



Addressing the COVID-19 Pandemic's Impact on Student Success

A RAPID-RESPONSE STRATEGIC
FRAMEWORK FOR FUNDERS

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ABOUT HELIOS EDUCATION FOUNDATION

Helios Education Foundation is dedicated to creating opportunities for individuals in Arizona and Florida to achieve a postsecondary education. Our work is driven by our four fundamental beliefs in Community, Equity, Investment, and Partnership, and we invest in initiatives across the full education continuum.

Through our Florida Regional Student Success Initiative, Helios is helping underserved, minority, and first-generation students from the state's large population centers in Miami, Orlando, and Tampa achieve a postsecondary education.

In Arizona, where Latino students comprise the largest percentage of the K–12 public school population, the Foundation is implementing its Arizona Latino Student Success Initiative focused on preparing all students—especially students in high-poverty, underserved Latino communities—for success.

Dear Education Partner,

It is undeniable that the spread of COVID-19 has changed our society. From the office to the classroom, the global pandemic has forced new ways of work, instruction, and person-to-person engagement. Under these circumstances, leadership matters. Pragmatic and prudent leadership will ensure Helios Education Foundation emerges from this challenge alongside our partners and the students we serve. Our board of directors showed steadfast leadership and commitment to Helios' fundamental beliefs of Community, Equity, Investment, and Partnership in the wake of unprecedented need by acting swiftly in support of communities in Arizona and Florida. Immediate need was met with an immediate response.

While communities struggled to meet needs brought on by the global pandemic, our partners and their respective boards faced the pandemic with a firm commitment; they remained focused on uplifting the populations they serve. Helios was proud to work alongside many community organizations at the onset of the pandemic to address hardships.

Committed to supporting communities, students, and educators across Arizona and Florida, Helios Education Foundation collaborated with United Ways and community foundations in both states to meet general community needs while also partnering with College Success Arizona, Take Stock in Children, and the Florida Consortium of Metropolitan Research Universities to structure student-centric funding. By investing in these partnerships Helios sought to ensure vulnerable student populations continued their path toward postsecondary completion with minimal disruption. Our ongoing commitment to educator professional development led Helios to invest in The Arizona Virtual Teacher Institute which, as of this writing, has trained over 7,700 school teachers throughout the state. This brief outlines our funding strategy and poses reflective questions for other philanthropic organizations dedicated to supporting communities in times of crisis.

We hope this methodology is useful to support your community during these challenging times.

Sincerely,



Vince Roig

Founding Chairman

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Vince Roig".



Paul J. Luna

President & CEO

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul J. Luna".

EDUCATION CHANGES LIVES AND STRENGTHENS COMMUNITIES.

The transformational power of education has the potential to impact not only an individual student, but also his or her family for generations to come. A high-quality education can propel workforce readiness, social and economic mobility, and civic

engagement. And, while all students benefit from the completion of a postsecondary degree, first-generation, low-income, and underrepresented students stand to gain the most; it also means they have the most at risk.

BACKGROUND

Helios Education Foundation is dedicated to enriching the lives of individuals in both Arizona and Florida by creating opportunities for success in postsecondary education. Fundamental beliefs in Community, Equity, Investment, and Partnership propel student supports and guide the foundation's strategic investments. While all students benefit from the transformational power of education, Helios focuses on serving first-generation, low-income, and underrepresented students, thus addressing the education equity gap that often prevents these students from realizing their potential.

Focused on student success in Arizona and Florida, Helios invests in partnerships that address each state's education needs.

In Florida, Helios implements a Regional Student Success Strategy by investing in the Tampa Bay, Central Florida, and South Florida regions, where the majority of the state's underserved students reside. By empowering partners to explore innovation, reimagine education pathways, and fund initiatives that seek to propel student success, Helios addresses educational inequity and empowers communities to challenge systemic injustices.

In Arizona, where Latino students represent over 40% of the K-12 student population, the foundation executes its Latino Student Success strategy that seeks to elevate college preparation and completion among this growing

population. Arizona's Latino students lag behind their nonminority peers in academic achievement across the K-12 continuum and are underrepresented in postsecondary degree attainment. What starts as an inequity in elementary school further develops in middle school and remains consistent throughout high school, as Latino students trail behind their White peers in college readiness. Elevating Latino Student Success all along the education continuum will ensure a growing proportion of Arizona's population can leverage the transformative power of education to benefit their community now and for generations to come.

To ensure students not only have access to but also complete a postsecondary degree, Helios supports initiatives that seek to dismantle barriers to access and completion. The COVID-19 pandemic had a profound impact on these initiatives that support the most vulnerable populations. The global pandemic has forced both Helios and its partners to transform the way they invest and respond. This brief will examine this impact.

Section 1 describes the landscape: minority enrollment in postsecondary education and the pandemic's impact on a post-COVID-19 workforce. Section 2 identifies a framework funders can use to support strategy development during a time of crisis and details Helios' response to the pandemic. Section 3 explores how Helios' nonprofit partners quickly shifted to new ways of work prompted by COVID-19.

Impact on education

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated numerous challenges all along the education continuum. In the early learning environment, providers struggled to remain open. K-12 districts had to be agile to equip students with computer hardware necessary to ensure instruction while also shifting teaching practices to accommodate remote learning. And at the postsecondary level, campus closures compounded long-standing challenges, including access to reliable technology, career mentorship, and counseling. Students suffered from food insecurity and lack of socialization, and they struggled to remain engaged with challenging curriculum delivered virtually. Compounding these challenges for postsecondary students were issues of unemployment, pessimism, and feelings of hopelessness about their future.

Education inequity reflected in the workforce

As exemplified by the COVID-19 crisis, individuals without a postsecondary degree are more vulnerable to job market extremes. Food service, hospitality and tourism, and manufacturing suffered greatly during the economic shutdown prompted by the global pandemic, leaving thousands of non-degreed individuals unemployed. Conversely, industries such as financial services, insurance, and information technology—industries with highly degreed workforces—made the critical shift to remote work, continued to service clients, and were able to minimize furloughs and layoffs despite economic challenges.

Florida is a richly diverse state, but without a concerted effort to ensure minority students complete a postsecondary degree, that diversity will not translate into a richly diverse workforce or the economic strength to lift minority communities. In Arizona, degree completion among Latinos lags behind nonminority students, thus limiting workforce options for this growing group. To ensure both states benefit from highly educated workforces that are racially and ethnically diverse, immediate supports were necessary so vulnerable students remained enrolled and committed to degree completion.



SECTION 2: HELIOS' RESPONSE TO THE PANDEMIC: A FRAMEWORK FOR FUNDERS

The global pandemic mandated a change in the delivery of pre-K–12 and postsecondary instruction. It forced organizations to transform the way they deliver services, and it is shaping a future that is vastly different than previously envisioned.

Long-standing issues, such as the digital divide, educator professional development, and lack of mental health services, have emerged as priorities for education leaders as result of COVID–19. Acknowledging these critical issues is essential for the success of all students, particularly underrepresented students, who rely heavily on support services to complete a postsecondary degree.

Helios' commitment to student success was reinforced by the resiliency demonstrated during the pandemic by students and in the organizations that support them. Instead of viewing COVID–19 related investments as short-term responses to an immediate need, Helios chose to incorporate the inequities highlighted by the pandemic within its existing community investment strategies. This approach is rooted in partnership and fueled by an understanding that change must be systemic in order to be sustained. Educational investments and COVID–19 investments are not mutually exclusive; each relies on the success of the other and will merge in order to meet the ongoing needs of students.



How did the Helios Education Foundation initially respond to the pandemic?

How an organization responds to an emergency sets the tone for what can be accomplished. If an organization moves too quickly, it might miss the crux of a problem, lose employee buy-in, or come across as tone-deaf to community partners. At the same time, if an organization moves too slowly, it can sink itself financially, diminish standing in a community, or lose the public-perception battle. Because of these factors, nearly every organization in the United States had to balance how quickly to respond at the beginning of the COVID–19 pandemic. To cope with the pandemic in Arizona and Florida, Helios moved quickly to organize a strategic framework to guide its actions. The framework served as a roadmap for how Helios was going to work through the pandemic. Being strategic allowed the organization to minimize opportunities for rushed decisions. Through the framework, the foundation outlined the outcomes it hoped to accomplish. This, in turn, made it much easier to focus on grant-making activities.

Helios' framework for managing through the pandemic was structured around three stages with seven specific items.

Stage 1: Listening and Strategizing focused on building strategy by planning with the board and reaching out to community partners and grantees. Stage 2: Implementing focused on executing the decided strategy and getting funding to strategic partners. Stage 3: Learning and

Evaluating focused on creating a formative feedback loop to understand the strategy's success and make modifications as needed. As of this writing, Helios is still in the middle of Stage 3 and continues to learn. We address each of these elements in Sections 2 and 3.

STAGE 1

Listening and Strategizing

- Begin with a dialogue with the board.
- Reach out to community leaders and existing partners, reassure them of your commitment and flexibility, and learn what they are going through.
- Identify crisis response priority goals and objectives.

STAGE 2

Implementing

- Support local nonprofit and community organizations aligned to crisis response goals.
- Develop grantmaking priorities from new goals and objectives.
- Work with a set of partners to adjust grant goals and milestones as necessary.

STAGE 3

Learning and Evaluating





Deciding on a course of action during the COVID-19 pandemic

STAGE 1

Listening and Strategizing

- Begin with a dialogue with the board.
- Reach out to community and existing partners, reassure them of your commitment and flexibility, and learn what they are going through.
- Identify crisis response priority goals and objectives.

Begin with board dialog

In a nonprofit the board works closely with the CEO to identify organizational goals and, sometimes, specific strategies. This planning often takes place during board meetings or retreats. However, COVID-19 turned typical board and leadership interaction atypical, requiring more flexibility and adaptation to implement necessary strategies effectively.

For many nonprofit boards, including Helios, formal structure gave way to flexibility with an increase in telephone calls and virtual meetings. At the heart of these meetings, leadership and the board had to address a number of questions, including:

- How does the pandemic impact day-to-day operations?
- How to keep staff safe (e.g., work from home and no travel)?
- Where is the organization vulnerable?
- How does the pandemic impact our mission and vision?
- What does this mean for our grantmaking?
- How can we continue to be a good community partner?

Through this dialogue, Helios board and leadership identified strategies to protect both the organization and staff. As a result, the foundation decided to maintain its current grantmaking strategy and fund all projects and programs already in place as well as those making their way through the grant pipeline process. Additionally, the board and leadership decided to increase funding for community support. But, to do this would require conversations with the community.

Reach out to community and existing partners, reassure them of your commitment and flexibility, and learn what they are going through

Community leaders and existing partners know a lot about the needs of their communities. They have direct connections with families, schools, and the people who make each community unique. When working collaboratively, nonprofits and community leaders seek opportunities that target specific needs, rather than offering generic support that may not have the same type of impact.

At the same time, community leaders and existing partners had their own concerns about how COVID-19 would shape their work. To help ease some of these concerns, at the onset of the shutdowns in March 2020, Helios reached out to each partner to reassure them of the foundation's commitment to their organization and offered flexibility in the execution of existing grants. Section 3 highlights a set of case studies that demonstrate how Helios' partners used ingenuity to modify and carry out their work.

While preserving the grants in place and in the pipeline, Helios also used this period of time to learn about additional challenges confronting partners and the community. But first Helios had to reflect on whom they were going to talk to and how they wanted to use this information. When working with community partners, the following considerations may be helpful:

- How do we select community leaders and organizations to partner with?
- Do we focus on trusted partners, or do we expand our network?
- How do we identify goals and projects?
- How do we plan with partners to move work forward?

To understand community needs in Arizona and Florida, Helios empowered and encouraged its Community Engagement teams to reach out to existing partners and community leaders. During the first few weeks of the pandemic, this meant several virtual meetings. In them, the Community Engagement teams focused on listening. They gave partners opportunities to discuss the challenges their communities were facing. They also reassured partners that Helios was going to be flexible with open grants and the use of grant dollars. This active listening resulted in the identification of possible community investment opportunities to bring back to Helios leadership and ultimately the board.

Identify crisis response priority goals and objectives

Armed with direction from your board and equipped with information from community leaders and existing partners, the final step in Stage I is to identify goals and objectives. When working on this step, there are a number of questions to consider:

- How might our decisions change the way we do business?
- Are we willing to invest in organizations or projects that we normally don't invest in?
- What's most important to our organization compared to that of our partners?
- What can we learn from our partners?
- Do we have the resources needed to do the work?

What was Helios' strategy during the pandemic?

Upon completion of the Listening and Strategizing stage, Helios identified three major priorities which became their focus during the pandemic. The first was a commitment to communities. The purpose of such work is to ensure that community organizations can continue to operate and have the financial resources to help their communities. The second priority was a commitment to students. In this area, Helios specifically focused on working with existing partners to keep students enrolled in college. Third, Helios focused on a commitment to educators with emphasis on improving digital instruction in a virtual environment.

STAGE 2

Implementing

- Develop grantmaking priorities from identified goals and objectives.
 - Commitment to communities: Support local nonprofits and community organizations
 - Commitment to students
 - Commitment to educators
- Work with existing partners to adjust grant goals and milestones as necessary.

TABLE 1

Aligned Community Funding During COVID-19

Organization	Amount
Arizona Community Foundation	\$100,000
Community Foundation for Southern Arizona	\$50,000
Valley of the Sun United Way	\$100,000
The Miami Foundation	\$50,000
United Way of Miami-Dade	\$100,000
Heart of Florida United Way	\$100,000
Community Foundation of Tampa Bay	\$50,000
United Way Suncoast	\$100,000

Develop grantmaking priorities from new goals and objectives: Commitment to communities

When the pandemic hit, it quickly became clear communities throughout Arizona and Florida were in need, and that need would be ongoing. People in those communities were going to lose jobs; students were going to lack basic resources; and emergency and frontline workers were going to lack supplies to do their jobs effectively. As a result of these challenges, the Helios board and leadership decided to make an initial set of investments focused on supporting local nonprofits and community organizations at the forefront of serving community members impacted by the pandemic.

Relationships were key to responding to community needs, as Helios determined the best course of action was to support existing partners in Arizona and Florida. The primary goal of this work was to provide general funding to support COVID-19 response and recovery in both states. Knowing there was immediate need, Helios wanted to be a good community partner by getting resources to those organizations that were on the ground and able to move quickly. In total, Helios gave \$650,000 to community organizations in Arizona and Florida with a focus on the regions we support in Florida (Tampa Bay, Central Florida, and South Florida) and the two largest counties in Arizona (Maricopa and Pima).

TABLE 2

Commitment to Students: Completion and Resiliency Grants During COVID-19

Organization and Project Name	Amount
Florida Consortium of Metropolitan Research Universities COVID-19 Summer Completion Grant Initiative	\$650,000
Take Stock in Children Florida COVID-19 Student Support Initiative	\$500,000
Take Stock in Children Florida COVID-19 Student Support Initiative Continuation	\$500,000
College Success Arizona—Arizona Postsecondary Student Resiliency Fund	\$650,000

Develop grantmaking priorities from new goals and objectives: Commitment to students

Through community discussions, Helios came to two conclusions about next steps for its grantmaking. First, the foundation wanted to maintain all of its existing grantmaking priorities. This meant continuing to support grantmaking for early grade success, college and career readiness, and postsecondary completion. In addition, the foundation also wanted to maintain the process for all the educational concepts already in the proposal development pipeline. Second, knowing that both students and teachers were going to need extra support during this time, the foundation worked closely with partners to develop a set of COVID-19 response projects aligned to Helios' mission.

Several projects focused on keeping current college students enrolled during the pandemic. Helios' partners were extremely concerned a high number of first-generation, low-income, and underrepresented students would drop out during the pandemic. Given this challenge, the foundation worked with three partners across Arizona and Florida to provide both monetary emergency scholarships and a set of support services aimed at keeping students enrolled through the pandemic. In total, Helios gave \$2,300,000 to support student completion and resiliency during the pandemic.

To guide the reader and to provide more detail about these partnerships, this brief provides the following three vignettes. Each overview identifies the work of the partner, defines how Helios expanded the existing partnership to support students, and lists a description of outcomes. A one-page fact sheet at the end of this brief summarizes all three initiatives.

The Florida Consortium of Metropolitan Research Universities

Formed as a partnership between the University of Central Florida, University of South Florida, and Florida International University, the goal of the Consortium is to strengthen Florida's talent pipeline. In partnership the three universities do this by seeking opportunities to: (1) accelerate student achievement; (2) increase career success in the three metro areas of Tampa Bay, Orlando, and Miami; and (3) identify promising practices and scaling them up to increase impact.



Early in the pandemic, Consortium leadership became concerned that some of their students were in danger of dropping out or not completing their degree. To counter this, Helios worked with the Consortium to develop the Helios-Florida Consortium COVID-19 Summer Completion grant. Under this grant the universities were able to provide emergency funding to students who were not covered by the CARES ACT or traditional financial aid.

A total of 610 students obtained emergency funding with this initiative, with an average award of \$1,061.60. Many of the students who obtained funding credited the resources for their continued enrollment. For example, one student reported, “Had it not been for your assistance, I would not have completed my final semester due to being unemployed.” Similarly, another student stated, “As a full-time mom, working full time and taking part-time classes, a weight has been lifted knowing that I qualified for this grant.”

Take Stock in Children

The Take Stock in College Initiative was designed to help Take Stock in Children (TSIC) scholarship recipients succeed in and complete college. To support this effort, TSIC provides yearly wrap-around support services that include:

- Webinars with experts;
- Virtual office hours;
- Themed weekly curricula;
- Nudging support (email and texts);
- Social media outreach; and
- Student Ambassadors.

The purpose of this approach is to provide consistent communication between TSIC staff and the college scholars.

Like other college support programs, TSIC worried that the pandemic could ultimately create financial hardships that students might not be able to overcome. Working with Helios, TSIC created a bifurcated approach to student financial support. Under the first phase, TSIC provided \$250 in direct support to mitigate hardships for students. For those students who required additional financial resources, TSIC implemented what it calls the SOS Student Emergency Fund Grant. Under this phase TSIC could award an additional \$500 in emergency funding for those students in critical need.

As of December 2020, across TSIC’s two grants totaling \$1,000,000, it has awarded 1,565 students a total of \$392,250. The organization will continue to support students with the additional funds throughout 2021. For some students the funding has made all the difference. “I will be splitting the money . . . to feed me and my family,” said one student. Another student reported, “It will pay for the many difficulties I am going through while trying to finish the semester. Currently, I am out of work, and as bills come due and class supplies run low, I am in desperate need of grant help.”

College Success Arizona

College Success Arizona’s mission is to significantly increase the college attainment rate in Arizona, particularly for students who otherwise would not be able to attend or graduate from higher education. To meet its goals, College Success Arizona provides supports through statewide initiatives, including: Arizona College Access Network (AzCAN); AmeriCorps: AdviseAZ; Arizona Ready for College and Career; and Ask Benji, as well as through scholarship giving and mentoring. In addition, College Success Arizona has been a long-standing partner on Helios’ College Knowing and Going initiative.

Like its counterparts in Florida, College Success Arizona quickly learned that students were struggling to stay in school. Through its outreach, College Success Arizona learned students had lost jobs and didn’t have enough money for basic resources. Working with Helios, College Success Arizona created the Arizona Postsecondary Student Resiliency Fund with the direct purpose of keeping students enrolled in college and focused on graduation. The Fund provided grants to low-income and first-generation college students to help them continue their education despite educational, housing, technological, or other expenses.

A total of 1,156 students obtained funding under the Arizona Postsecondary Student Resiliency Fund. Of those students, 89% were minority who reported that they were using the fund mostly for multiple needs or educational expenses.



Develop grantmaking priorities from new goals and objectives: Commitment to educators

A second priority that emerged through partner discussions focused on teacher professional development for online instruction. Like most of us, teachers were caught off guard when the pandemic hit. With relatively little to no training in the delivery of online content, K–12 teachers struggled with the immediate shift to online instruction. This meant that many teachers also struggled with how to engage students online and how to assess student learning and understanding.

Emerging out of Arizona State University was an opportunity to provide digital training to teachers that included sharing best practices in online instruction, web tools, setting up virtual instruction plans, pacing charts, monitoring student progress, teaching times, and stress management. The project, which was a \$7.5 million

collaboration between the Arizona Governor’s Office, the Arizona Department of Education, Arizona State University, and Helios Education Foundation, aims to provide every teacher in the state of Arizona with the training needed to deliver online instruction.

As of December 2020, the Arizona Virtual Teacher Institute has trained a total of 4,646 Arizona school teachers from 822 schools across 331 school districts.

ASU Virtual Teacher Training During COVID-19	
Organization	Amount
Arizona State University—Arizona Virtual Teacher Institute	\$2,500,000

SECTION 3: HOW DID HELIOS’ PARTNERS RESPOND TO COVID–19, AND WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

The COVID–19 pandemic was unlike any other crisis faced by the United States. Almost overnight, the country went from a vibrant and super–charged economy to eerie silence. As the Helios board of directors and senior leadership strategized about the foundation’s response to the pandemic and where to target resources, grantees engaged in similar discussions about how to continue their work and how to address unplanned impacts. Beginning in March, Helios staff scheduled wellness checks with grantees, to determine how they were faring and how the foundation could help. Staff inquired about needed resources and grantee’s ability to continue their work. Specifically, Helios wanted to ensure the grantee’s continuity of work. The foundation learned their partners responded immediately and consistently with innovation,

grit, determination, and agility. Numerous partners used the funding provided by Helios and other philanthropic sources to pivot swiftly, while staying true to their organizations’ missions. Helios learned that even during a crisis, when economic and social effects can seem insurmountable, visionary organizations and individuals will proactively make the best of any given situation.

“Never let a good crisis go to waste.”

—Sir Winston Churchill
mid-1940s as the world approached the end of World War II

Work with existing partners to adjust grant goals and milestones as necessary.

As described in Section 2, Helios wanted to learn from its partners and adjust grant goals and milestones as necessary. In addition to scheduling recurring check-ins with partners, Helios asked a standard guiding question in all interim reports to learn about changes and necessary adjustments based on the COVID-19 pandemic. All responses were compiled in a database which identified commonalities, trends, and innovative learnings. Because Helios has more than 100 open grants, totaling more than \$114 million, those responses represent one-third of current partners.



How did organizations reimagine their work to support both students and their organizational priorities?

The foundation’s analysis showed that 60% of partners initially postponed or rescheduled events, but 80% of programs developed and launched new tools to maintain and even increase participant engagement.

CASE STUDY 1	
Cuéntame at Make Way for Books	
Primary Goals	Impact Area
Early Language and Literacy, Teacher Professional Development, and Community Outreach	Early Grade Success
	Location
	Tucson, AZ

The goals of the Cuéntame program are twofold: increase high-quality early learning opportunities for young children who don’t have access to early education, and provide support to home-based early learning providers. Many of the participating families and home-based providers have been directly impacted by the pandemic. Some because parents are essential workers or first responders, and too often family members have contracted COVID-19 and/or lost their jobs. Compounding the problem, as the number of COVID-19 cases began increasing in March 2020, the Cuéntame team made the difficult decision to stop all in-person programming, but they knew they had to find alternative ways to serve their community.

Through the Cuéntame Story School sessions, parents and caregivers can support their children’s development of critical emergent literacy and language skills, social-emotional skills, and positive approaches to learning. Before the pandemic, these learning opportunities took place at neighborhood schools and community centers, where parents and families brought their children to in-person sessions. Within a matter of days, the Family Education and Literacy team moved all Story School programming online. In place of face-to-face sessions, participants now attend weekly livestream video sessions hosted on the Make Way for Books Story School platform. During the pandemic, Cuéntame’s highest priority has been to maintain the integrity of the original face-to-face design, particularly with respect to social connections, peer learning, and support. To that end, it created pre-

recorded Cuéntame Story Lessons that families can access weekly. They include in-depth information on the bilingual brain; cognitive and language development in the first five years; emergent language, literacy, and biliteracy; social-emotional skills; and positive approaches to learning. Cuéntame Story Lessons also feature bilingual readings of the Cuéntame Story School books, as well as songs and rhymes. The Cuéntame team also delivers books and resources to families prior to the series start date, including backpacks filled with the curriculum books, writing materials, and other supplies for language and literacy activities.

Finally, families can interact on the Family Learning Space, an online platform where parents can post their thoughts and experiences related to the weekly Message and Question, access and share information on community resources, and build community with their fellow Cuéntame cohort members. Family Literacy Specialists moderate the Family Learning Space, and it will be an essential means of highlighting participating families' home literacy skills.

When Make Way for Books resumes in-person programming in 2021, it plans to permanently integrate modifications that have successfully engaged children and families into the Family Engagement strategy and continue providing remote participation options. Because content is provided virtually, families from remote and rural areas across Southern Arizona who normally wouldn't have access to in-person programming but desperately need it are participating in extremely high numbers. And participation hasn't waned due to "Zoom fatigue." Instead, the numbers are doubling the original projections.

“Thank you for teaching us more ways to communicate with our children with songs and through readings. We can enjoy and teach our children that even in difficult times, books teach us a thousand ways to continue dreaming of a better world.”

—Cuéntame Parent

The Cuéntame program also provides support to home-based early learning providers who identified a need for additional tools to support children who have been directly impacted by the pandemic. To help providers navigate these complex issues, Cuéntame staff are providing virtual coaching that emphasizes tools and strategies to support children's social-emotional development, including ways to use books and stories to address anxiety, confusion, and fear related to COVID-19. The increased focus on emotional literacy will be reflected in book distribution as well.

“The uncertainty regarding the duration of these new circumstances has been difficult for our staff and the community we serve. However, we are a nimble organization that takes pride in finding new and innovative ways to reach children, families, and educators. As we grow accustomed to this reality, we continue to look forward to the day we can return to face-to-face programming. In the meantime, we are inspired by the extraordinary capacity that books and stories have for connecting people in times of difficulty.”

—Jenny Volpe

Executive Director, Make Way for Books



While Helios focused efforts on getting financial resources to partners, how did these organizations then meet the needs of the populations they serve?

In light of the pandemic, 75% of Helios' partners provided basic services and supports to the populations they served, while also fulfilling original grant goals.

CASE STUDY 2 Florida State University CARE Unconquered Scholars Program (USP)		
Primary Goals	Impact Area	Location
Student Supports and Scholarships	Postsecondary Success	Tallahassee, FL

The Florida State University CARE Unconquered Scholars Program (USP) provides an array of support services centered on the overall success of youth who experienced foster care, homelessness, relative care, or ward of the State status. The combination of challenges experienced by former foster youth can hinder academic success and degree completion. Continuation of these services was critical given this population is at greater risk of experiencing homelessness, food insecurity, insufficient medical care, undiagnosed learning disabilities, or lack of independent living skills.

When the pandemic forced the university to transition to a virtual campus in March 2020, the program immediately identified students who would need on-campus housing and coordinated with University Housing to ensure housing stability. To assist participants not living on campus who began experiencing homelessness during COVID-19, USP used reappropriated funds to secure a townhouse off campus to provide living accommodations for the remainder of the spring term. The townhouse was stocked with food to ensure adequate nutrition. WiFi access was also provided so that residents could continue attending virtual classes and complete the semester successfully.

As the pandemic lingered and virtual learning was extended, University Housing decided to remain closed during the summer 2020 term. This presented a significant hardship for incoming program participants. Many Unconquered Scholars are admitted to the university through the Summer Bridge Program. Normally, the Summer Bridge Program provides 7 weeks of on-campus housing to coincide with the summer academic session. Each year, USP participants report that living on campus for the Summer Bridge Program resolved homelessness or allowed them to leave an unsafe/unstable housing situation in their hometown. To ensure students who needed safe, stable housing could be accommodated at the university, USP coordinated with University Housing to open a limited number of spaces for incoming students in need. In coordination with the university's Dean of Students and the Center for Academic Retention, students who lacked technology devices (e.g., laptop, tablet) were identified. Each was sent a loaner tablet to ensure continued ability to complete academic assignments and progress toward his or her degree.

During the 2019–2020 academic year, USP was able to provide significant rent assistance to students, which helped 18.5% of the USP's students avoid eviction and homelessness. Thirteen students, 8.9% of the program students, received funding to address unmet medical needs. Eleven students, 7.5% of the program's students, received funding to combat food insecurity. An additional 5.5%, eight students, were assisted with educational expenses. Simply put, the Helios Education Foundation Unconquered Scholars Program Support grant funds allow the program to provide direct support to students so they can maintain stable housing, and have access to medical care, food, and educational materials. It allows them to stay focused on academics and persist in their pursuit of a college education, when the stark alternative was to drop out.



Lessons learned and considerations

Recognizing the importance of how nonprofits respond to their partners during the pandemic, the following offers a set of lessons learned and considerations to guide collaboration. When combined with the strategic framework identified in Section 2, we believe funders can fully develop a workable strategy aimed at creating positive impacts.

Considerations for philanthropic organizations that support other nonprofits and students in a time of crisis

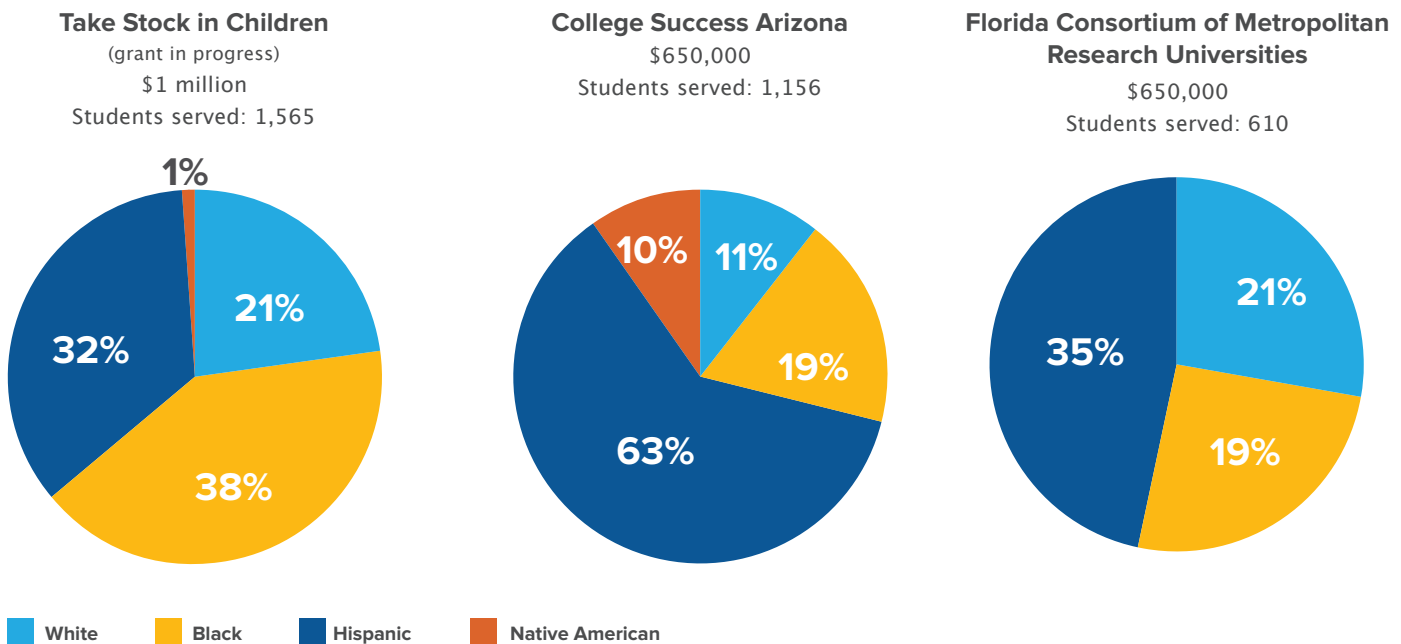
- **Learn from your partners' agility.** While their work paused initially, almost all Helios grantees developed a completely new process or platform for continuing to provide services such as Make Way for Books. Some plan to incorporate these changes into their normal business procedures because they are so effective.
- **Allow grantees to use the reporting process to share both successes and challenges.** Use information as an opportunity to open a discussion about grant expectations.
- **Work cooperatively.** Share ideas and ask for advice through this time.
- **Leverage relationships.** Complement rather than compete to provide services.
- **Practice active listening.** Give partners an opportunity to discuss challenges.



Commitment to Communities: Aligned Community Funding During COVID-19



Commitment to Students: Completion and Resiliency Grants During COVID-19



Commitment to Teachers: ASU Virtual Teacher Training During COVID-19



As of December 2020, the Arizona Virtual Teacher Institute has trained a total of 7,790 Arizona school teachers from 1,098 schools across 382 school districts.





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