

Inside Philanthropy



The State of
American Philanthropy

Giving for Global
Humanitarian
Assistance

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ABOUT INSIDE PHILANTHROPY

Inside Philanthropy is a digital media site that covers the world of charitable giving. We report daily on foundations, major donors, and trends in philanthropy. Through our GrantFinder resource, we also profile and track thousands of funders working across key issue areas and geographic regions. Inside Philanthropy is supported by reader subscriptions and advertising. We do not receive funding from any other source. Learn more at insidephilanthropy.com

ABOUT THE STATE OF AMERICAN PHILANTHROPY

The State of American Philanthropy is a series of background papers on important topics and trends in U.S. philanthropy. The papers draw on past research and reporting by IP writers, as well as new interviews, grantmaking data, and other sources. Learn more at insidephilanthropy.com/state-of-american-philanthropy.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Around the globe, 2021 and early 2022 revealed converging crises that have intensified human suffering. From proliferating armed conflicts to the COVID-19 pandemic and worsening climate change and severe weather, humanitarian need has increased exponentially. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has projected that in 2022, \$41 billion will be needed for humanitarian efforts addressing conflict, health emergencies and natural disasters across 63 countries.

Over the last 10 years, as economic inequality has worsened across all regions, alongside growing recognition of racial and gender injustices worldwide, the spotlight on humanitarian aid structure and strategies has intensified. “Decolonization” of the aid sector and what this means for the future of humanitarian response is a critical, hotly debated topic. Many critics of the older models of aid delivery say the most effective crisis responses are as localized as possible while incorporating needed technical skills and experience.

This State of American Philanthropy report presents analysis based on data about giving for humanitarian assistance work both within U.S. borders and around the world. To clarify the terms we use in this brief, humanitarian aid/relief/assistance is material and logistical assistance that is used to save lives, relieve suffering, and maintain human dignity during emergency situations. It is usually short-term. Aid and relief efforts respond to needs that are often divided into four categories: food, shelter, non-food items (clothing, blankets, bedding, stoves, water containers, hygiene products), and water/sanitation. Humanitarian response works to ensure that assistance, aid and protection reaches the people who need it most. Development aid is longer-term assistance given to support economic, social and political development in developing countries.

Development aid is not the focus of this report. IP’s State of American Philanthropy initiative has produced a separate brief on [Giving for Global Health](#), and is developing other briefs on Giving for Global Economic Development and Giving for Global Human Rights Work. All of these have obvious overlaps with the subject of this brief on humanitarian aid and crisis relief. The connections between natural disasters, armed conflict and climate change are becoming increasingly undeniable, and so funders’ efforts to support response, mitigation and resiliency efforts are also relevant to global humanitarian relief, and are discussed in the SAP brief [Giving for Climate Change and Clean Energy](#).

Globally, the vast majority of humanitarian aid is provided by governments, funneled through United Nations intermediary agencies and large intermediary international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs). Private philanthropy plays a small but important role in this space, often catalyzing new thinking and explorations, as well as funding initiatives for specific communities or actions that governments, due to political obstacles, can’t fund. In responding to disasters taking place within the U.S., private philanthropy is a major financial contributor to relief.

Who's Giving

- Private foundations in the U.S. have historically focused efforts more on emergency response funding for natural disasters than humanitarian aid globally.
- Global humanitarian groups have therefore targeted major individual donors as well as fundraising campaigns to activate large numbers of smaller donors.
- Over the last decade, as local disasters have multiplied, community foundations in the U.S. have entered the field in a significant way.
- Foundations giving significantly to humanitarian assistance include The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Susan Thompson Buffett Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation, Sall Family Foundation, Margaret A. Cargill Foundation, the Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust, and the Howard G. Buffett Foundation.
- Corporate foundations and businesses provide substantial support and in-kind contributions to local disasters.

Who's Getting

- About half of all humanitarian funding flows to immediate response and relief efforts, 12% to reconstruction and recovery, 4% to preparedness efforts and 2% for building resiliency.
- Globally, U.N. agencies and a small number of large INGOs receive most humanitarian aid funding. About 60% of global humanitarian aid funding goes to U.N. agencies; 20% flows to the NGO aid sector, and only a small .4% goes to local and national NGOs.
- Candid data shows that close to half of all private institutional philanthropic funding from 2014 to 2018 for humanitarian assistance went to five organizations.
- In the U.S. context, while big organizational actors exist, they are complemented by many national, state and local organizations that actively respond to disaster events.

The Big Issues and Funding Trends

- Identifying and implementing workable policy solutions that address intertwined conflict, climate and health challenges and that don't worsen fragile global economic and social insecurities is a daunting obstacle.
- The decline of multilateralism makes it that much harder to find dedicated political solutions to address existential challenges of climate, health and conflict.
- Funding for the disproportionate impact of humanitarian crises on girls and women is still not at the levels many in philanthropy say is necessary and doesn't always respond to their specific challenges effectively.
- Critical ongoing discussions explore how to effectively transform the traditional aid model to one that more deeply considers racial, gender, economic and social justice perspectives, and which centers on affected communities and their lived experiences and knowledge in humanitarian responses. Over the last five years, progress to transform the aid model has seen spotty progress.

Equity in the Sector

- Rethinking humanitarian assistance requires changing relationships that have been traditionally anchored in former colonial powers giving aid to former colonies.
- Some question whether the current push to localize the aid agenda – sending more funds to local actors – is actually gaining real traction, or if talk of decolonization in the sector is running up against consolidation and growth of major international aid infrastructure.
- The challenge is not only for U.N. agencies and INGOs to behave and govern differently, but just as critically, for donors to rethink their strategies so that organizations have the support, motivation and flexibility to explore and find effective, impactful and equitable solutions and transformed leadership.
- Since 2020, because of travel restrictions and other steps related to lockdowns, local leadership often took on additional functions, decision making and responsibility, illuminating an alternative path forward.

Fundraising Now

- With an increasing number of world-altering crises in the news and in the forefront of public attention, donations to humanitarian assistance organizations have been way up for the past several years.
- While the continuing COVID pandemic has shaped the fundraising landscape – especially with seemingly permanent hybrid online/in-person fundraising events and shifting composition of donor pools—the main strategies remain the same for most organizations, with just a few tweaks here and there.

The need for humanitarian aid continues to grow at an extraordinarily fast pace as climate, conflict and health crises multiply. NATO nations' unity around Ukraine aside, multilateral political efforts over the past decades have stagnated and haven't produced the solidarity and vision necessary to address the pandemic, climate change, or, most recently, Russia's attacks on its neighbors. IP's and other news outlets' coverage of the pandemic era indicates that the world's attempts at recovery over the past two years looks extremely uneven, fragile and fragmented between countries and regions. Global cooperation is splintering as authoritarian regimes rise. In the short term, the economic forecast in a world reeling from the pandemic and energy impacts of the Eurasian war is troubling for most nations.

To see positive change come out of this, social movements and civil society at all levels, working along with humanitarian aid leaders, must play an active role in demanding effective reform and action. In particular, humanitarian aid and development actors need to collaborate and cooperate in fuller and deeper ways to build out and interweave programs and initiatives helping to address and overcome root causes of disasters and conflicts, positioning the world to become more equitable and fairer for all.

While the government-led multilateral space has become less visible and effective, COVID-19 and the Ukrainian war have highlighted the growing power and strength of multilateral development banks (MDBs). These MDBs are rarely on the radar screens of donors, but they may present opportunities to link a recovery from COVID-19 and the war in Europe to a series of investments by MDBs in infrastructure and technologies to address global inequities in a clean and sustainable way.

While private philanthropy has not historically played a huge role in global humanitarian assistance, the private donor community could lean in to support transformation in the sector. Foundations can act more flexibly and often take more risk than governments. Philanthropy can also fund proof-of-concept projects, capacity strengthening and upskilling, and unique constellations and partnerships across sectors and geographies. If the global community is going to address climate, conflict and health challenges, ultimately reducing the need for humanitarian aid, it is going to take deep and honest collaboration and commitment between governments, banks, donors, the U.N. and NGOs at all levels and across sectors.

Introduction

In 2021 and 2022, proliferating crises around the globe have intensified human suffering. From armed conflicts to the massive COVID-19 pandemic and worsening climate change and severe weather, humanitarian needs have increased exponentially. In the period from 2021 to early 2022 alone, Hurricane Ida hit the Gulf Coast, wildfires devastated California and Colorado, a deep freeze hit the power grid in Texas, historic floods occurred in Germany and other parts of Europe, and cyclones and typhoons ravaged India, Indonesia and the Philippines. We also saw armed conflict emerging and deepening in Ukraine and Afghanistan and the continuation of long-term conflicts in several other regions.

The [Global Humanitarian Overview](#) is the world's most comprehensive assessment of humanitarian need, produced by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). It estimated that 235 million people required humanitarian assistance and protection in 2021 due to COVID-19—that is 1 in 33 people globally. In 2022, a projected \$41 billion will be needed for humanitarian efforts addressing conflict, health emergencies and natural disasters across 63 countries.

In the past few decades, global humanitarian need has exploded, growing from \$500 million in 1989 to an estimated \$40 billion in 2021. While governments, private foundations, corporations, technology innovators and individuals have significantly increased humanitarian support, critical needs remain unaddressed, growing in every global region. OCHA estimates that over recent years, a 40% gap existed annually between available resources and global humanitarian need.

While the pandemic destabilizes vulnerable communities, climate change continues to multiply risks posed by natural disasters, all complicated further by emerging and long-standing conflicts. In the U.S., there were 22 weather disasters in 2019 with losses exceeding \$1 billion each – compared with about six events annually from 1980 to 2019. Flooding, wildfires and droughts are more frequent and severe, increasingly wiping out homes, businesses and lives around the globe. There is also no end in sight for long-term armed conflicts in Ukraine, Afghanistan, Yemen, Syria, Sudan and elsewhere. In Afghanistan, due to drought and conflict, half of the population of 40 million requires food aid, including an estimated 1 million Afghan children at risk of dying from malnutrition. In early 2022, up to 16 million people in Ukraine and neighboring countries were on the move and in desperate and dangerous situations.

Growing nationalism and the politics surrounding the COVID pandemic critically undermined global solidarity and belief in multilateral cooperation. In light of multiplying risk factors, high-income countries chose to “go it alone,” hoarding vaccines without sharing for over a year. As a result, there is little trust or incentive in multilateralism to tackle the world's biggest challenges, including climate change and long-simmering conflicts. Russia's aggression in Ukraine further complicates the global landscape, with the world dividing into Cold-War-era power blocs with even less hope of joint action on needed solutions. Given this grim picture, the International Labor Organization estimated that in 2021, livelihoods of close to half the global workforce were at risk. In this multilateral vacuum, development banks have leaned in to play a more active and visible role, coordinating, aligning and leading strategy, and funding what in the past was the purview of governments.

Over the last 10 years, as economic inequality has worsened across all regions, complicated further by racial and gender injustices, the spotlight on humanitarian aid structure and strategies has intensified. Governmental humanitarian aid is often seen as an extension of political and economic policymaking, linked to colonial pasts.

“Decolonization” of the aid sector and what this means for the future of humanitarian response is a critical topic.

U.N. Director General Ban Ki Moon, recognizing the need to rethink humanitarian assistance, convened the first World Humanitarian Summit in 2016. The summit resulted in the Agenda for Humanity, which is committed to centering people and their needs in humanitarian response and involving affected communities and their lived experiences in aid-related priority setting and strategy. Core commitments focused on women and girls, addressing forced displacement, tackling climate change, and ensuring financing for these efforts. Some progress has been made over the last five years, but with regard to instituting the depth of change needed to meaningfully share power with local responders and communities, the seriousness of donors, U.N. agencies, INGOs and others remains unclear.

This State of American Philanthropy report includes analysis of both global and U.S.-focused giving. Private philanthropy plays different roles in global and U.S. domestic humanitarian response. Globally, the vast majority of humanitarian support is provided by governments, funneled through U.N. intermediary agencies and large intermediary INGOs. In 2019, according to the Center for Disaster Philanthropy, foundations and charities spent the relatively small amount of \$352

million for disaster and humanitarian crises globally out of a total of \$30 billion in giving from private, government, corporate and individual donors. Though private philanthropy represents a small dollar amount, it plays an important role in catalyzing new thinking and explorations, as well as funding initiatives for specific communities or actions that governments can’t fund politically. When it comes to disasters taking place within the United States, private philanthropy is a major financial contributor to humanitarian relief.

According to the International Rescue Committee’s 2022 Watchlist report, the following are the most critical global human emergencies in 2022. Note that this list was published before the start of the Ukraine conflict.

- Afghanistan – crisis after conflict impacting 24.5 million people.
- Ethiopia – climate and conflict crisis affecting 26 million people.
- Yemen – cumulative impact of protracted conflict affecting 21 million people.
- Nigeria – growing insecurity impacting 8 million people.
- South Sudan – regional tensions impacting 8.5 million people.
- Democratic Republic of Congo – compounded crisis of conflict and disease affecting 27 million people.
- Myanmar – violent deadlock leaves 14 million people in crisis.
- Somalia – humanitarian access worsens, compromising 8 million people.
- Syria – economic crisis compounds war, impacting 14 million people.
- Sudan – political tensions rise amidst drought and conflict, impacting 14 million people.

In the U.S., the biggest natural disasters of the last 10 years were:

- Hurricane Sandy in 2011, \$74 billion in damages.
- Western wildfires in 2018, \$25 billion in damages.
- Hurricanes Irma, Maria and Harvey in 2017, \$276 billion in damages.
- Drought in the Midwest in 2012, \$34 billion in damages.
- Tornadoes in the Midwest in 2011, \$23 billion in damages.

The Lay of the Land

Who's Giving

Governments are the biggest source of funding for global humanitarian response and relief. Individual and major donors are a second significant source of support, with a few key billionaires playing a particularly significant role over the last few years. Private foundations in the U.S. have historically focused efforts more on emergency response funding for natural disasters than humanitarian aid globally. Private foundations have historically often perceived global humanitarian needs as cyclical Band-Aid responses that require large infusions of government support, rather than private donations.

Humanitarian groups have therefore targeted major individual donors and launched fundraising campaigns that seek to activate small donors. Over the last decade, as local disasters have multiplied, community foundations in the U.S. have entered the field in a significant way. Large donor-advised funds are another source of significant support, as well as corporate foundations and businesses that provide assistance when disasters strike close to home.

In the first six months of 2021, governments gave approximately \$13 billion for humanitarian aid and response with another \$27 billion projected in estimated need. The U.S., E.U., German and Japanese governments are the biggest global humanitarian aid funders. The U.S. \$5 billion annual commitment represents more than twice that of other governments. Domestically, the U.S. spends many billions more on national disaster relief, with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) alone allocating \$11.2 billion in 2018 for disaster efforts.

In the U.S. context, individual donations are a significant nongovernmental source of humanitarian and disaster aid. In 2018, 29% of American households gave disaster support totaling an estimated \$3 billion. Crowdsourced giving is on the rise through online platforms such as Network for Good, CrowdRise, Fundly and GlobalGiving. In 2018, Network for Good and GlobalGiving, raised approximately \$20 million for disaster relief.

Individual donors acting through donor-advised funds are another big source of giving, especially for crisis relief in the U.S. In 2020, Fidelity Charitable Trust alone had almost 154,000 donor-advised funds. According to its website, total grantmaking over the history of Fidelity Charitable Trust to humanitarian aid totals \$582.4 million—including \$52.7 million to the 2017 Hurricane season (Harvey, Irma, Maria), \$46.4 million to the Syrian refugee crisis over the last decade, and \$490 million to COVID-19 pandemic response. In 2019, Fidelity Charitable Trust reported \$21 million in grants to disaster relief.

A few individual major donors have also increased support to sectors that impact the need for humanitarian aid in a significant way, specifically responding to COVID-19 and climate change. Jack Dorsey gave \$1 billion to pandemic response in 2020. In 2022, Mackenzie Scott distributed funding to organizations focused on countering climate change. From the billionaire ranks, Azim Premji and Jeff Bezos have given over \$100 million individually to COVID relief efforts. Others including Bill Gates, George Soros and Jeff Skoll have given vast sums through their foundations.

Based on IP's analysis of Candid data, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation was the top private institutional donor contributing slightly over

\$300 million to humanitarian aid over the period 2014–18. In 2019, the Gates Foundation gave \$73 million to humanitarian and disaster relief. Other significant giving for aid from private institutional sources over the five-year period includes the Susan Thompson Buffett Foundation (\$63 million), Rockefeller Foundation (\$58 million), Sall Family Foundation (\$26 million), Margaret A. Cargill Foundation (\$20 million), the Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust (\$18 million) and the Howard G. Buffett Foundation (\$17 million).

Over these same years (2014–2018), there were three corporate foundations giving especially large amounts for crisis relief—Boehringer Ingelheim Cares Foundation (\$74 million), the Walmart Foundation (\$12 million) and Abbvie Foundation (\$9.5 million)—among the top 25 institutional private donors to humanitarian relief, according to Candid data. In addition to corporate foundation donations, businesses, particularly those located in areas impacted by natural disasters, provide cash and in-kind services to local communities. In 2018, business contributions to disaster relief totaled \$206 million according to estimates from the Center for Disaster Philanthropy’s “Measuring the State of Disaster Philanthropy 2020” report.

Inside Philanthropy

August 2020 Survey

“In current circumstances, it seems likely that preoccupation with domestic issues will grow and international giving by US philanthropy will contract. While this is natural, I worry about US philanthropy becoming myopic and self-focused just when the risk and power of global interconnectedness has taken center stage in history. It would be a very bad moment for US philanthropy to lose sight of international trends, needs, ideas and possibilities.”

—Foundation professional, Washington, D.C.

Given the growing frequency of natural disasters and public health crises that impact communities, localized and decentralized humanitarian responses have become increasingly relevant and important. Disaster funders have also become more localized with community foundations, particularly in the U.S., taking an increasingly high profile in disaster response. Five U.S. community foundations appeared in the top 50 humanitarian funders, according to Candid data for 2014–2018. These include Greater Cincinnati Foundation (\$16 million), San Antonio Area Foundation (\$9 million), Chicago Community Trust (\$6 million), Silicon Valley Community Foundation (\$32 million), and the Foundation for the Carolinas (\$20 million). Together, they gave approximately \$85 million in disaster relief from 2014–2018. Other significant local initiatives include United Way of Greater Houston and Texas’s OneStar Foundation, both giving \$32 million in 2019 for disaster relief.

The Hurricane Harvey disaster that hit the Houston area in 2017 provides a valuable snapshot of funder responses to local disasters in the U.S. Major donors played a significant role in responding to hurricane devastation in Houston. The Hackett Family gave \$20 million to start the Hackett Center, dedicated to addressing mental health issues for communities devastated by the hurricane. The Dell Foundation gave \$36 million to the Texas Rebuild Fund. John and Laura Arnold gave \$5 million to the Greater Houston Charity Foundation. Businesses donated \$157 million to hurricane recovery. Greater Houston Community Foundation served as a funding intermediary, created a Hurricane Harvey Relief Fund that supported immediate and longer-term community needs. The fund raised \$114 million for 126 nonprofit organizations. Individual donors numbering 5.4 million gave \$772 million to 32 crisis and aid groups for hurricane response.

Who's Getting

Globally, U.N. agencies and a small number of large, international NGOs receive most humanitarian aid funding. Consolidation trends in global humanitarian organizations appear likely to escalate further, even with growing awareness and appreciation that localized humanitarian aid can be the most effective. In the U.S., while big organizational actors exist, they are complemented by many national, state and local organizations that actively respond to disaster events.

The 2018 Global Humanitarian Assistance Report indicated that 60% of global humanitarian aid funding goes to U.N. agencies, with 20% flowing to the NGO aid sector. Out of the NGO-directed 20%, 94% goes to INGOs (up from a reported 85% in 2016) with local and national NGOs receiving a small .4% of funding. In Ukraine, U.N. tracking shows that in 2022, less than 0.1% of aid funding so far has gone directly to Ukrainian NGOs.

A Center for Disaster Philanthropy 2020 report found that 52% of all humanitarian support goes to address natural disasters. CDP reports that 50% of all humanitarian funding flows to response and relief efforts, 12% to reconstruction and recovery, 4% to preparedness efforts and 2% for building resiliency. According to the Chronicle of Philanthropy, North America received 61% of all philanthropic disaster funding in 2019, followed by 14% to Africa and 17% to global programs. Top grant recipients in 2019 included the Red Cross at \$36 million, the World Health Organization at \$25 million, and BakerRipley, a Houston-based nonprofit, at \$23 million.

Candid data shows that from 2014 to 2018, close to half of all private institutional philanthropic funding for humanitarian assistance went to five

organizations. All the top 10 organizational recipients by funding level were located in the U.S., with most having a global focus. Some are U.S. offices of international NGOs. These groups include Doctors Without Borders USA, International Rescue Committee, Direct Relief, Catholic Relief Services U.S., CARE, Samaritan's Purse, Oxfam America, Mercy Corps, Union of Concerned Scientists and AmeriCares. Many of these groups serve intermediary functions, providing resources to local responders, hospitals, clinics and civil society organizations in affected locations. Two of the top 10 recipients have religious affiliations.

Of the top 50 funding recipients appearing in the Candid data, 12 are located outside of the U.S. These include Artsen zonder Grenzen (Germany), Centro Internacional de Mejoramiento de Maiz y Trigo (Mexico), Food and Agriculture Organization of the U.N. (Italy), Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (Switzerland), Het Nederlandse Rode Kruis (Netherlands), Oxfam Novib (Netherlands) and International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (Switzerland).

Candid Top Funding Priorities: Humanitarian Assistance 2014 - 2018¹

Subject	Amount Funded
Basic and Emergency Aid (short term food, water, shelter)	\$1.19B
Food Security (access to consistent food supply)	\$452M
Disaster Relief (short- to medium-term water, shelter, food, education)	\$333M
Disaster Reconstruction	\$42M

Source: Candid

In the U.S. domestic context, there are 21,000 nonprofits listed in Guidestar under the disaster and emergency management heading. The states of Texas, California, Florida and North Carolina

received the most disaster assistance. In 2019, storm relief received \$60 million, flooding response \$20 million, wildfires \$18 million, and Ebola and other epidemics \$72 million.

Giving and Getting Deeper Dive

Experts IP interviewed pointed out that the trend toward concentration in both giving and getting in the humanitarian aid sector will likely continue, and even increase in the future. Overseas government development funds dominate the humanitarian space, with a few billionaires also playing a role with direct contributions.

Private funder support for humanitarian aid is fairly limited. Many U.S.-based private foundations have traditionally been reluctant to support humanitarian response globally. In a recent *Chronicle of Philanthropy* article, “[Persistent Myths About Disaster Giving Continue to Create Major Shortfalls](#),” the Center for Disaster Philanthropy points out four myths that stand in the way of more philanthropic support to the sector (see box on this page).

Given the lack of support from traditional philanthropic sources, humanitarian organizations have relied heavily on fundraising campaigns aimed at small, individual donors.

On the recipient end, we see a few big INGOs and U.N. agencies serving as umbrella intermediaries for many smaller projects and organizations. The pressures to consolidate are significant given escalating demands for aid in today’s fragile world, which leads many donors to prioritize efficiencies of scale. IP Interviews for this brief indicated that NGO recipients at regional and national levels are often strapped for direct resources. The lack of core, flexible donor support makes it difficult for

medium-sized NGOs to survive and thrive, particularly during start-up and early growth periods.

Four Myths Limiting Humanitarian Support



Center for
Disaster Philanthropy

- 1. Giving to disasters is throwing good money after bad.** Funding can have a big impact on creating sustainable recovery, which helps mitigate risks.
- 2. Giving to complex humanitarian emergencies is risky.** Funding for basic needs is never too risky a bet. Giving to organizations with trusted mechanisms in place reduces risk.
- 3. The most important time to provide funding is in the immediate aftermath of a crisis.** Over 50% of all private funding went to immediate relief and only 10% went to resilience, reconstruction and recovery. Local organizations need multiyear, general operating support grants for effective, long-term recovery.
- 4. Government funding will fix everything.** Giving from governments exceeds what private philanthropy can do but foundation dollars are critical to ensuring that underserved populations can rebuild their lives. Private philanthropy can fill gaps and should award grants with as few conditions as possible.

In spite of consolidation, and partially in response to criticisms that philanthropy continues to foster colonialist dynamics with communities in crisis, funders are increasingly supporting efforts to localize decision-making and distribution of funds. Globally, the movement to localize humanitarian assistance and response has received much attention, if not huge amounts of available capital. The U.N., recognizing the need to restructure aid, has committed on paper to ensure that 25% of all

humanitarian funding supports local efforts. Overall progress is spotty on meaningfully achieving this metric by U.N. agencies and INGOs.

Funders supporting localized efforts in Puerto Rico provide one example of this trend. In 2017, Hurricane Maria devastated Puerto Rico, leaving 3 million people without power for months. The following year, the Ford Foundation, Open Society Foundations and the Rockefeller Foundation came together to support the Resilient Puerto Rico Advisory Commission, a collaborative effort to build back Puerto Rico in a more resilient and just fashion. Now referred to as [ReImagina Puerto Rico](#) and a program of the Center for a New Economy, the island-wide efforts have focused on transforming the energy, health and education, housing, and physical and natural infrastructure sectors. The efforts seek to build localized structures and systems that anchor the island in fairer, stronger and more resilient approaches so that natural disasters are not so devastating, particularly to the poorest in the future.

Funder Spotlight



The global refugee crisis has grown to more than 100 million displaced people worldwide. To address what it calls an “unprecedented global challenge,” Hilton established its Refugees Initiative. Approved by the board in 2021, the foundation quickly awarded \$19 million in grants to refugee organizations around the world that same year. The initiative is separate from Hilton’s Disaster Relief and Recovery program, which awarded \$20 million in grants in 2021.

In 2021-22, the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation is rolling out a learning initiative to explore new approaches to localization. In this \$10 million initiative, the Hilton Foundation offers flexible, core support to four types of intermediary organizations. The organizations include a movement of local and national civil society organizations from developing nations that share a common goal of promoting fair and equitable partnership in the current aid system, a regional disaster network based in Latin America, a global consortium of NGOs governed by the NGOs themselves, and an INGO with decentralized country offices. Hilton, in partnership with these four networks, will document and analyze findings to understand the components, resourcing and balance necessary for successful localization.

“We are trying to figure out how we can best support localization efforts, intentionally partnering with intermediaries who are as rooted in the communities as possible and proactively supporting collaboration between social movements for equity and justice and humanitarian assistance,” Hilton Foundation Program Officer Robert Miyashiro said. Miyashiro also noted that the Center for Disaster Philanthropy is hosting a learning circle for funders interested in supporting local levels and anticipates being able to share and debate findings from this initiative with this cohort of donors.

While not among the companies giving the most financial resources for crisis relief, technology companies have also entered into the humanitarian donor space in new and interesting ways. Companies such as Google, eBay, TikTok and others are increasingly using their technology to help responders and communities in distress. A number of these companies have established in-house

impact challenges that include funding, mentorship and direct technical assistance from staff volunteers for effectiveness and scalability of response. The Google.org impact challenge in 2020 committed \$11.7 million to fund bold ideas for a more resilient future. Organizations received \$2.4 million and post-grant support from the Google for Start-ups Accelerator to bring life to the ideas. Grants supported Global Water Watch, which sought to monitor global access to water resources, and a project to quantify the gulf stream to improve weather predictions.

The Big Issues and Beyond

Connecting “disasters” to policy choices. The first big issue is the advent of the mega-crisis era and the challenge of finding effective solutions to complex emergencies across health, conflict and climate. COVID-19 is the 21st century’s first “super-crisis.” Economic and social insecurities, combined with accelerating environmental degradation and climate damage, translate into more frequent and severe public health and conflict crises. Each of these trends exerts direct influence on worsening converging trends, resulting in mega-crises.

One example is climate change compounding the complexity of the conflict in Afghanistan, which is playing out during massive drought, leaving more than half of the country lacking food security and at risk of malnutrition and possible death. A second example is the invasion and displacement crisis in Ukraine that is compounded by COVID-19. Saving lives in these circumstances is extremely complex. Finding workable policy solutions that don’t worsen fragile economic and social insecurities can seem daunting.

Decreasing cooperation among nations. A second big issue is the decline of multilateralism and global inability to respond collaboratively to these existential challenges. Tackling humanitarian challenges requires identifying and committing to dedicated political solutions through bilateral and multilateral engagement. The government and philanthropic response to COVID-19 is a striking example of today’s lack of global solidarity in the political realm. In 2021, high-income countries hoarded vaccines and related technologies with little willingness to share across borders. This scenario, further complicated by the invasion of Ukraine, has undermined faith in multilateralism, global solutions and the U.N. system, making joint action on climate change and peacekeeping initiatives even more difficult. The primacy of national security and counterterrorism efforts today also complicates humanitarian efforts in many complex conflict settings around the world.

Spotlight: Funding for Ukraine



Over the course of seven weeks, private funders gave \$700 million and pledged another \$660 million to aid in the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Ukraine. This is the highest level of private philanthropic monies mobilized in a short time period for a humanitarian crisis in history, with the exception of COVID-19. According to the U.N. financial tracking system published in Devex, 67% of funding is going to U.N. agencies, 10% to the International Committee of the Red Cross, 7% to INGOs, and less than 0.1% directly to Ukrainian organizations.

On a more positive note, stimulus packages have, to some degree, helped strengthen societal resiliency and COVID-19 recovery by providing an opportunity to reimagine economic and social systems that work better for everyone. In this context, it is important for leaders to de-silo the humanitarian and development agendas, and to integrate planning together. The global community, even amidst current conflict challenges such as in Ukraine, can find ways to address root causes of crises and identify potential collaborative action across these and other allied sectors.

Linking gender inequity to crisis outcomes.

A third big issue is addressing the needs of women and girls in complex settings. COVID-19 highlighted yet again the disproportionate impact of health crises on girls and women. In Ukraine, we also see women and girls severely impacted by violence of all kinds. Disasters kill more women than men, and hit women's livelihoods hardest. All forms of gender-based violence against women and girls escalate during disasters and conflict, and 60% of all maternal deaths take place in humanitarian crisis settings. While funding for women and girls has significantly increased over the last decade, it still isn't at the levels necessary, and doesn't always respond to their specific challenges effectively.

American Jewish World Services (AJWS) is one humanitarian aid organization that believes addressing gender inequality is integral to disaster response. During COVID-19, it supported Association des Juristes Sénégalaises (AJS), a grassroots organization in Senegal focused on women, which opened helplines to report domestic violence and offer women psychosocial support. It worked to enact more effective rape legislation to deter violence against women during crisis

situations. AJS also distributed food aid to ease economic stress that can lead to domestic violence.

As another example, in 2021, the Open Society Foundations launched a \$10 million emergency fund in Afghanistan to expand protections for Afghan citizens, especially for those engaged in advancing human rights and women's rights.

Project Keshner, responding to calls for a gender-sensitive response in Ukraine to tackle barriers to vital services, address increased risks of gender-based violence, and facilitate the reception of refugees, is funding FEMSMS, an SMS communication network for women at risk of gender-based violence in the region.

Reforming the colonial model of aid

delivery. A fourth big issue is the need to reform the model and business of global humanitarian aid. Based largely on a colonial framework of charity, the humanitarian system has struggled to hand over power to local communities. Critical ongoing discussions explore how to transform the traditional aid model to one that is based in racial, gender, economic and social justice, and centers affected communities and their lived experiences and knowledge in humanitarian response. The localization agenda has made some inroads over the last two years, with local leadership increasing during the pandemic as travel for global aid staff has been restricted. The question is how much of this shift will remain in place once the pandemic ebbs.

In 2008, Oxfam became one of the first INGOs in the aid space to start considering how to rebalance power and funding in its confederation. Oxfam has historically worked across humanitarian aid and development and has long-running programs to

address inequalities. In 2019, it committed to a new system of collaboration and inclusion, creating six Oxfam local affiliates with the mandate of shaping their own disaster management plans and taking on greater leadership roles within Oxfam. Its stated role is to support and facilitate these local actors. Recognizing that humanitarian aid by itself cannot address the root causes of emergencies, Oxfam also committed to weaving together internal development and humanitarian programs so that marginalized communities and others are strengthened and better prepared for future disasters.

INGO Spotlight



The Alliance for International Medical Action (ALIMA) is one of a few home-grown, medium-sized NGOs operating on the African continent in the humanitarian space. The alliance connects national NGOs with international research institutes and seeks to transform how medical care is conducted in humanitarian settings. Since its founding in 2009, ALIMA has treated over 7 million people in 13 countries across Africa. ALIMA's Guillaume Le Duc pointed out that the organization is different from other aid groups in two specific ways—inclusive governance and its emphasis on driving innovation for humanitarian settings.

Funder Trends and Strategies

No-strings philanthropic support for independent NGOs. Humanitarian aid strives for impartial needs assessments combined with neutral provision of emergency services.

Government bilateral aid, while the biggest source of humanitarian aid, also carries a politicized agenda. For this reason, individual and major donor support for independent humanitarian assistance with no strings attached is critically important. This type of funding can focus on meeting needs of underserved and marginalized populations, and it can fill gaps and catalyze experiments in humanitarian response technologies and approaches.

On the other hand, private and corporate foundation humanitarian giving is sometimes more complicated. There can be tensions between foundations offering earmarked funding and targeted project grants and an independent humanitarian aid model that supports assessed priorities, giving focus first to those most in need of services.

Patricia McIlreavy, the executive director for the Center for Disaster Philanthropy, notes that while many have called for “shifting the primary accountability to communities served over donor interest, ending sexual abuse and exploitation within our ranks and programs, coordinating and leveraging our resources more effectively, advancing community-informed, locally focused and equity centered solutions, and mitigating and sharing risks with grantee partners, real change has been slow to follow.” She notes that donors must develop more courageous leadership so that they better understand their own weaknesses, embrace intersectionality in funding and programming, embrace funding flexibility, and commit as much as possible to supporting action at local levels.

Some pandemic-era changes in funding practices are sticking. COVID-19 shook up the donor and INGO community and pushed donors

and organizations to act differently, authorizing some of the approaches that grantees and communities have called for over many years. The pandemic prompted donors and INGOs to escalate efforts to build deeper relationships with local responders and affected communities. Donors showed a greater degree of flexibility over the last two years, and international organizations stepped back because of travel restrictions and lockdowns, creating space for more local leadership. The question is whether this momentum to localize responses will continue, or if business will return to usual once the pandemic ebbs.

Funder Spotlight



American Jewish World Service (AJWS) provides humanitarian aid to activists and organizations in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the U.S. In 2021, AJWS invested \$37.1 million across all grantmaking programs. That funding included support to 54 grantees working in the disaster and humanitarian response space. Grants supported organizations helping communities recover and rebuild after natural disasters and those displaced by drought, hunger and conflict.

Private foundations describe meaningful efforts to listen more to affected communities and to determine funding priorities based on what affected people say they most need. In interviews, donors said they became more flexible about reporting requirements over the last two years, and some funders are also increasingly open to providing flexible support in advance of disasters, positioning organizations to respond immediately

to emergencies. Cash as aid is another donor approach trending over the last five years, with COVID accelerating the rate of growth in cash-based strategies.

While a number of private and corporate foundations report that they offered more general operating support grants with increased flexibility over the last couple of years, this is not always the perception of grantees. COVID-related travel and meeting restrictions undoubtedly prompted more flexibility in project management. Even so, many grantees still report that they are mostly operating within a landscape of project funding targeting certain locations, populations and/or strategies.

Consolidation of humanitarian aid recipient organizations. As noted previously, there has been a significant trend globally to consolidate humanitarian organizations into large entities that offer technical, logistical and other types of crisis support across many regions and countries. While technical expertise is important in responding to complex crisis situations, it remains unclear how this trend of consolidation will balance with the front-line realities best understood by locals who know the socio, cultural, political and economic landscape, which must be considered in crisis response.

Perspectives on Equity

In 2020, donors, U.N. agencies and INGOs were forced to confront racism in global aid in ways they haven't in the past. These debates centered on discrimination in the sector and ways in which the humanitarian system seems to work as a successor to colonialism. While many of the aid scandals in the last few years have focused on race and gender discrimination, LGBTQ populations and people with disabilities are also demanding equity.

Every nation has equity issues related to power imbalance, whether it is based on ethnic or religious group identities, long-standing political rivalries or some of the same gender, race, sexuality and other identities Americans are grappling with. Funders often lack deep knowledge of the intricacies of these power imbalances and struggle to anticipate how their funding choices might contribute to ongoing tensions.

Rethinking humanitarian assistance requires changing relationships that have been traditionally anchored in former colonial powers giving aid to their colonies. Some question whether the push to localize the aid agenda—sending more funds to local actors—is actually gaining substantial support. Is humanitarian aid moving in a more systematic way to decolonize the sector and its structures? In *The New Humanitarian*, Paul Corrain writes, “Anti-racism is necessary but not sufficient for the aid industry to make the fundamental changes to move beyond its colonial legacy.”

Will this moment lead to a transformed system or will it play out as minor adjustments at the edges, with the overall aid structures and philosophy remaining the same? The challenge is not only for U.N. agencies and INGOs to behave and govern differently but just as critically, for donors to rethink their strategies so that organizations at all levels across sectors have the support, motivation and flexibility to explore effective, impactful and equitable solutions and transformational leadership suited to the location.

In 2020, because of travel restrictions and other steps related to lockdowns, there were some bright spots illuminating an alternative path forward in the aid landscape. Local leadership took on additional functions, decision-making and

responsibility. This is a positive step forward in rebalancing power in the aid area and one that has deep support in settings dealing with humanitarian crises.

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“Most funders are prioritizing racial justice and that is clearly having an impact on decision making, but philanthropy as a sector is extraordinarily white and western. It is important for funders to prioritize diversity in their own institutions as well as those that they fund.”

—Fundraiser, Portland, Oregon

A Closer Look at Funder Types

Most private funding in the global humanitarian aid space flows to and through large nongovernmental intermediaries. Major individual donors play a large role in supporting global aid. Private and community foundations are big funders in U.S. disaster response, but less so on the global humanitarian relief scene. Corporations provide significant in-kind and cash contributions to impacted areas where they are based or have markets.

Private Foundations

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation is the leading private funder in this space, having contributed over \$300 million from 2014 to 2018, and more recently, billions toward COVID response. Its Emergency Response team aims to reduce suffering, disease and death in countries affected by natural disasters and complex emergencies. The largest portion of Gates' emergency funding is disbursed as flexible funding to address high-impact disasters, including disease outbreaks. Within three days, funding can be approved to pre-vetted partners with local and national capacity to respond effectively. For complex emergencies, often in conflict settings, Gates supports food, water, sanitation, healthcare and shelter.

Another leading private foundation in this space is the Susan Thompson Buffett Foundation, which gave \$63 million to support sexual and reproductive health needs, including safe abortion, for women and girls affected by conflict and crisis.

The Skoll Foundation has given \$200 million to accelerate its grantmaking in pandemics, making

much of its first wave of COVID-19 response funding in Africa. The Open Society Foundations and Rockefeller Foundation have also supported global emergency COVID response.

On its website, the Center for Disaster Philanthropy tells brief stories of its work with a [wide range of foundations](#) on specific disaster initiatives related to their geographic or programmatic interests. Just a few of those examples include the Annie E. Casey Foundation building disaster response guidelines into capacity-building for its grantees; Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation supporting Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Islands following disasters there; Charles Stewart Mott Foundation responding to the drinking water crisis in Flint, Michigan; Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust helping health grantees prepare for disasters and integrate resiliency strategies; and Simmons Foundation responding to Hurricane Harvey and recovery efforts. CDP's stories further illustrate the reality that private foundations have idiosyncratic relief interests usually tied to their own geographic location or to a desire to ensure that grantees have the capacity to operate in crisis situations.

Corporate Funders

Corporate foundations and companies provide grants, cash and in-kind contributions of services or product to aid organizations and communities. These efforts are often closely tied to corporate communication and public relations outreach.

Boehringer Ingelheim Cares Foundation spent \$74 million over the years 2014–2018 to provide its medicines and products through Americares and Direct Relief to people in need around the world; in the U.S., Abbvie Foundation (\$9.4 million) also provided access to their medicines and essential products for people in need. Walmart has provided

\$35 million in cash and in-kind contributions for COVID-19 response, General Electric \$5.4 million, and Google many tens of millions.

In-kind support offers specialized assistance based on the expertise of the company. Often, this includes supply chain processes, IT competencies and technology innovations. In-kind contributions help NGOs creatively use emerging innovations and scaled systems for disaster preparedness, resiliency planning and emergency response. Examples include Walmart, which, with its presence in 24 countries and thousands of U.S. locations, is well-positioned to provide support through supply chain operations; General Electric's Disaster and Humanitarian Relief program, which draws on the company's engineering expertise; and Google, which contributes staff time to mentor aid organizations in using emerging technology.

Corporate Funder Spotlight



IKEA Foundation

The Ikea Foundation's humanitarian aid focuses on different issue areas including refugees, emergency response, and climate change. Ikea typically awards multi-year grants disbursed in annual installments. Recent grantees include the Home Project, which received funding for its work with unaccompanied refugee children arriving in Greece; and GiveDirectly, which received a €3.97M grant for its cash transfer program benefitting refugees and host communities in Uganda.

The UPS Foundation offers funding for disaster relief and humanitarian causes through the Community Safety program, including programs like Humanitarian Relief & Resilience, Post-Crisis Recovery, Global Health System Strengthening, Solutions in the Sky for Health System Strengthening, and Road Safety. UPS offers

indirect aid through logistical assistance. This includes large grants, trucks, inventory-tracking software, and teams of technical experts who guide grantee organizations on distributing food and medical supplies as efficiently and rapidly as possible. Though the foundation does not have a program dedicated to refugees, it has partnered with UNHCR to address refugee crises around the world. It has also funded organizations that assist Syrian refugees, among other affected groups.

The IKEA Foundation is one of the biggest grantmakers in the refugee giving space. IKEA's grants for refugees focus on families living in poverty who are particularly vulnerable to a changing climate. The foundation invests in programs and partners aimed at strengthening the resilience of refugee communities and creating livelihood opportunities for refugee and host populations in Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda and Jordan. It is providing €100 million over the coming five years to help refugees improve their incomes and become more self-reliant.

Community Foundations

Community foundations have played a growing role in humanitarian relief over the last decade, mostly within the U.S. Many community foundations have been especially active in COVID-19 emergency relief for the most marginalized communities. Two of the most active community foundations are the Chicago Community Trust and the Silicon Valley Community Foundation.

The Chicago Community Trust teamed up with the United Way of Metro Chicago to establish and co-lead a COVID-19 rapid-response effort, which raised and granted funds to provide emergency food, shelter, cash assistance, and other support to communities hit hardest by COVID-19. Launched

in less than a week, the fund primarily served Black and Latinx communities, older adults, individuals with disabilities, undocumented community members, and people experiencing homelessness, housing instability, or wage loss. Over \$35 million went to 432 organizations.

Hosted by the Silicon Valley Community Foundation, the COVID-19 Regional Response Fund has provided over \$20 million to trusted lead partner organizations in the 10-county Bay Area region. The fund provides operating grants to lead agencies that have deep roots in the community.

New York Community Trust managed the NYC COVID-19 Response and Impact Fund, which moved funds quickly to nonprofits. In 2020, the fund raised \$110 million from 1,300 donations, giving out 760 grants to New York City nonprofits. Grants supported social service organizations to react to spikes in demand, arts organizations to adopt virtual operations, homeless students to learn remotely, and healthcare workers to develop telemedicine capacity. In 2021, the Emergency Fund continued to raise and distribute funding for rebuilding and recovery from the pandemic.

Major and Smaller Donors

In the U.S. there is a long tradition of locally based major donors contributing significantly to natural disasters. Recently, this local giving has focused on COVID-19, wildfires and hurricane response. Forbes reports that of the 2,000+ billionaires around the globe, 77 have given to emergency response over the last two years. Fifty-four have disclosed giving amounts, with 23 giving unspecified amounts or providing assistance in supplies and equipment.

Examples of major donor giving include Michael Dell's \$36 million gift to Hurricane Harvey

recovery in Texas; Michael Bloomberg's \$74.5 million contribution to COVID-19 aid; Steve Ballmer's \$25 million toward COVID-19 response efforts; and Jeff Bezos' \$100 million gift to food banks. Several Indian businessmen, including industrialist Gautam Adani and others, have given tens of millions to COVID response in India. Tech billionaire Yuri Milner recently announced a gift of \$100 million to help Ukrainian refugees.



**Major Donor Spotlight:
Yuri and Julia Milner**

Yuri and Julia Milner's \$100 million pledge to aid Ukrainian refugees is going toward Tech for Refugees; a partnership between the Milner's Breakthrough Prize Foundation, Airbnb, Spotify, and Flexport.org. Russian-born Yuri Milner is not without controversy. Leaked documents revealed that in 2017 he used funds from Kremlin-controlled banks to invest in Facebook and Twitter. He has since sold his shares in both companies.

Individual small-dollar donors play an exceptionally significant role in humanitarian aid, which is somewhat unusual compared with other philanthropic concerns, where the ratio of giving from small donors is much less. According to Indiana University's Women's Philanthropy Institute, one-third of U.S. households gave money directly to charitable organizations, other individuals or businesses for COVID emergency response in the first 18 months of the pandemic. Even with the economic insecurity driven by the pandemic, people in the U.S. continued to donate

money. Online platforms have become extremely popular for this type of giving.

Intermediaries and Associations

U.N. agencies and INGOs serve as important intermediaries in the humanitarian aid space. UNICEF, UNHCR, and the World Food Program are leading U.N. intermediary agencies for aid. Large INGO intermediaries include Oxfam, International Rescue Committee (IRC), Direct Relief, CARE, Mercy Corps and AmeriCares, amongst others. These organizations have staffing and internal teams that respond directly to global emergencies, as well as the capacity to regrant funds to local partner organizations, medical facilities and civil society.

In 2018, Oxfam's total expenditure was slightly over \$1 billion, working with partners to reach 20 million people with humanitarian and development programs. IRC expenditure was \$718 million in 2017 working with local organizations and civil society in 40 countries and 26 U.S. cities. Direct Relief distributed in-kind donated medical products worth over \$2 billion and \$170 million in cash to 80 countries and 50 states. In 2020, CARE distributed \$300 million and assisted 12 million

people through disaster relief efforts. Mercy Corps, with a budget of \$435 million, worked across 40 countries and reached 37 million people in crisis. Americares used \$60 million to aid emergency response in California, Louisiana, Haiti and Lebanon.

There are currently not many place-based intermediaries in this sector headquartered in developing nations, and those that exist find it challenging to survive and scale given consolidation trends. Experts IP interviewed noted that more place-based, locally rooted intermediaries need support through start-up and growth stages.

There are several funder affinity groups that play important coordinating roles, and some also distribute funds. The [Center for Disaster Philanthropy](#) provides a hands-on way for foundations, corporations and wealthy individuals to deploy their money more strategically and effectively when disaster strikes. It is the only full-time resource dedicated to helping donors maximize their impact through resources, community-driven grantmaking and philanthropic consulting services.

[Peace and Security Funders Group](#) convenes and supports a community of funders to build a more peaceful, just and equitable world. PSFG has a Peace and Security Funding Map which tracks funders by geography, level of investment, and grantees. [Human Rights Funders Network](#) is an association of funders in the Global South, East and North dedicated to resourcing human rights action around the world. HRFN identifies five priority areas with the potential to create necessary change in the current funding landscape. These include intersectionality, racial justice, closing civic space, the global funding ecosystem, and climate justice.

Intermediary Spotlight



PSFG
PEACE & SECURITY FUNDERS GROUP

PSFG has been supporting global peace and security efforts since it was founded in 2000. To date, it has awarded over 53,000 grants valued at \$4.5 billion to nearly 11,000 recipients around the world. PSFG member organizations include a number of funders including Ploughshares Fund, Arca Foundation, Foundation for Middle East Peace and many more.

Fundraising Now

It is an unavoidable truth that when more humanitarian crises are in the news, more charitable dollars flow to organizations dedicated to relief efforts. It will never be enough to handle the need, but it does bolster organizations' operating budgets. IP recently spoke to four charities—three well-established NGOs and one newer organization—to learn how they are communicating with existing and potential donors to differentiate themselves from the throng of compelling causes.

The COVID pandemic has indelibly altered the playing field. The pandemic catapulted relief needs into the headlines, and that attention translated into more donors and more dollars.

World Vision's chief financial officer, Doug Treff, said the pandemic increased donors' empathy for the challenges facing the world's most vulnerable. The shared struggle, he said, caused the organization's donors to look out for others and help where they could, which led many to give much larger gifts than in previous years.

Founded in 1950 by missionary Robert Pierce, World Vision says it's the largest international Christian nongovernmental organization. In fiscal year 2021, it raised \$1.3 billion. For the last two years, World Vision has held virtual events to help churches learn about child sponsorship opportunities — a key component of World Vision's mission. Treff said, "As restrictions ease, we anticipate a return to events in churches and with other key partners."

Sarah Taylor Peace, chief revenue officer at CARE, also said that when the issue you're fundraising for

is in the news, the job is easier. Since the pandemic, CARE is expanding and delivering programs on the domestic front for the first time. "We are taking our learnings from the world and applying them to the U.S.," she said.

The venerable 77-year-old global organization CARE was founded in the aftermath of World War II, and brought 22 charities together as a "cooperative for American remittances to Europe," delivering packages of essentials to the war-torn continent. In fiscal year 2021, CARE saw a 19% increase in revenue over the previous year. The organization had its largest year ever, raising \$732 million. CARE anticipates another big jump for fiscal year 2022, which ends in June.

Ourania Dionysiou, vice president of international philanthropy and partnerships at the International Rescue Committee, also found that the pandemic inspired the private sector to step up quickly. "Adapting to the emergency, which was difficult for all, gave us solidarity as an organization both as an institution and a group of humans," she said. IRC started in 1933 at the behest of Albert Einstein, himself a refugee, to aid Germans suffering under Hitler. In fiscal year 2021, IRC raised \$980 million.

Before the pandemic, IRC regularly brought major donors into the field. "Now, we bring the programs to the donors by doing digital adaptations of everything," Dionysiou said. "We conduct virtual field trips, send program voices to donors, and have virtual events. While there were a few tech hiccups at the beginning, now, it is second nature. All are successful." Early in the pandemic, IRC also expanded its digital marketing efforts, netting a 21% increase in online giving in 2020. While it may seem counterintuitive to solicit when people are losing their jobs and feeling uncertain, they were

also stuck at home and looking for ways to support others less fortunate during the crisis, Dionysiou said.

The newest organization IP spoke with, Team Rubicon, tweaked its communications tactics, too, increasing email outreach, launching a biweekly livestream with leadership, as well as a monthly e-newsletter, and bringing donors “into the field” – virtually—using volunteer-recorded video updates targeted to the project’s donors. Team Rubicon was created in 2010 by military veterans who wanted to use their recent overseas experiences to help people affected by disasters. The organization had its largest year yet in 2021, generating \$41 million.

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“The need for philanthropic attention to natural and manmade disasters often eclipses the long-term proactive vision for organizations.”

—Fundraiser, Frederick, Maryland

Team Rubicon looks forward to outlasting its major fundraising challenge, which is gaining traction in a field full of older, more well-established names. For example, during a disaster in the U.S., Team Rubicon knows that everyone has knowledge of or experience with organizations like the Red Cross. “We’re not going to compete with them,” CEO Art delaCruz said. “As a matter of fact, we work complementary to them and recently announced a partnership with them.”

Adapting tactics amidst shifting donor pools. The most common pandemic challenge for these charities was one experienced by fundraisers across all fields—cultivating new, high-end donors, which traditionally requires in-person contact and relationship-building, which was definitely more difficult. However, for these particular

organizations, even if their goals weren’t met with regard to bringing in new donors, the amount raised by donors already in the fold more than made up the difference. An ongoing challenge, though, is converting new pandemic/emergency donors into loyal, long-term donors.

While World Vision does receive large grants in the multimillion-dollar range, its most visible efforts are dedicated to bringing in modest, individual gifts. Its keystone is child-sponsorship programs, which begin at \$39 a month. World Vision’s gift catalog, through which donors can fund goats, chickens, ducks and other animals for a child in another country, has a big footprint on its website and in promotional materials, but Treff said that the “catalog and other mail donations make up less than 15% of revenue. Slightly more than half of our revenue from individuals comes from the monthly sponsorships.” In terms of World Vision’s whole revenue pie, 40% comes from individuals, about 30% from government and multinationals, and about 25% as in-kind corporate donations. Most recently, Treff added, the mix is shifting slightly, with corporate donations decreasing somewhat as major donations grow.

At CARE, Peace credits the organization’s 21% growth in donors over the last two years to a quick and strategic retooling of its planned 75th-anniversary campaign into its Crisis Response Campaign. She also credits her team’s agility in changing tactics to meet donors where they are: Most substituted in-person meetings with one-on-one video calls and thank-you messages. They also delivered impact updates to donors by video instead of taking them to the field. In its last fiscal year, CARE’s revenue sources were roughly equally divided among U.S. government and bilateral institutional funders, major donors, family

foundations and private donations, with the latter category increasing 50% compared to fiscal year 2021. Peace said that people often give modest amounts during their lifetimes, but then leave sizable estate gifts.

At Team Rubicon, monthly donors are called the “support squad.” They often engage through the organization’s blog and social media, which feature testimonials from the disaster victims who were helped and the volunteers who helped them. At the beginning of the pandemic, Team Rubicon’s donor count declined. But by the end of 2021, it had 10% more donors than in 2019, with revenue from corporate and foundation donors growing by more than 30%. Forty percent of its current revenue comes from individuals, while 60% comes from corporations and foundations.

Until recently, Team Rubicon conducted individual fundraising campaigns for each disaster or relief event. Now in its 12th year, it has moved to general fundraising to support the organization and its readiness. “We know there will always be another storm or earthquake,” delaCruz said. “We’re asking people to make investments in training the ‘standing army’ of veteran volunteers... to provide effective relief when the time comes.” For example, it might take \$200 and five sessions to learn how to use a chainsaw properly for debris removal, he said. “That’s our appeal—help prepare this volunteer to help people on the worst day of their life.”

Hybrid online/in-person events for the foreseeable future. For these charities, the switch to online galas at the start of COVID has evolved into a hybrid strategy combining online and in-person events. For example, Team Rubicon runs a major social media and email-driven fundraising campaign for Veterans Day, combined with nationwide corporate speaking engagements for employees who are veterans. It also holds a Salute to Service gala in New York City, where it has a strong donor base that generates 10% of its annual revenue. While the gala was virtual in 2020, it was held as a hybrid function, in person as well as online, on November 11, 2021. New York’s clear COVID protocols made the city an ideal location, delaCruz says.

IRC evolved its New York City-based annual gala into a virtual, and now hybrid, event. “We leaned into historical partners, such as the Ford Foundation and Africa Center, to host smaller, in-person dinners simultaneously, adapting the experience and keeping supporters connected,” Dionysiou said.

CARE also will continue to hold its Impact Awards dinner gala as a hybrid event. Peace says the team was delightfully surprised when the two digital-only versions of the dinner, in 2020 and 2021, both surpassed fundraising targets while attracting new audiences who were able to watch online. In 2022, while resuming an in-person event in November,



“We know there will always be another storm or earthquake. We’re asking people to make investments in training the ‘standing army’ of veteran volunteers...to provide effective relief when the time comes. That’s our appeal—help prepare this volunteer to help people on the worst day of their life.”

—Art delaCruz, CEO, Team Rubicon

CARE will also keep digital elements, and, the team hopes, its newer and more widely dispersed audiences.

Small tweaks make a big difference. While Giving Tuesday has come to feel like a matter of obligation for some nonprofits, for World Vision, it is a critical fundraising strategy. In 2021, World Vision leveraged a \$1 million cash match to drive \$2.4 million in revenue, primarily from existing donors, and primarily through social media.

For Team Rubicon, volunteers are regarded as the organization's biggest asset. The fact that those volunteers are veterans (as well as EMTs, firefighters and other first responders) is a hallmark of its brand. By volunteering with Team Rubicon, veterans get community, connections, identity, purpose and a clear-cut mission of helping people on their worst day, delaCruz said. "We are the first North American nonprofit to receive the WHO EMT Type 1 classification, which gives us enormous credibility with ministries who need aid. It tells them we can do the job."

One of the biggest pandemic challenges for many organizations was transitioning core functions to remote online management. IRC had a tremendous advantage thanks to the proprietary cloud-based system it developed in collaboration with Microsoft, which launched in 2019. The system handles all communications and messaging functions, incoming donation processing, as well as IRC's actual delivery of financial assistance to its partners. The system was up and running in 33 countries in 2020 before the pandemic.

Many Unknowns in the Ukraine Crisis. Team Rubicon's delaCruz says that a crisis is a moment either to innovate or wither, saying, "In the fall of

2020, it was vaccines; in August 2021, it was Afghanistan; and now, it's Ukraine, so we continue to evolve as communities' needs change."

CARE's Peace pointed to another moment of national crisis. She said, "We were on the ground helping after the earthquake in Haiti in 20 minutes. We have been in these countries and stay through thick and thin and have deep roots in the communities. In turbulent times, if you can meet the moment and have resources that are relevant, then donors across the board are generous. We are seeing that right now with our Ukraine appeal."

Fundraiser Spotlight



An emerging area of collaboration for humanitarian groups is gaming companies and sites like Gamers Without Borders, which contributed over \$20 million for COVID-19 relief and vaccine distribution. Gamers Without Borders' 2022 Esports festival features a \$10 million prize fund which will be donated to Direct Relief, IMC, UNICEF, Gavi, and UNHCR

Treff at World Vision described Ukraine as a "wild card," saying the organization remains optimistic that its donors will continue to respond to crises no matter where in the world they occur. IRC's Dionysiou also said donations are rolling in, but her team doesn't really know where the Ukraine situation will take the organization, and that it makes her personally sad. She added, "In terms of fundraising dollars, yet again, we will exceed our goals. It is bittersweet."

An Analysis of Opportunities & Challenges

Some of the opportunities and challenges for funders that IP's analysis has identified are closely related to crisis relief organizations' revenue ratios, the big issues they continue to face and the mostly positive funding trends that are happening, but more slowly than many would prefer. Others are factors within the operating environment over which funders have relatively little control, but which could be places to seek leverage or slight movement of the needle.

Reduced faith in governments and the U.N.

COVID-19 is a global crisis, but some hopeful prognosticators asserted that it could also serve as the shock that leads to transformative change — a rethinking of economic and social systems and structures that reduces inequality and reintroduces a global commitment and solidarity to addressing the world's biggest challenges including climate change and long-term conflict. So far, the trend lines don't look positive. Multilateral political efforts have stagnated and haven't produced the solidarity and vision necessary to address the pandemic, worsening climate change, or most recently, the outbreak of war in Ukraine. In reality, the global community seems to be moving backward in time with cold war nodes of power reemerging and solidifying.

Overall, there is reduced faith and trust in government leadership and U.N. structures. Pandemic recovery is still looking extremely uneven, fragile and fragmented between countries and regions. Progressive governments, with their commitment to international cooperation, have shown leadership coordinating around the pandemic and Ukrainian war. But it isn't clear how

long this collaboration will stand up to rising authoritarian regimes. In the short term, the economic forecast in a world reeling from the pandemic and energy impacts of the Eurasian war is troubling for most nations.

Deeper integration of humanitarian response and development aid.

To see positive change come out of this, social movements and civil society organizations working at global, regional and national levels, along with humanitarian aid leaders, are going to have to play a very active role in demanding effective reform and action. In particular, the humanitarian aid and development actors need to collaborate and cooperate in fuller and deeper ways to build out and interweave programs and initiatives that address and overcome root causes of disasters and conflicts, positioning the world to become more equitable and fairer. The Ukrainian war and its energy and fossil fuel connections specifically open up the possibility to demand immediate investment in clean energy to supply markets that are struggling to meet demand.

Harnessing the power of multilateral development banks.

While the government-led multilateral space has become less visible and effective, COVID-19 and the Ukrainian war have highlighted the growing power and strength of multilateral development banks (MDBs). The engagement level of MDBs is already massive in scale. From April 2020 to June 2021, MBDs deployed \$160 billion to fight the pandemic's health, economic and social impacts. In the first six weeks of the Ukraine conflict, the World Bank disbursed almost \$1 billion. Development experts are actively calling for the MDBs to be replenished

rapidly and at much higher levels than before. The development sector is pushing MDBs to reimagine their mandates to roll out new, expanded funding strategies supporting COVID-19 recovery, the Paris Climate Agenda and the SDGs. This is a moment and an opportunity, bank advocates say, to link a recovery from COVID-19 and the war in Europe to a series of investments in infrastructure and technologies to address global inequities in a clean and sustainable way.

It's unclear what the future looks like with these super-charged multilateral banks leading global development. Will they be able to help align governments and address growing inequalities, discord, and a rapidly worsening environment? Social and economic justice advocates are skeptical, as international financial institutions and their instruments have not been known historically for effectively addressing global inequality and the lived challenges of society's most marginalized. How global multilateral leadership and financing plays out will have enormous impact on the humanitarian aid landscape and emergency needs moving forward. Private philanthropy can support efforts to monitor these actors and hold them to account for addressing climate, health and conflict challenges.

Transformation of the humanitarian aid sector. Humanitarian assistance remains a critical part of today's global architecture and safety net. Humanitarian assistance strives to save lives, reduce suffering, and protect human dignity in times of extreme crisis. The era of mega-crises requires the sector to honestly examine itself. These efforts demand difficult discussions, tough decisions and sustained focus and energy within donor institutions, U.N. agencies and NGO leadership at all levels. Roles and relationships must

be reimaged and the sector must move beyond debate to concrete and practical reform.

While private philanthropy has not historically played a huge role in global humanitarian assistance, today is a moment when the private donor community could lean in to play a critical role in supporting transformation in the sector. Foundations can act more flexibly and often take more risk than governments. Philanthropy can also fund proof-of-concept projects, capacity strengthening and upskilling, localizing efforts, and unique constellations and partnerships across sectors and geographies—often areas that governments struggle to fund.

Issue Spotlight: Multilateral Funding and Ukraine

Some experts fear that swift fulfillment of significant UN funding appeals for humanitarian aid in Ukraine are detracting from other ongoing global humanitarian crises. In an interview for Deutsche Welle, Jeroen Kwakkenbos, senior aid policy advisor at Oxfam said, "It's not to diminish the cost on human lives ... but the amount of resources and attention that is being pushed towards Ukraine is not the same as other crises..." Main concerns are government donors reallocating aid budgets or delaying funding approvals for other humanitarian crises. While countries like Spain, Netherlands and France announced new funding vehicles for Ukrainian aid, others like Norway and Denmark are using existing humanitarian aid budgets. The likely outcomes of this practice are the delay or cancellation of other crisis response programs.

These funding approaches, uncovered in interviews, are particularly important to transforming today's humanitarian landscape:

- Flexibility—addressing prioritized needs and centering local leadership.
- Looking forward—providing rapid-response monies before crises happen.
- Multi-year grants—enabling support for preparedness and resiliency efforts, as well as immediate response. Limiting one-off grantmaking.
- Low threshold grants—providing fast support, limiting unnecessary requirements.
- Cash as aid—shifting agency to impacted people to choose their own priorities.
- Intersectional approaches—recognizing the complexity of crises.
- Community-rooted, place-based intermediaries—using groups that are closest to the ground.
- Patient support—enabling humanitarian start-ups in regional, national and local contexts to grow and thrive.
- Upskilling—investing in local leadership and responder skills.
- Inclusive and transparent—targeting those most impacted.
- Coordination—working with humanitarian donors and ratcheting up outreach to funders from other sectors, including development, rights, health and education.
- Localization plans and budget—ensuring inclusion in grant review and decision-making.
- Metrics—recognizing that the cost of saving lives in complex settings can be significant, and the rate of return on investment cannot be measured in the same way as other investments.

Given the escalating pace of global emergencies and disasters, donors have a responsibility to step up, moving as quickly and creatively as possible to support implementing actors to strategize, govern and respond in transformed ways. The humanitarian aid space that includes private donors, the U.N. and NGOs increasingly recognizes that the people best suited to respond to emergencies are those closest to them. Now is the time to put these words into action, to sustain efforts that save lives and build a culture and commitment to equity and inclusion.

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“Donors also need to consider what long term really means. They need to stick with organizations longer and make multi year commitments so organizations can plan and adjust without spending all their time dialing for dollars or explaining necessary adjustments. This work is not rocket science and does not need to be made more complicated. The key question a donor should ask is “how can I be useful?”

—Foundation professional, Rockland, Maine

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[Alima, The Alliance for International Medical Action](#)

[Disaster Philanthropy Playbook](#)

[Gamers Without Borders](#)

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[Start Small](#) (Jack Dorsey giving spreadsheet)

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¹Based on available grantmaker data from Candid. Excludes federal funding and funding by higher education institutions

Feedback?

The State of American Philanthropy is an ongoing project. Each SAP brief will be updated periodically to integrate new information, additional data and evolving perspectives. This brief was originally posted to Inside Philanthropy in June 2020. It has not yet been updated. If you have comments or information you'd like to share with us, please email us at managingeditor@insidephilanthropy.com.