EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

COVID-19 Solidarity Response Fund

An Overview of the Fund Approach
Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic presents an unprecedented global health emergency, and it is clear the virus and its evolving impacts can only be overcome by steadfast international cooperation among all stakeholders and with the World Health Organization (WHO) at the center of response and recovery efforts. In March 2020, WHO partnered with the United Nations Foundation (UNF) and the Swiss Philanthropy Foundation (SPF) to launch the COVID-19 Solidarity Response Fund. The Fund is the foremost mechanism that allows individuals, private sector partners, foundations, and other organizations around the world the ability to provide direct support to the life-saving work of WHO and its key partners.

The Fund is not a legally established, central fund. Rather, it is a consortium of partners, including independent fiduciary partners operating in twenty countries, that work together to raise unrestricted resources from non-traditional donors to advance WHO’s Global Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan (SPRP). At the outset of the pandemic, WHO did not have in place a mechanism to quickly allow non-traditional donors — from individuals to private sector partners and small-scale philanthropies — to contribute directly to WHO’s efforts, as the WHO Foundation had not yet been established. As such, the Solidarity Fund has filled a niche that no other mechanism could for this moment’s global health crisis.

Financial resources raised in the name of the Fund are allocated by a Steering Committee toward urgent needs, consistent with the strategic objectives of the SPRP. WHO, especially its commodity supply chain, is the foremost beneficiary of the Fund’s resources, but the Fund’s Steering Committee also has the ability to allocate resources to partners inside and outside the UN system who are critical in the global response. The Fund is collaboratively managed by a Project Management Board co-chaired by WHO and the UN Foundation, the Fund’s largest fiduciary partner.

The speed and timing of the Fund’s establishment, the outpouring of generosity from Fund donors, and the agility and rapidity of Fund disbursements are all hallmarks of the Fund and indispensable attributes given the global response needs to the COVID-19 pandemic. Weekly Fund disbursements from fiduciary partners to WHO and its partners started the third week of Fund operations, making the Fund some of the earliest significant support to the global response.
Reaching New Audiences

Contributors to the Fund include organizations, private companies and corporate foundations, individuals, and non-governmental organizations. By definition, all contributors’ gifts are unrestricted. More traditional contributors such as Member States, multilateral institutions, or philanthropic foundation partners of WHO continue to donate directly to WHO, as per past practice.

The Fund’s fiduciary partners, including the UN Foundation, Swiss Philanthropy Foundation and the Transnational Giving Europe network, Japan Center for International Exchange, KBF Canada, and China Population Welfare Foundation, take the lead in soliciting, confirming, and receiving contributions to the Fund.

To enable individual online donations from anywhere in the world, UNF established an online common web donation platform for the Fund in consultation with WHO. This website houses general information about the Fund, its purpose, and an online donation form. As the Fund evolves, content on the website is updated, including weekly disbursement updates. Other Fund fiduciary partners host their own webpages for the Fund in local languages, many also allowing for online donations.

While the Fund is able to solicit and receive funding directly from individuals via its website and partner webpages, it also benefits from third parties that act as intermediary fiduciaries via existing donation platforms. The Fund’s principal partners — the UN Foundation and WHO — actively sought out amplifying partners to extend the reach of the Fund. These include novel partnerships with Facebook Fundraisers, Tiltify, Benevity, Amazon Pay, and Text to Give. The Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA); Global Citizen and its celebrity network; media companies such as Now This, Vice, and Upworthy; and international business associations including the World Economic Forum, International Chamber of Commerce, International Organisation of Employers, UN Global Compact, and Connecting Business initiative also engaged to help disseminate and amplify messages about WHO and the Fund through their channels. Digital influencer and celebrity engagement, events such as the One World: Together At Home concert, online and employee giving campaigns, percentage-of-sales efforts by retail companies, and donor-advised funds are all additional tactics the Fund has used to solicit interest and financial resources.

Social media has also played a key role in extending the reach of the Fund. A common hashtag — #COVID19Fund — was adopted early and shared widely with donors, supporters, and influencers as a way to unify content and amplify the Fund. Suggested messaging continues to be shared with partners via a digital toolkit so that branded content is consistent across multiple partner platforms, allowing for continuous, on-message fundraising. Great care is taken throughout, including codifying written agreements and brand guidelines to not convey direct partnership between the Fund’s contributors and WHO.

Receiving Contributions and Working with Contributors

The Solidarity Fund brings together many collaborators and contributors in new partnership arrangements. In order to understand and acknowledge any potential legal, financial, or reputational risks associated with accepting a donation or entering into a new partnership, prospective contributors are connected with the appropriate fiduciary partner who then conducts a due diligence process according to their own institutional practices. The due diligence criteria give consideration to the requirements and reputation of WHO and the United Nations and preclude collaboration with the...
tobacco and arms industries. Once a partner clears due diligence, the contribution is committed to the fiduciary partner in writing and is then considered a firm pledge, which can be used for forecasting and allocation planning. A shared tracker is used by fiduciary partners to track funds anticipated, funds received, funds allocated, and funds disbursed to beneficiary partners.

Additionally, to ensure donors and partners to the Fund are provided with a philanthropic experience which mirrors industry standards and requirements, contributor management and stewardship are ongoing processes. The Fund’s fiduciary partners acknowledge and publicly recognize contributions and provide where applicable confirmation for tax deductions to ensure contributors receive informed, accurate documentation about the value and tax implications of their contribution. The Fund also uses social media platforms to publicly acknowledge contributions above a certain threshold.

Disbursing Contributions and Working with Beneficiaries

Decisions regarding allocation Fund resources are made by a designated Steering Committee, nominated by the WHO Director-General and chaired by the WHO Executive Director of Health Emergencies. The Committee takes a range of elements into consideration when determining the allocation of funding, prioritizing the most urgent public health needs and underfunded priorities based on the evolving situation of COVID-19. The Steering Committee does not put forward calls for interest or have an open application process for granting funds. However, proposals can be presented by WHO units and by non-WHO prospective beneficiary partners following a specific application procedure. In the first phase of the pandemic, priority was given to early research and development efforts — including through the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) for
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The Fund has volunteered for an independent evaluation which will be coordinated through the WHO Evaluation Office as per its standard practices. The bulk of the evaluation is expected to be completed in time to share with the May 2021 World Health Assembly, with a review of final implementation after the Fund’s resources have been fully expended.

Setting a New Standard for High-Impact Fundraising

As of November 2020, the Fund remains the second largest contributor to WHO’s COVID-19 response. When it was established as a novel experiment in an emerging global health emergency, the full scope, duration, and severity of the pandemic were unknown. However, it was clear from the start that the Fund should operate with principles of international solidarity, transparency, and accountability at its core and with an approach that could remain flexible, iterative, collaborative, and responsive. Given the size, structure, and high visibility of the Fund, there continues to be a need to assess risks quickly and remain agile in mitigating them to ensure success for the Fund and all its relevant partners.

Guided by these principles and due to the tremendous generosity and engagement of partners, the Fund has raised over $238 million from over 653,000 individual donors, corporations, and other non-State actors in 190 countries. In a relatively short interval, this Fund has demonstrated an unprecedented capacity to help WHO meet the myriad challenges presented by COVID-19, while providing valuable insights and experience that will be utilized in the future to support WHO’s collective efforts.

Reporting on Impact

The Fund takes a consolidated approach to communicating with contributors about the impact of resources raised. Primary stewardship mechanisms include regular impact reports and contributor calls to allow donors the opportunity to hear directly from WHO on the relevance and value of the Fund. An annual report of the Fund will be developed by summer 2021. Beneficiary partners of the Fund also are obligated to provide formal annual reporting to fiduciary partners. This direct reporting is complemented by regular updates for donors and storytelling on the Fund’s website, as well as on WHO and other fiduciary partner websites, social media channels, and blogs.

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www.covid19responsefund.org