

Introduction:

This is a transcript of an April 2020 conversation among five Black nonprofit and philanthropic leaders during the height of the COVID-19 crisis. The speakers are:

- Rhonda Broussard, founder of New Orleans-based [Beloved Community](#), which provides consulting aimed at implementing regional, sustainable solutions for diversity, equity, and inclusion
- Darren Isom, partner at The Bridgespan Group, and moderator of the discussion
- Aisha Nyandoro, chief executive officer of [Springboard to Opportunities](#), a Jackson, Mississippi-based nonprofit that connects families living in affordable housing with resources and programs that help them advance themselves in school, work and life
- George Suttles, director of research at [Commonfund Institute](#), the education and research division of New York City-based Commonfund, which offers financial asset management for nonprofit institutional investors
- Tarik Ward, director of ELMA music programs at [ELMA Philanthropies](#), which provides philanthropic advisory services to the ELMA Group of Foundations in the US and South Africa

The COVID-19 crisis is further exposing known inequities in both outcomes for marginalized communities and funding for the BIPOC-led organizations that serve them. There's a unique opportunity to use this crisis as a catalyst to pivot to more inclusive, dynamic, and equitable funding practices that support the greatest impact for those most in need. In this session, Bridgespan Partner Darren Isom talks with a learning community of BIPOC nonprofit leaders and funders to:

- Name the emotional weight leaders of color are carrying during these tough times,
- Discuss the real-time challenges we are facing navigating the current crisis
- Explore solutions that position equitable practices as a solution to maximizing impact, now and on the other side of this crisis

Full Transcript:

Darren Isom:

Thanks for joining me today. I look forward to our conversation. I wanted to start actually with a convocation, because I'm an old southern boy I think everything should start off with a good convocation. This one is from Angel Kyodo Williams, who's an author of *Being Black: Zen and the Art of Living with Fearlessness and Grace*. I'm offering a quote from one of the interviews that she offered on On Being. So, I think it's a really powerful one that speaks a lot to where we are, and so the quote is, "For growing numbers of us, our sense of survival, our sense of thriving is embedded in a sense of movement and spaciousness and increasing allowance for more and more difference. You ask what is love. Love is space. It's developing our own capacity for spaciousness within ourselves to allow others to

Boston

2 Copley Place,
7th Floor, Suite 3700B
Boston, MA 02116
USA
T. 617.572.2833

www.bridgespan.org

Johannesburg

Bridgespan Africa Initiative
10 The High St,
Melrose Arch 2076,
Johannesburg
South Africa
T. +27.11.012.9280

Mumbai registered address

Bridgespan India Private Limited
9th Floor, Platina, G Block, Plot C 59
Bandra Kurla Complex
Mumbai 400051
India
T. +91.22.6628.9624

New York

333 Seventh Avenue
11th Floor
New York, NY 10001
USA
T. 646.562.8900

San Francisco

88 Kearny Street
Suite 200
San Francisco, CA 94108
USA
T. 415.627.4500

be as they are. That is love. To come from a place of love is to be in acceptance of what is, even in the space of moving towards something that is more whole, more just, more spacious for all of us."

So with that as our convocation, I encourage us all to think about that space and creating spaciousness as we have our conversation today for us for ideas and for the communities that we represent. And so just as opening question I would love ... Once again, I'm Darren. I'm a partner with Bridgespan Group San Francisco. Excited to have some really smart folks here today. Just from a topic of conversation, I threw out the title "Position with great pause the pivot towards more equitable funding practices." And as a teaser, although the COVID-19 crisis is further exacerbating existing inequities in funding, for BIPOC led organizations and organizations serving the most marginalized communities, there's unique opportunity to use this crisis as a catalyst to pivot some more inclusive and equitable practices that prioritize more proximate leaders and solutions.

So happy to talk with some folks that are in my learning community, nonprofit leader, philanthropic leaders, as we explore solutions that position equitable practices solutions to maximizing impact while also understanding how the current crisis is impacting our communities first hand. With that, we have a lot of time to talk about what we need to do better, but I wanted folks to just kick it off and talk about who they are, introduce themselves to folks, and share a little bit about what are things that they're seeing, practices that they're seeing during this time that in many ways serve as best practices moving outside of this time as well.

Tarik will talk a little bit later about thinking about it in two phases. We're definitely in the crisis phase. I would love to get a sense of what people are doing now or things that we should continue doing on the other side of this as well. And I'll have ... Rhonda, can you start actually?

Rhonda Broussard:

Yeah, I'd love to. Thanks, Darren for having us. I am one, just in a space of gratitude for the convocation. The idea that love is space just it fills me right now, and I think so much of what we're going to talk about on the call of what we're experiencing now is how do we hold space with love. I'm the founder and executive director of Beloved Community, and so centering love is a part of our work, is a part of our daily practice. But I love the idea of love as space itself.

I am based in New Orleans. I'm a mother. I'm a Black woman. I'm a lesbian. I'm a partner. I'm a sister. I'm a daughter. I'm a friend. I am a breast cancer survivor. I am deeply moved by health disparities in our country, and I wake up every day to work on equity work in schools, equity at work, and equity in our housing communities.

And what I would say from a practice that I'm seeing right now ... I came into the COVID crisis on a medical leave. So I'm coming back into work from medical leave, and I had this flood of emails from a funder who we've been in cultivation with. A pipeline conversation, and I'm trying to make sense of it. We got on the call, and she's like, "We want to give you money now. We know that organizations who are in pipelines still need support," and it was the fastest cultivation culmination conversation I've ever had.

And so I think that one of the things that's happening right now is some of the rapid relief funding and the ways that funders are setting up their criteria for it in advance that are not having lengthy processes, not having grant reporting or specific milestones and metrics that you have to meet, but really

understanding that organizations who are doing work on the ground need funds in order to keep doing that. And some funders have made that process really easy for us to access.

Aisha, what's it look like on your end?

Aisha Nyandoro:

Oh, thank you for pivoting to me. That just made my heart feel warm and fuzzy. Thank you boo.

Thank you, Darren for cultivating this conversation. It is really the balm that my soul needs for this time that we're in. So thank you for that. I am Aisha Nyandoro. I'm the chief executive officer of Springboard to Opportunities. Springboard provides programs and services for families to live in federally subsidized affordable housing, and we do that work by taking a radically resident-driven approach. What that means for us is that we listen to individuals, and we center all of our programs and services to what those individuals need, not any preconceived ideas and notions about what we believe that individuals who live in extreme poverty may need.

I am based in the beloved state of Jackson, Mississippi, but for now as I am sheltering at home, I am at my house. And I am CEOing from my home, and it can be done because we are still winning. So what I am seeing in this space right now, I'm seeing a lot of deep confusion and hurt on the ground. The majority of the individuals that we work with are single, African-American women with kids. They are individuals who already cycle through trauma, and so I'm seeing more trauma being leaped on to them and heaped on to them, and they don't quite know what to do with it or how to process that because it's so much coming from so many different places each day.

I'm seeing that, and I'm holding that and recognizing that I am a translator in that space. So what do I do with that, and how do I hold my beloved community in that space from the shelter of my home, which is quite safe and feels a little different? But then also what I'm seeing from a broader perspective and much larger just coming at this space as a practitioner, I'm seeing us have conversations about guaranteed income. And I'm seeing us have conversations about what does it just look like to give people money.

Since the organization that I run, one of our initiatives that we've been doing for the last two years is the Magnolia Mother's Trust, where we have just been giving poor Black women a thousand dollars a month for 12 months entrusting that they know what to do with that. And now we are having these conversations at an explosive level of, "Okay. Oh, we can actually give people money, and we can trust them." And I'm like, "I've been telling y'all that for three years. It took a pandemic for you to listen to a sister, but thank you."

So I am holding that as well, and I am so excited. I was having a conversation with Jesus, and I was like, "I've been asking for you to blow this up. I didn't want you to do it in a pandemic, but Jesus you work the way you work. I was not specific, and you got a sense of humor. So do what you do." So I am holding that as well.

I'm holding those two things. I'm really sad that so many of the people that I hold and love are going to have to go be with the ancestors in order for us to get the wisdom that we need to move all of us forward and for all of us to be safe, but I know that in being with the ancestors that wisdom will continue to be carried on. I am really excited, which is weird. But I'm really cautiously excited about what will be born from this space that we're in. So I'm holding all of that as well.

I am going to pivot it over to Tarik.

Tarik Ward:

This is Tarik. I am the director of music programs for the ELMA Philanthropies and the ELMA Music Foundation. We sort of look at that journey for young people through childhood into adulthood as one best taken by music and art. We really take a look at these systems that they have to navigate through the lens of culture and music, and it's through that that we kind of get a different perspective on a lot of these pieces. I think the overriding themes that we've taken from this experience so far in talking to our grantees is really getting to this idea of resisting the urge to go back to normal.

I think right now there's this fight to try to get back to the way things were, but now you have this entire community of people that we've been supporting that have been trying to fight their way out of normal for generations. Really trying to figure out how do we break these systems, and so far I think what we've seen is a lot of these legacy institutions have now shown their cracks in terms of what they're actually able to provide to these communities. I think what has been shown is that these folks were doing okay. They were managing to survive despite these institutions, not necessarily because of them. So now a lot of these institutions are starting to really show their wear.

The demand for these community-based services and folks that have been around this entire time, their value is now becoming much, much clearer to a much wider audience. Now you have folks who had been delivering meals that now *have* to deliver meals. So before it didn't really much matter, because they were delivering meals to poor kids. But now they got to deliver meals to a whole lot of folks.

So it's that kind of thing. This idea that normal is not the place that we want to get back to. This is now an opportunity for us to pave a new pathway to the future and do so with the wisdom of the people that have been doing this this entire time. There's a lot of folks of color, a lot of people that have been serving these marginalized communities that, again, have been screaming these answers from the rooftops this entire time about what we need to do. Sometimes it's, "Hey, just give folks money, and that's what poor people need." Or, "Hey by the way, it's really weird that kids have to go to school to eat. That's really strange. Maybe we should do it some other way." So all these things now start to stack up on each other when it starts to affect a lot more people.

I think from where we sit, it's now a function of really being in a place to listen and really hear what our communities are experiencing and really understanding what are the real ways that we can help. Sometimes that's just get out of the way, and I think the thing that has been the most illuminating about this period, it's really twofold. One, is that you really absolutely see who those leaders are. Who are the strong ones that have been holding this thing together this whole time? You see exactly who they are, because they're the ones standing right now looking around like, "Okay, this is what we've been doing. We've been operating in chaos for decades." It's just now that the chaos has reached your doorstep.

And then I think on the other side you start to see the value of trust, because now from a philanthropic perspective, I don't have the time to ask you for all those things that we otherwise would've asked you for. You can't fill out a ten-page application. You can't send me those audited financials. So now I've got to lean on the fact that I've been working with you. I know who you are. I trust you and your organization and your mission and what you've been doing, and those are the things that now I'm looking at that and I'm holding it. And I say, "Man, these are the things that we have to hold on to. These are the things that we have to use to power through this." Because as Darren mentioned it, there's survival and then there's thriving. I think we've got to make sure that we are able to empower these

folks to get past the survival phase and move into a place where we're actually thriving, where we're now taking advantage of the opportunities that have presented to us and are able to pick up the pieces and not build what we had before. Not rebuild the things, but now build anew.

I think that is the most exciting piece is that we have now a plethora of lessons to take. Some of them we learn the hard way, but now we have them. I think it's now our opportunity to make sure not only that we learn them, but that we get out of the way and empower the folks that can actually get those things done. So that's probably been the most powerful thing for me so far is being able to hear and feel and receive those stories.

Brother George is going to take us into what that actually looks like.

George Suttles:

Yeah, no, thanks Tarik. First and foremost, just want to express gratitude. [cough] Excuse me. Happy to be here with everyone today. I have the good fortune of going last, so all I have to say is ditto, amen, preach, and then I pretty much am able to cover everything that I wanted to say. [clears throat] Excuse me.

A little bit about me. I'm New York City based. At my day job, I'm the director of research with the Commonfund Institute, which is the thought leadership arm of Commonfund, which is an asset management firm that works with large nonprofit institutions as institutional investors. We work squarely in the endowment management space. But I also wear several different hats outside of my day job.

I'm on the board of New York Foundation, which is a New York City-based private foundation that funds grassroots community organizing and advocacy efforts. A lot of the organizations that New York Foundation funds, much to Tarik's point, they were already on the front lines advocating for a new world order as it were. So they were leaders of color who are directly impacted by health disparities, social economic disparities, all of the insecurities that you mentioned. Financial insecurity, citizenship, status insecurity, and all of those things.

And so I was encouraged that when we reached out to our grantees, they were already in the trenches doing this work. They understand crisis management, because that's their mode of operation. That was their mode of operation even before COVID-19 hit New York City. Being able to connect with those grantees, trust their leadership, and quite frankly rely on their resiliency was something that was encouraging to me and just raised the urgency in my mind that when the smoke clears from this crisis we're really going to not only rely on those leaders for their guidance and their leadership to understand how we rebuild communities in a new way, but we're going to have to make a conscious effort to sort of build a platform to amplify their voice.

I think it's going to behoove funders to say, "Not only did we see you do this work during the crisis, but how do we amplify your voice so that you have a seat at the table and you have the tools that you need to really rebuild in a new and important way?" So for me that's really what I've been looking at from a funding perspective is how do we build that infrastructure so that our Black and POC leaders who we've been supporting not only have that seat at the table, but they're rewriting the narrative in a way that's structured and important and powerful and that folks are really hearing their perspective.

Darren Isom:

Thanks for that, George. I want to spend some time in just a bit talking about BIPOC leaders and how they're manifesting that agency now and what that looks like and how we can better support them. But before I do that I just wanted to recognize this while we have a panel of all Black leaders here. Maybe about a month ago I started realizing that I was experiencing this crisis very differently than a lot of my peers. Folks would call and be like, "How are you doing?" I was like, "I'm fine. How are you doing?" And then I realized a lot of my white colleagues, yeah this is a tough period for everyone. It's a lot going on. We're all working from home if we're lucky, but what was interesting is that they would ask, "How about your mama in New Orleans?" And I'd be like, "Hold on a second. I'm actually living this. People are asking because I'm living the life that they're seeing on the news."

So I think in many ways what's interesting about this crisis is that it's a crisis for everyone involved. It's hitting everyone in different ways, but for a lot of BIPOC leaders and folks working in the field, it's very personal, and the dissonance of managing the personal while pushing towards a professional solution can be really intense and overwhelming. So I just wanted to make space for that, because I kind of feel like it's something that needs to be talked about and recognized. But also, Aisha, I want you to chime in because I feel like in our conversations, and you Tarik as well, we've talked about how this gives us insights as to what this looks like for people actually living in situations that we have proximate insights that others think of as just being intellectual exercise. But then when you actually have to work through these situations and scenarios real time, you have a very different perspective. I think it's important for us to kind of share those perspectives as well, because I think that colors how we think about the solutions, but also how we think about our world and shaping them.

Aisha, you want to chime in there and Tarik maybe?

Aisha Nyandoro:

Yeah, no definitely. I'll go first, and then I'll pass it on. You're exactly right when you work in a community how all of this hits very differently. Perfect example for me, here in Mississippi schools officially closed for the year I think a week ago. Friday or something like that. I knew that that was coming, so I was prepared for me and my house. But when the news actually came from the governor I wept, and it was like gaping, hyperventilating weeping. My husband could not figure out what was going on. He was like, "We're fine. You know this was coming." I was like, "I'm not weeping for myself." I was like, "I am weeping for the mothers that we work with who I already know that they are stretched to capacity. So I am weeping for them and their babies, because I know what this means, and I know I can't help."

As a leader who works in community, when you are running an organization where you're radically resident driven, whenever there is a need you are used to being able to work with your people to solve it. In this regard it's like, "Okay, we can try to work and make sure we get you Chromebooks. We can make sure you got hotspots and all that," but this is something that I can't fix. So sitting with that has been a reckoning and trying to hold myself tender and make sure that I am okay while still pushing forward to do the work has been something that I've been grappling with, quite frankly, for the last few weeks.

As we continue to have these conversations about social distancing and do we open the economy up or do we keep it closed. I had this conversation with my board last week as we were talking about why are some of the residents in our communities not social distancing. I was like, "It's a lot of privilege that comes with the ability to be able to social distance that we don't really talk about." For the population that we work with, all of them their jobs are now essential, because it's all folks who work in these stores stocking the shelves or working checking out your groceries or driving the buses. Those things.

I was like, "So they're now essential, but their paychecks are still not essential." Their paychecks still are not providing a living wage. They have their kids who are now at home by themselves trying to educate themselves throughout the day and just holding and grappling with all of that. So there are tiered conversations that we need to be having simultaneously about what all of this looks like as we continue to move forward. I think we're just stuck on one piece of it, and we have got to get to a place where we're multitasking quite swiftly, quite frankly, because our communities are depending upon it.

We also have to make sure that while we're multitasking quickly that we are looking out for the leaders that are holding all of this, because if most of us are being honest, most of us are not okay. Most of us are holding it together day by day. When the weekend comes we're like, "Ooh, thank you. It is wine all day Saturday." Or whatever that looks like.

So we need to be having conversations about how are we holding the leaders okay to make sure that we are all right throughout the long haul of this as well, because this isn't a six-week sprint. This is a six-month, one year, 18-month marathon, and we all have got to be okay on the other side of this, because all of our communities need us now more so than they ever did before.

Tarik Ward:

I think that for me is the perfect point, because if leadership was lonely before, I don't even know what to call it now. You have a lot of these folks who on a good day would be happy to neglect themselves in service of their team and their community, and that is what made them great. We still fetishize this martyrdom concept in nonprofit. I think when looking at it from that perspective, having a funder, and I've had this said to me over the last couple of weeks, having a funder call and just say, "Hey, I actually don't need anything. How you doing?" And they stop for a second. They say, "Wait, what?" "I said how are you doing."

Being able to let go and have that conversation I think is really, really important, because there's a lot of folks that's not checking in on that. Not only are they taking care of their own families and their own loved ones, they're also taking care of their team who has now been dispersed and traumatized and now who is still also taking care of their community and those babies that they're worried about. Those are burdens that they were already carrying, and all of this just made it heavier.

I think for me if I zoom out, what it makes me think about is, "Okay, well how are we enabling this loneliness?" If I think about how these organizations are structured, how are they funded, do they have a strong leadership team, are they paying enough to have a number two, is there somebody else that can take over for them, have they succession planned, have they been given the room and the funds to succession plan? So all those pieces that we talk about and that exchange and that relationship of funders and grantees, those are all things that we thought were important and we kind of talk about. Yes, in the event that dot, dot, dot, but now it's real, and these things are coming to past.

As much as I can call and talk to these folks and really just say, "Hey listen, whatever you need I got you." If you can just call me and tell me, "Hey Tarik, we're looking for such and such and such and such. Can you help?" If I don't know, I know somebody that does. All that is fine, but then I have to be able to look past this and say, "Okay, are they really prepared to deal with something half this size again? And have we set them up to succeed? Are we asking them the right questions? Are we looking at this budgets in the right way?" So all those things start to come up.

I think that for me is the lesson that we take from that. Beyond that just human connection there's also then understanding that that human connection is a result of a lot of those other dominoes that had to fall before then and how much are we a part of either enabling their success or setting them up to fail. I think those are the pieces that I really take away from this, and I hope that not just me, but our team and all the other teams around that are thinking about how do we fund these organizations to thrive in the world beyond this and now taking into account say, "Okay, well we kind of didn't really set them up for success coming into this. So how do we make sure that we rectify that?"

George Suttles:

Yeah Tarik, I just want to really quickly piggy back on those great points. I think there's also, especially in philanthropy, there's an opportunity for us to reimagine how we support leaders from a restorative and healing standpoint as well. There are the strategic and tactical things that we know we can do to support leadership in this space, but there's a certain level of healing, restoration, and rejuvenation that we need to invest in as well. And what does that infrastructure look like?

I think it's going to call on philanthropy to really be innovative and imaginative and creative around funding that work. There's going to be certain level of PTSD that leaders are going to have suffered coming out of this crisis. You talk about the human impact, and I think that's absolutely right. But then how do we heal, restore, and rejuvenate our leaders so that they can sustain their leadership in the longer term? Because the work isn't done yet. If anything, the hard work comes in rebuilding and recovery. So how do we position them to be spiritually sound, mentally sound, emotionally sound? Because it's going to be a long haul, and I want to make sure our leaders are prepared for that.

Tarik Ward:

Yeah, because for so many of these folks it's not a job. This is their life's work. They've poured themselves into this, and this is not just a means of supporting oneself and a means of getting a paycheck. I think you're absolutely right on that point.

Rhonda Broussard:

What I would add too, gentlemen, is that not just that we pour our lives into it, but for so many Black and POC nonprofit leaders we live the experience that we created our nonprofit around. If we didn't experience it personally, our brother, sister, mother, father, grandmother, great grandmother, children did or are currently experiencing it. And so there's the trauma of COVID that we're all going through at different levels, but there's also this trauma that we have in the actual work that we do.

So what does it look like for us to think about the longterm impact and the way that our leaders, particularly those of us who grew up in poverty, are not likely to ask for more money or not likely to be thinking about the money that it takes for succession planning? So from a philanthropic partner lens, I would say if you see things that we're not asking for in the budget, if you ask your leaders and your portfolio how they're doing and they say fine, but they don't have answers to those three questions, guide them through what it looks like. Put the extra money in the coffer to say, "Okay, this is the gap between where you are and where some of your white or higher income, higher profile peers are." Because we may not know to ask for it. We may be embarrassed to say we're not doing well, because we've had to demonstrate that we overcome adversity at every turn.

I love the idea of having restorative practice and really building that into what's coming for the future and making sure that some of that is really clearly aligned to what the lived experiences of our leaders have been over time.

Darren Isom:

Rhonda, just to chime in, because I'm going to want you and George to pick that up again, because I think it's a really important theme. I talk all the time about this idea of being more than just a transactional funder and being a funding partner and what it means to be a funding partner. I think as you both have articulated quite well, right now is a time when we need funders to alleviate the worry budgets of leaders and not add to them. So I think the question becomes what does it look like for a funder to alleviate that worry budget? What does it look like for a funder to look out for a leader that they think of as being part of their team, part of their squad? What are actionable steps?

I'll add to that. As I found was really interesting when sitting on the board of some organizations, as well as some big funding organizations. The first thing folks were told was reach out to your grantees, see how they're doing. What I found really interesting, and this is painting in broad strokes for the sake of conversation, so it's not necessarily spreadsheet backed. But a lot of white leaders, the second the crisis hit, they called their funders. They knew it was time to shore up that funding. Black leaders, they called their constituents. They called the people in their community. It took them a week to think about calling their funders. It wasn't even on their radar.

After they called their funders, they thought that their job was to project confidence to the funders, and they were projecting vulnerability to their constituents and confidence to the funders. In actuality, you project vulnerability to your funders and confidence to your beneficiaries, your constituents. So it took a totally different rethinking of what the relationships look like. Much of that thinking is just counterintuitive to how we've navigated life, particularly as a Black leader. You sure as hell don't want to come across as raggedy to a funder during a crisis asking for more money.

So I think there was something to be said about how do we reposition or how do we use this period to reposition those power dynamics in a way that's more healthy, more restorative, and actually lends itself to building the kinds of relationships that drive the right kinds of impact.

I'll throw that back to you, George. And then Rhonda, I'm sure has some thoughts on that as well.

George Suttles:

Yeah, it's interesting. Tarik alluded to this a bit. A lot of philanthropy's inclination is typically to develop strategy up here and then find partners that align with that strategy. So the reason why it was so important for philanthropy to kind of shed some of the traditional modes of operation is because no one really knew what was going on when COVID-19 hit. So philanthropy had to connect with their partners, their grantee partners who they trust and say, "Hey, what are you all seeing on the ground?" Because philanthropy didn't have the vantage point or the privilege of time to map out a strategy and then find grantees that aligned with them. They just were like, "Everything's gone to hell, and we know that our leaders on the ground have a better sense of what's going on and how to respond. So we need to give them flexible general operating support and let them do their work."

In a lot of ways we need to hold on to that in the relationships post COVID-19, because our leaders always knew what was best. They always were closer to the ground, and they always were doing what was best for the communities that they were serving. So my grand hope is that we hold on to that. As we continue to develop relationships with communities and grantee partners, philanthropy needs to continue to fall into that particular lane.

There are smart folks in philanthropy who can strategize around any and everything, but at the end of the day, when in doubt trust your leadership. Trust the communities that are doing this work and are benefiting from community leadership. I think the worst-case scenario if you hold that as a truth and value, from the philanthropic side you can do no wrong if you just trust the communities that you're partnering with and trust the leadership that's coming out of community and just really focus on building their leadership up and supporting the infrastructure that will allow them to do their best work. That's going to be a winning strategy 100% of the time. My hope is that that's one of the key tenets that we hold on to moving forward.

Rhonda Broussard:

To put a finer point on what George is talking about, our day job with Beloved Community is working folks through their equity strategy. Here you've been working on this equity strategy and inclusion strategy, a community-based leadership strategy for the past few years. Now is the time to double down on that. Don't say, "Oh my goodness, we did this wonderful work three years ago." And now let's move with urgency into rapid relief funds and with urgency into understanding, making sense of COVID, relying on the strategy that you built that is really about how do you center the populations that you're purporting to serve, that you are serving, that you have been serving. Holding in mind that, like you said, some of the fastest ways to get the work done is through our partners.

From a local funding community that often minds national funders will fund an intermediary to then release funds or steward funds in a local community, because they know some of those partners best. I would also remind philanthropic partners that the intermediary is its own nonprofit that is maybe asking these same questions about their sustainability, that's trying to sure up their own staff and their own teams at the same time. Double down on your intermediary funding, and then create a separate fund that you're really public about in partnership with some of the local leaders that the intermediary has been funding and has been supporting over time so that you don't have folks on the ground who are worried that the intermediary is going to hold all the money and they're not going to see it in their everyday action.

I would also say that there's the things that we know to fund, there are the people who are already in our pipelines who are already in our communities, but one of the things that we're seeing is emerging grassroots action that was not necessarily on an organization's radar before. I'll give an example from New Orleans. You have a group here called Southern Solidarity. I think they now have friends in Oakland who are called Oakland Solidarity, and they're working primarily doing daily canvassing with our unhoused populations. Not just around food, but around PPE, around safety and security during COVID.

These are not people who were in housing community work before. These are not people who were formerly working with unhoused. They're not coming out of an organization. This was somebody who said, "I'm healthy and safe. I'm going to step out into the next intersection and help the people who aren't." So how do we start to talk with our communities about where those emerging actions are? These are groups that don't have 501(c)(3)s, are not connected to your regional foundation, community foundation, and could likely use some support beyond the GoFundMe's that they're already doing.

Darren Isom:

Rhonda, I think you bring up some good points I want to come back to in a second and more so on this idea of George and I had a conversation about yes, this is about doubling down on your grantees. But how do you use this opportunity to actually grow your group of folks that you're funding and supporting to make sure that the folks that are doing the work are getting funded? Going back to George's point as well, which is a great one, how do we use this is an opportunity to actually enrich our strategy? We have these wonderful strategies, which are all very well thought out and have wonderful theory of changes,

logic chains and things that make complete sense. But if we're learning something in the field that we know wasn't included in our strategy, maybe it's time for us to rethink what our strategy was and how do we grow that strategy or change that strategy to be more inclusive from a thought perspective. How do we learn from the field and learn from the people actually doing the work and have proximate solutions?

But from a learning perspective, Tarik I know this is the point of yours and Aisha, I know you thought about it as well. I'm always very interested, particularly now looking at how in many ways philanthropy and society in general has made some big bets around particular what we would call kind of the pillars of a community or the pillars of the social sector. A lot of those pillars ain't holding stuff up right now.

So I would love to get your thoughts on ... I mean, I'm just putting out there, but seriously. It's too early in the week. America is going through some stuff right now. It's just a lot going on. But how do we think about what this period is exposing for us as it relates to a lot of the things that we thought about as trusted institutions? And what does that mean for us as we think about doubling down on investment perspective and how we should be funding to recognize what are the trusted institutions within a neighborhood, within a community? I'll just throw out as an example my mom was joking with we realize now the schools ain't the schools, it's the teachers. Or even the people that are working at the schools in the cafeteria. That's the schools. And then my mother jokingly said, "And the churches, I don't know what the churches are anymore. I don't know who's leading that." It's precarious as hell.

But Tarik, I would love your thoughts there. And Aisha, I'm sure you have some as well.

Tarik Ward:

Yeah, I think that's what you're seeing is what's now being exposed is the infrastructure on top of which these legacy institutions really stood. They weren't standing on their own. Schools weren't there by themselves. They were there along with the afterschool programs, along with the community-based programs, and they were part of an ecosystem. When you start to subtract them, the ecosystem doesn't fall apart. It's the other parts of the system get stronger. They assume more responsibility.

Your community center that used to just provide afterschool help is now delivering food. They're now handing out checks and money to community members. They're now an even safer haven for folks to be able to come and get the things that they need. So now what you're seeing is this is actually where a lot of the power really was within this ecosystem. It wasn't necessarily with the things that were the biggest and the most expensive and the most visible.

I think even more so coming out of it, and this is actually building off of what Rhonda said, what you're now going to see are these organizations that we would have otherwise poo pooed, said, "Okay, well they don't even have any paperwork. Have them come back to me when they're ready." But they're the ones that have now emerged as the lifeline for folks that are keeping things together. So it's been really, really fascinating to watch that element of it as well.

Now the question then becomes how do we reorganize the support within this ecosystem. In fact, I had a call this morning where somebody asked me, said, "Well, now that the schools are closed, are they going to redirect some of those dollars to the community centers that all the kids are going to end up going to?" I said, "You would think. It doesn't appear so as yet." And he just kind of looked. He's like, "Well, all right. That's disappointing." And I said, "Yeah, it is." But I think that's the reality of what we've

seen is that the resources are flowing, but they're not necessarily flowing to all the places where the work is always getting done.

Now you have these teachers who have now re-assumed their roles as heroes, where they're now shouldering so much of this work without the infrastructure of the school behind them still trying to get the job done daily. And now parents who are also heroes before this are now stepping up and adding a whole new layer. You're now seeing these smaller organizations that we have been comfortable overlooking before that are now stepping into this space.

When I think about some of the relationships that we have started to form over the years and really thinking about how do we get at some of these smaller organizations that would otherwise have flown under our radar, that's when you start to form the relationships with these local funders and folks on the ground who, again, they know more about what's going on than we do. In fact, they know more about what's going on than we ever will, because we don't live there. We're not from there, and they do the stuff. They know the folks, and those relationships are now proving very, very fruitful. Because now through them we can understand exactly what's going on, and we can say, "Okay, here's some extra dollars. You all get it to the places that need it most and tell us how it works out on the other end. Don't worry about having to plan that out on the front side."

So, those are the spaces that I think are going to be really, really fascinating, because we're going to see a lot of things emerge from this that don't look like the usual suspects. They're not going to be those big, fancy organizations that we'd normally think of. And I think it's going to be a welcome change to start thinking about, "Okay, there was a lot of things bubbling underneath the surface that we just were missing." So I think that's going to be really fascinating.

Aisha Nyandoro:

Yeah, no I think so much of this is fascinating. But Darren, when you posed the question about the unusual suspects immediately I was like that's subjective. Because the unusual suspects really depends on your vantage point in which you're coming to community, because in a lot of the communities that we work in the trusted institutions are already the smaller entities. Like we were saying, the community centers, the nonprofit organization, the grassroots org. Those are already the trusted institutions that have been doing the work that in this crisis are doing what we do, leveling up quite quickly and just doing more of the work.

What I hope, though, that comes out of all of this is that all of those model organizations that are now continuing to show up and be the superheroes for the community, which is what we always do, I hope that those individuals recognize their power and that they begin to advocate for themselves and not wait for other people to advocate on their behalf. Because we have short-term memory problems for why ever that is, and we are not going to remember to pull these people forward and make sure that they get the support that they need.

My piece in all of this, using my little bit of social cap ... Uh-uh, I don't have a little bit of social capital. Using all of the social capital that I have is making sure that I am advocating and lifting up the names and the voices of the other institutions doing amazing work who may not have the platform that I have, and that I'm doing it now and not waiting for us to get on the other side of this crisis to begin to do that, and that I'm helping them to understand how to do that as well. Because in every crisis we always talk about the heroes that came and did and murdered, that slayed. These folks are slaying, but 16 months from now those organizations are not going to be around, because no capital is going to come their way. We still not going to liberate the capital to give to the folks who saved us during the emergency, and those

folks still not going to be paid. And they still going to be sitting at they kitchen table trying to run they nonprofit from the kitchen table. We ain't got to do that.

So, what I am saying is that I hope ... Y'all are laughing, and it's so funny. But what I am saying is that I really hope that the folks who are doing the work are empowered to recognize their own power doing this, and that they ask for what they deserve. No, they fight for what they deserve, and that we make philanthropy and everyone else recognize their power and pay these folks in these organizations and make sure that they are endowed and have the capital that they need to do the work, because those are the folks who are saving all of us right now.

Tarik Ward:

Real talk, and that money should not come from anybody's emergency fund.

Aisha Nyandoro:

Hello!

Tarik Ward:

Because emergency funds dry up. Those things need to be sustaining funds and folks that are going to be able to look at this long term. This is not a blip. These folks have been here, and they're going to be here. I think that's the other piece of it is we can't think about this as just an emergency. We have to think about this as a longterm piece. As you said, this is a marathon.

George Suttles:

It's interesting. Just really, really quickly. Aisha, she made many excellent points, but the one that is especially resonant with me is I know here in New York City a colleague of mine and I are working on a sort of leader of color articulation project where we uplift and we tell the stories of our community-based nonprofit leaders so that they're never forgotten, because that's the evidence. When we start to fall back into our traditional modes of grantmaking and philanthropy and strategizing, it's like, "No, no, no. Listen to these stories. These are the folks who are in the trenches actually doing the work. Never forget these are the folks you need to support." So the hope is that by capturing those stories and chronicling the heroism, as Aisha said, then we can keep folks honest post COVID-19.

Darren Isom:

An excellent point, and I think that it also sticks with me for us to kind of own the narrative around all of this. I think it's a question of capturing the people who are doing the work. I was joking with a cousin, we were talking about New Orleans how the rates are high. And yes, a lot of it has to do with a lot of things we've talked about from a health perspective, from a community perspective, from an equity perspective, but also as my cousin said, because people are working. People still have to work. People are out there. They have to. They're essential, and these are folks in restaurants, in grocery stores. These are people with good jobs. It's your cable man. It's your mailman, and so I think there's a way to unpack that in a way that's important.

I want to spend a little time as well, and we're starting to run out of time. Sorry y'all. We have to do this again. I want to spend a little time as well talking about a few things. Rhonda, you brought this point up, and I want to make sure that it's one that's well understood and articulated, and it's around the capacity-building piece. We've all done lots of great equity work in the past two, three years that's created great equity plans. I want you to speak a little bit more to what it means to live into that strategy now as opposed to putting that beautiful strategy up on a shelf and moving on because of urgent times, what that looks like.

Tarik, I would also love for you to chime in. I'm sure George would have some thoughts here on what does it look like to fund now with an eye on capacity building afterwards. What are those two tranches, if you will? What does it look like to think about those things that you should have been doing or we should have been doing within the philanthropic world around capacity building, around the size of grants, around building endowments particularly for Black lead organizations, around all these pieces that are important to success of the community? How do we start some of those now with the goal of continuing those after we're done with the crisis? Hopefully soon enough. So Rhonda, if you want to chime in first with the equity piece?

Rhonda Broussard:

Yeah, I'd love to. I think what's important for us to remember in this moment is all of our local communities have the answers. Within Beloved we think about what are the key questions that everyone needs to be asking to keep themselves honest and then how do they make that transparent so they can keep themselves accountable with their communities. So question one, to what extent are any of the funds, grants that you're distributing going to a population that really represents a community that you serve? Both in terms of ultimate population receiving services from that nonprofit, but also for the executive leadership of that nonprofit.

If you look at your portfolio and only 10-percent of your funds go to Black and BIPOC leaders and 90-percent of your funds ... no matter how many grants you make, 90-percent of the funds are going to your white-lead organizations, you have some reckoning to do here. Within these current responses, whether you're doing a rapid respond fund, whether you're doing a six to eight month, an 18 to 24 month, you're starting your new three-year strategy right now, you can ask yourself that question and then get really honest about what you're trying to shift and who you're funding to do the work in which communities.

The second question you can be asking yourself is to what extent do the voices of the actual people receiving services impact this work? To what extent are their voices respected and honored in the process and the decision making? Again, if you're a foundation who primarily funds intermediaries, how are you really listening to points that everyone on the call has made already today? How are you really listening to what they need and to what their communities are saying? How do you know that the decisions that you're making as a funding body are representative of that inclusive voice? Are you only talking to the same three leaders or do you have some opportunity to get to 15 leaders, to have your whole team get to 50 leaders to understand what that looks like? So, how are you bringing that inclusive voice in?

Then from the equity perspective, to what extent are any of those decisions really moving the needle? In the conversation moving the needle in terms of what services people have access to and what their outcomes are going to be. If you can tell me right now that all of the granting partners that you've worked with in the response to COVID-19, that out of all of them half of your Black and BIPOC-led organizations will be closed in the next eight months and all of your white led organizations are going to go on for the next 10 years, that's an equity problem. So what are the changes that you need to make now in the ways that you're investing in those organizations to make sure that your white and BIPOC-led organizations are getting the same amount of runway to plan and to have ample support on the ground for the work that they're doing every day?

So three questions. It doesn't matter where you are in the country, Tarik, where you are in the world, where you're funding. But how can you get really honest about that and honest first with yourself and

then make those communications transparent. We've appreciated some of the transparent communications we're seeing from ... There's a rapid relief fund that was specifically looking at AAPI communities in the Northeast, and they're like, "Look, we are living into this, and we know that this community right now is being disproportionately impacted. We're here to support this, and we want to write it because we know that the impact is right now, and it's something that we're going to keep doing later in the future." So, thinking about how that matters for your region. The answers may be different, but the questions can be the same.

Tarik Ward:

Yeah, for me I always lean on show me your budget, and I'll show you your priorities. When you talk about capacity, I look at your budget. I see your capacity. For me, it's always a question of demand. If you demand of me that we pay for X, Y, and Z, then now it's on the table. If I don't see an executive coach in your budget or if I don't see a strong leadership team or I see a huge gap in pay or I see an ED and then everybody else, I say, "Well, that's your capacity. It's you." So, that's the bottleneck.

For me, it's always a function of what is it that you demand for me. And Aisha made this point earlier is that you've got to ask or I won't provide. If it's a thing that you must demand it from every funder, even if they're not amicable to the idea, if you don't demand it, it won't show up.

I think for me it's a function on ensuring that we have those conversations very early on with our prospective grantees and even our current grantees and say, "Hey listen, what do you need?" I always end almost every single one of those early conversations with prospective grantees with, "Okay, how can I help?" And I just leave it there, and I let that sit on the table, because it's from there that we actually get to the conversation about, "Okay, well I really need to hire an assistant." "Okay, that sounds like a reasonable investment. Let's talk about what that costs." Or, "I really need an evaluator." So, "Okay, well I didn't see any of that in your budget. Where is that?"

So for me it's always about that demand. Then when I think about say the relationship that we have with the Brooklyn Community Foundation, we have a coach for those young leaders. These are all small organizations, almost all POC-led young leaders, and we got them a coach. When this thing hit we said, "Okay, I need 10 more hours from this coach." That was the first thing on the list. Like, "Okay, we can figure out the budget thing and all that stuff later. We need more hours for them so that they have a sounding board. They know exactly who they can call to talk to figure out, OK, girl, how am I going to get to tomorrow."

That for me has probably been the biggest revelation, because we built it into the budget. It's right there. We have X number of hours from her, and we're going to add on some more because we planned for it. I think for me it's just about just being eyes wide open from the beginning, and when we talk about capacity, put it on paper. This is not an ethereal thing. This is not abstract. This is real. We can count it. We can look at the capacity of an organization.

I think if we're going to commit ourselves to asking them to put it on paper, then put it on paper. I said put the whole thing down. Said, "Well, what budget do you want?" I said, "Well, how many do you have? Just tell me what it costs to do this." You're laughing. You'd be surprised at how many folks say, "Okay, well which version do you want? You want the clean one or do you want ..." I said, "Well, okay." Then we have to have a different conversation. I think showing me your budget is showing your priorities, and that's where the capacity is. It's on paper. You know exactly what it is, and that's what you have to pay for.

I think it's been a way we've operated, and I think now it's just even more clear that when I start looking down the line after the ED, and I start looking at let me look at this org chart and who's reporting to you and who are we paying for and tell me how this works, that's more important now than ever. Because if you get sick, then what happens? If you got to go take care of your family, then what happens? Who are they going to be listening to? And that's capacity building. It ain't all this other stuff. It's that right there. It gets real in a hurry. I think that's the space where you just have to be really honest and really clear about what you're demanding, because you're going to get what you ask for, and you're not going to get what you don't ask for. That for me has been the biggest thing.

George Suttles:

Yeah, I agree with all of that wholeheartedly. The one thing that ... [clears throat] Excuse me. The one thing that I'm really interested in, and we know this about our folks, is in times of crisis we take care of our own. You're seeing all of these mutual aid funds pop up, the GoFundMe's pop up, but we know about giving circles and sou-sous and all of these community-based mechanisms that we'd use to express our philanthropy to take care of our own, and I just wonder if there's an opportunity for institutional philanthropy to invest very deeply in that kind of infrastructure and capacity as well. Can we create mechanisms where communities are taken care of, but then also have the resources to take care of themselves and generate and strategically deploy resources on their own behalf?

So, there could be a tremendous opportunity to look at not only just endowing organizations, but really endowing communities and thinking about all of the creative ways that you can create that philanthropic infrastructure so that money flows so that there's almost like a philanthropic ecosystem that's inclusive, but also community based too. I think there could be tremendous opportunity there. I hope that institutional philanthropy has the appetite to explore some of that, too.

Darren Isom:

George, I love those thoughts. We're at time, but I want to go over just a little bit. One, because I want to before I close us out give us our benediction, because we need one clearly. Rhonda, you'll appreciate all that time in school in France, the teachers would always say the presenters should always leave your guests or your audiences with a gift, something that folks can take away. So as we close out this call I would love for folks just to share, starting with you George. What gift are you passing on to the folks listening to this, something to hold onto and think about particularly with an audience of Black leaders in mind? As rarely do we have an opportunity to speak amongst ourselves. So I would love for you to kick us off, George and pass to someone else as well before I close us out.

George Suttles:

Yeah, no absolutely. Just the gift of imagination. We possess incredible resiliency and creativity and imagination, and now's the time for us to truly use that imagination and start to discover ways to create the world that we all want to live in. I would just encourage folks to continue to be creative and to be imaginative, and I'll pass it to Rhonda.

Rhonda Broussard:

Thanks, George. The thing that is top of mind for me is listen to Black women. So much of what we're seeing right now in COVID response, Black women in nonprofit leadership have been calling for. Releasing more programmatic funds for general operating funds, reducing some of the restrictions on reporting and timeline to funding. We had a knowledge body that was already calling for some of these changes that now we see philanthropic community responding to. Y'all could have listened to us last year.

But also how are we listening to trans Black women? How are we listening to indigenous women? How are we listening to Latinx women, to Latina women? How do we understand the actual real experiences, listen to the people who are having them? And to Aisha's point earlier, trust them to make decisions that are in their best interest? We all benefit from it in the end.

Aisha, you want to pick up?

Aisha Nyandoro:

Thank you, sister. Yes, echo all of that. Trust Black women. Liberate capital our way. Give me all your money. If you feel guilty about having money, I will make you feel less guilty about having money. But no, the other piece that I really leave with is joy and resilience and laughter. There's so much going on right now, and we're bombarded from information from so many different sources, but we as people of color are resilient people. So we really need to lean into that part of our history and that part of our narrative and allow that to be our light to carry us forward into joy and laughter. Because they can close down everything, but they can't take that from us. That lives in our hearts, and that is what we should allow to be our light right now during this period of darkness.

Tarik Ward:

I'll leave it with check on your peoples. Just check on your peoples. Now more than ever relationships are going to be the thing that sustain us, and those relationships come in a lot of different forms, whether it's people you live in a house with. Check on them, because even though you see them, that doesn't mean they're fine. So check on them. Check on the people close to you, and check on your grantees. Everybody that you write a check to, they should have heard directly from you by now several times just to see how are you doing. And then just stop. No agenda. Just, "How are you doing?" Then end it with, "How can I help?"

That's it, because I think at this stage we have to recognize that we are sitting in extraordinarily privileged positions, and it behooves us to pay that forward. Sometimes it's as simple as that one phone call to just say, "Hey, how you doing? How are you holding up? Is there anything that I can do?" Sometimes that call is the thing. So, check on your peoples.

Darren Isom:

Thanks, Tarik. I want to say the gift for me has been having you guys in conversation. So thank you so much for all that you shared. But I also encourage folks to ... I joke all the time that Black Americans are experts at storytelling because storytelling is your way of calibrating a world that doesn't make sense, and that's all we've done since we got here. So rely on your stories and rely on your stories to make sense and listen to those stories.

I'll let us go with just a quick quote. One of my favorite ones from James Baldwin. You can't go wrong with a little Baldwin. "For nothing is fixed forever and forever and forever; it is not fixed; the earth is always shifting, the light is always changing, the sea does not cease to grind down rock. Generations do not cease to be born, and we are responsible to them because we are the only witnesses they have. The sea rises, the light fails, lovers cling to each other, and children cling to us. The moment we cease to hold each other, the sea engulfs us and the light goes out."

With that, thanks again guys. Great talk with you guys and talk with you again soon. Keep on going.