



MORGAN TIMMS/TAOS NEWS

Lisa O'Brien is joined by Lisa Tringali, Traci Chavez McAdams, Helen Forte, and Jennie Begley.

Go Bold or Go Home? TCF did both.



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By Haven Lindsey

“TCF adjusted how they work with the community to streamline the process to access funds,” Lillian Torrez, superintendent, Taos Municipal Schools

The past year presented the nation and the community with unprecedented challenges. Yet, according to Lisa O'Brien, Director of Taos Community Foundation (TCF), “as atrocious and awful as it has been, the pandemic was a game changer for us.”

Indeed, TCF has had a banner year. The foundation opened a record number of charitable giving funds, donations and assets surged, and legacy gifts were at an all-time high.

Perhaps most telling, partnerships between community leaders and the community they serve proved to be formidable and unwavering.

GOING BIG AND BOLD

TCF is in the business of community support and fills multiple roles of public charity, philanthropic advisor and community grant maker on behalf of the community. So, how does an organization of dedicated employees support nonprofit entities and provide a consistent voice of support when relegated to work

remotely for the first time in its history?

“We went bold,” responded O'Brien. Faced with the challenge of working from home yet fulfilling a tremendous community need, TCF bypassed conventional action steps and went for the bold leap. They stuck the landing.

The first leap forward was to form an Emergency Action Fund. The Fund for Taos' provided a vehicle for charitable support. Emboldened with a newfound confidence and belief in their abilities, they set a goal of raising \$1M with a promise there would be no administrative fees – 100 percent of every dollar received would be funneled back into the community. So far, they've raised \$900,000 and are poised to meet their goal.

Historically, the grant application and approval process can take months, but with the realization time was an escalating valuable commodity, TCF made another leap and simplified the application

process. The once intricate process was scaled down to a one-month turnaround which kept resources flowing into the community. Everyone noticed.

MINIMIZING PAPERWORK, MAXIMIZING COMMITMENT

“At the beginning of the pandemic, TCF rapidly moved to working with community partners to address immediate human need,” commented Cheri Lyon, El Pueblito UMC Pastor and Shared Table director. “They minimized the paperwork and maximized their commitment to helping nonprofits and others effectively serve people in need.”

TCF staff pushed themselves to meet the urgent demands for supplies such as food and masks. The fast turnaround required a new level of trust that organizations would use the funds with optimal efficacy and efficiency.

“Philanthropy is often the first entity providing financial support during a crisis,” noted O'Brien, and

explained their shift in execution.

“Philanthropy is always a leap of faith. You don't always know what the outcome will be. We chose to move forward in a strategic way. We leaned into the expertise of our community and trusted that everyone was bringing their best. By not focusing entirely on the outcome, it pushed us to move past the unknown. The lessons from the experience have proven to be more valuable.”

CREATIVE SOLUTIONS TO COMPREHENSIVE CHALLENGES

Sandra Emory, Executive Director of Youth Heartline, witnessed the significant shift to streamline resources when the community needed them the most.

“As a nonprofit that has been serving the community for 30 years, it is heartening to feel heard and wholly supported by a community foundation. Conversations, no matter their form, turn into creative solutions.”

Luis Reyes, CEO with Kit Carson Electric Cooperative, commented on TCF's pandemic pivot. “They rose to the occasion to help those who needed it and filled the gaps for our community. They've been a shining star.”

The solution-driven impetus has had a positive ripple effect on the community. Pandemic notwithstanding, TCF met the challenges with expansive thinking.

“That's when growth happens – when you're standing outside that comfort zone and you realize, you're not going back,” O'Brien added.

“We're focusing on what we're seeing through our collective windshield – the rearview mirror is small for a reason. We're looking ahead and we're taking the boldness with us”

ABOUT TCF

The current Board of Directors includes Dr. Charlie Anderson, Adriana Blake, Dr. Catherine Collins, John Hamilton, Alix Henry, George Jaramillo, Dave Lambert, Vernon Lujan, Ben Maddox, Dennis Manzanares and David Norden.

Taos Community Foundation is located at 115 La Posta Road, Suite A, Taos, NM 87571. For more learn more, visit taoscf.org or call (575) 737-9300.