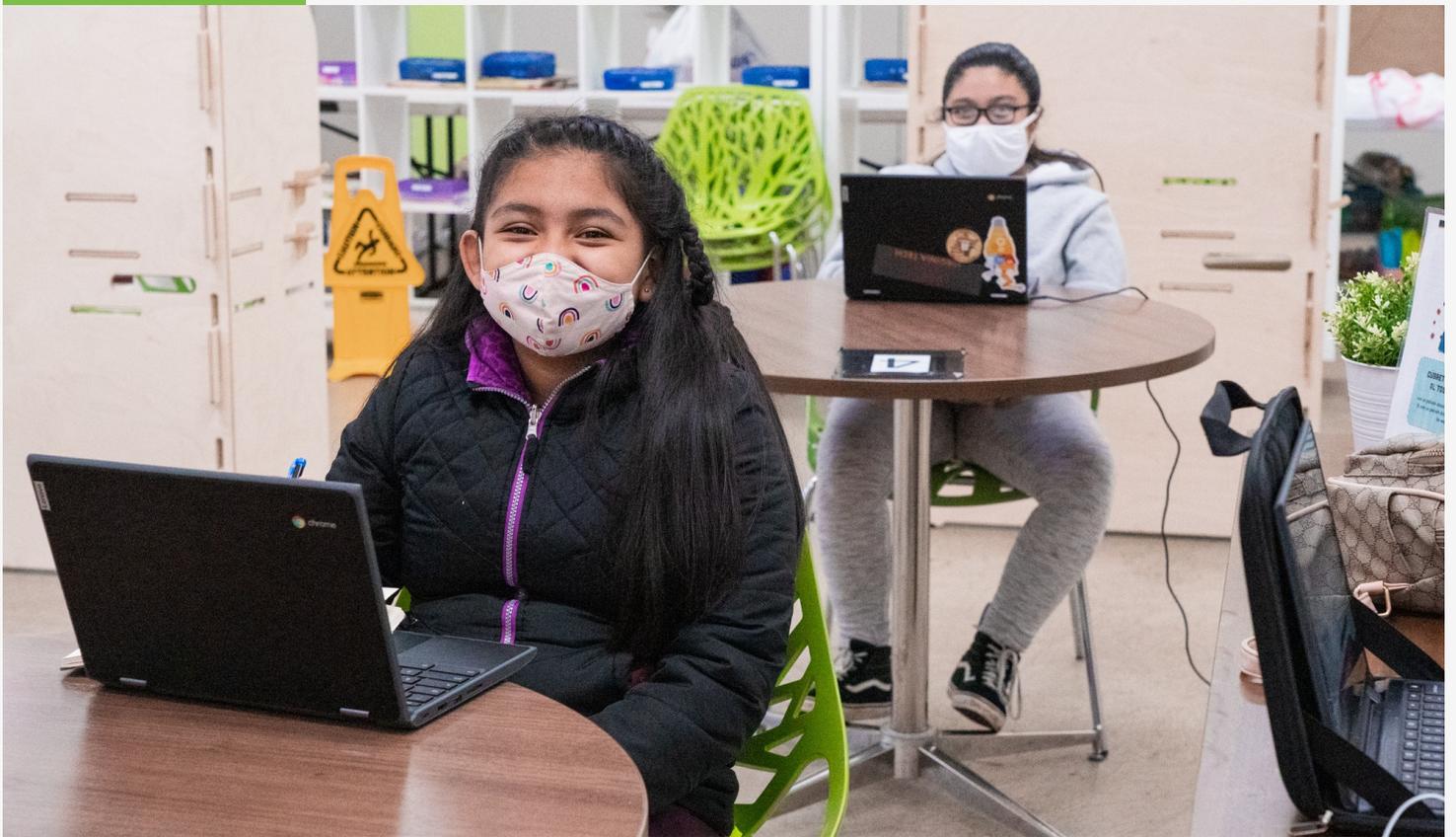


# Stronger Together

ACT FOR ALEXANDRIA'S  
RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19  
PANDEMIC



Impact report for the  
community

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# About ACT for Alexandria



ACT for Alexandria is a community foundation dedicated to improving the lives of people in Alexandria, Virginia.

We are Alexandria's home for philanthropy and for individuals who want to make a difference.

[www.actforalexandria.org](http://www.actforalexandria.org)

- **ACT is a convener.** As a community foundation, we are uniquely positioned to connect many sectors within our community.
- **ACT is a catalyst.** We listen and collaborate with our partners to ignite rapid responses to needs in our community.
- **ACT is an advocate.** We bring the community together to amplify our voices and promote equity for all.

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“Our human compassion binds us to one another - not in pity or patronizingly, but as human beings who have learnt how to turn our common suffering into hope for the future.”  
– Nelson Mandela



These words from Nelson Mandela are an inspiring summary of the past year. The COVID-19 pandemic brought profound change to

our nation and our community. The degree of hardship and loss of life is beyond what many of us have experienced in our lifetimes.

And, the past year is a testament to the love and compassion that Alexandrians have for one another. We sheltered in place, supported local businesses, volunteered our time, and made donations so that our community could remain safe and strong in the face of adversity.

The pandemic also highlighted the destructive grip of racism in our community. Neighbors hardest hit by the pandemic were the same ones left out of the region’s pre-pandemic prosperity. To move forward as a community, we understood that we would need to

prioritize investments in African American, Latinx, and immigrant communities. This report captures how we came together to uplift and support one another this past year – neighbors helping neighbors. Thousands of Alexandrians, local businesses, congregations, and the City provided more than \$5.76M in COVID-19 emergency support. We learned how resilient Alexandria’s nonprofits are, and how everyone could take steps to make a difference.

As we rebuild and recover, we must deepen our resolve to move forward together. We look forward to continued partnership with you and all of those who share our love of Alexandria.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Heather Peeler'.

Heather Peeler  
President & CEO, ACT for Alexandria

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# COVID Response

## MEETING THE EMERGENCY NEEDS OF OUR COMMUNITY

From March through December 2020, ACT for Alexandria, in partnership with the City of Alexandria, thousands of donors and more than 100 nonprofits, worked together to provide critical programs and services for our neighbors in need.

Our collective response to the pandemic was immediate, responsive, and comprehensive. Our response was comprised of four key initiatives:

- The Alexandria Resilience Fund (previously named the ACT Now COVID-19 Response Fund)
- The ALX Cares Grocery Gift Card Program
- The Alexandria City Employee's Covid-19 Assistance Fund
- The Alexandria Arts Fund

This report features highlights from each of these initiatives and includes insights about what we learned and steps we will take as we continue to uplift and support Alexandrians.





# The Alexandria Resilience Fund

## DELIVERING CRITICAL SERVICES, STRENGTHENING NONPROFITS

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit our community in March 2020, ACT quickly worked with the City of Alexandria to mobilize partners, donors, and nonprofit organizations to meet our community's needs head-on. Our community rallied to provide critical services, including:

- emergency food and financial assistance
- access to healthcare, technology, and personal protective equipment (PPE), and
- educational supports to enhance distance learning and student success

The spirit of collective action is core to Alexandria and Alexandrians responded with enthusiasm, commitment, and compassion by giving to the Alexandria Resilience Fund (initially called the ACT Now COVID-19 Response Fund). We also put racial equity at the center of our response in order to address the pandemic's disproportionate impact on communities of color.

We knew that our community's needs would evolve as our understanding of the pandemic's impact on our community would evolve. Thus, the Fund's work included two phases. Phase 1 took place between March and June 2020. Phase 2 took place between October and December 2020.

A list of Alexandria Resilience Fund grantees can be viewed in Appendix A.

# The Alexandria Resilience Fund Racial Equity Statement

ACT for Alexandria and the City of Alexandria envision a community where the color of one's skin, ethnicity, or citizenship status does not determine their outcomes in life. Historically, African Americans, Latinx, immigrants, and our neighbors of color have had fewer economic and educational opportunities, are more likely to experience housing and food insecurity, and have worse health outcomes compared to their white counterparts due to systemic and institutional racism.

We believe that the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 is a racial equity issue and the pandemic has exacerbated the pre-existing inequities in our community. Prioritizing racial equity in our grantmaking is the most effective way to respond to the needs of our community now and in the future.

The Alexandria Resilience Fund intends to support organizations providing essential services to residents disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, while also addressing the underlying factors – specifically systemic and institutional racism – that perpetuate poverty and limit economic opportunity. We will prioritize partners and programs committed to addressing racial equity and that have deep, trusted relationships with marginalized communities on the sidelines of Alexandria's prosperity.



We know we will continue to bear witness to COVID-19's devastating impact on our community and we are committed to finding ways to invest in longer-term solutions that address the root causes of poverty and disproportionate economic opportunity for people of color in Alexandria. The Alexandria Resilience Fund is one among many important efforts to build a more equitable and just Alexandria.



## The Alexandria Resilience Fund Phase 1: March - June

Originally named the ACT Now COVID-19 Response Fund, the Alexandria Resilience Fund grew out of previous emergency response efforts. ACT seeded the Fund with \$25,000 from our reserves and received \$200,000 from both the City of Alexandria and Amazon. The Fund soon grew to more than \$1M thanks to the generosity of Alexandrians, local businesses, foundations, donor advised fund holders, religious congregations, Spring2ACTion donors, and others who gave to the Fund.

The focus of the first phase of grantmaking was emergency relief - food, shelter, supplies - and building the capacity of nonprofits to modify their service delivery models. The Fund prioritized requests that assisted:

- children and youth
- people disproportionately impacted by the crisis including low-wage workers, gig economy workers, and seniors
- people experiencing homelessness or at-risk of experiencing homelessness
- healthcare, emergency response, and essential workers,
- immigrants, especially those who lack documentation



Funds distributed



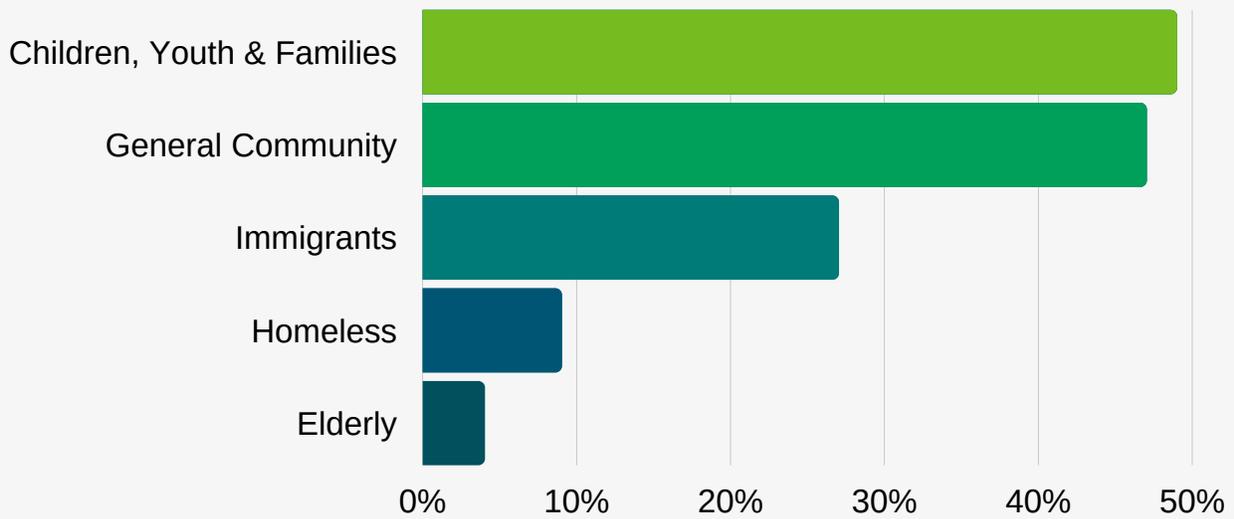
Grants awarded

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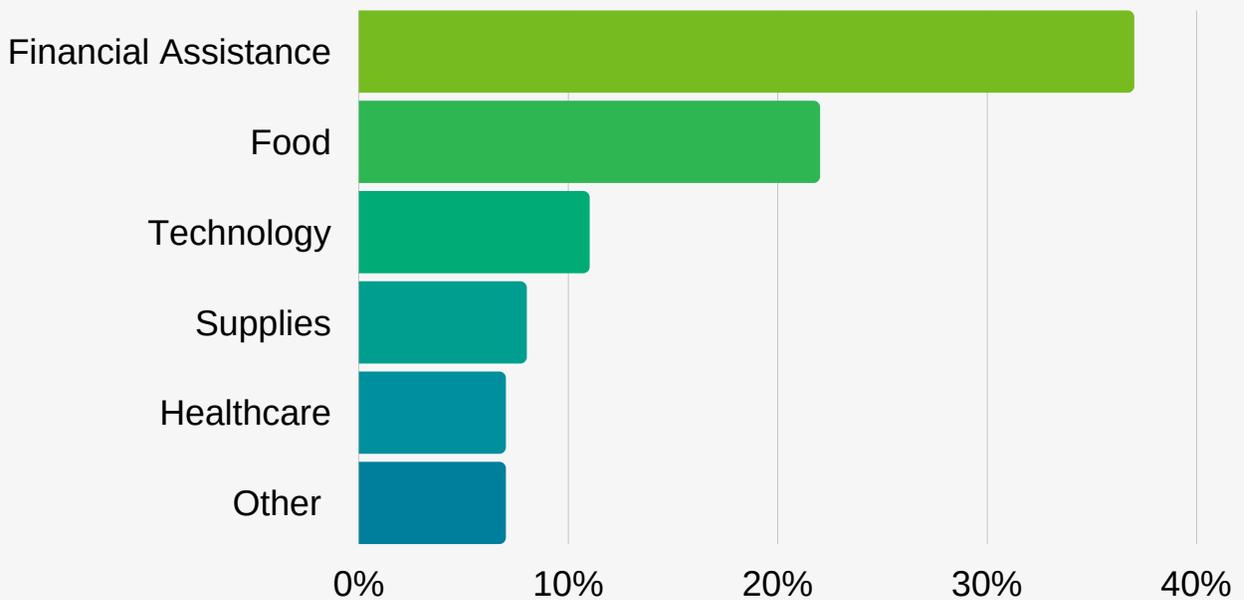
# The Alexandria Resilience Fund

## Phase 1: March - June, 2020

### Populations served



### Use of grant funds





## The Alexandria Resilience Fund Phase 2: October - December, 2020

In considering its COVID response, the City of Alexandria wanted to ensure the sustainability and health of Alexandria's nonprofits. Thus, it enlisted ACT as a partner to distribute nearly \$2M in federal CARES Act funding to meet emergency needs and continue the work from the Fund's first phase.

Nonprofits serving Alexandrians could receive up to \$50,000 and the average grant size was \$30,984. The Fund served 13,708 Alexandria residents, with the majority living in the 22305, 22311, and 22304 zip codes and the majority identifying as Hispanic or Latino and Black or African American.

In addition to grants, the Fund invested in coaching and training to help stabilize nonprofits. The training addressed the fundraising, financial management, and leadership needs of local nonprofits.

As a result of this investment, Alexandria has a stronger nonprofit sector that will continue to meet the needs of Alexandrians in the years to come.

\$2M

Funds distributed

68

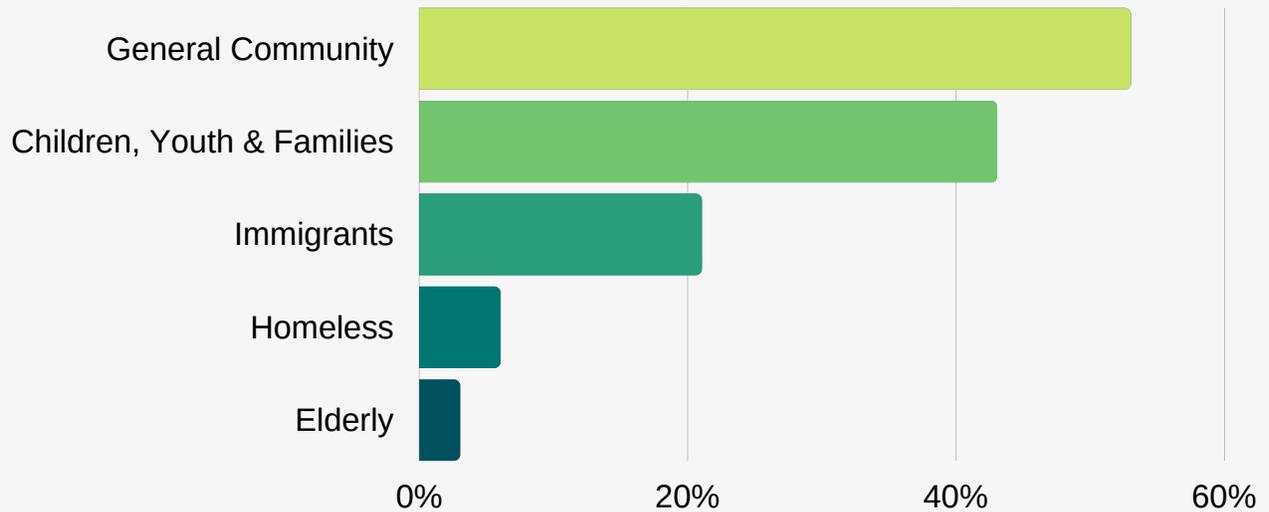
Grants awarded

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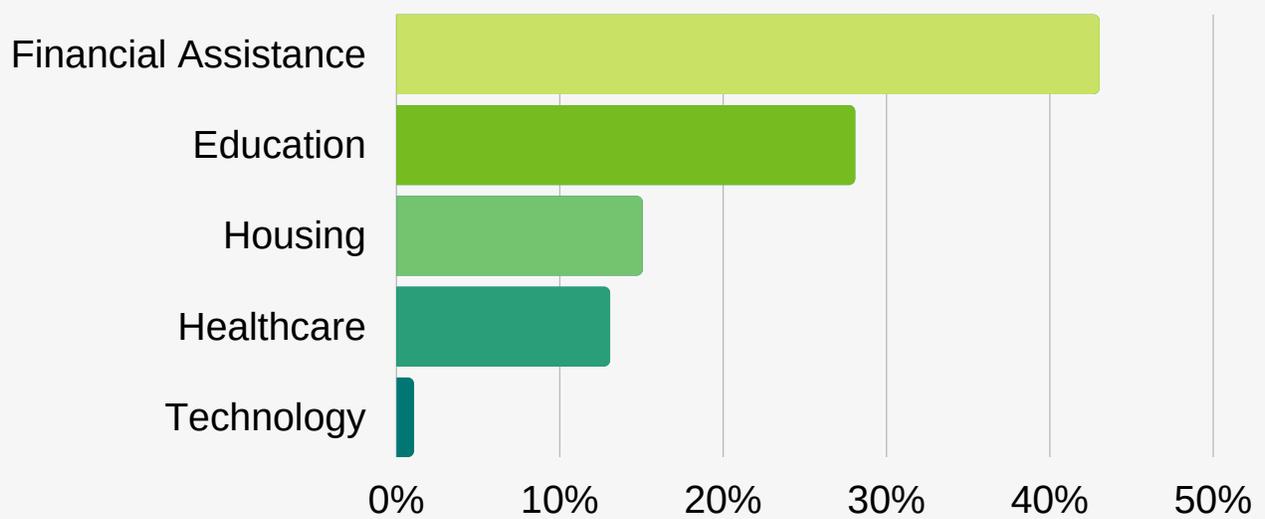
# The Alexandria Resilience Fund

## Phase 2: October - December, 2020

### Populations served



### Use of grant funds





# ALX Cares Grocery Gift Card Program

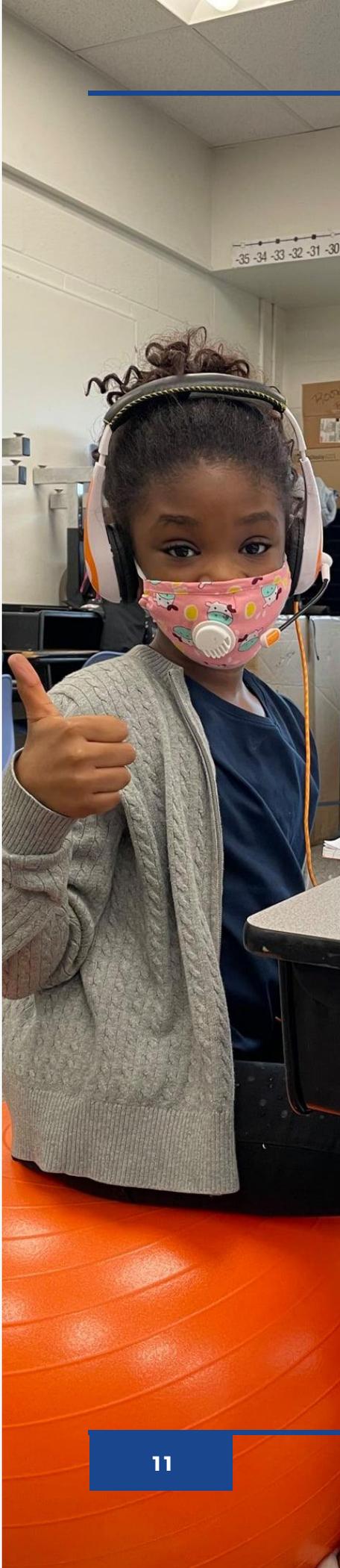
## ADDRESSING FOOD INSECURITY, UPLIFTING FAMILIES

The ALX Cares Grocery Gift Card Program (ALX Cares) was a partnership between ACT for Alexandria, the City of Alexandria, and 12 nonprofit partners to provide grocery gift cards to eligible individuals and families. The program was intended to address food insecurity brought on by the COVID pandemic and provide eligible residents the ability to purchase food and household supplies that met their needs. Eligible participants received gift cards for multiple months across the duration of the program. The City provided CARES Act funding for six months (July to December 2020) to support the program.

Program eligibility requirements included:

- Residence in the City of Alexandria
- Documented loss of income due to COVID-19
- Household income of 50% of Area Median Income (AMI) - \$63,000 for a family of four, \$44,100 for an individual

Participants could receive a grocery gift card according to the size of their family unit: \$100 for one person, \$200 for two people, and \$400 for three or more people. A household could receive a card for multiple months, but could not receive more than one card per month.



This program was made possible through the work of 12 extraordinary nonprofit partners. Nonprofit partners were selected through a competitive process based on their relationships with community members and experience providing emergency assistance. Eight partners collected and verified applications, responded to applicant questions, and distributed gift cards. The remaining four partners accepted pre-verified referrals and distributed gift cards accordingly. A list of nonprofit partners can be viewed in Appendix B.

ACT also provided \$193,000 in administrative grants to the nonprofit partners to cover staff time and the administrative costs of the program.

More than 3,000 Alexandrians applied for gift cards; 2,326 households met the eligibility criteria and received cards. In total, more than \$2.5M was awarded in grocery gift cards.

*"Beyond not choosing food vs rent, people felt hopeful that there was actual help coming. People felt like they were seen and valued." - ALX Cares nonprofit partner*

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# ALX Cares Grocery Gift Card Program



Awarded in gift cards



Families received cards for 6 months

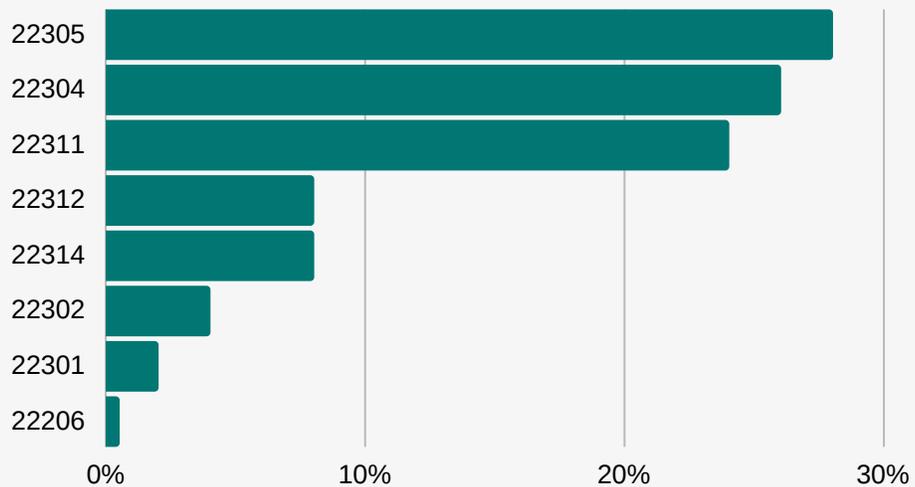


Families received cards



Children served

78% of card recipients live in 3 zip codes:

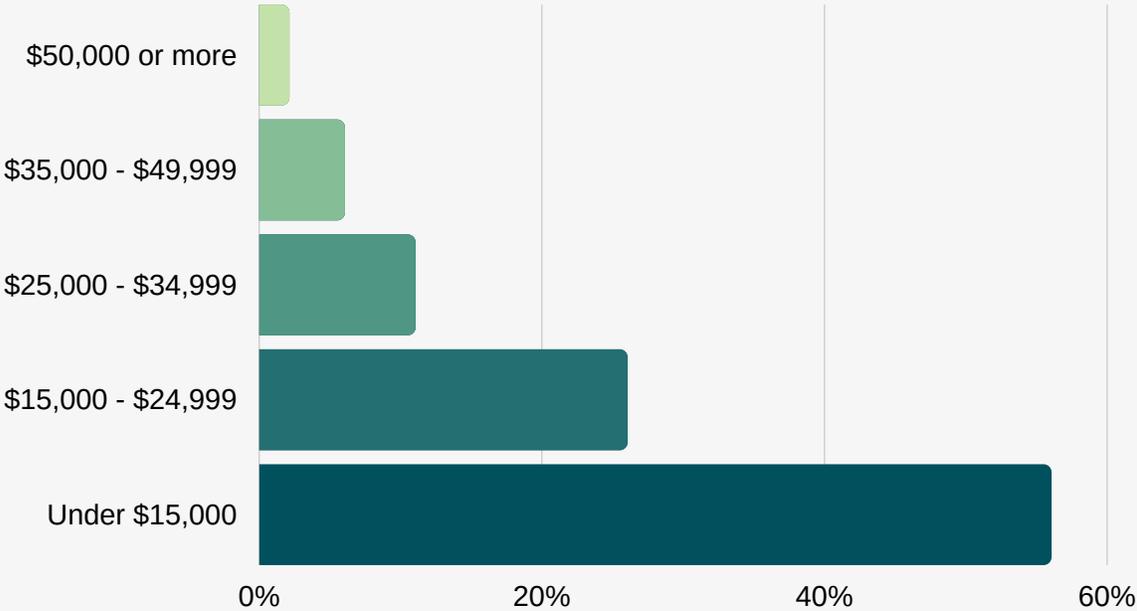


Due to preexisting inequities, Black and Hispanic families were disproportionately represented in the program

	City of Alexandria Population*	ALX Cares Program
Black	21%	44%
Hispanic	17%	41%
White	52%	7%
All other races	11%	8%

\*U.S. Census Bureau; American Community Survey, 2015-2019 5-year estimates

82% of card recipients have a household income less than \$25,000/year



In the last 12 months, 83% of participants sometimes or often ran out of food and did not have the money to get more





# The Alexandria City Employee's COVID-19 Assistance Fund

## SUPPORTING THOSE ON THE FRONT LINES

Thanks to the support of local donors, we came together as a community to create the Alexandria City Employee's COVID-19 Assistance Fund. The purpose of the Fund is to support and uplift the people who make Alexandria such a great place to live. Throughout the pandemic, City employees risked personal health to keep the City operating. They also experienced significant financial hardship. Spouses and partners lost jobs, hours were reduced, and making ends meet became harder for so many.

ACT engaged Christ Church Lazarus Ministry to review applications to the Fund. In addition to making funding awards, the Ministry's volunteers responded to all applicants with care and compassion, often connecting employees to other support and programs.

Assistance was available to City employees earning less than \$60,000 annually.

- More than \$140,000 was provided in financial assistance
- 255 employees received assistance, including first responders, social workers, and healthcare workers
- 60% of employees assisted had households with children
- The primary form of support was grocery gift cards, followed by transportation assistance, utility bills, and mortgage/rental assistance



# The Alexandria Arts Fund

SUPPORTING ALEXANDRIA'S VIBRANT ARTS COMMUNITY

ACT also collaborated with donors and the arts community to launch the Alexandria Arts Fund. With support from the Fund, the Alexandria Arts Alliance launched a collaborative, online fundraising event:

ACT 4  
#ArtsALX

ACT 4 #ArtsALX. The event featured 23 local artists and arts organizations who collaborated on a virtual performance. It was streamed on Facebook Live on October 24, 2020. The event raised \$32,000 for participating organizations.

Alexandria is a city full of gifted artists, keeping us engaged and entertained. The arts help us appreciate the beauty around us, even in turbulent times. Artists and arts organizations experienced unprecedented challenges. The lack of revenue from performances, classes, and exhibitions led to critical financial problems for the arts. During the pandemic, most artists and organizations had to cancel seasons and indoor events for the foreseeable future. Some transitioned to smaller, outdoor events and virtual presentations. Due to the nature of their work, many arts organizations were not eligible to apply for COVID-response grants for emergency services. Nonetheless, organizations creatively pivoted and adapted. They experimented with new ways to engage audiences and create new work.

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# Lessons Learned & Future Opportunities

## CREATIVITY, FLEXIBILITY & PARTNERSHIP

ACT conducted an assessment of the Alexandria Resilience Fund and ALX Cares Grocery Gift Card program to help us identify lessons learned and inform future grantmaking efforts. Key insights include:

- Alexandria's nonprofits responded to the pandemic with creativity and flexibility
- Grantees built new capacity to communicate with and engage their constituents
- Grants provided flexible funding which stabilized organizations
- Collaborations were essential
- ACT's focus on racial equity was instrumental

**Alexandria's nonprofits responded to the pandemic with creativity and flexibility.** Across the board, nonprofits took note of community needs, quickly responded, and pivoted. For example, mentoring programs became frontline food distributors; child care programs provided families with emergency financial assistance. Many ALX Cares partners reconfigured their work so that they could offer the program to their constituents.

**Opportunity:** Shifting gears isn't easy even in the best circumstances. Flexible grant funding during the pandemic ensured that organizations could redeploy staff, purchase unbudgeted supplies and reconfigure programs.



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### **Grantees built new capacity to communicate with and engage their constituents.**

COVID disrupted traditional communication channels between nonprofits and their constituents. Grantees had to make investments in new infrastructure like texting platforms in order to stay in touch with the people they serve. In addition, language and literacy barriers posed a challenge for many community members. Nonprofits found themselves as primary translators and information navigators for Alexandria's diverse residents. They helped their clients apply for assistance from City programs and access public health information.

**Opportunity:** Funding for nonprofit staff to engage constituents and translate information should be a part of emergency response efforts. Nonprofits have trusting relationships with community members. In addition to sharing vital information, nonprofits can help residents navigate and access safety-net programs like access to food, rental assistance, and education supports.

**Grants provided flexible funding which stabilized organizations.** The grants ensured grantees' ability to respond to significantly increased needs. Grantees were able to retain and hire new staff. Equally important, they described this support as “last dollar support,” e.g., transportation to get food from a food bank, getting computers to kids so they can participate in online school, or a paperwork filing fee for those seeking immigration help. These hard-to-fill gaps have become even more glaring as funds previously available were depleted or reallocated to other COVID-related needs like rental or food assistance.

**Opportunity:** Nonprofits are skilled at finding ways to maximize resources and invest in their operations in ways that are critical to their long-term sustainability. Future funding programs should continue to provide general operating support and to allow maximum flexibility.

**Collaborations were essential.** New collaborations emerged; existing collaborations grew stronger. Many grantees and community partners noted that collaboration played an essential role in their ability to meet the needs of Alexandrians throughout the pandemic. Collaborations formed across sectors (ex: food distribution programs partnering with youth development programs) as well as within sectors (ex: emergency financial assistance providers). In addition, the City of Alexandria, through the Race and Social Equity Office and the Department of Community and Human Services, offered

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multiple forums for nonprofits and City agencies to come together. These weekly meetings enabled coordination, information sharing, and relationship building.

**Opportunity:** Partnerships and collaboration are indicators of community resilience. They enable sharing of information and resources in support of a common good. Future funding opportunities should foster and support collaboration.

*"ACT is at the forefront of advancing [a framework for] racial equity. With the COVID funds now - it's all about equity ... it has played into equitable access to health. ACT is really helping non- Hispanic Whites who work with communities of color - providing these resources - so organizations can understand their positions of power and privilege."*  
-- Alexandria Resilience Fund grantee

**ACT's focus on racial equity was instrumental.** Questions about grantees' experience centering racial equity in their work were incorporated into the grant application process and the post-grant evaluation. Many grantees reported being early in their organization's equity journey; others were farther along. They had awareness about the importance of focusing on racial equity and were exploring ways to be more inclusive. Grantees appreciated ACT's focus on racial equity and the provision of workshops to support increased learning and understanding.

**Opportunity:** The pandemic has highlighted the need to prioritize racial equity when helping our community respond and rebuild. Future funding opportunities should continue to address the role of race and racism in society and provide funding and capacity building to help grantees prioritize racial equity.

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# Moving Forward

ADDRESSING SHORT-TERM NEEDS AND INVESTING IN LONG-TERM CHANGE



ACT looks forward to continued collaboration with you – the donors, businesses, civic leaders, and the nonprofit community – to ensure a future where we are all stronger together. Our collaborative work to ensure a healthy, vibrant community for all Alexandrians will continue in the months and years ahead.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought a great deal of distress to our community. It also catalyzed generosity, creativity, and impact. People came together quickly to mobilize resources, stand-up programs and services, and support our neighbors throughout the crisis. This report highlights the many ways we took action to address an unprecedented crisis: from grants to support emergency services, to grocery gift cards to address widespread hunger, to support for front-line workers, and funding for the arts.

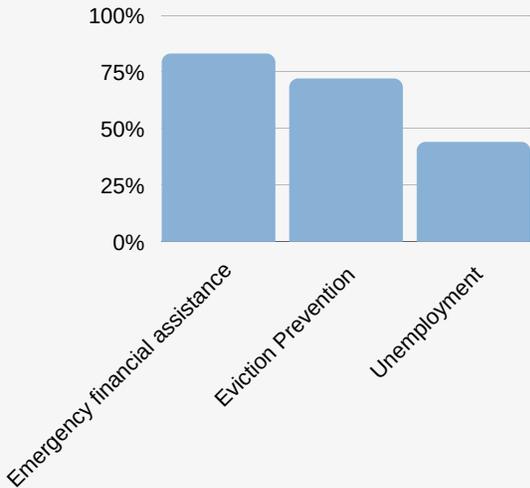
With the arrival of vaccines, we can begin to see a light at the end of a very dark tunnel.

However, far too many Alexandrians live in poverty and on the margins of the economy. Acute needs remain: **housing security, food security, financial instability, educational disparities, access to healthcare, access to technology and reliable internet service, and affordable child care.** These are complex challenges that do not have easy solutions.

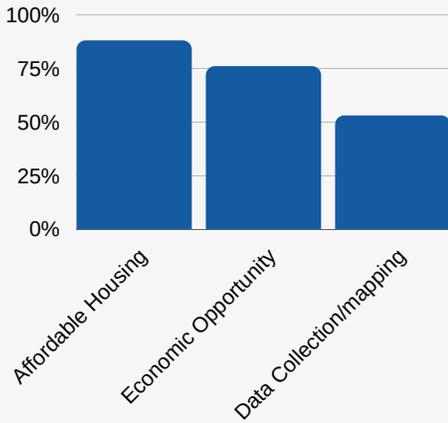
The pandemic highlighted deep-seated inequities in our community; dismantling these inequities will require persistent focus and effort. Despite greater awareness of systemic racism, equitable healthcare and economic and housing opportunities are not a reality for many. In addition, fears about deportation and distrust of government remain at the forefront for immigrant communities, and citizenship status is a barrier in accessing federal relief programs.

Recently ACT's stakeholders were polled about the most pressing issues and opportunities for future investment. These priorities take aim at poverty in Alexandria.

### Most pressing issues



### Areas for future investment



The future is hopeful. Across the past year, new partnerships and new ways of doing business took root and they will help accelerate the pace of change. We will continue to work with partners and grantees to address the urgent human service needs of Alexandrians. And we will work with partners to disrupt systems and rebuild programs so that we can have a more equitable future.

Alexandria is stronger together.

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# Appendix A: Alexandria Resilience Fund (ACT Now COVID-19 Response Fund) Grantees

African Communities Together  
AHC, Inc.  
Alexandria Housing Development Corporation  
Alexandria PTA Council  
Alexandria Seaport Foundation  
Alexandria Soccer Association  
Alexandria Tutoring Consortium Inc  
ALIVE!, Inc.  
Arcadia Food, Inc.  
Assistance League of Northern Virginia  
ATHENA Rapid Response Innovation Lab  
Ayuda  
Basilica of St. Mary St. Vincent de Paul Society  
Best Buddies International, Inc.  
Bethany House of Northern Virginia  
Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Washington  
Bringing Resources to Aid Women's Shelters  
Capital Caring Health  
Capital Youth Empowerment Program  
Carpenter's Shelter  
Casa Chirilagua  
Catholic Charities Migration and Refugee Services  
Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Arlington  
Center for Alexandria's Children  
Christ Church (Lazarus Ministry & Refugee Ministry)  
Communities In Schools of Northern Virginia  
Community Lodgings  
Computer CORE  
CRI  
Dar Al-Hijrah Islamic Center  
Dream Project  
Edu-Futuro  
Eliana's Light, Inc.  
Ethiopian Community Development Council

For the Nations DC  
Friends of Guest House  
Friends of the Alexandria Commission for Women  
Fruitful Planet  
Goodwin House Foundation  
Grace Episcopal Church Alexandria  
Greater DC Diaper Bank  
Heard  
Hearts of Empowerment  
Higher Achievement Program, Inc.  
Hopkins House  
ICNA Council for Social Justice  
ICNA Relief USA Programs Inc.  
Just Neighbors Ministry Inc  
Koinonia Foundation  
Legal Aid Justice Center (LAJC)  
Legal Services of Northern Virginia  
Literacy Council of Northern Virginia  
Lyles-Crouch Traditional Academy  
MedStreet, Inc.  
Melwood Horticultural Training Center  
Mother of Light Center  
Neighborhood Health  
New Hope Housing  
Northern Virginia Family Services  
NOVA Scripts Central Inc.  
Nueva Vida  
OAR of Arlington, Alexandria & Falls Church  
Old Presbyterian Meeting House  
Old Town Community Church  
Optimist Club of Alexandria Foundation, Inc.  
Phoenix Houses of the Mid-Atlantic  
PK Move  
Project Discovery

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# Alexandria Resilience Fund (ACT Now COVID Response Fund) Grantees, continued

Project ID & Spread the Vote  
Rebuilding Together DC Alexandria  
Restoration Immigration Legal Aid  
Ronald McDonald House Charities of Greater  
Washington D.C.  
RunningBrooke  
SCAN of Northern Virginia  
Scholarship Fund of Alexandria  
Senior Services of Alexandria, Inc.  
Space of Her Own  
St. John's Community Services  
St. Paul's Episcopal Church (Lazarus Ministry)  
St. Rita Church  
Tahirih Justice Center

Tenants and Workers United  
The Campagna Center  
The Child and Family Network Centers  
The Salvation Army  
Together We Bake  
United Community  
UpCycle Creative Reuse Center  
Urban Alliance  
Volunteer Alexandria  
Volunteers of America Chesapeake  
Washington Street UMC  
Wesley Housing Development Corporation  
YMCA of Metropolitan Washington  
Your Ethiopian Professionals Network



# Appendix B:

## ALX Cares Grocery Gift Card Program Partners

Community Partners	
	African Communities Together
	Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Arlington
	Community Lodgings
	Ethiopian Community Development Council
	Northern Virginia Family Service
	Tenants and Workers United – Inquilinos Y Trabajadores Unidos
	The Campagna Center
	City of Alexandria, Department of Community and Human Services
Distribution Partners	
	Society of St. Vincent de Paul
	The Child and Family Network Centers
	The Salvation Army (Alexandria Citadel Corps)
	Casa Chirilagua

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# With Appreciation

WE ARE GRATEFUL TO WORK IN  
PARTNERSHIP WITH THE FOLLOWING

**ACT for Alexandria Staff:**

Sally Gardner  
Molly Klein  
Leeann Napoleon  
Heather Peeler  
Tricia Ritchie  
Brandi Yee

**ACT for Alexandria Board:**

John Armstrong  
Karen Avery  
David Baker  
Virginia Bennett  
Molly Dahl  
Scott Darling  
Rose Dawson  
Maureen Devine-Ahl  
Sydney Etheredge  
Laurie Flynn  
Chris Foster  
Kelly Grant  
Lisa Guernsey  
Charles Holt  
Kurt Huffman  
Joe LaMountain  
Stephanie Landrum  
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Lisa Martin  
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**Partners:**

The City of Alexandria  
Elizabeth Grim  
Sophia Hill  
Rachel Mosher Williams

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Together  
Alexandria City Public  
Schools  
ALIVE!, Inc.  
Casa Chirilagua  
Catholic Charities of the  
Diocese of Arlington  
Child & Family Network  
Centers  
James Cullum, ALX Now  
Local Motion Project  
Nueva Vida  
M. Enriquez/Visit Alexandria  
Regis Vogt  
R. Kennedy/Visit Alexandria  
Tenants & Workers United





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