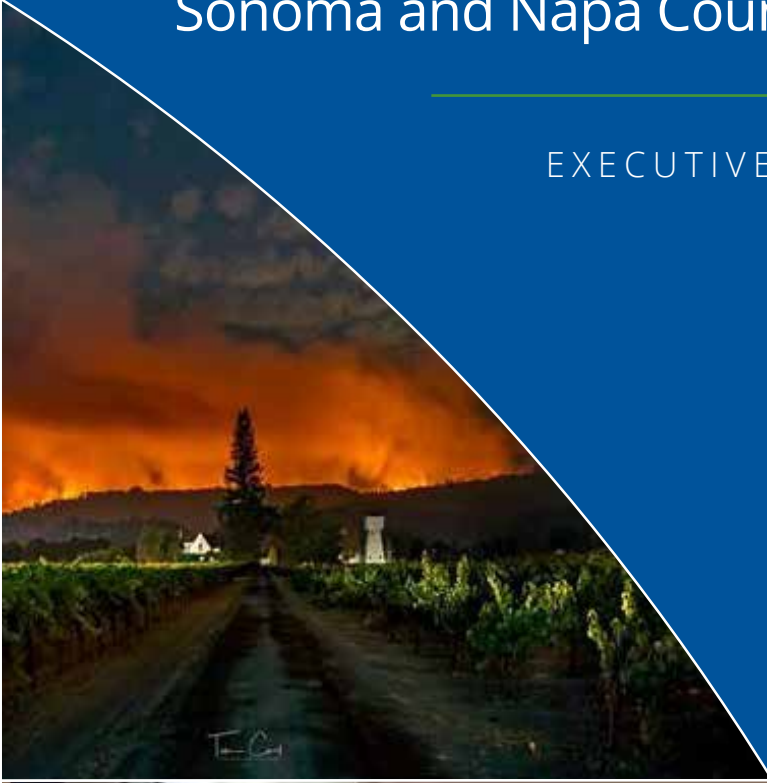


# Bridging to the Future Sonoma and Napa Counties after the 2017 Fires

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY





## Background

On the two year anniversary of the 2017 wildfires, Sonoma and Napa counties are faced with a new normal, most recently hallmarked by rolling power shut downs across the region in the face of heightened fire danger and high winds. A poignant reminder of the dramatically changed landscape, the shut downs highlight that the very real threat of disaster remains the context for the work of local leadership, as stakeholders move from direct relief and recovery efforts into rebuilding, and vigilantly protecting, a resilient community.

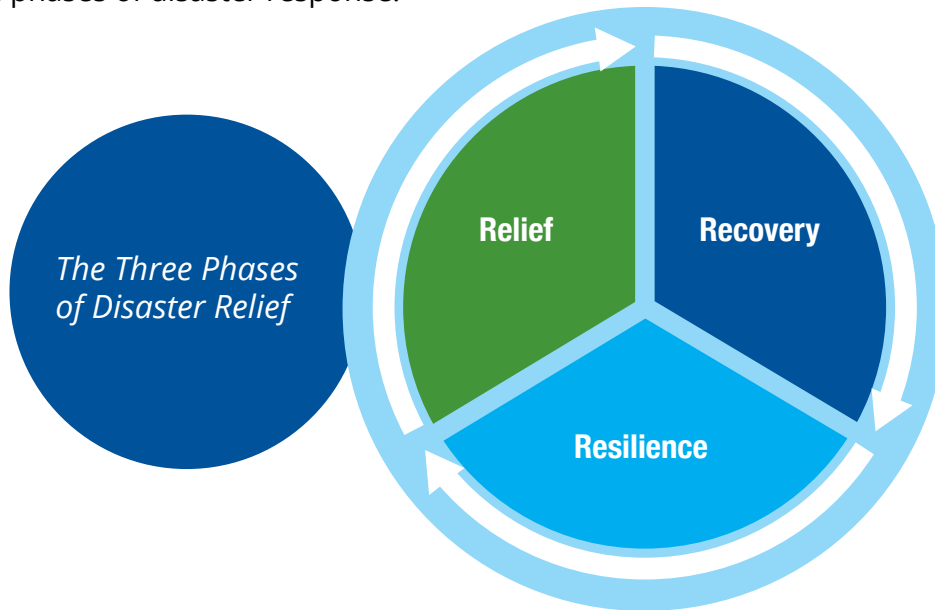
The needs of the community have grown dramatically. Affordable housing, mental health, job stability and environmental safety have surfaced as unmet community priorities, as a larger number of the region's population than ever before has been made "vulnerable" by job loss, housing instability, and trauma. How does the community of stakeholders most engaged in the disaster response effort feel about its own impact two years after the fires? That is the question asked of more than 60 foundation staff, government agency representatives, and nonprofit professionals, and the focus of this timely assessment.

## Methodology

This report, resourced by the St. Joseph Health Community Partnership Fund, a grantmaking foundation of the Providence St. Joseph Health system that has been involved in the disaster response effort, was designed to assess the cross-sector regional response to the wildfires in Napa and Sonoma. It draws from an extensive mixed-methods evaluation process that encompassed document review, surveys and interviews. The research was supported by a local Advisory Committee with representatives from providers, funders, and local government.

## Findings

The findings of this assessment offer an opportunity to reflect on the region’s disaster response – specifically with regard to the alignment and efficacy of philanthropic, community based and local government resources and efforts. The first section of the report reviews disaster response best practice by sector (philanthropy, CBO, and local government) as a foundation for the findings, and is followed by research findings and analysis on each sector. Each section explores successes and challenges and/or fund deployment and fundraising (as relevant), evaluation, equity, partnerships and collaboration, planning and next steps. Taking these broad learnings into account, the primary finding of the report is that the region would benefit from investment in a disaster response eco-system, one that aligns networks and strategies and delineates planning and coordination by the three phases of disaster response.



The following tables present findings from the three main stakeholder groups identified in the assessment: the philanthropic community, community-based nonprofit providers, and county government.

### Philanthropic Response

#### Key Facts

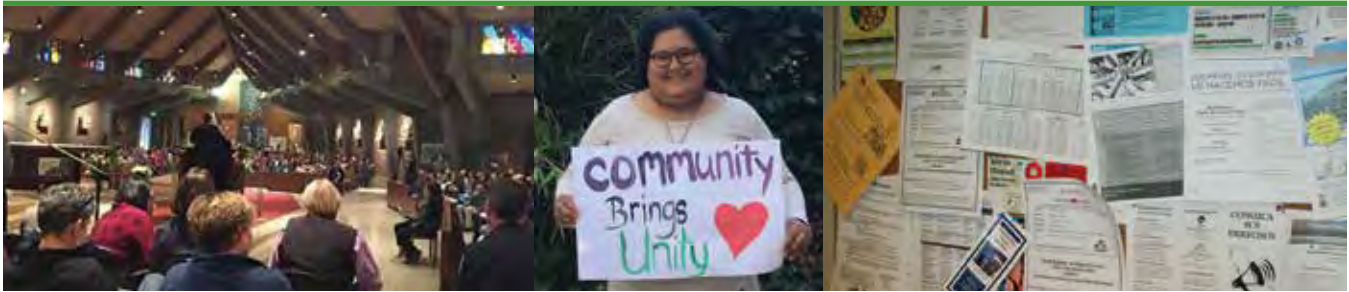
At least \$140 million raised for wildfire response, with a majority coming as new money from outside of Sonoma and Napa counties. Funds raised had more flexibility than government dollars, and were distributed in a decentralized manner by dozens of organizations.

#### Response Achievements

- Large amount of money raised and distributed to those affected by fires
- Private funding could support groups and needs not addressed by government aid
- Participation of many funders allowed access to broad spectrum of donors, including non-traditional ones
- Hundreds of organizations and many thousands of people helped (Napa-specific) Activation of MOUs with CBOs post-disaster
- Grants were weighted towards immediate relief efforts but also covered medium term recovery and long term resilience efforts

#### Response Challenges

- Rapidly changing circumstances and the decentralized funder base made alignment and coordination difficult, leading to some duplication of efforts or unmet needs
- Crisis environment helped prevent systematic evaluation or data collection efforts
- Differing strategies, values, and philosophies caused tension between some funders



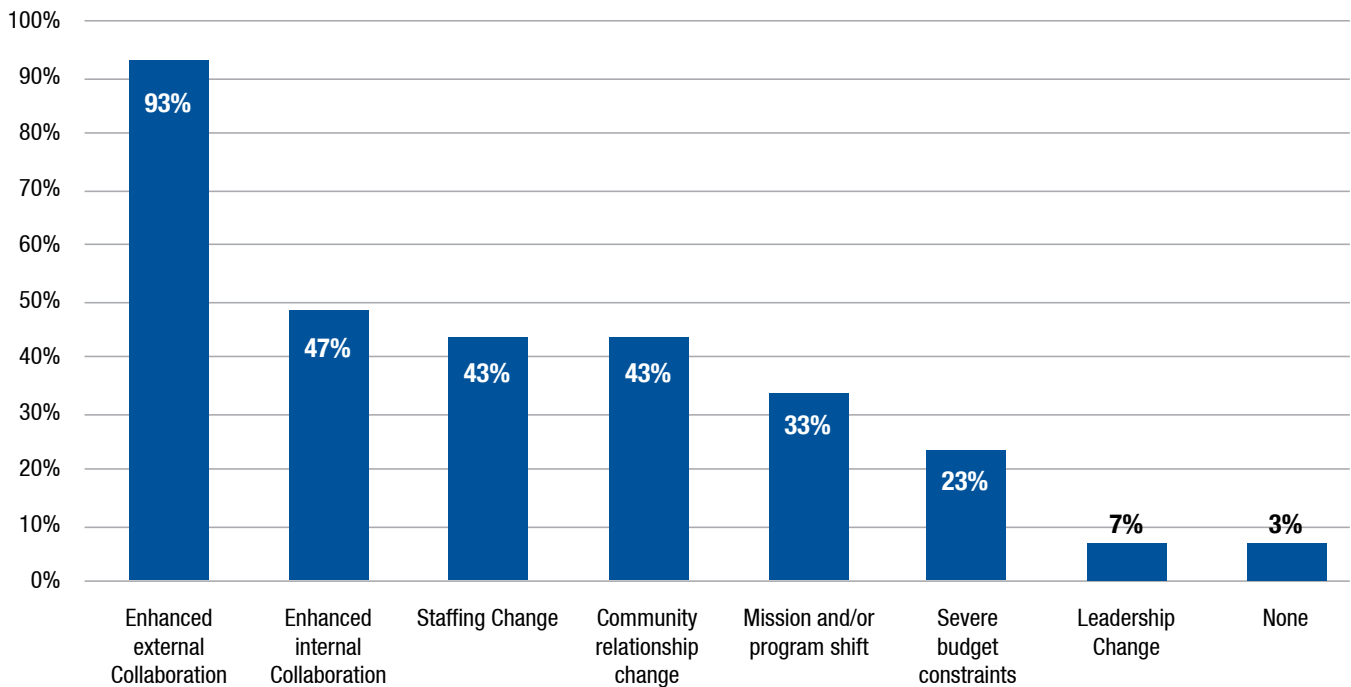
## CBO Response

### Key Facts

93% of regional CBOs raised new funds post-disaster. Almost every organization was changed and challenged in some way by the disaster and subsequent response. Some changes were beneficial, while others were detrimental. Some organizations suffer from fatigue and a desire to move on, while the impacts of the wildfires persist.

### Changes in Response to Wildfires (n=30)

Respondents could select all that apply



### Response Achievements

- Flexible and “all hands on deck” relief and recovery response.
- Response to needs of most vulnerable groups.
- Highly rated partnerships with other CBOs, local government agencies, and hospital systems.
- Improved long-term recovery and resiliency collaboration.
- (Napa-specific) Activation of MOUs with philanthropy post-disaster.
- (Sonoma-specific) Transform VOAD to COAD; Creation of ROC Sonoma County.

### Response Challenges

- Evaluation of efforts
- Preparedness for disaster response (Collective action plan, Continuity of Operations Plans, Training, etc.)
- Some disaster response fatigue
- Long-term recovery and resilience clarity

## Local Government (County) Response

### Key Facts

As with other sectors, local government was more focused on relief and recovery than long term recovery and resilience. Agencies have faced multiple challenges, and have made efforts to remedy them. As with other sectors, evaluation efforts have been spotty. Partnerships with CBOs and funders are increasingly valued, but commitment to a cross-sector collective action plan is still needed.

#### Response Achievements

All hands on deck as Disaster Service Workers at EOCs, PIO, and LACs in relief and into recovery period

Mental health response, including crisis counseling and community-based trauma relief

Massive clean-up and progress in massive rebuild project

Partnership with CBOs to reach vulnerable communities.

Improvement of Emergency Response System

- Alert system
- Added staff and restructuring in Department of Emergency Services
- Creation of the Office of Recovery and Resiliency

#### Response Challenges

Initial confusion at EOCs

Budget constraints dwarfed some response, particularly in long-term recovery and resilience

Most individuals still awaiting rebuild or permitting

Unmet needs in certain vulnerable populations, most notably Spanish speakers and immigrants

Assessment of response efforts

Implementation of resilience framework

## Toward an Aligned Plan and Disaster Response Ecosystem

The situation during and immediately after the fires in Napa and Sonoma was chaotic and constantly changing, making alignment and coordination difficult. In Sonoma County, the scope of the disaster was far too great for any one organization to handle and there was not a coordinated disaster relief plan in place. As a result, many capable organizations set out to address the problem, sometimes with minimal coordination. In Napa County, the community had learned from the 2014 earthquake, and stakeholders identified that these learnings and planning efforts, which included pre-authorized MOUs between philanthropy and CBOs and more organized COAD, helped the Napa response tremendously.



An aligned plan represents the next phase of disaster readiness for the region. What are the components of an aligned plan, and what does a disaster response eco-system look like? From feedback gathered, such a plan would capture both prevention strategies and plot out future response efforts. The plan would focus on avoiding duplication and filling service gaps, and capture the entire philanthropic, the nonprofit, and county contributions to such an effort. It would identify each contributor's unique strengths, while making room for the different values, strategies, and philosophies that are inevitable in such a broad coalition. It would recognize that Napa and Sonoma are different counties with different landscapes and needs, but look for ways the neighbors can support each other and work together.

The stakeholders that were surveyed and interviewed through this assessment consistently cited the need for such a plan. Some referred to growth in this area among certain groups and collaboratives, but consensus and clarity was considered "still a work in progress." Additionally, many respondents identified reasonable obstacles to the creation and implementation of such a plan, referring to differing organizational missions, the lack of a tradition of collaboration in some sectors, time and resource pressures, and even competition as hindrances. Although these barriers are real, they are also surmountable.

## Recommendations

One of the primary recommendations of the report is to intentionally embrace the Collective Impact Model to help support alignment, measure impact, and address barriers to collaboration. There are many helpful and successful models to review in support of this effort. While the need for a collective impact plan and investment in a disaster response eco-system were some of the strongest takeaways from the assessment, the process surfaced many other findings and actionable items and they are listed below.

1

### Embrace the gaps.

Focus on the joint task of fulfilling unmet recovery needs through funding, program alignment, referral and communication. The greatest unmet needs are in housing and **housing affordability, mental health, personal finances and jobs, and environmental safety**. This is the new normal, and a continuation of the response as the effort concludes its recovery phase and moves into the resilience phase.

2

### Consider Collective Impact to facilitate future disaster response and current recovery efforts.

The unique collective problem of disaster preparedness and response could benefit from the Collective Impact Model. The most effective structures are multi-sectoral and all share five key conditions:

- **A common agenda**, and a shared vision for success
- **Shared measurement framework**, including agreement on helpful data collection and accountability
- **Mutually reinforcing activities, which requires coordination through a joint plan of action**
- **Continuous communication, which builds trust and transparency**
- **Backbone support**, an organization with the staff, resources and skills to help the collective convene, coordinate and communicate.

While some of these conditions are in effect currently in Sonoma and Napa, not all of them are fully developed.

3

### Identify a backbone for collaborative preparedness and action

Intentional commitment to investing in a disaster response backbone entity to help strengthen these collective impact conditions could pave the way for a stronger disaster response collaborative. A backbone entity does not preclude multiple strategies, networks, efforts or timelines or minimize the role of existing agencies, organizations, partnerships, or collaboratives, but it aligns all efforts toward a common agenda.

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### **Improve collective communication.**

There have been dramatic improvements to county-level communication systems relevant to disaster response as a result of the wildfires, but there is still room for improvement to keep the myriad individual organizations, networks, partnerships and coalitions connected and aware of each other's efforts. A particular focus on strengthening the feedback loop between funders and CBOs could improve disaster response planning and action. Whether regional or county-specific, creating a cross-sector communications hub will bolster all phases of disaster response.

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### **Create (and share) an equity lens. Discuss and define equity and vulnerability. Prioritize coordination and cooperation when definitions diverge.**

One of the findings of this assessment was that equity and vulnerability were critical frameworks that drove planning and strategy – but that many stakeholders have differing definitions on what equity and vulnerability look like. There is no “correct” approach to defining equity and vulnerability. A deep, honest, and inclusive discussion on equity and vulnerability in post-disaster settings could benefit the goal of effective collective action and collaboration.

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### **Commit to strategies that include immediate relief, medium term recovery, and foster long-term and ongoing community resilience.**

Much of the activity and funding went to the initial phases of disaster relief and recovery. It is natural to want to think the work is done after those phases and want to retreat from the task of disaster relief and recovery. However, long-term recovery and resilience is absolutely crucial to true community wellness. Delineating the lessons learned/best practices related to the distinct phases of response – relief, recovery, resilience – and ensuring that all three are current elements of the disaster response ecosystem will help keep the region in a state of readiness.

Community resilience is paramount to disaster response. It is achieved by capacity building, community empowerment, social connectedness and capital creation, improving community health, wellness, and community systems. It should not only be an on-going investment and activity, but one that is also incorporated into any collective disaster response plan and individual organizational or agency decision-making.

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### **Define (and share) success measures.**

The regional disaster response could be strengthened by the collective definition of disaster relief, recovery, and resilience outcomes. While there are rational reasons why evaluation is not always prioritized in disaster response, tracking outputs is key to receiving certain forms of state and federal reimbursement, and tracking outputs and outcomes helps organizations to know when they are having their desired impact and when they need to shift gears. Since disaster response is truly a collective endeavor, the creation of a consensus driven system could be utilized by the region or county-level communities and would make that response more efficient and effective.

This report has been resourced by the St. Joseph Community Partnership Fund.  
As a regional funder, SJCPF is committed to the disaster response of the region.  
For a copy of the full report visit our website.



Community Partnership Fund

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