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**Disaster Recovery & Resilience Toolkit**  
**September 11, 2017**

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**Introduction**

The Greater New Orleans region has extensive experience in recovering from the devastating effects of natural and man-made events. In an effort to share our knowledge, Greater New Orleans, Inc. (GNO, Inc.) has created a streamlined resource document that can be used by governments, nonprofits, economic development organizations, and community groups -- during the immediate, short-, and long-term recovery process.

These recommendations were compiled by GNO, Inc., but represent the significant expertise of many individuals who were critical to the recovery of the region and state following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005, many of whom have worked on previous and subsequent recovery efforts, including 9/11 and Hurricane Sandy. **These individuals are listed at the end of this document and can make themselves available to answer your questions, based on their experience and expertise.**

**Key Steps Following the Emergency**

- Encourage ALL individuals and businesses to sign up for Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and Small Business Administration (SBA) assistance: In addition to providing much needed assistance to those impacted, *the amount of FEMA assistance to individuals impacts the region's formula to receive Disaster Hazard Mitigation Grant funds and also supports a Congressional ask for additional rebuilding funding.*
- Individuals should register at the [Disaster Assistance Improvement Program](#): The goal of the Disaster Assistance Improvement Program is to improve survivor access to disaster information and make applying for disaster assistance easier. FEMA, under the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), acts as the managing partner. The site allows you to find disaster assistance that meets individual needs, learn more about the 70 forms of assistance from 17 federal agencies, apply and determine status for disaster assistance and reduce applications required, identify a FEMA Disaster Recovery Center, locate a hotel or temporary place to live, find food and nutrition programs, apply for a change of address, and learn more about SBA loans for homeowners, renters, and businesses.
- Small businesses and homeowners can access [Disaster Loan Assistance](#) from the SBA. There is no special designation for nonprofit organizations. All nonprofit organizations should register as small businesses.
- U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation Corporate Citizenship Center - National Disaster Help Desk – the help desk supports existing systems and communications between chambers, businesses, non-profits, local/state/federal governments and fills gaps when needed. When the Disaster Help Desk (**888-MY-BIZ-HELP**) is activated during a disaster, it also helps to coordinate any US Chamber national corporate donors into the area.

**Jump Starting the Recovery Process**

Local governments, philanthropy, and NGOs must understand and follow the government money and assistance available for recovery from this particular disaster and identify the resources available to meet their own needs, within that framework. Separately, in terms of assisting others, they should identify opportunities for supplementing or filling gaps in assistance among the public resources. Key early action items are as follows:

- Activate [FEMA Public Assistance Program](#):
  - Work closely with FEMA on Public Assistance assessments



- Encourage ALL individuals and businesses to sign up for FEMA and SBA assistance
- Partner with FEMA to provide technical and case management assistance to homeowners seeking short-term rental or “shelter in place” assistance as they rebuild their homes.
- Work with FEMA and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Systems Administration (SAMSHA) to establish a crisis counseling program to support impacted residents as they come to terms with loss of homes and belongings. This FEMA-funded program can also assist first responders, case managers, and other front line response and recovery workers deal with the emotional crisis. A model is [Louisiana Spirit](#) which is activated following disasters in Louisiana.
- Apply to FEMA for the [Disaster Case Management program](#) to support long-term case management. This program supports families and individuals living in temporary housing as they move through the process to securing permanent housing.
- Establish a data sharing agreement with FEMA and other federal agencies upfront to help track damage assessment information and Individual Assistance data on individuals. This is critical in keeping track of individual situations and needs for intermediate, short- and long-term recovery. ([Templates are available](#))
- Relative to multiple assets that can be rebuilt using FEMA “Public Assistance” grants (all streets; public buildings; schools; etc.), streamline project approvals and maximize awarded monies by consolidating, where feasible, those assets into integrated design and construction plans using FEMA’s “alternate procedures” track. Hire a qualified firm to assist with the related negotiations.
- Ensure that local hazard mitigation plans are compliant with applicable federal regulations to assure that FEMA hazard mitigation grant funding can be allocated.
- Stand up [Disaster Unemployment Assistance](#) and [Disaster Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program](#)
- Review procurements for keeping within federal guidelines to avoid conflicts with federal partners including FEMA, Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), US Department of Transportation (USDOT), Health and Human Services (DHHS), Department of Education (DOE), etc.
  - Activate pre-positioned contracts
  - Trigger emergency procurements for debris removal, waste removal, immediate repairs and rebuilding
  - Assess the degree to which existing local procurement and other contracting laws will either expedite or hinder the use of public resources for local infrastructure and/or community redevelopment programming.
- Conduct preliminary damage assessments of housing, business conditions, infrastructure, emergency services, and public services. Focus on vulnerable neighborhoods and populations to identify outstanding needs.
- Develop economic impact and damage projections to support requests for funding.
- Work with Congressional delegation to coordinate on federal resource requests.
- Identify the state agency that will be charged with developing your State’s action plan by which to receive any appropriated HUD Community Development Block Grants (CDBG-DR) funding and help shape both the action plan as well as housing, commercial, and infrastructure programs through which the state would award CDBG-DR to local governments.
- Establish regular coordination meetings/calls with state and local agencies, social services, and community organizations to assess needs and deliver services.
- Review codes and ordinances to remove any hindrances to effective and efficient rebuilding.
- Increase support to permitting divisions to handle increased volume of permit needs.
- Consider suspending property tax and fees to lessen burden on those rebuilding.
- Prioritize standing up critical infrastructure and public services and critical social services.
- Begin planning for temporary services i.e. getting schools back up and running, hospitals, etc.
- Transition from shelters to temporary housing.
- Develop disaster housing plan (or activate existing options).
  - Work with realtors, landlords, public housing authority, and others to determine location of safe and sanitary vacant units.
  - Establish a voluntary buyout program or another process to deal with vacant properties that are left by people who are not able to return.
- Connect with local businesses to determine impacts but also to integrate them into response and recovery efforts as



- Develop working groups with state and local governments to help shape CDBG-DR funded housing, commercial, and infrastructure initiatives.
- Include local agency leadership, business stakeholders, civic leaders, housing experts, economic development, infrastructure, environmental, coastal, and impacted residents in planning efforts.
- Coordinate with the local bar association to procure pro bono attorney services to assist small businesses with SBA loans, homeowners and non-profits with FEMA emergency assistance applications, and all of the above with insurance claim procedures.
- Coordinate with regional and local financial institutions to identify lending flexibility and support that might be created to leverage any state and/or federal recovery resources available for residential and commercial redevelopment.
- Identify community-based organizations that have the capacity to implement various aspects of recovery, for example: [SPB](#), which has already deployed to Texas.

### ***Working with Volunteers and Philanthropy***

- Coordinate volunteer efforts at state and local level working with local community services or faith-based organizations. Mobilize an organized volunteer sign-up process and connect people to relief and rebuilding. Sample of Louisiana Program is [Volunteer Louisiana](#).
- Assess the timelines for distribution of public resources and gaps in service or other limits attendant to SBA, FEMA, and HUD recovery funding and identify private program and partnership opportunities to supplement those resources or otherwise provide direct support that those sources cannot ably provide. Work with local and national philanthropic organizations to establish immediate funds to:
  - Establish a relief fund ([here](#) or [here](#)) to accept immediate donations and get resources to those in need.
  - Support community services and faith-based organizations providing immediate needs support to individuals and families.
  - Support mental health providers to give crisis counseling and longer-term mental health services to victims, children, and first responders.
  - Establish an employer assistance program for employees' immediate needs.
  - Set up free legal assistance services to assist homeowners and renters navigate ownership and rental issues.
  - Support small business recovery and entrepreneurship.
  - Develop economic development strategies for recovery.
  - Support innovation of new approaches for rebuilding and creating long-term resilience.
  - Support volunteer mobilization efforts.
  - Support community planning and program development that will be pursued incident to the State and its local governmental partners creating the HUD CDBG-DR action plan and related implementation. Voluntary buy-out programs, commercial revitalization, and household and small business flood proofing are examples of initiatives in which philanthropic funding could be used to directly leverage public funding.
  - Support and enable technical and financial assistance partners that are positioned to directly help small businesses and households seeking rebuilding assistance as well as serve as program administrators of any CDBG-DR funded programs.

### ***Communication of Information***

- Establish a Communications Plan
  - Set clear expectations on timelines and FEMA process.
  - Work closely with press and social media outlets to keep information flow to the public.
  - Activate social networks - formal and informal to share information.
- Create and update [resource guides](#) that are relevant to various audiences
- For businesses, determine potential audiences for [crisis communications plans](#). This could include: survivors impacted by the incident, customers, employees and their families, news media, community, company management, government officials, and suppliers.
- Use plain language for all outreach documents and alerts and ensure they are translated into multiple languages.



Consider ways to communicate, such as radio announcements, with people who cannot read or who do not have access to the internet or print media.

- Utilize community-based organizations that understand their communities for outreach, conducting needs assessments, conducting intake for and/or implementing various disaster recovery programs.
- Communicate locally and nationally about ways in which individuals and institutions can donate resources, e.g. [Hurricane Harvey Updates](#).

### **Small Businesses**

- Create resource guides for small businesses making them aware of resources and strategies for recovery:
  - [Small Business Resource Guide](#) created in 2006 for post-Katrina recovery
  - [Post-Disaster Business Recovery Guide](#) created in 2012 for post Sandy recovery
- Ensure that small business assistance programs are part of the State's action plan for federal assistance.
- Provide technical and resource assistance to small businesses applying for disaster SBA loans.
- Create grant, loan, and technical assistance programs to catalyze small business recovery (using CDBG-DR and/or private philanthropy).
- Utilize (and fund) [Small Business Development Centers](#) (funded by SBA) to provide technical assistance to small businesses.
- Assist local small businesses in accessing contracts relating to the recovery and rebuilding.
- Support small business assistance programs.

### **Housing**

- Assess damage and impacts to residences: rental and homeownership.
- Create two paths for homeowners wishing to rebuild: rehab and new construction.
- Identify qualified nonprofit housing organizations, legal services organizations, construction managers, housing finance specialists, etc. to provide technical assistance/case management.
- Create a large, flexible, quick-decision loan fund for property owners who can move quickly to rebuild and have identified take-out funds i.e. insurance, govt. subsidies. Leverage banks and philanthropy to create this funds; government sources are not suitable.
- Pair homeowners with a technical assistance/case management team.
- Assist homeowners with title and other document organization relative to filing insurance claims and/or applying for any direct CDBG-DR housing rebuilding assistance.
- If there are parts of the community that may not be rebuilt, secure land in a safe building location and build homes quickly that can be "swapped" for properties in the unsafe areas.
- Federal and state programs for "elevation" are complicated and require special funding streams that must be put into place early in the disaster.
- Rental programs are critical yet not often addressed in disaster recovery plans, yet rental housing is often key to ensuring employees return to the affected area. Key considerations include: 1) the need to develop new rental units (on the assumption that the displaced renters will be able to return if supply increases) and 2) a focus on helping small business owners (landlords) that operate affordable rental housing that was damaged in the event. Local leadership should work with FEMA on collecting detailed information on homeowner and rental housing.
- Assist state and local government with post-FEMA longer term rental placements.

### **Marketing, Tourism and Business Development**

- *Get in front of the narrative* – It is critical to provide data and information that conveys a true picture (literally) of the event. If you do not do this, the media will do it for you, to your own detriment. For example, following Hurricane Katrina, images of the devastated Lower 9<sup>th</sup> Ward became the de facto images for all of New Orleans. Even though the iconic neighborhoods like the French Quarter were not greatly damaged, everyone thought "Bourbon Street was under water."
- *Communicate with Your Stakeholders* – The simple fact that you communicate with your members, partners,



associations, key consultants, etc. will demonstrate that you are in control, and are still in business (or will soon be back). Also, for those in distress, the communication will be reassuring. Silence after a disaster is deafening.

- *Find the Silver Lining* – It is a somewhat uncomfortable, but historically true fact, that disasters are cash flow positive events. While money can never compensate for the suffering and loss, it is an extraordinary opportunity to invest in the physical and organizational changes that would have otherwise been impossible. For example, the historic turn-around of the New Orleans schools (now 100% charter) would not have happened absent Katrina.
- *When You are Ready, Get Boots on the Ground* – The best way to demonstrate the progress of the rebuilding effort is to bring in key opinion-makers for physical tours. When these people can see/touch/feel the recovery, they will become evangelists for it. The cumulative effect of multiple tours for key stakeholders is an army of positive spokespeople.

### **Building Long Term Resilience**

- Facilitate organization and/or meetings of neighborhood associations in partnership with local government as means to structuring public input and involvement in long-term recovery action plan and program development and implementation. Examples of citywide and regional planning initiatives include: [Louisiana Speaks](#) and The Unified New Orleans Plan.
- Business leadership can be early organizers of recovery plans: [Bring New Orleans Back Plan](#).
- Facilitate long-term land use planning processes and help shape sustainable housing and commercial incentive programs that build on initial recovery funded efforts.
- Establish a [recovery](#) fund for longer-term rebuilding investments addressing underlying community challenges that make your region vulnerable to disaster.
- Consider innovative ways to reduce flooding and “live with water” (as do the Dutch): [Greater New Orleans Urban Water Plan](#).
- Build resilience to disasters and urban shocks on multiple levels: [Resilient New Orleans](#).
- Build coastal resilience and flood protection: [Louisiana Coastal Master Plan](#).
- Learn from past disasters: [After Great Disasters: An In-depth Analysis of How Six Countries Managed Community Recovery](#).

### **Action Plans for Federal Funding (CDBG-DR) after Major Disasters**

- [Louisiana](#): Katrina/Rita; Isaac; Gustav/Ike; Great Floods of 2016
- Hurricane Sandy
  - a. [New York](#)
  - b. [New York City](#)
  - c. [New Jersey](#)
  - d. [Connecticut](#)

### **Important Legislation and Waivers Enabling Smart Rebuilding**

- [Legislative waivers for CDBG from Katrina Rita and Sandy](#)
- Legislative waivers for HUD from Katrina, Rita, and Sandy (hyperlink to come)
- [Stafford Act Amendments from 2007](#)
- [Staff Act Amendments – Hurricane Sandy](#)

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