



COVID-19 Giving Report

DECEMBER 2020

Giving During Crisis: How the COVID-19 Pandemic Emboldened Philanthropists to Dig Deep and Drive Change

A Glimpse into Granting at Vanguard Charitable

A year defined by challenge, 2020 will forever be remembered for the indelible mark it left on the planet. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in January, every corner of the world has faced unprecedented health and economic challenges as the virus continues to ravage communities. Amidst these challenges, many nonprofit organizations continue to be called on to serve more people than ever before.

These organizations—whether providing essential services like food, housing, education support, shelter and healthcare, or promoting the arts, culture, or civic engagement—have all leaned heavily on the support of philanthropists to continue functioning during this dire crisis. And yet despite the incredible outpouring of generosity witnessed so far, we are far from any sort of resolution, and philanthropists will continue to be called on to support both short- and long-term relief and recovery efforts.

At Vanguard Charitable, we are inspired by the continuous response we have seen from our donors, with grants to all charities reaching nearly \$1.3 billion in the first 10 months of the pandemic and \$88.6 million specifically earmarked for direct COVID-19 relief. And, stemming from the generous response of donors, we have learned about the best ways to help guide philanthropists as they navigate a complicated giving landscape in order to make the most impact possible with their giving.

— JANE GREENFIELD, *President, Vanguard Charitable*

On a parallel path with philanthropists' desire to learn more about how to make the most significant impact, Vanguard Charitable enacted a [series of guiding resources](#) to better serve donors:

- **[Digital Resource Guide of Pre-vetted Nonprofits](#)**
Within two weeks of the pandemic's emergence, we posted on our website a resource guide of pre-vetted nonprofit organizations providing COVID-19 crisis relief. The resource guide, accessed more than 14,000 times, eliminated the need for donors to spend time searching for and evaluating nonprofits and assured donors they were granting to organizations providing immediate relief.
- **[Quick Links to Community Foundations](#)**
Beyond this resource, we provided a link on our website to easily allow donors to find and support community foundations that have identified their community's greatest need.
- **[Regular Email Touchpoints](#)**
When most of the country moved to shut down in mid-March, Vanguard Charitable launched into action. On March 14, we sent an email reminding donors of the unique position they are in to give through their donor-advised fund (DAF), and encouraging donors to act now, at this great time of need, by reassessing philanthropic goals and incorporating both short- and long-term giving in their missions.

Prior to this communication, while the U.S. was just beginning to learn about the impacts of the pandemic and charitably-minded individuals began planning their philanthropic response, our donors had already given \$400,000 to COVID-19 relief efforts. Following that initial email, which included resources on how and where to give, grants increased to more than \$10 million in just seven days.

- **[New COVID-19 Podcast](#)**

Recognizing the importance of connecting donors to the nonprofits they support, and in seeking an opportunity to highlight both the work and needs of nonprofit partners on the ground, we launched The Value in Giving podcast. Featuring Vanguard Charitable President Jane Greenfield and industry-leading executives, episodes in the first season of the podcast focus on the impact of COVID-19, ongoing needs and progress toward relieving suffering, and ensuring the longevity of invaluable nonprofit organizations.



- **[Free Digital Nonprofit Mapping Tool](#)**

In October 2020, we launched the Nonprofit Aid Visualizer, NAVi, a proprietary mapping tool that allows users to directly search for charities providing COVID-19 relief and apply filters that highlight organizations in areas with high incidence rates or that are especially vulnerable to the virus.



Donors Took Action

We felt it was important to review how donors have responded to the financial needs of nonprofits thus far in this pandemic. This report examines these trends and offers our learnings from the first key months of this ongoing crisis in the hope of encouraging further giving, even as we confront another and perhaps even more deadly wave of the outbreak in the weeks and months to come.

2020 began with devastating wildfires across Australia, closely followed by a global pandemic of proportions not seen in more than 100 years, a civil rights crisis, and most recently, a pattern of serious hurricanes in the Atlantic and wildfires scorching the entire West Coast of the U.S.

The devastation of 2020 has underscored the lessons of history: Our world is delicate and great need exists, but so does the great generosity of the philanthropists who catalyze response and relief efforts of on-the-ground heroes. While the scale and total impact of COVID-19 is still not fully known, we have seen, across the board, that the philanthropic response to COVID-19 has reached far beyond the response to crises past.

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SECTION I.

A Surge in Granting and Impact

COVID-19 has resulted in an industry-wide surge in giving that has topped the giving amounts of previous crises. Since the virus has taken hold, more than \$11.9 billion has been donated across philanthropic vehicles to support relief efforts.¹

In the initial COVID-19 giving period between February 1, 2020, and November 30, 2020, Vanguard Charitable donors recommended nearly \$1.3 billion to more than 4,000 unique organizations—an increase of 25% compared to the same time period in 2019. The number of grants issued (grant units) also increased by 39% during this time period, amounting to an increase of more than 38,000 grants recommended over the same time period in 2019.



SINCE THE VIRUS HAS TAKEN HOLD,
more than \$11.9 billion
 HAS BEEN DONATED ACROSS PHILANTHROPIC VEHICLES
 TO SUPPORT RELIEF EFFORTS.¹

This increase in giving during the pandemic's corresponding deep economic recession underscored the resiliency of donations from DAFs during economic downturns.² DAF account holders are well positioned to respond and give even during financial downturns since the funds donated are earmarked for charitable giving and cannot be used outside of that purpose.

Beyond the increase in giving specifically to relief efforts, giving by Vanguard Charitable during fiscal year 2020 increased by 51% despite the steep economic downturn that marked nearly half of the year.

LEADERSHIP PERSPECTIVE

“During crisis, it is imperative that people step up. While our donors are always engaged and active grantors, we recognized there was a role we could play in providing key information so that our donors could recommend grants for COVID relief in addition to the charities they have supported for years. We are tremendously proud of the rapid and generous action they’ve taken.”

— JANE GREENFIELD
 President, Vanguard Charitable



¹ <https://candid.org/about/press-room/releases/record-breaking-covid-19-philanthropy-topped-giving-for-other-disasters-but-overlooked-those-most-affected-by-pandemic>

² https://www.sp2.upenn.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Heist-Vance-McMullen_Understanding-Donor-Advised-Funds_working-paper-002.pdf

SECTION II.

Giving by Cause:

Donors Placed a Large Emphasis on Supporting Health & Human Services, but Maintained Their Support for All Types of Organizations

While many philanthropists immediately sought to support charities directly addressing the considerable health and well-being needs that arose from COVID-19, donors also generously supported nonprofits that lost income and fundraising streams.

LEADERSHIP PERSPECTIVE

“Nonprofits are on the ground each day, providing resources that save lives and deliver important services. DAFs, community foundations, and corporate and individual donors provide the lifeblood to support these operations. As a leader in philanthropy, it is our foremost responsibility to build and maintain avenues to maximize giving at all times, and especially during times of crisis.”

— JOHN J. BRENNAN
Board Chair, Vanguard Charitable

Top 10 Nonprofits Supported by Vanguard Charitable Donors During the COVID-19 Pandemic*



*February 1, 2020-November 30, 2020



SECTION III.

Giving by Region:

Where Did Donors Give?

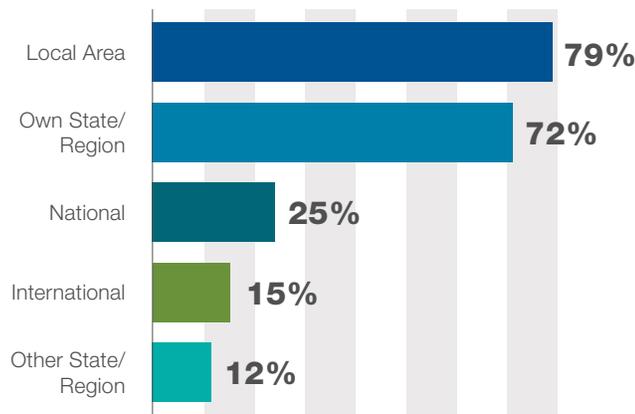
Given the global reach of the pandemic and its widespread impact across most nonprofit categories, donors are undoubtedly feeling overwhelmed by the sheer number of nonprofits seeking additional support, and the many ways in which their philanthropic response could ultimately take shape. Geography is but one variable to consider, and yet it would seem to be a key way that donors are navigating these difficult decisions.

Soon after the pandemic emerged, we asked our donors where they intended to give, and three-quarters of donors reported that they intended to give to local community and state organizations. Donors also reported that they wanted access to expertise about both charities local to them, and those providing relief in the areas impacted most by the virus.

We asked donors to rank where they intend to give and they expressed a strong preference for their **personal location**.

We also asked donors what types of resources would be valuable to them. They indicated a strong preference for **expert-curated, location-based lists** of giving opportunities.

Top Giving Areas Ranked by Vanguard Charitable Donors



Resources Vanguard Charitable Donors Find Valuable

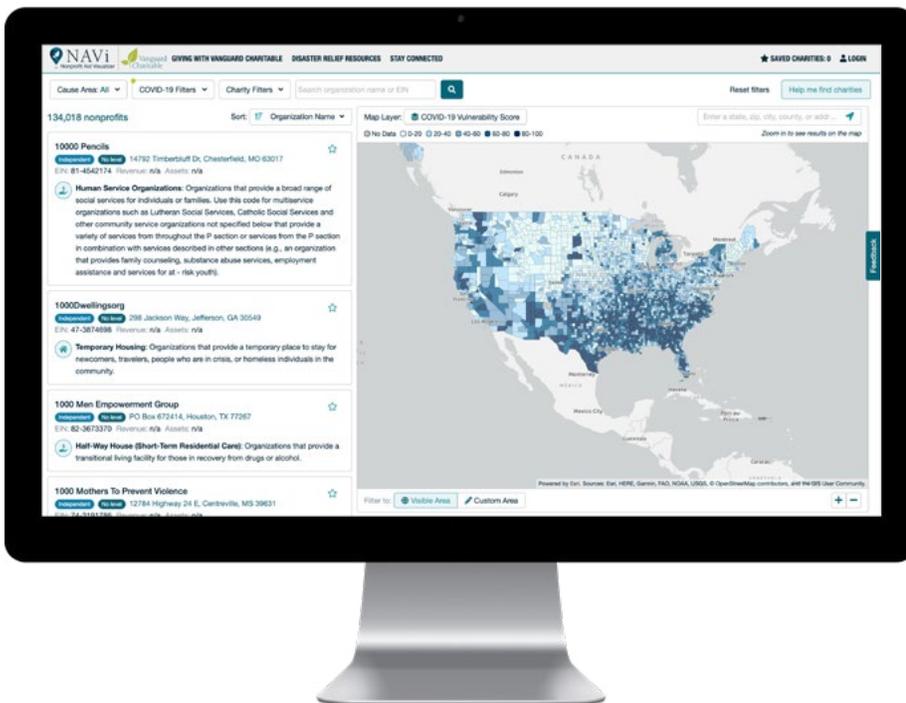
- 70%** Lists of expert-recommended charities in their local area
- 50%** Lists of expert-recommended charities in hard-hit areas
- 35%** Interactive online tools to select charities
- 25%** Data on where other donors are granting
- 16%** Webinars about effective giving
- 8%** Personalized data about their granting impact

As the pandemic and its attendant economic ramifications began to impact nearly every city and state in our country, Vanguard Charitable donors nationwide responded by focusing their charitable efforts in their local communities.



MUCH OF THIS GIVING REMAINED IN DONORS' OWN LOCAL COMMUNITIES: **approximately 62%** OF GRANTS ISSUED DURING THIS PERIOD WERE DONATED TO ORGANIZATIONS LOCATED IN THE SAME STATE AS THE DONOR TO SUPPORT RELIEF EFFORTS

With 79% of donors expressing interest in supporting their local communities, Vanguard Charitable took action, connecting individuals with nonprofits in communities with the greatest need through the launch of [NAVi](#). It's an interactive mapping tool that serves to inform, educate, and connect philanthropists with organizations that are actively supporting COVID-19 relief efforts.



“A primary purpose of NAVi is to connect donors to communities that are being overlooked during the pandemic. Many of these communities were already vulnerable, and now with COVID-19, they are highly exposed to serious challenges. The tool can help donors identify and support nonprofits that they might otherwise have never known about without NAVi.”

— MAGDA GUILLEN SWANSON
Research Project Strategist,
Vanguard Charitable



SECTION IV.

Impact Giving:

Supporting Nonprofits Where They Need it Most

Unrestricted grants are critically important in helping nonprofits make the greatest impact, because unrestricted granting gives nonprofits the ability to apply funds where they are needed. This flexibility is even more important during times of crisis. Vanguard Charitable has long encouraged its donors to research and support the organizations that are poised to know how best to deploy funds where they are most needed. Our donors heeded this critical component of an effective disaster-relief giving strategy. Compared to the same time period in 2019, Vanguard Charitable saw a 40% increase in unrestricted grant units during the early COVID-19 grant response period.

Unlike past crises, COVID-19 has endured for months and will likely continue to endure for many more months, and perhaps even years, to come. With that, so continues the need for philanthropic support. Recurring grants, which accounted for nearly \$70 million of the grants issued during the crisis giving period, are one way donors showed their continuing support.

Their grants will help ensure that no matter how long the virus grips the nation, the nonprofits serving communities across the country will have the ability to continue to respond, support relief efforts, and survive over the long term.

Lastly, to ensure grant funds were immediately realized by nonprofits, Vanguard Charitable expedited the granting process for grants marked specifically for COVID-19 relief.



VANGUARD CHARITABLE
DONORS GRANTED
\$88.6 million
DIRECTLY TO COVID-19 RELIEF
CHARITIES COMPARED TO
\$20 million
IN RESPONSE TO 2017 HURRICANES
AND SUPERSTORMS

SECTION V.

Leadership Spotlight:

A Driving Force for Change

Strategic philanthropy is more than smart giving; it is the expert stewardship of nonprofit leaders who are charged with oversight of funding and the deployment of resources necessary to advance their mission and drive impact. In navigating the pandemic, leaders were called on to serve more people than ever during a large-scale economic downturn. They stepped up to meet the challenge by leveraging existing partnerships and forging new ones to alleviate suffering and ensure the longevity of the critical services their organizations provide.



“When we get through this we will be redefined as a nation and we’re going to be redefined as communities. I don’t think people are going to let go of the fact that this pandemic has shown that our lives are inextricably linked.”

— NICOLE TAYLOR, CEO, SILICON VALLEY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION



“Before COVID-19, about 37 million Americans faced food insecurity. Feeding America estimates that as a result of the pandemic, that number could reach more than 50 million. Many of the people who are seeking assistance are new to the charitable food system.”

— CASEY MARSH, CHIEF DEVELOPMENT OFFICER, FEEDING AMERICA



“It really is a partnership between organizations like ours, the donors who fuel our work, and the people in the communities we serve whose voices we need to hear. When we put all three of these together, really magical things can happen.”

— MICHAEL J. NYENHUIS, PRESIDENT AND CEO, UNICEF USA



“As the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted to an extreme degree, emergencies always create immediate new health risks while worsening and exposing in sharper relief the gaps that already exist for many people. As Direct Relief accelerated its response to community health centers in all 50 states and internationally, the response and generosity of the public has been absolutely essential and enormously inspiring. And Vanguard Charitable is just a perfect example of how resources can be rapidly mobilized, allocated, and directed with tight controls, high efficiency, and transparency.”

— THOMAS TIGHE, PRESIDENT AND CEO, DIRECT RELIEF



“This pandemic has tried the resilience of our world. While we have seen devastation and suffering, we have also witnessed philanthropists providing a beacon of hope and a path forward for recovery through their generosity. At the CDC Foundation, we rely on the support of donors to continue our work to combat this virus and serve vulnerable communities across the globe. Because of them, we are confident that we will defeat COVID-19.”

— DR. JUDY MONROE, PRESIDENT AND CEO, CDC FOUNDATION

SECTION VI.

Donor Spotlight:

Passionate Philanthropists Engaged for Good

Without a doubt, philanthropists have stepped up during this crisis to provide the funding needed to support nonprofits and charities that are bolstering COVID relief and other services for affected communities.



“Because we had already budgeted and contributed to our Vanguard Charitable DAF in a previous year, we were able to act quickly and support an organization we really admire.”

— TOM AND KATHY COLE



“Our front-line efforts are aimed at providing support at the local level in the places we work, so that our grants can have the greatest community impact.”

— NRG ENERGY



“To help organizations working to mitigate the economic consequences, we immediately gave to the local food pantry, along with Tipping Point Community and GiveDirectly, both of which focus on supporting those in poverty.”

— ANDREW AND CAROLYN CHATHAM

SECTION VII.

Encouraging Effective COVID-19 Giving: *Lessons Learned*

The overwhelming impact the pandemic has had on every aspect of our society—from health to the economy to social well-being—will forever shape our world. The pandemic has also changed the way the nonprofit industry engages with donors and the way philanthropists give, challenging them to incorporate both short- and long-term plans in their missions. DAFs yet again have proven to be a resilient giving platform that allows donors to respond nimbly and generously, especially during times of economic downturn.

Global Crisis, Local Response

We've learned donors are deeply invested in the communities where they live by the way many individuals quickly mobilized to support local charities. Most importantly, we've witnessed the absolute importance of philanthropic support of all nonprofits in times of crisis, regardless of the services they are providing. Nonprofits stepped up to provide desperately needed personal protective equipment to front-line workers, access to computers for children learning remotely, and food and housing for the countless Americans who lost their livelihoods as a result of the pandemic, and much more.

Further, we saw many nonprofits outside of direct relief organizations stepping up to find ways to innovate and provide services in their communities during this isolating time. From zoos providing programming online to museums hosting virtual experiences, these services have been invaluable in supporting well-being during this trying time. These organizations, too, are reliant on the generous support of donors now and in the future.

Despite the sadness, loss, and formidable challenges 2020 has brought, Vanguard Charitable remains motivated to provide the most efficient giving vehicle for good. We've learned from donors and nonprofit partners during this crisis, and we are prepared to evolve to meet the ever-changing needs of our society while continuing to provide the highest-value DAF to support philanthropists.

Donors Appreciate Information That Can Help Inform Their Decision About Where to Give

At Vanguard Charitable, we listened to our donors and quickly reacted to enhance our ability to help them fulfill their philanthropic missions. First, we created a website resource center to help inform donors about nonprofits undertaking relief efforts. Next, we deployed supportive direction for donors who were seeking more information about how to give impactfully.

As a follow-up to our donor survey, where we learned that 79% of donors were looking for expert guidance on local nonprofits providing COVID-19 relief, we developed NAVI, an innovative mapping tool that allows donors to easily search for, pinpoint, and connect with hundreds of nonprofits by location, the vulnerability of an area, and incidence levels of COVID-19.

“Of all of the benefits of having a Vanguard Charitable DAF, it never occurred to us that we might be uniquely able to respond to the needs of our community in an emergency. To be able to lump several years' worth of donations to charities at this time is a privilege.”

— ANONYMOUS

Vanguard Charitable Donor

Deepen Nonprofit Partnerships

By working directly with grant recipients, we learned more about the best ways we could help them reduce administrative tasks to process grants and provide the funds they needed directly to continue their work on the ground without any holdup. We've learned that it's important to meet nonprofits where they are.

For some, it's still preferable to receive grants by mail. Other nonprofits find it most efficient to process electronic transfers. Being aware of nonprofit preferences, and staying nimble enough to accommodate variances, goes a long way in our ability to efficiently facilitate grants. We also created practices to expedite grant timelines to ensure the rapid arrival of funds.



Create Connections

Further, we recognized the importance of increasing the connection between donors and the nonprofits they serve, and shedding light on the often complex and nuanced issues the organizations are addressing. In response, we launched The Value in Giving podcast to help forge connections and provide a forum for conversation.

As the COVID-19 crisis continues to unfold, the need for strategic philanthropy will only become more vital to provide the resources necessary to rebuild and ensure the safety, health, and longevity of our communities and the nonprofits that sustain life and culture.

Whether the crisis is related to the environment, civil rights, health care, or economics, we must be continuously prepared to respond and support the nonprofits that deliver the essential services that shape our world.

The need will never end and support must continue. We stand with our many partners in philanthropy and communities across the globe to unite and maximize philanthropy's impact over time.