



COUNCIL OF NEW JERSEY GRANTMAKERS
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Strengthening Philanthropy in Our State

Sandy Recovery: A Marathon, Not a Sprint

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It is difficult to be patient when lives, and indeed, entire communities have been torn apart. So when Gov. Chris Christie famously declared “Shame on Congress” and slammed elected officials for delaying aid to states devastated by Hurricane Sandy, New Jersey residents applauded. The trail of destruction left in Sandy’s wake demanded immediate relief.

However, in a disaster as vast as this one, it is clear that the philanthropic community has differing roles to play in our state’s recovery process.

While there is an urgent need for agencies to move quickly in solving immediate problems, there is also a need for organizations to provide long-term relief, so they can address the many remaining issues after the first responders leave.

In the aftermath of Sandy, the philanthropic community rallied to the aid of storm victims. Money poured in from individuals, corporations and foundations eager to help. But the task of rebuilding is overwhelming after a disaster on a scale that has never been experienced before in New Jersey. In its role of supporting effective philanthropy, the Council of New Jersey Grantmakers looked for resources that would help guide funding organizations in how to best meet the diverse and dire needs of storm victims and their communities.

To be most effective in philanthropy, we know it is important to understand the dynamics at play. To that end, the Council of New Jersey Grantmakers connected philanthropic leaders in the Sandy relief effort with those in other states that have weathered some of the worst natural disasters in our country. Dozens of state and national funding organizations joined in on the Council’s weekly teleconference calls to learn about issues that face communities after disaster strikes. And we learned that recovery is a marathon, not a sprint. We learned about the stages of disaster planning, about best practices and strategies to ensure rebuilding and recovery continues after FEMA, the Red Cross and other relief agencies depart. We heard from people like John Davies, of the Baton Rouge Community Foundation, who was in the forefront of the philanthropic response after Katrina and whose organization grew into one of the largest community foundations in the country. We also heard from Christopher Ilstrup in Vermont, whose group sprang into action after Irene, and Jera Stribling, with Alabama Giving, who was on the front lines of philanthropy when 62 tornadoes struck her state in one terrible day in 2011.

What these leaders emphasized is that it is critical to the recovery effort to have a reasoned, well-thought out approach that will support rebuilding efforts for at least five years into the future. They told us time is required to get a clear picture of what is needed and to discern where gaps in services will occur once federal funding is exhausted. They told us to be prepared to deal with mental health issues that arise 12 to 18 months after a disaster, when people finish the tasks of rebuilding their homes and begin to reflect on what they lost. They told us about unemployment issues and legal aid issues and financial issues and homelessness that will surface for years to come. They talked about the importance

of creating a framework to support storm victims into the future. They stressed the need for philanthropic funds -- like the New Jersey Recovery Fund at Community Foundation of New Jersey or the Hurricane Sandy Relief Fund headed by First Lady Mary Pat Christie -- that are vital to the recovery effort. These organizations must work to identify what the long-term demands will be and develop a methodical plan for meeting them, in partnership with local officials who know their communities best and can spearhead sustainable efforts to rebuild.

Recovering after a storm is a complex process, one that must be done in stages. As the leading reference for philanthropic disaster response, "Creating Order from Chaos," developed by the Jesse Bell Du Pont Fund, points out, the desire to help is greatest in the beginning, but recovery is a process that will continue years after public attention has shifted to other crises. Just as our governor played a key role in getting aid quickly for emergency relief after the storm, longer-term relief efforts are equally important. On this road to recovery, the philanthropic community is prepared to be there for as long as it takes stricken New Jerseyans to reach the finish line.