

GPCVC Nonprofit Discussions, Summer 2020: COVID-19, Racial Equity and Social Justice



The Greater Philadelphia Corporate Volunteering Council has been conducting a series of informal discussions of how COVID-19 and current cultural conversations around racial equity and social justice are affecting employee engagement. Each virtual discussion has featured a panel of three nonprofit representatives and was moderated by a GPCVC member.

Below are the compiled key takeaways and generalized opinions from the four conversations held to date. Stay tuned for opportunities to stay engaged by following our [LinkedIn Page](#).

Key Takeaways

Common Themes To-Date:

- **Corporations can be a cause ambassador.** They have power and can set the example for their employees in how they position themselves on social issues and the causes they support. Specifically now, that includes racial equity and social justice.
- **Support local nonprofits by joining a nonprofit board.** If individuals are passionate about a cause area, there most is likely a nonprofit that supports that cause and which could benefit from the employee's skills, talents and expertise.
- **Digital literacy is a significant hurdle.** Without access to and correct utilization of digital devices, a large proportion of individuals and families in need are unable to navigate the multiple services and nonprofits available to assist them.
- **Resource connection and information sharing is greatly needed by both nonprofits and their clients.** This includes the different services that clients can access and best practices during the pandemic, as well as informing nonprofits what services other organizations offer.
- **Virtual Volunteering is one way that nonprofits encourage volunteers to support their missions during these uncertain times.** The Philadelphia Foundation's [Key Skills Hub](#) is a marketplace for matching passionate, skills-based volunteers with volunteer opportunities posted by nonprofits. Volunteers can donate their time to nonprofits seeking assistance in the areas of business strategy, marketing, accounting, graphic design, human resources, website development and more. COVID-19 related projects currently are receiving priority matching.
- **Volunteers are critical to operations and to the delivery of mission-critical services.** All nonprofits panelists stated that in-person volunteers are afforded the same level of care and safety as staff and are required to follow the same guidelines.

Conversation on Under- and Unemployed Populations: August 6th

Host: Diane Melley, Executive Director, Second Century Initiatives & Corporate Partnerships, Philadelphia Foundation

Moderator: Justin Land, Program Officer, Global Citizenship, Dow

Nonprofit Panelist:

- Center for Employment Opportunities -- Lateefah Strickland, CEO's Philadelphia Site Director
- Orion Communities -- Kris Keller, Executive Director
- HACE -- Maria N. Gonzalez, President and CEO

Common Issues

- Typical barriers to employment have only been exacerbated by the pandemic: having a criminal background, lack of appropriate education or technical skills, hiring biases, high or low expectations about what a person can do based on stereotypes.
- Prior to the pandemic, clients with non-traditional employment backgrounds struggled to find employment opportunities. Now, the stigma such individuals face matters even more.
- There are multiple programs and services to assist individuals and families who are out of work. However, assistance is not the same thing as stability. Assistance is the ability to get through the moment. Stability is about building resilience. Assistance will only allow individuals get through to the end of the crisis. Finding employment opportunities once the pandemic is gone is the only way to position these individuals on a path to stability.
- Employment stability is not only a question of finding employment for individuals, but also supporting the local businesses that provide positions for people. How do communities elevate and nurture the next cohort of businesses or support those that will weather the pandemic to ensure an adequate supply of jobs in the future?
- There exists an advancement ceiling for low-income individuals with regard to mid- to large-size corporations. Non-technical entry level positions have been contracted out to specialized firms (catering, janitorial, maintenance, etc.) and therefore upward mobility for individuals in these positions no longer exists.
- Depending on the service they provide, some nonprofits have seen a five-fold increase in individuals and families requesting some form of assistance. It takes time to explain the system to new individuals and put them at ease that there are programs that will help them. A focus is not only on getting them through the pandemic but lessening the immediate stress and trauma of losing employment.

Employee Engagement Impact (What Corporate Volunteers Can Do)

- Opportunities vary depending on the organization. Interested individuals should check websites and/or reach out directly to the nonprofit. Opportunities to volunteer include:
 - Mock interviews and feedback volunteers for job readiness programs
 - Resume editing and coaching
 - Financial literacy training programs
 - Technical assistance volunteers to set up equipment and teach digital literacy
 - Collection of goods based on the specific need of a nonprofit or the populations they serve

Conversation on Health: July 23rd

Host: Diane Melley, Executive Director, Second Century Initiatives & Corporate Partnerships, Philadelphia Foundation

Moderator: Charlene Vickers, Director of Community Investment, AmeriHealth Caritas

Nonprofit Panelist:

- WES Health System -- Shushma Shah, Director of Business Planning & Analysis
- Family Service Association of Bucks County – Dina Della Ducata, MS, PHR, Chief Executive Officer
- Philadelphia Mental Health Center --- Kerey Parnes, Chief Executive Officer

Common Issues

- Telehealth medicine has allowed for continuation of many services during the pandemic. However, some services still need to be delivered at home (such as treating children needing daily intervention) or at a location (such as services for senior populations). Practitioners treating children are still able to support clients but have noticed declines in progress due to lack of structure and the reinforcement of behaviors that on-site delivery once allowed. Practitioners have often not been able to access seniors due to contamination and safety issues.
 - Telehealth supplementation of in-person services is hindered by technology limits of individual families. Access to a computer or cell phone with video chat capabilities along with the need for connectivity to the internet is an ever-present challenge for clients.
- Routine physical health visits to family doctors or pediatricians are happening less frequently than pre-COVID-19. Transportation to services was an issue pre-COVID-19. This is now compounded with uneven reopening of primary care physician offices and anxiety about seeking out services. As a result, clients are going to the ER more often to seek services.
- Uncertainty regarding the reopening of schools and childcare increases the stress and anxiety on clients, as well as on staff and management. Depending on the school reopening plan, practitioners still are unsure if they will have the ability to deliver services in schools. Children are beginning to feel disconnected with lack of a school structure, not being able to see family and friends and this is being expressed in maladaptive behaviors.

Employee Engagement Impact (What Corporate Volunteers Can Do)

- Opportunities vary depending on the organization. Interested individuals should check websites and/or reach out directly to the nonprofit. Opportunities to volunteer include:
 - Translation services
 - Supply drives
 - Organizing food drives
 - Mentoring managers
 - General staff support for free medical clinics

Conversation on Food Insecurity: July 9th

Host: Diane Melley, Executive Director, Second Century Initiatives & Corporate Partnerships, Philadelphia Foundation

Moderator: Amanda Bauman, Senior Manager, Community Affairs, Campbell Soup Company

Nonprofit Panelist:

- The Greater Philadelphia Coalition Against Hunger -- Melody Keim, Executive Director
- Manna on Main -- Suzan Neiger Gould, Executive Director
- Cathedral Kitchen -- Alex Wills, Community Relations Director

Common Issues

- People of color are being disproportionately affected by the pandemic. The data shows that communities of color are most affected by food insecurity. If racism is not addressed, then hunger and food security cannot be correctly addressed.
- Clients are facing a heightened level of anxiety recently due to the tentative end of certain benefits from the CARES Act on July 31st. Nonprofit practitioners foresee a large increase in demand for food and other resources if this happens.
- Clients -- specifically those lacking stable housing -- mention increased feelings of marginalization due to disruption of the sense of community that different agencies have previously provided them. Contactless meal service does not allow clients to connect with others as had occurred in pre-COVID-19 times.
- The sector has always known that there were more families and individuals experiencing food insecurity than took advantage of services. COVID-19 highlighted many of these groups of people. Whenever recovery does take place, making sure that these people continue to have access to services and are supported is a key priority.

Employee Engagement Impact (What Corporate Volunteers Can Do)

- Opportunities vary depending on the organization. Interested individuals should check websites and/or reach out directly to the nonprofit. Opportunities to volunteer include:
 - Contactless delivery of meals and other resources
 - Donations of time and talent through targeted skills-based volunteering projects
 - Food-specific virtual food drives. Nonprofit websites have lists of high-demand food.
 - Advocacy and information sharing

Conversation on Under-Served Communities: June 18th

Host: Diane Melley, Executive Director, Second Century Initiatives & Corporate Partnerships, Philadelphia Foundation

Moderator: Tiffany Tavarez, Vice President, Community Relations, Wells Fargo

Nonprofit Panelists:

- African Family Health Organization -- Oni Richards-Waritay, Executive Director
- Esperanza Health Center -- Maryann Salib, Associate Medical Director of Community Health and Wellness
- Mazzone Center -- Larry Benjamin, Director of Communications and Development

Common Issues:

- The combined uncertainties of COVID-19 and the systematic changes in racial equity and social justice have created a high stress environment for nonprofit staff and clients.
- Tech access, especially for youth and senior populations, is more important than ever. There is no quick solution to this problem.
- Educating clients on risk mitigation, the latest updates on safety and the changing environment is top priority. The difficulty of this is compounded by lack of technology access. Without the right messaging and information, clients can be reluctant to seek services.
- Services have expanded to reach more clients, straining existing resources of staff, time and money.
- As Greater Philadelphia moves into the green phase, finding locations that have the space to safely offer services will be an ongoing challenge.

Employee Engagement Impact (What Corporate Volunteers Can Do)

- Remote volunteering options are a possibility. Opportunities vary depending on the organization. Interested individuals should check websites and/or reach out directly to the nonprofit.
- In-person volunteering is still needed and is a priority for nonprofits as they meet the growing demand on their services. These needs include:
 - Esperanza Health Center
 - COVID-19 Testing Site volunteers
 - Mazzone Center
 - Onboarding and screening of clients
 - African Family Health Organization
 - Contactless food deliveries
 - Doulas
 - Afterschool teaching assistance

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