

OPINION

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✓ PREMIUM

Federal Aid Plan for Nonprofits Needs More Input From Black-Led Organizations

To the Editor:

When white folks catch a cold, black folks get pneumonia.

Many of us are familiar with this phrase, which sums up the level of inequity black communities face in comparison with others in times of crises. Whether we are speaking of an economic downturn, environmental disaster, or a health pandemic, the disparities we face — on every indicator of well-being — means that the impact on black communities will be far worse. This is why I was surprised about the glaring absence of black-led national nonprofits that signed on to a letter to members of Congress by a coalition of more than 50 groups seeking \$60 billion in federal aid. (“Nonprofits Seek \$60 Billion Federal Aid Package,” March 18)

The proposal the groups made is right in that the nonprofit sector is critically important to the health and well-being of this country. They are, in fact, first responders in times of trouble and in too many instances, their work is not

recognized unless something goes wrong in this country. These organizations are economic engines — they are employers, purchasers of goods and services, and take a lead role in building strong communities. For these reasons as well as others, they need support to shore up the front lines to deal with this crisis.

However, if we don't think through the distribution of money in ways that get funding to communities disproportionately impacted by disasters, we can do more harm than good. For example, the proposal calls for distributing stimulus dollars through existing programs like the Economic Injury Disaster Loan Program, which supports nonprofit employees. These and other funds coming through federal, state, and local government far too often don't benefit black-led organizations that support black communities – again, a community hit disproportionately harder than others. While the stimulus money is needed by the nonprofit sector, using biased investment vehicles will not get us where we want to be.

At a time when the philanthropic sector is heavily focused on racial equity, let's put all of our conversations, conference sessions, and books we are all reading to use when we make such important proposals. Funding disparities lead to racial disparities. Let's get stimulus money to nonprofits that actually support the most impacted communities – to do so, we need more thinking about investment strategies that promote equity.

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