

OCTOBER 2022

VT COVID-19 Response Fund

RESPONSE | RECOVERY | RESILIENCE

Dear Friends,

I'm in awe of what the numbers in this report represent.

Collectively, you put nearly $11 million to work in Vermont communities through the VT COVID-19 Response Fund.

Your support went directly to your neighbors working the front lines of health care, food production, and human services who served tirelessly with courage and purpose. It went to nearly 500 nonprofits that found creative ways to meet the needs of Vermont's most vulnerable populations.



As your donations came in, we quickly moved dollars to the people and organizations that needed them most, **filling critical gaps** in funding while nonprofits waited for state and federal relief.

With **trust** that our proven nonprofit leaders on the ground knew what was needed most, we embraced **flexibility** in the face of uncertainty. Our relationships with those nonprofits, along with our state and federal partners, allowed us to leverage philanthropic generosity and move dollars into the community quickly and strategically for greater **impact**.

Importantly, we never lost sight of **closing the opportunity gap**—the central tenet of our work. Many of the conditions that hold Vermonters back were exacerbated and accelerated by COVID-19, exposing the depth and complexity of our challenges as a state.

As we moved from response to recovery, we organized grantmaking around six initiatives—resilient food systems, equitable and anti-racist communities, mental health and suicide prevention, learners in transition, rural connectivity, and rural entrepreneurship—that dovetailed immediate need with a long view on building a **stronger, more resilient** Vermont.

As I write, 2,000 miles of fiber optic cable are extending broadband access in the Northeast Kingdom, statewide organizations are making coordinated investments in mental health and suicide prevention, and Vermont learners are taking advantage of free community college classes.

The VT COVID-19 Response Fund is changing lives and improving the services, systems, and supports that will help Vermonters thrive in the long term.

With gratitude,



Dan Smith, President and CEO

Cover Photo: Peter Crabtree; Photo Above: CEDRR

VT COVID-19 RESPONSE FUND

TOTAL IN

$10.8M



Photo: John Lazenby



Photo: Courtesy of Vermont Foodbank

VT COVID-19 RESPONSE FUND

TOTAL OUT

$10.8M



56%
Community Foundation Fundholders

44%
Other Donors

VT COVID-19 RESPONSE FUND MADE

881
grants to

496
organizations

Data in this report are from March 2020 through August 2022.

RESPONSE

In March 2020, as the effects of the pandemic began to ripple throughout our homes and businesses, the Community Foundation established the VT COVID-19 Response Fund.

The goal was to sustain the critical programs and services required by vulnerable Vermonters to meet their immediate needs.

We know that in joining with other donors into the Community Foundation's COVID-19 fund, our resources will not only be put to good use, but can be leveraged with other dollars for the greatest impact.

BETH GANZ, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
KATZ AMSTERDAM FOUNDATION



Photo: John Lazenby



Photo credit

RESPONSE GRANTMAKING
TOTAL

$6M

Neighbors Helping Neighbors

Within days of the first confirmed case of COVID-19 in Vermont, the Community Foundation established the VT COVID-19 Response Fund. Donations from every corner of the state (and beyond) were quick to follow. By the end of March—24 days after the first case in Vermont—you had already contributed nearly $1 million to the fund.

As Foundation President and CEO Dan Smith said when announcing the fund, "When the river rises or the snow is deep or the barn catches fire, neighbors step up. It's the Vermont way."

While we could not anticipate the duration or complexity of the pandemic in those early days, we knew the Community Foundation would play an important role in keeping people safe and connected, businesses viable, and front line workers protected.

The dynamic structure of the fund, and our established relationships with trusted nonprofit leaders on the ground, allowed the Community Foundation to:

- Distribute grants on a flexible and rolling basis
- Release nonprofits from applications and reporting requirements
- Work with nonprofit partners to vet and award grants to smaller organizations
- Get funds quickly to the people who needed them most
- Leverage state and federal dollars for greater impact

With an outpouring of support from donors and fund-holders, by the end of July 2020, the fund had distributed more than $6 million into Vermont communities to meet urgent basic needs.

> *"In the early months of the pandemic, we saw a tripling of homelessness in Lamoille County. The grant from the Community Foundation meant less time on my computer applying for funds and more time setting up plastic shower curtains between beds, delivering food and toilet paper to guests staying at hotels, doing daily temperature checks and symptom screenings, and having important conversations about how to provide safe shelter to nearly 100 individuals without homes in the midst of a global pandemic. The Community Foundation trusted us to do our work without the burdens of paperwork."*
>
> **KIM ANETSBERGER,** EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, LAMOILLE COMMUNITY HOUSE



SUPPORT FOR YOUTH
$1.54M



HOUSING/SAFE SHELTER
$1.12M



SENIOR SUPPORT
$773K



HEALTH & WELL-BEING
$868K



BASIC NEEDS/ COMMUNITY SUPPORT
$560K



FOOD ACCESS
$492K



MARGINALIZED POPULATIONS
$365K



RESPONSIVE CAPACITY-BUILDING
$288K

RECOVERY

COVID-19 brought closing the opportunity gap—the central tenet of our work—into full relief. Beginning in September 2020, seven months into the pandemic, the Community Foundation began to organize COVID-19 grantmaking around six recovery initiatives that dovetail with the Foundation's commitment to closing the opportunity gap.

Over 24 months, we distributed close to **$4.8 million in grants toward the recovery initiatives**. The following stories illustrate how those grants will serve Vermonters for generations to come.

LEARNERS IN TRANSITION
$904K
invested in education and career training

WELCOMING COMMUNITIES
$874K
to advance anti-racism and belonging

FOOD SYSTEMS RESILIENCE
$860K
to support farm viability and food security

RURAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP
$842K
toward creating next generation jobs

MENTAL HEALTH & SUICIDE PREVENTION
$753K
toward stronger prevention and intervention

RURAL CONNECTIVITY
$558K
at work expanding high-speed internet access

RECOVERY GRANTMAKING
TOTAL
$4.8M



Photo: Courtesy of Food Connects

Our Main Street Survived

An anonymous donation sparked nearly $1 million in grants to southern Vermont businesses

Just three months after opening Pastime Pinball in Manchester Center, COVID-19 forced Beth and Marty Friedman to close their doors. "We hadn't even finished putting our signs up," said Beth.

As their "playable pinball museum" sat empty month after month, the Friedmans feared they might have to close for good. "Even after we reopened, no one came in," she recalled. "It was pretty horrible. We just sat there staring out the window."

Sparked by a $500,000 anonymous donation and match challenge, the Community Foundation and local philanthropists:

- Established the Main Street Business Relief Fund for Arlington, Dorset, and Manchester
- Distributed nearly $1 million in grants to 55 private sector businesses
- Helped restaurants, lodging properties, attractions, and retail shops remain viable

Open less than one year, Pastime Pinball was not eligible for grants from the state. And, until Elisabeth Marx from the Community Foundation literally knocked on their door, they had not heard of the philanthropy-fueled Main Street Business Relief Fund. "We probably would have closed if not for the grant," said Beth.

Today, Pastime Pinball is one of many thriving businesses in the area, adding a family-friendly destination with an educational tilt to Manchester Center. From a Humpty Dumpty game dating back to 1947 to Godzilla game released in 2021, players of all ages come in to play the curated collection of more than 60 pinball games.

"This was the vision," said Beth, "we made it through."

MAIN STREET BUSINESS FUND FOR ARLINGTON, DORSET, AND MANCHESTER

$1M	55
GRANTED	MAIN STREET BUSINESSES

"Looking back, where would we be today if even half of these businesses had closed permanently? In an area where tourism is directly linked to our local economy, the grants were a blessing at a time of incredible uncertainty. It allowed me to breathe for the first time in weeks."

KAREN GERIAK, OWNER OF NIPPER'S CAFE



Photo: Courtesy of Pastime Pinball

"Our family has been enjoying this community for nearly 50 years, and Vermont has had a huge influence on our children and grandchildren. We all love it and want to see it remain the special place that it is."

ANONYMOUS DONOR

Support for Vermonters in Crisis

How one fundholder is moving mental health and suicide prevention forward through philanthropy

Just over a year after the Community Foundation announced its five recovery initiatives, we added a sixth: Mental Health and Suicide Prevention.

Brought forward by a donor advised fundholder, underscored by national headlines, and made urgent by the mental health crisis unfolding among Vermont youth, the Community Foundation expanded grantmaking and internal resources for mental health and suicide prevention. Working closely with the fundholder, we established partnerships with mental health professionals to address both the immediate crisis exacerbated by the pandemic, and the long-term structural problems in a system that has too often failed Vermonters.

"Being part of a team with others who understand the big picture—the services, the projects underway, the efforts being made—means it's possible to really help innovations in the field," said the fundholder.

In partnership with the fundholder and 23 nonprofit organizations around the state, the Community Foundation has distributed grants to programs that:

- Provide children waiting in emergency rooms for mental health placement—sometimes for six days or more—with age-appropriate, calming activities
- Establish consistent screening and training protocols across every emergency room in the state
- Leverage federal dollars by funding advance planning so that organizations can implement quickly when federal grants arrive

The real work that was inspired and supported by the fundholder, however, is just beginning.

The Community Foundation has established mental health and suicide prevention as a priority area, expanding internal resources, deepening relationships with partners, including the Vermont Program for Quality Health Care (VPQHC) and the Vermont Association of Hospitals and Health Systems, and creating new opportunities for donors and fundholders to support this initiative.

"With thanks to the fundholder whose gift, knowledge, and dedication is moving this work forward, philanthropy can take real steps to fix a chronically understaffed, underfunded mental health system," said Martha Trombley Oakes, director of philanthropy at the Community Foundation. "Not only has their commitment inspired additional funding for mental health and suicide prevention and helped to reduce stigma, it has also, no doubt, saved lives."

MENTAL HEALTH AND SUICIDE PREVENTION INITIATIVE

23
NONPROFITS

$753K
GRANTED

"The vision is that when a person needs help, they're going to get quality, timely help from someone who is well-trained. If you have a heart attack, most doctors know how to help you. That's not the case for someone who is suicidal."

ANONYMOUS FUNDHOLDER



Photo: Courtesy of Vermont Land Trust

Small Grants + Local Changemakers = Meaningful Impact

Helping public schools and students advance pandemic response and social justice

From outdoor learning spaces to BIPOC affinity groups, 96 mini grants totalling $363,000 were sent to Vermont public schools during the pandemic to support locally identified priorities and needs.

With support from the Barr Foundation and a donor advised fund at the Vermont Community Foundation, the COVID-19 Response Fund made grants to the Vermont Principals' Association (VPA) that, in partnership with the Vermont School Boards Association and the Vermont Superintendents Association, distributed the mini grants to local schools to support initiatives including:

- Colorful umbrellas to make outdoor mask breaks possible on rainy days for Orleans Elementary students
- A partnership between Rutland City Public Schools and the Abenaki Arts and Education Center to expand indigenous curriculum for elementary students
- The construction of a student-built sugar house at Mill River Union High School for outdoor learning
- Resourcing a new LGBTQ+ Task Force in the Burlington School District

The success of the mini grant program inspired continued partnership with the VPA, including an additional $10,000 from the VT COVID-19 Response Fund in 2022, in addition to a discretionary grant commitment of roughly $20,000 to continue equity and racial justice work in schools. This further round of mini grants will help local changemakers continue and deepen the important work they seeded with the initial mini grants.

"Not only is this work the right thing to do," said Mike McRaith, assistant executive director of the VPA, "it also honors the goals of public education to create engaged, knowledgeable citizens who will be leaders of tomorrow."

EDUCATION MINI GRANTS

$363K	91
GRANTED	SCHOOLS

"During the pandemic, it became obvious that students needed crucial support—especially those impacted by the inequities endemic to race, sexuality, gender identity, and income. The grants made through the Community Foundation helped meaningful, student-led initiatives move forward at a local level."

PATRICIA FONTAINE, VERMONT COMMUNITY FOUNDATION FUNDHOLDER



Photo Courtesy of VPA/Orleans Elementary School

RESILIENCE

COVID-19 forced nearly every nonprofit on earth to think creatively about meeting needs, and the Vermont Community Foundation was no exception. Like so many of the organizations we serve, our team adapted. We heard loud and clear from nonprofits how helpful it was that we waived restrictions, deadlines, and reporting requirements in the name of trust and expediency—and we encouraged our donor advised fundholders to do the same. Many of those lessons are here to stay.

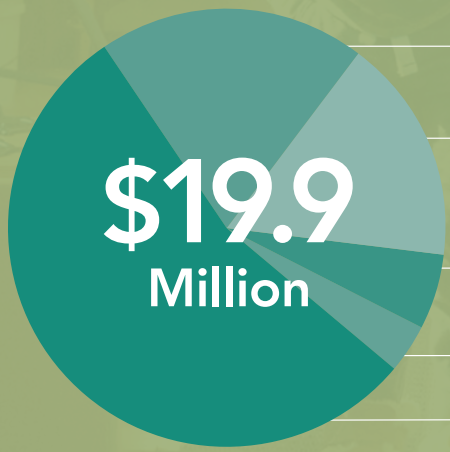
> *As you and the Community Foundation team clearly understand, this is an especially difficult time for the families who need us the most. We intend to get past this shutdown period and rebound with strength, to serve our community better than ever.*
>
> **DAVID MANDEL,** MARY JOHNSON CHILDREN'S CENTER



Photo: Peter Crabtree

TOTAL COVID-RELATED GRANTMAKING

In addition to the $10.8M in grants made through the VT COVID-19 Response Fund, the Community Foundation and its partners nearly doubled the COVID-related impact through grants from other funding sources.



$3.9M
Donor Advised Funds

$3.3M
Community Foundation Directed

$1.1M
Supporting Organizations

$690K
People & Places Funds

$10.8M
VT COVID-19 Response Fund

Trust-based Philanthropy

We are looking to build forward with our partners to use the lessons and learnings of the pandemic to create new systems and ways of grantmaking including:

- Streamlining grant systems
- Simplifying written reports
- Deepening relationships with grantees
- Developing an open, online, rolling intake form
- Evaluating reporting processes with grantees
- Taking risks on new ideas and pilot programs



Flexibility

Early in the pandemic, grantees were released from reporting requirements and encouraged to use grant funds however they needed. Most were awarded as general operating support, in part for expediency, but also to create more flexibility in grant purpose. We worked with donor advised fundholders to accelerate their grantmaking and in many cases, plan for multiple rounds of funding to meet the needs of the moment. We are working with our nonprofit partners to bring elements of trust and flexibility to future grantmaking.

Embracing Risk

The pandemic demonstrated the importance of embracing new ideas and perspectives. We are committed to "responsible risk" as a core organizational value, and will continue to work with our partners to try new ideas and pilot new ways of addressing issues. Part of this includes exploring new methods for providing upstream support and technical assistance to communities without strong, local nonprofits so they can bring ideas forward, create fundable proposals, and get projects up and running. We shared this knowledge with fundholders so that they too could respond to the conditions on the ground and think differently about how to meet the needs of their neighbors and communities.

Partnerships

Nonprofit partners helped us identify and award grants throughout the pandemic. We relied on our trusted partners—such as the Vermont Foodbank and Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence—to lead on the vetting and decision making. These and other nonprofit partners made subawards through their networks, ensuring dollars reached local organizations doing important work, and extending the reach of the fund to every corner of the state. Continued and expanded partnerships will allow us to ensure small organizations and rural areas are not overlooked.

> *"The relentless collaboration between government organizations, nonprofits, philanthropy, and individuals contributing to the cause that occurred during COVID-19 is central to better connecting our local food systems with local need. We are all part of the same system. No one organization can end hunger in Vermont alone."*
>
> **ALLISON MINDEL,** CHIEF PHILANTHROPY OFFICER AT THE VERMONT FOODBANK

Making Good Decisions Quickly

Sitting at the intersection of nonprofits, philanthropy, and government, the Community Foundation is in a unique position to be an honest broker of ideas. Thanks to your generosity, we leaned into that position during the pandemic, moving nearly $11 million into the community quickly and with great coordination and care. Real momentum occurs when we align giving within a broader strategy. To that end, we remain curious about the conditions that hold Vermonters back and committed to the pursuit of greater understanding.

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photo:

The evidence of philanthropy, of your collective impact, and of the incredible forward momentum we create when we come together, is all around us. We are making progress toward a stronger, more resilient Vermont.

DAN SMITH, PRESIDENT & CEO

THREE WAYS YOU CAN SUPPORT THE PROGRESS

Give to the Opportunity Fund or one of our many Vermont-focused people and places funds.

vermontcf.org/OurFunds

Open a Donor Advised Fund where from day one your dollars go to work making a difference in Vermont.

vermontcf.org/DAF

Visit the Insight Hub to learn how philanthropy can impact the issues you care about most.

vermontcf.org/InsightHub

Or connect with us directly by emailing **Jane Kimble** at **philanthropy@vermontcf.org** or calling **802-388-3355 ext. 286**