



## **Hurricane Katrina 10 Years Later: Lessons Learned**

By Bob Ottenhoff, President and CEO, Center for Disaster Philanthropy

It looked like something out of a Hollywood movie: major portions of the city of New Orleans underwater. Beyond the city were incredible scenes of devastation along the central Gulf Coast from Louisiana to Alabama.

While it may have looked like a movie scene, it was a painful reality. And it happened 10 years ago this month when Hurricane Katrina roared ashore and the levees failed.

The numbers from Katrina are staggering: nearly 2,000 killed, hundreds of thousands of people in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama displaced, and more than \$100 billion in damage. Katrina turned out to be one of the worst natural disasters in American history.

New Orleans is a city at higher risk for natural disaster. Sitting on the Gulf Coast, much of it's land below sea level, it's highly vulnerable to tropical storms and flooding.

But it's vulnerability is not unique. All across the country, there are communities that face higher risks: coastal communities; cities and towns located in flood prone areas or along fault lines; and cities with large populations to serve in a disaster.

These communities need to implement the lessons learned the hard way after Katrina. In fact, ALL communities should prepare for potential disasters. But those that know they are at greater risk need to take action.

Nonprofits, whether global or national relief organizations, foundations, or local service providers, can play a large role to make that happen.

**Advance planning and preparation.** Communities need to have a response plan in place before a disaster. Nonprofits can play a role in that planning, encouraging community leaders to take the risk seriously and working with them to develop an effective plan.

Nonprofits need a plan for themselves too. How will they respond when a disaster strikes? How will they handle an influx of donations or volunteers? If they are a service provider in a stricken city, how will they make sure any interruption of service is as limited as possible?

**The need for resilient communities.** A crucial part of planning for disasters is ensuring that physical infrastructure and support systems, such as civic and faith organizations, can withstand or bounce back from a disaster and be used in the recovery process.

Again, this is an area where nonprofits can work with communities to build more resilience. Nonprofits also need to make themselves more resilient, ensuring that their physical plants and functional systems can be of maximum help during disaster recovery.

**Donations need to be used effectively for full recovery.** When a disaster strikes, nonprofits are often flooded with money, donations, and volunteers. But those often dry up once attention focuses elsewhere. Mid- and long-term recovery needs then go unmet due to lack of resources.

Nonprofits that fund relief should recognize the importance of funding for full recovery after a disaster, not just the immediate need. Funders should anticipate what will happen over the next few years after the disaster and provide resources to meet those needs.

Katrina was the impetus for the founding of the Center for Disaster Philanthropy, a 365-day-a-year resource for private philanthropy for disaster recovery. Today, the philanthropy community is making great strides to be more effective in shortening the disaster recovery period.

Hurricane Katrina was an immense tragedy not just for New Orleans and the gulf coast but the entire nation. But it gave us an opportunity to learn how to prepare for and recover from the next major disaster to strike. And it will only be a matter of time before that happens.

Find out more about the Center for Disaster Philanthropy at [www.disasterphilanthropy.org](http://www.disasterphilanthropy.org).

<http://www.thenonproffitimes.com/news-articles/10-years-later-lessons-learned-from-hurricane-katrina/>