



Highlights of [GAO-10-800](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

Residents of the Gulf Coast continue to struggle to recover almost 5 years after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita devastated the area in August and September of 2005. In many cases the federal government coordinates with, and provides support to, nonprofit organizations in order to deliver recovery assistance to impacted residents. A better understanding of how the federal government works with nonprofit organizations to provide such assistance may be helpful for recovery efforts on the Gulf Coast as well as for communities affected by major disasters in the future.

GAO was asked to describe (1) how the federal government has worked with nonprofit organizations to facilitate Gulf Coast recovery following the 2005 hurricanes and (2) steps the federal government has taken to address challenges to strengthen relationships with nonprofits in the future. Toward this end, GAO reviewed the applicable disaster recovery literature and relevant supporting documents. GAO also interviewed officials from federal, state, and local governments as well as a wide range of nonprofit officials involved in Gulf Coast recovery.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is not making new recommendations in this report but discusses the implementation status of a relevant prior recommendation.

[View GAO-10-800 or key components.](#)
For more information, contact Stanley J. Czerwinski at (202) 512-6806 or czerwinskis@gao.gov.

HURRICANE RECOVERY

Federal Government Provided a Range of Assistance to Nonprofits Following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita

What GAO Found

The federal government used a variety of direct and indirect funding programs to support the delivery of human recovery services by nonprofit organizations following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in areas such as housing, long-term case management, and health care. These programs included well-established grants such as the Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and its Social Services Block Grant, as well as the Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Community Development Block Grant. Programs established in the wake of the 2005 hurricanes also provided funding to nonprofits offering recovery services. These included HHS's Primary Care Access and Stabilization Grant and HUD's Disaster Housing Assistance Program.

The federal government also supported nonprofit organizations through coordination and capacity building. For example, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) used Voluntary Agency Liaisons (VAL) to help establish and maintain working relationships between nonprofits and FEMA as well as other federal, state, and local agencies. The Office of the Federal Coordinator for Gulf Coast Rebuilding in the Department of Homeland Security provided a variety of assistance to nonprofits including problem identification, information sharing, and networking. Other federal agencies also worked to bolster the capacity of nonprofits by providing temporary staff, training, and technical assistance to nonprofit organizations.

The federal government is taking steps to address several challenges and strengthen its relationship with nonprofit organizations providing recovery assistance. For example, nonprofit officials GAO spoke with cited challenges with the federal disaster grant process including what they viewed to be complicated record keeping and documentation procedures as well as other requirements to obtain aid. A report issued earlier this year by the President's Advisory Council for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships recognized the need to ease the administrative burden on nonprofits and contains specific recommendations for action. In an effort to make it easier for nonprofits with limited financial resources to obtain the services of AmeriCorps workers, the Corporation for National and Community Service waived the usual matching requirements in the wake of the 2005 hurricanes.

In addition, FEMA is taking steps to address challenges regarding the training of its VAL staff. Following an earlier GAO recommendation that VALs could benefit from additional training regarding federal recovery resources, FEMA issued a VAL handbook and is developing several VAL training courses that it expects to implement by the end of 2010. Finally, although there has been a lack of specific guidance regarding the role of nonprofits in disaster recovery, the federal government has taken steps to address this gap. FEMA and HUD have led a multi-agency effort that resulted in the development of a draft National Disaster Recovery Framework. Among other things, this framework contains specific information about the roles and responsibilities of nonprofits in disaster recovery.