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## Lessons from the Past - 1918 Spanish Flu

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# Lessons from the Past – 1918 Spanish Flu

Written by: Juan Ochoa

## Community Engagement Blog Post

*How do communities bounce back from a global health crisis and the subsequent halt of the economy?*

A 2018 study by [Stanford Business](#) found, “That “silent killer” [of disaster relief] is a lack of community cohesiveness, ... the number and diversity of its voluntary organizations and their willingness to cooperate.”

The researchers arrived at that conclusion by studying another pandemic – the 1918 Spanish Flu. Many communities were afraid of any sort of social interaction, fearing that they too would catch the disease. Residents were only out for themselves, adopting an “us vs. them” mentality which wiped out many forms of socio-economic cooperation and civic action. Consequently, these communities suffered more during the pandemic and had a longer road to recovery.

What can our communities learn from past pandemics? **That volunteers build resilient communities.** Communities that thrived throughout the Spanish Flu maintained a unified sense of purpose. Residents of these communities saved food production and distribution operations, banks, and insurance organizations. There was not an “us vs. them” mentality, instead everyone acknowledged that their society is only as strong as the most vulnerable. Community members had a shared responsibility for the health of the community and themselves. Despite challenges, residents continued to volunteer their time, abilities, or expertise to improve their communities.

The big take away, it’s not “us vs. them” during COVID-19 – we are all in this together. Communities, whether in a pandemic or not, rely on a collective spirit. Consider virtual volunteering, creating virtual advocacy campaigns, donating, shopping local or simply reaching out to your favorite non-profit to offer virtual volunteer services. Make the most out of your virtual volunteering, online service-learning class, or online activism. The possibilities to engage virtually are endless and as society moves to a more virtual setting, you might be paving the way!

Your involvement in the community is needed to cushion the impact of COVID-19! How will you leave your pawprint?

## **Bibliography**

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