

Corporate Peer Discussions Financial Services Industry Response During COVID-19 **Summary of Best Practices on Corporate Response**

Virtual convenings held on April 22, 2020

Convening Organizations: ACCP, CECP, COF, and POL

Association of Corporate Citizenship Professionals (ACCP), Council on Foundations (COF), Chief Executives for Corporate Purpose (CECP), and Points of Light (POL), which collectively represent more than 400 of the most socially and environmentally responsible global companies, are joining forces to support leaders of corporate purpose and to advocate for the field by convening dialogue on relevant solutions and to share best practices. While some companies are still assessing their response, we have already seen hundreds of corporations respond to the COVID-19 crisis with courage and determination. Their leadership sets an example for the sector to follow. In the sessions on the Financial Services Industry's Response During COVID-19, 26 member companies participated.

Key Themes and Best Practices

Companies in the Financial Industry, including Banks/Service institutions and Insurance companies, have responded to support their employees, customers, and communities during the COVID-19 crisis.

Supporting Employees

- Companies have closed bank branches and are working virtually to support the health and wellbeing of employees. Companies are investing in work from home equipment for employees to work securely and efficiently virtually and communicating via Slack Channels, SharePoint, Microsoft Teams, Facebook pages for employees, Campaigns on internal portals, etc. to adjust to the virtual environment.
- Most of the participating companies pledged no layoffs for a period of time (through 2020, for example).
- Despite branch closures, many financial institutions have increased workflow with the processing of customer loan requests and have had to redirect resources and staffing to support this demand.
- Companies are activating their Employee Relief Funds to support employees facing hardships.
- At most companies, counseling services are available 24/7 to employees.
- Some have increased minimum wage or made a one-time payment to non-exempt employees.
- Others are adjusting benefits to support employees, such as changing short term disability plans and providing additional time for caring for other family members.
- Bereavement donation programs are being created for families of employees who have been affected by COVID-19. These may provide funds to the family or donations in honor of the employee to a charity of the family's choosing. Companies are also supporting virtual memorials.
- Some companies have set aside funds to support wages and benefits to cafeteria and custodians employed through a third-party vendor. Companies are being creative to find ways to keep them employed (i.e. making meals that then are delivered through Meals on Wheels).
- Companies that typically provide meals to their employees are offering food service (pre-packaged, social distance drive up meals pickup) to employees at a discounted rate.

Supporting Customers and Small Businesses

- Financial institutions play a vital role in helping process stimulus payments digitally, are working with nonprofits to quickly set up payouts to individuals at scale, and are processing Small Business Association Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loans as well as loans to others outside of that program.

- Companies are providing delayed payment without penalties, waiving fees to cash stimulus checks and providing seminars on money habits.
- Insurance companies are providing shelter in place paybacks for insurance policies and extending personal coverage for those delivering food or medicine, as well as offering free bereavement services.
- Additional measures include:
 - o Providing contact-less payments and banking wherever possible.
 - o Using proceeds from the Paycheck Protection Program to support nonprofits or small businesses and CDFIs which play a vital role in expanding access to safe and affordable products and services to low-income communities and communities of color.
 - o Live Oak Bank set up a team to work with nonprofits on the PPP program and encouraged other companies on the call to refer nonprofits to their program. See details: <http://go.liveoakbank.com/Live-Oak-Bank-Paycheck-Protection-Program-Nonprofit-Outreach>
 - o Companies are offering webinars for entrepreneurs on how best to use PPP loans.
 - o Financial companies are providing loans for companies looking to refurbish factories to manufacture PPE.

Philanthropic Response

- Financial institutions quickly pledged millions of dollars locally and nationally to increase medical response and capacity, fund medical research, address food insecurity and housing, address small business relief efforts, and boost learning access during school closures, with a focus on vulnerable populations.
- NY Life and Cigna [joined together for a fundraising campaign](#) to raise \$100M in a “Brave of Heart” campaign to support frontline workers in New York.
- In line with the [Council on Foundations Pledge](#) signed by many funders in light of COVID-19, many companies are reaching out to current grantees to shift funds to direct operating support and accelerating funding. If companies agreed to sponsor an event, they are maintaining that commitment.
- Companies with financial platforms are helping nonprofits to set up COVID-19 fundraising campaigns.
- Additional areas of focus include support for victims of domestic violence during the quarantine.
- Many companies are encouraging employees to donate to nonprofits and increasing the corporate match to nonprofits addressing the COVID-19 pandemic (matches are increasing, in some cases to 3:1).

Shift to Recovery and Rebuilding

- Companies are re-thinking their approaches to grantmaking for the medium and long-term as COVID-19 shifts to recovery mode. One company had planned to focus on a few large partners but instead will be doing smaller grants to a larger number of organizations due to the broad community needs.
- IDEO [created a challenge](#) for how businesses can pivot in response to COVID. Companies can consider helping to fund the solution-building that comes out of this challenge.
- Financial companies know there are tremendous needs in many communities and are looking at grants that deal with the broad set of challenges facing nonprofits across all issue areas.
- Focus will be on community resilience and recovery and the health and stability of organizations.
- Companies are leveraging the expertise of their employees to provide thought leadership for forums such as small business associations and chambers of commerce on virtual panels and presentations on the state of the economy, nonprofit lending, etc.
- Some companies are preparing for Giving Tuesday Now for COVID-19 relief on May 5, 2020.

Educational Programming

- Companies with programs and partnerships in financial literacy or education are accelerating a transition to online classes and working on internet accessibility and remote learning resources.

- One company has set up an IT helpdesk for educators and teachers needing help transitioning to virtual learning platforms.

Inclusion and Diversity Lens

- Philanthropic responses to COVID-19 are placing attention on vulnerable populations most affected and focusing on equity and the intersections of poverty and race.
- Companies are being careful to frame their employee engagement through an inclusion lens as they provide COVID-education and resources for working from home.
- D&I staff and HR teams are actively engaging remotely with diversity networks to be aware of conversations. ERGs are hosting virtual lunches and ERGs can help identify communities and nonprofit organizations that are the most impacted by COVID-19.
- Companies need to make sure not to assume all of their employees are in a position to help others, some are in need of support themselves.
- Companies are seeing the value of creating group experiences with families and colleagues amid virtual work. This could take the form of doing a volunteer project at the same time with a virtual room open, or taking advantage of virtual tours of museums with a curator, at home Earth Day projects, etc.
- One company has a program to “adopt” co-workers; check in with 3 people they don’t work directly with.
- Companies can co-advocate on anti-discrimination issues due to COVID-19 (ex. joint statements against discrimination against Asian-Americans).
- Companies are leveraging engagement champion teams across the company to promote community.

Employee Assistance Funds (EAFs):

While companies are first looking to help employees by connecting them to relief through government programs and measures available through the core business, EAFs are being activated for COVID-19. EAFs allow a company to make a grant to individual employees in order to alleviate personal hardship. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, some companies are:

- **Expanding eligibility and accessibility** of EAFs by waiving requirements for employment for more than 1 year. Companies are also providing flexibility by waiving documentation requirements for grants of \$500 or \$1,000 and by creating a weblink rather than intranet application, for example.
- **Increasing available funds:** with more demand for assistance, companies are seeking to add funds by making corporate donations into the fund. While being sensitive of asking too much of employees at this time, some companies are running a donation drive for employee contributions into the fund and matching those funds (or increasing the match). Some companies also allow for donation of unused Paid Time Off (PTO) into the fund, valued at the day rate of that employee’s salary.
- **Relief Grant Amounts:** The most common cap cited was \$1,500 per employee for the COVID-19 program. Within that, there may be varying tiers of support due to an employee’s situation. This amount is likely based off of the federal relief checks of \$1,200 person and is lower than employee relief caps most commonly cited on the calls for natural disasters, which typically max out at \$5,000.
- **In-House or External:** Companies can either manage the Employee Relief Funds internally or use an outside vendor. While there are many vendors, the most commonly cited vendors on the peer-to-peer calls were [E4E Relief](#) and [Emergency Assistance Foundation](#). The primary reason why companies decide to outsource the management of these funds is to rely on the expertise in the complexity of the funds and minimize the administrative burden on staff. Using a third party also eliminates the risk for self-dealing for corporate foundations. For those companies that manage the funds in-house, it can be a full-time job for a team of 3-4 people to process requests, in partnership with HR.

Virtual Volunteerism:

- April is National Volunteer Month, and a time of year when many companies ramp up their service events. Employees have a passion to respond to the crisis by using their innovation and passion for good; some are asking for virtual opportunities and others are self-mobilizing, such as using 3D printers to make masks. The mental and emotional benefits of volunteerism are powerful in this time of social distancing.
- It is also Earth Day, which lends itself to big hands-on volunteer events which are now canceled. Providing kid-friendly projects are especially popular with so many families with children home from school.
- Virtual volunteerism can provide safe opportunities to volunteer in areas such as capacity building, financial capability work, thanking donors, fundraising, digital transformation, tech infrastructure, mobile resources, visiting with elderly virtually, etc. IT workers can help nonprofits and educators adjust to virtual learning.
- Many companies are providing employees with lists of curated virtual volunteer opportunities, drawing from resources such as Points of Light's list of [resources for virtual volunteer opportunities](#).
- While virtual volunteerism isn't new, it is a dynamic area that is developing rapidly. Local volunteer opportunities have been well-received as a meaningful opportunity to make an impact. To that end, corporate volunteer teams across regions are sharing knowledge and best practices with each other.
- Many employees, working from home and seeing immediate needs in their community, have a desire to help neighbors, family, or their local community; in response, some companies are removing the 501c3 requirement for service time so that employees could use their Volunteer Time Off (VTO) time flexibly. *An example of an addendum to a Volunteer policy can be found at the end of this summary.*
- Companies are leveraging their robust pro bono programs for legal service related to COVID-19 and also to assist local governments with updating legacy systems. Employees can also help nonprofits re-tool and re-think their business models with process engineering and business planning.
- At this time, companies can connect board members with board leadership experts to provide guidance on how to support nonprofits at a time of crisis and provide training for employees to serve on boards.

ESG Strategy

- Financial companies are thinking about how to incorporate COVID factors into their long-term policies and ESG reporting in areas such as travel (what is "essential"), procurement (supporting small partners), environment (managing climate risk), and corporate giving (prepare for disasters, form strategic partnerships with NGOs, and empower employees to donate, volunteer, work pro bono).

COVID-19 Resources from each partnering organization:

- ACCP: [COVID-19 Resources for Corporate Citizenship Professionals](#)
- CECP: COVID-19 Resources [Recap for CEOs](#) and [Recap for CR Leaders](#)
- COF: [COVID-19 Resource Hub](#)
- POL: [COVID-19 Action Plan](#)

Sample COVID-19 Community Service Hours Addendum:

We're taking steps to encourage you to continue to support your community by lifting restrictions on 501(c)3 requirements for volunteer hours. That means that any volunteering in support of your community can go towards your allotted 16 paid hours and unpaid volunteer hours.

Here's what qualifies:

- General "good deeds" for neighbors in need, including running errands, purchasing groceries, and picking up prescriptions for neighbors, seniors, and those who may be high risk that you're connected with.
- Providing lessons to seniors or children over Skype, FaceTime, or any other virtual platform.
 - Lessons must be free of charge.
 - Lessons can be provided to those who live with and are caring for an individual that is susceptible to becoming sick.
 - Lessons can be provided to families with children who are working from home while providing childcare simultaneously as schools are closed.
- Making masks for health care workers, essential employees or others in the community, as long as the masks are donated directly to organizations or individuals.

Please refer to the following examples to support yourself in determining whether or not your activities qualify:

- In normal circumstances, you're a reading volunteer and now with shelter in place orders, you're reading with your neighbor's children over Skype.
- In normal circumstances, you're a Second Harvest Food Bank volunteer and now you're picking up groceries for your elderly uncle.
- In normal circumstances, you're a financial education volunteer and now you're delivering financial education programming virtually to young students while schools are closed.
- In normal circumstances, you're leading a cooking class through the food bank and now you've connected with community members virtually to teach nutrition and cooking from your home kitchen.

Please Note: When volunteering, please practice social distancing and follow CDC guidelines.