

TOGETHER, FOR GOOD

Together, For Good

Why the collaboration motivated by the COVID-19 pandemic should take root and grow.

As civilization begins to reboot on the wings of a largely successful vaccination campaign, and as it becomes at least somewhat reasonable to discuss the idea of the pandemic's end, like many of you, I am left with new questions about the fate of the nonprofit community, of philanthropy, of ethical corporate leadership and, more importantly, of the causes toward which our collective efforts are triangulated.

In so many areas of life, as a society, we are intent on getting back to normal; to some version of the way things used to be. While our outright exuberance in this regard is warranted in some areas – like eating in restaurants, hugging grandchildren and boarding planes – some good has come to our sector with the great reset of the past 14 months and should be maintained. We have an opportunity to fuel something progressive and growth-oriented; to reimagine our structures with collaboration and trust baked into the new foundations.

Across our sector, the pandemic forced alliances and unification as we worked collectively to come up with creative solutions to unprecedented problems. Funders faced moments of great humility as they heeded the direction and calls to action of grantees. Philanthropists partnered with their peers to merge resources and mobilize funds quickly through collaborative funding platforms. Nonprofits, confronted by disorganized or redundant programmatic markets, collaborated more deliberately and honestly than ever before to meet the spiraling needs of their communities.

This has amounted to a genuine awakening to the intelligence of deeper and sustained collaboration; to the simple but powerful notions that none of us alone has the answers and that organizations can do far more together than any one of them can do separately. Changing Our World's own *Forging Forward Virtual Summit*, which hosted an astonishing roster of speakers who might have hesitated to share a microphone prior to March 2020, is further proof of this.

It's worth observing, however, that sustaining this level of cooperation and trust in the post-pandemic world is going to be hard. Complacency, as global economies roar back to life and our lives return to something like normal, will, no doubt, become a very real draw. Wholesale organizational change is famously difficult to come by, and one that requires the cooperation of more than one organization, even more so.

But the pandemic has offered us a window and what is needed, to ensure it doesn't slam shut, is for each of us to find our role in a new movement—to visualize a future that's different from our past and to talk honestly about what it would take to get there.

I'm encouraged by the fact that I've seen unified action for sustainable impact work, and work exceptionally well. Changing Our World is the driving force behind ONE HUNDRED—the world's first multi-disciplinary, fully connected service collective for organizations committed to enacting positive change—which was formed five years ago as an expression of our desire to help organizations solve long-standing and emergent problems through a complete harmonizing of their fundraising and communications strategies, resources, branding, messaging, digital experiences, etc. Our integrated teams, drawn from agencies across Omnicom, have been successful not only because of the holistic support we offer our clients but because we learned quickly that we could and should trust one another.

Trust must become an underlying principle within our sector if we are to sustain high levels of cooperation in the long term. Nonprofits should occupy a central role in creating and strengthening community trust. Donors can't take their place in advancing progress if they don't trust the organizations doing the work. Corporations all but *have to* place their focus not only on shareholders and profits, but on the needs of employees, communities, suppliers and the planet—a critical component in building the community trust that is today necessary for business viability. And we, as consultants, can only fulfill our role in moving the needle on society's toughest challenges by building credibility and trust in our client relationships.

The dance between trust and cooperation may seem obvious in the abstract, but we are seeing it take hold in ways that are fundamentally new to our sector.

During our *Forging Forward Virtual Summit*, we heard about nonprofit leaders joining forces to coordinate social services to support a web of emerging crises being experienced by shared constituents; about the hunger of nonprofit leaders for their peers' support as they take on long-standing issues on which the pandemic has shown a spotlight; about the need for presence and power for community members at tables where decisions are made; about the value in funders' willingness to be agile in their grantmaking; about the potential of strong, regional nonprofit networks to achieve greater impact.

We see it on more intimate stages, as well – in private conversation with leaders who range from high school development directors looking to fund operational strategies that make their schools stronger for students and families, to corporate leaders who understand purpose-led business to be at an inflection point, to powerful leaders in global business and philanthropy who are joining forces to lead major world-wide initiatives.

As we emerge from the pandemic, we have an opportunity to coalesce this appetite for unity into a bona fide movement that calls everyone to bring their piece of the puzzle to the table. We must all ask ourselves what resources and strengths we bring to bear. Changing Our World, for one, will be voicing change by calling our industry and its leaders to move from a mindset of survival to one of renewal; by helping our clients to re-imagine their strategies for the post-pandemic era; by designing holistic and donor-centric development structures; by guiding our corporate partners to meet the urgency and energy of the moment.

This is all, of course, an opportunity not to reshape our sector for its own sake, but to transform public health and education; to get human services to those who most need them and in ways that are systematic and effective, and heed their beneficiaries' insights; to ensure corporations' citizenship claims translate into clear, long-term action plans; to build the resiliency of our planet.

In the next several months, Changing Our World will offer a series of essays on how each of us might contribute to this vision from where we sit. We are optimistic about what the future holds – *giving has grown by 10.6 percent during the worst pandemic since 1918* and the past 14 months have shown us that we *can* come together when the stakes are high. I submit that, as the tug of normalcy strengthens for us all, the stakes for long-term impact grow even higher and that we must seize this moment to come together, for good.

Written by:



Brian Crimmins
Global Managing Partner, ONE HUNDRED
CEO, Changing Our World