Response Grants focusing on resiliency in communities by addressing the immediate and basic needs of economically vulnerable populations impacted by COVID-19, and Nonprofit Adaptation Grants to assist organizations whose operations had been adversely impacted by COVID-19. The first grants were awarded on April 8th with 9 grants totaling $85,000.

“Thanks to this rent assistance from the East Lake Initiative, I now have more wiggle room to support my children’s education”

-East Lake Initiative

Before Alabama had its first diagnosed COVID case, the leadership of the City of Birmingham reached out to the Foundation to help build a public-private partnership to support the Birmingham community from the economic impacts of COVID-19. The Birmingham Strong emergency loan fund, held and managed at the Foundation, was established to fortify small businesses by providing bridge capital before federal CARES Act funding became available. In the months since, Birmingham Strong has become a model that other cities have replicated to help stabilize employment, stimulate economic vitality and offset losses related to the crisis.

In a short period of time, we recruited $1.2M to match a $1.2M investment from the City. After being reviewed by a multi-sector loan advisory committee, 90 loans totaling almost $2 million were approved to support small businesses located within the Birmingham city limits.
MAY

As we continued to learn about the effects of COVID-19 on our region, the Foundation led additional efforts supporting organizations on the frontline of the crisis. We helped convene a weekly meeting of 20 funders to discuss community needs and alignment of funding around COVID; partnered with the Birmingham Business Resource Center to provide support for nonprofits applying for the Paycheck Protection Program; and continued to play a leadership role with the Alabama Hard-to-Count Collaborative in reaching out to populations at risk of being under counted for the Census 2020.

Throughout the pandemic the Foundation has worked to provide timely updates and information to the community. From March until May, we hosted a weekly virtual update webinar. Beginning in June, we moved to a biweekly community update. Speakers have included Joseph Parilla of the Brookings Institution, Dr. Michael Saag, the UAB Director of Infectious Diseases, Senator Doug Jones and a panel discussion on workforce development after COVID-19. Recordings of the presentations are available on our website cfbham.org/news/research.

JUNE

Over the course of the nine weeks of our initial COVID-19 response we awarded 98 grants totaling $1,493,500 to nonprofits meeting critical community needs. This included 59 Rapid Response grants to meet critical needs related to COVID-19, including food, rent, and utility assistance, medical care, mental health care, education and more. An additional 32 Nonprofit Adaptation grants helped organizations adapt their technology and operations so they could continue providing services during the crisis.

The Foundation and forward-thinking donors also made special proactive grants to address community-wide needs around equitable access to COVID testing, child care for children of essential workers, COVID vaccine research, and CARES Act funding support.

“Our son had become so withdrawn without school and his typical routine. After just one day of camp at The Exceptional Foundation, my husband commented on how much more like himself he seemed to be. We are so glad he’s able to come to camp and see his friends!”

– Parent of an Exceptional Foundation student

EQUITY AND INCLUSION

In 2018, we spent the year in community conversations, listening to a broad range of community members to help set our priorities for the next decade. Equity and inclusion was identified by the community as a central issue to address and it has become a critical focus area for the Community Foundation. We have embraced a broad definition of equity that includes all groups that are systemically marginalized, excluded, and under-resourced, while also focusing on racial equity and how systemic racism impacts our whole community.

Through our grantmaking and research we have seen how COVID-19 has exposed fractures in our economic and health systems. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, there is a disproportionate burden of illness and death among racial and ethnic minority groups. In addition, the recent killings of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor and other people of color have brought a heightened awareness to the racial inequality faced by Black people in our country.

At the Foundation, we are committed to actively pursuing this focus on equity and inclusion. We have begun an intensive training with a cohort of other foundations throughout the Southeast so that both our internal and external processes are inclusive and responsive to the needs of all people; we built equity-related questions into the phase one COVID-19 grant application; our phase two grants will prioritize support for organizations led by people of color; and our 2020 Woven Together Learning Series will take a deep dive into equity and inclusion through the remainder of the year.

Changing the narrative and creating a region where race is no longer a determining factor and where all lives are valued equally will take time, patience and commitment from all of us. We believe that focusing on equity and inclusion can help move us towards our vision of becoming a just, prosperous and unified region where every person is empowered to reach their full potential.
JULY

In late June we issued a second community survey, receiving over 280 responses that helped us to better understand how the crisis was evolving. Informed by this data and national best practices, in mid-July we opened the second phase of our COVID-19 grantmaking. Phase Two grants will focus on two categories: Programs and Services to Meet Critical Needs and Operational Support. These grants will prioritize support for groups disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 crisis, and will focus on being inclusive and accessible to smaller organizations as well as those led by people of color. We received more than 100 applications in the first week that the new grant cycle was open. Our Programs staff, Grant Review and Evaluation Committee and Site Review Team volunteers are diligently reviewing all of the requests. The first round of grants will be awarded on August 21st and the second round will be announced on September 11th.

NEXT STEPS

The Community Foundation views this crisis in three phases: relief, recovery and resilience. After we complete our Phase Two grantmaking in September, we will begin planning for a third phase of funding to take place in late fall. We are committed to using all of our resources to meet changing community needs as we learn about the long-term effects of COVID-19 in our region. None of this work would be possible without the support of hundreds thoughtful, generous and civic-minded donors who have partnered with us to support people and communities in need. Thank you.

To meet the ongoing needs of our community, we continue to seek funding to sustain our long-term response. To learn more about joining us, contact Lora Blalock at lblalock@cfbham.org.

“My wife and I are most grateful for the Emergency Response Grants that you have been awarding. We check the list every week and are delighted to see so many organizations that we support and admire on that list and to learn about organizations we didn’t know about and their positive impact in Birmingham. You are doing good work and we’ll continue to support the Community Foundation’s efforts in this area in the coming months.”

– Community Foundation Donor

To find out more about our COVID-19 response and how you can help make a difference, please contact:

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Above: A grant from the Community Foundation to the Society of St. Andrew was used to secure and distribute 320,000 pounds of fresh fruits, vegetables, and milk to 80 hunger-relief agencies in the region.

On the cover: An Emergency Response grant to the YMCA of Greater Birmingham allowed the organization to provide childcare services for children of essential workers in five of its branches. To date, the YMCA has provided care for over 100 children, allowing their parents to focus on their important work.