

# Challenges and opportunities for the sector moving into 2022

As we close out 2021, we spoke with several philanthropic leaders about how their work changed, especially due to the pandemic this year. Read about their successes, challenges and opportunities as we look toward 2022.



**Amy Eyman**  
Executive Director  
Fairfield County  
Foundation

## How did your work change or adapt – especially due to the pandemic – this year?

Obviously, like many others, we changed the way we do business by having our office closed at times and not always having our full staff in the office all at once, to maintain social distancing. We ended up ordering new computers with docking stations so that we could take our computers home so that we had the ability to work from home when needed. Our entire staff chose to be vaccinated, so that was helpful, and we asked individuals that came into our office to wear a mask when they entered. In addition, we adjusted when needed and everyone seemed to be very understanding. We all became experts on Zoom meetings and many of our meetings were conducted that way.

## How did these changes impact your grantees? Will they stick after the pandemic ends?

Our grantmaking process stayed about the same. Many of the processes changed to online, over the phone or via Zoom.

We did allow grantees more time to implement grants due to the lack of workers, supplies and equipment and we worked with the organizations to help facilitate what we could. A few times, we worked with nonprofits to repurpose a grant if there was a greater need or if something was unavailable as part of a grant. Follow-up did not always happen as it should, due to the restrictions on visiting some of the nonprofits.

## What are you most pleased about that you accomplished this year?

During the pandemic, we established a COVID-19 Relief Fund and worked very closely with the United Way in our community to raise funds and award them to community nonprofits. We've always had a relationship with the United Way in our community, but this time gave us an opportunity to truly work together, like we hadn't before. In addition, many of our relationships with other community partners were deepened, through our efforts to work together as a community to make the best of a bad situation. These collaborations have continued, and for that, I'm thankful. We are also ending the year with close to double what our typical donations have been in the past. I know last year, a lot of donors were concerned about giving and what was going to happen, but I think things have settled a bit and they feel more comfortable with donating.

## What will be the biggest challenge next year? Opportunity?

Our biggest challenge is to continue to serve our community during this "new" normal and continue to get back to business as before. We really had to scale back in-person meetings with donors, professional advisors and nonprofits and we need to get back out there, in front of donors and potential donors. We also kicked off an unrestricted giving campaign called GIVE365. This campaign has allowed individuals to give on a smaller scale – \$1 a day – and still be part of the foundation. If COVID-19 taught us anything, it's that we don't know the future needs of our community, which is why raising unrestricted dollars is so important.



**Su Lok**  
Principal, Three Rivers  
East LLC – Formerly,  
Director, Corporate and  
Community Partnerships  
for The Scotts Miracle-  
Gro Company

## How did your work change or adapt – especially due to the pandemic – this year?

In an age of virtual meetings, this year we have comfortably settled into new ways of engaging and sustaining relationships with our partners and colleagues in the community. And while in-person engagement is certainly

preferred, I have found that the virtual environment has enhanced access to our community partners, enabling us to connect with more nonprofit organizations than ever before. Whether it's reaching out via Zoom or hosting a remote multi-partner collaboration, virtual meetings are an easy way to engage with more individuals efficiently and cost-effectively. And the online work setting has provided us with an opportunity to be more focused, attuned and inclusive of our partners and their needs.

### How did these changes impact your grantees? Will they stick after the pandemic ends?

At the start of the pandemic, the nonprofit community required an increased amount of support to maintain much-needed client services. Funders and donors responded with flexibility, meeting their nonprofit partners where they needed support the most. This initial crisis response, borne from the pandemic, fostered more open and honest dialogue between funders and grantees. I believe this strengthened the relationship model whereby successful partnerships are not transactional but based on a mutual alignment toward a common purpose. My hope is that this practice continues beyond the pandemic.

### What are you most pleased about that you accomplished this year?

A signature youth empowerment initiative that I established five years ago marked a major milestone with the first graduating class from the program this year. Along with helping this next generation of students grow and discover their career passions, I was also pleased to professionally develop a staff team that is deeply committed to its work and the mission of the program.

### What will be the biggest challenge next year? Opportunity?

The ability of nonprofits, along with the donor community, to respond to the changing socio-economic landscape will be key. I look forward to collaborating with a cross-section of partners to navigate these waters and advance the work of lifting up our community.



**Cecilia Render**  
Executive Director  
Nordson Corporation  
Foundation

### How did your work change or adapt – especially due to the pandemic – this year?

2021, how do you put it in words? The year saw us in a continued lockdown, which I did not expect to like, but now it is hard to return to the office. Everyone had to make changes this year, whether that was “pivoting due to the unprecedented” circumstances or actually having to shut down services, it was a difficult time for nonprofits and funders. Zoom became our friend or our worst enemy, depending on your view. “You’re on mute” or “are you frozen” became part of our everyday language. We had to learn to hold virtual site visits and virtual galas (which I actually like much better – the galas, not the site visits). There were many challenges, but we also were able to see the resilience of those we partner with. We listened and learned and became more responsive instead of directive in our grantmaking.

### How did these changes impact your grantees? Will they stick after the pandemic ends?

I am hopeful that the changes will remain as we move forward. Listening allows us to meet the nonprofits where they are instead of where we want them to be. That dialogue will make us better partners. We took the time to review our grant application and process and will have a streamlined but more informative application and review process. Part of this was to verify that we are actually serving the underrepresented communities like we say we do but also just to make the process easier on all of us. Diverse and inclusive grantmaking has become a rallying cry and I hope that means that we will all support those in our communities that need us most, not those who have the best brand, but the most impact.

### What are you most pleased about that you accomplished this year?

With all the negativity that flourished in the world in 2021, I am glad to say that we did not give into it. I think we saw some of the worst behavior, but saw that there is still hope and positivity out there. I am proud to be part of a sector that finds and cultivates the best in people. I was so glad to see Blessing House build a new facility that will allow for more children to have a safe place to stay instead of being put into a system where they can quickly become a number. Nordson Tech Time was able to switch to virtual STEM programming for students across the country and they even wrote a Nordson theme song that was used for their events. I love the fact that one of the unsung programs out there, ACES, was able to track down and assist 65 Lorain students who had become disengaged from school and get them to graduate. It's all these small but not insignificant events that make me proud to do what I do.

### What will be the biggest challenge next year? Opportunity?

It's already 2022 for me, our fiscal year started November 1. We donated the Nordson Depot to the City of Amherst to be used as a community center for nonprofits, Giving Tuesday was a big hit and I am looking forward to continuing to build better and stronger partnerships. We are in the middle of making some changes that I cannot disclose yet but that will help Nordson grow our commitment to our employees and our communities. We partnered with the Cleveland Foundation to research why students of color are not taking advantage of the STEM opportunities afforded to them and will hopefully be able to use that data to understand and implement programming that will strengthen educational opportunities for our Black and Brown students.

All that to say, I am hopeful for 2022. I will be coming off the Philanthropy Ohio board but will continue to be active and learn and grow with the organization. You are an amazing group of people and I appreciate the fact that I get to call you my colleagues.