

A Case Study of Michigan During Crisis

The Governor's Office of Foundation Liaison in the COVID-19 Pandemic

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PREPARED BY:

Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy
Grand Valley State University
201 Front Ave SW, Suite 200
Grand Rapids, MI 49504

PREPARED FOR:

Governor's Office of Foundation Liaison
111 S Capitol Ave, PO Box 30013
Lansing, MI 48909



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Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy

The Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy at Grand Valley State University was established in 1992 with support from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. Our mission is to be a global leader in helping individuals and organizations understand, strengthen, and advance philanthropy, resulting in a smart, adaptive sector that helps create strong, inclusive communities.

We put research to work with and for professionals across the country and the world. Through professional education offerings; research, evaluation, and consulting services; and bold thinking to advance the field, we support a philanthropic ecosystem defined by effective philanthropy, strong nonprofits, and informed community change.

Project Team

Aaron Yore-VanOosterhout, Ph.D., Research Manager

Jeff Williams, M.A., M.B.A., Director, Community Data and Research Lab

Teri Behrens, Ph.D., Executive Director

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INTRODUCTION

Toward the fall of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic entered a new phase as several pharmaceutical companies showed promising results for a number of different vaccines. While the world breathed a sigh of relief, the Johnson Center reached out to the Governor's Office of Foundation Liaison (OFL) in Michigan — the first state office of its kind in the United States — to encourage them to document their experience over the past year. By this time, several foundations had published similar studies as guides for future endeavors. For the OFL, a case study could offer the twin benefit of 1) helping the OFL take stock of its work over the past year and plan for the future, and 2) providing a guide for foundations across the country that may be interested in establishing a similar office in their own state.

What follows is a compilation of roughly a dozen interviews with state officials and funders conducted from December 2020 to February 2021. Given the nature of the pandemic at that time, these interviews were all conducted virtually. This compilation, of course, does not represent the end of the current crisis or the OFL's work. Instead, it points to the paths forward the OFL may take, especially as it continues to engage Michigan's executive branch and the funding community in fruitful collaboration.

‘AS WE TRY TO FIND OUR WAY OUT OF THIS CRISIS’: OFL IN THE FIRST TWO YEARS OF THE WHITMER ADMINISTRATION

At many points during the COVID-19 pandemic, Michigan has served as a bellwether for the country. Early on, the state experienced one of the first surges in cases as thousands of people became sick and hundreds died in March 2020 alone.¹ The state then battled another surge as a COVID-19 variant elevated infection rates to the highest in the United States in April 2021.² Amid all of this, Gov. Gretchen Whitmer enacted dramatic measures under a state of emergency meant to reduce the suffering. Many policies addressed the immediate crisis: for example, shifting schools to a remote-learning mode, halting dine-in service at restaurants, and limiting participants at public gatherings. But some policies have addressed the longer-term, systemic problems at the root of the state’s experience during the pandemic, such as racism and the inequities it breeds in health care and education.

Michigan also stands out among other states for its Governor’s Office of Foundation Liaison, established in 2003 as a link between the executive office of the governor and the philanthropic sector. To date, Michigan is one of the only states with such an office — indeed, Michigan’s OFL was the first of its kind in the country — and the relationship has been fruitful particularly as the governor has addressed deeply rooted inequities. The OFL has been instrumental to Gov. Whitmer’s office in several ways:

- First, the OFL’s longevity and relative stability allow it to function as a **“long-term policy adviser”** for new executive office personnel, orienting them to the possibilities that Michigan’s foundations can offer for local and statewide initiatives.
- Second, the OFL’s unique status as an outsider situated within the governor’s office affords it the privilege of serving as **an equity activist with insider status**.
- Third, the OFL’s **immediate access to the governor’s policy advisers and funders statewide** opens a dialogue between the drivers of statewide initiatives and the organizations that can incubate those initiatives, evaluate them, and promote them at the local level.

The sections that follow address these themes in chronological order.

An Abbreviated Orientation

Former governor Rick Snyder had served three years in office before the city of Flint, during a budget crisis, switched its water source from treated Detroit water to the Flint River, which contaminated the water supply.

¹ Cumulative Confirmed Cases and Deaths among Confirmed Cases by Date, page 3. Michigan.gov. Accessed April 30, 2021, from https://www.michigan.gov/coronavirus/0,9753,7-406-98163_98173---,00.html

² Bosman, J. (2021, April 1). Virus Surge in Michigan Is a ‘Gut Punch’ to Hopes of Pandemic’s End. *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/01/us/michigan-covid-outbreak.html>

**“If you’d have asked me pre-COVID [...],
‘What do you think’s going to happen?’ I
would not have said our state
government is going to double down on
a fight against systemic racism.”**

– *Foundation staff member*

Snyder then served another year before declaring a state of emergency in Genesee County. By contrast, Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, inaugurated on Jan. 1, 2019, declared a state of emergency across Michigan only one year into her term as the first two cases of COVID-19 were diagnosed in the state.

In what was destined to be a relatively brief introduction, the nearly two-decade-old OFL broadly oriented the Whitmer administration to work in the foundation sector. In so doing, they helped establish relationships that would prove integral to both the executive office and funders as each were called upon to preserve life and alleviate suffering during a global pandemic.

“You have a new state [official]. He or she is trying to find the restrooms — you know what I mean? There are a million things that are flying and, if you have an OFL, as we do, that is in concert with, in collaboration with and can pull together dozens of foundations... I was blown away the first time I met with this group. [...] Who knew that there were all these foundations in the state of Michigan?”

— *Michigan department director*

team to observe cabinet-level meetings, albeit infrequently. The Whitmer administration instead moved the OFL’s offices onto the same floor as the policy team and established an “ambassador” system, whereby OFL staff meet one-on-one with policy advisers who then report back to Whitmer’s cabinet.

This new arrangement fostered even closer relationships between members of the OFL team and policy staffers. For example, “I didn’t hesitate, if someone didn’t answer my emails within a reasonable period of time or return the phone call, to walk down the hall and find them,” said Foundation Liaison Karen Aldridge-Eason. In retrospect, added one policy adviser, the OFL should take further advantage of this proximity in the future. “I, for one, would never have been disgruntled if Karen had come to my door and said, like, ‘Hey, I want to talk to you about this thing.’”

These relationships, in turn, fostered mutual trust that offered Michigan foundations a position of privilege within the state’s executive office. To date, the OFL has worked with three different administrations and has provided continuity since 2003. As one policy adviser commented,

The OFL, for its part, spent the first year of the Whitmer administration adjusting to its role with new colleagues in the executive office. Michigan’s constitution limits governors to two four-year terms in their lifetime, which means the OFL can expect at most a consecutive eight years of relative stability before their role — including their physical location — is subject to reinterpretation. Prior to Gov. Whitmer’s entrance into the executive office in 2019, the Snyder administration maintained the OFL’s physical separation from the governor’s policy team and placed them on a different floor within the building that houses the state’s executive staff. At the same time, that administration invited members of the OFL

“Karen is a wealth of knowledge. [...] Oftentimes as I was developing policy, I would talk with her about [...] pitfalls or ways to think about this. And she would sometimes connect me with foundations ahead of the finished product to think through what the policy could achieve in order to make sure that it was successful.”

— *Policy adviser, Michigan executive office*

“You know, being in a governor’s office, these jobs that we occupy are often short-term because they’re so high-paced and, so, being able to tap into OFL and the foundations that they work with allowed me access to almost like a long-term policy adviser working and seeing everything[, and who] worked with several different governors with similar goals even if they were in a different party, and talk about what they’ve tried on the ground — what worked, what didn’t, which populations maybe weren’t touched by the policy goal and we should think about it differently.”

Beyond this function, the OFL’s primary task — indeed, the office’s most significant role since it was established — is to build relationships with state officials and learn their interests and plans in order to make introductions with like-minded funders. For example, one funder established a relationship with a leader within the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) to advance child welfare policy in the new administration. Partners at the Annie E. Casey Foundation “literally were at the table with us,” explained the agency staffer, and were “very helpful with driving program change in evaluations. [...] They flew me to, like, New York to witness how New York does part of their work.”

Furthermore, this “matchmaking” draws compounding interest for funders that outlast administrations. As one funder explained, “there’s still people from the Snyder administration, the Granholm administration [...] that we] could call or email today, you know, years later [...] because we were able to build those relationships. And I think that was just starting to get there with the Whitmer folks.”

Inequities Laid Bare

On March 11, 2020, Michigan entered a new state of emergency — an emergency set in slow motion that revealed, week by week and month by month, the historic inequities that determined who would succumb and who would largely be spared.

At the same time, the state’s executive branch assumed broader powers to address the crisis, instituting nearly 200 executive orders in 2020 alone, roughly 10 times the number of executive orders signed the year before.³ These orders ranged from myriad efforts to “flatten the curve” — that is, slow the COVID-19 infection rate in order to relieve pressure on hospitals statewide — to establishing a Coronavirus Task Force on Racial Disparities.⁴

“[R]acial equity needed to be addressed before COVID. COVID crystallized that in the most [...] terrifying way”

– *Policy adviser, Michigan executive office*

The Governor’s Office of Foundation Liaison, too, suddenly took on a much larger role. In a few months, the OFL went from a behind-the-scenes matchmaker for one of three branches of state government, to a *de facto* policy adviser for the branch most responsible for alleviating suffering during a pandemic. The history of the OFL and its team served them well for this role. For example, Aldridge-Eason and Foundation Coordinator Stephen Arellano, both from Genesee County, had worked to assist Flint during its water crisis that began in 2014. Moreover, the relationships they created in the first year of Gov. Whitmer’s administration enabled funders and state officials to work together more quickly to address need during the pandemic.

³ Executive Orders. Michigan.gov. Retrieved April 26, 2021, from https://www.michigan.gov/whitmer/0,9309,7-387-90499_90705--00.html

⁴ Executive Order 2020-55 (COVID-19). Michigan.gov. Retrieved April 26, 2021, from https://www.michigan.gov/whitmer/0,9309,7-387-90499_90705-526476--00.html

On March 13, 2020, the OFL closed its office in the George W. Romney Building. Within two weeks, the OFL had arranged for a virtual meeting where Gov. Whitmer and the department and agency directors of the State Budget Office, Housing Development Authority, Health and Human Services, Labor and Economic Opportunity, and Education provided an update to all members of the Council of Michigan Foundations (CMF). From that point forward, the OFL became a direct conduit for policy updates from the executive branch to Michigan's foundation community. And these updates accelerated during the early days of the pandemic. From the OFL, "you get up-to-date, straight-from-the-source information [...] when policy's taking shape," according to one funder.

For smaller, local funders, these virtual updates and large-scale meetings connected them to a broader universe of foundations and established a useful context for many decisions from the state capital. "When it came to some of the COVID relief efforts and process," said one funder, "I think learning from that greater capacity was helpful and we were able to kind of pivot and learn from others and get ideas from others." Furthermore, as many of these primarily rural funders regularly collaborated with their local legislators, and those legislators were often at odds with Gov. Whitmer's policies, hearing policy briefings directly from department directors and others in the administration shed light on this tension. "I think I have a better perspective of where, maybe, the governor's priorities are and why they might not directly align with what [my local lawmaker is] trying to do," said one funder. "Even though it's two different opinions of how to get to the same goal, I at least have a little bit of a better understanding of where some of that tension has been."

Meanwhile, the OFL expanded its own role as this state of emergency deepened and grew more complex. For example, the office supplemented the work of the executive branch's advisory committees as it arranged for a representative from the philanthropy sector to sit on the governor's Coronavirus Task Force on Racial Disparities. The OFL raised "the voice of philanthropy" before state officials, said one funder, "to make sure that racial equity and 'safety net' and poverty issues were really at the table, not just [...] science and health."

One Crisis Response Informs Another

During the first weeks of the pandemic, the OFL team drew on their own experience in the Flint water crisis to inform their efforts. As Aldridge-Eason said,

"We had some sort of insider views on [...] how some crises leave certain people behind. So, we reached out immediately to the head of the [Aging & Adult Services Agency] because in the Flint water crisis, everybody was talking about the little kids as being a vulnerable population and nobody was talking about [...] seniors in this. Seems to me, their vulnerability might [...] mirror in some ways [that of] young children. We found exactly the same thing with this, with the pandemic. They needed some special attention, and so we were able to quickly mobilize a corporate funder to respond to the food needs and create these seven-day boxes for seniors so that they were able to stay home and not have to go to the grocery store, you know, and be prepared and also give them that contact, at least weekly, that somebody knocked at their door."

In this instance, the OFL quickly took the initiative to learn specific needs among the state's senior population and connected a state agency with a funder interested in fulfilling that need. This worked, according to the funder, because of trust. "The better the relationship, the faster you can execute," they explained. "I think that was probably how the whole pandemic has worked for me — those relationships that I have that I trust are the ones that we really executed on quickly and made a difference."

Then, a little more than two months following Gov. Whitmer’s emergency declaration, a Black Minneapolis resident, George Floyd, was murdered by a white police officer in front of a crowd of onlookers. The resulting mass protests led a national reckoning with racist police brutality at first, and eventually encompassed systemic racism more broadly as it became clear that COVID-19 had a particularly devastating impact among people with underlying health conditions, exacerbated by historic inequities. As a funder explained the OFL’s resulting transformation, “especially on these issues around social safety net, poverty, community, race — Karen [Aldridge-Eason] always led with those before or after COVID. [...] I think it was just that the COVID crisis, the response, the racial equity [...] awakening after the George Floyd murder gave her a new platform or opportunity to speak about it more overtly or differently, or push it in different ways.” As Aldridge-Eason explained the OFL’s role, “we’re an activist office.”

This activism manifested in a variety of ways.

In partnership with CMF, for example, the OFL helped align and focus funders’ priorities on racial equity. The OFL then presented this united front to state officials for action. Beginning in the early months of the pandemic and continuing into the summer, the OFL arranged a series of informational sessions for funders that centered on “safety net” programs — i.e., many of the programs administered by MI Bridges, such as food assistance, cash assistance, etc. — and transitioned into racial equity. As a result, many funders coalesced around key principles of equity and demanded the same from their state partners. As one funder said, “if they’re going to work with philanthropy, this is important.”

Many in the executive branch heard that message loud and clear. According to one state official,

“In my conversations with the Office of Foundation Liaison, they have really emphasized to us how much [racial equity is] a value that the foundation community in Michigan are pretty lockstep on. [...] I don’t think it’s really, necessarily new with them [...] but, obviously, it was amplified by George Floyd’s murder and [that of] Breonna Taylor. All the things that happened [in summer 2020] to call attention to the inequities that still persist. I do think the office made it clear to us that if we are to apply for grants, if we are to try to build relationships, we have to be cognizant of that.”

Of course, the OFL’s work in this regard was made all the more effective with a willing partner in the current administration. As one funder pointed out, “our governor just declared racism as a public health crisis. That was huge to have the governor stand in front of cameras and say on TV, “systemic racism,” “white supremacy.” [...] If you’d have asked me pre-COVID [...] what do you think’s going to happen? I would not have said our state government is going to double down on a fight against systemic racism.”

POSSIBILITIES FOR A MORE COLLABORATIVE FUTURE

As the pandemic transitions to a new phase and deep-seated partisanship in state politics continues to stymie policy initiatives, state officials and funders alike suggested a number of paths forward.

For example, equitable vaccine distribution — both as a means to curb the pandemic and, later, as a preventive measure to forestall further outbreaks — represents the next challenge for many state officials. Beyond simple logistics, there is lingering vaccine hesitancy across a broad spectrum of racial and ethnic groups, from small proportions of Black/African American communities to white evangelical Christians.⁵

⁵ Hamel, L., et al. (2021, March 30). KFF COVID-19 Vaccine Monitor: March 2021. *Kaiser Family Foundation*. <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/poll-finding/kff-covid-19-vaccine-monitor-march-2021/>

Effectively combatting this hesitancy will require trusted community voices, according to one state official. Considering Black/African American communities, they said,

“It’s not paranoia when people really are out to get you, and in the past that has been the case. [...] There’s one thing for the government to [promote the vaccine]. There’s something else for other trusted voices and I think that that could be a role that philanthropy can play, but there has to be some coordination between what we’re doing on the vaccination front and what philanthropy can do on the communication, on the message front. So, I think that that’s one way that the Office of Foundation Liaison can be really critical, in helping us bridge those two very important roles.”

Other particular areas of interest for state officials and funders included education, the carceral system, public health, poverty, child care, and even age-related social stigma, or ageism. The breadth of these themes demonstrates well the OFL’s usefulness to many in the government and philanthropic sectors, and the hope that its work will expand.

More generally, state officials and funders also pointed to the particular services the OFL offered that they found most helpful. These include the following:

Facilitate Broader Collaboration Statewide

Policy advisers and agency directors in Lansing frequently seek to implement initiatives across the state, and it can be challenging to align hundreds of local foundations to support any single cause. “If we want to do a statewide rollout of a project,” asked one state department director, “how can we identify somebody who can fund this across the state, or can [OFL] be the broker to get multiple foundations together to cover a whole statewide initiative?”

Funders, too, are seeking broader collaboration. As one funder said,

“I like the outreach to funders to help co-create what the work is supposed to look like, that they can then try and sell, essentially, to government. [...] Sometimes you can get caught in your own little foundation bubble. [...] Being able to connect with folks from across the state who are also working at foundations trying to do similar things and helping to think out loud together and co-create — I would like to see [the OFL] keep doing that.”

Expand, Formalize Meetings Between State Officials and Funders

One method to achieve broader collaboration is to offer more frequent meetings and written updates between funders and executive office staff, and regularly host larger symposiums or other events of particular interest. Interview participants in both sectors sought more access to each other in order to align priorities, air policy ideas, and achieve statewide impact. “I think getting on a schedule with the check-ins would be good,” said one agency director. “We do hear from them more sporadically right now, and I think just building that relationship and keeping in close communication would be great.” In addition, as one funder explained, “it would be interesting to have, like, a funder-legislator symposium or event [...] periodic opportunities for funders and government folks: maybe it’s Director Gordon from MDHHS or, like, the health affinity chapter of CMF is hosting a webinar with Dr. Joneigh Khaldun two weeks from now or so to talk about vaccines.”

In this vein, another state official sought a more formalized process for orienting new state officials to the work of the OFL, in addition to an introduction to the broader work of the philanthropic sector. “I was pretty surprised [to learn that] Kellogg is willing to just give us money to go and do this” said this official. Still, “I don’t know [...] how wide that spectrum of opportunity is.”

Facilitate Pilot Programs

While broader collaboration was important for many, some state officials saw value in foundations' particular niches: their geographic or thematic areas of specialty. In this sense, foundations function as grassroots organizations with more flexibility to innovate and conduct trial runs of programs that could later be adopted statewide. One agency administrator said, "a lot of my job is going to be case building because the things that we want to do, they cost money. We have to get public support for them [...] particularly those things that have to be changed legislatively. Those pilots [...] that we can do with philanthropic organizations to build the case that something is needed will really help us to make needed changes in state government."

Build OFL Capacity

Multiple funders commented on OFL staff's seemingly boundless energy, but openly wondered how sustainable their efforts could be with a staff of three. "I really am worried about their capacity," said one funder. "They do such good work that what I wouldn't want to happen is for them to crash and burn. Not because they're not doing good work or because people don't see the value, but they just don't have the capacity with three people to do all these things." As another funder put it, "they're moving at the speed of light."

Maintain Online Environment

Finally, even as the state returns to some in-person activities following widespread vaccination, one rural funder wanted to see online meetings continue. In addition, they hoped that a broader, statewide circuit could be established for other, in-person gatherings. "Hopefully, I think, there might be a [...willingness] to rotate around the state so that you can maybe add some variety and make it easier and spread out some of that travel burden when there are those face-to-face" gatherings, explained this funder. "Grand Rapids is closer than Detroit or wherever the rotation might be."

APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY

From December 2020 to February 2021, the Johnson Center spoke with 14 stakeholders, in both the public and nonprofit sectors, chosen from a list provided by the Michigan Governor’s Office of Foundation Liaison. The semi-structured conversations and the interview guides are included below. On the government side, the Johnson Center sought experts in a range of fields, from policy advisers of different specialties within the executive office of the governor, to department administrators involved in the state’s safety net, to the state school superintendent. From the philanthropic sector, the Johnson Center spoke with administrators from foundations across the state, representing a wide variety of interests and programs in both urban and rural contexts.



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INTERVIEW INSTRUMENT: OFL COVID-19 RESPONSE

Executive Office Staff

Introduction

Hello! I'm Aaron Yore-VanOosterhout, and I'm a research manager at the Johnson Center for Philanthropy at Grand Valley State University. Thank you for taking the time to talk with us. Before we do anything else, I'd like to point out that this conversation is being recorded. Are you comfortable with this?

[IF NO, EXPLAIN THAT WE RECORD ALL INTERVIEWS IN ORDER TO ANALYZE THEM IN AGGREGATE LATER, AND PULL PARTICULARLY EMBLEMATIC QUOTES FROM CERTAIN CONVERSATIONS. ALL SUCH RECORDINGS WILL BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL. IF STILL NO, THANK PARTICIPANT FOR THEIR TIME AND END INTERVIEW IF ALONE, OR PREPARE TO HAVE ONE RESEARCHER TAKE DETAILED NOTES.]

[IF YES, CONTINUE.]

The Office of Foundation Liaison for the State of Michigan and the Council of Michigan Foundations has asked us to help them document the response of the OFL to the COVID-19 pandemic. Overall, this case study will document how the government and philanthropic sectors collaborated to respond to the pandemic and the racial equity issues that were highlighted by it.

Broadly, we want to understand how your work with the OFL evolved as the pandemic unfolded and how you hope the work will continue. Please note that we're not employed by CMF or OFL, so your honest thoughts won't hurt our feelings!

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Great! Now we'll get started with the interview.

Personal history questions

1. Please state your name and job title for the transcript.



2. In what capacity have you worked with the OFL?

Pre-pandemic activities

For the next few questions, we'd like you to think of the period before the COVID-19 pandemic. For now, let's say 2019.

3. What was your office's "normal" work with the OFL, in any, before the pandemic?
 - a. Follow-up probes:
 - i. Did you meet with any of the OFL staff regularly?
 - ii. Did you participate in briefings?
 - iii. Did you participate in any specific projects that OFL brokered? If yes, what were they?
4. What did you see as the major benefits of these "normal" activities with the OFL?

Early days of the pandemic

Now, let's shift to the early days of the pandemic — from January through June 2020, more or less. For reference, it was during this period that Michigan's east side suffered the greatest losses as thousands of people died in the Detroit area, and Gov. Whitmer introduced a series of restrictions on public life meant to "flatten the curve" (i.e., slow the infection rate). Foundations, particularly, came under scrutiny for their historical inaction during moments of crisis, and the Ford Foundation led broad changes in the sector, taking on debt to increase payouts and pledging to remove restrictions on funding for current and future grantees.

5. How did your work with the OFL change?
 - a. PROBES: Were there new conversations or partnerships? If so, describe them.
6. What did you observe about how the OFL changed its work?



- a. How did that affect the outcomes of those activities?

It is also important to remember that, during this time, mass protests erupted around the country following the killing of George Floyd by police officer Derek Chauvin on May 25.

7. How, if at all, did the Executive Office work with the OFL to respond to these popular movements?

- a. Were there any challenges in this work (e.g., a foundation board divided along ideological lines)?

- b. How were those challenges overcome?

Now, please think of the state government's response to the Midland Dam emergency, also occurring during this time.

8. How did that response compare to the COVID-19 pandemic, due to the efforts of the OFL in the latter?

July 2020 to the present

Next, let's shift to the period after the Fourth of July through the present. During this period, Gov. Whitmer relaxed many restrictions on public life, first in northern Michigan and then throughout the rest of the state. Beginning in mid-fall, however, COVID-19 infection rates across the country spiked to unprecedented levels, especially in those areas that were largely spared in the months before. We are now experiencing another wave of infections and deaths — but this time around, the Executive Office's range of responses has been circumscribed by the Michigan Supreme Court, and the Legislature has been more reticent to institute sweeping public health measures and bailouts for businesses and their employees.

9. What, do you think, is the role of the OFL during this next phase?

10. Based on the shared experience during the early COVID-19 response, what would you like to see the OFL continue to do that it did not do before?



Post-pandemic period

Finally, let's assume the COVID-19 vaccines are widely distributed these first few months of 2021. In a period of recovery...

11. What would you like to see the OFL resume doing that it had to pause during the crisis?

12. What would you like to see the OFL continue to do that it did not do before?



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6. What did you observe about how the OFL changed its work?



- a. How did that affect the outcomes of those activities?

It is also important to remember that, during this time, mass protests erupted around the country following the killing of George Floyd by police officer Derek Chauvin on May 25.

7. How, if at all, did the Executive Office work with the OFL to respond to these popular movements?

- a. Were there any challenges in this work (e.g., a foundation board divided along ideological lines)?

- b. How were those challenges overcome?

[OPTIONAL FOR FOUNDATION STAFF] Now, please think of the state government's response to the Midland Dam emergency, also occurring during this time.

8. How did that response compare to the COVID-19 pandemic, due to the efforts of the OFL in the latter?

July 2020 to the present

Next, let's shift to the period after the Fourth of July through the present. During this period, Gov. Whitmer relaxed many restrictions on public life, first in northern Michigan and then throughout the rest of the state. Beginning in mid-fall, however, COVID-19 infection rates across the country spiked to unprecedented levels, especially in those areas that were largely spared in the months before. We are now experiencing another wave of infections and deaths — but this time around, the Executive Office's range of responses has been circumscribed by the Michigan Supreme Court, and the Legislature has been more reticent to institute sweeping public health measures and bailouts for businesses and their employees.

9. What, do you think, is the role of the OFL during this next phase?

10. Based on the shared experience during the early COVID-19 response, what would you like to see the OFL continue to do that it did not do before?



Post-pandemic period

Finally, let's assume the COVID-19 vaccines are widely distributed these first few months of 2021. In a period of recovery...

11. What would you like to see the OFL resume doing that it had to pause during the crisis?

12. What would you like to see the OFL continue to do that it did not do before?