



**Emergency Savings in the Face of COVID-19**  
**Presented by the Louisiana Asset Funders Network**  
**Webinar Summary**

We all hear and know – savings is important. Emergency savings is even more critical. But for many families pre-pandemic, emergency savings – let alone savings in general -- may have seemed like a luxury. Emergency savings and a person’s ability to navigate regular life emergencies is hard... add a global pandemic and we have to ask: is it completely unrealistic?

On July 23, Louisiana AFN hosted *Emergency Savings in the Face of COVID-19*, a webinar that highlighted recent data on how ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) has been impacted financially and shared insights into ALICE’s ability to save. Speakers discussed various mechanisms, policies, and strategies funders should explore to increase opportunities for ALICE households to save.

Leigh Phillips, SaverLife, shared that despite massive numbers of furloughs and lost jobs, people are saving at a higher rate now than before the crisis. Additionally, people are reducing their use of small-dollar loans due to stimulus and unemployment checks. Government relief is offering some families stabilization – but not all. Individuals are hopeful that they can refocus on saving more when the crisis is over, and they’re less worried about meeting essential needs.

In response to the pandemic, SaverLife changed its program model to offer emergency support to help meet immediate needs of savers and secondarily focus on savings. Leigh encouraged funders to support innovation that leans into the current reality and adjust expectations for results during the pandemic.

Kim Morgan with United Way of Western Connecticut described the launch of the [ALICE Saves](#) platform which integrates SaverLife (incentivized, matched savings) with TrustPlus (financial coaching). Funded in part through JPMorgan Chase, United Way has reversed the focus of ALICE Saves to most immediately meet people’s financial coaching needs and secondarily highlight opportunities for savings during the pandemic.

Communities Foundation of Texas leveraged a Prosperity Now report that found 45 percent of households in North Texas were liquid asset poor. To increase savings and build financial stability, Ashley McIver shared how the Foundation invested in the Working Families Success model that combines employment services, income supports, and financial coaching. She also explained how emergency savings is a key building block to a person/family’s overall financial stability.

For people of color, emergency savings data shows a significant racial divide – certainly an impact of structural racism. Sarah Willis, JPMorgan Chase, called funders to act and invest in savings strategies that help people save for predictable and unpredictable needs such as technology to support distance learning. She underscored the need to look for policy changes



that help shape a better system to foster savings – especially policies that embrace an equity lens. Finally, Sarah stressed that funders should invest in strategies that optimize debt repayment to reduce liabilities on a family’s balance sheet.

Speakers and participants discussed the need for funders to:

- Understand people can save but essential, emergency needs must be met first.
- Embrace programmatic redesigns that are flexible and may impact results, but are a realistic reflection of individuals’ needs.
- Allow for innovation by offering flexibility in investments that do not overly subscribe to a rigid model.
- Prioritize investing in models and policy change work that promotes equity and savings for ALICE populations.
- Support integrated fintech strategies that offer promise for scale and easy adoption.
- Look for financial coaching within emergency savings models.

***Speakers Included:***

**Leigh Phillips**, President and CEO of SaverLife

**Kim Morgan**, CEO of United Way of Western Connecticut

**Ashley McIver**, Senior Philanthropy Officer with Communities Foundation of Texas

**Sarah Willis**, Vice President, Financial Health & Corporate Responsibility with JPMorgan Chase

**Katie Pritchett**, Sr. Vice President, Impact and Operations with Capital Area United Way & Co-Chair of LA AFN