



## PAR Report On Not For Profits

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The Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana and the Nelson A. Rockefeller Institute of Government today released a report on the important role the nonprofit community has played in hurricane recovery efforts across Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. *GulfGov Reports: Response, Recovery, and the Role of the Nonprofit Community in the Two Years Since Katrina and Rita* examines the role of the nonprofit sector in the recovery, what impact hurricanes Katrina and Rita have had on the work of these organizations, and what changes they already have made to handle the next disaster that strikes.

In contrast to the criticism that seems to accompany almost every aspect of the governmental recovery effort, the consensus among local officials, residents, and outside observers is that the nonprofit sector has responded to the rebuilding challenge beyond all expectation.

"The scope of the nonprofit community's work in helping the Gulf Coast region rebuild has been unprecedented," said Jim Brandt, president of PAR and co-principal investigator for the *GulfGov Reports* project. "It has included everything from national foundations investing millions of dollars in the recovery to out-of-town groups making frequent rebuilding trips to locally based groups lobbying for policy changes. There is no question that the nonprofit community is helping to push the recovery forward."

Immediately after the storms, organizations that had never been involved in disaster relief and

recovery work looked for ways to help. Small churches that really were not equipped to handle sizable numbers of evacuees opened their doors anyway, and their congregations responded. Normally staid foundations cut through paperwork and procedures to get money out quickly to organizations and agencies working directly in the affected areas. Well-established nonprofits performed double duty, taking in their counterparts from the devastated areas at the same time that their client loads increased. As the immediate crisis passed and the affected communities settled in for the long recovery, the nonprofit sector moved with them.

This study finds that nonprofit, community-based, and faith-based organizations remain more important than ever in the recovery efforts. By examining the groups cited in this report, one gets a picture of the variety of these organizations and the different strengths they bring to the recovery. In addition, some common issues and concerns emerged from the research:

The wide-ranging impact of hurricanes Katrina and Rita required the nonprofit sector to be adaptable to rapidly changing circumstances. It was not so much the missions of these groups that had to be altered. Rather, it was the scope of the work that changed as the demand and the need for services exploded.

The critical need for a disaster response and recovery plan was reinforced. Many nonprofit organizations did not have such a plan before Katrina and Rita. Now they do. Other groups that had plans found they had to revise them.

Funding sustainability is a serious problem. More than two years after hurricanes Katrina

and Rita, many groups are running out of the money they need to keep providing elevated levels of service.

The role and coordination of volunteers are major concerns for state and local governments. Everything from work assignments to housing, food, and transportation must be coordinated so that volunteers can be sent where they are most needed. That encompasses both the response and recovery phases of disasters.

“Studying the nonprofit community’s response to Katrina and Rita and how nonprofit organizations worked with government at all levels offers us another opportunity to gain insight into how best to respond to disasters,” said Dr. Richard P. Nathan, co-director of the Rockefeller Institute and co-principal investigator for the *GulfGov Reports* project. “It is critical that we take heed of the lessons learned here so that we can be better prepared for the next time. This fifth report from our three-year study focuses a flashing red light on the need for mechanisms to enable a leading organization in disaster situations to pull things together to make and oversee working connections among nonprofit and community-based groups. This is a vital part of the hard work of managerial leadership on the ground. Laws should be in place so that such mechanisms will be established at the ‘get go’ with adequate financial support to maximize and coordinate the contributions of volunteer groups to help address both human and infrastructure needs.”

Nonprofit, community-based, and faith-based organizations are well-suited to help out in disaster response and recovery. They are flexible, they can adapt their missions, they can marshal resources, and they can get around stultifying paperwork. But even the most efficient, well-run, well-funded nonprofit group has a limited reach. For all of the work that the nonprofit sector has done and continues to do in the hurricane recovery effort, it is still more akin to a drop in the bucket rather than a giant wave.

The scale of the devastation is so vast in Louisiana and across the Mississippi Gulf Coast

that only government has the capacity to handle significant rebuilding. The role of the nonprofit sector was not meant to replace government as the primary driver of the recovery. Rather, it was to buttress the governmental response, to fill in the gaps. For the recovery to proceed in a timely and substantial way, government must take the lead while nonprofit, community-based, and faith-based organizations play a strong supporting role with their focus on the human element of any disaster.

This report is part of an ongoing research project being conducted jointly by the Rockefeller Institute and PAR with the help of a grant from the Ford Foundation. In addition, the John C. Stennis Institute of Government at Mississippi State University and the Center for Urban Planning and Policy Assessment at Jackson State University are partnering in the research network for this project, as are researchers affiliated with Louisiana State University, the Southern University Law Center, and McNeese State University. The Advisory Committee for the project is chaired by former Mississippi Gov. William F. Winter.

The report is available online at [www.rockinst.org/gulfgov](http://www.rockinst.org/gulfgov) or [www.la-par.org](http://www.la-par.org).

Previous reports also available online include: [\*GulfGov Reports: One Year Later\*](#)

[\*GulfGov Reports: A Year and a Half after Katrina and Rita, an Uneven Recovery\*](#)

[\*GulfGov Reports: Education. An Examination of the Impact of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita\*](#)

[\*GulfGov Reports: Spending Federal Disaster Aid. Comparing the Process and Priorities in Louisiana and Mississippi in the Wake of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita\*](#)

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