

# GREATER HOUSTON COVID-19 RECOVERY FUND

A collaborative effort of United Way of Greater Houston  
& Greater Houston Community Foundation



GREATER  
HOUSTON  
COMMUNITY  
FOUNDATION



United Way of Greater Houston

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A LETTER FROM CEOS AMANDA MCMILLIAN & STEPHEN MAISLIN

To our community,

United Way of Greater Houston and Greater Houston Community Foundation stood together to support those in our community who have been impacted by COVID-19 and the resulting economic crisis. In March 2020, we established the Greater Houston COVID-19 Recovery Fund to ensure the most vulnerable in our community affected by COVID-19 have access to food, health care, shelter, and other basic necessities to sustain them in this crisis.

Nearly one million households in Greater Houston’s four-county region were living on the economic edge or in poverty before the pandemic. Due to the widespread economic and health impacts of COVID-19, that figure increased by hundreds of thousands. With the closing of public spaces, schools, and workplaces, many low-wage workers who have been living paycheck to paycheck continue to experience unprecedented financial hardship. Families are struggling to survive, especially vulnerable population groups that have been disproportionately impacted by job losses and are grieving the loss of a loved one. The pandemic has also jeopardized vital community resources such as public education, health care, housing, and the demand for affordable child care and emergency food assistance has increased exponentially.

The Greater Houston COVID-19 Recovery Fund set out to make the greatest impact with the funds entrusted to us. It was clear that no one fund or organization could answer needs of this magnitude – it takes public and private sectors working together and it is ongoing.

We have received donations of all sizes from foundations, individuals, and companies, and we thank everyone who has answered this urgent call for help in our community – every gift counts. We would like to offer special thanks to Houston Endowment for their lead gift of \$1 million and a challenge gift of \$1 million that added \$1 for every \$4 raised, resulting in an additional \$4 million. **This generosity enabled the Fund to invest \$18.4 million in 87 nonprofit partners that were able to serve more than 209,802 individuals living in 100,578 households located in Fort Bend, Harris, Montgomery, and Waller counties.**

Thank you for your continued support of our organizations and our community. We remain committed to learning from and improving our efforts so that we can effectively support the Greater Houston region. Later in this report, we share lessons learned from this collaborative effort. Greater Houston Community Foundation and United Way of Greater Houston are honored to serve you, and we look forward to our continued partnership in the future.

With gratitude and appreciation,

Amanda McMillian  
United Way of Greater Houston

Stephen Maislin  
Greater Houston Community Foundation



GREATER HOUSTON COVID-19 RECOVERY FUND TASK FORCE

The Greater Houston COVID-19 Recovery Task Force, composed of board members and appointees of both United Way of Greater Houston (UWGH) and Greater Houston Community Foundation (GHCF), oversaw and approved grants made from the Greater Houston COVID-19 Recovery Fund. The Task Force also provided oversight and leadership for the Greater Houston COVID-19 Recovery Fund Grants Committee, which was responsible for developing the grant-making strategy, recommending grants, and evolving the grant-making strategy to respond to community needs. The Grants Committee was composed of staff members of the two organizations, in addition to program officers from Arnold Ventures and Houston Endowment (HEI), who both brought extensive disaster response and public health expertise.

The Task Force was entrusted to make investments in services provided by trusted nonprofit partners that have proven experience and systems in place to serve the community during times of disaster.

Thank you to the generous community leaders who supported the Greater Houston COVID-19 Recovery Fund through their service on the Task Force, Grants Committee, and subcommittee of staff that supported the agency application review process.

Advisory Task Force

- Tony Chase**, ChaseSource, LP

**Irma Diaz-Gonzales**, Employment & Training Centers, Inc.

**Lynn Elsenhans**, Sunoco (retired)

**Bob Harvey**, Greater Houston Partnership
- Laura Jaramillo**, GHCF Board Member

**Nancy McGregor**, GHCF Board Member

**Y. Ping Sun**, Rice University and Yetter Coleman LLP

Grants Committee

- Stephanie Blair**, GHCF

**Chris Hensman**, Arnold Ventures

**Annie Hurwitz**, GHCF

**Elizabeth Love**, HEI (formerly), Hershey Foundation (current)
- Curtis McMinn**, UWGH

**Margaret Oser**, UWGH

**Mary Vazquez**, UWGH

**Renee Wizig-Barrios**, GHCF

**Diana Zarzuelo**, GHCF

Subcommittee Members

- Shauna Harris**, UWGH

**Rebecca Hove**, GHCF
- Traci Jack**, UWGH

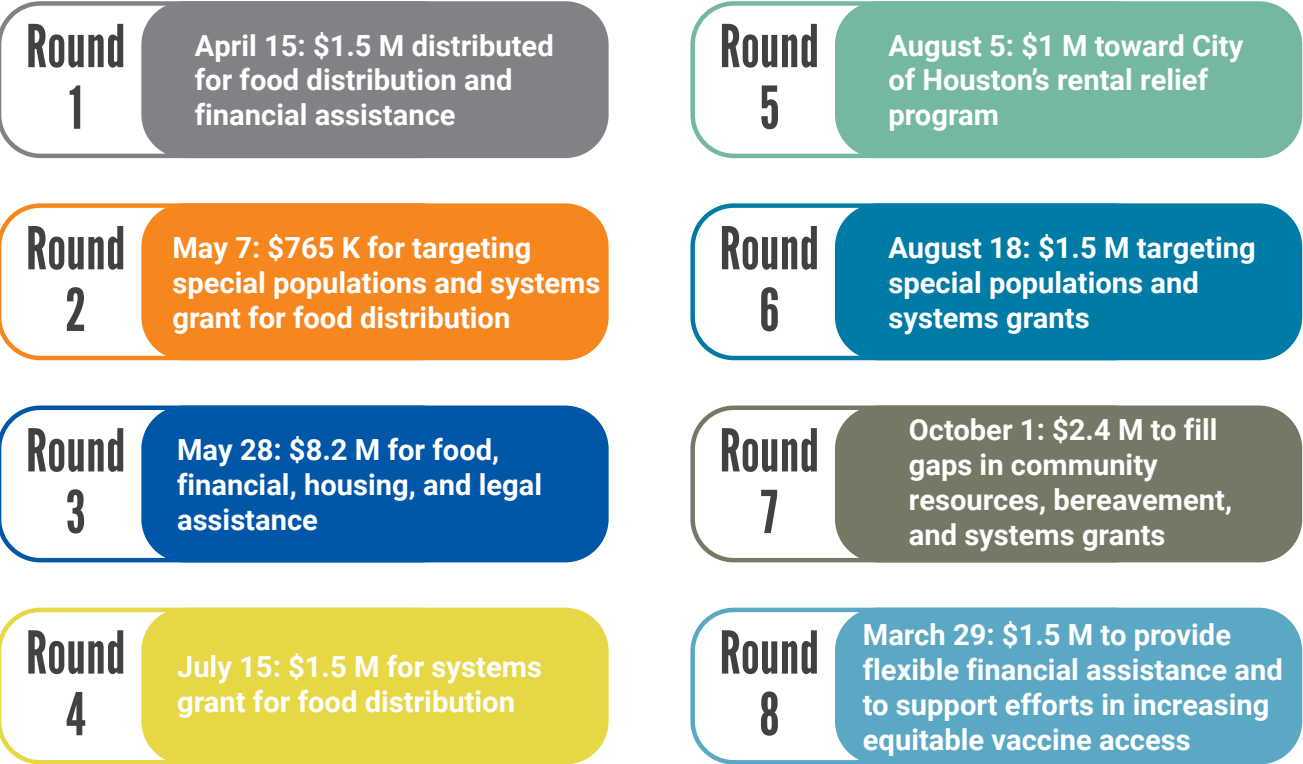
**Jennifer Touchet**, GHCF

Thank you to the leadership teams and staff from both United Way of Greater Houston and Greater Houston Community Foundation for the incredible work they have done to meet the needs of our most vulnerable neighbors during this challenging time. The Greater Houston COVID-19 Recovery Fund was truly a collaborative effort.



GRANT ROUND SUMMARY

Greater Houston COVID-19 Recovery Fund Distribution Timeline



\$70K for external fund evaluation and donation credit card processing fees

As of February 2021, the Fund has raised and invested \$18.4 million in 87 local organizations that have served more than 209,802 individuals living in 100,578 households in need through eight rounds of grants. *Please note, data provided is not considered final, due to ongoing reporting from grantees.*

Round One – April 15, 2020

The first round of grants from the Greater Houston COVID-19 Recovery Fund included **\$1.5 million invested in 30 nonprofit partners** to provide critical basic needs, like food and emergency financial assistance, to vulnerable families and individuals who likely wouldn't receive any other aid, such as government stimulus.

Round Two – May 7, 2020

In response to urgent, emerging community needs caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Greater Houston COVID-19 Recovery Fund Task Force announced a **stopgap investment of \$765,000 to four Greater Houston nonprofit organizations**. The grants supported four key populations: domestic violence survivors, food insecure households, laid-off hospitality workers, and people experiencing homelessness.

GRANT ROUND SUMMARY

Round Three – May 28, 2020

The Greater Houston COVID-19 Recovery Fund invested **\$8.2 million in 65 nonprofit partners** to meet urgent needs. Grants were provided to organizations serving Greater Houston's most vulnerable families and individuals in need of food, financial assistance for basic needs and housing, as well as services to prevent homelessness due to evictions and foreclosures. Funds were also invested to support financial and housing counseling, legal assistance, and to support a public-private partnership that addressed urgent pandemic needs and chronic homelessness issues.

Round Four – July 15, 2020

Amid a growing resurgence of COVID-19 cases in the Greater Houston region and an ongoing economic crisis, the Greater Houston COVID-19 Recovery Fund invested **\$1.5 million in emerging needs grants** to support food insecure households and those who are unemployed but unable to receive government assistance, including immigrant and mixed-status households.

Round Five – August 5, 2020

A special grant of **\$1 million was awarded to bolster the City of Houston's second rental relief program**, aimed at helping the most vulnerable Houston residents remain housed.

Round Six– August 18, 2020

The Greater Houston COVID-19 Recovery Fund invested **\$1.5 million** to provide emergency financial assistance to people on the verge of eviction or homelessness, pregnant women, and foster youth. The grant also supported system-level innovations which would amplify community impact.

Round Seven– October 1, 2020

As families and individuals continued to endure economic hardships created by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Greater Houston COVID-19 Recovery Fund invested **\$2.4 million in emergency financial assistance and rental assistance**, as well as support for those who lost loved ones from the coronavirus. These investments provided flexible financial aid to families that have lost a primary breadwinner or immediate family member due to COVID-19 in the four-county region, as well as emergency financial and rental assistance to under-served residents in Fort Bend, Montgomery, and Waller counties.

Round Eight - March 29, 2021

The Greater Houston COVID-19 Recovery Fund invested **\$1 million** to provide emergency financial assistance to households facing economic challenges related to COVID-19, with a focus on reaching families who are eligible for government assistance. A **\$500,000** grant also supports a hyper-local approach to increasing equitable vaccine access across target communities in Greater Houston through a collaborative effort among several nonprofit partners.

NONPROFIT PARTNERS

Thank you to these incredible organizations for providing critical resources to our neighbors in need during a time of unprecedented challenges. United Way of Greater Houston and Greater Houston Community Foundation also extend thanks to the Fund Task Force for their thoughtful oversight and approval of all investments made from the Greater Houston COVID-19 Recovery Fund.

Organization	Investment (\$)
The Alliance	180,000
Attack Poverty	125,000
Avenue CDC	250,000
BakerRipley	1,225,000
The Beacon of Downtown Houston	25,000
Boat People SOS	173,400
Bo's Place	25,000
Boys and Girls Clubs of Greater Houston	150,000
Brighter Bites	55,000
Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston	1,125,000
The Center for Pursuit	35,000
Change Happens	150,000
Chinese Community Center	200,000
Christian Community Service Center	141,000
Coalition for the Homeless of Houston/Harris County	836,270
Communities In Schools of Houston	150,000
Community Family Centers	100,000
Connective	119,000
Covenant House Texas	70,000
Crisis Assistance Center	81,000
Cy-Hope	30,000
Cypress Community Assistance Ministries	75,000
East Harris County Empowerment Council	250,000
Easter Seals of Greater Houston	300,000
Epiphany Community Health Outreach Services	75,000

Organization	Investment (\$)
Evelyn Rubenstein Jewish Community Center of Houston	50,000
Every Texan/Young Invincibles	25,000
Family Houston	180,000
Fe y Justicia Worker Center Houston	240,000
Fifth Ward Community Redevelopment Corporation	150,000
Fort Bend Seniors Meals on Wheels	140,000
Free Indeed Community Works	200,000
Harris County Domestic Violence Coordinating Council	500,000
The HAY Center Foundation	25,000
Healthcare for the Homeless	35,000
Healthy Women Houston	150,000
Houston Area Urban League	150,000
Houston Food Bank	1,650,000
Houston Immigration Legal Services Collaborative	500,000
Houston in Action	500,000
Houston: reVision	50,000
Humble Area Assistance Ministries	230,000
Interfaith Caring Ministries	165,000
Interfaith Ministries for Greater Houston	205,500
Interfaith of The Woodlands	106,000
Islamic Society of Greater Houston	150,000
Jewish Family Service	175,000
Katy Christian Ministries	195,000
Kids Meals	50,000
Living Hope Wheelchair Association	70,000

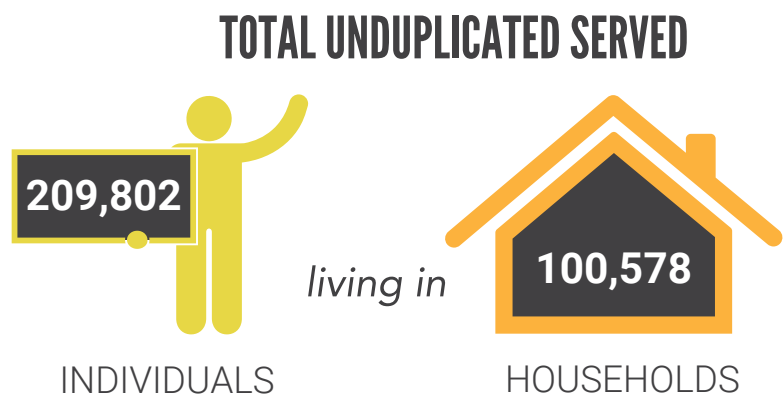
NONPROFIT PARTNERS

Organization	Investment (\$)
Local Infant Formula for Emergencies	35,000
Local Initiatives Support Coalition	300,000
Lone Star Legal Aid	140,000
Meals on Wheels Montgomery County	240,000
Memorial Assistance Ministries	1,928,011
Ministry Assistance of the Near Northwest Alliance	30,000
Mission Northeast	80,500
Montgomery County Food Bank	79,600
Montrose Counseling Center	250,000
Montrose Grace Place	25,000
My Brother's Keeper Outreach Center	175,000
Neighbors in Action	50,000
New Hope Housing	145,000
North East Partners In Power	125,000
North Pasadena Community Outreach	40,000
Northwest Assistance Ministries	375,000
Prison Entrepreneurship Program	40,000
Project Row Houses	45,000
Rosenberg Richmond Helping Hands	25,000
The Salvation Army	105,000
Second Mile Mission Center	115,000
Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston	150,000
Sojourn Landing	120,000
Southeast Area Ministries	20,000
Star of Hope Mission	165,000
Tahirih Justice Center	95,000

Organization	Investment (\$)
Target Hunger	16,000
Texas Center for Child and Family Studies	350,000
Tomball Emergency Assistance Ministries	37,500
Urban Harvest	75,000
Volunteers of America Texas	200,000
Waller Assistance & Restorations Ministries	150,000
Wesley Community Center	25,000
West Houston Assistance Ministries	235,000
West Street Recovery	165,000
Workers Defense Project	250,000
YMCA	110,000
Total	18,348,781

\$70K for external fund evaluation and donation credit card processing fees

FUND IMPACT



The Greater Houston COVID-19 Recovery Fund (GHCRF) invested \$18.4 million in 87 local nonprofit partners that were able to serve more than 209,802 individuals living in 100,578 households located in Fort Bend, Harris, Montgomery, and Waller counties.

More than 221,216 individuals received food assistance; 30,482 people received flexible financial assistance to pay for urgent needs such as food, bills, health care, child care, life-saving personal protective equipment, and more; and 12,990 individuals received housing financial assistance to pay their rent/mortgage and utilities.

Over a year into the pandemic, the data are clear: the most vulnerable in our region have been hardest-hit by the public health and economic impacts of COVID-19. [Read more about this on Understanding Houston's COVID-19 site.](#) Challenges these groups faced before the pandemic have only been exacerbated and many are unable or less likely to seek out public benefits.

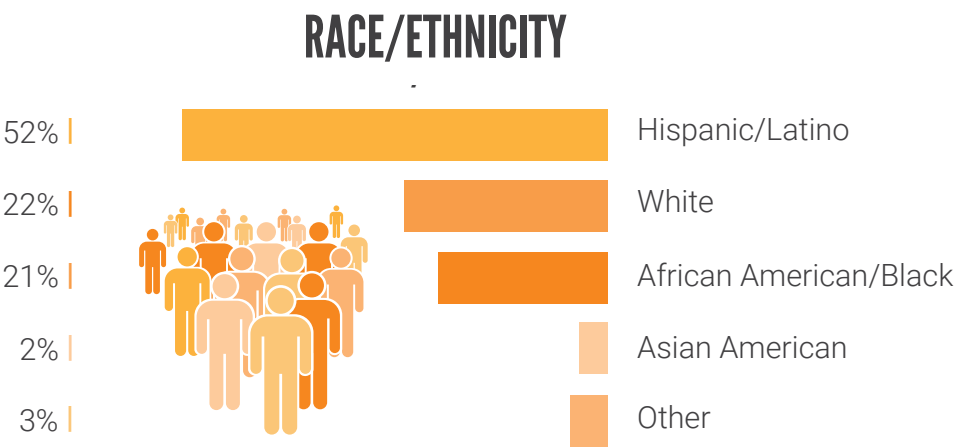
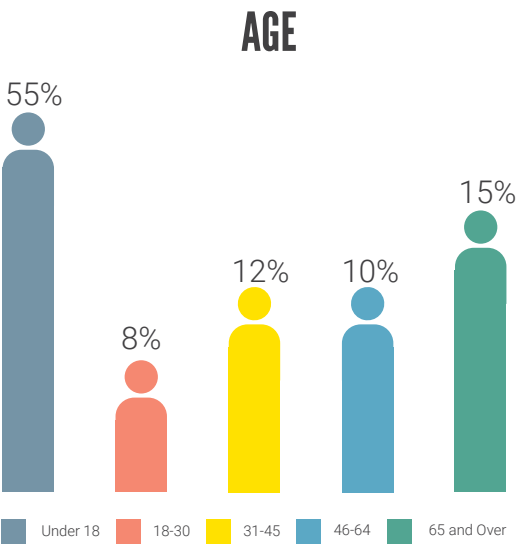
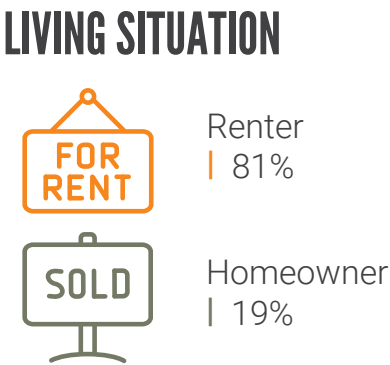
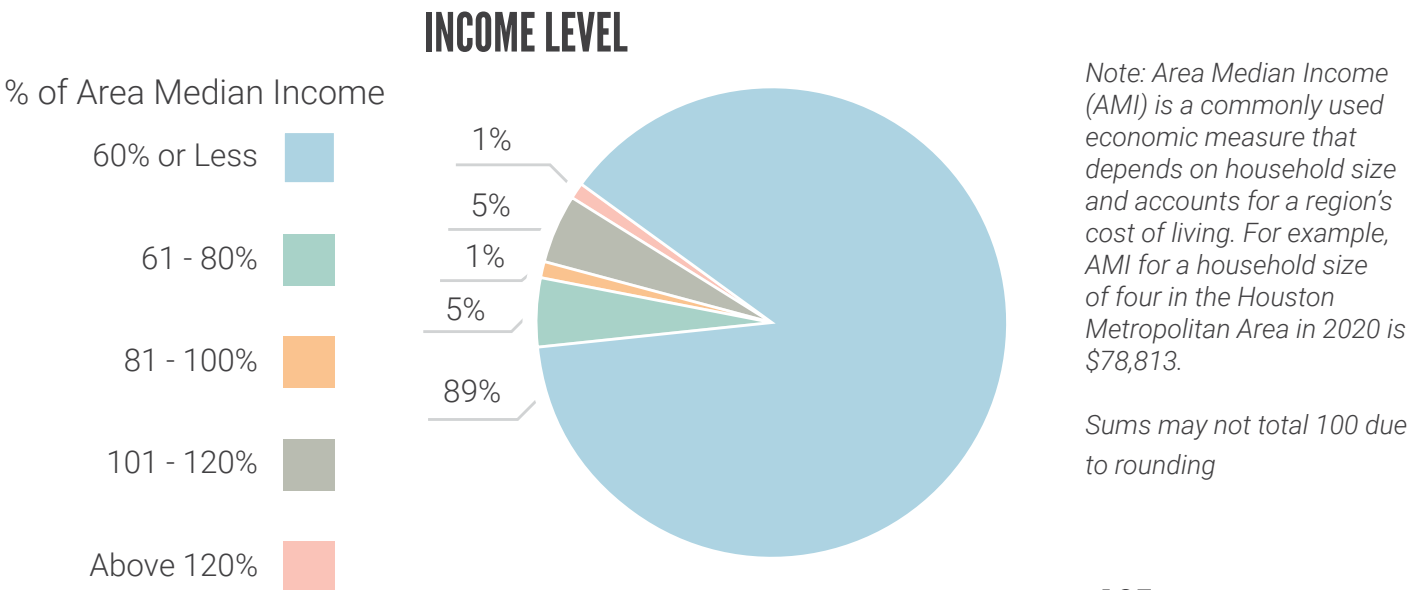


*Note: The sum of individuals served by service type will not equal the number of unduplicated individuals served because individuals may receive more than one service. The number of individuals receiving housing emergency financial assistance is likely underreported, as some individuals utilized flexible emergency financial assistance toward rent/housing.*

FUND IMPACT

About 89% of households served by GHCRF are low-income, meaning they earn 60% or less of the AMI, which is about \$47,300 for a household size of four.

The majority of clients served identified as renters, Hispanic/Latino, and were children under 18 years of age or adults 65 years and older.



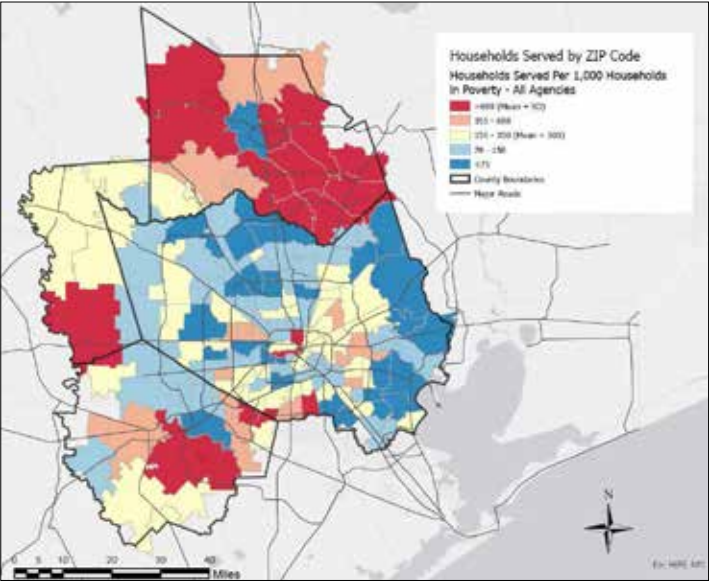


FUND IMPACT

Depth of Households Served by ZIP Code

Depth of service across the four-county region

To quantify the depth of service relative to need, the rate of households served per 1,000 households in poverty was calculated for each ZIP code and compared to the average of all ZIP codes, defined as the “expected rate.” If the ZIP code’s service rate was higher than the expected rate, then that ZIP code was categorized as “well served.” This ZIP code analysis revealed that more than half of the ZIP codes in the region were rated as “well served” or better.

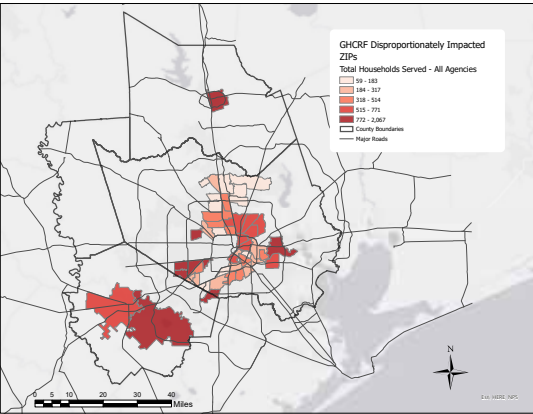


- **20% of ZIP codes (36) were classified as “minimally served” – served at a lower than expected rate (shown in dark blue)**
- **29% of ZIP codes (52) were “moderately served” – served at a rate slightly lower than the average (light blue)**
- **28% of ZIP codes (50) were “well served”– served at a similar rate of the average (yellow)**
- **10% of ZIP codes (18) were “very well served” – served at a rate above the average (pink)**
- **12% of ZIP codes (21) were served at a much higher rate than expected, meaning a rate that exceeds one standard deviation above the average (shown in red)**

Serving Disproportionately Impacted ZIP Codes

The Fund served disproportionately impacted ZIP codes at a higher rate than non-disproportionately impacted ZIP codes across all counties. The map below shows the distribution of total households served within disproportionately impacted ZIP codes broken into five quintiles of equal size. The highest quintile (dark red) represents the top 20% of ZIP codes in terms of total number of households served in disproportionately impacted ZIP codes, and the lowest quintile (light pink) represents the bottom 20% of ZIP codes in terms of total number of households served. In terms of households served among disproportionately impacted ZIP codes, the top 20% ZIP codes were found in:

- **Southwest Harris County (77053, 77036, 77081, 77099 – Gulfton/Sharpstown/Alief)**
- **Spring Branch (77080)**
- **Cloverleaf (77015)**
- **Montgomery County (77301 – Conroe)**
- **Fort Bend County (77469 – Richmond)**

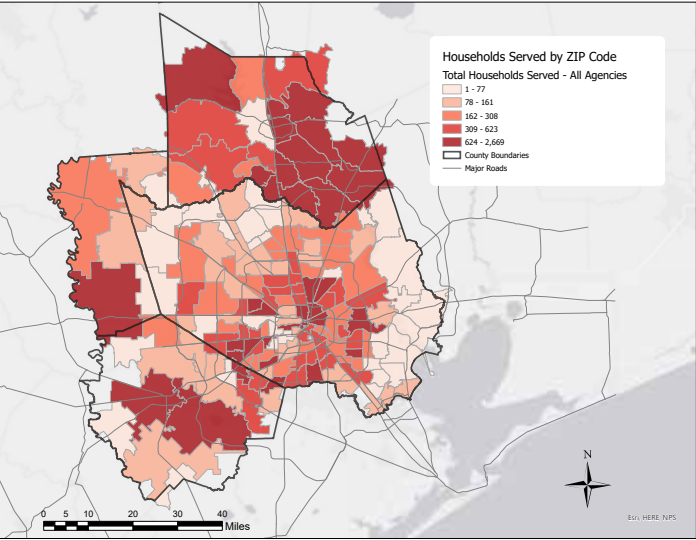


FUND IMPACT

Households Served by ZIP Code

Distribution of beneficiaries served across the four-county region

GHCRF had a broad reach, serving residents from across 177 ZIP codes in the four-county region – Fort Bend, Harris, Montgomery, and Waller counties. Of the 100,578 households served through GHCRF, two-thirds had a known ZIP code of origin, 31% were unknown, and 2% were reported as experiencing homelessness. Of the beneficiaries served with a known ZIP code of residence, the vast majority were Harris County residents, not surprising given the fact that Harris County is the most populous county.



- **65% were served in Harris County**
- **25% were served in Montgomery County**
- **8% were served in Fort Bend County**
- **2% were served in Waller County**

This evaluation data will continue to be used to inform future grant making strategy and outreach to nonprofits.

CLIENT STORY

Susan\* contracted COVID-19 last June and had to be hospitalized. Because of COVID-19 restrictions, Jack\*, her husband of 48 years, wasn’t allowed to visit his wife in the hospital, but the two made it work by communicating over the phone.

Not long after Susan was hospitalized, Jack became sick from COVID-19. The couple’s three children urged their father to go to the hospital, but Jack refused and his illness worsened. On June 26, Jack lost his life to COVID-19.

Once Susan recovered and was released from the hospital, the family quarantined and was able to hold a funeral service for Jack.

In addition to mourning the loss of her husband, Susan is dealing with lingering issues related to COVID-19. She has trouble maintaining her balance and falls frequently – issues for which she is seeing a neurologist.

With medical bills and funeral expenses mounting, Susan applied for assistance through the COVID-19 Lost Loved One Fund. The support from the fund helped her pay for Jack’s funeral and her hospital stay. During a time of tragic loss and great uncertainty, Susan is grateful for the support of the Lost Loved One Fund and is looking forward to being healthy once again.

\* Client names have been changed.

HIGH-IMPACT GRANTS

In addition to meeting urgent basic needs, the Fund invested in unique opportunities to expand community impact in the near-term, and invested in system change grants that will assist vulnerable populations and disaster response in the long-term. A few high-impact grants include:

**Get Shift Done**, originating from Shiftsmart out of Dallas, was created to fill the gap between the reduction of volunteers and the increased need among food banks and other nonprofits. Greater Houston Community Foundation learned of this new innovation and contacted Get Shift Done to help meet the surge in food insecurity and hunger among residents of Greater Houston. During the Interim Round for Urgent Needs on July 15, Houston Food Bank received \$1.5 million, which enabled the Get Shift Done for Houston initiative to utilize out-of-work hospitality workers to staff their food pantry, providing unemployed hospitality staff with jobs and steady incomes. These additional workers increased the capacity of the Food Bank in order to meet the growing demand for their services and saved the workers from having to join the food pantry lines.

“Houston Food Bank and its partners provide essential services in times of disaster, and due to COVID-19, the demand for food assistance has increased exponentially,” says Brian Greene, President/CEO of Houston Food Bank. “We are serving clients that we had pre-COVID and also those who have never sought food assistance before. Along with increased demand we are challenged with a drop in volunteers due to stay-at-home orders and adults who must stay at home to school their children, among other factors. We are currently distributing one million pounds of food per day. It is crucial for us to get food into the community, and in order to do so we need help, and the assistance from Shiftsmart will help us provide food for better lives.”

For more information or to support the Get Shift Done initiative, go to [getshiftdone.org/houston](https://getshiftdone.org/houston).



HIGH-IMPACT GRANTS

COVID-19 Lost Loved One Fund

In October 2020, the Greater Houston COVID-19 Recovery Fund distributed \$1.5 million to Memorial Assistance Ministries to launch the COVID-19 Lost Loved One Fund. The grant provided flexible financial assistance to families that have faced a loss of a primary breadwinner or other immediate family member due to COVID-19.



Qualifying families were provided \$3,500 to address immediate needs such as funeral arrangements, or assistance with rent, mortgage, or utilities. All individuals received information and referrals to grief counseling.

“MAM’s work is based on the value of neighbors helping neighbors,” states Sonja Gee, MAM President and CEO. “For families facing the tragedy of a COVID related death, the impact of this bereavement fund is more than just the vital financial support it provides. It is the sense of community and belonging it offers to those who may otherwise feel they are facing this tragedy on their own. It is like the hot casserole and warm hug that remind us we are not alone, that our community cares, and that together, we can get through even the most difficult of situations. MAM is proud to offer such an important service to Houston during this challenging time, and grateful to the Fund donors, United Way and Greater Houston Community Foundation for the opportunity.”



Coalition for the Homeless

On July 1, 2020, the City of Houston, Harris County, and the Coalition for the Homeless, along with the partners of The Way Home Continuum of Care, announced a joint plan to serve 5,000 people experiencing homelessness by October 2022 to limit the spread of COVID-19. With an investment from the Greater Houston COVID-19 Recovery Fund, the Coalition for the Homeless leveraged grant funds to update their systems to better serve people experiencing homelessness across partner agencies. They also leveraged dollars from the Fund to secure additional federal funding for their Community COVID Housing Program (CCHP), which is designed to improve systems for coordinating care and housing for homeless people.

For people experiencing homelessness, housing is health care. Because of underlying health conditions and lack of access to facilities, people experiencing homelessness are more susceptible to COVID-19 and, if infected, are more likely to experience serious complications or death compared to those who have a home.

The program officially commenced on October 1, 2020. The infusion of funding through the CCHP has already been transformative for the system. As of January 2021, the system had housed more than 1,000 people. Without the funding from CCHP, the organization would have only been able to house approximately 300 people in the same time period.

“We are thankful for the Greater Houston COVID-19 Recovery Fund’s support of the project management team at the Coalition, which has been critical to implementing this innovative program!”



HIGH-IMPACT GRANTS

The Greater Houston COVID-19 Recovery Fund’s grant to Connective provided incredible leverage of community funds by amplifying the impact of response efforts across our community. Too often during times of disaster, governments and nonprofits act immediately and then evaluate the impact and effectiveness years down the line. Employing best in class human-centered design research tools, Connective developed a program for assessing human needs and recommending immediate actions to response organizations in an agile, real-time way.



The grant allowed Connective to run monthly Design Research sprints. Every month, they chose a topic, identified an audience, picked a research tool, conducted research (through in-depth interviews, focus groups, surveys, or observational analysis), distilled insights, and helped partners put them into practice immediately.

For example, in the fall of 2020, Connective spoke to landlords about their experience of renting during COVID and the risk of eviction for some tenants. Connective kept diversity of experience in mind when choosing the landlords and tenants to speak to: varying portfolio size, varying geographies, different gender, and ethnicities. Connective learned that landlords trust tenants who are proactive about their issues and ask for assistance. Landlords were also willing to make a lot more concessions than they were pre-COVID. Tenants, however, were often scared of communicating their issues and operated with a pre-COVID mentality, where they did not believe their landlords were willing to make concessions. The City and nonprofit administrators immediately changed their messaging based on Connective’s research in order to coach tenants on how to have effective conversations with their landlords.

This research also informed effective legal assistance intake processes, building accessible technology tools for non-English speaking immigrant communities, and improving on COVID rental assistance programs.

“Connective needs to be an essential piece of a disaster recovery system.” - Agency CEO

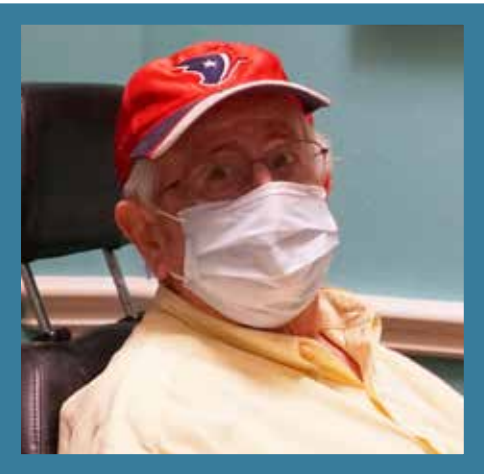
CLIENT STORY

John retired fifteen years ago after serving in the Army during the Korean War, working as a freight solicitor, and owning a successful business. He worked hard his whole life and thought he had all the savings he needed.

John never imaged he would require help, but his wife began facing health issues that left her bedridden, and John had a stroke that left one side of his body weak. As time went on, medical expenses and other costs quickly added up, and funds started running low.

John was no longer able to take his wife to the hospital for her appointments, so they began relying on a transportation service. It was through that transportation service that John first heard about a meal delivery program that would provide him and his wife with nutritious home-delivered meals—and a lifeline during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Now, John and his wife receive meal deliveries every week. The meal deliveries have been especially important during COVID-19, as both John and his wife are at high risk for infection, so eliminating trips to the store helps them protect themselves, and the nutritious meals help them stay healthy. The volunteers who deliver the meals take time to check in on John and his wife and make sure they are doing OK, which lifts John’s spirits and helps him feel less isolated.



THE COLLABORATIVE EFFORT: LESSONS LEARNED

Coming together to create a joint fund to address the impact of COVID-19 was critical, given the magnitude of the pandemic’s impact. United Way of Greater Houston and Greater Houston Community Foundation wanted to do a deep dive in evaluating the Fund’s model and efforts in supporting the community. The following data were collected by Working Partner, a third-party evaluator commissioned to review the efforts of the Fund. Working Partner collected feedback on the effectiveness of the collaboration and how the disaster recovery system in the Houston region could be strengthened. Interviews were held with nonprofits engaged in distributing the funds, with donors, and with staff from both agencies.

Setting the Foundation for a Comprehensive Local Disaster Recovery System  
Prepared by Working Partner, Jessica Pugil and Bret Sinclair

Five Key Lessons Learned

- 1. The collaborative eliminated competition for funds and raised the visibility of the Fund at a time when the fundraising environment was uncertain. Some expressed enthusiasm for having a single, local “go-to” place in the future where everyone would know to go to make a donation. **Perhaps most important to donors and other funders was having organizations leading the effort which they trusted and knew would be responsible in overseeing the effort.**
- 2. The size and role of the Task Force should be determined by the size of the disaster and the amount of funds to administer. **In every case, it is important to have diversity in terms of race/ethnicity as well as industry.** Additionally, representation from key sectors/organizations should be considered, including a community voice, a representative from the business community, and potentially representatives of organizations that have access to data that can inform Fund priorities.
- 3. **The data-informed approach was especially appreciated,** not only by members of the Grants Committee and the Task Force, but also by funders who used the research to inform or validate their own grant strategies for the pandemic.
- 4. The model of distributing recovery support through community-based organizations (CBOs) requires a strong network of organizations with the capacity to deliver support rapidly and effectively. Given their past experience with CBOs in prior disasters, **Greater Houston Community Foundation and United Way of Greater Houston were able to build upon the already strong list of organizations with experience in disaster recovery** by bringing on new organizations and agencies that were relatively inexperienced in disaster recovery but had the ability to reach new geographies and vulnerable populations.
- 5. In the event of another disaster, it is recommended to **maintain a standing structure that can quickly activate, empower, and implement increased resources.** Nonprofit leaders and funders agreed that more planning prior to disasters is needed.

“I hope the transparency of this effort will have a lasting effect on how disaster recovery is done going forward.”

- Agency CEO

THE COLLABORATIVE EFFORT: LESSONS LEARNED

Greater Houston Community Foundation and United Way of Greater Houston have done impressive work in collaboratively administering recovery efforts under very uncertain conditions created by the pandemic. In doing so, they have established a strong foundation for a disaster recovery system to serve the Greater Houston region in the future. Based on the lessons learned from previous disaster evaluations and the findings of this report, the structure below illustrates the emerging framework for a disaster recovery system and highlights the elements of the framework that have been established through the Greater Houston COVID-19 Recovery Fund effort.

KEY ELEMENTS OF A DISASTER RECOVERY SYSTEM	ACCOMPLISHED THROUGH THE GHCRF EFFORT
A central location for donating funds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• GHCF and United Way’s expertise and capacities were leveraged</li><li>• A central, local place for funders and community members to donate was established</li></ul>
Establish grant-making strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lessons learned from Hurricane Harvey and best practices were utilized in developing the grant-making strategy</li><li>• Data were utilized to identify top and emerging needs, and to flexibly manage the Fund through the effort</li><li>• Eligible populations were clearly defined</li><li>• Use of systems grants strengthened capacity to serve especially vulnerable populations, though ‘systems’ needs better definition</li></ul>
Identify process for providing recovery services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Built on Community Based Organizations capacity established from prior disasters and expanded to agencies that could reach more vulnerable populations and communities</li><li>• Use of intermediaries brought potential efficiencies, other benefits</li></ul>
Use effective practices to serve eligible populations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Community Based Organizations that leveraged technology – e.g., creating online application platforms and utilizing texts – created significant efficiencies</li><li>• Capacity to provide direct assistance in lieu of vendor payments has been developed at some agencies and there is less resistance to its use</li><li>• A user-friendly common database for reporting was established (through Houston Harris County Rental Assistance Fund), and there is less resistance to its use</li></ul>
Communicate with public funders, and government to maximize transparency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A central website with information and ongoing updates was established</li><li>• Regular communications with funders (though more communication with the public might be useful in future events)</li><li>• Communication and coordination with City and County efforts established, building a foundation that can be strengthened in the future</li></ul>

This is clearly a case of 1+1=3

- Funder  
In regards to partnership between Greater Houston Community Foundation and United Way

“It was helpful that GHCF and United Way combined forces. There are so many silos already, it was useful for funders to make it easy for agencies to get money to meet critical community needs.”

- Agency Staff



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Thanks to the many generous organizations and individuals, the Fund has raised and invested \$18.4 million in 87 local organizations that have served more than 209, 802 individuals living in 100,578 households in need through eight rounds of grant.

*We are so grateful to the generous lead donors whose gifts helped launch the Greater Houston COVID-19 Recovery Fund.*

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515 Post Oak Blvd. Suite 1000  
Houston, Texas 77027  
713-333-2200  
[ghcf.org](http://ghcf.org)

[www.greaterhoustonrecovery.org](http://www.greaterhoustonrecovery.org)



**United Way of Greater Houston**

50 Waugh Drive  
Houston, Texas 77007  
713-685-2300  
[unitedwayhouston.org](http://unitedwayhouston.org)