

Writing Sample

Excerpted from:

“Money and Giving: New Principles for Fundraising and Philanthropy”

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Setting a Precedent for Unprecedented Giving

By Jeana Caporelli

“Unprecedented giving” surrounding crises and upheaval in the United States is not quite so unprecedented. At the start of the millennium, it’s estimated that 66% of American households contributed to organizations providing relief to people affected by the 9/11 attacks in 2001 or those affected by Hurricane Katrina in 2005. In a very short period of time, Americans came together to raise billions of dollars — \$2.8 billion for 9/11, \$5.3 billion for Katrina relief.¹ Years on, in the face of a global pandemic, economic uncertainty, and a reckoning regarding race and inequality, Americans continued to give.

The year 2020 saw the intersection of many crises. The disproportionate effect of COVID-19 on Black and Brown Americans is plain. Black Americans are 2.8 times more likely than White Americans to be hospitalized due to COVID-19. Latinx Americans and Native Americans are 3 times and 3.4 times, respectively, as likely as Whites to be hospitalized.² Less than three months following the shutdown of several states in order to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 — on May 25th, 2020, George Floyd was murdered at the hands of Minneapolis police. Floyd’s killing proved to be a tipping point. It came at the heels of the nation seeing the disproportionate impact the virus had on Black and Brown communities. Floyd’s death was followed in quick succession by a series of other police killings and racially-motivated hate crimes. These events proved to be a catalyst for record-breaking giving

¹ https://money.cnn.com/2011/09/06/news/economy/katrina_donations_911/index.htm

² <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/covid-data/investigations-discovery/hospitalization-death-by-race-ethnicity.html>

toward bail funds, Black-led advocacy groups, and directly to the families of victims of police brutality as Americans continue to demand a reckoning in response to 400 years of systemic racism. However, even an unprecedented amount of small dollar donations will not create the structural change that is necessary to heal this country.

The inequities reinforced and showcased by the COVID-19 pandemic led to appeals from Americans to corporations and the “one percent” to help bridge the gap between what aid the government was willing to provide, and what the most underserved communities require. The company JPMorgan Chase pledged \$30 billion dollars over the next five years to provide economic support to Black and Brown communities.³ Philanthropist Mackenzie Scott pledged \$586 million dollars to champion racial justice causes in the US, focusing on smaller colleges and HBCUs.⁴ The government’s inability to provide adequate aid to the communities hit hardest by COVID-19 has led to the resurgence of hundreds of mutual aid groups across the US. Mutual aid groups have long been deeply rooted in the community and provide necessary and targeted care to those who are underserved by the government.⁵ However, we must not forget about the role of government in ensuring the public good. Yves Voltaire, a Harlemitte who runs a community fridge, framed the goals of mutual aid programs succinctly: “We’re not looking to necessarily put a Band-Aid on these major crises that are in front of us, it’s about building the world we want to see.”⁶ Our governments have an equal role and greater responsibility in this process as the keepers of law and justice. Money alone is not the solution.

³ www.jpmorganchase.com/news-stories/jpmc-commits-30-billion-to-advance-racial-equity

⁴ www.mackenzie-scott.medium.com/116-organizations-driving-change-67354c6d733d

⁵ thecity.nyc/life/2021/1/4/22202979/nyc-mutual-aid-groups-covid-head-into-2021-with-expanded-mission

⁶ <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/03/nyregion/covid-19-mutual-aid-nyc.html>