



2021 COVID-19 Pandemic Organizational Response Need Assessment Summary

Responses: We received 53 responses to this inquiry. This represents half as many responses as we received for our first two COVID-related assessments. Despite pushing the survey out on our website, through social media and two Constant Contact mailings we did not see as many responses as we'd anticipated. Almost half of the respondents identified as Arts and Cultural institutions which may be because they have been the most negatively impacted by the pandemic.

Of those that did respond;

43% represent arts and cultural institutions

10% represent anti-poverty organizations

8% represent healthcare

8% represent childcare

31% represent a wide-variety of organizations including: animal welfare, churches, school districts, municipalities, economic development, and substance use treatment

The questions were designed to ascertain the operational and program-related response and recovery needs of organizations as we enter the 18-month milestone of the COVID-19 pandemic.

What follows are the questions that were posed and a summary of responses.

1. What were the sources of additional income that were obtained specifically to address the pandemic response of the organization?

Given a long list of possible revenue sources, over 60% of respondents cited the Paycheck Protection Program loan as a major support to their operations. 37% of organizations reached out to their donors with a pandemic-related appeal and over half of respondents received enhanced state or federal support. Of note is the role that foundations in our region played in the response and recovery of organizations. 84% of those responding received support from a combination of the Community Foundation (33%), private foundations (25%), corporate foundations (9%) and/or the United Way (17%).

2. Did your organization experience a significant loss or a significant gain in revenue since the pandemic began?

This is where the story of the impact of the pandemic gets told. 52% of organizations reported a significant loss of revenue, while an additional 31% reported a minor loss of revenue. When asked for estimated total loss, responses varied widely from under \$5,000

to \$200,00+. Broken down, 41% of organizations reported a loss of between \$0-\$50,000 and 44% of organizations reported a loss of between \$50,000-\$200,000. On the flip-side, 12% of respondents reported a minor or significant revenue gain. 20% of organizations reported a gain of between \$0-\$5,000 and 19% reported a gain of between \$50,000-\$200,000. The responses indicate that a majority of the organizations responding are operating in the red and have not had access to funding sources that would bridge that gap.

3. What pandemic-related investments has the organization had to make and where did those funds come from?

The investments most often cited were the following: Personal Protective Equipment (89%), technology to support remote work and service provision (57%), and capital investment in pandemic mitigation products (40%). The average amount spent on these investments ranged from \$100-\$350,000. The larger investments came from school districts. The average spent by organizations was \$45,393. Most of the money to pay for these additional investments came from existing operating budgets/reserves. Additionally, significant support was received from State and Federal funders and from local foundations.

4. How are you currently operating and what impact has the pandemic had on the utilization of your services?

Approximately 74% of organizations responding are currently fully operational providing either in-person or remote services. Eighty-two percent of respondents report that their employees have returned to the office or are performing their duties with a hybrid of office hours and remote work. Over 80% have a re-opening plan complete and that plan has been shared with employees, clients/consumers/patrons, and community members. Before resuming all services and operations as they were prior to the pandemic, the majority of respondents will be looking to New York State for guidance. Most re-opening plans were developed by executive/administrative staff and very few sought inputs from line/program staff or clients/consumers/patrons. A significant percentage, 27%, have temporarily suspended some services and are providing others. Utilization of services is split evenly. Approximately 40% of respondents have seen either a sharp or moderate increase in the utilization of services and 40% of respondents have seen either a sharp or moderate decrease in the utilization of services. Twenty percent of respondents report no significant increase or decrease. Comments suggest that programs that were helping with basic needs such as food, rental assistance, healthcare, and transportation experienced an increase in utilization while those related to job-training, workforce development and performance (staged productions) experienced a decrease in utilization.

When asked if there were operational changes that were made that would be continued once the pandemic was “over”, about a third of respondents reported that no permanent operational changes would be made, while two-thirds reported that they would continue remote work and programming options, as well as alternative work-week options. For many organizations, these changes will continue because as one respondent put it “We

are currently assessing future options, not so-much because of COVID, but as a way to attract workers. We are experiencing a huge challenge in getting qualified people to fill positions.”

5. What Human Resources (HR) challenges and staffing issues have you been experiencing as a result of the pandemic?

Respondents are experiencing a wide-range of HR challenges as a result of the pandemic. The most pressing issues are that of staff recruitment and retention. Many organizations have reported an increase in staff turnover and difficulty finding qualified staff to fill open positions. Many respondents report struggling with the many HR issues related to testing and vaccination requirements. Organizations completing the survey report that an average of 87% of their employees are vaccinated and for those that have not received the vaccination cite concern about the safety of the vaccine or concern about the effect the vaccine will have on an existing medical condition. Twenty five percent of unvaccinated employees cited political beliefs as the reason while no one cited access as a barrier. Navigation of the HR implications of quarantine and caring for family members that are exposed or infected have also been a challenge.

There were also a significant number of respondents that were seeking guidance with Diversity, Equity and Inclusion policies and best practices.

Organizations have provided significant support to their employees. The most often cited were: flexible work schedule, mental health treatment access, pop-up COVID vaccine sites, referrals to other supportive services, and remote work options. Of most concern to organizations related to their ability to retain staff are the long-term effects COVID will have on the mental health and morale of their employees, losing staff due to vaccine mandates, and operating short-falls that might lead to staff reductions. A common refrain amongst respondents: *“We face an overwhelming number of vacancies that far exceeds pre-pandemic times.”*

6. How have you changed the way your organization meets the needs of your clients/consumers/patrons (CCP) as a result of the pandemic?

Services for CCP's have changed significantly to respond to the pandemic. The majority of respondents have offered remote-services or live-streamed events to meet the needs of community members. Many have provided services outdoors, made service provision hours more flexible and offered expanded services. Several organizations were also pop-up vaccination sites. There were many specific concerns about meeting the needs of CCP's for the duration of the pandemic. Those most frequently cited were: safety of CCP's while receiving services or participating in programs, absorbing the cost of providing additional services, staff burnout, and the isolation and mental health issues of CCP's.

7. What were the unexpected and/or positive changes to your organization as a result of the pandemic?

There were many unexpected and positive changes resulting from the pandemic that organizations reported. These focused around three themes: an increase in technological capacity, a decrease in operational costs, and an increase in time devoted to developing

innovative programming and engaging staff and the community. With respect to technology, organizations were able to invest in software to provide remote services including virtual meetings, virtual performances, telehealth provision and transportation management software. They also invested in hardware such as computer-based phone and messaging systems, video cameras, lighting, laptops, etc. to support virtual programs and remote work.

Organizations also report having the time to think about how they provide services and the services that they provide. They report being able to come up with innovative and creative programs in response to the pandemic, many of which will continue beyond the crisis as they are more accessible or have opened up new audiences.

Organizations also reported that there was a renewed focus on their mission and that staff and community engagement took on a new sense of urgency and importance in order to provide an effective response to the pandemic. One respondent put it like this: *"...we have certainly become more proficient in virtual meetings both internal staff meetings as well as collaborative meetings with partners. we saved a lot of money on reduced travel. when we had to go remote 3/2020; I instituted mandatory daily am & pm departmental meetings so program managers could guide staff work schedules, capture report out at the end of the day AND use these meetings as a source for keeping teams connected and also inquiring/mentoring of staff's personal health & well-being."*

8. What specific types of support can funders offer that would be helpful to your organization as you continue to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic?

The overwhelming majority of respondents cited unrestricted grants and information about alternative funding sources would be the most helpful supports that funders could offer at this time. Streamlined application processes, reduced reporting requirements and capacity building workshops/trainings on issues related to the pandemic were also significantly represented.

Recommendations

- Expand unrestricted grant opportunities for organizations
- Continue working towards streamlined reporting and application processes
- Work with NYCON, or a similar organization, to offer a series of Human Resources capacity building workshops
- Work with *Workforce Development* in all counties to offer support for recruitment and retention
- Continue to seek out and communicate funding opportunities to organizations in the region
- Continue to seek out and communicate training opportunities to organizations in the region
- Offer *Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion* seminars to organizations focused on practical considerations such as developing policies and procedures, and best practices.