

Stanford SOCIAL INNOVATION REVIEW

Sponsored Supplement
**Strengthening Santa Barbara County's Disaster
Resilience**

By Barbara Andersen

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to shore up the agencies that work with them so that, hopefully, in a disaster situation, a plan for minimizing harm and for coordinating relief and recovery efforts will be in place.

- Prioritize funding to build resilience. Find ways to help develop a community

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with the flexibility, communication skills, and social capital to bounce back after disaster strikes.

- Start a discussion. Gather representatives from different sectors across the community—including both government and nongovernmental agencies and organizations—to discuss options, strategies, resources, and potential shared initiatives. Work on developing high-level relationships to build awareness and effectiveness, as well as to reduce unnecessary overlaps

in service in the event of a disaster.

- Invest in studies and pilot programs that explore the benefits of disaster preparedness and mitigation. As an example, earlier this year, the Center for Disaster Philanthropy launched a \$2 million Midwest Early Recovery Fund. Our goal is to

help communities in the Midwest that have been affected by “low-attention” disasters—events including tornadoes, flooding, earthquakes, landslides, and wildfires that are destructive but not catastrophic, and thus do not command a great deal of attention. The fund aims to get money quickly and efficiently to organizations working with people who are most vulnerable, such as those living in uninsured or underinsured single-parent homes; the unemployed or under-

employed; immigrants; veterans; older individuals; people with disabilities, low literacy skills, low incomes, and people with other significant unmet needs. Without this assistance, these individuals might go without help for months.

- Learn the landscape of disaster funding. One of the preconditions for operating effectively as a grant maker is knowing how your work fits into the larger funding context. This is especially true regarding disaster philanthropy, given the major roles that government and multilateral organizations play in disaster situations. Understanding this context will open up an opportunity—especially for foundations—to intervene in creative ways to fill gaps not being addressed by other funders.

If foundations, corporations, and individuals bring the same type of strategic mindset to disaster philanthropy that they bring to the rest of their giving choices, they can dramatically increase both the long-term impact of their disaster-related giving and the overall effectiveness of disaster relief in general. ☒

Strengthening Santa Barbara County’s Disaster Resilience

BY BARBARA ANDERSEN

In August 2005, the United States witnessed one of the most devastating and costly natural disasters in its history when Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast. First responders, volunteers, nonprofit service providers, businesses, and philanthropists rushed to the aid of the affected communities.

In Santa Barbara County, The Orfalea Fund asked the question, “If a disaster of that magnitude were to happen here, are we prepared?” A civil grand jury investigation and comprehensive needs assessment concluded that the answer was no. Although our community has tremendous vulnerability to natural disasters such as wildfires and earthquakes, the individuals and organizations responsible for responding to and recovering from those disasters had a long way to go toward working together in a systematic and coordinated manner.

To change this, the fund, the global consulting firm James Lee Witt Associates, and the Santa Barbara County Office of Emergency Management developed the Aware & Prepare Initiative. Launched in 2008 with the support of a collaborative of local foundations, the public-private partnership committed to enhancing capacity of government agencies and nonprofit organizations to prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters. Grants were soon distributed to support resource acquisi-

tion, emergency and business continuity planning, emergency communication systems, and public education programs. Most important, mechanisms were put in place through which government agencies and nonprofit organizations can share information and collaborate on countywide projects.

Seven years later, the partnership has grown to include more than 45 organizations and community leaders. Various committees and subcommittees meet regularly to identify priorities, develop and implement programs aligned with those priorities, and assess their progress against designated benchmarks.

What is the secret to this partnership’s success and sustainability? It’s the understanding that strategic philanthropic funding can facilitate strong relationships and organizational partnerships that increase the effectiveness and efficiency of emergency response and recovery, along with lessons learned in hindsight from disasters such as Hurricane Katrina.

Philanthropy was the catalyst for facilitating this level of collaboration, highlighting emergency preparedness as a priority for our region, and providing the resources necessary to enhance organizational capabilities. But it is the passion of our emergency management professionals, community organizers, and the people who provide nonprofit services who work every day to ensure the safety of our residents that makes the initiative a positive example of how our communities can benefit from multisector engagement. ☒

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