



A CALL TO ACTION

Southern Partners Fund besieged with requests to alleviate COVID-19 Crisis

Grantee partners have flooded SPF's Atlanta office with pleas for emergency resources to alleviate the chaos and fear being unleashed by COVID-19 in SPF's funding area.

SPF's geographical focus includes twelve southeastern states, (AL, AK, FL, GA, KY, LA, MS, NC, SC, TN, VA, and WV), the least philanthropically funded region in the U.S. Rural communities in our region are struggling to stay alive in a dystopian political environment where facts are fiction and fictions are facts. While much of the focus has stayed on urban centers, rural communities are also in desperate need of help.

Affordable health care has always been scarce in communities of color and the working poor. Underlying health issues make COVID-19 an even more potent threat, heightening the risks of severe medical conditions and death. Many southern states have refused to expand Medicaid, forcing rural hospitals and clinics to close, leaving our elderly, our most vulnerable, to fend for themselves. Here, the lack of testing kits and protective gear for health care providers becomes especially dire. Needed shelter in place and social distance regulations compound the difficulties of providing services.

Southern Partners Fund's capacity for enabling our grantees to build coordinated response teams in their communities is well documented. Our grantee organizations rely SPF's Justice Fund for Disaster Relief and Renewal grants to identify their most vulnerable populations and connect them to agencies and services that can help. In turn, vulnerable populations in these communities trust SPF grantee organizations to provide them with the best support available. In many communities, our grantee partners are their first responders.

SPF's disaster fund grantees, small rural community organizations, form a vital part of emergency management systems in SPF's 12-state region. They have compiled community profile data that includes names and ages of each household member, their doctors, medicines, medical conditions, nearest relatives, important phone numbers, transportation needs, and other pertinent information that will help facilitate wholeness after a disaster. They are connecting government agencies at local, state, and national levels to vulnerable populations, lobbying for test kits and protective gear for health care workers. With meager resources, they are transporting people across two and three counties to purchase food and supplies, which despite markups of 25-35%, are still running short due to fear-based hoarding. Supply trucks deliver food and supplies to rural communities one time weekly. Our grantee community organizations are helping local rural governments to ask state health departments and FEMA the right questions, and to demand services be provided in their towns and counties.

SPF is receiving numerous grant requests for funds to mitigate the COVID-19 crisis that we are unable to fulfill. We urgently need your financial support for our Justice Fund for Disaster Relief and Renewal in as timely a manner as possible.

With deep gratitude,

Fernando Cuevas, Jr.
Executive Director



Historical Perspective + Context

According to Karen Watson, Executive Director of Sylvania, GA's Positive Action Committee, SPF founding member, past Board Chair and current board member:

"SPF's Fund for Disaster Relief and Renewal began in the aftermath of hurricane Katrina in 2005. Rural communities in LA and MS, historically marginalized economically, educationally and medically, were equally marginalized by the country's disaster relief efforts. SPF's Fund for Disaster Relief and Renewal was created to assist rural communities to rebuild as well as access needed local state and national services. For 15 years, from Katrina to the COVID-19 virus, SPF's Disaster Fund has distributed approximately \$630,000 to over 70 rural community organizations in crisis.

Currently, many southern rural communities no longer have a local hospital, nor medical technology or equipment for diagnosis and treatment. The COVID-19 virus is overwhelming existing small community clinics with one or two local doctors, few nurses, and open in daylight hours only. People with serious chronic medical conditions and emergencies often lack the human and financial resources needed to make a two to three- hour drive to see a specialist.

Elders frequently live in small older houses, miles away from their closest neighbor. No access to education in years gone by, and years of long hours of hard work every day in other people's homes and in the fields have left many seniors functionally illiterate. They are often unable to read medical forms or newspapers or understand the news they hear on TV about the dangers of COVID-19 and the need to shelter at home to avoid infection.

Young people of color in poor rural communities are not frolicking on the beach or hanging out in clubs like we've seen on newscasts. But they congregate on street corners, in their homes, and in pool halls like their urban counterparts, oblivious to the seriousness of COVID-19. Too often they've been overwhelmed by problems with local school systems and law enforcement; some are formerly incarcerated or children of incarcerated parents. Their only hope is to listen to community leaders who've had their backs in the past, whom they feel they can trust.

Local community organizations who are in the community for the long haul, headed by local leaders of the same race and class as the community, are the only entities fully trusted both by the community and by local state and national emergency service providers.

Addressing the additional hurdles rural poor communities are having to navigate is paramount to fighting this pandemic.

Rural Community organizations like Positive Action Committee who are SPF grantees are depending on SPF to help us move our vulnerable populations through the COVID-19 crisis. In turn, SPF is depending on OUR funders and supporters to enable us to channel funds to these leaders. Please don't let us down in this time of serious need."



Grantee Organization Testimony

Carolyn Ford, Executive Director of North FL Educational Development Corp. in Gretna, FL, SPF founding member and current board member adds:

Gretna, FL is in the poorest county in the Florida Panhandle. Most employees in the Panhandle's poorest rural counties are hired by the State in low-end jobs like clerks, the hospitality industry and tourism. The COVID-19 virus has cut their families' lifelines:

- Schools, senior citizens centers and daycare centers are closed;
- Low-income families are out of work and not receiving paid leave;
- All feeding sites are closed;
- Most service providers were told to close operations and go home.

Community problems aggravated by the COVID-19 virus are:

- Lack of access to buying basic food
- Lack of transportation to grocery stores, pharmacies and Dr. appointments
- Lack of access to technology
 - Monthly minutes provided by the state are used quickly
 - People don't have money for cable
 - Some counties lack internet service or service is sporadic and poor

Our communities are in crisis. Death is around the corner. We really need help.

Please respond to Southern Partners Fund Executive Director, Fernando Cuevas, Jr.
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(SPF staff are working from home due to COVID-19)

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