

# Lifting up Nonprofits

At the Human Service Chamber, Michael Corey helps 165 member nonprofits achieve their goals through advocacy and a newly expanded focus on professional services.



## Michael Corey

Executive director

Human Service Chamber of Franklin County

**IN ROLE SINCE:** 2017

**AGE:** 40

**EDUCATION:** B.A., Duke University (history with minors in political science and English); M.A. in education policy and leadership, Ohio State University; J.D., OSU Moritz College of Law

**COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT:** Board member for the Franklin County Rise Together Innovation Center, Rapid 5: Rivers and Parks Imagination Design, and the National Council of the Moritz College of Law. He previously volunteered with the Columbus Commission on Black Girls, the American Constitution Society of Columbus' Board of Directors, the Advisory Council on Diversity Initiatives for the Ohio State Bar Association, Lower Lights Christian Health Center's board of directors, and the Downtown YMCA of Central Ohio's advisory board.

When Michael Corey was hired as executive director of the Human Service Chamber of Franklin County in 2017, he was charged with overseeing its two distinct missions: to serve as “one voice” for the health and human services sector, and to provide professional services so that nonprofit members could focus their precious resources on serving the community.

Three years and a once-in-a-lifetime pandemic later, his job description suddenly included multiple other roles: chief communications officer, legal and government affairs adviser, advocate for federal funding and COVID vaccines, health news curator, personal protective equipment procurer, logistician and group therapy leader.

“Ninety-five percent of my job became COVID response czar,” Corey says. “Many of our members were allowed to operate in person during the pandemic to serve the elevated needs of the community. My goal was to do everything to keep them safe and informed.”

Today, some of the initiatives Corey implemented in those early days of uncertainty remain a part of the chamber's offerings to its 165 members, a number that has doubled since 2020.

While advocacy has always been the chamber's top priority, the professional services component became more important in 2020. When local nonprofits needed high-quality legal, human resources and accounting services, Corey cobbled together generous businesses and individuals who could provide expertise to help members navigate issues like safe workplaces, funding, and layoffs and furloughs.

To help continue these services, Corey announced in early November a dramatic expansion of those offerings thanks to the work of Bhumika Patel, director of membership and community engagement, and two “transformative” gifts.

Support from The Columbus Foundation will fund finance, accounting, fundraising and cybersecurity/information technology services for members. And funding from the city of Columbus will allow the

chamber to provide the most in-demand service—human resources—and hire two full-time staffers to support members in the areas of communications and environmental and energy sustainability. That will bring the Human Service Chamber up to 4.5 employees with a projected 2023 budget of \$850,000—more than double its largest previous budget.

“We just want to be as helpful as we can by elevating the quality of the services we're offering, which will bring significant savings to our members,” Corey says. “This will allow our members to continue to focus on the elevated needs that will continue to exist in our community.”

The Human Service Chamber has been around since 2010, but by the time Corey was hired, it was struggling and membership had dwindled to 48. Board members believed in its mission and sought a leader to bring new life to the organization.

In picking Corey, they chose an attorney who previously worked at Bricker & Eckler and was a regional voter protection director for the Hillary for America campaign, a legal fellow for the Office of U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown, a policy analyst at the Children's Defense Fund-Ohio and a consultant for the Ohio Board of Regents.

Christie Angel, the chamber's board chair and outgoing president and CEO of the YWCA Columbus, says Corey was the thread that held the sector together during the pandemic. He has many qualities that make him a good leader, she says, and is empathetic, an excellent communicator and values the role members play.

“He has a caring spirit for the members and the work that we do, but also as individuals who are leaders in our teams,” Angel says. “Big picture, he cares deeply about the success of our community and has a deep foundational understanding around the importance of health and human services delivery, the connection to the community and the work that we do. He has that understanding that without us, there is no safety net.”

*Laura Newpoff is a freelance writer.*



# LARGE FOR-PROFIT FINALISTS

Comine Burger

Kirt Walker