America's Business Community Leads Pandemic Response and Preparedness: COVID-19 recovery, resilience to economic fall-out and support for Community Collaborative model to prevent the next public health crisis

Bill Oldham
Founder and Chairman of the Board
Thought Leadership & Innovation Foundation (TLI)
1750 Tysons Blvd, Suite 1500, McLean, VA 22102 USA

Shawn Murphy
Executive Director
Thought Leadership & Innovation Foundation (TLI)
1750 Tysons Blvd, Suite 1500, McLean, VA 22102 USA

Abstract

Despite its devastating impact on populations and businesses worldwide, COVID-19 is providing an opportunity to reassess, discover and strengthen the fabric of communities and states across the country in order to mitigate the brunt of future health crises. While we are "all in this together," there is a need to take action and set the agenda for addressing the factors that affect the strength and resilience of individuals, businesses, policy makers and communities. Now is the time to galvanize business and healthcare leaders nationwide to not only react to the current and ongoing coronavirus challenge, but to also prepare for future health crises that have the power to cripple our economic climate, further impact racial disparities and access to care, and impose restrictions on our entire healthcare system. By working together through community collaboratives and taking action now, this tragic pandemic serves as a learning experience to move forward toward repair and effect positive change.

Keywords: Pandemic, Community Collaborative**,** COVID-19**,** Coronavirus**,** Opioid Abuse**,** Furlough**,** Racial disparities**,** Economic Empowerment

Introduction

Caught in the Cross-Hairs of a Pandemic

Since its emergence in Wuhan, China, in late 2019, the novel coronavirus that causes COVID-19 has spread rapidly around the world. As the deadly virus sweeps across the United States, the White House coronavirus task force has presented a dire projection of between 100,000 to 240,000 deaths – well beyond the 12,500 Americans killed by the 2009 H1N1 flu outbreak.[i]

[ii]As this pandemic continues to rage around the world, pandemic preparedness is impacting businesses of every size and scope throughout the country. Some may falter and smaller organizations are likely to feel its force more acutely. Business interruption, closures and lost opportunities for sales will resonate across every industry.

For these reasons, it is in the best interest of business leaders nationwide to not only react to the current and ongoing coronavirus challenge, but to also prepare for future health crises that have the power to cripple our economic climate.

Evidence suggests that the likelihood of pandemics has increased over the past century because of increased global travel and integration, urbanization, changes in land use and greater exploitation of the natural environment.[iii] These trends are likely to continue and intensify. Significant policy attention has focused on the need to identify and limit emerging outbreaks that might lead to pandemics and to expand and sustain investment to build preparedness and health capacity.[iv]

As COVID-19 reached the shores of this country, many were caught off-guard and considerable catch-up is necessary, with drastic measures being taken to avoid potentially unnecessary and avoidable economic disruption, slow the spread of the virus and save lives. Employers and employees alike are paying a steep price with the mandated closing of businesses and the furloughing of employees nationwide. Unprecedented measures were put in place and unemployment reached record levels—with nearly 10 million filing for unemployment benefits in a two-week period.[v]

Knowing that this "once in a lifetime" pandemic is likely to occur again in our lifetime, it has become imperative that a new and effective means of protecting both employer and employee – and ensuring the survival of businesses -- must emerge outside of government programs.

By exploring the economic fall-out of the current pandemic, and the extraordinary value and impact of community collaborative approach to high-level challenges, communities are building solutions outside of government programs while concurrently seeking to access federal funding for specific initiatives.

1.2 COVID-19's Economic Fall-Out

As the impact of the pandemic worldwide continues to play out with deaths, business closures and stock market decline, businesses prepare for recovery. Every organization looks forward to the "bounce," which requires coordination and cooperation throughout the community. Overcoming supply chain failures, loss of work due to illness, the widespread effect of quarantines, travel restrictions and the closing of non-essential businesses and loss of income and profits[vi] requires diligence.

Exhibit A

Given the unprecedented nature of this ongoing catastrophe, it can be informative to look at the economic impact of past epidemics. The Black Death**,** a devastating global epidemic of bubonic plague that struck Europe and Asia in the mid-1300s, killed so many people that wages for surviving workers doubled. In 1918, the Spanish Flu killed 675,000 Americans. This epidemic peaked just as World War I ended, with many experts pointing to the drop in demand for war materials and demobilization, and not the Spanish Flu, as a trigger for the ensuing recession.[vii]

But today, the circumstances are much different. At the time, President Woodrow Wilson added to the death toll by censoring news to keep people working. There were no measures imposed, such as social distancing, closing bars and restaurants or opportunities to work from home. While actions in 2020 are likely to reduce the total death rate, they still bear a heavy economic toll.[viii]

On a more optimistic note, several months ago, the U.S. economy was strong with unemployment at a 50-year low, strong wage growth and record optimism among small businesses.[ix] Regardless of where the nation lands, companies need to be ready for major changes in how they conduct business for some time to come.

2.0 Critical Time to Work Together

Public health is a shared responsibility. Communities, businesses and individuals can and should take measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and follow recommendations from the CDC on how families, schools and businesses can plan for and respond to the virus.[x]

There is increased recognition that support for these CDC recommendations is critical to recovery and state and local chambers, its members, and the wider business community are attempting to adopt and implement these standards, if they have not done so already.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce is pushing government leaders to quickly take several common sense steps to provide assistance and relief to businesses and workers alike, while urging Americans to not overreact in ways that hamper efforts to control the spread of the virus or cause unnecessary disruptions in daily life.

2.1 Understanding the Value of a Community Collaborative

Apart from this current pandemic, communities across the United States face a barrage of serious issues, such as the opioid epidemic, health disparities, gun violence, homelessness and many other problems that impact population health and well-being. Leaders are struggling to identify coordinated, cohesive actions to effectively combat these corrosive problems.

A number of forward-thinking community organizations and projects utilize a collaborative strategy to effect change. Unfortunately, too often their outcomes across a complex network of issues remain poorly understood – and can generate unforeseen consequences in unpredictable ways.

Complex and severe community issues cannot be resolved by quick fixes. Rather they require a broad multiple stakeholder perspective and action plan to fully address every dimension of an intractable problem. The approach must be carefully constructed, responsible, far-reaching and lasting. When community organizations coordinate their work and join forces on innovative interventions, they can mitigate the "butterfly effect" that leads to chaos and chance circumstances.

The Community Collaborative model developed by the Thought Leadership & Innovation Foundation is designed to bring together all relevant groups and stakeholders – especially those who have not traditionally been included -- to overcome the deep societal challenges related to health and well-being. This approach incorporates visionary and practical strategies designed to have a positive, supportable impact on a wealth of projects needed to solve the staggering challenges that currently undermine our nation's communities.

This can be accomplished by eliciting the input of an extensive grouping of local business and healthcare leaders and serving as a depository for information and guidance needed in the event of a significant healthcare crisis. By developing partnerships with these leaders in public and private businesses the outcome will be a better-prepared community to deal head-on with a healthcare emergency without any hesitation or time lost due to a lack of preparation.

It is in the best interest of business leaders to not only react to current and ongoing pandemic challenges, but to also prepare for future catastrophic events. Experts believe that the world's leaders are ill-prepared for outbreaks of infectious diseases, and businesses are unprepared for the significant economic, social and political disruption.

By developing partnerships with business coalitions, hospital systems, community groups and others in targeted geographic locations, community collaboratives are creating plans for businesses to protect their communities in the event of regional, national and worldwide disasters. This requires extensive experience with implementing community collaboratives, as well as involvement with government and community leaders. These collaboratives can be leveraged to launch a coordinated and educational outreach plan to business groups, coalitions, grantors and others with a vested interest in supporting these programs.

2.2. Six Phases of a Community Collaboration

TLI's six-phase Community Collaborative model leverages various means to bring together organizations, people and data to meet the objectives of the collaborative. As the project progresses through the six phases, hard science is applied to the data collected while benchmarks, best practices and milestones are identified across the community.

Phase 1 – *Asset and signal mapping* provides visual representation of data on a common platform to guide innovation. The platform can be customized to meet the needs of the community to share data and represent data visually. Data reporting and visualization are vital to improve processes and stimulate innovative solutions to common problems.

Phase 2 – *Community meetings* will be held to engage community leaders and organizations in the collaborative and begin to develop a network for action. The meetings are the vehicle to bring people together to develop

shared vision and shared understanding of the issues. The goal of the community meetings is to recruit organizations to participant teams.

Phase 3 – *Community assemblies* will be held once a critical mass of participant teams has been engaged. The community assemblies are learning and sharing sessions. Each meeting agenda progresses from education and training to shared learning and innovation to dissemination and spread of innovation and outcomes. The assemblies are designed to inspire, motivate and engage participant teams.

Phase 4 – *Technical assistance* is provided throughout the collaborative in the form of monthly calls to share information and for coaching. Virtual meetings are motivational and action oriented. Participants are assigned a change management expert coach available for ad hoc assistance and coaching.

Phase 5 – *Data management and communication* is provided through the platform. The collaborative will hold the membership and all participant teams will have access to the program. Asset and signal mapping are done on the platform, as well as report development. Formal reports will be developed and disseminated to the teams as the project progresses.

Phase 6 – *Sustainability and adoption* of new practices are developed as the Community Collaborative process builds the capacity of the teams and the communities they serve to sustain the networks developed and maintain the platform for collaboration. The tools and processes used in the development of the collaborative network remain with the community to sustain the gains and foster innovation.

The lessons learned, the innovation that emerges and the networks expanded in the community can spread throughout the rest of the country. Community teams will have the opportunity and support to publish their ideas and highlight their successes, as well as their lessons learned on a local, state and national stage.

Exhibit B

Elements of a learning community are utilized to address the most important issues from the perspective of the collaborative participants. The collaborative is focused on action and utilizes the structures and processes of a formal breakthrough collaborative to move from idea generation to action to implementation of innovation. This unique hybrid model benefits from the rigor of a breakthrough collaborative while maintaining the flexibility seen in learning communities.

3.0 Case Study*: Los Angeles County Community Collaborative (LAC^3)*

The County of Los Angeles is the most populous county in the United States and leads the nation in terms of job growth, the number of minority-owned business and being one of the top public health systems. Unfortunately, LA County also leads the nation in unsheltered homelessness, poverty rate and STD outbreaks. While life expectancy is higher than much of the rest of the country, strong disparities exist within the county. A difference in life expectancy of nearly 15 years exists between the highest and lowest performing communities.

California had the fourth highest number of drug overdose deaths in the nation, 4,868 in 2017:
- In LA County, there were an average of 464 accidental opioid-related deaths per year from 2011-2017
- On average, individuals who died from drug overdoses died 30 years prematurely
- Hospitalizations and emergency department visits related to opioid diagnoses have increased 31 percent and 51 percent, respectively, between 2006-2017, with a substantial increase in costs associated with hospitalizations from opioid diagnoses
- According to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health 2012-2014, the prevalence rate of misusing/abusing prescription opioids in the past year in LA County is 4.7 percent, higher than the national average of 4.3 percent.

In most communities, the opioid crisis is slow to develop and lasts a long time. The areas of the country that are not yet in full crisis are experiencing a slow increase in opioid use. Communities may not notice the impending crisis until it is too late to prevent the destruction of lives and community resources.

By fostering the economic and social health of communities – while improving access to care and resources to prevent overdose – this approach strengthens virtually every member of the community. It takes a multipronged approach to build resilience among families and communities through actions that strengthen education, health

and economic development. Communities are empowered with the tools that they need to grow and flourish and develop connections with other communities to form lasting bonds. The idea is to harness the diversity, leadership and influence of the most innovative communities to create a model for the nation to propagate social capital and build communities of recovery and wellness in states, cities and rural areas across the country.

3.1 A Disruptive, Innovative Approach

The Los Angeles (LA) County Departments of Public Health and Mental Health worked with the Los Angeles County Community Collaborative (LAC³), an incubator of innovation to address the nation's opioid crisis. LAC³ was a partnership between the LA County Department of Public Health, the Department of Mental Health and the Thought Leadership & Innovation Foundation. Guided by a universal prevention framework, LAC³ aimed to promote social and environmental conditions that protect communities from the harms of opioid use.

This disruptive, innovative approach to the opioid crisis had the aim to decrease overdose deaths, decrease addiction, provide compassionate, effective pain management and improve the overall health of communities. The goal was to eliminate inequities in healthcare, education and justice systems by tackling institutional and structural racism and fighting for economic opportunity. The end point was to relieve the suffering of those in physical, mental and spiritual pain and do so without causing the downward spiral of addiction. This cannot be done by one intervention or one group, but a cohesive, coordinated effort by many. As a result, each person would be less susceptible to opioid and other substance use challenges while transforming the lives of families and friends who surround the individual who is addicted.

4.0 Looking Forward

Given the complicated fabric of society, solutions often overlap, intersect and carry unpredictable results that can be detrimental or sub-optimal unless a systematic collaborative approach is undertaken. This requires a broad multiple stakeholder perspective and action plan to fully address every dimension of a problem as deeply impactful and widespread as the COVID-19 pandemic. When community organizations coordinate their work and join forces on innovative interventions, they can avoid siloed actions that are not effective in solving complex problems, such as:

➢ Disparities in access to care: race, gender, sexual orientation, rural vs. inner city et. al.
➢ Return to work, employee safety, COVID-19 testing
➢ Social Determinants of Health, such as food, nutrition inadequacies, housing insecurities, transportation challenges, social isolation and loneliness.
➢ Patient engagement strategies and outcomes measures
➢ Development of new programs

A community collaborative embodies the ideals that personal, family, economic and community resilience can be nurtured, and steps taken to shape a better future. The opportunity to discover and strengthen factors impacting resilience offers a solution to communities and states across the nation that face crisis.

Building on existing efforts, the approach is based upon a process that organizes community resources, fosters public-private partnerships and supports key stakeholder actions via community-based collaboratives to deal with the root causes of this public health crisis.

It centers on engaging community leaders from all sectors, inviting them to share their stories, ideas and innovation – moving them from dialogue to vision and action. By bringing together multiple groups throughout each city or region, the collaborative engages diverse organizations that deal with socioeconomic disparities, structural racism, resource injustice and the loss of a sense of community.

Interventions to disrupt the symptoms of a distressed community such as a pandemic crisis are critical but insufficient to promote community wellness. The social determinants of health are among the most powerful cultural factors at work. These cultural factors are either re-created by people or altered and can, therefore, be reshaped with the intention of improving health and healing social or economic ills.

Healthy communities change this trajectory and develop a way of life that optimizes the potential of all its members for health, happiness and prosperity. Well communities have strong immune systems that protect them from the diseases of despair and enable them to learn to grow through adversity. The COVID-19 pandemic is just another opportunity to embrace these changes.

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iv Madhav.

v Oil Soars as Trump Flags Saudi-Russia Production Deal: Live Updates; New York Times; April 2, 2020; Online Available: https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/02/business/stock-market-today-coronavirus.html?action=click&module=Spotlight&pgtype=Homepage; accessed April 2, 2020.

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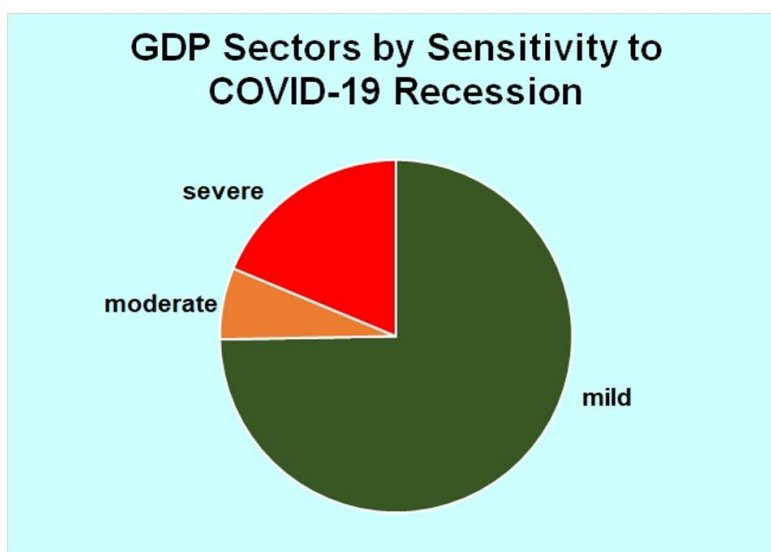
vii Conerly, 2020.

viii Conerly, 2020.

ix Quick Take: Coronavirus' Economic Impact; U.S. Chamber of Commerce; March 16, 2020; Online Available: https://www.uschamber.com/series/above-the-fold/quick-take-coronavirus-economic-impact; accessed April 2, 2020.

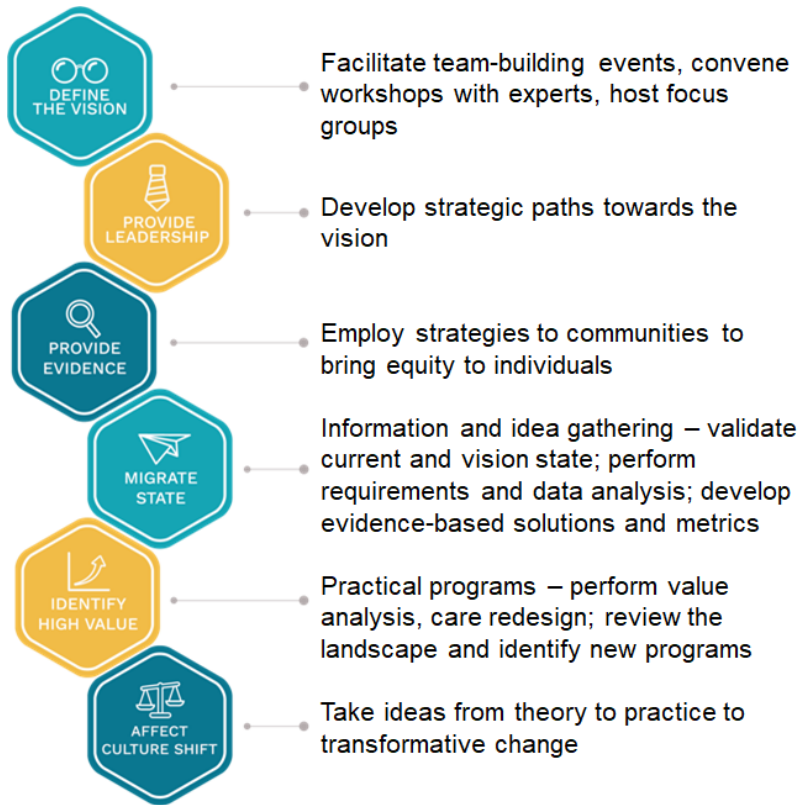x CDC; Coronavirus; Online Available: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/; accessed April 2, 2020.

EXHIBIT A

Source: https://www.forbes.com/sites/billconerly/2020/03/20/economic-forecast-update-march-20-2020-for-covid-19-coronavirus-impacts/#75875e152f07

EXHIBIT B

DEFINE THE VISION	Facilitate team-building events, convene workshops with experts, host focus groups
PROVIDE LEADERSHIP	Develop strategic paths towards the vision
PROVIDE EVIDENCE	Employ strategies to communities to bring equity to individuals
MIGRATE STATE	Information and idea gathering – validate current and vision state; perform requirements and data analysis; develop evidence-based solutions and metrics
IDENTIFY HIGH VALUE	Practical programs – perform value analysis, care redesign; review the landscape and identify new programs
AFFECT CULTURE SHIFT	Take ideas from theory to practice to transformative change

- Analyze critical data and data mapping
- Synthesize data and develop evidence-based solutions
- Track outcomes and metrics
- Measure results towards transformative change and vision state

Source: 2020. Thought Leadership & Innovation Foundation