

Marshall Plan 2.0

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In 1948, the goal of the United States' Marshall plan was to rebuild war torn Europe, remove trade barriers between countries, modernize industry, fuel the continent's prosperity, and prevent the spread of Communism. To achieve that, the plan reduced interstate barriers, dropped many regulations, and incentivized productivity and the adoption of modern business procedures. This historic self-help program was financed entirely by the United States government and was designed to provide necessities to populations in need.

Today, a modern-day Marshall plan, version 2.0, is in order. This time, the existential threat is not the spread of communism, but an unseen enemy, SARS-CoV-2, 2019, known everywhere and forever as Coronavirus. And the combination of that virus with something equally as challenging: the deep political, social, and economic divisions that have weakened America's government and left its diverse citizenry unable to tap into the energy and ingenuity—and shared purpose directed headlong at disaster—that has long characterized our greatest moments as a nation. While respecting all the federal/CDC recommendations and top-down solutions, this plan calls for *mobilizing*—not *immobilizing*—America. The distinction that marks this connected age from its predecessors is that we can share with fellow citizens limitless information—one to one, one to many or many to many—and instantaneously open channels for engagement and action. In other words, we have never been more suited or strengthened to help ourselves. If George Marshall were here, he would see the government's self-help role this time as mostly allocating our tax dollars toward immediate payments to any effort, by anyone, that intends to support the common good in this time of crisis. He would surely monitor information, to

make sure we are connecting around what is true, and push funding toward the most efficacious ideas and programs and be checking of progress. Will there be fraud, vast mismanagement, and outright theft from this gusher of relief funds? Of course. Will that be out-weighted a hundred times over by ingenious, can-do, large-hearted actions—a historic expression of what we, and so much of the world, have long hailed as “the American spirit?” Without a doubt.

Any multi-billion-dollar fund, called the Federal Relief Emergency Effort (FREE), should be overseen by Marshall 2.0, a group of leading citizens from the private and public sectors without political ties. The allocations will mostly go directly to communities across the country. What we are all now realizing—to our shared horror—is that, for a host of complex reasons, we no longer have a federal government with the muscle and public support that George Marshall and his boss, Dwight Eisenhower, could direct toward winning a war and then rebuilding Europe. What we have now, although, are communities—the hospitals and doctor's offices and shops, restaurants and hotels, schools and parks and houses of worship, neighborhood associations and occasional parades—that are the social networks where we actually live and die. It is the place where the mail carrier putters each day, door to door, where the garbage trucks roll by, where the nurse, truly tired, stops at the convenience store after her endless shift and has the all-night clerk say, “no charge tonight.”

Or that's what they should be free to say. And free to do—a thousand such acts by people who know the context of the lives we live in concert with one another. The night-clerk can file a voucher on a Paypal system for instant payment, so the convenience store owner does not see a deficit on the ledger. Soon, a community is saying, “No, health workers do not pay for groceries in our town.” How about your town? Ours, too.

And what about the kids, home from school each day? Are schools open for business? The out-of-work teachers have organized some activities in the park, played at proper social distance. The accountants are receiving a small federal stipend to run free online classes for managing needs on limited budgets. So are folks who have had the virus and built an immunity—a number that will grow. They can be key care workers, or convalescent plasma donors in the health tents set up in the town green.

Just as the Marshall Plan once freed those in Europe from interstate barriers and regulations, we need to do the same to support local populations. For those out of work, or working half time for pay that could not match basic expenses—the

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Post Office (everyone has one nearby, by federal law) should be a place you can go for a local job; these jobs can be paid for by FREE through something akin to the long-standing Block Grant program, pioneered by Nixon Administration. Civil Service regulations would be waived, and they would be temporary federal employees, making \$15 an hour, tax free, to be directed by local officials, who are on the ground and best know a community's shifting needs during what could be a very long crisis. Here are other items that Marshall 2.0, and its FREE Fund, can drive.

Leverage the US postal service. An army of 600,000 who work in the US postal service know their communities and can bring medicines and supplies to targeted communities at risk. Let's direct them and double their number with temporary civil servants, all coordinated through a central command center and directed by data that identifies populations with the highest risk levels, this vector—which can deliver health care products and diagnostic testing kits—maintains social distancing while delivering critical goods and services. Public-private partnerships with delivery and transportation companies could diminish the impact on service availability and incomes.

Use hotels as health care facilities. Emptied by current regulations and closures, hotels can serve, in this emergency, as centers for special care. Modified to house noncritically ill, quarantined patients, hotel rooms could provide respite, food, shelter, and isolation, and avoid massive, economy-damaging layoffs. This action would reserve hospital beds for only those who need advanced services while maintaining capacity for normal critical care, like trauma, heart attacks and strokes. To maintain hospital capacity most effectively, elective surgeries have been rescheduled until the crisis seemed lessened and/or is more manageable.

Facilitate new services delivery models for small businesses. Rather than shutting down restaurants, repurpose them and the services that they provide—with direct federal supports—to safely craft and deliver meals within the communities they serve. Use lockbox technologies to safely deliver goods in need of repair to service centers. Enable and encourage online ordering of local goods and services to maintain community engagement and a strong local economic foundation.

This is the way public and private can work together, in the digital age. Although the Marshal Plan focused on re-building, v2.0 will focus on repurposing, to avoid lasting economic damage, coordinating supply chains to avoid misdistribution of scarce resources, and leveraging existing infrastructure to address the challenges that the coronavirus epidemic brings. The nation, operating under this distributed, down-to-the-ground model, empowering connected communities, will emerge stronger, more facile, and more prepared for the next national threat. And more are likely, with rebounds of coronaviruses and climate-related catastrophes.

Marshall, a general who became Secretary of State when he launched his famous plan, helped America win a war, but also helped us win peace. In both endeavors he saw that the human

spirit – and the way it flowed through action – was as important as any battle plans, or later the ingenuity of programming or money spent in Europe. “It is not enough to fight,” he said. “It is the spirit which we bring to the fight that decides the issue. It is morale that wins the victory.”

The nation's morale, battered by decades of bitter divisions over wealth and poverty, race, and class, disputes about the rise of big business and the role of government—of public *versus* private, as though the country's future could rely upon one without the other—could well be restored by these powerful public-private collaborations. In the coming months, imagine when the hotel service provider joining the ranks of hero, along with the teenager delivering meals on her bike, or her laid off Dad helping the restaurant cook meals to feed the suffering.

How are wars won? Town by town, community by community. Who wins them? Not powerful industries, cutting deals with governments, or war profiteers, with their bright-eyed business models. Sure, those things can help. But those are not the people who win wars. You know the scene—among the most iconic in all of cinema; the one in “Saving Private Ryan” where Tom Hanks, stops a guns-drawn dispute in his company with “What's the pool now at—300 dollars?” Everyone stops and turns. His men have a betting pool, trying to guess what their steely commander and leader does back home. “Teacher. English composition. In the spring, I coach baseball.” In the coming months, imagine when the hotel cleaning team joins the ranks of hero, along with the teenager delivering meals on her bike, or her laid off Dad working all night helping the restaurant cook meals to feed the suffering. It is a different definition of hero than one that prevails in the winner-take-all marketplace.

Marshall 2.0—a national cooperative resting on the verity that people are happiest when they cooperate and share equally in both burden and triumph—is hereby open for business, and for purpose, calling upon the ingenuity borne of unlikely unions, cross-border partnerships and the very best ideas of how to help our fellow citizens, and thereby help ourselves.

A common admonition linked to America's two most recent calamities—9/11 and the '08 financial crash—is “Never let a crisis go to waste.” One might argue that both those crises, despite so many eminently worthwhile actions and outcomes, went to waste. Why? Failures of imagination. Through all those Herculean efforts to fix what had been broken, and right what had been wronged, we forgot about the power of the American spirit. Each crisis started with us coming together as a nation, but then we splintered, and badly. What Marshall 2.0, and billions in a FREE fund, provide, is a structure to not keep fear and desperation from ruling the days ahead. It allows the “better angels of our nature,” in Lincoln's powerful parlance, to prevail.

“Morale is a state of mind,” Marshall said, “It is steadfastness and courage and hope.”

He's talking about what has always made America great. Let's get to work.