The Hurricane Fund for the Elderly: Engaging Philanthropy After a Disaster

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Overview

- Review the impact of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita on older adults;
- Describe an effort to engage philanthropy in meeting the needs of older adults affected by a disaster;
- Discuss the challenges and opportunities for engaging philanthropy after a natural disaster.
Hurricanes Katrina & Rita Devastated Older Adults

- 5 million people over 60 lived in US Gulf States in 2005;
- 700,000 older adults left their residences during the storms;
- Geographic area affected equals the size of Great Britain.
- Low-income states hit hardest:
  - Mississippi
  - Louisiana
  - Alabama
Older Adults Disproportionately Affected

- Older adults comprised 15% of New Orleans’ population but accounted for 70% of the total who died (1,836).
- Half of those who died were over 75.
- 70% of New Orleans nursing homes were not evacuated.
- 20% of the victims were recovered in nursing homes and hospitals.
- 30,000 elderly were evacuated from facilities and transported to 19 different states.
Hurricane Fund for the Elderly (HFE): From Concept to Impact

- Federal Administration on Aging asked the country to respond to the needs of older adults in the Gulf States;
- GIA, with the support of The Atlantic Philanthropies and Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, established the HFE.
Mission: 
Hurricane Fund for the Elderly

The Hurricane Fund for the Elderly will provide support to organizations in Alabama, Louisiana and Mississippi that are giving exemplary leadership to the building, rebuilding and sustaining of communities in which older adults have the opportunity to serve and be served.
HFE Implementation Steps:

2. Established fund parameters.
3. Conducted a needs assessment.
4. Issued a Call for Proposals.
5. Evaluated proposals.
6. Engaged funders in supporting specific projects or contributing to general funds.
7. Awarded grants/Monitored grant progress/performance.
8. Issued three Call for Proposals over two years.
Conducting a quick needs assessment

- Talked with seniors in the affected area;
- Contacted human service agency leaders;
- Talked with line workers in the aging service network; and
- Reviewed reports, media coverage and available data from before, during and after the storms.
What Happened to Older Adults After the Hurricane
Older Adults Need for Assistance

• People who have never sought assistance, now desperate.
• Communities lost capacity to provide services.
• Low income states had poorly funded social services.
• Budget cuts prevalent due to impacted tax base.
• No infusion of federal money into aging services.
Problem Areas Targeted by HFE:

1. Barriers to planning for older adult needs.
2. Lack of disaster preparedness in region.
3. Desperate need for health care.
4. Need for housing.
5. Lack of aging services workforce.
6. Unmet needs in mental health services.
HFE Played Many Roles

- Served as catalyst to raise awareness about the needs of older adults;
- Stimulated creative thinking;
- Engaged funding partners;
- Served as match-maker between philanthropy and agencies;
- Emerged as one of the few philanthropic efforts to focus specifically on older adults in the Gulf States.
Hurricane Fund for the Elderly
Raised $4.8 million

• 17 projects in Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama;
• Disaster preparedness initiatives;
• Case management;
• Policy and advocacy work;
• Housing;
• Legal services;
• Capacity building for older adult services.
Funding Partners

• The Atlantic Philanthropies
• The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
• The Woods Charitable Trust
• The Retirement Research Foundation
• United Jewish Appeal - Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York, Inc
• AARP Foundation
• United Jewish Communities
• The Jewish Federation Council of Greater Los Angeles
• Lower Pearl River Valley Foundation
• New York Community Trust
• The Hartford Foundation
Challenges to Engaging Philanthropy in a Disaster

- Unplanned events – timing;
- Outside funders’ traditional geographic interests;
- Lack of community contacts to vet projects/staff;
- Confusion about government’s role in rebuilding;
- Overcoming a pervasive sense of hopelessness;
- Generating interest in “old news”;
- Need to create easy application process;
- Challenges for local organizations to submit proposals
Engaging Philanthropy After a Disaster

• Philanthropy has a key role to play in helping older adults recover.
• Older adults need advocates.
• Vetting projects and local capacity to use funds effectively needs to happen quickly.
For more information on the
Hurricane Fund for the Elderly

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