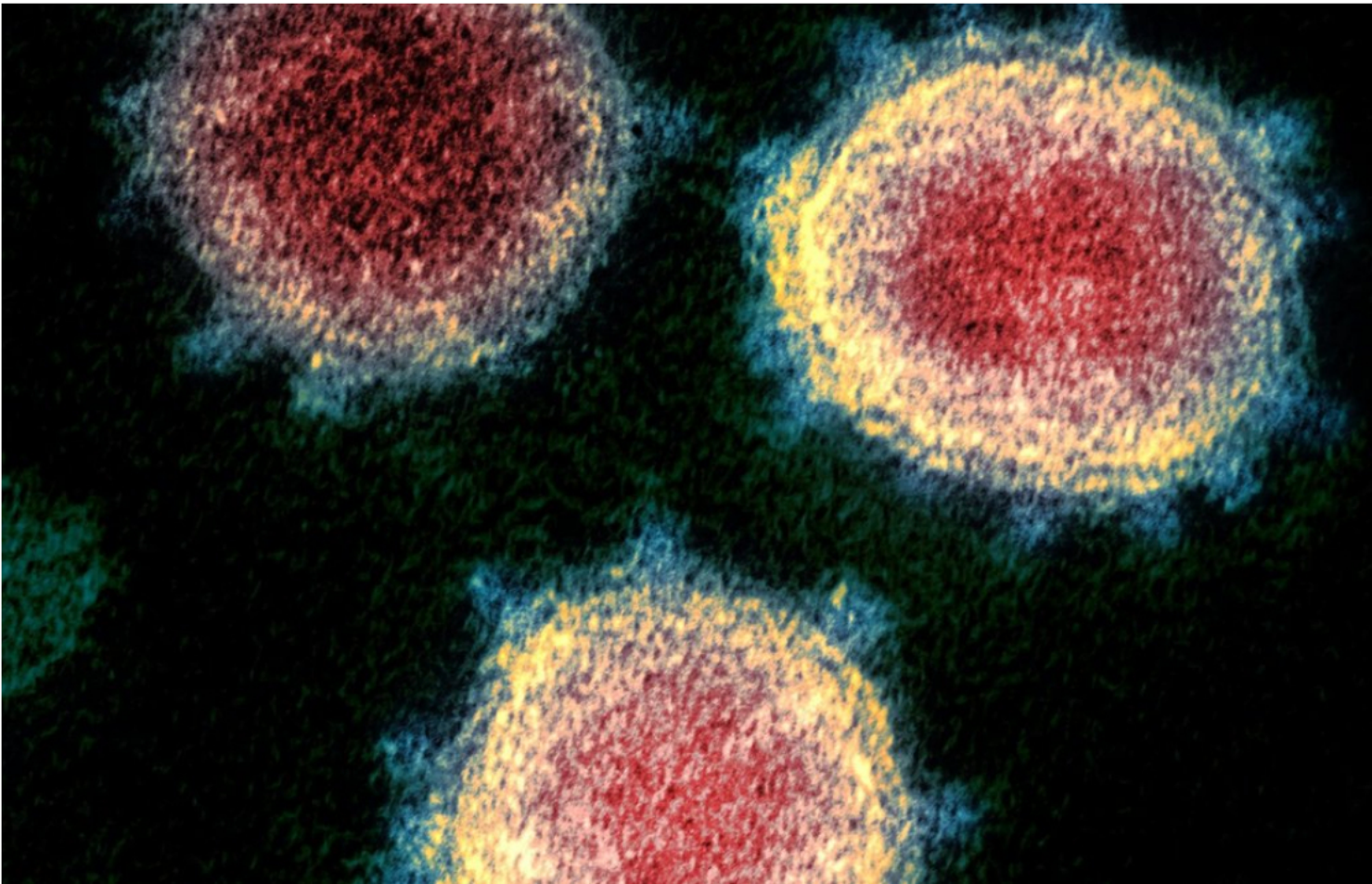


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\$2M fund started to help gig workers, vulnerable populations affected by coronavirus in Seattle area

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This undated electron microscope image made available by the U.S. National Institutes of Health in February 2020 shows the Novel Coronavirus SARS-CoV-2. Also known as 2019-nCoV, the virus causes COVID-19. The sample was isolated from a patient in the U.S. (NIAID-RML via AP) ny401 ny401 ny401 (/ The Associated Press) **Less** ^



By [Jim Brunner](#)
Seattle Times staff reporter

A coalition of philanthropic groups and major corporations in the Seattle area is launching a \$2 million-plus campaign to help people disproportionately impacted by the coronavirus outbreak’s disruption of the economy.

The new COVID-19 Response Fund will aim to rapidly send grants to organizations with “deep roots” within vulnerable populations, including people who lack access to health insurance or sick leave, residents with limited English proficiency, communities of color, and health care and gig economy workers, according to a summary of the initiative, which will be announced publicly Monday.

“I think what we are facing is a battle on two fronts. One is a public health crisis, and the other is an economic impact crisis,” said Tony Mestres, president and CEO of the Seattle Foundation, which is helping coordinate the effort.

Already, the novel coronavirus outbreak has caused shutdowns of major conventions and other gatherings in the Seattle area, and [Gov. Jay Inslee on Sunday warned](#) that he is considering further “mandatory measures” for social distancing to slow the spread of the virus, which had killed 19 people in the state as of Sunday.

It’s not yet known which organizations will receive the money or exactly how the funds will be used, but organizers say it will help community organizations connect with vulnerable workers and residents to help them get through an economic slowdown.

Mestres said the goal is to complement the public health response with a campaign to help “so much of our community that is already on the precipice of economic stability.”

As a start, more than \$2 million has been committed to the fund, which will provide grants on a rolling basis. The initial donors include Microsoft and Amazon, which are each kicking in \$1 million, and the Starbucks Foundation, which is in for \$250,000, according to Michele Frix, chief strategy officer for the Seattle Foundation. Alaska Airlines also has made “a generous commitment,” Frix said in an email. The city of Seattle and King County also are partners in the effort.

Mestres said he expects the COVID-19 Response Fund to grow with further support from businesses and other organizations in the coming weeks. “We also know the fund is going to adapt and be agile as we learn more,” he said.

In order to move quickly, there will be no grant application process for the COVID-19 fund. Instead, the Seattle Foundation and United Way will work with King County’s Pandemic Community Advisory Group to direct the money.

The Seattle Foundation is setting up a donation page to accept contributions of any size at www.seattlefoundation.org/covid19.

The grant initiative follows other efforts by the business and nonprofit sector to augment the government’s coronavirus response. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation announced a \$5 million commitment to coronavirus response in the Seattle area, [focused on expanded testing and analysis](#).

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