

REBUILDING DURING A PANDEMIC



September 30, 2021



WHAT HAPPENS AFTER A PANDEMIC?

Trees burning in Kirkwood (2021 Caldor Fire in Lake Tahoe, CA)

Here in California, we see our share of wildfires - some - controlled and intentional, others - raging and devastating. Much like a wildfire, the COVID-19 pandemic swept through our sector, indiscriminately impacting grantee partners and donors alike.



HOW ARE OUR PARTNERS DEALING WITH THE CRISIS?

The California Fire Poppy. These only appear after a fire. Besides offering beauty and hope across the hills after a devastating fire, their presence also helps to prevent erosion after mudslides.

As we've tracked with our grantees throughout the past two years, we've heard many encouraging stories of hope, that demonstrate their creativity and resilience amidst multiple challenges. Today, many are out of crisis mode, and are able to look towards long-term recovery.

FINANCIAL STATE (2020)

63%

of grantee partners **anticipated** some financial deficit in 2020

37%

of grantee partners experienced **actual** deficit in 2020

These statistics were collected through First Fruit's risk assessment surveys completed by our grantee partners in 2020 and 2021. If an organization's financial condition is considered a key indicator of organizational health, **our grantee partners fared much better than they anticipated in 2020.**



WHAT ABOUT 2021?

42%

of grantee partners forecast
deficit for 2021

88%

of grantee partners projecting
deficit are operating on annual
budgets of \$5M or less

Global recovery will continue to be uneven. In light of this, grassroots and small-sized nonprofit organizations will continue to be at risk from COVID-related setbacks.



HOW ARE WE SEEING
RESILIENCE DEMONSTRATED
AMONG OUR GRANTEE
PARTNERS?



We uncovered these four insights from our conversations with grantee partners.

While these are not new trends, they are examples of how resilience is being uniquely expressed during this moment in history. Resilience is as much about thinking ahead as it is about doing what it takes to respond and recover from a crisis.



LEADERS

Nurturing more and *new* types of leaders



PARTNERSHIPS

Engaging in fruitful partnerships



DIGITAL TOOLS

Embracing the integration of new technologies



ADAPTABILITY

Equipping people to adapt well to change

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LEADERS

In the nonprofit landscape, leaders play a key role in helping their organizations navigate times of crises.



TRENDS IN LEADERS

LEADERSHIP TRANSITION

There are have been encouraging developments in this area - stories of organizations looking to their younger leaders to help them be agile and adaptable during this time. As older leaders step back and allow space for future leaders, training and coaching for the next generation will continue to be important.

DECENTRALIZED DECISION-MAKING

As pandemic shutdowns stopped travel and in-person meetings for a time, the pivot towards virtual leadership gatherings have allowed greater access for field leaders, who may not have been able to attend in-person meetings in the past. This has helped address bottlenecks in leadership, leading to more effective and inclusive decision-making.



TENSION POINTS

TYPES OF LEADERS

Are there groups of people that are **“left out”**? There may be opportunities to develop leaders among groups of people that aren't typically a part of this conversation.

LEADERSHIP GAP

Is there a pipeline for the **next generation of leadership**? Unfortunately, the pandemic has created a leadership vacuum in the field as good leaders have passed away. For those organizations without a leadership pipeline, who will be the next leader?

HOLISTIC LEADER CARE

Leaders are exhausted...many have been in constant crisis mode for the last two years. Strategies for responding to crises pre-pandemic are no longer effective in this protracted global pandemic.





LOOKING TOWARDS THE FUTURE

1. How has the global church traditionally defined leadership?
2. What traits or people have been overlooked in the past that might be “best for the world” leaders today?
3. Are steps being taken to prepare the next generation of leaders?





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PARTNERSHIPS

As a global and complex crisis, the pandemic has been too big to “go it alone”. Although partnerships were key before the pandemic, this experience has moved the nonprofit landscape towards a shared vision.

TRENDS IN PARTNERSHIPS

RESOURCE SHARING

Information has become more open-source in the nonprofit field. Ministries are creating, sharing, and openly collaborating on resources that will benefit the field and aid towards recovery.

MORE VOICES

With the move towards virtual gatherings, many networks have brought more Majority World voices into their meetings and strategic planning. While in the past, travel costs often excluded these voices, this trend could lead to more equity and effectiveness in the nonprofit landscape.



TENSION POINTS

TRUST

Trust, especially in a cross-cultural context, is built over time through in-person interactions. Most of the fruitful and effective partnerships we observed during the pandemic occurred **where trust was previously built.**

VALUE OF DIVERSITY

Majority World voices have been more present in virtual meetings. Considering the uneven recovery and financial costs, **will those voices continue to be included** when in-person meetings resume?

INFORMAL VS. FORMAL

Although nonprofits are sharing information more openly than ever before, **it remains to be seen what types of partnerships will develop as a result of the pandemic.**





MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER

1. When it comes to partnership/collaboration, are there priorities you see in light of the pandemic's uneven recovery?
2. What might it take to move “beyond the conversation” towards more fruitful and formal partnerships?
3. As in-person gatherings begin to occur again (and are valuable for trust building), how could we ensure Majority World voices continue to be present?



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DIGITAL TOOLS

The pandemic caused many to utilize new digital tools, but how well have we integrated these tools for greater organizational focus?



TRENDS IN TOOLS

CONNECTIVITY

For those organizations with access to the internet, moving to virtual gatherings and meetings was not an issue. One of the most encouraging trends observed is the higher level of engagement achieved through virtual gatherings, which played a key role in the inclusion of Majority World voices.

INTEGRATION

The pandemic expedited digital integration plans that many organizations had in the works before the crisis. [Research](#) shows that companies who integrated advanced technologies into their strategies were more prepared for the events of 2020.



TENSION POINTS

LIMITATIONS

Digital tools are convenient and create higher engagement among organizations, but they will never fully replace the value and need for in-person interactions like the experiential aspects of teaching, training, and mentoring that are core aspects of many organizations.

DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT

Not all organizations have the resources or people to integrate tools for added value. Once we are on the other side of this pandemic, **will these tools be abandoned?**

ACCESS

The efficient integration of digital tools depends on **internet accessibility**, but many regions around the globe don't have access to the internet.





WHAT COMES NEXT?

1. How has digital engagement worked well, to enhance the purpose and goal of an organization?
2. Might there be cases where digital engagement detracts from or inhibits the mission of an organization?
3. If access is a serious limitation, are there other creative alternatives?



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ADAPTABILITY

An organization equipped to handle change will be prepared to deal with future crises. Adaptability is essential to an organization's resilience.



TRENDS IN ADAPTABILITY

STAFF HEALTH

Research has shown that employees who know their companies care for them as individuals have greater commitment and enjoy their work more, leading them to become more flexible and adaptable. Organizations are prioritizing staff health in a holistic way, caring for their emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being by offering spiritual retreats and professional development opportunities.

THINKING AHEAD

Organizations that were able to care for their staff during the pandemic had structures and processes in place that allowed for flexibility. For example, one leadership development ministry had a mini-grant initiative providing leaders a path to submit opportunities of personal need. When the pandemic hit, they already had this system in place to quickly adapt and care for their people.



TENSION POINTS

LACK OF RESOURCES

There are several barriers that nonprofits identify: 1) **Time** - many organizations are busier than ever before; 2) **Finances** - limited capacity to respond to needs that feel less urgent; 3) **Ability** - what solutions are possible?

REAL COST OF MINISTRY

How do organizations create a more **comprehensive budget** that re-integrates the *people* component? Will the donor community be responsive to it?

THE LONG VIEW

Short-term solutions like one-time staff retreats are important, but for lasting change, organizations will need to **identify solutions that will blend with their organizational culture and structure.**





BUILDING FOR RESILIENCE

1. In addition to the trends highlighted here, what might be some other organizational focus areas that are crucial for increased resilience?
2. Identify some ways to move toward holistic leader-care as a part of building organizational resilience.
3. What opportunities are there for donors and grantees to reintegrate people back into their ministry cultures and budgets?





LEADERS

Nurturing more *and* new types of
leaders



DIGITAL TOOLS

Embracing the integration of new
tools

KEY INSIGHTS



PARTNERSHIPS

Engaging in fruitful partnerships



ADAPTABILITY

Equipping people to readily
accept change



REBUILDING FOR RESILIENCE

As with any crisis, there are multiple factors to be considered as our sector continues to work towards rebuilding. These are just a few of the more prominent trends within the complex picture of recovery during the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is our hope that these findings generate helpful discussion within our field as we continue to seize opportunities to reimagine our mission in a new context, with the hope of producing a more resilient future.

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