



THE WEAN FOUNDATION

MAKING PHILANTHROPY BETTER

MAKING PHILANTHROPY BETTER

How the COVID-19 pandemic spurred new practices,
encouraged collaboration and deepened commitments to
racial equity in the Mahoning Valley

Foreword

The introductory statement of reports such as this one could be the same for foundations across the country: The COVID-19 pandemic and conversations about race, community safety and equity compelled philanthropy to envision new ways of operating. Broadly speaking, foundations prioritized connection over compliance and shifted orientation from power holder to power sharer; from charitable, programmatic grantmaker to partner in transformative, long-term change. The pandemic showed us philanthropy *can* work differently.

Over the last few years, for example, members of Grantmakers for Effective Organizations (GEO) made multi-year grants and funded general operating support; collaborated more deeply with other funders; provided coaching and training for staff members to integrate racial equity into their work; supported advocacy and community organizing; ventured into new relationships; and appointed new leaders. Foundations made a lot of changes in a short period of time.

With such rapid change, we know many organizations will be tempted to roll back practices to work in a way that feels more comfortable. It's good to regroup. But let this be a time for learning, not permanent reversal. Foundations must ask themselves, what were the results of these changes? What progress has been made? What is possible? It is important for our field to assess and then systematize what worked.



Philanthropy is better today, yes—and there is so much more we can do. The conventional approach to institutional philanthropy has fallen short of our collective aspirations. No one is claiming victory. No one is funding the status quo. So what is the opportunity?

Funders must not only systematize improvements within their own institutions but build an ecosystem of change-focused organizations. This requires a shift away from prioritizing the individual organization's concerns first and foremost to focusing on the places where missions intersect with other funders and nonprofits. What are the issues we all care about and how do we offer something complimentary to address them? The future of philanthropy is grounded in that kind of collaborative, versus competitive, way of engaging. Collaborating not just when it comes to the delivery of grants and sharing stories of impact but collaborating as thought partners at each stage of a more culturally responsive and community-driven process.

Through this report, The Raymond John Wean Foundation calls on others in the Mahoning Valley—funders, nonprofits, government leaders, and community members—to move beyond what is comfortable and reimagine together what is possible.

Marcus Walton, *President and CEO*
Grantmakers for Effective Organizations

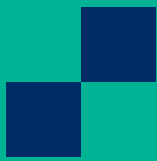
Preface

The word philanthropy originated in the early 17th century from the Latin and Greek words meaning “love of humankind.” In more recent times, the word took on a less-than-loving connotation. The crux of the rebuke: Philanthropy perpetuates the very problems it seeks to remedy, with funders unwilling to relinquish the inherit power that comes with their position and eradicate the root causes of poverty and inequity.

As my friend and colleague Marcus Walton observed in the Foreword, the pandemic and the upswell of calls for racial justice that occurred at its peak instigated a collective shift away from this 21st century notion. Some foundations, like ours, accelerated efforts to be more resident-centered and racially equitable that were already underway; others adopted practices they would have never predicted were possible.

The question of the day is whether these shifts in the right direction will last.

With a view into foundations across the country, Marcus tells us the way forward centers on more collaborative versus competitive grantmaking and in creating ecosystems that drive change. This will be hard *only if* Mahoning Valley leaders and organizations stay comfortable doing what we’ve always done and what agrees with our individual agendas and ambitions.



In the pages that follow, we aim to show what can happen when we do things differently. The report relays collaborative efforts to support organizations and residents who are driving positive change. It also includes reflections—our own as well as those of our partners—about what is needed to become even more collaborative as a philanthropic and civic community, as Marcus implores us.

Let this not be a story of what one foundation did during a time of crisis but the preface to the story of what we can do together to become a more loving Mahoning Valley.

Jennifer Roller, *President*
The Wean Foundation

“It’s productive when funders see themselves in the context of the larger philanthropic ecosystem, just as those of us in nonprofits try and look to each other to share our thinking and streamline our asks.”

Matt Martin, Executive Director, Trumbull Neighborhood Partnership

Contents

The Backstory: An Unfolding Crisis and Initial Response	08
Joint Application: A Collaborative Effort for Greater Impact	14
By the Numbers	21
What Worked: Practices to Build On	23
Keeping Up Momentum: What Needs to Happen Next	32



The Backstory

AN UNFOLDING CRISIS AND INITIAL RESPONSE

On March 9, 2020, Ohio Governor Mike DeWine declared a state of emergency in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, setting in motion a series of events and actions taken by the Wean Foundation to respond to the emerging crisis in the Mahoning Valley. In the hours and days that followed, staff adjusted already scheduled events and convenings, began researching philanthropic best practices, and committed to meeting the urgent needs of existing grantees. Below is an overview of the Foundation's initial response.

ADJUSTMENTS TO EVENTS AND OPERATIONS

The day after the governor declared a state of emergency, grantseeker interviews for the 2020 Neighborhood SUCCESS Grants (NSG) program concluded, marking the Foundation's last in-person meeting for several months. The Foundation canceled some previously scheduled convenings, such as the Share the Learning event for 2019 NSG grantees, and adjusted others to a virtual format or postponed them. The Foundation also quickly suspended regularly scheduled grantmaking, shifting attention to figuring out how to address immediate needs. Two weeks later, Ohio issued a statewide stay-at-home order. The Foundation office promptly closed to the public and staff transitioned to remote work.

RESEARCH AND COMMUNITY INPUT

Staff spent time researching philanthropic practices employed during previous economic downturns and times of crisis to inform possible courses of action. The board had just gathered for its regularly scheduled second-quarter meeting at the beginning of March, prior to the state of emergency. Staff scheduled a special, virtual meeting for March 24, 2020, to discuss a response plan. Staff developed a COVID-19 Active Grantee Interview Guide and facilitated conversations with existing grantees to assess their most immediate needs. From this learning, the Foundation awarded its first COVID-19 grants to existing grantees Inspiring Minds for \$30,000 and Trumbull Neighborhood Partnership for \$25,000.



These organizations were committed to avoiding layoffs. With this funding, their staffs remained in place so they could address the community's needs.

Outreach to the Foundation's Strategic Partners—the Youngstown Neighborhood Development Corporation and Trumbull Neighborhood Partnership—revealed concerns that local small businesses, including those led by Warren and Youngstown residents, could be overlooked in accessing federal emergency aid to keep their businesses afloat through the pandemic. Board members and community partners shared similar concerns, and the Foundation responded in the following ways:

- Explored the option of having local financial institutions provide assistance to small businesses with Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) applications. (Ultimately, this was not a feasible option.)
- Partnered with HBK CPAs & Consultants, the Foundation's accounting firm, to assist small business owners with completing PPP applications. (Only one small business participated.)
- With other regional foundations, supported JumpStart and KeyBank in bringing KeyBank Business Boost and Build program to the Mahoning Valley, and along with other partners, ensured the prioritization of Black, Latinx and woman-owned businesses in the program. Originally launched in 2017, the program's focus shifted to small business recovery in response to the pandemic.
- Supported Economic Action Group's outreach to minority business owners in Youngstown and Warren to ensure equitable access to federal recovery dollars. (See page 20 for more details.)

ORGANIZATION OF A COLLABORATIVE RESPONSE

Similar to funders in other communities around Northeast Ohio and across the country, the Wean Foundation and the Mahoning Valley's two other major funders, the Community Foundation of the Mahoning Valley and The Youngstown Foundation, began discussing whether they might work together to leverage their respective resources, skills and expertise to deploy a collective response. The foundations moved to develop the Mahoning Valley COVID-19 Crisis Relief and Stabilization Application to streamline the funding process for all three foundations and reduce the burden on organizations facing dire needs. See page 14 for more on how these three foundations came together and responded.

DEVELOPMENT OF A PLAN

On March 24, 2020, the Foundation convened its board for a special, virtual meeting to discuss how best to respond to the emerging global health crisis and a worsening of racial inequities that was sure to follow and meet the immediate needs of residents in Warren and Youngstown. The discussion centered on rapid response funding, collaboration with other funders, and outreach to existing grantees and strategic partners. Staff presented several potential adjustments to the Foundation's grantmaking programs and processes, based on its research, experience in the community and feedback from grantees, including:

- Converting programmatic grant dollars to general operating funding to support nonprofits' management, staffing, fundraising, etc.;
- Waiving or delaying reporting requirements;
- Responding rapidly and efficiently to grantseekers by:
 - Increasing the staff discretionary approval limit,
 - Creating rolling deadlines, and
 - Creating electronic board approval mechanisms;

- Focusing funding availability on a core group of existing grantees; and
- Distributing annually, through grants and grant-related expenses, more than the minimum 5% of the total fair market value of its noncharitable-use assets.

Foundation staff and directors acknowledged that a quick and efficient response, one with open and honest communication between the Foundation and its grantees, would be key to success. A multifaceted plan centering on the following actions was approved by the board at the March 24 meeting:

- **Shift grantmaking to crisis response**, creating a dedicated pool of funds for existing grantees who were struggling or would likely struggle because of the COVID-19 pandemic. A total of \$1.2 million was identified for COVID-19 response from the following sources: Neighborhood SUCCESS 2020 budget, the Foundation's 2020 Community Investment Grantmaking budget, and the Capacity Building Fund.
- **Increase Foundation staff's discretionary approval limit** from \$5,000 to \$25,000, applying guidelines used for an existing program.
- **Implement electronic approval mechanism for all requests** of more than \$25,000. The electronic notification to the board would include a brief description of the request and how it aligned with the Foundation's COVID-19 response, along with the requested amount. The staff would request board members to respond within 48 hours.

The pandemic quickly revealed how limited resources were to meet the community's needs as well as an enormous information gap on where community leaders could go to find the resources they needed to meet those needs. The board agreed that the creation of a COVID-19 Resource Guide on the Wean Foundation website, with links to a curated list of information from trusted partners, would be another way to support community organizations.

“Often it seems when the needs are the greatest, the funds are hardest to get.

During the pandemic, the Wean Foundation went in the opposite direction and made it easier for us to get some funding. The money we received helped us considerably in meeting that difficult moment but we still have an opioid epidemic and we still need funding.


What is most helpful for us is for funders to understand what we do and why we do it. Come spend time with us and see what we are doing.”

Nicole Wesley, President and Founder, Nikki’s House

JOINT APPLICATION

A Collaborative Effort for Greater Impact





The development of the Mahoning Valley COVID-19 Crisis Relief and Stabilization Application by the Wean Foundation, the Community Foundation of the Mahoning Valley and The Youngstown Foundation—and the rapid grantmaking that followed—proved to be an important learning experience for the three foundations. From determining the appropriate technology to use to implement the collective effort to ensuring the priorities of each foundation were evident, the three foundations worked together in a way they had not previously, in the midst of a very uncertain and debilitating time.

Wean Foundation staff developed the joint COVID-19 application through Google Forms, which made it possible for all three foundations to access submissions and supporting data to inform their funding decisions. The single application, housed on the Wean Foundation website, enabled Mahoning Valley nonprofits to submit requests to all three funders at the same time or select which of the three they wanted to consider their application. The foundations committed to receiving applications for funding on a rolling basis. To facilitate quick decision-making, the presidents of the foundations and key grantmaking staff met virtually two times a week, initially. Once the volume of applications began to slow later into the spring, one meeting per week became and remained the norm for the duration of the collaboration. The group made award decisions and released funding within one-to-two weeks of receiving requests to meet local demand.

On March 24, 2020, the foundations received the first round of applications through the online application. The foundations fielded more than 100 requests for funding in the first three months of launching the joint application, with the greatest number of proposals submitted in the first few weeks. During this time, the foundations primarily focused on supporting emergency needs. In June 2020, the foundations adjusted the application so grantseekers could specify whether the funds would support crisis relief or stabilization efforts.

A SHIFTING FOCUS TO STABILIZATION AND A DEEPENED COMMITMENT TO RACIAL EQUITY

As COVID-19 surged in those initial months and resources were continuously pushed to the limit, the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on communities of color became apparent and was compounded by civil protests for racial justice following the murders of Black men and women across the country including Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd and Breonna Taylor. Continuing to focus its grantmaking in the context of COVID-19 response, the Wean Foundation examined its own racial equity efforts and made strategic investments in Black-led organizations and in nonprofits and neighborhood groups demonstrating a commitment to the uplift of communities of color.

In the summer of 2020, with fewer requests to support crisis relief and more for stabilization efforts, the Wean Foundation considered how it could better align its COVID-19 response with its existing strategic priorities of community revitalization, educational opportunity, economic opportunity, and public and civic sector leadership, and with its racial equity goals.

At the end of July, the Wean Foundation conducted the Mahoning Valley Covid-19 Crisis Relief and Stabilization Fund Survey to better understand how the changing landscape was affecting the number and scope of recent requests to the joint application. Staff patterned the survey after the Greater Cleveland COVID-19 Response Fund's #CLEResponds Listening Campaign. Survey questions included:

- What is the greatest COVID-19-related challenge for the Mahoning Valley at this moment?
- What does an equitable post-COVID Mahoning Valley require from funders?
- Where do you see the greatest potential to stabilize your organization and position it for viability in the future?

The Wean Foundation received nearly 100 complete responses from nonprofits operating throughout the Mahoning Valley, some of which had received funding through the joint application. Survey data was disaggregated by the self-identified race of the respondents. Eighty-nine percent of respondents identified as white; 7% as Black; 1% as Hispanic.

Survey participants said supporting families and children in school were among the greatest challenges facing the Mahoning Valley at the time. To ensure an equitable post-COVID Mahoning Valley, respondents ranked funding among their top needs, in addition to programs and community support. Sixty-eight percent of respondents identified capacity building as critical in stabilizing and positioning their organizations for future viability; 48% said operating support. These results confirmed the Wean Foundation's growing belief that these were the greatest needs of local nonprofits and underscored how critical it was for funding partners to respond accordingly.

LAST CALL FOR 2020 PROPOSALS

After a modest increase in total applications received in August and September, requests dipped again in October. This prompted the three foundations to pause and reflect on how best to move forward. On November 3, 2020, the foundations made a final call for 2020 COVID-19 Crisis Relief and Stabilization applications.

"While we are grateful to have partnered with the Community Foundation of the Mahoning Valley and The Youngstown Foundation, the declining number of grant applications and the responses from our community survey suggest a shift in the approach to the pandemic this fall," Wean Foundation President Jennifer Roller said in a press release announcing the final call. "We are now focusing on what we've learned collectively in an effort to stabilize organizations long term."

The Wean Foundation conducted direct outreach to grantees and other nonprofit partners to notify them of the final call and also share information about the state CARES Act funding to further support crisis and stabilization efforts.

YEAR-END GRANTEE CHECK-IN

To draw further from the learning of the community-wide survey of Mahoning Valley nonprofits, staff developed a year-end check-in with those organizations that received COVID-19 funding from the Wean Foundation through the joint application. The two-question survey asked 1) whether their organization's needs for requested funds changed once received and 2) what, if any, additional feedback they wanted to share. Eighty-six percent of the 36 unique organizations that had received a grant from the Wean Foundation via the joint application responded to the survey.

The survey revealed that an overwhelming majority of grantees used the COVID-19 funding as they originally intended. A \$75,000 grant awarded to the Youngstown Neighborhood Development Corporation in April 2020 was one instance where, based on community need, use of funds shifted from providing financial support to residents to maintain their housing to providing financial support for emergency home repairs.

Many grantees expressed how timely and instrumental the funds were in ensuring their organization's survival during the early days of the pandemic.

JOINT APPLICATION RELAUNCH

At the start of 2021, the pandemic persisted. With the community's needs just as dire as they were in the middle of 2020, the foundations reopened the joint application. In preparation, they made minor revisions to questions to ease the burden on grantseekers and to clearly identify requests for operational versus programmatic support.

On January 4, 2021, the foundations again began accepting submissions through the joint application. In the first quarter, the foundations received 88 applications. As time went on, the requests began to reflect more traditional operations versus pandemic-related needs. The foundations decided to close the joint application portal and announced a final deadline of April 2, 2021, for submissions. At the time, the Wean Foundation shared in a public statement how the last year would shape its grantmaking going forward: "Based on our commitment to do better, we're reducing what we ask for, providing longer term and more flexible funding, and paying much needed attention to Black and Latinx-led organizations," Roller said.



EXAMPLES OF SUCCESS

The foundations' collaboration led to several positive outcomes for the Mahoning Valley that exemplify the potential for future collective grantmaking.

Of note, Philanthropy Ohio applied through the joint application for funding to support the Ohio Collaborative for Educating Remotely and Transforming Education Fund (OCER), a public-private partnership with the Ohio Department of Education. Local philanthropic support of \$75,000 by the three foundations in OCER resulted in nearly \$400,000 coming back to the Mahoning Valley through awards to local school systems, including Youngstown, Warren and Campbell city schools and the Trumbull County Educational Service Center.

The three foundations also supported the "Mahoning Valley Main Street" program led by Economic Action Group (EAG) to ensure equitable access to PPP loans. Using publicly available data, EAG made more than 20,000 phone calls to 5,000 businesses, targeting those based in the cities of Warren and Youngstown as well as greater Mahoning County. Of those contacted, 20% received at least one PPP loan, with the average loan amount being \$114,132. The program was recognized with a Community Impact Award from the Dominion Charitable Foundation and as the "Project of the Year" by the Ohio Community Development Corporation Association.

The foundations' collaboration also garnered interest from other local funders. In the early days of the pandemic, the three foundations participated in weekly calls between the Mercy Health Foundation, PNC Bank, United Way of Trumbull County, and the United Way of Youngstown and the Mahoning Valley. The organizations discussed how they might continue to collaborate in the future.

by the NUMBERS

THE FOLLOWING IS A TALLY OF WHAT THE JOINT APPLICATION SUPPORTED IN 2020 AND 2021.

321

Total Viable Applications Received Through the Joint Portal

168

Total Grants Made by All Funders

\$2,803,193

Total Awarded by All Funders

42*

Total Wean Foundation Grants Made Through Joint Application

\$527,775*

Total Awarded by the Wean Foundation

25% OF TOTAL FUNDING AWARDED SUPPORTED BLACK-LED OR LATINX-LED ORGANIZATIONS, WITH AN AVERAGE GRANT AMOUNT OF \$16,721

Wean Foundation Funding Supported:

- Housing/utilities
- General operating and staffing
- Food assistance
- Economic opportunity
- Internet/tech access
- Personal protective equipment
- Education
- Community revitalization
- Capacity building
- Other crisis needs, including the work of the Minority Community Vaccination Action Group

** Excludes the two initial grants the Foundation made to existing grantees, Inspiring Minds and Trumbull Neighborhood Partnership, before the joint application was developed.*

“Philanthropy is in a position to make true change by supporting work that impacts the deep-rooted, systemic issues that exist in our society. By supporting organizations that are an extension of their core values, philanthropy knows where true impact is being made. Why not support those efforts at a higher level and institutionalize them, allowing these organizations to fully focus on the work?”

Deryck Toles, Founder and CEO, Inspiring Minds



WHAT WORKED

Practices to Build On

No one knew in March 2020 how COVID-19 would affect so much of the world and how it works. Through the joint application, the Wean Foundation and its partners made operational improvements, strengthened relationships, adopted new technologies, and reconsidered long-held grantmaking practices to be more resident-centered and racially equitable. How can the Mahoning Valley learn from this experience? How can philanthropy continue to push itself to be better, to be more loving? What follows are practices to build on.



1. Deeper commitment to racial equity

As COVID-19 surged in the summer of 2020, so did civil protests for racial justice. The Wean Foundation recognized the need to take bold steps in addressing both urgent COVID-related needs and racial inequities in the Mahoning Valley. Staff reflected on how the Foundation works to achieve its mission and where it could improve. Then, the Foundation communicated directly with grantees, strategic partners and others about what it hadn't gotten right and how it would seek to remedy missteps.

The Foundation redoubled its commitment to racial equity and inclusion work, demonstrated by its adoption of desired Racial Equity Outcomes in each of its four pillars:

- **Grantmaking:** Fund the development and implementation of viable solutions (correct analysis, sound tactics and well-designed end results) led by organizations whose leadership reflects the racial demographics of the communities in which they work.
- **Convening and Partnerships:** Define challenges, formulate solutions and take collective action with Black and Latinx-led organizations with a stake in the decisions being made.
- **Capacity Building:** Support sustainable (strong leadership, strategy and impact) Black and Latinx-led organizations.
- **Operations:** Create and sustain a culture that challenges racism.

The Wean Foundation also adopted bolder and more straightforward language to make racial equity the conversation and challenge the status quo. This language reinforces its commitment and demonstrates how central racial equity is to its work.

“The racial equity work the Wean Foundation is doing is very bold, and very much needed in our community. They are starting conversations, bridging gaps. By undertaking such lofty and potentially divisive work, they are treading on uncharted ground, so to speak. It’s easy for somebody to say, they could be doing more or it’s not having an impact but there is no playbook for this right now.”

Kevin L. Scott, Executive Director, Ohio Urban Renaissance



2. More intentional community engagement

More monetary investment in communities of color is critical; but investing in relationships is just as important. The weekly discussions among the three major foundations in 2020 revealed the need for more intentional engagement with Black and Latinx nonprofit leaders in Warren and Youngstown. With an influx of applications for funding from new or less well-known organizations, there was a concern among some in the group that good work in the community was going unrecognized and unsupported, and that more could be done by the funders to improve their awareness.

As a result, the Wean Foundation launched a series of “Getting to Know You” Zoom tours with Black and Latinx leaders in Warren and Youngstown. The goal of the calls was to get to know the people behind the work, versus a focus on specific funding opportunities. This gave Foundation staff and the nonprofit participants space to learn and grow in their understanding. These calls yielded several new connections with individuals and organizations that are doing good work and are aligned with the Wean Foundation’s mission.

An outgrowth of the calls: “We See You Grants.” These up to \$5,000 grants, made at the staff’s discretion, are meant to support organizations aligned with the Wean Foundation’s values and strategic priorities, forge new connections, and allow for rapid deployment of resources to efforts that uplift residents in Warren and Youngstown neighborhoods.

"I first became engaged with the Wean Foundation when I joined its Emerging Leaders program in 2018. At first, I was hesitant to participate, given my initial impression of the Foundation as a white organization. However, participating in that program was one of the greatest things I ever took a chance on. It taught me meaningful skills and opened up new opportunities for both myself and our organization.

Since that time, I've maintained a steadily growing relationship with the Wean Foundation that I deeply value. While not every conversation has been easy, and there have been some difficult moments, the Wean Foundation has always been respectful and made an effort to understand the issues I care so deeply about; for that, I'm forever grateful. Today, I can confidently say that the Wean Foundation sees my mission, recognizes the causes we're fighting for, and is taking real action in offering their resources and talent to support me in important ways."

Dionne Dowdy-Lacey, Executive Director, United Returning Citizens



3. Courageous experimentation and learning

The Wean Foundation's research of philanthropic best practices during previous economic downturns saved considerable staff time and effort in creating its COVID-19 Response Plan. Staff also looked to The Cleveland Foundation's #CLEResponds Listening Campaign as the model for its Mahoning Valley Covid-19 Crisis Relief and Stabilization Fund Survey, which was useful in generating immediate, community-wide feedback in response to the collaborative grant efforts.

This outside guidance proved to be an important reminder that the Wean Foundation doesn't have to go it alone, nor should it. Indeed, the Mahoning Valley can benefit from an infusion of ideas, resources, innovations, and models from other parts of the country and beyond. Some of the best practices the Wean Foundation applied during COVID-19 have stuck; others have been adjusted. But what won't change is the willingness to experiment and learn. If the Mahoning Valley is to become stronger, more equitable and more prosperous, community leaders need to have the humility to acknowledge what they don't know and seek out information and ideas to address old problems in new ways.

“It will always be a challenge to find available resources to address the generations of deferred investment in the community. It’s important to remain innovative and open to new ideas. A lot of times, things are done because that’s the way they have always been done.

We need to follow and prioritize the best practices from peer cities, including inviting more people to the table for new perspectives and being more mindful of data and technology that can effectively move the needle.”

**Nick Chretien, Co-founder and Executive Director,
Economic Action Group**



4. Sustained collaboration

It's been said that collaboration moves at the speed of trust. The Wean Foundation, the Community Foundation of the Mahoning Valley and The Youngstown Foundation would not have been able to join together to create the Mahoning Valley COVID-19 Crisis Relief and Stabilization Application without a previously established relationship with one another. When crisis presented itself, they moved quickly, and the resulting coordinated, streamlined effort leveraged each funder's ability to invest resources in the community.

The pandemic proved that the Mahoning Valley's three major funders have the capability to come together in times of crisis and deliver effectively.

Working together affords some great benefits, including the ability to mitigate risks and address pressing issues at greater scale. But to achieve deeper and more sustained collaboration, the organizations must adopt a commitment to shared values, greater trust, humility, and a willingness to learn.

“If the three larger funders were aligned in their strategies, more significant investment could be made in city neighborhoods and into things that are really transformative. Ultimately, there has to be a focus. Given the total sum of resources, there is a lot more that could be done if everyone was truly working in more alignment and with a collaborative spirit.”

**Ian Beniston, Executive Director, Youngstown
Neighborhood Development Corp.**



KEEPING UP MOMENTUM

What Needs to Happen Next



Let's Work Differently, Together

Shari Harrell

President and CEO

Community Foundation of the Mahoning Valley

Our organization changed dramatically during the COVID-19 pandemic. I changed dramatically. We were so used to the way it's always been but the pandemic turned everything upside down. You couldn't hold on to what was. Everything had to be approached differently, and that was challenging.

We learned we could work differently; we could respond differently. We could respond to community needs more effectively as partners and still act with urgency.

The challenge now, as many of my colleagues have said, is making sure we don't fall back into the same patterns and that we continue to find new ways of working—even if they aren't necessarily easy or comfortable. By collaborating more, we can hold ourselves accountable to these improvements and take bigger risks together.

I'm really proud of the work we did collectively with the Wean Foundation and The Youngstown Foundation during the pandemic. We were able to meet the needs of the community in a way we can't always do on our own. More money went out the door more quickly. If we can continue to figure out where our focus areas intersect and align, we can have significant joint impact in those areas. Even though we are different organizations, the pandemic showed us we have the ability to get out of our own way to do things for the greater good. My hope is we find more opportunities for where our work overlaps and where we can work differently, together.



Let's Influence, Together

Lynnette H. Forde

President

The Youngstown Foundation

While I certainly have respect and admiration for what philanthropy can do, and I'm privileged to lead the problem-solving efforts of this organization, none of us can do this work alone.

I thoroughly enjoyed the experience of working with the other foundations to examine applications together during the COVID-19 pandemic. Individually and organizationally, we benefited from that collaborative process, as did our grantees. The initial intent was to address an urgent and, what we hoped would be, short-term crisis. In the end, we proved we could work together in a way our organizations hadn't previously—and I think we all realize there is enormous long-term potential in that.

Imagine if we harnessed that momentum and brought more strategic focus and alignment to our collective work? Imagine if we sustained a collaborative grantmaking process for the long-term? We could change how nonprofits view foundations and philanthropy. We could change how we partner with stakeholders. We could change grantmaking all together; we could make transformative change.

In this community of limited resources, nonprofits often fight for the spotlight, while others go unnoticed. If our foundations collaborated more, we could encourage greater collaboration among nonprofits, discover additional partners we can support, and address our region's most pressing challenges more effectively, together.



Let's Build Trust, Together

Jennifer Roller

President

The Wean Foundation

I'm grateful to our partners for sharing their thoughts on what we can do to continue to make philanthropy better in the Mahoning Valley to ensure a brighter future for all.

I am struck by recurring calls for a more collaborative versus competitive philanthropic ecosystem. Mahoning Valley funders, government and nonprofit leaders and others have immense potential to make true transformative change. To reach this potential—and become a more loving and prosperous community—we need to be aligned in a greater purpose. Connectivity builds trust and trust builds alignment. How do we do this?

First, we need to get to know one another better. It might sound simple but building connectivity takes work. So let me start. I'm Jennifer. I believe in people and their ability to make change. I value learning, creativity, innovation, authenticity, and being resourceful. I'm striving to be responsible with my power and to show up as a leader who honors her emotions. I'm fighting for the courage to make mistakes and to do what needs to be done, in ways that likely have not been tried before.

What about you? How would you answer the following? I believe in _____. I am fighting for _____. Send me your thoughts at jroller@weanfoundation.org.

About The Raymond John Wean Foundation

The Wean Foundation is a private foundation dedicated to community building in under-resourced communities of Warren and Youngstown in Ohio's Mahoning Valley. In partnership with residents, we challenge the conditions that hold problems in place. We leverage a powerful combination of grantmaking, capacity building, convening and partnerships to provoke new thinking, strengthen communities and disrupt the status quo to achieve our vision: empowered residents creating an equitable Mahoning Valley.

BOARD

Gordon Wean
Chair

Molly Seals
Vice Chair

Sara Daugherty
Secretary

Carla Baldwin

Dante Capers

Stanley Elkins

William Mullane

Vincent Peterson, Sr.

Sybil West

STAFF

Jennifer Roller
President

Leandrah Hunt
Associate for Race Equity and Inclusion
Data

Erika Parker
Communications Officer

Fallon Peterson
Senior Director of Programs
and Operations

McKayla Rockwood
Administrative Associate

John Spivey
Facilities Coordinator

Tara Walker-Pollock
Program Officer, Capacity Building

Mission

To advance community building in the under-resourced communities of Warren and Youngstown, in Ohio's Mahoning Valley, through a powerful combination of grantmaking, capacity building, convening and partnerships.

Vision

Empowered residents creating a healthy, vibrant, equitable and economically stable Mahoning Valley.

The Raymond John Wean Foundation

147 West Market Street

Warren, OH 44481

330.394.5600

info@weanfoundation.org

weanfoundation.org