

On Giving Tuesday, nonprofits take stock of Connecticut philanthropy

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Fairfield County's Community Foundation CEO Juanita James, at a Fairfield County Giving Day event held in March 2017 in Fairfield, Conn.

After the barrage of Black Friday, Small Business Saturday and Cyber Monday have run their course, shoppers will take stock of how their budgets are holding up in the early going of the 2017 holiday shopping season, and what spending they might yet be able to absorb.

Waiting in the wings are thousands of nonprofits wondering the same thing – and specifically whether there will be any overflow for their coffers on **Giving Tuesday**, coined as an annual reminder to put the spirit of the holidays to work for those less fortunate.

If the smart money is any indication, there will be more to go around this year. For two years running, a Fidelity Investments donor-advised fund has topped all philanthropic fundraising in America, according to the recently updated "Philanthropy 400" list published annually by *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*, raising \$4.1 billion in 2016. That figure will balloon to \$6.9 billion in next year's installment of the list, according to *The Chronicle*, with a booming stock market triggering contributions to the Fidelity fund.

In affluent southwestern Connecticut, the stock market has driven similar largesse this year according to some nonprofit leaders. But in the same breath, they note the continued shifting sands of government policy that has shaken their confidence in support for the key services they offer, and the ever-increasing needs of families who seek help from the organizations they support.

'Philanthropy cannot completely close the gap'

At Fairfield County's Community Foundation, donations have been "really, really strong" in the words of Juanita James, CEO of Norwalk-based FCCF, which supports a number of causes throughout the region.

In affluent southwestern Connecticut where many nonprofits are able to marshal impressive donation totals in any given year, the performance of the stock market has a direct impact on giving, James said. Many nonprofits are also reliant to varying degrees on support from state government for the services they provide, with Connecticut having recently approved a budget that will cut funds for many.

And nonprofits everywhere are still awaiting the outcome of Republican attempts to reform the tax code, with possible ramifications for tax incentives that help spur contributions to philanthropic organizations.

"Last year we had some real challenges in the stock market and we saw the giving go proportionately down," James said. "The budget concerns are a tremendous concern both at the state and federal level — philanthropy cannot completely close the gap that is being created by these budget cuts."

Making voices heard, on Tuesday and beyond

The Connecticut Council for Philanthropy polled last month funders throughout the

state on how they are responding to the state's fiscal crisis, and has scheduled a Dec. 6 forum in Hartford on the topic of how those individuals can increase their impact through advocacy and lobbying.

The Hartford organization last spring installed Karla Fortunato as CEO, a Connecticut native who worked previously for organizations in Maryland and Boston. In an October blog, Fortunato stated she has been crisscrossing Connecticut the past five months to learn more about the philanthropic sector's challenges and opportunities. Many struggled in recent months during budgetary freezes set in place during Connecticut's budget standoff that forced some to furlough workers.

"What can we learn from other states that have encountered serious fiscal crises?" Fortunato stated in the October blog. "What tools and resources can philanthropy individually and collectively bring to bear on these serious fiscal challenges?"

Nonprofits statewide are hoping for a meaningful infusion on Giving Tuesday, and again in less than four months time on the annual Fairfield County's **Giving Day** scheduled for March 1, 2018. On Dec. 1, Fairfield County's Community Foundation holds the first of two "boot camps" for nonprofits new to the one-day fundraiser as part of its ongoing work to provide training to philanthropy leaders throughout the region.

"Donors are working more closely with us and because of research ... they are seeing where gaps and disparities are; and they are saying to us, 'I want to do more,'" James said. "When donors see not only where the challenges are but ... how those dollars are being used, they are being more generous."

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