

# POWER AMIDST CHAOS

FOUNDATION SUPPORT FOR ADVOCACY RELATED TO DISASTERS



A publication of Alliance for Justice in partnership with Louisiana Disaster Recovery Foundation and Foundation for the Mid South



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photos courtesy of Craig Morse

## About the Author

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Before the hurricane and levee breaches, Dr. Usdin worked for local and national foundations as a program development and evaluation consultant. In addition, she has taught courses for the South Central Public Health Leadership Institute, the Centers for Disease Control, and Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine.

Dr. Usdin served as the lead strategic planner for a citywide violence prevention initiative in New Orleans, and has facilitated planning processes for groups such as the National Network of Public Health Institutes, the Louisiana Public Health Institute, and Montefiore Medical Center in the Bronx.

Dr. Usdin has a B.A. from Duke University, a Master's Degree in Public Health from the University of California at Berkeley and a DrPH from Tulane School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine. The focus of her academic work has been on the planning and evaluation of community development and change initiatives.

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## Preface

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For more than 20 years, Alliance for Justice has encouraged nonprofits and foundations across the country to engage in advocacy.

We believe that playing an active role in the formation of public policy is essential if these groups are to accomplish their goals. By ensuring that individuals on the margins have input into the decisionmaking process, and encouraging leaders to bring fresh ideas and research to the table, lasting improvements can be made.

The very real importance of advocacy was brought home to us when Hurricanes Katrina and Rita hit the Gulf Coast. In the aftermath of the storms, we saw that local nonprofits and residents were largely absent when crucial policy decisions were being made, leaving many victims voiceless in the process.

Without effective advocacy, especially on the part of those hardest hit by the storms, too much money was squandered on inefficient and ultimately ineffective government policies. We strongly believe that local organizations are best suited to shape policies that will direct the restoration process in the Gulf Coast for years to come, and we want to ensure that they have the capacity to be heard.

Funders should heed the lessons described in this report, lessons gleaned from the major challenges that foundations faced as they funded public policy efforts, as well as from their successes. Funders should also pay special attention to the principles contained in this report. Only by preparing *now* can better decisions be made later.

**It is important to note that *Power Amidst Chaos: Foundation Support for Advocacy Related to Disasters* is not—and does not pretend to be—a comprehensive look at all of the advocacy funding strategies and work done following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.** Instead, this monograph highlights several foundations' work during hurricane recovery, drawing these examples from the many organizations and individuals who have provided funding, expertise, or staff to address advocacy issues in the aftermath of the 2005 disasters. Unfortunately, it is impossible to give credit to all who have given so much to the Gulf Coast over the last two years in these pages, but that attention and support continue to be greatly appreciated.

*Power Amidst Chaos* was written for Alliance for Justice by Linda Usdin, a New Orleans native and edited by Holly Yeager, a freelance writer based in Washington, DC, and Alliance for Justice staff Liz Towne, Director of Advocacy Programs, Susan Hoechstetter, Foundation Advocacy Director, and Abby Levine, Senior Counsel. Sairah Saeed, Law Fellow, Kyle Murphy, Program Associate, and Sarah Stanley, Intern, provided invaluable assistance in the editing and production of this report.

This report was produced as part of Alliance for Justice's Foundation Advocacy Initiative, which seeks to increase foundation support for nonprofit involvement in the policymaking process by providing legal information to help foundations navigate the laws governing their ability to support and engage in advocacy activities. It was directly supported through the generous support of **Foundation for the Mid South** and **Louisiana Disaster Recovery Foundation**. We are grateful for their valuable contribution to this important work and would also like to thank **Louisiana Association of Nonprofit Organizations** for its thoughtful input and assistance in the production of this report. We also would like to thank the many individuals who participated in the formation of this publication, far too many to name individually.

Sincerely,



Nan Aron, President

*I hope that there will never be another disaster in this country of the scope of the 2005 hurricanes that hit the Gulf Coast, but unfortunately, there will be others. The Foundation for the Mid South is working to make sure that nonprofits have stronger, more persuasive voices on behalf of marginalized residents and communities. This case example of philanthropy's response to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita stresses the importance of supporting advocacy both during times of normalcy and crisis, and provides information and reflections specifically designed for grantmakers.*

**Ivey Allen, Foundation for the Mid South**

*This is a story that had to be told. The recovery from hurricanes Katrina and Rita was hampered by a nonprofit and philanthropic culture in the Gulf Coast that, for the most part, didn't encourage organizations to influence public officials on housing, economic, education, health, and other policy issues important to their constituents and communities. Those affected by the hurricanes are still suffering from not having their voices heard as loudly as needed at policymaking tables. And, we, as grantmakers throughout the country, have to heed the lessons of this reality, and help build the capacity of nonprofits so that they can represent their constituencies quickly and effectively after future disasters—and we need to do it now.*

**KC Burton, Louisiana Disaster Recovery Fund**

*The hurricanes of 2005 taught us that local and national nonprofits, churches, faith-based groups and foundations have to work together **now** to strengthen organizations' abilities to influence federal, state, and local laws before and after the next disaster. That is certainly a priority for nonprofit groups in Louisiana. I hope that, by reading this report, the nonprofit sector comes to realize how critical our groups are and how much more they can do to help obtain fair policies that affect people's housing, health, finances, and all aspects of their lives following a disaster and in the lengthy rebuilding.*

**Melissa Flournoy, Louisiana Association of Nonprofit Organizations**

## **POWER AMIDST CHAOS:**

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### **Foundation Support for Advocacy Related to Disasters**

It may not be well recognized, but funding advocacy after a disaster is critical. It was the most important thing foundations did for our communities after Hurricane Andrew hit South Florida. After viewing the aftermaths of Katrina and Rita, it was clear to me that supporting advocacy would be particularly important on the Gulf Coast.

*Ruth Shack, president of Dade Community Foundation, at the 2007 Council on Foundations Annual Conference*

### **Introduction**

More than two years after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, the harrowing images of victims stranded on rooftops and abandoned in the Superdome may have begun to fade. But the signs of the storms' devastation are still all too present, and the recovery is far from complete. While rebuilding has taken hold in some areas and a few neighborhoods show signs of life, others are quiet, still strewn with rubble, their former occupants still far from their homes.

We now have an opportunity to analyze the failures that led to this misery, failures at all levels of government, among most of the major safety net organizations that were designed to help during disasters, and in the rebuilding processes that have brought such uneven progress toward recovery. It is also a moment to consider the successes, and to develop advocacy strategies to address the systemic problems that contribute to communities' vulnerabilities—vulnerabilities that were on display along the Gulf Coast before, during, and after the hurricanes.

Foundations responded in many ways after the 2005 disasters. Using just a fraction of those efforts as examples, this paper reviews challenges, strategies, and principles related to supporting advocacy work in disasters. This monograph provides a guide for foundations to evaluate their grantmaking practices and community involvement, and to assess how they can help communities become better prepared before disasters strike, and better able to respond after they do.

A key role of nonprofits is to monitor government, business, and other institutions in order to ensure that people whose lives are affected by decisions—particularly those who operate on the margins and lack the resources to speak for themselves—are considered by policymakers. No longer can we afford for federal and local governments to make decisions in a vacuum. Those affected must be involved in the decisionmaking process.

Foundations and other grantmakers must work with local nonprofits and other community groups in every part of the country to help establish strong institutions that understand the full range of advocacy strategies—lobbying and influencing the legislative process, organizing, voter engagement, systems reform, and more—and know how to use those strategies to make these voices heard.

Advocacy and public policy work should not be seen as daunting by nonprofits, but as essential tools to help organizations fulfill their charitable missions. Advocacy can take many forms, from meeting with editorial boards to lobbying government officials. It may also include community organizing; voter education and engagement efforts; developing and nurturing community leadership; conducting needs assessments and polling; researching key issues and potential solutions; developing plans to reform systems; and otherwise speaking out for the needs of an organization's members, constituents, clients, or others. Most importantly, advocacy allows for the collection and dissemination of community voices, provides a way for ordinary people to get involved and shape their neighborhoods and cities, and allows them to express their approval of or dissatisfaction with government policies—and push for change.

When the hurricanes hit the Gulf Coast, the provision of direct services such as food, clothing, shelter, medical care, and buses for evacuation was critical. But crucial public policy questions were quickly in play. The effect those policy decisions had on the rescue and recovery work that followed underscores the importance of advocacy during a disaster. How would the poor, elderly, and disabled be evacuated? Where would the evacuees go? What about pets? What should the city do for those who did not leave? Which communities would be the first to rebuild? What protections would be in place for the workers? What engineering standards would be required for rebuilding the levees?

The policy issues are endless, from decisions that should have been made before the storms hit shore to new concerns that are arising two years later. The Washington Post reported in July 2007 that the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) had ignored warnings about increased levels of carcinogenic formaldehyde gas in FEMA trailers—the same trailers given to those who lost their homes in the storms.<sup>1</sup>

Congress is investigating, but community pressure is needed to ensure appropriate safety measures are taken; the government is held accountable for its dangerous decisions and inaction; and medical care is provided for those who need it.

The situation poignantly illustrates the need for strong nonprofit advocates, supported by engaged and well-informed foundations. Rather than seeing advocacy as a specific activity or purpose of only certain groups, many organizations should integrate advocacy into their work. Until organizations embrace their role as community change makers, the decisionmakers will continue to ignore the wants and needs of communities. But nonprofits cannot wait until the next crisis hits to build their advocacy capacity, and foundations cannot wait for the next disaster to help strengthen nonprofit organizations' ability to influence public policy on behalf of the disadvantaged and less influential.

This monograph begins by identifying ten principles that foundations should use to ensure that a range of public voices can effectively influence the decisionmaking process before, during and after disasters. The next section examines the need for private foundations, community foundations and other local philanthropists to fund advocacy and advocacy capacity-building now, before the next disaster strikes. The report then describes effective ways for foundations to work with local groups to ensure that, in a time of disaster, the groups are able to amplify the voices of the poor, people of color, and others who are too often excluded from civil society. Finally, the monograph examines how, as foundations contemplate new priorities, they must be sure to build strong organizations that are able to continue their advocacy work long into the future.

The impact of the devastating hurricanes and levee breaches along the Gulf Coast, and the poor governmental leadership in response, should make us all pause. While the havoc wreaked cannot be undone, we must learn from it. This report is intended to serve just that purpose, and it challenges many foundations to reconsider their grantmaking philosophies and practices.

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<sup>1</sup> Spencer S. Hsu, "FEMA Suppressed Health Warnings for Workers, Katrina Victims," *The Washington Post*, 19 July 2007.

# Principles For Foundation Support Of Effective Disaster-Related Advocacy

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## 1. Foundations need to invest in building and strengthening advocacy capacity of all organizations now.

The most common complaint from funders after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita hit was that local nonprofits had limited capacity for public policy advocacy. Foundations can address that challenge by making multi-year grants and general support grants, and by providing capacity-building grants, particularly those targeted to building advocacy programs and support.

Involvement with advocacy cannot wait until disaster strikes. Even before the hurricanes hit, immediate decisions were being made (or should have been made) about how to evacuate residents, allocate funds, and begin clean-up. Nonprofits need to be at the table from the very beginning and those with established relationships with policymakers will always have an advantage. Advocacy comes into play immediately. It cannot wait until after meals are served, medical wounds treated, and homes rented; it cannot be seen as secondary in importance to the provision of services. After all, advocacy affects how services are provided, by whom, and how much they cost.

## 2. Foundations need to develop their own advocacy capacity.

The more knowledgeable and sophisticated a foundation is about advocacy, the more effective its grantmaking decisions will be. Local and community foundations should have at least one staff person with experience in advocacy who is responsible for making advocacy grants and building the capacity of local groups to engage in public policy work. Other foundations should do the same, or utilize local intermediaries.

An effective advocacy staff can initiate constructive, tactical grantmaking and make purposeful use of all of a foundation's resources, including its reputation and voice. Grantees often value the provision of training and technical assistance (especially when they are provided in addition to their grant funds), and informed funders will be able to offer better resources and advice.



### **3. General support and other types of flexible funding are needed immediately after disasters.**

Foundations should provide general support grants—they allow grantees the maximum ability to respond to changing needs and potential and occurring crises.

In the wake of a disaster, foundations should consider modifying their priorities and practices to expedite the grantmaking process. In addition to providing general support grants, foundations should streamline their usual grantmaking proposal processes, allow existing grantees to deviate from grant proposals as to how they use the funds, and consider supporting different types of organizations, in broader issue areas, or in different geographic regions than they usually do.



### **4. Funding grassroots leadership development and community organizing efforts should be a priority.**

Effective advocacy work is often spurred by a small number of individuals who build a collective voice to support a community's interests and rights. This is particularly true in the wake of a disaster when nonprofit infrastructure and communications have been weakened. It is a time when new, as well as experienced, leaders and organizations emerge or strengthen their efforts to help their communities. Foundations should make special efforts to identify emerging leaders and organizations. With more resources, grassroots organizations can better represent people affected by disasters at the policymaking table.

### **5. Foundations must work with and through local organizations and people.**

Aiding, supporting, and rebuilding communities—whether along the Gulf Coast or elsewhere—obviously cannot be done by a foundation single-handedly. All funding and other decisions should be made by working with local funders, community-based organizations, and others familiar with the culture and priorities of the community. Building these relationships prior to disasters is advantageous.

Grantmakers may find it helpful to deploy staff to the area to work with local experts who can serve as their “eyes and ears” on the ground, build and strengthen local relationships, and provide better-informed recommendations on where funding or other resources are needed. Advocacy work must be founded upon local knowledge. Foundations can support increased coordination between

nonprofits as well as the alignment of national and regional advocacy organizations with credible local partners so that the intricacies of the needed advocacy work are accomplished.

Foundations should also take advantage of the opportunities that new and emerging groups present for increasing communities' nonprofit advocacy capacity, while continuing to support established organizations.

## **6. Foundations need to support grantees to make positive, systemic, and infrastructure changes in communities after a disaster.**

In large-scale disasters, every institution is impacted. The tendency may be to try to rebuild what was there, but these disasters also provide an opportunity for transformation of systems that have historically failed. Foundations can support convenings that identify best practices and the organizational planning work that will help transform the old systems. Foundation support for institutional re-visioning can lead to the development of an advocacy agenda that will be progressive rather than supporting the status quo.

## **7. Foundations need to think long-term.**

By every analysis, the recovery and transformation of most of the major systems in the Gulf Coast region require a five- to ten-year framework, a timeline typically beyond grantmakers' commitments. Foundation support is needed to help nonprofits with long-term rebuilding and renewal that is necessary for effective advocacy work.

The problems currently being addressed on the Gulf Coast were revealed and exacerbated through hurricanes and floods, but they have faced this region for many years. Foundations' earlier investments in the region could have helped make important changes long before 2005. Although the strategies and solutions may take many years as well, foundations should make a commitment to the long-term policies and programmatic work that is necessary.

## **8. Foundations should collaborate to hold government and businesses accountable.**

Coordinated actions by foundations could shape policy that has widespread effects. Billions of federal dollars for infrastructure repair were mired in red tape for almost two years due to the federal



government's selective enforcement of a regulation requiring a 10 percent local match.<sup>2</sup> Coordinated advocacy by foundations would bring a force to bear on federal decisions such as this one.

In addition, foundations can facilitate local government disaster planning, convene key players after a disaster to address relief work, and take other leadership roles.

**9. Grantmakers should recognize the critical role of government in disaster work by supporting and encouraging grantee engagement with the public sector.**

No matter how organized or well funded, the nonprofit sector can never supplant government or rebuild alone. Nonprofit organizations have to bring their constituents' voices to policymakers, legislators, representatives of the executive branch, and the courts. They must also facilitate open discussions of issues in election campaigns. Grantees' activities can include using power to leverage resources, monitoring government actions, and working collaboratively with government to find the best solutions to problems; sometimes they will do all three at the same time. Foundation support for these efforts is critical.

**10. Foundations need to have communication strategies in place, especially related to disaster planning and recovery.**

Communications come in various forms, including communication between a foundation and its grantees; between grantees and clients; among members or constituents; and with the government. Advocacy work clearly requires intense communications. Before a disaster, foundations should provide grants to enable grantees to develop a communications plan (including lists of staff and board members with alternative contact information, alternative places to store such lists, and priorities on what to communicate and with whom). In addition, foundations should know how to contact their grantees so they can check in and offer immediate help.

As policies are being developed, plans drawn, and decisions made, it is crucial for organizations to be able to communicate those with the public (including harder-to-reach people in rural areas and those who have been displaced) and to seek input. Decisions should not be made in a vacuum, and people need to be made aware of decisions and benefits that affect them.



<sup>2</sup> The Brookings Institution, "The Katrina Index, March 2007" [http://www.brookings.edu/metro/pubs/20070314\\_katrinaES.pdf](http://www.brookings.edu/metro/pubs/20070314_katrinaES.pdf)

## Vulnerability Before the Breaches

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Although the magnitude of the damage caused by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and the levee breaches that followed went far beyond the imagination, the uncoordinated response and slow progress on rebuilding should not have been surprising.

The U.S. Gulf Coast includes many states that are both traditionally under-recognized by national funders and the most desperately in need of support to combat the racism and poverty that leave large portions of the population vulnerable. The two states hardest hit by the 2005 hurricanes, Mississippi and Louisiana, had the worst and second worst poverty rates in the country.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the most unprotected and at risk in these states were disproportionately African American and thus exposed to the additional challenges of race and class bias.<sup>4</sup> Superimposed on this picture of vulnerability were structural weaknesses such as:

- limited funding for civic engagement and community organizing,
- underdeveloped and uncoordinated nonprofit and philanthropic entities,
- lack of a practiced or well-communicated disaster-preparedness strategy including an evacuation plan,
- environmental degradation leading to the disappearance of 25 miles of critical marshland buffer each year,<sup>5</sup>
- a dangerously insufficient levee system that was crippled by political corruption and long recognized as poorly designed and badly built.<sup>6</sup>

The nonprofits in the region had limited advocacy capacity before these devastating storms hit. Few in the nonprofit sector or among its funders made civic engagement and community organizing a high priority. In some sectors, such as the juvenile justice system, advocates were robust and had already spent years pressing for systemic change. In others, however, public policy was not high on the agenda.

Insufficient funding for public policy work made it difficult for advocates to make their case. As one national funder said, most philanthropy in the region paid little attention to social justice work. The funding priorities before the 2005 hurricanes greatly affected the post-disaster responses. Without an established and well-funded network of local organizations ready and able to represent the needs of the poor and disadvantaged, the communities on the Gulf Coast were at the mercy of the uncoordinated and unfocused government and large national organizations that often had differing priorities and concerns.

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<sup>3</sup> Isaac Shapiro and Arloc Sherman. "Essential Facts About the Victims of Hurricane Katrina." Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 19 September 2005. <<http://www.cbpp.org/9-19-05pov.htm>>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Juliet Eilperin, "Shrinking La. Coastline Contributes to Flooding," *The Washington Post*, 30 August 2005.

<sup>6</sup> State of Louisiana, Office of the Governor, "Governor Blanco appoints members to new Consolidated Levee Board; Turns to Attorney General to ensure board members meet new standards," Press release, 31 December 2006.

In the wake of the hurricanes, 90,000 square miles were affected and more than 500,000 homes were destroyed or damaged in Louisiana and Mississippi.<sup>7</sup> Nearly 6 million people lived in the areas hit hardest by Hurricane Katrina. Eighty percent of New Orleans was underwater, and, with the arrival of Hurricane Rita less than a month after Katrina, some parts of the city stayed that way for more than four weeks.<sup>8</sup> The local civil society—a thin layer of support before the storms—was itself decimated by the disasters. Many of the nonprofit and foundation leaders found themselves in the same situation as the populations with whom they worked.

This report examines the experience along the Gulf Coast, and should serve as a tool for foundations and nonprofits in other parts of the country as they consider changes in their approach to civic engagement. [See Appendix A]

How would a stronger network of advocacy-focused nonprofits have made a difference? Obviously, the hurricanes could not have been prevented. However, much of the flooding damage was caused by levee breaches—breaches that had been predicted yet ignored. Would a massive campaign by local organizations or neighborhood groups have led to pre-hurricane fixes? Even if not, what if the organizations worked with the City of New Orleans to staff, furnish, and stock adequate provisions in emergency shelters? Would that have prevented the horrors in the Superdome? We will never know, but questions such as these illustrate the vital need for local advocates.

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<sup>7</sup> Louisiana Recovery Authority, “Addressing the Challenges of Recovering and Rebuilding from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita: Overview of comparative damage from Hurricane Rita and Katrina,” 19 December 2005 <http://www.lra.louisiana.gov/assets/12212005.ppt> “

<sup>8</sup> Shapiro and Sherman, “Essential Facts About the Victims of Hurricane Katrina.”

## I. Local foundations should work now—before disaster strikes—to build a robust civic sector in their communities.

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Many local foundations have traditionally focused their work on charitable giving to cultural institutions such as opera companies and museums, schools of higher education, and services programs in their own communities. While these are important investments, funders should also work to build a local infrastructure that can support a civic sector able to advocate on behalf of the poor, people of color, and others who are often without a seat at the table when important decisions are made.

As the experience along the Gulf Coast illustrates, building nonprofits' advocacy capacity is best accomplished before emergencies hit. Planning for crisis response takes time and resources, and the groundwork for the intense collaboration that is needed when chaos ensues—having communications procedures set up, knowing the players and how to work together effectively—must be laid in advance. Ideally, local and community foundations should have at least one staff

person with experience in advocacy who is responsible for making advocacy grants and helping to build the capacity of local groups to engage in public policy work. And all staff should have advocacy goals in mind. National funders can either do the same or partner with local funders or other knowledgeable intermediaries.

To be effective, relationships must be built over time, within the community and with funders elsewhere. Without a good understanding of the local nonprofit community, many funders delayed in sending resources and support in the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

Such early work must place special emphasis on building a civic sector that can become a force for public-interest advocacy. Some grantmakers described Louisiana foundations and grantees' capacity for social justice advocacy work as 10-15 years behind organizations in the rest of the country. Marguerite Casey Foundation appropriated \$10 million to send to the affected areas but has only been able to grant less than half that amount so far because it has not found enough nonprofit groups that can do the advocacy work and handle the relatively large grants the foundation makes.<sup>9</sup>

## **Supporting Nonprofit Capacity**

Funding grassroots organizing groups and building their capacity is key. As Dave Beckwith, executive director of The Needmor Fund, explains, the goal of community organizing is to build power with which people can achieve their goals. After all, "Goals change over time, but the need to have power doesn't." A central objective should be to create sustainable organizations that have the flexibility and resources to address future challenges as they arise.

Several funders noted that well-established organizations were much better prepared to respond after the hurricanes. For instance, ACORN, the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now, whose community organizing and leadership development work had been funded by The Needmor Fund for years, was quickly able to adapt to new demands. In addition, it had a network of community leaders, including many from the devastated Lower Ninth Ward, already empowered and trained to speak up for their community. They knew they could "be something besides victims," and mobilized their neighbors to prevent the city from demolishing many of their homes.

For years, Needmor supported organizations in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama to help build a nonprofit and community infrastructure that could provide a voice to people in deep poverty and others who were too often not heard. This made it much easier to make quality grants during and right after the Gulf Coast crises. As Dave Beckwith said in a memo to the board, "Our intense focus on this region and the South has really paid off in the sense that the organizations [we currently fund] are deep, well led and powerful both in the impact areas and in the 'receiving communities'—so the voice of those directly affected is strong."<sup>10</sup> It is important that all foundations be able to make that claim in the future.

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<sup>9</sup> Cynthia Renfro, Marguerite Casey Foundation, Interview

<sup>10</sup> Memo from Dave Beckwith to Needmor Board

## Collaboration

The common grantmaking strategy of facilitating nonprofit collaborations is also challenging during a crisis and more effective before disaster hits. Since working together takes time, resources, patience, and judgment, foundation support for nonprofit collaboration is most effective when informed by the nonprofits themselves.

Before the hurricanes hit, the nonprofits of the Gulf Coast region were fragmented, as they are in many parts of the country. That fragmentation reduced their ability to respond effectively to constituent and community needs. But in the immediate aftermath of the hurricanes, many nonprofits were frustrated by a push from funders for greater collaboration. As Steve Bradberry, ACORN's lead organizer in Louisiana, explains, "At the time of disaster, some national foundations were calling for groups to form alliances—but at that time, people were dealing with issues of immediate survival. In the moments after emergencies, it was an inappropriate time to request that organizations refocus their energy away from the crises."

In the two years following the disasters, many of the nonprofits in the region have collaborated and developed ongoing means of communication and coordination. For example, Louisiana Association of Nonprofit Organizations (LANO) renovated a building that is used as Nonprofit Central in New Orleans and hosts weekly meetings for Unified Nonprofits of Greater New Orleans, a growing coalition of the city's nonprofit agencies. This group, which started in October 2005 as a support structure for nonprofit staff and board members returning to the city, now focuses on networking, highlighting new opportunities for nonprofits, and providing a forum for governmental agencies to meet with the nonprofit community.

The Twenty-First Century Foundation used a creative way to bring groups together and enhance their investments in the collaboration. Rather than fund one particular organization to convene a coalition, it sought out a range of leaders in Mississippi who invited others to participate in a nonprofit advocacy coalition. Because the foundation wanted leaders to come together as equal partners, it provided support for them to talk and decide what to work on and how to proceed. The Twenty-First Century Foundation funded Oxfam, which then regranted funds and provided technical assistance to the coalition members. The resulting Steps coalition of more than 30 groups was formed to work for affordable housing, civil rights, the environment, equitable economic assistance, and historic preservation. As Maya Wiley of the Center for Social Inclusion explains, "If you want groups to work together you have to build local leadership and get them involved in [developing] relationships with each other."

Disasters can eventually push nonprofits that have not coordinated in the past to look beyond historic differences or lack of familiarity and work together. Rather than wait until the chaotic period immediately following a disaster to spur this type of activity, foundations can support efforts now to build alliances that can be expanded upon as needed. Having pre-existing relationships makes connecting in an emergency that much easier.

## **Mapping**

International organizations have standard tools such as vulnerability mapping to immediately assess the needs of populations in a disaster. Emily Pelton, a longtime CARE International employee who worked most recently at Hands On Network (a national network of 56 volunteer agencies acting as entrepreneurial civic action centers), sees these tools as easily transferable and valuable for domestic crises. Ideally, maps should be developed before a crisis and quickly updated to direct relief workers to the most at-risk and sometimes most difficult-to-reach people.

Eight months after Hurricane Rita destroyed many rural communities in southwest Louisiana and eastern Texas, Bernadette Orr, manager of the Gulf Coast Recovery Program at Oxfam America, reported that staff was still going into rural communities that had neither been visited by a single relief organization nor received any funding for recovery from national foundations. Vulnerability mapping in the hands of advocates would have resulted in greater attention to these rural communities.

## **II. When disaster strikes, foundations should support local groups that are able to give voice to the poor, people of color, and other vulnerable populations—and make sure they are strong enough to be heard by decisionmakers.**

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**A**n old organizing slogan, “Nothing about us without us,” says it all. Plans should not be generated and implemented and decisions should not be made without the input of the affected people. After a disaster, foundations need to fund nonprofits (including local ones, or intermediaries that will fund or train local ones) to be at the policymaking table to represent the views and desires of various constituencies and community groups.

Meeting the immediate needs of Gulf Coast residents for rescue, food, temporary housing, and health care was critical. These needs were visible and easily understood, and the philanthropic community responded generously. But providing money, toiletries, food, clothes, volunteers, and other resources is one thing—assessing the needs, matching the resources to the needs, and fairly distributing the collected resources is another.

This challenge was compounded by the total devastation in the region, which left local nonprofits—the very groups that could have helped foundations strategize—reeling. The fragmented

and devastated nonprofit community, under-funded by national foundations before the storms, confronted severe obstacles in responding effectively to the increased demands it faced. Added to these difficulties were the tremendous decisionmaking challenges that accompany major disasters, including the absence of functioning communications channels, staff who are unable to work full-time and under intense personal stress, and the enormity of local needs.

Some foundations “gave all of their money upfront for relief and therefore cannot now give money to help communities deal with big picture issues that require influencing public policies,” says Ivey Allen, president of the Foundation for the Mid South. She says foundations need to be strategic in deciding how to help those affected, rather than acting on their first (albeit well-intentioned) impulses. In the future, Allen adds, “We have to figure out how to plan ahead for supporting different aspects and phases following a disaster and to stagger resources” among the different phases.

## **A Voice for the Vulnerable**

The disadvantaged are often the most difficult to reach in a disaster. Cynthia Renfro of Marguerite Casey Foundation tells of times following the hurricanes in Louisiana when the Red Cross and other groups tried to provide services but were barred by first responders from entering the hardest hit areas, where many of the poor lived. Sadly, these neglected communities were used to being treated badly—and had no structures in place to speak up for their needs.

In this and other ways, disasters can exacerbate the inequities that exist in society and further marginalize vulnerable communities. Alandra Washington, program director of philanthropy and volunteerism at the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, says: “One thing we learned about disaster funding, both after 9/11 and the Gulf Coast hurricanes, is that it is imperative to keep in the forefront a lens of racial, class, and gender equity in supporting the work of nonprofits working with those who experienced the disaster. Kellogg’s philanthropy and volunteerism funding focused on women, youth, and communities of color following the hurricanes in order to keep their voices, presence and perspectives in the recovery and rebuilding efforts.”

## **Accountability**

Accountability can easily disappear when simultaneous crises arise and clear lines of responsibility are erased. In New Orleans, the dispersal and disenfranchisement of large numbers of residents made the need for accountability even more pressing. Some renters who had fled the city found themselves evicted from their homes with little they could do about it from afar. Some decisionmakers saw the chaos as an opportunity to experiment and impose new restrictions that unfairly affected those with limited influence—at precisely the time they needed additional consideration.

For instance, in September, 2006, St. Bernard Parish Council passed an ordinance that prohibited owners of single-family residences from entering into rental arrangements with anyone except “blood relatives.” Owners and occupants who violated the ordinance were subject to fines and civil penalties. The ordinance described the need to “maintain the integrity and stability of established neighborhoods as centers of family values and activities.” However fair-housing activists

saw the rules as an attempt to maintain longstanding patterns of inequality. Since the affected properties had been virtually all white-owned, the blood-relative restriction would have drastically reduced access to housing for people of color in the parish.

Activists from Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Center sued the parish in US district court, demanding that it rescind the ordinance and citing federal Fair Housing Act prohibitions on housing ordinances that discriminate based on race, color, national origin, religion, gender, disability or familial composition. The Parish Council eventually amended the ordinance, removing the “blood relative” requirement and instead mandating that landlords acquire a “Permissive Use Permit” from the St. Bernard Parish Council before renting or leasing property.<sup>11</sup>

## **Voter Mobilization**

Less than a year after the hurricanes hit, the residents of New Orleans needed to elect a mayor and other local officials. Funders such as Carnegie Corporation of New York recognized the hurdles that residents and those who still had not returned home would face, including finding the proper polling places and getting to the city to vote, and funded groups to mobilize displaced voters for the 2006 elections.<sup>12</sup> Without these get-out-the-vote efforts, including chartering buses to bring displaced residents back to New Orleans, many of the poor would have become further disenfranchised.

## **The Importance of Being Close to the Ground**

In the wake of the storms, several foundations sent representatives to the scene. In addition to providing support to organizations in the region, this local presence gave funders direct access to the people affected by the storms and valuable information as they made decisions concerning the many requests they received. Other foundations relied on local grantmakers to act as intermediaries. Without such close-to-the-ground information, many other foundations waited for a comfort level that prevented assistance from getting to the region at the most critical time.

Bill Quigley, Director of the Law Clinic and the Gillis Long Poverty Law Center at Loyola University in New Orleans, highlights the importance of “having boots on the ground.” Local knowledge and familiarity with the community “helps not only in making sure that smaller voices are being heard but also gives foundations information needed to identify and align with credible local partners.”

While having boots on the ground is important, it is also important to make sure they are the right boots. Derrick Johnson, state president of the Mississippi State Conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (Mississippi NAACP), says that too many foundations “relied on individuals from the Northeast who were not familiar with the landscape or the culture in Louisiana or Mississippi. We need people who understand our history, different cultures and peoples.” Foundations need to be sensitive to this when sending staff, consultants, and even volunteers to disaster sites.

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<sup>11</sup> State of Louisiana, St Bernards Parish, “Official Proceedings of the Council of the Parish of St. Bernard,” Page 9, 19 December 2006. <http://www.sbpj.net/12-19-06minutes.doc>

<sup>12</sup> Robert Rackleff, “Voters of Hurricane Katrina,” Carnegie Reporter, Vo. 4/No. 2, Spring 2007.

Effectual grantmaking is not an easy task. Ensuring that limited resources will be spent most efficiently for the community good requires research. Cynthia Renfro of Marguerite Casey Foundation says that after the hurricanes, all funders who chose to make relief and recovery grants on the Gulf Coast should have asked locals which nonprofits would best spend the money to benefit the communities and local residents. Not all funders asked such important questions.

## **The Need for Flexibility, Quick Action and General Support**

In many ways, foundations are being challenged to overcome long-established funding practices and biases.

Several foundations, including The Twenty-First Century Foundation, Ms. Foundation for Women, the Ford Foundation, Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation, and Marguerite Casey Foundation freed up general support grants, shortened grant terms, and partnered with local community foundations to distribute emergency relief. This immediate access to funds allowed the local organizations to locate staff and clients, and, in some cases, to reestablish offices entirely. These organizational needs could not wait for a foundation's next grantmaking cycle.

Ms. Foundation for Women (Ms. Foundation) devised an innovative and simple approach to help alleviate some of the burden and responsibilities imposed on already-stretched nonprofits. To speed money to the region, the foundation suspended its usual grantmaking processes after the hurricanes. Instead of requiring potential grantees to draft proposals, a Ms. Foundation program officer interviewed prospective grantees by telephone and then drafted requests, which were emailed to grantees for verification and clarification. Without this procedural shortcut, the local groups would likely not have been able to stop their immediate work long enough to write formal proposals. At the same time, Ms. Foundation obtained information needed to make well-informed and legally permissible grants. This is an easily replicable idea, and it garnered great interest from other foundations when described at a 2007 Council on Foundations conference workshop.

Some foundations quickly put their money into a common fund. "Within organized philanthropy, collaborative funds offers an easy and cost-efficient way that foundations may participate meaningfully in the response to a disaster without the need to create new program areas or add staff," according to Annie Ducmanis, Gulf Coast Fund project manager for Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors. The Gulf Coast Fund for Community Renewal and Ecological Health is a collaborative fund created in September 2005 and housed at Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors. The Fund was formed during an emergency conference call in the weeks after Hurricane Katrina, when funders active in several affinity groups—organizations of foundations focusing on similar interests—realized that the magnitude of this disaster was much bigger than any one foundation could address alone. They also understood that in order for grant dollars to be used most effectively, it would be necessary to bring in the expertise of the communities most affected by the hurricane. "Working with an advisory group of two dozen community leaders with deep knowledge and expertise about the needs of the region, the Fund has developed an effective and efficient means to distribute resources. It supports grassroots and community-based organizations with a diverse set of constituencies. Advocacy and organizing work is a priority because without these efforts many communities would be left out of the recovery process," says Ducmanis.

The hurricanes and levee breaches also put pressure on funders to shake free of their typical grantmaking comfort zones and make grants to organizations that might not have looked like their usual grantees but were playing essential roles in recovery. Prior to the storms, some funders tended to give money only for specific issues or constituencies and for prescribed grantmaking periods; other foundations never gave multiple-year grants. In response to the immense need, some foundations shelved these usual practices and began funding multi-issue, multi-tiered organizations or intermediaries that did the same. Those foundations knew that solving big problems like homelessness or unemployment cannot be viewed or funded in a vacuum. Those issues are related to childcare, education, transportation, healthcare, and so many others. Only by tackling the larger societal issues can significant change be made in any smaller problem.

As The Needmor Fund discovered early on, “Groups [in the Gulf Coast] say they most need flexible money to speak, to organize, to hold the rescue/relocation/recovery/rebuilding process accountable to those most in need.” Wisely, many funders increased their general support to organizations following the hurricanes. For example, Ford, Annie E. Casey, Charles Stewart Mott, Foundation for the Mid South, F.B. Heron, and O.P. & W.E. Edwards foundations have provided general support for Louisiana Disaster Recovery Foundation (LDRF) that has been used in part for policy work and the foundation’s emergent Equity and Inclusion Campaign to promote affordable housing and community development [see Appendix B for more information on the campaign]. General support funding is a strategy that every foundation should implement.

Since the 2005 disasters, the Greater New Orleans Foundation (GNOF) has been working to reinvent itself. Prior to the hurricanes, it was constrained by the high percentage of funds that could be dispersed only according to donors’ wishes (often called “restricted funds” or “donor-advised funds”). After the disasters, GNOF was able to raise more unrestricted funds, giving it greater freedom to decide how and where to allocate resources. Such flexibility has allowed it to choose to work with the New Orleans city government as a major partner in developing the Unified New Orleans Plan (UNOP). It is also developing a \$25 million community revitalization fund for work on land use, housing, and tax policies. This has been possible because the Rockefeller and Ford foundations recognized the importance of supporting and strengthening community foundations in places like New Orleans and Mobile, Alabama, that could direct funds and other resources, including their own staffs, to support the equitable rebuilding of their communities.

The Rockefeller Foundation took an unusually active and visible role in ensuring that New Orleans residents and neighborhood organizations had input into the unified plan. It provided more than half of the \$7.5 million needed for the process. “Two or three people at Rockefeller who are advocates for risk-taking and get-right-in-the-mix strategies saw an opportunity and saw UNOP as something that the city really needed. They thought that it would have a huge impact,” explains Carey Shea, The Rockefeller Foundation representative who moved to New Orleans to staff the project.

Over the course of the UNOP, 54 neighborhood meetings and three community-wide congresses were held. Approximately 5,000 residents (both in New Orleans and the diaspora) provided input into the plan, which has now become one of the key elements in the city’s rebuilding process. Reflecting on The Rockefeller Foundation’s leadership role, which marked an unusual degree of foundation involvement in a government process, Shea says: “It is important that [leaders at the foundation] had a high level of tolerance for criticism from outside and were willing to take

a courageous and sometimes controversial stance. They saw this as a way to ensure that poor and vulnerable people would be heard.” And people did take part. As Patricia Jones of Neighborhood Empowerment Network Association (NENA) left a community congress held as part of UNOP, she commented that there probably was not a city in the United States that had so many residents trained in community planning.

## **The Emergence of New Voices**

The enormous demand for services and the need for community representation in decisionmaking that followed the 2005 hurricanes prompted many individuals and nonprofit organizations that had not previously represented their communities to begin to play an advocacy role. At the same time, new nonprofit groups sprang up to address the region’s changing needs. For example, tens of thousands of new Hispanic residents (estimates vary from 10,000–100,000) have gone to the New Orleans area to work since Katrina and Rita struck. A new organization called Puentes New Orleans—“Bridges, New Orleans,” in English—was recently launched to help Hispanic residents deal with their new surroundings.

Emerging advocates often did not appear on foundations’ radar screens. In a report on leadership capacity and needs after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, Maya Wiley explains that after the 2005 storm season, “New and often younger leadership emerged to form new institutions or simply to work externally to an existing institution.”<sup>13</sup> Examples include Saving Our Selves, based in Atlanta, Coastal Women for Change in Mississippi, Moving Forward Gulf Coast, Inc., in Slidell, Louisiana, and, in New Orleans, New Orleans Network, Peoples Organizing Committee, and others. Importantly, the majority of this new leadership appears to be women of color, often under forty years of age, who bring to the process new styles and innovative approaches.

Several funders recognized the importance of community organizing as a way to empower local residents and allow their voices and opinions to be heard. LDRF, with support from the Ford Foundation, has been involved in helping organizing groups (both neighborhood-based and nationally aligned) enhance their policy advocacy clout. LDRF funded organizing groups such as All Congregations Together and The Jeremiah Group to advocate for the “right to return” policy as an essential principle in the New Orleans recovery planning.<sup>14</sup> It also provides flexible funding to support the participation of residents and displaced residents in the rebuilding planning processes and the capacity-building of the organizing groups.

## **Reliance on Multiple Strategies**

In dealing with any large policy issue, whether in the aftermath of a crisis or not, multiple advocacy strategies should be used.

Along the Gulf Coast, foundations undertook research that not only provided crucial information for local advocacy work but also built the capacities of local organizations and partnerships between

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<sup>13</sup> Maya Wiley, The Center for Social Inclusion, “Triumph Over Tragedy: Leadership, Capacity and Needs in Arkansas, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana and Mississippi After Hurricanes Katrina and Rita,” August 2007.

<sup>14</sup> The right to return is defined as ensuring that families displaced by the storms have both immediate and long-term rights and economic incentives to return to the Gulf Coast region.

national and local groups. In 2006, the Ford Foundation contracted with The Rockefeller Institute of Government in partnership with Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana to track the flow of governmental funds related to rebuilding.<sup>15</sup>

Funders also recognized the importance of providing legal services to immigrants, displaced residents and workers, and others. “As with most disasters, Katrina produced immediate needs for emergency shelter, food, ice—but pretty quickly people need legal assistance,” says Martha Bergmark, president and CEO of the Mississippi Center for Justice. “Fortunately for us, the JEHT Foundation recognized this and made it possible for us to have a presence on the coast within days after the storm”—support for her group leveraged additional funding from the AARP Foundation, Ford Foundation and others. The Ford Foundation also supported the Advancement Project, which filed suit to stop the eviction of rental tenants and otherwise helped residents navigate public housing, insurance, and other processes.

“Katrina was a major setback in states whose legal aid capacity was already severely under-resourced,” explains Bergmark. “Lawyers from outside the region continue to be generous in volunteering their time to help, but the local infrastructure has to be in place to say ‘yes’ to these offers. Our regular, free legal clinics attract a continuing flow of the hurricane’s most vulnerable survivors. They need help navigating FEMA and state housing assistance programs, dealing with insurers and fraudulent home repair contractors, clearing title to property to secure eligibility for assistance, and forestalling home foreclosures.”

In the absence of flexibility and openness to new kinds of funding, important needs risk being ignored and problems exacerbated. Perhaps the mental health issues that are surfacing so vividly now could have been mitigated with earlier attention. “The best thing that we [national funders] could have done first would have been to get mental health resources there for the people,” says Linetta Gilbert of the Ford Foundation.

In addition to funding advocacy to directly improve the quality of life and civic engagement on the Gulf Coast, Open Society Institute looked at the larger issues underlying the crises—the disparity between rich and poor, white, black, and brown. From the days right after Hurricane Katrina hit, OSI said the storm “has made clear that as a nation we must confront the effects of racism and inequality exposed by the flood waters.”<sup>16</sup> Acting on that, it provided a series of grants to investigative journalists and photographers around the country “to promote a national conversation on racism and inequality in America” related to the Gulf Coast communities.<sup>17</sup> The grantees were charged with reporting on critical issues including the delivery of health services after the hurricanes and the related role of economic disparities, the challenges of people living in poverty in the affected areas, the impact of the disasters on African Americans, FEMA inadequacies, the response of insurance companies to the disasters and the government’s inability to ensure that policyholders were treated fairly, and the impact of the post-disaster influx of immigrant labor. Foundations, through their flexibility and capability to innovate, have the power to continue the much-needed discussion about inequality long after the nightly news coverage turns its focus to

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<sup>15</sup> See the State University of New York’s Rockefeller Institute of Government website at [http://www.rockinst.org/research/disaster\\_homeland/default.aspx?id=292](http://www.rockinst.org/research/disaster_homeland/default.aspx?id=292). Also see the Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana website at <http://www.la-par.org/>.

<sup>16</sup> Open Society Institute, News & Announcements, “OSI Statement on Hurricane Katrina,” 9 September 2005.

<sup>17</sup> Open Society Institute, News & Announcements, “One Year After Gulf Storm,” 31 Media Grants Awarded to Support Coverage of Race and Class in America,” 29 June 2006.

another disaster. They should not minimize their ability to set the agenda and encourage in-depth conversations about serious issues.

In some cases, the storms put new energy behind long-running calls for change. Juvenile justice system advocates had well-developed advocacy capacity but could not bring about substantive change before the storms. But by being proactive, Juvenile Justice Project of Louisiana (JJPL) took advantage of the opportunity provided by the disasters. As David Utter, director of JJPL, remarks, “In the last year and a half, we have been able to achieve 90% of the changes that we have been working for during the previous 10 years.” After New Orleans flooded, JJPL’s major funders, including JEHT, Annie E. Casey, Marguerite Casey, and Ford foundations, released existing funds and provided JJPL with discretion on how to spend them. JJPL used the money to reunite youth in the juvenile justice system with their families, reform the parish’s juvenile justice policies, reform critical aspects of the city’s criminal justice system, and encourage the development of alternatives to incarceration rather than simply rebuilding Orleans Parish’s juvenile detention facilities.

According to Utter, “By March 1, 2006, New Orleans Juvenile Court began a strategic planning process to develop a plan to rebuild the entire Orleans Parish juvenile justice system—detention, court processing, prosecution and indigent defense—based on national best practices, research and proven models.” After lobbying by JPPL, the City Council in 2006 appropriated funds for two detention alternatives (an evening reporting center and an emergency shelter), a juvenile defender conflict panel, and best practices training for system stakeholders and members of the community.

## **A Role for National Groups**

The number of national organizations working in the Gulf Coast region has surged since the hurricanes hit. Many of these groups realize the importance of local partners and have worked to identify them. National organizations have often been able to provide strategic frameworks to support local nonprofits that are newly engaged in advocacy. Where this has been most effective, groups have made commitments to a long-term presence in the region.

PolicyLink, National Low-Income Housing Coalition and the Washington, DC-based Center on Budget and Policy Priorities have effectively supported Louisiana Housing Alliance and local housing advocates during their efforts to navigate the state legislative process. Furthermore, while the government was focused on assisting homeowners, other groups such as Technical Assistance Collaborative and National Alliance to End Homelessness mobilized new foundation support for local advocates working to provide rental housing for low-income and vulnerable special-needs populations.

Nationally based assistance, though, is best when it is guided by local knowledge and leadership. Lorna Bourg, executive director of Southern Mutual Help Association, proposes a “down-to-the-closest-local-community” distribution of resources that would allow national organizations to respond in a more timely manner. Funding may come from around the country, but it would be used by those who understand the real needs and players—“entities [that] have community social capital

and intelligence to quickly determine who was impacted and to what extent.”<sup>18</sup> This desire and need for local decisionmaking cannot be understated. Several effective national funders that were active after the hurricanes understood that the local groups and people wanted partners, not charity.

Accessing national funding is not always easy. According to a 2006 analysis from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, only 9% of national post-Katrina funding went to Louisiana-based organizations and only 4% to Mississippi-based organizations.<sup>19</sup> Pre-existing relationships are usually essential in making connections and finding possible funding sources. Melissa Flournoy, CEO of LANO, tells of the call she received from Rob Collier, president and CEO of Council of Michigan Foundations (CMF). “On the Friday before Katrina, Rob was in New Orleans to speak at a philanthropy initiative LANO organized to share his expertise about the benefits of creating a regional association of grantmakers. When Rob called the week following Katrina, he asked how he could help direct foundations to invest with nonprofits on the ground in Louisiana. Rob was instrumental in encouraging foundations to move quickly and invest with local nonprofits doing the important work. This early response—magnet money—gave nonprofits the courage to go out and get other money and begin the long journey back.”

One result of the LANO/CMF relationship was a telephone call from Rob Collier to Steelcase Foundation, which then provided start-up money for Unified Nonprofits of Greater New Orleans. The New Orleans group has since developed a nonprofit disaster response plan, trained nonprofits in effective advocacy, and developed a common pool of technical assistants to help organizations rebuild.

The networking between the two state associations—LANO and CMF—and foundations that were willing to reach out to new grantees based on recommendations of trusted colleagues gave a critical boost to many smaller nonprofits in crisis that did not have national contacts.

There are also examples of local organizations along the Gulf Coast that have benefited from alliances with new national funders. The Initiative for Regional and Community Transformation (IRCT) at Rutgers University and the LDRF published a series of *policy papers* on the first anniversary of Hurricane Katrina with first-time support from national foundations, including the Ford Foundation.<sup>20</sup> The LDRF used the papers to build its credibility and influence, and organized meetings with legislators to develop more equitable housing policies in the state. As a result of its work, senior citizens on fixed incomes, renters, and people with disabilities who were left out of initial plans from the governor’s office for the use of community development block grant funds were included in the next phase of plans.

Other national alliances and funding collaboratives have leveraged foundation grants by working together. Gulf Coast Funders for Equity, led by The Twenty-First Century Foundation and Oxfam America, is a coalition dedicated to supporting nonprofit organizing and other types of advocacy and ensuring that all residents and other stakeholders, particularly those with the least access to resources, participate in shaping and implementing the rebuilding efforts. “We recognize that there’s a lot of power in organized money,” says Rev H. Vaughn, The Twenty-First Century Foundation program director and Gulf Coast Funders for Equity co-chair. “Gulf Coast Funders for

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<sup>18</sup> Lorna Bourg, Statement to the U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pension., Washington DC. 7 March 2006. [http://help.senate.gov/Hearings/2006\\_03\\_07/Bourg.pdf](http://help.senate.gov/Hearings/2006_03_07/Bourg.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, “Gulf Coast Non-Profits: Landscape Analysis and Needs Assessment,” 31 August 2006.

<sup>20</sup> [http://louisianahelp.org/publications/LDRF\\_policypapers.pdf](http://louisianahelp.org/publications/LDRF_policypapers.pdf)

Equity is a vehicle for organizing ourselves as funders, mobilizing that power and that voice to work side by side with our grantees to demand equity in the rebuilding of the Gulf Coast.” Members of this network meet regularly to share information, identify opportunities for cooperative funding, and encourage other funders to make support for systemic change in the affected regions a priority. They have developed principles for sustaining advocacy in the Gulf Coast and are in the process of developing a technical assistance and support fund for new and non-traditional groups.

While local (and in some cases, regional) groups are vital in bringing forward the needs of local constituencies, national and regional groups can play an important role besides providing funding. Policy work can be frustrating for grassroots groups with limited resources for advocacy and limited experience with other levels of government. For instance, a group could spend time developing a local approach for an issue that would best be served by a statewide strategy. National or regional groups can use their familiarity with state and federal government rules and systems to strengthen local groups’ effectiveness. Mississippi NAACP was supported by several national organizations as it crafted its position on housing issues before the state legislature. In many instances, foundation support of training and technical assistance can help a local group decide for itself what policies it wants to pursue and the best strategies—and targets—for doing so.

Foundations can also assist in the development, compilation and distribution of proven tools that can help the most at-risk communities or sectors in a community, such as the elderly or those with special needs, to receive critical early assistance. Tools that were especially useful post-hurricanes include: websites and blogs to enhance communication and participation by constituents, especially young people; instant feedback tools such as those used by AmericaSpeaks, which instantaneously records participants’ voting choices in town halls and other forums; and mapping systems that are now widely available and do not require sophisticated technological knowledge to operate. These can all assist in the amplification of community voices heard by policymakers.

### **III. Foundations should build for the long term, leaving behind strong organizations that are able to advocate on behalf of the vulnerable long after a disaster.**

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The passage of time—and the slow progress toward recovery—have brought new challenges along the Gulf Coast. The immediate disarray following the storms has been replaced with frustration and exhaustion. People who live and work in the affected communities are overwhelmed with bureaucratic failures that have prevented even the most basic rebuilding.

They are constantly forced to try new strategies to combat seemingly intransigent dilemmas, such as how to increase the availability of low-income housing to allow displaced people to return to their communities, and how to provide basic healthcare services to counter the provider exodus that followed the hurricanes. Other essential services, such as childcare, are also wanting, and the demand for mental health services is deep.

In many respects, the despair and inequality along the Gulf Coast developed over years and decades, not just with the arrival of the storms, and they will not be resolved overnight or within a short grantmaking cycle. The array of critical work that remains to be done—returning people to their homes, reconnecting families, and rebuilding the crucial elements of daily life—makes it essential that the voices of those affected be heard now and long into the future.

The 2005 hurricanes have also brought new opportunities for change. Many public systems are being overhauled, including the critical re-visioning and recreating of the state levee boards, the Orleans Parish Assessor's Office, and the public education system. With strong advocacy capacity, such moments can become an occasion to transform ineffective or corrupt systems. But organizations can only take advantage of these opportunities if they are nimble, proactive, forward-thinking, and have the capacity to make the most of the situation.

Local advocates know they face a long-term challenge. Martha Bergmark of the Mississippi Center for Justice explains, "We have to ... be able to maintain a level of staffing that allows us to continue pro bono assistance for individual legal problems and also work on systemic advocacy for years to come."

But there is already concern about funder fatigue. Some foundations that quickly and easily made grants in the immediate aftermath of the hurricanes are now struggling in the second or third rounds of funding with determining the extent of their special commitment to the region, evaluating both how much to provide and how long to remain involved in the area. Some funders, explains Chris Crothers of the Foundation for the Mid South, gave grants quickly but grew anxious when they did not see change happen right away. Long-term funding commitments, often leveraged with additional monies, are necessary to have any real effect.

There are also signs of fatigue among non-profit leaders. In an attempt to address this "burn-out," LDRE, with support from the Needmor Fund, Twenty-First Century Foundation, Ms. Foundation, and the Edward W. Hazen Foundation, has implemented the Louisiana Organizers Renewal Award. The award allows organizing leaders to take much-needed sabbaticals for rest, respite, and renewal in the midst of their intense commitments—in many cases to rebuild their personal lives, their homes, and their communities.

Some grantmakers have recognized the need to leave behind a civil society infrastructure that is able to play an advocacy role in crucial public policy debates. As Linetta Gilbert of the Ford Foundation says, advocacy grantmaking on the Gulf Coast after the hurricanes "for us was about leaving organizations in place that can address the inequities and can bring about change." National funders can also take advantage of a new willingness among local groups to work together. Partnerships and collaborations take time and constant reinforcement, and foundations must be willing to follow through over time. Without such external aid, the collaboration or partnership could falter easily.

Soon after the hurricanes, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation promoted civic engagement in Mississippi, supporting meetings at which citizens brainstormed and provided recommendations to city and state government. Two years after the storms, the foundation awarded a large grant to The Gulf Coast Business Council to help renovate a building for use by nonprofit organizations and pay for technical assistance, training and outreach programs in Biloxi, Mississippi. "Now, in 2007, it's necessary to help nourish and strengthen the nonprofit sector so that they can give voice to community needs and serve the communities as well as possible," according to Adele C. Lyons, Knight Foundation program director in Biloxi. "It's been great that a synergy has been created among the groups temporarily housed together since a few months after the hurricanes in the old Harrah's Corp. [building]. Providing permanent, adequate housing will build upon that synergy."

## Conclusion

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Immediately following the 2005 disasters, the Gulf Coast received an avalanche of support from foundations, individuals, corporations, government, and others. The most pressing early needs of nonprofits working in the region were to provide emergency services and resources, coordinate volunteer support on the ground, and facilitate broad input on immediate policy decisions. These needs changed as time passed, however, and the focus shifted to long-term recovery and permanent rebuilding, and an array of associated public policy questions. The desire to tackle some of the historic problems that have afflicted vulnerable communities—problems that were exacerbated by the hurricanes—is strong and should be continued.

The experience along the Gulf Coast has created an environment that is more supportive of public policy work and systemic change. More and more people realize that they must be active in their communities to address complex problems. As Cynthia Renfro of Marguerite Casey Foundation says, nonprofits “now know why they cannot *not* be in the room.” Rather than dismissing the importance of advocacy or thinking it is the role of some other organization, more nonprofits now understand it is their responsibility.

Victories such as the successful fight to restructure the New Orleans Levee Boards, the overhaul of the Orleans Parish juvenile justice system, Mississippi NAACP’s housing work, and the widespread participation in UNOP have created a changed atmosphere for advocacy work in the Gulf Coast region. In most cases, successes were supported by foundations that were willing to implement new funding strategies, such as providing flexible organizational support and recognizing the changing needs of communities in disasters.

But the work in the region is far from complete. Two years after the 2005 hurricanes and levee breaches, the Gulf Coast continues to wait for federal funds and for the promised rebuilding boom. To date, FEMA has allocated \$6.3 billion to Louisiana for the rebuilding of essential infrastructure, but as of July 20, 2007, only 42% of this amount, or \$2.6 billion, had reached Louisiana communities.<sup>21</sup> Thus, with many decisions still to be made and the continuing failure of decisionmakers to respond to local concerns, the need for foundation support remains strong.

Several challenges posed by the 2005 hurricanes have implications for future disasters. The philanthropic sector can play a pivotal role in addressing these challenges by working collaboratively to support nonprofits’ coordinated strategies and action plans for disaster response and recovery. Change can happen, but it requires foundations to reconsider some basic philanthropic principles, such as the length of support and the types of organizations considered suitable for funding. Without a self-review by the philanthropic sector and coordinated action between foundations, future disasters are likely to be met with some of the same failures that are still plaguing the Gulf Coast today.

The philanthropic sector could play a catalytic role by supporting emerging leadership and increasing the policy advocacy capacity that is needed to make fundamental movement toward the equitable rebuilding of this region—and essential disaster preparations for the nation.

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<sup>21</sup> For more on federal spending for the Gulf Coast, see testimony of Donald E. Powell, Federal Coordinator of Gulf Coast Rebuilding, before the U.S. House Committee on the Budget, 2 August 2007, at [http://budget.house.gov/hearings/2007/8.02dhs\\_testimony.pdf](http://budget.house.gov/hearings/2007/8.02dhs_testimony.pdf) (from *The New Orleans Index*, Second Anniversary Edition, at [www.gnadc.org](http://www.gnadc.org)).

## Appendix A

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### Private and Public Foundations May Fund Charities that Lobby

501(c)(3) public charities may legally participate in the policymaking process. Although prohibited from supporting or opposing candidates for public office and limited as to the amount of lobbying they do, public charities may engage in an unlimited amount of all other types of advocacy. Both private and public foundations may even support public charities that engage in advocacy work, including lobbying.

**Private foundations** may support public charities that lobby, but they must follow specific rules. Most importantly, the grant may not be “earmarked” for lobbying, as earmarked funds create a taxable expenditure to the foundation. A grant is considered earmarked for lobbying if it is conditioned upon an oral or written agreement that the grant be used for lobbying purposes. The prohibition on earmarking does not mean that private foundations must require grantees to refrain from using grant funds for lobbying; in fact, a grant agreement that forbids use of the funds for lobbying is unnecessarily restrictive.

Under federal tax law, private foundations may make two types of grants that avoid creating taxable expenditures—general support and specific project grants—while permitting grantees flexibility in the use of their funds. A general support grant is not earmarked for a particular purpose and specifically is not earmarked to be used in an attempt to influence legislation. The public charity may use the grant funds for any purpose, including lobbying. If the grantee uses the money for lobbying, the private foundation will not incur a taxable expenditure.

Private foundations may also fund specific projects, even those that include lobbying. When making a specific project grant, the private foundation must review the grantee’s project budget and may give a grant in an amount up to the non-lobbying portion of the budget. The public charity must use the grant funds only for the specific project. If these conditions are met, the private foundation will not incur a taxable expenditure, even if the grantee subsequently uses some of the grant money for lobbying under the designated project.

**Public foundations**, such as community foundations, may earmark funds for lobbying; however, earmarked grants will count against the public foundation’s lobbying limit. Generally, such earmarked grants will be double counted—against the lobbying limits of both the public foundation and the public charity.

Both private and public foundations may fund without restriction charitable activities that do not fall within the federal tax law definitions of lobbying. Private foundations are subject to additional restrictions on funding voter registration drives.

## Appendix B

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### **Gulf Coast Groups Act to Hold Federal Leaders Accountable**

In June 2007, Louisiana Disaster and Recovery Foundation (LDRF) launched its Campaign for Equity and Inclusion.

This Campaign is a cross-sector strategic action campaign aimed at federal policymakers that seeks to energize and sustain a national dialogue on equity and inclusion. The Campaign's mission is to advocate for the right of return to communities of opportunity, employing the principles of equitable development to uplift the poor, the elderly, and communities of color in the Gulf.

The Campaign is action-oriented and geared towards long-term progress, particularly via sustained relationships with local communities essential to Gulf redevelopment. Public-private cooperation is essential. The Campaign endeavors to engender a) widespread constituent participation and political advocacy and b) legislative accountability to realize three main goals:

1. To sustainably redress systemic socio-economic inequities that were exposed in the Gulf Coast by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.
2. To ensure reasonable and equitable preparation for future disasters such that no individual faces disproportionate risk due to race, ethnicity, gender, class, age or disability.
3. To pursue adequate protections and opportunities for disadvantaged communities that lack their fair share of the material and political resources necessary for effective disaster mitigation or recovery strategies.

[The] emphasis is on shaping the policy agenda at the federal level in four interdependent issue areas central to Gulf Coast equity and development: infrastructure, housing and economic development, human capital services and education.

*Excerpted from the framing paper for The Louisiana Disaster Recovery Foundation's Equity & Inclusion Campaign, written Leigh Graham, June 2007, [http://www.3592.com/onlinedb/ldrfrp/pics/LDRF\\_EI\\_Campaign\\_Framing\\_Paper\\_5.30.07.pdf](http://www.3592.com/onlinedb/ldrfrp/pics/LDRF_EI_Campaign_Framing_Paper_5.30.07.pdf)*







