

HELPING NONPROFITS SERVE IN VIRUS CRISIS

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New York, New York - In the maelstrom of Covid-19, much has been said and much is planned to address private sector needs, from corporate bail outs and paid leave for employees who become sick or are laid off to relief for small businesses. The needs of nonprofits, however, are somehow largely absent from the discussion. Whereas they and their employees may qualify for assistance, they should be covered explicitly.

It is difficult to describe nonprofit needs, moreover, given that the types, size, wealth and leadership of nonprofits vary widely. The Metropolitan Museum, for example, is a gigantic organization with 2,200 employees. But unlike most smaller organizations, it has an endowment of more than \$3 billion dollars. It has said it expects to lose \$100,000 over a few months as a result of the virus closing.

On the other extreme are thousands of small organizations that provide many kinds of valuable services. They can be extremely small, with staffs of a few persons, or sizable with dozens of employees. Another example is the Committee for Hispanic Children and Families in New York City with a multi-million-dollar budget, some 30 employees, grant support from the City, the State and foundations and offering far-reaching services. Now operating remotely, it assists the disproportionately affected Hispanic community and other groups.

Another is UnidosUS, formerly the National Council of La Raza, with perhaps 40 employees at headquarters in Washington, and more than 200 affiliates around the country. It is one of the oldest and largest civil rights, community development and advocacy organizations. It is operating remotely.

Thousands of similar service organizations exist in the African American, Asian American and American Indian and Hispanic communities. Some are large, decades old and national in scope, like the NAACP and the National Urban League. Others are local, small and relatively young, like the Museum of Chinese in America (MOCA) in New York. It is operating remotely.

Of particular concern, clearly, are the smaller, less known nonprofits whose work is of vital importance to millions throughout the country, particularly to minority communities, the most grievously affected by the crisis. They do not have endowments and even in the best of times struggle to raise funds and provide essential and often irreplaceable services. Their needs vary depending on their size, age, budgets, sources of funding and other factors. In fact, according to a 2018 study by the consulting group Nonprofit Finance Fund 75 percent of nonprofits said that in a crisis they would run out of cash in six months.

Broadly stated, nonprofits need to find emergency stop-gap resources to pay and provide benefits to employees, pay rent or mortgages and meet other financial obligations. They also need guidance on operating remotely, the new normal that requires adjustments, new communications modalities and perhaps training. They need to know how to harness the goodwill of volunteers who may lack experience but are eager to help.

How can nonprofits with the greatest challenges find resources when the economy is in such dire straits? And to whom can they turn when they increasingly compete with others? Who can advise them? And they

need help to develop longer-term plans for recovery and sustaining their operations post-crisis.

Most important, they require greater doses of something through which they customarily survive: exemplary, inspirational executive leadership. Their management leads by example, demonstrating commitment, empathy and unswerving loyalty. Their management listens attentively to staff and evaluates their ideas. They creatively marshal resources in competition with others.

Assuming the crisis will have most nonprofits closed indefinitely, perhaps until summer, their resources will be depleted, and they will have to be very creative and competitive to secure what they need. Fortunately, some organizations have recognized the great challenges faced by nonprofits and are beginning to respond to their needs.

In New York City some nonprofits will receive support from a new Covid-19 rescue fund that was created by 26 foundations and by individual donors. Among the best known are Bloomberg Philanthropies, Carnegie Corporation, the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and the Wells Fargo Foundation. The fund has raised more than \$78 million, but clearly much more is needed.

Meals on Wheels in Portland, Oregon has shown resourcefulness. It closed 22 dining locations in mid-March and now is using a delivery method for 15,000 clients. Volunteers have rushed to help the organization respond to a spike in requests for food.

During times of crisis, it is crucial to come together and help each other. While in social isolation, there is still a lot that we can do to assist those in need. Many nonprofits organizations, for example cultural organizations, are providing their services for free during these difficult times. So, make a financial contribution to your favorite nonprofit organizations if you can or help, volunteer, or in any way you can. We need these organizations more than ever.

Marcela Miguel Berland is the President and CEO of Latin Insights, a New York City-based market and opinion research and strategic communications firm. Frank Gómez is her longtime partner.

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CONTACT:

Frank Gomez fragobf@outlook.com Marcela Miguel Berland mberland@latininsights.com