



## **COVID-19 Impact on Biomedical Research Funding Organizations** A Survey of the Health Research Alliance Membership

The COVID-19 pandemic has and continues to create a disruptive and measurable imprint on nonprofit organizations. In addition to disrupting the health and safety of the workforce, the pandemic challenges the fundamental ways nonprofits are meeting their organizational missions.

The Health Research Alliance (HRA) is a collaborative membership of almost 100 nonprofit biomedical research funding organizations. We are committed to maximizing the impact of biomedical research to improve human health and we work collaboratively to accelerate the pace of scientific discovery.

As a membership we often collaborate on common directives in the field - e.g., the best ways to support early career scientists; how to accelerate open science; how to support diversity, inclusion, and equity in the research workforce; etc. After hearing similar anecdotes from member organizations about the impact of the pandemic on fundraising events, research awards, etc., we decided to conduct a survey of our membership to understand the pandemic's broader organizational impacts. We were particularly interested in the pandemic's impact on organizational revenues (e.g., revenue diversification, fundraising/endowment performance), operations (e.g., staff changes, restructuring, impact of remote work other bottom-line adaptations), research grant awards (e.g., number of awards, extensions, diversity of awards), and programming (e.g., conversion to virtual, cancelling).

In the report that follows, you will read about these impacts. While we suspected the trends that this survey quantified, some results were surprising. At HRA, we have started to use this report to help facilitate complicated conversations within our CEO roundtable and collaborative working groups. We believe that HRA is a microcosm of the broader nonprofit sector and hope this report and its strategic insights are helpful to you as you reflect on your own organizational changes and as you plan for the future.

We are grateful to our evaluation partners, Jenna White and Megan McDermott for helping us identify the most salient impacts among our membership.

If you have questions about the report, please contact me directly at [maryrose@healthra.org](mailto:maryrose@healthra.org). You can find out about HRA's numerous other efforts on the [HRA webpage](#).

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Maryrose Franko".

Maryrose Franko  
Executive Director, Health Research Alliance



**COVID-19 Member Survey Results**

McDermott & White  
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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

CY	Calendar Year
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FY	Fiscal Year
HRA	Health Research Alliance
NCE	No Cost Extension
PPP	Paycheck Protection Program
RFA	Request for Application
SC	Steering Committee
WFH	Work From Home
YOY	Year-over-Year

## Executive Summary

The Health Research Alliance (HRA) is a collaborative member organization of nonprofit research funders that is committed to maximizing the impact of biomedical research to improve human health. The 90+ member organizations include voluntary health agencies, private foundations, and operating foundations that are funders of health research. All member organizations share a common interest in speeding the translation of biomedical science discoveries into applications that improve health, and in identifying and adopting best practices in funding health research.<sup>1</sup>

HRA engaged external consultants to survey its members to better understand impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the organizations that fund medical research. This report is intended to present the survey results, and to communicate the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on member organizations. Specific organizational impacts of interest explored included:

- Revenues (e.g., fundraising/endowment performance, revenue diversification).
- Operations (e.g., staff changes, restructuring, impact of remote work other bottom-line adaptations).
- Research grant awards (e.g., number of awards, extensions, diversity of awards); and
- Programming (e.g., conversion to virtual, cancelling, introducing new programming).

The survey was developed based on the following key objectives:

- Document top-line, bottom-line, and net impacts on funding streams.
- Document operational adaptations.
- Document impacts-to date on fundraising, research grant awards, and programming.
- Document key pain points among member organizations.
- Illustrate key impacts using qualitative data.

### ***Overall Biggest Reported Impacts***

1. The overall biggest impact of COVID-19 on HRA members surveyed was the shift to remote and/or telework.
2. The overall second biggest impact of COVID-19 on HRA members surveyed was on research/grant awards and associated activities.
3. The overall third biggest impact of COVID-19 on HRA members surveyed was on fundraising revenues.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: <https://www.healthra.org/>

## Key Findings

**Overall, the Switch to Remote / Telework had the Biggest Reported Impact Across all Organization Types.** Across organization types, the switch to remote work and/or telework had the biggest reported impact on HRA members. However, most members reported that remote work did not adversely impact organizational or individual performance. The largest organizational impact from the shift to work from home (WFH) has been on organizational culture.

**Impacts Varied by Organization Type.** Organizations that rely on fundraising reported more significant negative impacts than organizations that operate through an endowment. For this reason, results are most often disaggregated by organization type. Declining revenues from fundraising was the top reported impact among fundraising members with 50% of fundraising organizations reporting that the total amount of funds raised in calendar year (CY) 2020 decreased compared to CY 2019. The average reported decline in total revenues was 35% year-over-year (YOY). Conversely, 59% of endowment-based organizations reported that their organization's endowment grew in 2020.

**Research/Grant Awards Spend and Procedures were Impacted.** The impact on annual spend on research/grant award and associated activities differs by organization type, with fundraising organizations reported the most significant decline in YoY spend. However, all organization types indicated that organizational flexibility was required (shifting deadlines, moving to virtual methods, no-cost extensions, etc.) to meet the needs of researchers.

**Impacts Were Both Positive and Negative.** The most consistently reported negative impact was the decrease in funds raised by fundraising organizations. Corresponding decreases in research grants awarded were also reported. Additional negative impacts reported included isolation and negative impacts on employees. However, unexpected positive impacts including new partnerships, as well as positive shifts in organizational culture because of the shift to WFH were also reported. Respondents struggled to assign an overall characterization of the pandemic as either overwhelmingly positive or negative.

60% Percentage of survey respondents who report that COVID-19 impacted the way their organization awards and administers research awards and/or grants.

50% Percentage of fundraising members who report that the total amount of funds raised by their organization in calendar year 2020 decreased compared to calendar year 2019.