

## Hurricane Irma: What Funders Should Know Webinar Summary

On September 14, 2017, the [Center for Disaster Philanthropy](#) hosted the webinar, “Hurricane Irma: What Funders Should Know.” Co-sponsored with CDP partners, the [Council of Foundations](#) and the [Southeastern Council of Foundations](#), and moderated by Vice-President **Regine Webster**, the webinar provided on-the-ground assessments and recommendations for effective disaster giving from a panel of experts, including:

- **Robert McFalls**, President and CEO, [Florida Philanthropic Network](#)
- **Rebecca Mandelman**, Vice President for Strategy and Engagement, [Miami Foundation](#)
- **Sherry Magill**, President, [Jessie Ball duPont Fund](#)
- **Liz Gibson**, Individual Assistance and Voluntary Agency Liaison Section Chief at [FEMA](#)
- **Cathy Howard**, Section Chief, CAPALAC (Central Asia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Latin America , Caribbean, and Ukraine) Coordination and Response Division, [UN OCHA](#)

Reporting on the current situation in Florida, **Gibson** noted that the rivers would be cresting soon, allowing an opportunity to assess impacts of flooding throughout the state. At present:

- 10,000+ people are in shelters;
- 29 fatalities;
- FEMA is attempting to consolidate shelters, providing temporary shelter assistance at hotels and on-site wrap-around services;
- Special needs of elderly are prioritized;
- Schools are beginning to re-open;
- Feeding and bulk distribution are launching, as blocked roads are cleared by the Department of Transportation.

**Gibson** was pleased to share that FEMA benefitted from lessons learned in Hurricanes Katrina and Sandy, and changes to the [Stafford Act](#), allowing for a faster and more efficient response. Challenges remain in deploying staff of varying skills and delays due to continued high water levels, transportation difficulties, and spotty communication.

**Howard** described the situation in the Caribbean, where there has been significant impact on 1.2 million people across 11 islands. Irma is the most significant storm to date, but Howard reminded the audience that hurricane season is not yet over, with 6-8 weeks remaining. She reported:

- 15,000 people still need emergency shelter, although Puerto Rico is recovering more quickly with only 180 people sheltered;
- Antigua and Barbuda are most damaged of all islands, with 100% of the structures of Barbuda damaged, rendering it uninhabitable and the entire population evacuated;
- Major impact to agricultural lands, in addition to structures and infrastructure;
- 25 fatalities, which may rise;
- Cuba experienced most damage since 1924, on the coast and interior, with 3 million people without access to water and power and significant damage to agricultural lands and schools;
- US Virgin Islands have just been able to receive aid, due to debris on airstrip and harbor, and very limited power. Tents and other alternative shelters will begin arriving today.

The large territory presents logistical challenges, but lessons learned from damage to Haiti in Hurricane Matthew have increased preparedness, in part through an early warning system. The UN Office of Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (OCHA) will go live tomorrow with a 3-month critical response plan that viewers can access at [unocha.org](http://unocha.org), with additional information available in news from a high-level event at the United Nations in New York City on Friday, September 15, featuring the impact of Irma.

Both **Gibson** and **Howard** shared concerns for public health as 3 million people were currently without potable water and the nutritional needs of babies and children need to be addressed. The Department of Health and Human Services is shipping vaccines to Puerto Rico and to the US Virgin Islands. Technical support teams from the United Nations are attempting to coordinate relief across governments and agencies linked to various territories. To ensure that donations are getting to those outside mainland United States in need during this chaotic and fast moving disaster, large reputable international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) with donation regulations and established codes of conduct were named by Howard as the “go-to” recipients for donations

The Florida-based philanthropic representatives shared the personal and institutional impact that Irma’s water and wind had landed on them and their communities, along with the creeping exhaustion that is now evident in first responders and evacuees.

**McFalls’** expertise built on response to 8 natural disasters has resulted in his belief that there is “no wrong door” for assistance, and donors of all types should make contributions to trusted organizations for a recovery effort that will take years. The Florida Philanthropic Network has already had one joint call with its members, agreeing to shift funds from less impacted areas to those with greater need. The [FPN website](#) has a list of all recovery funds in the state. Given his extensive experience with services for the elderly, and with 1-in-5 persons in Florida over the age of 65, McFalls recommended particular attention be paid to the needs of older adults. Door-to-door deliveries of ice, water, cooling equipment and nutritional meals, as well as human contact for those who did not evacuate or who are stranded without power are all needed.

**Magill** recommended that funders coordinate their efforts to launch a single recovery assistance fund for their service areas, whose grants may be jointly determined by multiple philanthropic organizations. Prior experience suggested that these types of funds be designed in advance so that they can be “stood up” prior to the actual disaster event. In addition, Magill suggested that funds move to nonprofits that can serve individuals, primarily smaller local organizations who may be current grantees and are reputable actors in the community. Funders may add benefit to disaster recovery by serving as a source of community information for municipal and county office holders.

**Mandelman** reported on the establishment of [three funds by the Miami Foundation](#): one for Caribbean relief developed in partnership with leaders of the Diaspora community living in Miami; another focusing on vulnerable populations in Miami and Dade County; and a third that will fund organizations working on-the-ground. As the Foundation moves through response and recovery, it will evaluate what might be done better and how it might strengthen community resilience. Of particular note is the need to focus on communication divide, where wealthier residents have access to more accurate information disseminated in multiple venues and via a variety of electronic devices.

The Center for Disaster Philanthropy has a [Hurricane Irma profile](#) that summarizes recovery organizations and their on-the-ground efforts, established recovery funds, and other related content and statistics. CDP has also launched its own [Hurricane Irma Recovery Fund](#). A regular partner of the National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (National VOAD), CDP works with these well-vetted organizations that will be providing aid and services through the long-term recovery from this storm. Information on the CDP website will be updated as comprehensive damage assessments are available, and, as with other funds mentioned during the webinar, there will be transparency in reporting how funds are awarded.

For additional information, please refer to:

- Waitt Institute, [Barbuda Recovery and Conservation Trust Fund](#)
- Community Foundation of Sarasota, [Hurricane Irma Relief and Recovery Fund](#)
- [Florida's First Coast Relief Fund](#)
- [Council on Foundations](#)
- [Jessie Ball duPont Fund](#)
- [Southeastern Council on Foundations](#)
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