

THE SONOMA COUNTY RESILIENCE FUND

FEBRUARY 2018 STAKEHOLDER
INTERVIEW SUMMARY REPORT



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Introduction

To date, Community Foundation Sonoma County has raised more than \$13 million dollars to support the recovery and rebuilding efforts after the devastating wildfires in October 2017. The purpose, goals, and strategies of the Foundation's new fund will be determined with input from various community leaders and residents.

Wendy Todd, an independent consultant, interviewed sixteen community leaders between January 19th and February 8th, 2018 to inform the development of the purpose, goals, and strategies of the Resilience Fund. Community leaders interviewed represented a variety of nonprofit and public agencies. This report summarizes themes that emerged. The interview discussions centered on the following key questions:

- What is your vision for what success could look like with CFSC's Resilience Fund?
- What concerns you most related to disaster recovery and rebuilding in Sonoma County?
- What leadership role could CFSC play beyond grantmaking?

Vision for Success

Most interviewees expressed a shared vision of success for the outcome of the recovery and rebuilding efforts through the Foundation's Resilience Fund. To summarize, the shared vision is that **a range of resources (e.g. skills, knowledge, data and funding) are well coordinated to ensure a diverse population remains living and working in Sonoma County.** Comments that illustrate this shared vision include:

"Resiliency is being able to bounce back into an equitable community. Results in people being able to stay here. [That Sonoma County] doesn't become a bedroom community or second home community."

"Success would be if the foundation was considered a trusted conduit between fire victims and funders and donors."

"Nonprofits should be trained in disaster-planning and be ready to collaborate, ready to respond as a *network* of service providers."

"Success would be a thoughtful approach to recovery and rebuilding that maximizes resources and helps support sustainable solutions... not just getting funds out for a quick fix that doesn't address systemic issues (like lack of coordination across nonprofits)."

“The rebuild takes into consideration bio-diversity, sustainability, and housing density to address the housing crisis.”

Community Concerns

Interviewees were asked to describe what concerns them most when it comes to community-wide issues related to recovery and rebuilding in Sonoma County. Interviewees shared concerns related to the outcome of the rebuild efforts as well as the planning processes for rebuilding.

Most interviewees expressed concern that the community would rebuild back to the same problems that existed in Sonoma County prior to the fires, which included income inequities, lack of affordable housing, nonprofit service duplication, limited access to mental health services, and lack of partnerships and communications between and among nonprofits and the public sector. Comments that reflect this concern include:

“Rebuilding people’s homes is not enough; we need to rebuild people’s lives.”

“If we rebuild back to the way things were, we will still have the same problems- institutional bias/racism related to housing and income inequality, for example. The fires could drive more lasting change - to fix the things that were broken.”

“We all have an opportunity to do things differently and not just rebuild the status quo. This is an opportunity to attract diverse populations, artists, and businesses to Sonoma.”

Housing and Workforce Concerns

Most interviewees specifically named **affordable housing and workforce shortages** as their key concerns, especially as these issues impact low-income individuals and families, when it comes to community-wide recovery and rebuilding. The specific issues related to affordable housing included: not enough housing stock and different values within the community associated with development (e.g. high-density). The specific issues related to workforce concerns included: not enough employment opportunities, fair and living wages, safety among undocumented community, and mental health issues. Many interviewees are worried about workers leaving Sonoma County because they can no longer afford to live here.

“We already had a housing crisis and now we have thousands of people who need a home and many others in vulnerable positions because rent was too high or people have lost jobs.”

“Housing is by far my biggest concern. Two million dollars is not enough to build but it could help push policies to *keep* affordable housing that we currently have. Once building starts happening there will be gentrification and low-income people are pushed out. CFSC should see what housing stock is currently affordable housing and help keep it

into the future. Land trusts to make it a designated area to maintain affordable housing.”

“I am worried that there will be a downward spiral stemming from people leaving, which will strain the economy, and people who could barely live here before will now leave.”

Mental Health Concerns

In addition, six of the 16 interviewees noted nonprofits and employers lack the capacity to **adequately address mental health issues** of staff and their clients. Access to mental health services was described as an issue prior to the fires. Now as the entire community deals with loss and grief there is significant concern that mental health issues (and substance abuse) will increase over time. Interviewees noted:

“I’m very concerned about the community’s mental health. Will there be more substance abuse and a decreased sense of hope and the ability to prosper?”

“There is limited staff capacity to do case management and support long term healing – to help the community manage trauma.”

“There were poor services and resources to meet mental health needs before and now they is a strain on those limited resources. Anyone who has service job (e.g. teachers, nonprofits) has experienced an increase by 30%. Supports need to be put in place to manage mental health of staff working in service jobs.”

Planning Concerns

In addition to concerns about the *outcome* of the rebuilding efforts, over half of the interviewees expressed concerns related to the *process* of recovery and rebuilding. Concerns centered on processes not being coordinated and/or inclusive and/or there was not enough data to inform the planning efforts. Interviewees noted:

“Are we considering the consequences of how decisions are impacting the most vulnerable? We will *all* be impacted if we degrade the environment and the workforce. Civic engagement is key to this all.”

“Some people have a lot of resources and others are limited and how will the rebuild happen in an equitable way? The people who have resources are going to be winners in the market...it would be valuable to have them at the table to help think beyond their own interests and think about collective interests of the community...to create a community that they would want to invest in.”

“There needs to be a comprehensive planning approach with different players having different roles to address various needs. I am concerned the planning processes are not informed by community input.”

“We haven’t, as a community, figured out what the needs are. Before we determine where money goes, we need to step back and see gaps.”

Environmental Concerns

In addition, five of the interviewees indicated rebuilding back to the same environmental problems was of great concern. A couple of comments that illustrate this concern include:

“There is lots of rebuilding going and I want to see more coordination across sectors. What’s the big picture and who is playing what role? I am concerned we won’t take steps to address root causes of crisis. It was human behavior that caused the fire. There will need to be lots of collaboration across sectors to figure out how to change behaviors and policies to prevent a future disaster.”

“Support productive dialogue, best-thinking, interdisciplinary, multi sector process (e.g. real estate, construction, insurance companies) so that voices are heard and lots of solutions considered. What are lessons learned to incorporate in rebuild - don’t just put it back the way it was. There are innovative ideas that are worth exploring. A healthy planning process results in healthy outcome. Bring in resources to facilitate the dialogue around priorities and tradeoffs and innovative new approaches for rebuilding.”

Leadership Roles

Interviewees were asked what role the Foundation could play moving forward beyond grant maker to support recovery and rebuilding efforts. Themes clustered around five distinct roles the Foundation could play moving forward:

Connector and/or Collaboration Supporter

Ten of the 16 interviewees suggested the Foundation play the role of connector and/or supporter of collaboration among nonprofits and/or other funders. This role is important given the concerns interviewees expressed related to the lack of service coordination across nonprofit organizations and the lack of coordinated planning efforts across the public and private sectors. Several interviewees noted the Foundation is uniquely positioned to help build bridges across sectors and can also initiate and support cross-sector collaboration.

“CFSC’s convening role should focus on bringing community voices together that do not necessarily talk to one another...keep building unity across groups so we have a community that is more diverse and inclusive and decisions are being made with engagement from residents from neighborhoods who are not typically included in decisions.”

“They could help create connections between people (e.g. donors and community members) so that there is dignity with donations made and received and ultimately a more equitable world.”

Nonprofit Capacity Builder

Almost half the interviewees suggested the Foundation play the role of building nonprofit capacity with a couple of interviewees citing successful capacity-building initiatives the Foundation has supported in the past. The capacities interviewees would like to see built among the nonprofit community include fundraising, trauma-informed care, community organizing and policy advocacy, and strategic partnerships.

Influencer or Advocate

Six of the interviewees indicated the Foundation could play the role of influencer or advocate.

“Influence donors and elected officials to change status quo. Convene cross-sector to learn more about innovative approaches. Be a spokesperson - let community know what is happening on fire relief across community (within and beyond CFSC).”

“CFSC is at the table with a number of efforts – they could use their spot at the table to demand that equity be central to decision-making process. Continue to bring other people with them to those tables.”

Researcher and/or Communicator

Six interviewees suggested the Foundation could play a strong role with regard to gathering information and communicating it broadly to the community. Some interviewees spoke about needing more data about the impact of the fire (e.g. what happened to everyone who lost their homes?).

Fundraiser

A couple of interviewees would like to see the Foundation bring in more philanthropic dollars from other funders to support recovery and rebuilding.

Conclusion

The intention of these interviews was to help inform the Foundation about fire-related issues community leaders are concerned about and explore the roles the Foundation may be well positioned to play within the community.

Most interviewees recognized the value in the Foundation’s thoughtful approach to developing the Resilience Fund’s goals and strategies and their long-term view of recovery and rebuilding. In addition, interviewees appreciated being asked to provide input and reflect on questions related to community engagement, equity, and the Foundation’s potential future role in the recovery and rebuilding process.

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- Vince Harper, Director of Community Engagement, Community Action Partnership
- Peter Rumble, Former Administrator, County Administrator's Office
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