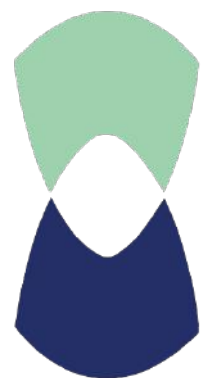


Connect Detroit Pandemic Impact Listening Session Report

Connect Detroit held a Listening Session on April 30 to support and better understand our community partners' challenges and responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. This report is the result, created from an audio recording transcription, chat comments, and conversation notes. More than 60 participants attended; their voices are reflected throughout.



Context – Food Insecurity, Illness and Death

Listening Session participants raised the alarm about youths' social and emotional health, food insecurity, and safety. Many youths are faced with family members' illness and death, which *“adds to the dysfunction in homes that are already dysfunctional.”* The grief and loss are real. Some organizations are providing stress relief kits and counseling to young people and their parents. In reference to everyone being in the same boat, one participant replied:

“I would like to change that, and say we are all in the same storm but not in the same boat. The reason I say that is my boat may have more than yours and your situation may be different than mine, so it is not necessarily the same boat but, for sure, the same storm!”

Youth

Many families struggle with home schooling responsibilities, while students try to adjust to new routines, insufficient distance learning, and lack of material resources to engage and complete assignments, (e.g., technical equipment). *“Imagine having multiple children in different grades and only one computer at home.”*¹ Several participants discussed the challenge of keeping young people engaged and vested.



This moment presents an opportunity to envision transformational change with young people. Many of our students feel disengaged from their distance learning because they have other priorities in their lives (health, safety, nutrition, etc.). One youth asked, “What is education really for?” What a great question for us all to be asking/thinking through together!



¹ Some quotes have been altered to correct spelling errors, missing letters, or missing punctuation. We did not want these issues to detract from their words and meaning.

Many provide incentives, encourage creativity, have guest-speaker video calls, and seek to meet basic needs, including buying groceries. Many non-profits are deepening their engagement with parents, and sought support from *“partners/speakers that are skilled in virtual facilitation.”* While parent engagement has grown, barriers for parents for whom English is a second language are exacerbated by having to engage virtually. There is a great deal of concern about meeting their needs.

Business Continuity and Communication

The COVID-19 crisis has changed the way we relate and work. We’ve been forced to learn new technologies, and work and communicate in ways that are unfamiliar.

“Doing so many new things all at once has been very stressful and not having that physical and mental support readily available has been a challenge.”

Non-profits have had to take into account how partners, program participants, boards of directors, stakeholders, and funders want to be communicated with: frequency, level of detail, medium (audio, text, email, visual), and on which platform (Microsoft Teams, Zoom, GoToMeeting, Facebook).

“Many youths do not answer their phones nor listen to voicemails, or check emails, so communicating with them is challenging.”

This adjustment further highlights the digital divide. Not only are there equipment and internet access capability disparities among youth, elders, and families our partners serve, many of our colleagues lack the ability to work efficiently or effectively at home.

Shifting funding priorities create increased anxiety. One participant explained that some foundations, and the City of Detroit, may want non-profits to return unspent funds. She understood why the philanthropic community is diverting dollars to fight COVID-19 and to assist Gleaners and Forgotten Harvest in feeding community members. Yet, organizations have payroll, bills to pay, and insurance (medical, practice liability, etc.) to maintain.

“Also figuring out how our programs and events will look going forward, unfortunately many programs and services may have to be altered or cut.”

Yet, our non-profit partners stress the importance of continuing to produce high-quality work, working to keep youths, families, community and academic partners engaged.

Workload, Burnout and Self-Care

“We are in an emergency state!

Everything is in the now!

Everyone wants everything now!”

Listening Session participants, to a person, indicated they were working harder, countering the perception that *“this should be a great time for you to relax.”* Zoom and Microsoft Teams meetings are non-stop. *“Multi-tasking has taken on a whole new meaning.”* In the struggle to meet everyone’s needs, there was a sense that burnout may be inevitable.

However, many participants have found ways to de-stress. *“We have to take those moments to ourselves, because we’re worthy.”* Self-care has included:

- Reading
- Long “sacred” baths
- Dancing (*“My hubby and I are dancing every night!”*)
- Taking a 10-minute break after each video call
- Drinking wine

***“I went from working
12 hours a day to
20 hours a day!”***



Hopes and Opportunities

It may have been a bit early to inquire about what good could result from this pandemic, economic upheaval, and physical distancing. But, in the midst of this, partners are diving into virtual instruction; engaging in grass-roots feeding, teaching, and resource delivery tactics; and “re-envisioning what the workplace may look like when we return.” Additionally, they are pleased that educational and social service providers are viewed as professionals and key in making this new reality work.

“We are finding that our students are not engaged with academic learning at home and are not maintaining communication with their schools. We are reaching out via phone calls, Group Me, and through other social media to provide a listening ear and additional resources for students.”

“Many of our youth use technology as a toy, and the virtual experiences will teach them a better use of today’s technology, and prepare them for a better tomorrow.”

Recommendations

Connect Detroit has often acted as a bridge between our partners, philanthropy and decision-makers. We continued this role as convening host, and by capturing, aggregating, and sharing what we heard.

In sum, we recommend the following:

- Recognize non-profit front-line workers
- Allow non-profit organizations to keep unspent monies if they pledge to use those funds to:
 - address program participants’ food insecurity and other basic need inadequacies exacerbated by COVID-19;
 - prevent electrical, Internet, gas cut-offs to individual and families; and
 - strengthen organizational communication and service delivery infrastructure.
- Appreciate the complexity of realizing digital inclusion
- Adopt equity-focused interventions to distribute resources where they are needed most
- Support the creation of safe workplaces when the Stay Safe, Stay Home order is lifted
- Allow funding flexibility to support organizations’ operational needs

“Keep a joyful heart. We will overcome!”

ORGANIZATION LIST

There were more than 60 participants from the following invited organizations:

Accelerate4KIDS	Lakeshore Economic Coalition
ACCESS	Life Directions
Advanced Technology Academy	Mack Alive
Alternatives for Girls	Mariners Inn
Atlantic Impact	Math Corps (Wayne State University)
Avengers Youth Mentoring Organization	Matrix Human Services
Barack Obama Leadership Academy (Timbuktu)	MicroWorks Employment Training Services
Bethel Baptist Church, East	Mosaic Youth Theatre of Detroit
Boys & Girls Clubs of Southeastern Michigan	No Barrier 2 Success
Central Detroit Christian	Ozone House, Inc.
Charles R. Drew Transition Center	Payne-Pulliam School
Clark Park Coalition	People's Community Services of Metropolitan Detroit
Code313	Perfecting CDC
Cody Rouge	Racquet Up Detroit
College for Creative Studies	Reggie McKenzie Foundation, Inc.
Detroit Branch NAACP	Ruth Ellis Center
Detroit Community Schools	SER Metro Detroit
Detroit Cristo Rey High School	Sigma Pi Iota Boule
Detroit Food & Entrepreneurship Academy	StarrVista, Inc.
Detroit Hispanic Development Corporation	Sweet Kingdom Baptist Church
Detroit Horse Power	Take One Community Program
Detroit Police Athletic League	The Greening of Detroit
Developing KIDS	The Lawn Academy
DPSCD - Exceptional Student Services	The Youth Connection
DTE MI Hispanic Collaborative	The Yunion
EcoWorks	U of D Mercy - TRiO Upward Bound Program
Franklin Wright Settlements	Urban Neighborhood Initiatives
GenesisHOPE CDC	Vista Maria
Heritage Works	Wayne State University Center for Urban Studies
Highland Park Boys & Girls Club (DTE Expansion)	YMCA
Hope Community Outreach and Development	YMCA - Centerline and Southfield
Inner City Youth Group	YouthWorks - Detroit
Junior Fire Cadets	
Junior Police Cadets	
Keep Growing Detroit	