

# Minnesota Disaster Recovery Fund:

Learnings From Collaborative Funding to Support Communities During the COVID-19 Pandemic

April 2021

**Minnesota  
Disaster  
Recovery  
Fund**  
for coronavirus



MINNESOTA COUNCIL  
ON FOUNDATIONS



SAINT PAUL  
& MINNESOTA  
FOUNDATION

# Introduction

In late January 2020, the first cases of COVID-19 were reported in the United States, and the severe disruption of our collective lives became a real possibility. When communities respond to crisis, whether a natural disaster or a tragic event, timing is of the essence. Resources are gathered and coordinated. Decisions are made quickly and action soon follows. Ideally, this is all made easier by having a prepared plan in place.

But how does a community respond to a slow-moving crisis, one that generates fear and uncertainty? An emergency that starts slowly before spreading its devastation out over the course of months, even years?

For some, a slow-moving crisis means taking a “wait and see” approach. The perception of “extra time” can allow for more information and additional clarity around community needs. It can also lead to indecisiveness, as was evident in the varied initial responses of state and local governments, major employers and institutions to the emergence of COVID-19. Philanthropic organizations also have a tendency to be process oriented, taking the time to identify investments with the greatest impact. All of this makes the response from Minnesota’s philanthropic community stand out.

The speed in which this pooled fund came together is remarkable, as is the way in which organizations at all levels of the process extended themselves. Early conversations held by the Minnesota Council on Foundations (MCF) resulted in quick affirmational decisions to create a response fund that was focused on reaching all populations across Minnesota and fulfilling the needs of communities.

This was soon followed by essential conversations around structure and decision making processes. MCF was stepping into a new role as an intermediary grantmaker, but needed a partner to process the grants. The Saint Paul & Minnesota Foundation offered the experience and capacity to distribute funds across the state. Both organizations waived all fees, committing 100 percent of the funds raised to support community recovery.

When it came time to decide how funds would be distributed and what the decision making process would look like, it was clear that local community foundations, the Minnesota Initiative Foundations, and other intermediaries who possessed the knowledge to address specific needs in their communities would play a critical role.

An advisory committee responsible for awarding the grants was established with diversity, equity and inclusion in mind. Corporate philanthropy, private philanthropy, community foundations, state government and nonprofits all had representation on the advisory committee.

On March 16, 2020, just over two weeks after Minnesota’s first case of COVID-19 was reported and a few days removed from the first conversations around establishing a fund, Susie Brown, president

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*“I wanted to make sure that we were doing something that was responsive, appropriate and added value. I hope the people who were involved actually witnessed and experienced that things can be done differently to the benefit of the community.”*

Susie Brown, President of Minnesota Council on Foundations

of MCF, sent a fundraising email to members. Two days later, MCF and the Saint Paul & Minnesota Foundation publicly announced that \$4.4 million had been raised for a coronavirus response and introduced the Minnesota Disaster Recovery Fund (MDRF).

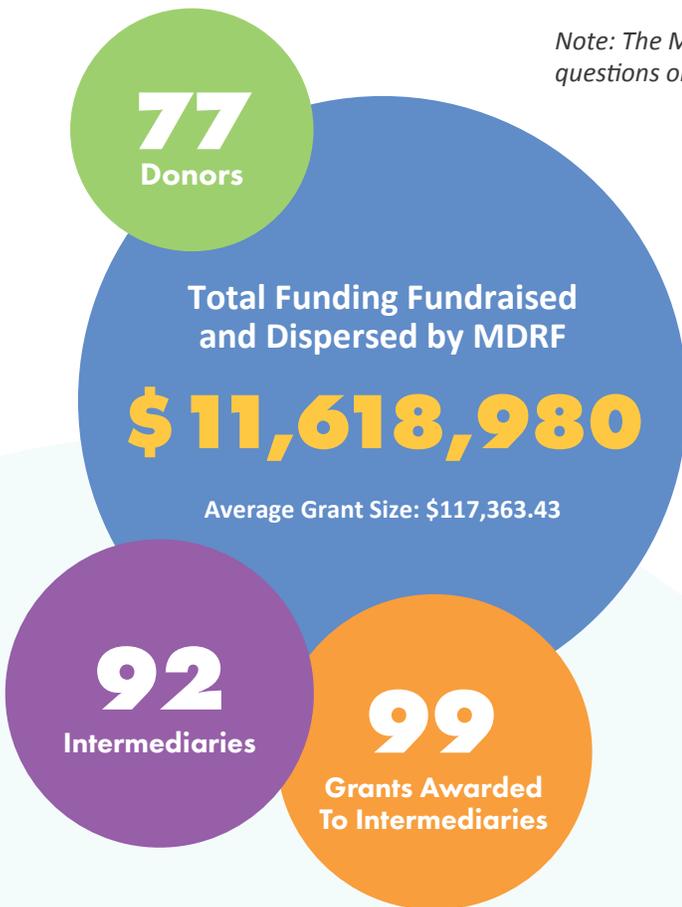
*“It takes courage to recognize and call out injustice. But every one of these partners already had exercised that courage. So it wasn’t a new deep breath of courage. It was the same continuing conviction that they already had.”*

Eric Jolly, Ph.D., President and CEO of the Saint Paul & Minnesota Foundation

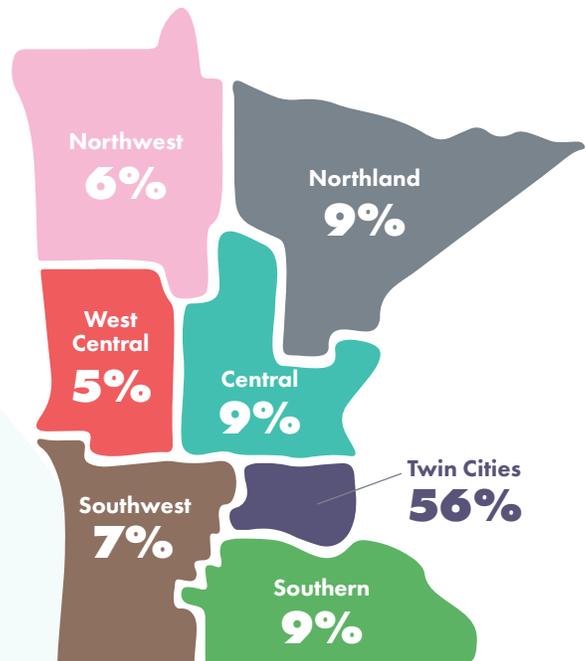
The following months would see the advisory committee meeting weekly to make critical decisions about the distribution of funds. Civil unrest would erupt across the Twin Cities in the aftermath of George Floyd’s murder at the hands of Minneapolis police, expanding the scope of the crisis and the fund. Later, a single anonymous donation would nearly double the size of the fund and, as the pandemic continued without an end in sight, the question of the appropriate time for relief and the time for recovery in a slow-moving crisis would be raised.

There is a lot to learn from the experiences of those involved in the fund and the impact of their work. In an effort to share those learnings for future collaborative funding efforts, Seiche conducted 21 interviews with MDRF stakeholders — donors, intermediaries and advisory committee members.

*Note: The MDRF application process did not require extensive questions or reporting. As a result, quantitative data is limited.*



**STATEWIDE FUNDING DISTRIBUTION (BY REGION)**



According to Minnesota Compass, the percentage of population per region are: Central - 758,101 (14%); Northland - 324,818 (6%); Northwest - 170,798 (3%); Southern - 739,132 (13%); Southwest - 275,843 (5%); Twin Cities - 3,065,147 (55%); and West Central 229,539 (4%).

Note: Donors include institutional foundations and donor-advised funds. There were an additional 123 individuals who donated to MDRF.

# Learnings: Themes

## Meeting Pressing Community Needs Required Minimizing Barriers to an Agile Response.

*“People were dying, the stakes shifted. This isn’t normal grantmaking. Businesses are shutting down. No one knows what we’re doing. We don’t know how long it will last. There was so much shift, change and uncertainty all the time, and we all had to embrace that.”*

Carrie Jo Short, Senior Director of Community Impact at the Saint Paul & Minnesota Foundation

As the impact of COVID-19 on social and economic systems continued to evolve, MDRF also shifted and adapted its process in real time.

- Disbursing funds in a timely and appropriate manner was core to the success of MDRF. Applications from intermediaries were reviewed, assessed and approved on a weekly basis during advisory committee meetings. As the longevity and uncertainty of the crisis became more apparent, the pace of funding was slowed, leaving more weeks between application reviews. Over time, informal parameters were developed to guide which intermediaries were recommended and then funded.
- Rather than adapting a pre-existing grantmaking process, MDRF developed a process that was flexible and guided by the principle of efficiency. From the outset, the application was simplified to require minimal documentation and reporting.
  - Intermediaries implemented a similar practice to remove the barrier of a demanding application process – easy online forms and/or trusting community members in their networks to identify who and where funds needed to be distributed.
  - Advisory committee members considered expanding the application to include more questions beyond the general ones that asked about how the money would be spent and which regions an intermediary worked in. However, there was consistent consensus to keep the application easy – questions that require extensive information would have been burdensome and time consuming.
- Intermediaries’ capabilities to regrant varied across communities and regions. Some had robust infrastructure while others had limited experience in regranteeing. However, they expressed gratitude in MDRF’s willingness to let them take on the intermediary role.

*“We had an online process. It was a form that they could fill out and it took about 10 minutes. Once we had funding, we made the first grants within a week. We just kept going down that list of [childcare] providers that had applied as we got more money.”*

Barb Yates,  
President of Think Small

*“You can make a pretty big impact with a pretty small amount of money. Some of our applications were for \$1,500 and they acted like you’d given them the moon, but it was what they needed at the time.”*

Betty Christensen, Program Developer for Minnesota River Area Agency on Aging

## Preparedness, even if limited, and information gathering were essential to guide, adapt and refine the process.

No one had lived through a pandemic before, so the circumstances were new and unpredictable. Decisions were made based on what was known and anticipating the unknowns. There was no right way, but MDRF stakeholders felt that they did the best they could with the knowledge and resources available.

- There were some individuals in the advisory committee with experience in the Philanthropic Preparedness, Resiliency & Emergency Partnership (PPREP), which was supported by Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies, a Minnesota-based organization with a long history and commitment to disaster philanthropy and a MDRF donor. They applied learnings from PPREP — understanding the role of philanthropy in disaster relief, disaster contingency plans, state vs. federal disaster declaration and exploring how disaster impacted marginalized and disadvantaged communities — to inform the overall MDRF process, especially on best practices and ways to structure pooled funding.
- Representatives from the Minnesota Department of Health and Governor’s Office were invited to attend the meetings, convened by the advisory committee, on a consistent basis to share information about where and how COVID-19 was spreading and the movement of state and federal relief funding. As the government funding gained momentum, MDRF was strategic in filling in gaps that the government didn’t fill.

*“One of the things that we did really quickly was to get a survey out to nonprofits in our 12 county region – not just nonprofits, but individuals too. I think we had 500 responses within a week and people saying, ‘This is what my needs are. This is what’s happening.’ I was able to share that information with the group.”*

Dawn Gange, Senior Development Officer at Northwest Minnesota Foundation

- The transition to telework after the Governor announced stay at home orders in March 2020, while challenging for some, did not stall responsiveness to the needs of the community. MDRF stakeholders who incorporated remote work into their workplaces before the pandemic easily pivoted. Those who needed to learn on the go quickly put together a digital workplace to support their staff, and then worked to improve it in the following months.

**Funding supported Minnesota’s diverse communities (including but not limited to): Asian, Black, Disability Community, Hmong, Indigenous, Immigrant, Islamic, Jewish, Karen, Latino/Latina/Latinx, Lao, LGBTQIA, Native American, People of Color, Sudanese and Undocumented Immigrants.**

*Note: Roughly 50 percent of grantees mentioned serving Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) either in the description of their project and/or in their report; many acknowledged that they worked with one or more races, diverse communities, etc.*

*“Normally, there is a lot more process around these things, but I think, as a collective, we said this is not the time to – this is a time to trust each other. Our priority was meeting the needs. Our priority was getting money, the quickest way possible, to those that needed it the most.”*

Anne Cullen Miller, President of Catholic Community Foundation of Minnesota

# Impact: Healthcare

## LOWER SIOUX INDIAN COMMUNITY

Lower Sioux Indian Community (Lower Sioux) received \$200,000 from MDRF to help alleviate the economic stress on households and to provide direct cash relief for food and basic needs to tribal members. Additionally, the Lower Sioux tribal citizens operate a small but full-scale clinic. The clinic provides medical, optical, dental and community health care for the Lower Sioux Nation. During the pandemic, the clinic was able to maintain basic health care services while also integrating COVID-19 care and participating actively in Lower Sioux's Emergency Operations Center. Funding from MDRF helped support pandemic shifts for the clinic including:

- Transitioned the clinic to mostly telehealth visits and limited in-person appointments
- Leadership staff within clinic and community health are actively participating with the Emergency Operations Center
- Integrated COVID-19 testing and now vaccinations
- One temporary staff person hired to assist with vaccinations

In collaboration, Emergency Operations Center (EOC), Lower Sioux Clinic and Community Health staff were actively involved in organizing and distributing emergency food to Lower Sioux families and casino employees, beginning in April 2020.



## The lack of clarity about relief and recovery efforts caused confusion.

The assumption that the pandemic would be short-term, similar to natural disasters like floods or tornadoes, placed an emphasis on the importance of recovery to help with resilience and rebuilding. However, it became more evident as MDRF made its first few grant rounds that relief was desperately needed and recovery was not within the foreseeable future.

- Deliberate determination of where funding should be allocated – whether for relief, recovery or nonprofit resilience – was fluid. However, the advisory committee did not firmly establish an approach to follow. While there were conversations at length to differentiate between relief and recovery efforts, MDRF administered significant funding to projects focused on relief because that was prioritized by communities.
- An anonymous \$5 million donation to MDRF expanded the fund's capability to pursue recovery efforts. MDRF did not provide communications that was clear to intermediaries to explain why the fund was shifting its grant criteria from relief to recovery. Prospective intermediaries expressed feeling rushed and unprepared to adjust their applications to the new criteria.

*"It was 'relief' and then jumped to 'resiliency.' It would have been good to receive communications about these things that MDRF was thinking and planning to do."*

Linda Her,  
Executive Director of Asian  
American Organizing Project

## There was respect and willingness to acknowledge and embrace tensions.

Advisory committee members came from diverse backgrounds, intentions, experiences and voices that reflected their knowledge and expertise of various sectors and the communities they represented. However, honest discussions about group expectations, individual biases and perspectives would have helped manage expectations and strengthen accountability.

- Intermediaries were selected with an equity lens, but decisions about dollar amounts that each organization received were driven by equality. If organizations had similar applications, MDRF exercised fairness and gave the same amount. The pressures to be responsive to community needs, racially and geographically, made it challenging to pause and hold further dialogue for members who wanted to better understand when the process practiced equity versus equality.
- Members often felt they had to bear the responsibility to educate their peers about donor intent and the issues facing the communities they served.
- Members from the nonprofit sector and BIPOC communities expressed that those with decision making power needed to center BIPOC voices who represented the communities that were disproportionately impacted by COVID-19.
- The intermediary approach was the backbone of MDRF, but there were frustrations about whether or not the intermediary landscape was truly equitable.
  - Organizations in Greater Minnesota did not have the same level of staffing and capacity as those in the metro area to function as intermediaries. The level of statewide work that intermediaries indicated was not equal. It was easy for intermediaries to claim statewide engagement, but then only work in one Greater Minnesota city while the majority of their work was focused in the Twin Cities. After the first round, MDRF included a question about regions, based on the Minnesota Initiative Foundation regions, into the application.

*“We didn’t invest in relationship building upfront as much as we could have or should have. As we got into it more, we did step back and spend more time on that because there were tensions that were coming up, especially the tension around funding intermediaries based in Greater Minnesota versus funding statewide culturally specific intermediaries that may have uneven reach in Greater Minnesota.”*

Katina Mortensen, Director of Public Policy for Minnesota Council on Foundations

# Impact: Basic Needs & Technical Assistance

## THE AL-HUDA CENTER

The Community Foundation of Grand Forks, East Grand Forks & Region activated its Nonprofit Relief Fund with \$40,000 awarded from MDRF. They made a distinct effort to identify and support 501(c)(3) nonprofits directly assisting residents in Polk County, Minnesota. Between April 2020 and January 2021, they expended all of the \$40,000 to regional nonprofits to assist with a variety of needs, including staffing, technology, food and housing assistance, and personal protective equipment. One of their grantees was to the Al-Huda Center, a community center located in East Grand Forks that primarily serves immigrants and non-English speakers. Funding from MDRF allowed the Al-Huda Center to continue to serve multiple crucial functions in helping individuals: apply for unemployment and/or citizenship; complete the census; job search; receive tutoring and ESL lessons; and the center was able to hire translators and to translate COVID-19 materials.

*"We've been helping the elders by running errands for them such as grocery shopping and rides to or from desired places, so they can stay home more and avoid the risks of contracting the virus. We've also been collaborating with food service organizations to deliver meals and PPE to families during this pandemic." - Abdirisak Duale*

*"It was very reassuring knowing that we could be part of a bigger pie because that's what these sorts of things require – having a community-wide strategy. To be able to write a relatively small check to the big piece and say, 'Go forth, do good things with it. And we just trust you,' was very reassuring."*

Brad Kruse, Philanthropy Director for Hugh J. Andersen Foundation

## Relationships were based on a collective purpose and grounded in trust.

The pandemic presented a unique situation because it affected everyone, everywhere. Being a part of MDRF and the statewide efforts to address disparities exacerbated by the pandemic allowed stakeholders to feel hopeful.

- There was implicit trust in MDRF leadership and organizations — especially MCF and the Saint Paul & Minnesota Foundation — because of their credibility and reputation within the philanthropy and nonprofit sector in Minnesota.
- Most donors and some intermediaries were members of MCF and/or affiliated with the Saint Paul & Minnesota Foundation.
- Donors who were not part of the day-to-day work and/or the advisory committee were comfortable in a hands-off role.

*"I know the trust level was there, and so if [MDRF] felt they had really great resources in place that they could pass the funding on to and the end user would absolutely get the result, we were great with that."*

Amy Sinclair, Executive Director of Thielen Foundation

- There was a collective understanding that communities needed help and needed it immediately. MDRF stakeholders were committed to collaborating, creating trusting relationships and resolving tensions in order to support their communities.
- In the advisory committee, mutual respect and grace for each other allowed for constructive conversations to take place to deepen relationships, particularly about community needs and equity.
- The effectiveness of MDRF empowered stakeholders to pursue other funding opportunities, participate in more collaborative funding and reexamine and change their own grantmaking processes. Many intermediaries used the groundwork and structure they built from MDRF to manage other large funds from the state and federal government.

## Racial equity needed to be prioritized from the beginning.

The pandemic disproportionately affected communities of color. Then, the murder of George Floyd underscored the prevalence of systemic racism in America. Society was in the midst of two crises, one of racial injustice and one for COVID-19.

- MDRF directed \$3 million to BIPOC-led nonprofits and/or organizations that supported BIPOC small businesses in Minneapolis and St. Paul. There was targeted outreach by the advisory committee to Native-led and Black-led organizations to encourage them to submit applications.
- Stakeholders who represented Greater Minnesota felt it was important to bring attention to the BIPOC communities in rural communities. Even though they were isolated from what was happening in the Twin Cities, they still face the same racial disparities that were accelerated and heightened during the pandemic and civil unrest.
- Stakeholders shared a range of responses to the civil unrest and how they adapted their work to incorporate racial equity and justice.
  - There was deep reflection internally for many organizations, especially to shift attitudes and provide actionable steps beyond solidarity statements.
  - Stakeholders who led organizations already working in social change and justice affirmed that the murder of George Floyd reinforced what communities of color were facing every day. They echoed that the work they were doing was more important than ever.
  - For those who lived outside the Twin Cities, they watched the news coverage of the civil unrest on television, but it did not directly impact their work and communities. Proximity was key in how they understood and internalized the situation.
- There was consensus that MDRF tried to practice equity throughout the process and weaved in a racial equity lens as well, but it was difficult to see how much the racial equity lens was applied and how easily it could be pushed aside to prioritize equality.

*“We were trying to have an equitable model that would impact kids, seniors and mental health. That was the equity lens we were using. When the second disaster – [civil uprisings] – happened, it shifted to a racial equity lens.”*

Sara Carlson,  
Executive Director of Willmar  
Area Community Foundation

*“There were some critical voices all along that were saying that the biggest gaps for COVID-19 are race-related. Once the uprisings happened after the murder of George Floyd, there was far more recognition of that. And there was a shift, I think, in attitudes. Because this was not one person making decisions. We were a group of people making decisions. It went from some of us to the majority of us, saying that we need to do race prioritization.”*

Bilal Alkatout, Senior Program Officer at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota Foundation

## Overall, MDRF was a positive experience, but there were missed opportunities and improvements to consider for the next time.

*“The principles of organizing around tornadoes or pandemic are the same principles that you organize around during a public safety crisis. You cannot ignore the economic implications of public safety. When everyone is prosperous, you don’t have to fear your neighbor.”*

Louis King,  
CEO of Summit Academy OIC

- Active fundraising was not part of the strategy besides the one email sent to a list of potential institutional and corporate donors in March 2020 to secure initial funding. MDRF stakeholders wondered why MCF and the Saint Paul & Minnesota Foundation did not pursue more ways to fundraise in order to expand the pooled funding. A larger fund could extend beyond the summer and then be used exclusively for recovery when the time came. That said, MDRF took on the responsibility to meet the needs of communities because they felt it was needed at that time, but it was not meant to become the leader or the main source of funding in this space.
  - MDRF created an internal structure that could be reactivated and repurposed in the future to deal with other disasters – natural or not.
  - The principles of organizing around the pandemic and natural disasters can be applicable to other crises that are not visible and deeply rooted in disparity and inequity.
- The needs were great everywhere, but some intermediaries expressed that there should be more support for arts and culture and environmental organizations. These organizations play a significant role in community resilience, especially in the recovery phase.
  - It was admirable that MCF and the Saint Paul & Minnesota Foundation did not take fees to manage the fund and MDRF stakeholders applauded them for that decision. However, the contribution of time, resources and staffing was significant. Next time, the organizations leading this work need to take into account administrative fees.
    - Intermediaries had the option to include administrative costs in their proposal. For the organizations that did not or only indicated a small amount, they expressed that they should have been more thoughtful about the capacity of their organization. Administrative fees would have helped with capacity building and provide staff with additional resources and support.
    - A donor of MDRF also provided a small grant to the Saint Paul & Minnesota Foundation to cover some costs such as hiring a few contractors.
  - Intermediaries that applied and were not funded as well as the intermediaries who were denied in the first few rounds, but then awarded funding in later rounds, expressed the desire to receive feedback from the advisory committee to help them understand why they weren’t selected and/or receive advice on ways to improve the application.

*“Personally I learned for the first time how grant making process can work, and how we can better help support the nonprofit sector partner and advocate with entities that hold so much power and money.”*

Nonoko Sato, Associate Director for Minnesota Council of Nonprofits

*“The big question on my mind and a lot of people’s minds in the nonprofit world is ‘What does this mean for the foundations who are part of MDRF – about what they’re doing with the rest of their funding profile?’”*

Liz Richards, Executive Director of Violence Free Minnesota

# Key Takeaways

## OVERALL FOR MDRF

- Gather as much information about the situation, but be flexible and adaptable to changes and emerging needs.
- Establish transparent communication and approaches, particularly around equity, racial equity and equality.
- Determine how to measure impact, which could influence how data is captured (i.e. questions in applications and reporting).
- Include administrative fees in fundraising to support the organizations leading the collaborative, and allow intermediaries the option to include administrative costs in their proposal.

## ADVISORY COMMITTEE

- Representation across race, expertise, sectors and region is needed to guide and inform an equitable process.
- Have upfront discussions about expectations, intentions, values and roles to minimize tensions and establish clear common ground about power dynamics and who has decision-making authority.
- Be transparent in your communication about process and progress.
- Keep the application simple, but incorporate a feedback loop.

## DONORS

- Trust in the people leading the work.
- Communicate how you want to be engaged throughout the process.
- Make connections and engage with other organizations to lay the foundation for future partnerships and collaborations.
- Provide support to launch the fund, and be open to additional support in response to later fundraising appeals.

## INTERMEDIARIES

- Proactively search for funding opportunities and directly reach out to donors.
- An easy application and evaluation process places less pressure on nonprofit organizations.
- Invest time and resources into strengthening regrant capabilities.
- Consistently engage with communities to receive reliable information to help identify needs.

*“One of the things we appreciated about MDRF was how easy and quickly the process moved. And so, that was definitely something we tried to model. We launched a grant opportunity that was this rolling, apply when you can, easy application that was accessible on our website.”*

Angie Pilgrim, Director of Community Impact at St. Croix Valley Foundation

# Impact: Small Business

## HMONG AMERICAN PARTNERSHIP



Hmong American Partnership (HAP) received a \$100,000 grant from MDRF to serve as a financial intermediary for communities of color disproportionately affected by COVID-19. HAP provided 88 grants and forgivable loans to support small businesses negatively impacted by the quarantine and social isolation measures enacted in the Twin Cities metropolitan area. Kabo Yang, a local chicken farmer, received a grant from HAP to help with her lost revenue. Yang is a vendor at HmongTown Market, located in Saint Paul, MN; she acquired the business from her parents after they passed away. The business' revenue decreased by 50 percent due to COVID-19; the majority of Yang's buyers

(mostly Hmong elders) use her chickens for cultural use (*hu plig and ua neeb*) and due to the pandemic, many customers were no longer having gatherings in their homes.

Sustaining the business through this tough time allows Yang to carry on a family tradition and play an important role in the Hmong culture. Yang shared, *"I have a lot of elder Hmong customers that keep encouraging me to keep raising chickens because they still practice the Hmong tradition, and especially with the Hmong New Year coming around the corner. It's been a tough year, but I pray that all this shall pass so we can all go back to living normally and enjoy being around our family and friends."*

# Impact: Food Insecurity

## GREATER WHITE BEAR LAKE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

Greater White Bear Lake Community Foundation (GWBLCF) received a \$20,000 grant from MDRF to provide grants to community-based organizations serving individuals and families, nonprofits and small businesses, to mitigate the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Through their regranting, GWBLCF supported Newtrax, a local nonprofit with a mission to provide transportation services to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. In March 2020, their operations were temporarily suspended as their transportation services are for a population very vulnerable to the pandemic. With a parking lot full of idle buses and drivers, Newtrax decided to utilize these assets by creating programs to distribute food to those currently in need.



In July 2020, Newtrax approached GWBLCF about seed funding to establish a local program to feed seniors and families in need whose food security had been negatively impacted by COVID-19. In addition to assisting families in need, this program would help address a huge economic need for many of the local restaurants. GWBLCF invested in the pilot, which leveraged \$95,000. Newtrax purchased and delivered approximately 9,000 meals to those in need. Over \$80,000 went directly to purchase meals from local restaurants struggling during COVID-19. This pilot program came to an end on December 31, 2020; however, a new program called "More Than Meals" was started with a similar purpose and at a bigger scale to continue on with the effort. Newtrax and the GWBLCF are continuing as partners in the "More Than Meals" program.

# Impact: Youth Support Services/ Homelessness

## LUTHERAN SOCIAL SERVICE OF MINNESOTA

MDRF awarded \$100,000 to Duluth Superior Area Community Foundation to be used to assist those who are most affected by COVID-19. The \$100,000 from MDRF was pooled into the Northeast Minnesota Response Fund; in total \$234,817 was distributed to 27 organizations. Duluth Superior Area Community Foundation provided a grant of \$25,000 to Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota (LSS) for “Emergency Support for LSS Duluth Youth Services.”

Support from MDRF helped to ensure that youth in LSS’s residential and shelter programs were able to stay housed, connected to social and educational opportunities, attending telehealth appointments and COVID-free.

LSS was able to provide education, PPE, social/emotional and basic needs support to youth in their residential programs; to date, none of their youth have tested positive for COVID-19. They attribute this to having 24/7 staffing and availability for safety. Staff and youth alike have also been trained on how to appropriately use PPE and they have ramped up cleaning and disinfecting protocols. Being able to purchase additional cleaning supplies, PPE and technology to help youth stay connected socially and educationally helped to keep them safe.

“Kayla,” a high school senior and resident, lost her job at a local restaurant due to the pandemic. Kayla had been contributing to her rent (which is put into a savings account for a future security deposit). LSS emotionally prepared the youth for this possibility and Kayla knew she would be okay because they had funding to help cover the cost for food and technology. Kayla didn’t need to worry about going out and trying to find another job. Instead, she was able to focus on her education, which she completed online. She didn’t need to dip into her savings account because all of her needs were being met. This made all the difference for her when things opened back up and she was able to find a new job. Kayla enrolled in a CNA class, got a job as a PCA and moved into her own apartment.



Another Door Emergency Shelter was able to safely stay open 24/7 – they are typically closed during the school day. Youth were able to transition to distance learning, continue their education and seek employment opportunities. They were able to attend doctor’s appointments and therapy sessions through telehealth, which they accessed through technology that was provided. Together for Youth Program, which supports LGBTQ+ youth, was able to help youth stay connected through virtual groups. They provided additional support by delivering “We Care Packages” to participants. These packages included activities, LGBTQ-affirming items and letters of support from people in the community letting the youth know they are cared about.

## Methodology

MCF partnered with Seiche, a strategy and creative consulting agency committed to social impact, to engage MDRF stakeholders and to explore lessons learned. Between February to March 2021, Seiche conducted 21 interviews with donors, intermediaries and the advisory committee. For individuals who were unable to interview, Seiche sent a list of questions and received detailed written responses. Then, Seiche systematically reviewed interview transcriptions to identify salient themes.

## MDRF Structure and Grant Rounds

There were three distinct components of MDRF: the advisory committee, donors and intermediaries. Between March and August 2020, there were five grant rounds distributing \$11.6 million in funding.

### ADVISORY COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVES

**The committee provided recommendations to fund community intermediaries, while the Saint Paul & Minnesota Foundation held the final granting authority decision.**

- Blandin Foundation
- Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota Foundation
- Bush Foundation
- Duluth Superior Area Community Foundation
- F. R. Bigelow Foundation
- Headwaters Foundation for Justice
- Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies
- Medtronic Foundation
- Minnesota Council of Nonprofits
- Minnesota Council on Foundations (Facilitators)
- Northwest Minnesota Foundation
- Office of Governor Tim Walz
- Saint Paul & Minnesota Foundation (Facilitators)
- Southwest Initiative Foundation
- The Minneapolis Foundation
- Willmar Area Community Foundation/CommunityGiving
- Youthprise

### INSTITUTIONAL DONORS

**Additional donors include individuals, donor-advised funds and anonymous donors.**

- Aroha Philanthropies
- ARR Family Foundation
- Associated Bank
- Bentson Foundation
- Best Buy
- Better Way Foundation
- Blandin Foundation
- Blue Cross Blue Shield of Minnesota Foundation
- Boston Scientific Foundation
- Bush Foundation
- Catholic Community Foundation
- Cargill Foundation
- Charlson Foundation
- Carlson Family Foundation
- Dorsey and Whitney Trust Co.
- Edward & Markell C. Brooks Fund from the Minneapolis Foundation
- Engelsma Family Foundation
- F. R. Bigelow Foundation
- George C. Power Jr. Family Fund at the Saint Paul & Minnesota Foundation
- George Family Foundation
- GHR Foundation
- Hardenbergh Foundation
- Hawkins, Inc.
- Hugh J. Andersen Foundation
- Isora Wells Foundation
- John Larsen Foundation
- Julie and Kirk Cousins Foundation
- Land O'Lakes Foundation
- Lulu Foundation
- Mardag Foundation
- McKnight Foundation
- Medtronic Foundation

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- Myers Communications Group, LLC
- Minnesota Bank and Trust
- Minnesota Vikings Foundation
- Northwest Area Foundation
- Pohlad Family Foundation
- Richard M. Schulze Family Foundation
- Saint Paul & Minnesota Foundation
- Securian Foundation
- Stiles Foundation
- Sundance Family Foundation
- Target Foundation
- TCF Bank Foundation
- The Deam Family Charitable Gift Fund
- The Margaret A. Cargill Fund at the Saint Paul & Minnesota Foundation
- The Otto Bremer Trust
- The Van Lengerich Foundation
- Thielen Foundation
- Thrivent
- United Healthcare
- Wells Fargo Foundation
- Wilf Family Foundation
- Winnebago Industries Foundation
- Women's Foundation of Minnesota
- Woodbury Community Foundation

## ROUND ONE

Eleven community intermediaries were granted \$2 million from MDRF. Below is the list of grantees for March 27, 2020:

ORGANIZATION	AMOUNT	POPULATIONS SERVED	REGION
Coalition of Asian American Leaders	\$200,000	Asian Minnesotan nonprofits	Statewide
CommunityGiving	\$150,000	Nonprofits serving vulnerable populations	Central MN
Heading Home MN Funders Collaborative	\$350,000	Nonprofit homeless service providers	Statewide
Initiative Foundation	\$50,000	Nonprofits providing basic needs for vulnerable populations	Central MN
Northland Foundation*	\$600,000	Childcare providers offering services to essential workers	Greater MN
Northwest Minnesota Foundation	\$50,000	Nonprofits and small businesses with short-term needs	Northwest MN
PFund	\$100,000	LGBTQIA individuals and families, nonprofits and small businesses	Statewide
Southwest Initiative Foundation	\$50,000	Nonprofits providing basic needs for vulnerable populations	Southwest MN
Springboard for the Arts	\$50,000	Artists, with specific focus on black, indigenous and people of color; LGBTQIA; and disability community	Statewide
Think Small	\$200,000	Licensed family childcare providers	Twin Cities
Youthprise	\$200,000	Nonprofits supporting youth nutrition and distance learning, with specific focus on black and indigenous people of color	Statewide

\* Minnesota Initiative Foundations application submitted on behalf of the Northland Foundation, West Central Initiative, Initiative Foundation, Southwest Initiative Foundation, Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation and Northwest Minnesota Foundation.

## ROUND TWO

Fourteen community intermediaries were granted \$2.1 million in this round. Below is the list of grantees for April 3, 2020:

ORGANIZATION	AMOUNT	POPULATIONS SERVED	REGION
CAPI USA	\$150,000	Support for immigrant-led nonprofits and individuals with disabilities. Provides technical assistance and support for those with limited English proficiency.	Statewide
Comunidades Latinas Unidas En Servicio (CLUES)	\$400,000	Support for Latino families and organizations who need financial support for basic needs	Statewide
Duluth Superior Area Community Foundation	\$50,000	Nonprofit organizations serving vulnerable populations in emergency and basic needs	Northeast MN
Headwaters Foundation for Justice	\$50,000	Small nonprofits with a specific focus on assisting black and indigenous people of color, LGBTQ and low-income individuals	Statewide
Hunger Solutions Minnesota	\$250,000	Support for nonprofit food shelves and hunger relief.	Statewide
Latino Economic Development Center (LEDC)	\$200,000	Grants for Latinx and undocumented small business owners	Statewide
Lower Sioux Indian Community	\$200,000	Direct financial relief for tribal members	Redwood County
Northland Foundation	\$50,000	Support for small businesses considered critical to the community	Northeast MN
Northside Funders Group	\$150,000	Grants for BIPOC-led small businesses in North Minneapolis	Minneapolis
Propel Nonprofits and Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), Minnesota Chapter	\$200,000	Support for mosques/centers to serve as a community spaces and service centers	Statewide
Rochester Area Foundation	\$50,000	Nonprofits impacted by coronavirus	Rochester/ Olmsted County
Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation	\$50,000	Support for nonprofits that focus on essential needs	Southern MN
The Arc Minnesota, Inc.	\$50,000	Support for individuals and families with children with disabilities	Statewide
Violence Free Minnesota (and partners)	\$250,000	Financial assistance for victims/survivors of domestic and sexual violence	Statewide

## ROUND THREE

Twenty-two place-based community foundations were awarded a total of \$820,000 to support their local communities on April 21, 2020:

- Community Foundation of Grand Forks, East Grand Forks & Region
- CommunityGiving
- Duluth Superior Area Community Foundation
- Eagan Foundation
- Eden Prairie Community Foundation
- Fargo-Moorhead Area Foundation
- Golden Valley Community Foundation
- Greater White Bear Lake Community Foundation
- Initiative Foundation
- Luverne Area Community Foundation
- Mankato Area Foundation
- Northfield Shares
- Northland Foundation
- Northwest Minnesota Foundation
- Richfield Community Foundation
- Rochester Area Foundation
- Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation
- Southwest Initiative Foundation
- St. Croix Valley Community Foundation
- West Central Initiative
- Winona Community Foundation
- Woodbury Community Foundation

In addition, \$1.2 million was awarded to the following intermediaries:

ORGANIZATION	AMOUNT	POPULATIONS SERVED	REGION
Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa	\$50,000	Tribal members and their families	North East Metro
Headwaters Foundation for Justice	\$50,000	Small nonprofits with a specific focus on assisting black and indigenous people of color, LGBTQ and low-income individuals	Statewide
Hmong American Partnership	\$100,000	Support for communities of color and immigrant-owned small businesses	Twin Cities
International Institute of Minnesota	\$50,000	Financial assistance and case management for individuals and families	Twin Cities
Minneapolis Jewish Federation	\$50,000	Support for Jewish individuals and families and nonprofit organizations in crisis	Twin Cities
Minnesota River Area Agency on Aging	\$100,000	Nonprofits and small businesses serving older adults and individuals with disabilities	South West MN
MN Immigrant Family Fund/Navigate	\$250,000	Individuals and families	Statewide
Nexus Community Partners	\$100,000	BIPOCs who own cooperatives and small businesses	Twin Cities
Northside Achievement Zone	\$50,000	Financial and basic needs support for individuals and families	North Minneapolis
OutFront	\$50,000	Support for individuals and families	Twin Cities
St. Paul Jewish Federation	\$50,000	Support for Jewish agencies and programs	Saint Paul Metro
The Catholic Community Foundation of Minnesota	\$100,000	Individuals and families (focus on undocumented) through parishes and Catholic schools	Saint Paul Metro
Tiwahe Foundation	\$100,000	American Indian individuals	Twin Cities
Tubman	\$30,000	Direct financial relief for individuals and families	Twin Cities
White Earth Reservation Housing Authority	\$100,000	Support for tribal members and their families	North West MN

## ROUND FOUR

Twenty organizations were awarded over \$3 million, with \$2 million awarded to organizations supporting nonprofit recovery and community resilience in BIPOC communities, on June 3, 2020. \$1.1 million was awarded to support additional nonprofit recovery efforts across the state. Grantee organizations included:

ORGANIZATION	AMOUNT	POPULATIONS SERVED	REGION
African American Leadership Forum	\$250,000	Community-based, nonprofit, Black-led and serving organizations that provide business support, training and education programming	Twin Cities
Alliance for Metropolitan Stability	\$250,000	Support for community-based advocacy and immediate needs related to COVID-19	Twin Cities
Arrowhead Regional Development Commission, Arrowhead Area Agency on Aging	\$100,000	COVID-19 response funds to support critical service, technology, organizational development, homeless and/or Native American elders	Northland MN
Central Minnesota Council on Aging	\$100,000	Support to nonprofit organizations that have unmet COVID-19 needs for older adults and family caregivers	Central MN
Community and Economic Development Associates	\$50,000	Provide technical assistance to nonprofit organizations in rural communities	Statewide
East Side Funders Group	\$250,000	Recovery support for BIPOC-led nonprofit organizations	Saint Paul, MN
Forum of Regional Arts Councils of Minnesota	\$250,000	Technical assistance for arts organizations	Statewide
Minnesota Children's Alliance	\$140,000	Technical assistance to CACs to support public health and child safety	Statewide
Minnesota Employment Services Consortium	\$250,000	Workforce development services to diverse groups	Statewide
Minnesota State Bar Foundation	\$100,000	Support to provide pro bono attorney assistance to nonprofit organizations during COVID-19	Statewide
Minnesota Voice	\$150,000	Partner support to provide assistance with programming, training and equipment	Statewide
Northwest Regional Development Commission/Dancing Sky Area Agency on Aging	\$100,000	Support for organizations providing grocery and supply delivery for senior centers, caregivers and community organizations	West Central MN
Red Lake Band of Chippewa Indians	\$150,000	Support for reservation nonprofit and service organizations to advance recovery due to COVID-19	Northwest MN
Saint Paul Promise Neighborhood & Amherst H. Wilder Foundation	\$200,000	Emergency funding for community-based, school-based, parent and public partners	Twin Cities
Southeastern Minnesota Area Agency on Aging	\$100,000	Improved nutrition support services for rural communities and support for volunteers and older adults impacted by COVID-19	Southern MN
Springboard for the Arts	\$20,000	Support for rural recovery network, convenings and economic development efforts	Statewide
Summit Academy OIC	\$150,000	Support to build community response infrastructures	Twin Cities
Women's Foundation of Minnesota	\$250,000	Support transformative recovery through the COVID-19 Women and Girls Response Fund	Statewide
Youthprise	\$250,000	Support to youth-serving organizations and programs	Statewide

## ROUND FIVE

Twenty-seven community organizations were granted \$2.3 million. This was the fifth and final round of grantees. Below is the list of grantees for August 18, 2020:

ORGANIZATION	AMOUNT	POPULATIONS SERVED	REGION
Asian American Organizing Project	\$150,000	Recovery support for Asian American communities	Twin Cities
Asian Media Access	\$100,000	Funds will support "Bicultural Healthy Living" and "Cultural Intelligent Framework" to help BIPOC community members to heal appropriately	Statewide
Battered Women's Legal Advocacy Project dba Standpoint	\$150,000	Funds will be used to provide support for women who are victims of domestic violence	Statewide
Chisholm Community Foundation	\$20,000	Recovery for communities within Northland, Minnesota	Northeast MN
Grand Rapids Area Community Foundation	\$20,000	Recovery for communities within Northland, Minnesota	Northeast MN
Greater Twin Cities United Way	\$100,000	Funds will support the emotional health and well-being of community partners	Twin Cities
Hibbing Foundation	\$20,000	Recovery for communities within Northland, Minnesota	Northeast MN
Initiative Foundation	\$50,000	Support for nonprofit technical assistance	Northeast MN
Lake Street Council	\$150,000	Support for community organizations on the Lake Street corridor	Twin Cities
Lao Assistance Center of Minnesota	\$150,000	Support for Lao American children and families in Minnesota	Statewide
Metropolitan Alliance of Connected Communities	\$150,000	Technical assistance and operating resilience support for human service nonprofits	Twin Cities
Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe	\$150,000	Funds will go support the recovery of a tribal nation with goals rooted in self-sufficiency	East Central MN
Minnesota Homeownership Center	\$150,000	Technical support for Minnesota home ownership	Statewide
Minnesota Organization for Habilitation and Rehabilitation	\$100,000	Technical assistance support for providers in service to the community	Statewide
Minnesota State Bar Foundation	\$100,000	Legal support services for nonprofit organizations	Statewide
Northland Foundation	\$200,000	Recovery for communities within Northland, Minnesota	Northeast MN
Northwest Minnesota Foundation	\$68,980.05	Recovery for communities within Bemidji, Minnesota	Northeast MN
Propel Nonprofits	\$250,000	Recovery funds for nonprofit organizations	Statewide
Rice County Area United Way	\$20,000	Recovery for communities within Southern Minnesota	Southeast MN

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Shoreview Community Foundation	\$20,000	Recovery to support communities in Shoreview, Minnesota	Twin Cities
Southwest Initiative Foundation	\$100,000	Technical assistance to support nonprofit organizations	Southeast MN
United Way of Douglas & Pope Counties	\$20,000	Recovery to support communities in Douglas and Pope counties	West Central MN
United Way of Northeastern Minnesota, Inc.	\$20,000	Recovery for communities within Northland, Minnesota	Northeast MN
United Way of Steele County	\$20,000	Recovery for communities within Steele County, Minnesota	Southeast MN
United Way of the Brown County Area, Inc.	\$20,000	Recovery for communities within Brown County, Minnesota	Southeast MN
Waseca Area Foundation	\$20,000	Technical assistance support that brings nonprofit organizations into the digital marketplace	Southeast MN
United Way of Cass-Clay	\$40,000	Recovery for communities within Clay County, Minnesota	Northeast MN

## APPENDIX C

# Interviewees

Seiche conducted 21 interviews with MDRF donors, intermediaries and advisory committee members.

NAME	ORGANIZATION
Amy Sinclair	Executive Director, Thielen Foundation
Angie Pilgrim	Director of Community Impact, St. Croix Valley Foundation
Anne Cullen Miller	President, Catholic Community Foundation of Minnesota
Barb Yates	President, Think Small
Betty Christensen	Program Developer, Minnesota River Area Agency on Aging
Bilal Alkatout	Senior Program Officer, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota Foundation
Brad Kruse	Philanthropy Director, Hugh J. Andersen Foundation
Carrie Jo Short	Senior Director of Community Impact, Saint Paul & Minnesota Foundation
Dawn Gange	Senior Development Officer, Northwest Minnesota Foundation
Eric Jolly, Ph.D.	President and CEO, Saint Paul & Minnesota Foundation
Jody Jonas	Community Relations Manager, Best Buy Foundation
Deborah Morris	Social Impact Associate Director, Best Buy Foundation
Henry Jimenez	Executive Director, Latino Economic Development Center
Jo-Anne Stately	Director of Impact Strategy and Economic Vitality, The Minneapolis Foundation
Katina Mortensen	Director of Public Policy, Minnesota Council on Foundations
Linda Her	Executive Director, Asian American Organizing Project
Liz Richards	Executive Director, Violence Free Minnesota
Louis King	CEO, Summit Academy OIC
Nonoko Sato*	Associate Director, Minnesota Council of Nonprofits
Sara Carlson	Executive Director, Willmar Area Community Foundation
Susie Brown	President, Minnesota Council on Foundations

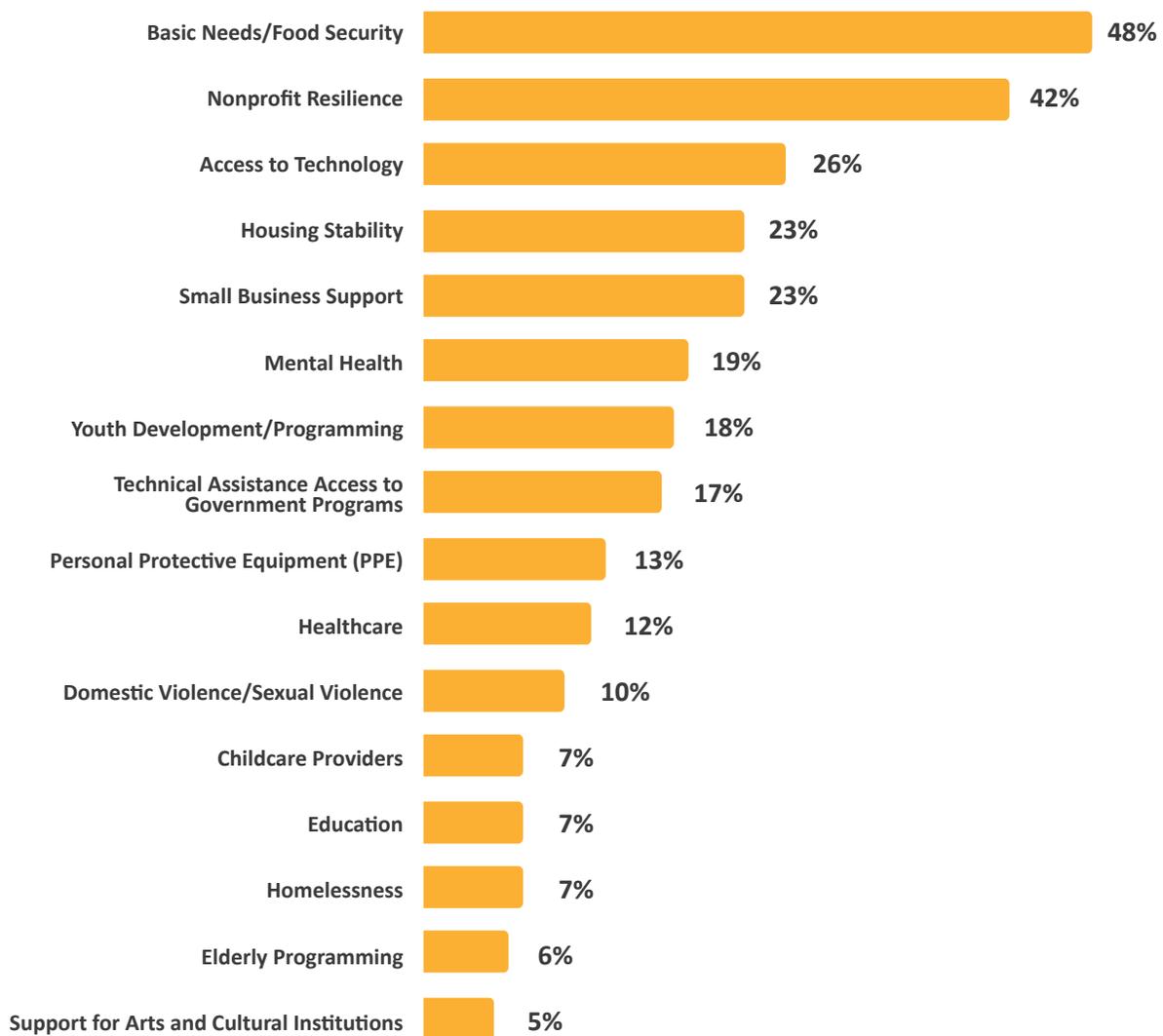
\*Submitted written responses to the questions.

# Impact Areas

MDRF provided 99 grants to intermediary organizations. Intermediaries reported that they supported a variety of issue areas within their communities. The chart below provides an overview of the issue areas funded through MDRF grantees. For example: 48 percent of grantees reported that they supported Basic Needs.

Note: Grants funded a variety of initiatives; therefore the percentage does not add up to 100 percent.

## ISSUE AREAS FUNDED THROUGH MDRF GRANTEES



**Basic Needs**

The MDRF funded both state and local nonprofit organizations that specialize in providing basic needs to Minnesota's most vulnerable populations and to several grassroots nonprofit organizations that pivoted to provide culturally specific needs and support services due to COVID-19.

**Food Security**

Support for existing and new food shelves, meals on wheels, direct stipends and other food distribution opportunities.

**Housing Stability**

Technical assistance and emergency financial support to secure housing for those experiencing homelessness and/or housing insecurity.

**Mental Health Services**

Professional help and social opportunities for those experiencing feelings of isolation, including access to technology, telehealth, volunteers to help seniors, warm-line for people to have someone to talk with.

**Small Businesses**

MDRF grantees provided a variety of support to small local businesses throughout Minnesota. This included small business technical assistance, financial stipends, and technical assistance/translation services to access government support programs.

**Nonprofit Support (Crisis, Recovery and Resilience)**

Due to COVID-19, nonprofits across Minnesota had to shift their operations to keep their staff and clients safe while maintaining and/or growing the number of clients they were serving. MDRF funded support to nonprofits for various needs, including U.S. Small Business Administration's Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), technology, technical assistance and operational support for nonprofits to retain and scale staffing as needed.

**Education**

MDRF provided support to help educational programs to pivot online, including laptops, software, internet service and technical assistance. This allowed students to access online educational programs and continue social connections.

**Homelessness**

MDRF provided support to organizations serving people experiencing homelessness, including youth. The funds help to provide general operations, shelter and basic needs, including meals, healthcare and PPE for people experiencing homelessness.

**Domestic Violence/Sexual Violence**

Funding from MDRF allowed nonprofits serving victims and survivors of domestic and sexual violence to continue to serve clients. Organizations were able to shift to meet the needs of their clients including: access to an attorney, virtual crisis management, technical assistance and PPE to maintain in-person operations.

**Access to Technology/Digital Divide**

Funding from MDRF provided access to laptops for youth and elderly to help maintain social connections, internet access, hardware and software to allow nonprofits to work remotely.

**Youth Programming/Mentorship**

Funding from MDRF allowed youth development and programming for teens and young people across the state to continue.

**Elderly Programming**

MDRF helped community-based organizations and churches adapt their programming and secure volunteers to ensure elderly have access to prepared meals, transportation and social experiences.

**Healthcare**

MDRF supported the conversion to telehealth services to ensure access to healthcare for vulnerable populations.

**Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)**

PPE for volunteers and essential nonprofit and essential workers.

**Childcare Providers**

The MDRF invested in intermediaries to redistribute funds to childcare providers (home and center-based) across Minnesota. When the stay at home order went into effect, many families of non-essential workers and families that experienced unexpected lay-offs pulled their children from childcare. Direct grants to childcare providers ensured they could continue to stay open and serve essential workers. Additionally, funds help to support relocation, staff salaries and PPE (thermometers, gloves, etc.).

**Arts and Culture**

COVID-19 has significantly impacted performing artists across the state. Support for arts and culture nonprofits helped to provide technical assistance, access to government resources and basic needs stipends to artists and performers. Additionally, support helped transition to a virtual platform.