



Responding to Disasters: A Guide for Local Education Foundations

Overview

A look through the websites and strategic plans of Florida's local education foundations will not likely give anyone the sense that these organizations are involved in facilitating community support for victims of natural and manmade disasters. Yet, many have found themselves in a "second responder" role in recent years. Several supported students and schools impacted by hurricanes and the Broward Education Foundation coordinated an \$11 million Victims' Fund for the devastating February 14, 2018 Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting.

Whether it is an individual somewhere across the U.S. watching events unfold on the news, a corporation with a disaster relief fund or a child with a lemonade stand, people want to help fellow citizens in need. When a school community is impacted, people with a connection to an education foundation may turn to that trusted entity with an offer to help. If an education foundation's online presence is strong, it might show up in a Google search to potential donors from afar.

In either case, the Consortium of Florida Education Foundations (CFEF) believes the mantra "be prepared" applies when it comes to planning how your education foundation will respond when a disaster impacts your school community. This paper is intended to help education foundation leaders consider if and how they will respond to disasters impacting local students and/or schools. Those choosing to facilitate a philanthropic response will benefit from the experiences of colleagues and experts in the field with some specific suggestions and best practices to consider in developing a policy and plan appropriate for their local context.

How Do You Know If and How Your Foundation Should Step Into the Responsive Philanthropy Arena?

The CFEF suggests starting with these six steps:

1. Start With Your Mission:

As the designated nonprofit aligned with a school district, many local education foundations are considered the "go to" partner by their school district and community for a wide variety of student, teacher and school-related needs. Others remain focused on a few clearly defined goals with other organizations stepping up to assist in other areas. An education foundation that solely focuses on student scholarships might see getting involved in disaster relief as mission-drift. An education foundation whose mission is to "link community resources to the needs of students" might see facilitating a response effort as a logical extension of that mission.

2. Assess Your Relationships and Capacity:

In the scenario of the scholarship-focused education foundation, a conversation on the topic might still be worthwhile. People know you are involved with students, so if an event happens that involves other student needs, it's good for the education foundation to be able to refer them to other community partners with confidence. If your education foundation is willing to facilitate response efforts, the next step is determining your capacity to do so. As you move through the remaining steps, be realistic about what it will mean to take on these additional duties. Are there short-term volunteers you can engage to help with administrative support and coordination efforts so your current staff/volunteers aren't stretched too thin?



How Do You Know If and How Your Foundation Should Step Into the Responsive Philanthropy Arena? (Continued)

3. Talk with School District Leaders at All Levels:

Clearly it is key to first talk with school board members and the superintendent to determine if they agree with the education foundation acting in a response role. Equally important, principals, department heads and other district leaders need to know the foundation is standing by to help when and if needed. This communication should become part of district and school emergency preparedness policy discussions. Everyone needs to understand the role the education foundation will play once the event has passed and be prepared to direct people seeking to offer monetary support to the education foundation.

4. Explore Various 'What If' Scenarios Together:

Part of the Orlando community's response to the horrific Pulse nightclub shooting in June 2016 was facilitating the tremendous outpouring of offers to help from around the world. Central Florida Community Foundation leaders shared that one of the reasons the private-sector, government and nonprofit response was effective is because the community had gotten together in advance to talk through various scenarios. What if there was a school shooting? A tornado devastated a neighborhood? Hundreds of evacuee families arrived at their airport after an international event? (Note: The last example was an actual scenario – Nearly 11,000 students enrolled in Florida public schools after Hurricane Maria devastated Puerto Rico, many arriving with only the clothes they were wearing.) If your community hasn't gotten together to talk through the philanthropic response to various potential events, education foundation leaders would be wise to suggest doing so to city, county, United Way, school district and other community leaders, being sure to involve local government emergency management agencies. The discussions can go a long way in helping education foundation leaders discern the circumstances in which they may choose to take a leading or supporting role.

5. Develop a Policy and Plan in Advance:

Now the important work really begins! Put together a task force to create a policy appropriate for the context and capacity of your organization. What types of catastrophic events will you respond to? What community partners and school district departments will you work with? Will you only accept cash contributions, or will you also facilitate in-kind gifts such as school supplies or gift cards for impacted students or teachers? How will you handle evaluating needs and vetting requests for support? Once your policy is in place, develop a response plan or framework. What will you do in the first 48 hours? What procedures do you need to put in place to make sure every step in receiving, disbursing and accounting for financial and in-kind support takes place in a timely and efficient manner? (See next page for suggestions in developing your foundation's policy and plan.)

6. Communicate, Communicate, Communicate!

We heard from CFEF members involved with various disaster response efforts that communication was key at every level and stage of a philanthropic response effort. First and foremost, if you have decided your foundation is willing to act in this capacity, make sure the appropriate stakeholders know in advance. Circle back with the people and individuals involved in earlier conversations and let them know you've developed a policy and plan. Second, as we learned when Hurricane Michael interrupted the school year for 58,000 students in Northwest Florida in October 2018, it's important to have multiple methods for contacting staff and volunteers when cell phone towers and servers are down for extended periods. Finally, be prepared to put your plan in action by assessing the level of need with your school district partners and letting the public know you are ready to facilitate assistance.



Policy & Plan Considerations

- ✓ Revisit your Gift Acceptance Policy in anticipation of potentially unusual gifts and be sure to address the need for administrative fees upfront.
- ✓ Think through how your decision to act in this capacity will work with your core foundation programs. For instance, if the foundation operates a teacher resource store you may opt to change “shopping” policies to serve impacted students with needed items such as hygiene kits, clothing or school supplies. Perhaps your classroom grant application processes could be adapted for teachers to apply for immediate, focused support.
- ✓ If you determine there are other organizations better suited to address certain needs such as housing or transportation, how will you work collaboratively with them?
- ✓ Prepare a template webpage where you can quickly upload the specific information and accept online contributions along with a related e-communication and social media plan.
- ✓ People often want to donate physical goods in the aftermath of a disaster. Are you able to accept and distribute those items? If not, who can you refer those eager donors to or how can you redirect them? (Idea: If your school district or college has a distribution and logistics education program, this could be a great service-learning project – with students developing a plan to deploy when needed!)
- ✓ How will you stay in touch with the stakeholders involved to make sure resources are distributed equitably and you aren’t duplicating efforts? Regularly scheduled conference calls with community partners and with school district leaders during a recovery effort can result in a more coordinated effort. This is an area where an education foundation can establish itself as a leader and collaborative partner.
- ✓ Get clarity around what type of support you are equipped to assist with – short term relief only or long term and capital needs? Of course, any event may have different associated needs and opportunities. When Hurricane Irma impacted the Florida Keys in September 2017, school damage was minimal, but many teachers were displaced or burdened with unexpected expenses in a community with the highest cost of living in the state. District leaders feared these teachers would leave for other areas of Florida. The foundation made the decision to facilitate \$750,000 in contributions from unexpected, out of state donors to get them back in the classroom through one-time relief grants.
- ✓ You will need extra help. Are there former board members or volunteers you can enlist for short-term help to do things like field phone calls and write thank you letters?

More Resources and Links

[Center for Disaster Philanthropy](#)

[Federal Emergency Management Administration \(FEMA\) – Hub of Philanthropic Engagement](#)

[National Council for Home Safety and Security](#)

[National Compassion Fund of the National Center for Victims of Crime](#)

[The Survivors Fund Process for Disaster Recovery](#)

[The IRS Disaster Relief Report](#)

[The Central Florida Community Foundation](#)

[Broward Education Foundation Marjory Stoneman Douglas Victims’ Fund](#)



Lessons from the Marjory Stoneman Douglas Tragedy

Within hours of 17 students and faculty members losing their lives when a gunman took control and terrorized their campus in Parkland, FL on February 14, 2018, contributions started pouring in from around the world. People from all walks of life felt the need to do something to honor the memory of those who were killed and the indomitable spirit of those who survived by contributing money for the benefit of the victims. As the direct-support organization for the school district, the Broward Education Foundation stepped up to facilitate contributions.

From the start, education foundation and district leaders knew that they needed expert help to manage such a monumental and emotionally charged effort. This assistance was found in the National Compassion Fund of the National Center for Victims of Crime, and within the first 24 hours they set about establishing a Community Steering Committee. This committee took the solemn obligation to honor the intent of donors to help victims very seriously by administering funding received in a way that was fair, transparent, victim-centered and trauma-informed.

The committee held a series of town hall meetings to listen to the ideas and concerns from their large and diverse community before establishing protocol, procedures and a timeline for disbursing the funds. In addition to funds received by the central fund, more than 140 different GoFundMe accounts were established by various individuals and organizations. By working closely with GoFundMe officials and demonstrating that a plan had been established, several of these ended up being directed to the education foundation fund. Within six months, funds were distributed as unrestricted gifts to the families of victims and on a prorated basis to those injured or on campus and subjected to the trauma of the unspeakable act.

No one wants to think about a school shooting happening in their community, but it is a sad fact that they have escalated in recent years. Just months before the tragedy, Parkland was named one of the safest communities in the United States. This type of tragedy could happen literally anywhere, and every school community would be wise to include facilitation of a philanthropic response in their emergency plan.

The Broward Education Foundation offers the following advice in developing this type of philanthropic response plan:

- ☒ What you tell donors the funds will be used for is important. Seek counsel to make sure the gifts will not impact aid coming from other sources.
- ☒ Think in advance about prospective steering committee members, bearing in mind that it will be important to avoid potential conflicts of interest and that you may need to include relevant constituents.
- ☒ Be prepared for the question, “What can I do to help?” You will need both expert help and administrative support. Think about who you can activate for immediate support.
- ☒ Develop procedures, processes and deadlines, and stick with them. Communication and transparency are key from start to finish.

Conclusion

Stepping up to facilitate relief, recovery and victim support efforts for a school community in the aftermath of a disaster can be a valuable service to both donors and those impacted. It can solidify relationships and help students, teachers and schools get back to the business of learning after an unexpected interruption. Advance planning can help education foundation leaders thoughtfully determine if and how they will respond in a time of need more effectively.

Consortium of Florida Education Foundations
www.educationfoundationsfl.org

The CFEF maximizes the individual and collective strength of Florida local education foundations to support local partners and schools.

