Americans have always been charitable with their money and time. The U.S. tax system was just five years old and included a tax exemption for gifts to charities when the H1N1 pandemic of 1918 struck the world, infecting 500 million people and killing 50 million, including 675,000 in the United States. And, it was just a year earlier when the U.S. federal government extended the language to allow individuals to deduct their tithing.

It took 102 years but the sector is back in pandemic fighting mode. Nonprofit executives are reimagining their organizations while trying to save lives, jobs and the economy. They are finding and providing protective equipment -- sometimes even manufacturing it -- and delivering direct services despite their organization doors being locked.

If flashing back to 1918 wasn’t chilling enough, the civil unrest of 1968 is being conjured across the globe. The senseless murder of George Floyd at the hands of rogue, now former, members of the Minneapolis police force has fanned the sparks already smoldering into a flame that will not be extinguished this time without meaningful change.

This is the 23rd annual The NonProfit Times’ Power & Influence Top 50. The phrasing normally employed for describing honorees is “celebrating” the work of the best and brightest in the sector. This is no time for reveling. This is going to be a long haul and the sector is in more than capable hands with the executives highlighted on the following pages.

Honorees and guests are usually feted at a September event in the ballroom of The National Press Club in Washington, D.C., during a normal year. The event has been postponed due to the pandemic and this being anything but a conventional time in history.

These are trying times around the globe. The executives on the following pages are blazing the path to getting everyone through this nightmare and ensuring the light at the end of the tunnel isn’t an oncoming train.
A rival scouting group attempted to drive GSUSA out of business by inviting girls to join. Guess which organization filed for bankruptcy. A commissioner of the White House Initiative for Educational Excellence for Hispanics, and literally a rocket scientist, her push for STEM education is almost as important as ensuring frontline pandemic workers had Thin Mints.

Sylvia Acevedo
Chief Executive Officer
Girl Scouts of America USA
New York, N.Y.

A rival scouting group attempted to drive GSUSA out of business by inviting girls to join. Guess which organization filed for bankruptcy. A commissioner of the White House Initiative for Educational Excellence for Hispanics, and literally a rocket scientist, her push for STEM education is almost as important as ensuring frontline pandemic workers had Thin Mints.

Ana Marie Argilagos
President
Hispanics In Philanthropy
Oakland, Calif.

Argilagos embodies the nonprofit-private-government partnership, having been a leader in all three areas. She has been a leader in all three areas. She is an active member of many nonprofit infrastructure boards, such as Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors and Candid. It's all about influence and equity.

Fred Blackwell
Chief Executive Officer
San Francisco Foundation
San Francisco, Calif.

Blackwell has said that the Bay Area and America need a higher “aspiration than going back to normal.” He has long been a leader improving the connection between housing and healthcare. His writing on using “privilege, power, and connections to enact policies advancing structural changes,” is moving philanthropy into greater action.

Nancy Brown
President & CEO
American Heart Association
Dallas, Texas

Brown has adapted the AHA’s mission to include issues that impact comprehensive health, from vaping to committing funds vs. COVID-19 research to mission-aligned enterprises improving health outcomes. She is pushing to remove access barriers like geography and cost to health equity, particularly in the LGBTQ community. Brown sits on every influential health steering nonprofit.

Phil Buchanan
President
Center for Effective Philanthropy
Cambridge, Mass.

Books by nonprofit thought leaders often have a very short shelf life. That’s not the case with Buchanan and his tome, Giving Done Right: Effective Philanthropy and Making Every Dollar Count, written long before the pandemic. He wrote “perpetuity is a very long time,” and has been pushing for greater foundation payouts. He was talking and writing about donor timetables before it was fashionable.

Cheryl L. Dorsey
President
Echoing Green
New York, N.Y.

As if #GivingTuesday wasn’t enough, she mobilized fundraisers and digital denizens and raised more than $500 million on #GivingTuesdayNow to assist in COVID-19 relief. The pandemic hit the U.S. in March and by May 5 the worldwide event was up and running. But there is more to it than cash. It’s an engagement movement.

Claire Babineaux-Fontenot
CEO
Feeding America
Chicago, Ill.

Babineaux-Fontenot and her team had to rethink and remake the supply chain and partnerships so that 200 food banks around the nation could deal with the immediate and unprecedented 60 percent jump in demand. The basics of food distribution are obvious. Through partnerships, she was able to fill the need for volunteers to get the food to the hungry kids who relied on meals from schools which were closed.

Brian Gallagher
President & CEO
United Way Worldwide
Alexandria, Va.

Gallagher has always been active in pushing transformation and recent events have really lit a fire under him. He is using the more than $3.5 billion raised to push social change. His words: “We’ve got to make fighting institutional racism part of our core and DNA.”

Daniel Cardinali
President & CEO
Independent Sector
Washington, D.C.

The jury is still out on Cardinali’s “big bet” of becoming a hatchery for community organizing while still working with large national organizations. There is no doubt that getting information and tactics into the field to influence acting locally for global impact is important now. Also, there is an influence tug of war going on in Washington, D.C., but Cardinali is in the mix.

Yolanda Coentro
President & CEO
Institute for Nonprofit Practice
Needham, New York, N.Y.

The phrase is grassroots when it should be rootgrass. It is the young who teach established leaders new paths and Coentro embodies that idea. She’s pushing social justice by training young nonprofit leaders literally how to be effective and sustainable. INP is becoming a national model because of her. Externally, she is deeply involved in public policy issues.

Cindy Cohn
Executive Director
Electronic Frontier Foundation
San Francisco, Calif.

Cohn has spent the past couple of decades fighting for digital rights, whether it is against government entities or others trying to put a stranglehold on access and privacy. She was a key figure in the movement blocking a venture capital firm trying to buy private organizations. It is the only time it stands still for Delaney. That’s the only engagement movement.

Tim Delaney
President & CEO
National Council of Nonprofits
Washington, D.C.

It appears that time stands still for Delaney. That’s the only explanation for the amount of vital data and analysis he and his team generate in what for everyone else is just 24 hours. Many state associations would be dead in the water without him. He is generally a few steps ahead. When regulations come down, he knows the size of the next shoe to drop and has a plan of action.

Asha Curran
Co-Founder & CEO
#GivingTuesday
New York, N.Y.

The phrase is grassroots when it should be rootgrass. It is the young who teach established leaders new paths and Coentro embodies that idea. She’s pushing social justice by training young nonprofit leaders literally how to be effective and sustainable. INP is becoming a national model because of her. Externally, she is deeply involved in public policy issues.
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causes in racial, ethnic and wealth inequality and launched "Chicago's developing digital outreach to the community. The virtual content running special projects at the National Domestic Workers Alliance, Logistics and data are what drive Hamilton and she is well schooled New Yorkers, Stronger Communities" strategic plan to reach 2.2 million #stophateforprofit among the leaders of the digital boycott. ADL senior managers think and act across the nonprofit sector. It isn't for new Ys in underserved areas of New York City. Her "Thriving people is a model for other social service agencies, especially for entrepreneurial bent. He is also proving that religion-based organizations that often disagree can work together for change. Greenblatt was among the first nonprofit leaders to call for Facebook to stop enabling hate speech and disinformation. He is among the leaders of the #stophateforprofit digital boycott. ADL is no longer a one-trick pony under his leadership and entrepreneurial bent. He is also proving that religion-based organizations that often disagree can work together for change.

Gayle has said that violence, health, and education have root causes in racial, ethnic and wealth inequality and launched "Chicago's Moonshot," a radical change in funding to an equity-focused strategic plan. She believes in the power of collective action. A member of the Federal Reserve Board of Chicago, she knows the social and economic fault lines of the nation.

Bill Gates
Co-Founder
The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
Seattle, Wash.
Gates has proved over the years that he's not afraid to make big bets and lose. Of course, he also wins quite a bit. He has been a voice of reason on the pandemic, its impact on society and the reality of vaccines -- views very different from the federal government. He is putting the foundation's considerable clout against COVID-19 and its corrosion of the social safety net.

The 1,400 clinics and pharmacies involve 207,600 volunteers with 33 percent of members in COVID-19 hotspots. What they learn shows that the arts had the highest percentage of "temporary closings." Lynch has worked to ensure that lungs of a community -- the arts -- recover from COVID-19. Data from the Small Business Administration shows that the arts had the highest percentage of "temporary closings." Tools his organization developed for messaging and funding were strungently good. And, every year some element of Congress wants to cut arts funding but he keeps getting even more money.

Eileen R. Heisman
President & CEO
National Philanthropic Trust
Jenkintown, Pa.
If there is an element of fundraising with a target on its back it is donor-advised funds. She'll never agree with you that money in those accounts is dormant. Heisman is a key player in the explosive growth of that giving silo with more than $8 billion in the portfolio. She also continues exporting the concept abroad.

Melanie L. Herman
Executive Director
Nonprofit Risk Management Center
Leesburg, Va.
Herman has been preaching against systemic risk at nonprofits long before a pandemic shut things down. It's not just about protecting a nonprofit but discovering institutional capacity. Whether it is cybersecurity, removing volunteers, exit agreements or sexual harassment, the wise CEOs and board members listen to her counsel.

Jo Ann Jenkins
Chief Executive Officer
AARP
Washington, D.C.
AARP always gets attention from officials during election cycles. Jenkins has made it so they have to listen every day with a lobbying group that's the best in the sector. She has reimagined aging, advocating for social change and impact. She changed the AARP Foundation's focus to hunger, income, housing, and isolation while extolling the virtues of experience in the workforce.

Dean Karlan, Ph.D.
Professor of Economics and Finance
Northwestern University/ Kellogg School of Management
Evanston, Ill.
If you haven’t read The Goldilocks Challenge: Right-Fit Evidence for the Social Sector, stop reading this column and go get a copy. His work measuring impact involves research and randomized controlled trials that have uncovered interesting trends. He tells donors not to worry about the nonprofit’s costs and to seek impact data. Donors shouldn’t watch the sausage making if they like the outcome.

Nicole Lamoureux
President & Chief Executive Officer
National Association of Free and Charitable Clinics
Alexandria, Va.
There is no doubt that Lamoureux should be at every public policy table when it comes to healthcare delivery for those with no or limited access to medical care, whether it be geography or finances. The 1,400 clinics and pharmacies involve 207,600 volunteers with 35 percent of members in COVID-19 hotspots. What they learn changes national ideas on revenue models and direct service.

Antony Bugg-Levine
Chief Executive Officer
Nonprofit Finance Fund
New York, N.Y.
Bugg-Levine just might be the busiest man in nonprofit finance. He and the NFF staff went 24/7 when the pandemic hit to get liquidity into the nonprofit financial system. He called waiting on the sidelines a “wasted opportunity” for impact investing. He’s a leader in grants and loans to small nonprofits and fights the idea that charities should be kept fragile.

Robert Lynch
President & CEO
Americans for the Arts
Washington, D.C.
Lynch has worked to ensure that lungs of a community – the arts – recover from COVID-19. Data from the Small Business Administration shows that the arts had the highest percentage of “temporary closings.” Tools his organization developed for messaging and funding were strungently good. And, every year some element of Congress wants to cut arts funding but he keeps getting even more money.

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Peggy O’Keefe  peggy.okeefe@infogroup.com  402.836.5690
Patty Ricci  patty.ricci@infogroup.com  402.836.5625
Forgotten that she controls more than $4 billion in revenue and more than 160 agencies. She was among the first at the U.S.-Mexico border getting supplies to children being kept in cages. It was her skills that got relief organizations into the makeshift border prisons. She also makes other sector leaders understand the connectivity between housing, health and services and push into those areas.

Gail McGovern
President & CEO
American Red Cross
Washington, D.C.

When you think about the mess she took over in 2008, starting with a $209-million operating deficit, McGovern and her team have been writing about how nonprofits and for-profits must stand with their employees and treat them as stakeholders and not drones. And what in some circles is considered heresy, suggests purpose might just be more important that passion, although both are required.

Tony Mestres
President & CEO
Seattle Foundation
Seattle, Wash.

How do you take $1 billion seriously without taking it seriously? Meet Tony Mestres. Forget for a moment the marketing ability, such as Geeks Give Back. Take a look at his Climate Justice Impact Strategy to support communities and his repositioning the organization as a voice for the community. It’s a case study in remodeling civic purpose for justice and equity.

Brian Mittendorf, Ph.D.
Senior Associate Dean / Fisher College of Business
The Ohio State University
Columbus, Ohio

When did accounting become fun? It is when you read Mittendorf’s Twitter feed @CountingCharity and the ideas being brought up there by nonprofit financial experts. He was among the first to question the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative’s structure to avoid oversight. His words: “Turns out those regulations serve a purpose & separating the founder from an org’s oversight can be helpful.”

Wes Moore
Chief Executive Officer
Robin Hood Foundation
New York, N.Y.

Moore’s “Power Fund” of at least $10 million from the foundation is getting the attention of other deep-pocketed New York City funders. The plan is to fund nonprofits that are run by people of color. His example of data-driven initiatives have been significantly less covert than his predecessors’ and much more instigative than reactive.

Cynthia Muller
Director, Mission Investments
W.K. Kellogg Foundation
Grand Rapids, Mich.

Muller is a groundbreaker in foundation investing that smashes through racial biases. That means investing not just in impact programs but also people, such as fund managers and entrepreneurs overlooked primarily due to a bias. She is targeting investment in ignored ZIP codes. The foundation can tie better student grades to school meals from a firm it invested in.

Michelle Nunn
President & CEO
CARE
Atlanta, Ga.

Forget PPE. She is finding ways to get cash across borders faster for basic sanitation, which makes interesting her throwing in with digital currency purveyors. Nunn is an international leader for strengthening basic health infrastructure, empowering local female leaders and combatting what is called an “infodemic” of misinformation in communities.

Una Osili, Ph.D.
Associate Dean for Research and International Programs
Lilly Family School of Philanthropy / IUPUI
Indianapolis, Ind.

Osili has become the “go-to” person when it comes to explaining economics in the tax-exempt sector. Her expertise is in private transfer decisions and financial behavior of donors and then putting it all into terms people can understand. There is no doubt she is supporting the sector through her testimony at Congressional committees – based on research she helped to structure and interpret.

Jonathan Reckford
Chief Executive Officer
Habitat For Humanity International
Atlanta, Ga.

Reckford transcends his role at Habitat to an inspirational leader not just through his words but also his big bets and wins while running the world’s largest private home builder. He knew earlier than most that a holistic approach to housing issues was needed if communities were to be revitalized. He has written about people coming together in times of crisis. He is the perfect leader for these times.

Rob Reich, Ph.D.
Co-Director, Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society
Stanford University
Stanford, Calif.

Reich is the sharpest voice when it comes to the dark side of philanthropy and politics, having been quoted saying the “power to direct one’s private resources for public influence,” and that “big philanthropy is one of the most unaccountable forms of power in a democratic society.” He writes about what most of the sector refuses to admit. It’s probably a good thing he is tenured.

Rashad Robinson
President
Color Of Change
Oakland, Calif.

Robinson is a self-described “hat aficionado.” Well, he’s wearing a lot of them. From getting cop shows tossed off the air, to being a leader of the Facebook ad boycott to constructing coalitions for community engagement, Robinson is in the middle of it all. His incredibly effective social justice tactics while leading 1.7 million members would be hard to replicate but every leader must try to do so.

Douglas Rutzen
President & CEO
International Center for Not-for-Profit Law
Washington, D.C.

It’s a good thing Rutzen has spent time around the world since he and the ICNPL are being called on daily as authoritarian governments try to beat back protests. It’s not just civil unrest but also academic repression. He has been warning of human rights abuses tied to the pandemic and government use of emergency powers. He’s smart, effective and in demand.

Rajiv Shah, M.D.
President
The Rockefeller Foundation
New York, N.Y.

Shah has said the sector needs to take “unique risks” and is pushing that belief via an evolved focus at the foundation. Someone whose decisions are steeped in data, he is paying for COVID testing and the Rockefeller Foundation Opportunity Collective is looking past COVID-19 to public, private sector investment in the 10 cities for post-pandemic recovery. He is also funding civil right initiatives.
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Lorie Slutsky  
President  
New York Community Trust  
New York, N.Y.

It’s nice to have a huge endowment but Slutsky has never forgotten what each dollar can do and how to leverage cash and influence. Kudos for investing in the vital New York State Census Equity Fund. She is a “lifer,” spending her entire career at the trust and infiltrating every borough of the city, supporting the sector which is at least 10 percent of the city’s economy.

Bryan Stevenson  
Founder & Executive Director  
Equal Justice Institute  
Montgomery, Ala.

Stevenson has been called the “drum major for justice and mercy.” The theatrical release of “Just Mercy” based on his memoir barely scratches the surface of the equal justice movement he created. When your TED Talk is viewed more than 6.7 million times (and it isn’t a music video) and there’s a documentary of your work, you are moving people to action. He works for more than “respectability politics.”

David L. Thompson  
Vice President of Public Policy  
National Council of Nonprofits  
Washington, D.C.

“Thompson” must be some sort of coalition name because there is no way one person can digest federal gibberish, translate it and give it to state associations to use as a shield or a weapon. He’s always been good but given the pandemic and the federal legislation discussed – then discarded or passed – he has been key to providing the data the sector needs to not be ignored during stimulus discussions.

Henry Timms  
Executive Director  
Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts  
New York, N.Y.

To Timms, up is down, left is right and he uses that “perspective” to turn things inside to spectacular results. He’s been talking and writing about the danger of loss of trust in established institutions, global connectivity, social media and the decline of deference. He is wisely using the organization’s assets to strengthen the movement for inclusion in communities.

Darren Walker  
President  
Ford Foundation  
New York, N.Y.

Walker is a respected leader but it is rare that an announcement from Ford forces people to re-read a sentence. Then came $1 billion in debt that Ford floated to fund nonprofits during the pandemic, adding 4 points to its annual payout. He also ensures that the foundation invests with diverse fund managers which often outperforms other endowments.

Anne Wallestad  
President & CEO  
BoardSource  
Washington, D.C.

It’s called BoardSource and it really has embraced the name since Wallestad took over. She has made it the first stop for common sense approaches to recruiting, educating and dumping board members. She trumpets the reason boards are not diverse is philanthropy streams aren’t colorful. There’s an upheaval in thinking about boards. She was there first.

Amy Sample Ward  
CEO  
NTEN  
Portland, Ore.

Sample Ward is becoming the sector’s tech ethicist. She was one of the first and loudest leaders on working to block the .org registry from being sold to a venture firm and also stopped using Facebook for ads promoting NTEN and its offerings. Her behind-the-scenes coordination with other nonprofit tech leaders gained her respect sector-wide.

Kevin Washington  
President & CEO  
YMCA of the USA  
Chicago, Ill.

Washington is setting up the Y as the model nonprofits and businesses need for reopening safely while lobbying the federal government for additional financial assistance. He has found ways to stay connected to communities through programs that feed kids who aren’t in school, blood drives and 600 Ys doing childcare for first responders. It’s OK that the pool is closed.

A. Honoree Sr. Donna Markham of Catholic Charities USA, NPT Editorial Director Paul Clolery, guests Danielle Powell and Charles Cornelio  
B. Scott Koskoski of event sponsors ONE HUNDRED Agency and Nicole Araujo of Mighty Citizen, Influencer of the Year Tony Mestres of the Seattle Foundation and Stephanie Cerudo of event sponsor Infogroup  
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D. Honoree David Thompson of the National Council of Nonprofits, guest Caren Forsten, honoree Una Osili of the Lilly Family School of Philanthropy and guest Carol Adelman  