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Women’s funders responding to tremendous need in their communities

Women’s Funding Network shares preliminary data from the first round of RRRCF grantmaking

SAN FRANCISCO — As congress stalls over yet another round of negotiations over the next stimulus package, it has been essential for philanthropy to step in and fill the void left by the federal government’s inaction, with women’s funders seeing even greater levels of need than previously anticipated, according to the Women’s Funding Network (WFN), which today announced preliminary findings and data from its first round of grantmaking for the Response, Recovery, and Resilience Collaborative Fund (RRRCF).

Launched in June, RRRCF is a multi-million dollar initiative to quickly deploy stabilization grants to women’s funds and foundations as they adapt to the post-pandemic landscape while remaining committed to their grantmaking and advocacy for the women and girls most impacted by systemic racism and injustice. The Fund will also convene thought-leaders, partners, and frontline community groups to help identify and resource bold strategies that, by 2022, will strengthen the gender equity and justice philanthropic sector as a vital, influential and effective advocate for social change. About 37% of grantee organizations are led by women of color. The average unemployment rate for the communities applicants are serving is 14%, and 44% of RRRCF grantees make grants to organizations serving urban communities.

“One of our biggest takeaways is the amount of need was greater than we had anticipated, both for the funds themselves and for the communities they serve,” said Women’s Funding Network President and CEO Elizabeth Barajas-Román. “As the COVID crisis and shutdown measures continue, women’s philanthropy is not only stepping in to fill the gaps, but through the RRRCF, our members are able to continue working together to dismantle systemic sexism and racism to prevent disparities in the future.”

Originally, the RRRCF expected to make many small grants of about \$10-15,000 earlier in the spring, when the country anticipated earlier movement toward reopening. However as the nation-wide shutdowns persisted, vulnerable women’s funds had deeper need – in the end 19 funds requested \$850,000. WFN was able to fund 16 of those requests at a total of \$400,000 in grant awards, and also moved larger grants per organization – with an average award size of

\$30,000, based on organizational need, as well as ability to leverage grant funds to financially recover.

Other key findings about the communities being served by RRRCF first round funding:

- **75% of applicants describe unemployment concerns** for the populations that grantees serve. The average unemployment across applicants in their communities is 14.4%, with a higher percentage of unemployment for women, particularly women of color, in every community represented in these applications.
- 74% of applicants are responding to funding needs resulting from **dramatic increases in food insecurity, in numbers of unhoused populations, and in reports of domestic violence and child abuse.**
- **63% of applicants describe an increased need for childcare services** due to COVID-19, with an expected loss of up to 50% of childcare centers in their communities, impacting women's ability to work, or in the case of "essential workers," creating unsafe conditions for children.
- 63% of applicants describe concern for organizations they fund **experiencing a decrease in revenue due to COVID-19, while experiencing a dramatic increase in need for their services.**
- 56% of applicants describe grantee's concern for **increased need among undocumented and immigrant populations in particular.**

Among women's funds and foundations that applied for RRRCF funding, 69% of applicants are experiencing a dramatic revenue loss due to a shift from in-person fundraising events to virtual events, and 50% are experiencing a decrease in individual donations, while 38% are seeing decreased support from foundations. This is especially acute as unemployment surges and available philanthropic dollars are stretched. Even so, most of those reporting this shift also noted that they've been encouraging direct funding to their grantees over their own needs. In fact, 44% discuss plans to **decrease operational costs to cover grantmaking priorities.** This can include closing offices and pulling back benefits, with 38% operating with decreased staff capacity due to hiring freezes and reduced full time.

Fifty percent of the women's funds receiving RRRCF funding plan to use the funds to support operating costs, including maintaining staffing levels and supporting staff in the pivot to virtual work, while 44% plan to use the funds to support their grant making efforts, including rapid response funds. Thirty-eight percent of women's funds receiving RRRCF funding plan to use funds to support specific programs they're building to better respond to the pandemic in their communities, and 37% described plans to leverage these grant dollars for increased investment by individuals, other philanthropic institutions, and corporate sponsors.

The RRRCF was created from nearly \$1 million in seed funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, W.K. Kellogg Foundation, other institutional funders, and individual donors. WFN seeks to raise an additional \$5 million in the next few months.

Grantees included Arizona Foundation for Women, Aurora Foundation for Women, Boston Women's Fund, Inc, Chester County Fund for Women, Iowa Women's Foundation, New Mexico Women, The Fund for Women and Girls at Fairfield County Community Foundation, The Women's Fund of Central Ohio, Washington Area Women's Foundation, Western New York Women's Foundation, Women's Foundation of Arkansas, Women's Foundation of Southern Arizona, Women's Fund for the Fox Valley Region, Women's Fund of Hawai'i, Women's Fund of Rhode Island and Women's Fund of Western Massachusetts.

Most RRRCF grantees will be featured on the new PowerOf.org platform, which is a collaborative effort from several social sector organizations led by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The platform connects people who want to make a difference with organizations addressing the impacts of COVID-19.

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With more than 100 women's funds and foundations spanning six continents, Women's Funding Network is the largest philanthropic network in the world devoted to women and girls. The Women's Funding Network accelerates women's leadership and invests in solving critical social issues—from economic security to reproductive health and justice — by bringing together the financial power, influence and voices of women's funds. For more information on the work of Women's Funding Network and its members, please visit www.womensfundingnetwork.org or connect on Twitter ([@womensfunding](https://twitter.com/womensfunding)) and Facebook (facebook.com/womensfundingnetwork).