

NONPROFIT NOTES

Alliance formed to address polycrisis

BY REV. MIKE DENTON

Imagine if, in January 2020, we had known how our world was about to change.

Imagine if we had known the COVID-19 pandemic was coming and had 60 days to build the digital infrastructure for remote work, fortify our supply chains, and coordinate a unified response among our businesses, nonprofits, governments, and citizens. What might we have done differently?

Today, in early 2026, Berkshire County is standing in that exact window of opportunity.

We are currently witnessing a cumulative effect of international economic policy, federal and state policy, and budget shifts that, if left unaddressed, will create a local economic and social disaster. For example, the sweeping 2025 budget reconciliation bill has initiated the deepest cuts to programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Medicaid in history.

The aid SNAP recipients receive (between \$3.5 million and \$4 million a month in Berkshire County) is money that goes directly into our local economy and supports grocery stores and related businesses. Medicaid cuts affect our entire medical system and all the organizations and businesses that support it. Rolling back equity-focused programming threatens successful policies and programming that address vulnerable communities.

These aren't just "nonprofit problems." When 10 million Americans lose health coverage, deal with increased costs, and millions more see food benefits slashed, the impact ripples through our local economy — from the grocery store clerk in North Adams to the HR manager in Great Barrington dealing with a workforce suddenly plagued by unaddressed health crises and increased housing instability.

We are facing a "polycrisis." It is not just one cut; it is the cumulative weight of reduced federal grants and programs, higher operating costs, and policy-based disqualifications that are hitting our for-profit and nonprofit sectors simultaneously. There is virtually no organization we would typically turn to for help that isn't currently watching its own resources thin out.

This is why we have formed the Berkshire Grit Alliance (BGA).



LIANA TOSCANINI

The Berkshire Grit Alliance met in Pittsfield in December to discuss the results of a survey on the impact of federal funding cuts and policies.

Led by a cross-sector coalition (including the United Way, The Nonprofit Center of the Berkshires, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, the George B. Crane Memorial Center, United Church of Christ, Pittsfield, and other community leaders), the BGA is built on the hard-won wisdom of the pandemic: we can do more together than we can do apart. But for this to work, it cannot be a "nonprofit-only" conversation. We need the private sector at the table. We need the "grit" of our community leaders who understand logistics, risk management, and the shared context of Berkshire County.

Our first step has been to collect data. We began with the nonprofit community and distributed a comprehensive survey to precisely map what our coun-

ty stands to lose. This recent survey of Berkshire-based nonprofits confirmed a high level of volatility in programming, staffing, and funding sources — no surprise given the waves of grant cancellations in the news.

Many respondents had already seen negative impacts not just in terms of federal and state grants, but foundation grants and individual donors, too. This is by no means a Berkshire-specific problem, but we can leverage our collective resilience, determination, and grit to identify Berkshire-specific solutions.

Our plan is to expand the scope of this survey to include for-profit and government organizations and establish a pattern for repeating it several times a year. This information feedback loop will enable us to shift from reacting to

responding, using the lenses of disaster response and mutual aid to protect our most vulnerable neighbors and, by extension, our local economy.

The next few years will be hard. Programs we have relied on for decades may end. However, Berkshire County was built on a foundation of resilience. By building these cross-sector relationships now, we aren't just bracing for impact; we are building something better.

If we apply our collective "Berkshire grit" today, we will look back at this moment not as the beginning of a decline, but as the birth of a more unified, stronger, and more relevant county.

Rev. Mike Denton is the pastor of United Church of Christ, Pittsfield, and a founding member of the Berkshire Grit Alliance.