

CRAIN'S 2021 BEST-MANAGED NONPROFITS

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FINALIST

New Detroit Inc.

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New Detroit Inc. was in the midst of [developing plans for industry-specific, cultural sensitivity trainings](#) when the pandemic-related disparities and nationally publicized deaths of George Floyd and other Black men and women spurred demand for them last year.

Individuals and organizations alike contacted New Detroit for guidance on how they should respond.

“Big questions were, ‘What can I do?’ ‘How should I be looking at my role in the organization...(and) my organization’s role in the moment?’” said New Detroit’s President and CEO Michael Rafferty.

The organization had just come through cost-cutting and securing \$600,000 in new grants to respond to revenue losses that had decreased its budget to just over \$1 million for 2020 and left it with a staff of only five employees.

It raised \$130,000 or more to increase its staff capacity and launch initial cultural sensitivity training pilots with local health systems and retail and hospitality employees.

With an \$80,000 grant from the Community Foundation for Southeastern Michigan, it brought in a COO in March and a director of services and programs in November 2020 to help design and launch the new diversity, equity and inclusion training.

“We saw that communities of color were being affected disproportionately as a result of the pandemic. We also realized all sorts of systems were examining how they needed to think differently, from real estate to health care,” Rafferty said.

“When you start to think differently about all those moving parts reinventing themselves, you have opportunity to build equity into their design.”

This summer and fall, New Detroit piloted an anti-racism curriculum for health care board members, management and employees with Authority Health, Henry Ford Health System and McLaren Health. It also built out and piloted another daylong, DEI training for hospitality and retail management and employees serving customers from 20 organizations convened by the Downtown Detroit Partnership, Rafferty said.

“As we were trying to figure out how to put that out to an industry that was struggling as a result of the pandemic, DDP was able to subsidize (the costs of the training) and pull in restaurants and retail,” he said.

“The objective is to make retail and hospitality welcoming to all races and all cultures.”

Stepping up advocacy

Having the voice of a trusted organization like the Brookings Institution would strengthen the integrity of any recommendations New Detroit made, Rafferty said. It secured a \$50,000 grant from Rocket Community Fund to contract with the Washington, D.C.-based organization and Detroit-based JFM Consulting Group to conduct joint research on how to achieve racial equity through COVID recovery across multiple categories like education and the economy.

Released in March 2021, the report, [“Examining and Addressing COVID Disparities in Detroit”](#) includes data on racial inequities and disparities, and interviews with experts and residents on how to close those gaps, Rafferty said. It’s informing policymakers, industry leaders and community leaders on how to advocate for equity in COVID recovery.

New Detroit also submitted numerous op-eds last year to advocate for the importance of labeling racism a public health crisis.

And in November it teamed up with Lakeshore Ethnic Diversity Alliance to host a virtual town hall conversation on critical race theory. The event attracted 430 attendees, 20 from out of state, Rafferty said.

To launch the cultural sensitivity trainings and advocate for DEI policy over the past 18 months, “a lot of what we did was partnering,” he said.