



Q&A with Nicole Anderson, President of the AT&T Foundation and AVP, Corporate Social Responsibility

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As President of the AT&T Foundation and Assistant Vice President of Corporate Social Responsibility, Nicole Anderson oversees AT&T's philanthropic and CSR strategic initiatives, as well as the company's CSR communications and awareness efforts. In addition, she currently serves as Vice Chair of the Conference Board's CSR Council.

As part of our on-going initiative to highlight how Governance & Sustainability Center members are responding to COVID-19, we recently interviewed her on a number of issues. In the interview below, she discussed the criticality of staying authentic to what you do and the importance of building upon your existing network, partners, and core competencies to deploy resources quickly and effectively in a time of crisis.

AT&T created a Distance Learning and Family Connections Fund, a \$10 million fund to give parents, students, and teachers the tools they need for at-home learning. Since the announcement in March, can you tell us about the impact this initiative has had in homes and communities across the country?

When the COVID-19 pandemic left nearly 50 million students displaced from their classrooms and shifting to remote learning, we immediately jumped to action. We turned to organizations we have worked with for years to find ways to help.

We launched the \$10M [AT&T Distance Learning and Family Connections Fund](#) to give parents, students and teachers tools and resources for successful distance learning. The fund has provided resources to help keep families and students learning and connected to each other during these difficult times.

For example, we helped Khan Academy bring its resources to scale, enabling them to

handle online usage 2.5 times higher than normal and serve 100 million users. Our support of Caribu allowed them to remove their paywall and take the bonding experience of family reading time virtual as they experienced a download rate 57 times higher than usual during March and April. And recognizing families also need social-emotional resources, we collaborated with Sesame Workshop to scale its [Caring for Each Other initiative](#), helping children and their caregivers stay healthy, build resilience, and adjust to a “for-now normal.” During May alone, the Caring for Each Other curriculum attracted 215,000 online views, which was a 290% increase in website traffic to the Sesame in Communities page from April.

To date, we've funded 63 organizations – national and local – to support students, families and educators.

AT&T has a longstanding commitment to small businesses. Could you expand on AT&T's current work to support small businesses, especially in the wake of COVID-19?

At AT&T, we're proud to work with thousands of small businesses across the country, keeping them connected to the customers and resources they need to thrive. Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, we have remained committed to supporting these businesses as they navigate through these uncertain times.

As millions of students and teachers make the shift to online learning, we know small businesses – especially those focused on education – are critical to ensuring students continue to succeed. Over the last five years, we've identified and mentored some of the most promising and innovative startups in ed-tech. To further support the innovative work these companies do every day, AT&T provided an additional \$1.2 million in support from our Distance Learning and Family Connections fund to 7 AT&T [Aspire Accelerator alumni small businesses](#). Some of these include CareerVillage.org, a nonprofit providing online career advice to underrepresented youth from a wide range of backgrounds, and Learn Fresh's NBA Math Hoops, an online learning tool that helps students learn fundamental math skills through the game of basketball.

AT&T has done a lot of great work to support customers and employees during COVID-19. Can you share how these initiatives tie into AT&T's broader business strategy and company values?

We have a long history of being there when it counts, because we recognize the inextricable link between the strength of our business and the strength of the communities where we live and work. Our response to the COVID-19 pandemic is grounded in that belief.

Whether our employees are in the field providing essential services, at home remotely supporting key business operations, or on the front lines putting their lives at risk to report breaking news, AT&T employees are always there for our communities and for each other. To help support the people who keep our company strong, we took a number of steps,

including bonuses for front-line employees and managers, as well as temporary paid family leave to help employees cover a broad range of COVID-related needs. And the [AT&T Employee Relief Fund](#) – a 501(c)(3) public charity supported by employee donations and matching grants from the AT&T Foundation – is helping our colleagues experiencing financial hardship due to circumstances beyond their control.

As a company whose business is rooted in keeping people connected, we recognize that the importance of reliable access to communications and community support in the wake of disasters cannot be overstated. As part of that, AT&T is proud to be building out [FirstNet](#), the country's only high speed nationwide wireless broadband network built for first responders and public safety.

We quickly realized that COVID-19 was overwhelming hospitals and healthcare workers, and we needed to provide additional community-based support for frontline first responders. So, we went to work with World Central Kitchen, Feeding America, Team Rubicon and the Salvation Army to [deliver nourishing meals at scale](#), \$5.5M worth, to frontline first responders.

What have been some of the biggest lessons you and your colleagues have learned thus far in navigating this crisis and preparing for the road ahead?

One of the biggest takeaways over the last several months is the criticality of staying authentic to what we do. By building on our existing work in the education and workforce skilling space, we understood the important role distance learning would play, and how to effectively implement a program that could instantaneously connect teachers and students.

The pandemic essentially provided a stress-test to our philanthropic practice, which confirmed our data driven approach to funding afforded us a depth of knowledge and relationships to deploy our resources effectively in a very short time frame. Now, we are turning our attention to the challenge of economic recovery – a challenge that is compounded by social injustice – and applying these same learnings to our work with local communities around the country and with a specific eye towards long term economic empowerment in our Black communities.

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