New York City was drastically affected by COVID-19 as it reverberated across our City’s hospitals, offices, schools, and homes. The virus spread rapidly infecting thousands of New Yorkers, and with the rate of contagion mixed with the complete unknown of the disease, New York—along with most of the country and the world—had no choice but to shut down.

Offices and schools closed sending workers, students, and teachers to adjust to at-home offices and virtual classrooms; nonessential businesses shut their doors and were forced to furlough many employees; supply chain disruptions and widespread fear caused shortages in medical supplies, household items, and groceries. As the days turned into weeks of quarantine, our City had to find relief from the pandemic. New Yorkers needed access to technology for continued learning and work, families needed healthy, fresh foods and help with bills, and essential workers needed medical and cleaning equipment to protect themselves while still serving clients.

It is during this unprecedented time that we were reminded that our society depends on each other for a healthy community. For more than 80 years, United Way of New York City has been committed to serving the community. Through triumphs and challenges, we mobilize the caring power of our City to help people in need. And with the growing concerns of COVID-19, UWNYC’s mission and purpose would remain the same.

Our organization has always been there for New York City in times of need—establishing and administering funds that support those in need. We were there during 9/11 and Hurricane Sandy, and now we are here for COVID-19.

On March 15, United Way of New York City established the COVID-19 Community Fund to provide resources and financial assistance to partner agencies and community-based organizations that work with our most-underserved communities. The fund would focus on meeting immediate needs of New Yorkers through relief efforts, while working to build self-sufficiency for families and strengthening the nonprofit sector across our City.
United Way of New York City’s COVID-19 Community Fund was designed to provide assistance to families to ensure basic needs were met, as well as to aid nonprofits stressed by the crisis and the overwhelming need of the communities they serve. When our organization looked at the scope of need, we realized that beyond the tangible assistance, nonprofits needed someone with the expertise to manage this widespread relief effort across multiple sectors. UWNYC knew that the magnitude of this relief effort would require collaboration across industries, and that our deep connections to cross-sector partners along with our ability to forge and rework unlikely partnerships would be a critical component to achieving success. UWNYC, designed and deployed the COVID-19 Fund with a shared mindset for learning, collaboration, and equity that assessed community needs, evaluated the effectiveness of strategies, and could pivot quickly to make adaptations as new data was obtained.

As funding became available through the COVID-19 Community Fund, nonprofits were welcomed and encouraged to apply. All applications would be reviewed by United Way of New York City’s Community Impact Team and the Board of Directors Community Impact and Public Policy Committee, and funding would be distributed in three phases.
Before COVID-19 struck, New York City was already facing challenges in educational equity, food insecurity, limited access to critical benefits, and other struggles often found in low-income communities—especially communities of color. These challenges were exacerbated by the pandemic and brought into focus the discriminatory effects faced by neighborhoods of predominantly Black and Brown people, including, a lack of available educational resources, higher rates of unemployment, less access to healthy foods, and in direct relation to COVID-19, higher infection and death rates.

United Way of New York City’s COVID-19 Community Fund would invest in specific issue areas where financial support would have the greatest impact.

**Advocacy and Policy Change (AdvocateNYC):** Now more than ever, people need to have their voices heard. UWNYC invested a portion of the COVID-19 Community Fund into organizations that led advocacy efforts in response to the pandemic. This work ensures that proposed policies are informed by voices of people impacted by the Covid-19 crisis in NYC, especially communities of color, immigrant communities, workers in ‘gig economy’ jobs, single-parent households, and people who lack adequate income to be self-sufficient. We are amplifying our voices to create policy change and are committed to strengthening collaborative efforts in the areas of educational equity, food insecurity, strengthening the nonprofit sector, and creating pathways toward self-sufficiency.

**Benefits Access, Eviction, and Crisis Support (BenefitsAccessNYC):** Before COVID-19, 2.5 million New Yorkers were struggling to make ends meet, and lacked the necessary income to be self-sufficient—even though more than 80% of households were employed. Many New Yorkers were living paycheck-to-paycheck and struggling to cover the costs of basic necessities. So when COVID-19 hit the City and the unemployment rate skyrocketed from 3.4% in February to 20.4% by June, it would be critical for New Yorkers to receive benefits and support for food, housing, healthcare, and other costs of living.

The unemployment rates also brought about the unfair and alarming unequal effects of the pandemic by age, zip code, and skin color. Nearly 12% of white people were unemployed as of June, but people of color and other minorities are seeing significantly higher rates with Black people at 23.5%, Hispanic people at 25.1%, and Asian people at 25.3%. And, the rates of unemployment aren’t just problematic for families. Young people who often rely on jobs in food service, retail, and childcare are drastically feeling the effects of COVID-19. Prior to the pandemic, people between the ages of 16-24 were at a 6.6% rate of unemployment, and today are the age group with the highest unemployment rate at 35.2%.

UWNYC’s COVID-19 Community Fund expanded available resources through our existing programs and partnerships in an effort to increase the number of New Yorkers who can access crisis supports and enroll in benefits that will help them stay in their homes, keep utilities running, stay healthy, and prevent hunger and malnutrition.

2. [https://www.labor.ny.gov/stats/pressreleases/prlaus.shtm](https://www.labor.ny.gov/stats/pressreleases/prlaus.shtm)
Educational Support (ReadNYC): The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated the inequities and economic disparities for low-income, immigrant, and communities of color in New York City. Tens of thousands of students across the City were in need of devices in order to continue learning from home. Without access to technology these students, like those students UWNYC supports in Mott Haven, are at a greater risk of falling behind, due to the lack of technology, books, and other important educational materials at home.

The COVID-19 Community Fund provided learning materials and technology to prevent academic losses as a result of the COVID-19 crisis and offered support for families to create a home environment that is conducive to learning.

Food and Hunger Relief (FeedNYC): Access to food during the pandemic was a pressing issue for families, especially those who were already living paycheck-to-paycheck before the crisis began. As stay-at-home orders continued, more people lost work and as a result, struggled financially to meet basic needs like food—especially fresh, healthy foods. As the need for food increased, the availability of food decreased with nearly 250 pantries needing to temporarily close for being unable to comply with state regulations and safety measures during COVID-19. Year round, UWNYC works with our network of 500 emergency food providers to bring quality food to those struggling with food insecurity.

The COVID-19 Community Fund made sure that quality food was available in food pantries and soup kitchens across the boroughs during this challenging time, with a priority on under-supplied neighborhoods. With the ability to reach hundreds of thousands of people in need, in real time, through our Plentiful App, UWNYC expanded this ground-breaking technology to connect more food-insecure New Yorkers with food assistance in this time of crisis.

Organization Support (StrengthenNYC): UWNYC’s StrengthenNYC helps community-based organizations become strong and sustainable—providing internal and external resources and expertise—in an effort to collectively drive improved community outcomes. As the effects of COVID-19 wreaked havoc across the City, more and more New Yorkers were leaning on local community organizations for assistance, and at the same time nonprofits were trying to manage their own financial challenges.

United Way of New York City’s COVID-19 Community Fund supplied resources to community-based organizations and mobilized virtual volunteer opportunities to support agencies and the communities they serve. During Census 2020, we assisted these organizations by finding virtual ways for people to get counted. This provided a significant increase in the number of individuals counted over the last census, and will help unlock the much-needed federal funding for their communities in future years.

\[^3\]Zimmerman, Alex and Jessica Gould. “5 weeks into online learning, NYC is still racing to get thousands of devices to students.” Chalkbeat New York. April 25, 2020.
As of October 31, 2020 United Way of New York City’s COVID-19 Community Fund raised more than $17 million and received more than $275,000 in in-kind services and support. Thank you to the hundreds of companies, individuals, foundations, government agencies, and events that contributed to our COVID-19 Community Fund. It is because of each of you that we are able to impact so many across our City!

Through the COVID-19 Community Fund, United Way of New York City funded and engaged with 303 community-based organizations (CBO)—17% of them being new partnerships. These CBOs received the funding, resources, and support needed to offer critical relief aid across the communities they serve, and it was fueled by the financial investments of more than 1,270 individual donors, 45 new or renewed institutions, and 31 longstanding corporate partnerships. This resulted in tremendous impact for our neighbors in need.
OUR IMPACT (continued)

(as of 10-31-20)

2,763 STUDENTS received access to technical + educational materials

MORE THAN 3,700 STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS provided with safety gear TOTALING $430K

8,543 INDIVIDUALS & FAMILIES received housing supports

11,696 STUDENTS supported to stay engaged in school or summer learning

1,223 INDIVIDUALS received workforce development training or employment assistance

1,780 ADVOCACY ACTION ITEMS TAKEN

3,069 INDIVIDUALS & FAMILIES ENROLLED IN SNAP

2.3M PEOPLE received food benefits OR HOUSEHOLDS

$3 MILLION provided to cover overdue mortgage, rent, and utilities

NEARLY 1.2 MILLION POUNDS OF FOOD, and an additional 250,000 MEALS DISTRIBUTED
JOINING FORCES FOR GREATER IMPACT

As COVID-19 continued to spread across the City and cases climbed higher, health officials learned that the disease was disproportionately affecting people of color. At the same time, the pandemic brought to light the decades-long racial inequity that has been oppressing Black and Brown people in our City and across the nation. Communities of color were facing greater job loss, food insecurity, housing challenges, lack of educational resources and supports, and concerns in meeting basic needs.

In an effort to provide relief efforts in communities of color, BET joined forces with United Way to help raise and distribute funds. It began with BET’s Saving Ourselves: A BET COVID Relief Effort television special, that rallied celebrities, musicians, business leaders and the black community to raise critical dollars that would be distributed to programs supporting African-Americans hit hardest by COVID-19. In New York City, where BET has a significant presence, the partnership continued beyond the event.

Thanks to BET’s significant contribution to UWNYC’s COVID-19 Community Fund, we have invested more than $3.6 million in neighborhoods of color across the five boroughs and partnered with 40 of our community-based organizations (CBO) to provide critical resources from money to manpower.
Tackling the issues left by COVID-19—that often stem from systemic challenges—would be no easy feat. We knew that the problems our communities faced, could not be solved alone. As we saw with our partnership with BET, United Way of New York City used our extensive network, reimagined current relationships and forged unlikely partnerships to benefit our City. Below is a sampling of some of the incredible collaborations that UWNYC formed to provide relief efforts during the pandemic.

**DoorDash:** With so many people in need of food and unable to leave their homes due to the threat of COVID-19, UWNYC partnered with DoorDash to help deliver food to families in need. DoorDash generously donated 10,000 rides to UWNYC. Rides have been used by our FeedNYC community-based organizations to deliver more than 250 pantry packages per week to households. We also provided grocery boxes for our ReadNYC families each week, and will continue through the end of October. Without school in session—a place where children often receive free breakfast and lunch—many families were finding it difficult to cover the cost of meals.

**Porsche:** In collaboration with United Way Worldwide (UWW), UWNYC was named one of the recipients of the Porsche 911 Speedster Auction. In April, Porsche Cars North America, Inc. held an auction through RM Sotheby’s for the very last 911 Speedster in production. The car, plus a generous match from Porsche raised an incredible $1 million for UWW to be distributed to COVID-19 relief efforts across the country.
Aden + Anais: To help New Yorkers during COVID-19, global lifestyle baby brand aden + anais launched a limited-edition collection called “in this together” in light of recent world events. The company partnered with United Way of New York City and for every product purchased from the collection in September, aden + anais donated a swaddle blanket to a ReadNYC family. Approximately 1,000 aden + anais swaddle blanket 2-pack sets were donated at a retail value of $25,000.

Starbucks/Princi & Amazon: When eateries across the City were forced to close due to the pandemic, our friends at Starbucks saw an opportunity to help hungry New Yorkers. The company donated more than 3,000 pounds of produce, dairy, and proteins, over 2,300 pounds of prepared foods, and nearly 2,300 pounds of baked goods that otherwise would have gone to waste during restaurant closures. In addition, Starbucks—along with Amazon, and Driscoll Foods—teamed up with UWNYC to provide 3,000 food care packages to MTA Workers—a group of essential workers devastated by COVID-19 due to high rates of infection and fatality—as a thank you for being on the frontlines and keeping our City running throughout the pandemic.

NFL: UWNYC has had a longstanding partnership with the NFL, New York Giants, and New York Jets. When COVID-19 hit the City, the strength of our relationship with the teams and the NFL shined brightly once again. The New York Jets and owners, The Johnson Family, were the first donors to our COVID-19 Community Fund, pledging $1 million toward relief efforts. As the pandemic continued to spread across our country, the NFL used their annual Draft Day as a platform to support United Ways, including ours here in New York City. The Draft-A-Thon, gave teams the opportunity to select a charity that would receive funding on their behalf from the event, and both the Giants and Jets chose UWNYC and contributed nearly $50,000 to our relief efforts. In addition, a $12,000 donation from the NFL Foundation was gifted to our Fund.
Below are a few highlights of how your dollars are making a difference.

**Advocacy and Policy Change (AdvocateNYC):**

- Funded advocacy partners and stakeholders to increase awareness of emerging issues arising due to COVID-19 and aligned on advocacy actions. Activities included policy analysis to ensure strategies have the greatest chances of addressing community needs and identifying policy gaps.
- Deployed advocacy actions (letters, testimony, social media communications, sign-ons, meetings with elected officials) to drive favorable policy and systems-level changes at city, state, and federal levels.
- Built capacity in NYC nonprofit organizations—particularly those serving people of color and/or areas of NYC with the lowest rates of self-sufficiency—to engage in advocacy and shape policies and systems changes.
- Strengthened inclusive coalitions of advocacy partners around COVID-19 and longer-term issues around education and self-sufficiency.

**Benefits Access, Eviction, and Crisis Support (BenefitsAccessNYC):**

- Provided funding to Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP) providers to allow more NYC residents to access crisis supports to pay rent, mortgage, or utility bills.
- Distributed eight laptops to allow Food Support Connections (FSC) partners to continue supporting virtual enrollment of families in SNAP.
- Contributed additional funding to Food Support Connections (FSC) partners to add additional outreach and enrollment staff to promote and enroll eligible people in SNAP.
• Funded the Housing Court Answers to support the increased demand for their referral services to assist residents struggling with paying rent, mortgage, or utilities.

• Invested additional funds to secure a greater matching award for Food Support Connections partners, making it possible to add additional SNAP outreach and enrollment staff for five community-based organizations.

Educational Support (ReadNYC):

• Provided crisis support to 400 ReadNYC families through:
  ◦ Monetary assistance for rent, utilities, food, and hygiene needs.
  ◦ Delivering grocery boxes because a hungry child won’t be able to focus on learning.
  ◦ Financially supporting social workers to connect families to health, housing, education, and employment resources.
  ◦ Delivered technology devices (tablets, software, and internet access) to 600 ReadNYC students to continue engaging in digital learning from home.

• Distributed culturally relevant books to build at-home libraries for 275 students to ensure reading gains and skills were sustained while not in school.

• Designed culturally relevant and rigorous summer learning opportunities for ReadNYC students to boost their literacy skills during our virtual Once Upon a Summer.

• Supported mental health by providing social and emotional support for children and families from ReadNYC schools to address compounded trauma from COVID-19 and created emotional space conducive to learning.

• Funded community based organizations (CBO) that work with Community Schools to enable them to continue offering services for children and families throughout the pandemic.

Food and Hunger Relief (FeedNYC):

• Brought additional food resources to address the COVID-19 supply gap in the emergency food system, and reached under-supplied communities through our network of emergency food providers and community-based partners.

• Leveraged Plentiful to connect with 86,000 users who can receive text messages to share important COVID-19 information on SNAP and other benefits through public service announcements.

• Equipped 50 to 70 emergency food providers to become “COVID-Ready” by providing technical assistance, safety and sanitation supplies, and other resources to enable them to operate safely at this critical time.

• Provided resources to create a cohort of ten AmeriCorps members to support emergency food providers that built organizational capacity and resiliency to support community well-being through access to food resources and related benefits.

Organization Support (StrengthenNYC):

• Designed and implemented virtual volunteer opportunities that strengthened UWNYC’s programmatic initiatives and built capacity of community-based organizations:
  ◦ Supported the Census 2020 “Get Out the Count” efforts, through phone and text banking, developing digital content, and engaging in social media and peer-to-peer outreach.
  ◦ Read and discussed culturally relevant books to ReadNYC students grades K-5 through virtual story time sessions.
  ◦ Provided virtual tutoring and mentoring sessions to ReadNYC students to help with their homework or a particular subject they are struggling with.
  ◦ Assembled Learning Success Kits at home by purchasing supplies via Amazon wish lists, building kits to enhance virtual learning experiences and delivering to ReadNYC students.

• Addressed immediate needs of community-based organizations faced with financial or operational challenges due to COVID-19 by providing skills-based technical assistance and capacity building supports, such as legal, technology, human resources, and marketing supports.

• Provided technology that facilitated remote work for community organizations, as well as training and supports.

• Delivered a virtual training/workshop for nonprofit leaders and Board members through BoardServe to strengthen their capacity to lead during uncertain times.
A Blessing for PATHSEO

Although New York City began the road to recovery for COVID-19, many low-income New Yorkers are still struggling with access to food. Children used to receive meals at school or during childcare programs, thousands of people are out of work, and people of color are up against systemic challenges that often create even greater hardships. For more than a decade, UWNYC has led the charge against food insecurity and has a great partnership with PATHSEO in Morrisania, Bronx. UWNYC provides food, supplies, and volunteers for their pantry and street team throughout the year. When the pandemic drastically increased the need, PATHSEO turned to UWNYC for added assistance. UWNYC provided financial assistance to cover the cost of rising food prices, and supplied refrigerators to store additional food that was needed to meet the growing numbers of visitors. Sandra Reyes, Executive Director of PATHSEO was beyond appreciative for the support UWNYC provided during COVID-19. “I see people in line, people I know who need help. But I was out of food. United Way of New York City has been a blessing.”

Bed-Stuy Restoration Guides Working-Class Families Toward Success

United Way of New York City has a long-standing partnership with Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation (BSRC), an organization working to close the income gap for families in Central Brooklyn. They focus on low-income and working-class families, chronically unemployed, single mothers, and previously incarcerated youth, where 63% of the people they serve are women and 65.8% are black. When COVID-19 hit, those already living paycheck-to-paycheck and struggling with debt—primarily single parent households and people of color—were now struggling even more trying to cover the costs of living expenses and food. Many did not have the devices or technology skills to work remotely and others lost employment due to shutdowns from the pandemic. Thanks to UWNYC’s COVID-19 Community Fund and our partnership with BET, clients had an opportunity to receive one-on-one training that will build technology skills, teach them to apply for jobs online, and provide the technology and additional skills to work remotely. In addition to workforce development, BSRC coordinated six food distribution sites. These locations served more than 1,000 households in need of meals, and provided fresh, healthy foods. One food distribution guest was beyond grateful for the support. “I received an email about a distribution of fresh vegetables, and I really needed it. I’m so appreciative of the assistance and hope for myself and my neighbors that it doesn’t end too soon. Thank you for helping our community,” she shared.
Financial Support for Families
UWNYC partner, LIFT NY, works with families to provide financial, social, and personal supports. Throughout the pandemic, LIFT learned that 90% of their members lost income due to COVID-19 and wouldn’t have the money to cover rent, food, and bills. UWNYC’s COVID-19 Community Fund was able to allocate critical dollars to LIFT to get financial support into the hands of struggling families. Martha, her husband, and two children are members of LIFT. She was so thankful to receive funding from UWNYC’s COVID-19 Community Fund. “We used the relief funds for the rent and to cover a few important items like water and toilet paper for our home. The funds helped us a lot. If not, I don’t know what we would have done. I think that at best I could have paid the rent, but not the lights or the phone. We had already taken all of the money I had saved from the past year for other necessities. I don’t know what we would have done without the support.”

Technology to Strengthen Our Nonprofits
When COVID-19 arrived in NYC, businesses had to quickly adapt to a virtual workforce. For organizations like Hunger Free NYC, their operations are critical to helping New Yorkers gain access to benefits like SNAP and other food supports. But working from home posed two major challenges. One, they were spending a greater amount of time on the phone with clients who were confused about reapplying or needing help for the first time, and two, the lightweight, portable tablets they had couldn’t handle the amount of data entry that is usually done on the office desktop. Thankfully, funding from UWNYC’s Covid Community Fund provided laptops and technology to staff to continue the critical food support enrollments—ensuring that hungry New Yorkers could get the help they needed. “It would be difficult to operate if we didn’t receive the donation from United Way. UWNYC definitely stepped up, and I was very grateful,” shared Denise Fernandez, Executive Director, Hunger Free NYC.

A Lifeline to Children and Families During COVID-19
Throughout the pandemic, many people stayed indoors to avoid contracting the disease. But for those families who unfortunately fell ill and couldn’t leave their home, who would be there to help? United Way of New York City served as a lifeline to many of our ReadNYC families throughout the pandemic from groceries and financial support, to books and at-home learning resources. Early on in the crisis, UWNYC connected with one of our ReadNYC families, a single mom with two children in 1st and 3rd grades. She was suffering from COVID-19 and was recently released from the ICU to recover at home. In order to keep her children healthy, she needed to isolate herself from them, but at the same time needed to feed her family and ensure that her children stayed on track with their education. It seemed impossible. But thanks to UWNYC and its partner organizations this family received the immediate support they needed. This family was able to receive a bundle of services that included bags of groceries, monetary assistance to cover household expenses while mom was out of work recuperating, books to practice reading, and learning materials for her children to engage with on their own.
This summer, New York City began to reopen—slowly and steadily. And as COVID-19 began moving into other locations across the country, NYC began moving from pandemic relief efforts to recovery efforts. The road to recovery will not be easy. It requires the assistance of an organization that can bring together people across different industries with the collective power to invest their time, talent, and treasure toward helping the City emerge stronger and more resilient than ever before. United Way of New York City is positioned to be that leading organization.

Now, as we help our City rebuild from the devastation of COVID-19 and prepare for the fallout from the second wave, we must also look to address system-wide deficiencies that were brought to light. Amidst the coronavirus, we learned that the disease disproportionately affected people of color—not just with devastating health concerns, but with social side effects: job loss, food insecurity, eviction, lack of educational resources, diminished savings, unable to meet basic needs, and the list continues. This disproportion surfaced questions about racial divides, equity, and the wage gap. These questions, coupled with the unjust killings of people of color across our nation have led to a deeper awareness of the structural barriers that impact Black and Brown individuals, across our country, and around the world.

United Way of New York City is an institution that is deeply rooted in racial equity and social justice. Our programmatic work centers around bridging the gap and condemning structural racism and discrimination. And, while conversations and statements are important and appreciated, we implore individuals and institutions to come together as a society and take meaningful and measurable steps toward ending systemic racism. As a result, we have issued a Call to Action and urge others to join us. Here are three ways to take action:

**Get Educated:**
Earn more about systemic racism and how to become a part of the solution through our virtual Town Halls and Educational Sessions. (details on unitedwaynyc.org)

**Get Activated:**
Give your time, treasure, and talent in areas like education, workforce development, and criminal justice.

**Advocate:**
Call your elected official, promote on social media, take a stand.

As the only organization with the resources to lead this system-wide change across our City, we are calling on our partners to amplify their voices for our Call to Action and are launching our Campaign for Equity: A Bold Call to Action. This campaign is a 3-year commitment that lays the foundation for more resilient communities and an equitable City. Our Campaign for Equity harnesses the outpouring of grief and frustration over racial inequity towards a collective action for change and civic healing. UWNYC’s work is to galvanize the goodwill, capabilities and resources of our network partners who are motivated with an urgency to affect positive change.

We look forward to sharing more about our Campaign for Equity plans and invite you to join us in our movement toward fulfilling our City’s potential.