Introduction

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 Resilience Fund will be determined with input from various community and nonprofit leaders.

In February 2018 the Community Foundation hosted 10 listening sessions to hear from the nonprofit community their thoughts on the following three questions:

- When it comes to community-wide issues related to the fires, what concerns you most?
- What ideas or solutions do you have to those issues?
- What role could the Community Foundation play in the recovery process?

A total of 172 individuals representing 123 nonprofits participated. The ten listening sessions were held in five different regions of the county:

- **North Sonoma County:** at Healdsburg Community Center in Healdsburg
- **Central Sonoma County:** at Social Advocates for Youth in Santa Rosa
- **Sonoma Valley:** at La Luz in Boyes Hot Springs
- **South County:** at Mentor Me Petaluma in Petaluma
- **West County:** at Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation in Sebastopol
Concerns:

Participants were first asked to list their concerns related to community-wide issues after the fires. These were then discussed and themed in both small and large groups. The following issues were brought up in at least 50% of the listening sessions; concerns are listed from most-discussed to least-discussed.

Housing

In every listening session, housing was brought up as the primary concern; participants noted that we had a housing crisis before the fires that was made exponentially worse by the disaster. The concerns touched on many aspects of housing in our community, from the challenges of housing pre-fire homeless to affordable housing for low-income people to the impacts of higher-income residents who opt not to rebuild. Several participants voiced concern about the impact of the housing shortage on particular groups, such as students, renters, the homeless and low-income families. In particular, the following concerns were reiterated throughout the listening sessions:

- **Affordable Housing:** The loss of affordable housing and the impact that will have on low-income people
- **Workforce Housing:** Lacking sufficient housing for construction workers to help with the rebuilding process, and lack of sufficient housing for current workforce
- **Homelessness:** The likelihood of an increase in homelessness in our community as a result of the fires; those who were previously homeless will have an even harder time getting into housing

Mental Health

In nine out of the ten listening sessions mental health was discussed as a top concern, with participants stating that we have suffered a community-wide trauma and many people have been impacted, whether or not they lost their homes in the fires. The most frequently voiced concerns around mental health were:

- **Funding Cuts:** In nearly every session, the cuts to county mental health funds were mentioned as a major concern; one participant defined this as a ‘crisis on top of a crisis’
- **Ripple Effects of Trauma:** A broad swath of our community will need mental health services to address trauma, from direct fire survivors to first responders to teachers and nonprofits who are serving fire survivors.
- **Long-Term Impacts:** Concern about the long-term effects of untreated trauma and mental health issues such as higher rates of homelessness, addiction, dropping out of school, incarceration, etc.
Nonprofit Impacts

The participants in the listening sessions were representatives from nonprofit agencies, so naturally the impacts of the fires on nonprofit services and capacity was a key concern, discussed in eight out of the ten listening sessions:

- **Fundraising:** Funds re-directed away from core programs to address fire-related needs, competition for limited resources, donor fatigue, and donors who lost homes moving away

- **Capacity:** Nonprofits are seeing an increased demand for their programs, and are concerned about their capacity to scale up, including being able to raise funds and hire staff to meet demand

- **Collaboration:** Given the increased demand and lack of sufficient funds for services, nonprofits have a great need for collaboration and coordination to ensure services are not duplicated

Economic Impacts

In seven out of the ten listening sessions participants brought up concerns about the economic impacts of the disaster on the community long-term. The concerns primarily centered on the rippling-out effects the housing shortage would have on the economy:

- **Current Workforce:** As the housing market becomes tighter and rental prices increase, we may see a ‘brain drain’ of skilled workers such as doctors, nurses, and teachers, a ‘compassion drain’ in the nonprofit sector, and a severe loss of low-income service sector and agricultural workers

- **Workforce to Rebuild:** There was a particular concern about the need for an additional 19,000 construction workers over the next three years to rebuild lost homes

- **Changing Demographics:** We may see a loss of vitality and diversity in our community if low and middle income people are forced to move out of the area

Environmental Impacts

In seven out of the ten listening sessions environmental issues were brought up as concerns. These included:

- **Rebuilding Efforts:** Concern that homes are being rebuilt in fire-prone areas without consideration of the likelihood of future fires, and the need to support homeowners in fire-proofing their homes and landscapes

- **Natural Resources:** The impacts of the fires on watershed health, particularly water and air quality

- **Education:** The need for education and awareness-raising about what it means to live in a fire-adapted landscape
Vulnerable Populations

In about half of the sessions participants discussed how the fires have disproportionately impacted low-income and other vulnerable populations. Concerns for the long-term included:

- **Recovery Process:** Ensuring the voices of those most marginalized are able to authentically participate in recovery efforts and that decisions are made with them rather than for them.

- **Undocumented:** The undocumented community is largely not eligible for government support and may be further marginalized in the recovery; there needs to be a different approach for working with this population.

Emergency Preparedness

Finally, in half of the sessions emergency preparedness was voiced as an issue to be addressed to ensure we are ready for the next disaster, whether that is a fire, flood, or earthquake. The primary concerns were:

- **Lessons Learned:** How do we take what we have learned from this disaster in order to be better prepared for the next one?

- **Comprehensive Planning:** Better preparation is needed to address needs of everyone but in particular for vulnerable populations such as seniors, monolingual Spanish-speakers and people with disabilities.

- **Communication:** The communication channels during the disaster were completely inadequate; need to develop better communication tools for the next disaster.
Ideas and Solutions

After discussing concerns, CFSC staff facilitated a large-group discussion about ideas to address the myriad of impacts of the fires. Responses were varied, from high-level concepts to small-scale and practical projects. All ideas and solutions were captured but not themed during this component of the meeting. The following list of ideas relate to the most-discussed concerns listed in the report—housing, mental health, economic impacts, the environment, emergency preparedness and vulnerable populations:

- Address the stigma around mental health to reduce the barrier to people seeking services
- Hire more mental health counselors at schools
- Support trainings on trauma-informed care for schools and service providers
- Help get people out in nature to foster well-being and health; nature as healer
- Work with the arts community to address mental health issues through the arts
- Foster local construction job training programs so we can hire local people for the rebuilding process
- Encourage policies to increase housing density such as permitting accessory dwelling units (ADUs) and tiny homes; address government obstacles to adding these units
- Use city/county vacant lots for temporary housing for fire survivors and for construction industry
- Employ eco-friendly building practices to reduce environmental impacts of rebuilt homes
- Encourage mergers of nonprofits to reduce duplication of services and administration costs
- Support nonprofit workforce’s well-being to prevent burnout and turnover
- Create a coordinated entry system for fire survivors to make service navigation easier
- Help people create individual emergency kits to be prepared for future disasters
- Learn from how the Russian River community has recovered from the floods to inform countywide recovery
- Foster public/private partnerships to accelerate recovery process
- Advocate for additional funding at the state and federal level to support recovery and rebuilding
Opportunities for Leadership

Finally, participants were asked to provide feedback on potential roles the Community Foundation could play in the recovery process. The key themes that emerged all relate in some way to being a conduit of information about the recovery process for the community:

- **Elevating Best Practices**: The Community Foundation is doing a significant amount of research on disaster philanthropy and the recovery process; there is opportunity to share what CFSC is learning with leaders and the broader community to inform recovery efforts.

- **Collaboration**: Help to foster strong communication and collaboration among nonprofit providers.

- **Convening**: Bring funders, government leaders, nonprofits, and residents together to ensure a well-coordinated and inclusive recovery effort.

- **Data**: Aggregate data about fire needs and share it with the community to inform the recovery process. There are many sources of data but they are disparate and not being collected in a systematic way.
Thank you to the following organizations who participated in the Listening Sessions:

10,000 Degrees
Agricultural Community Events Farmers Markets
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Building Trades Training
Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Santa Rosa
Children’s Museum of Sonoma County
City of Santa Rosa
Congregation Shir Shalom/ SVTCFB
COTS
Earle Baum Center of the Blind
Face to Face
First 5 Sonoma County
Forest Unlimited
Forget Me Not Children’s Services
Friends of the Mark West Watershed
Girl Scouts of Northern California
Global Student Embassy
Hanna Boys Center
HANNA Winery
Healdsburg Education Foundation
Imagine You Project, IMCF
Interfaith Food
Jewish Community Federation
Jewish Community Free Clinic
Kaiser Permanente Community Benefit
KRCB - North Bay Public Media
La Luz
LandPaths
LifeWorks of Sonoma County
Lomi Psychotherapy Clinic
Luther Burbank Center for the Arts
Mentor Me Petaluma
North Bay Organizing Project
Petaluma Ecumenical Properties
Petaluma Health Care District
Raizes Collective
Rebuilding Together Petaluma
Redwood Empire Food Bank
Restorative Resources

4Cs Sonoma
Alliance Medical Center
Artstart
Becoming Independent
Boys & Girls Clubs of Sonoma Valley
Buckelew Programs
California Human Development
Center for Well-Being
Cinnabar Arts Corporation
Community Action Partnership of Sonoma County
Corazon Healdsburg
Dovetail Learning, Inc.
Everybody Is A Star
Farm to Pantry
Food for Thought
Forestville United Methodist Church Food Closet
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Girls on the Run Sonoma County
Habitat for Humanity of Sonoma County
Hanna Institute & HeART Without Borders
Healdsburg Community Center
Healdsburg Sustainable Design Team Steering Committee
Integrative Medical Clinic Foundation
International Institute of the Bay Area
Jewish Community Center Sonoma County
Jewish Family and Children’s Services
Kid Scoop News
KSVY 91.3 FM radio
Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation
Legal Aid Of Sonoma County
Lilliput Families
Los Cien Sonoma County
Matrix Parent Network
NAMI Sonoma County
Pepperwood
Petaluma Educational Foundation
Petaluma Sunrise Rotary Foundation Inc
Reach For Home
Redwood Community Health Coalition
Redwood Gospel Mission
Roc Sonoma
Russian River Rotary Foundation
Santa Rosa Arts Center
Santa Rosa Community Health
Santa Rosa Symphony
Shebang Ventures
Sonoma Community Center
Sonoma County DHS
Sonoma Co. Rotary Clubs
Sonoma Land Trust
Sonoma Resource Conservation District
Sonoma Valley Education Foundation
SOS Community Counseling
Summer Search
The Living Room
The Salvation Army
Valley of the Moon Natural History Assoc.
Vintage House
Walking Elephant Theatre Company
West County Community Services
Women’s Recovery Services

Russian Riverkeeper
Santa Rosa Children’s Chorus
Santa Rosa Metro Chamber/Mike Hauser Academy
Senior Advocacy Services
Social Advocates for Youth
Sonoma County Bike Coalition
Sonoma County Legal Services Foundation
Sonoma Ecology Center
Sonoma Overnight Support
Sonoma State University
Sonoma Valley Fund
Stewards of the Coast and Redwoods
Sunny Hills Services
The Lost Church / Railroad Square Music Festival
United Policyholders
Verity
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West County Health Centers