

GUEST ARTICLE: Disaster Response - What You Can Do

SUSAN WINER

October 2, 2017

Reactive philanthropy in the wake of disasters such as hurricanes or forest fires is understandable but can miss what is important. A thoughtful approach to giving when calamity strikes is what counts.

Hurricanes have torn through the Gulf of Mexico, the Florida coast and Caribbean, leaving devastation in their wake and leaving insurers facing heavy pay-outs. Whatever the causes are – Man-made global warming is often cited – the results speak for themselves. In such times talk about philanthropy takes on a very different, more urgent, complexion. Wealthy individuals are already stepping up. Michael Dell, for example, has reportedly pledged \$36 million of his money to recovery efforts in and around Houston following Hurricane Harvey.

It is fitting, therefore, that Susan Winer, who is founder of the firm Strategic Philanthropy and a regular commentator in these pages on philanthropy issues, discusses recent events. Her article also lists out organizations that readers may want to connect with.

As is always the case, the editors are grateful to guest contributors for adding to debate and invite responses. They can email tom.burroughes@wealthbriefing.com

(Susan is also one of a large number of speakers at this publication's impact investing summit in New York, scheduled Oct 11. For more details see [here](#).)

In a televised interview in the midst of Hurricane Maria, the Mayor of San Juan, Puerto Rico, Carmen Yulín Cruz quietly said to a reporter, "Please don't forget about us...Please".

This one plaintive statement captures the hardest aspect of the mounting natural disasters that have occurred, one after another or even simultaneously, devastating communities and uprooting families.

The question is how long it will take to get back to relative normalcy given the destruction of infrastructure and lives. Even those individuals with their heads in the sand about climate change cannot ignore the impact of roiling waters and raging winds of a magnitude not experienced in centuries, if ever.

The immediate response to disasters is always gratifying. In moments such as these, the outpouring of money, food, clothing, human capital, and support for the communities affected, have been...and always are extraordinary. It doesn't matter where the tragedy hits, the response is global, reminding us that, despite any political, cultural or ethnic differences, we all can and do work together when our fellow global citizens in such dire need.

But as wonderful as this immediate response is, certain realities are too often missed. The damages that have occurred don't just disappear; homes and families don't just right themselves and move on. For the most part the impact of any natural disaster is evident long after the last reporter files a story. Haiti is an excellent example. The country has been battered almost annually by hurricanes, but it was an earthquake in 2010 that caused so much damage and destruction. Seven years later, only a fraction of the infrastructure has been repaired, and the health and well-being of Haitian citizens continues to be challenged. One reason is that public attention has turned to other sites of disaster and funds for Haiti's rebuilding are drying up.

What does this all mean to you as a trusted advisor?

First and foremost, we all are affected by what is going on across the globe. Our natural human instinct is to want to do something...anything to help. This visceral response can be put to good use in conversations with clients so that they can maximize the impact and value of their financial or material contributions to organizations. Two ways clients can accomplish is through the choice of the recipient of any charitable gifts and by a remaining involved even when attention to the impact of the disaster is no longer a headline or even on the news.

Helping your clients to think through a strategy for disaster relief and to know where to give will accomplish more and mean more to both the donor and the recipients. Donors can make timely gifts that will have true impact if they consider the following:

- What is the most direct path to reaching those in need? While larger organizations such the Red Cross and UNICEF have a broad reach, they are but one choice to address immediate needs;
- Smaller organizations embedded in the community, such as the Houston Food Bank, can offer immediate as well as long-term support to those in need;
- Relief and rebuilding are two different things. There is the pressing need for immediate support for life-saving aid, but it is important to keep in mind longer-term sustainability - to rebuild what was lost. The resources needed to do this are too often overlooked by donors.

Rather than reactionary giving, donors should be thoughtful and focused in order to maximize the benefit of their charitable gifts whether U.S.-based, in the Caribbean, Mexico, or Bali.

Consider giving more frequently over time. Creating an automatic monthly contribution can ensure that funds are already available when needed most.

WHERE TO GO FOR MORE INFORMATION

There are many good, sustainable, and well-respected organizations at work - selecting the most appropriate one(s) means taking the time to do some research and understand their mission and capacity. We encourage you to share this article and these resources with your clients.

Three comprehensive resources that can help inform your clients in their disaster related gifts are:

[The Disaster Philanthropy Playbook](#)
[Measuring the State of Disaster Philanthropy: Data to Drive Decisions](#)
[The Center for Disaster Philanthropy](#)

Contingent on which natural disaster your client wants to address, there are specific resources for them to consider that have demonstrated a commitment to long-term support in communities with the greatest need. Many of these organizations are considered intermediaries (often re-granting funds) with strong and direct relationships with organizations based 'on the ground' in the communities that have been hit recently by disasters. They have vetted the organizations that they fund and hold them accountable.

Hurricanes:

[GlobalGiving](#) is a global crowdfunding network. Its fund for hurricane recovery in the US and Caribbean encompasses emergency supplies and long-term recovery and rebuilding, channeling donations to vetted local organizations. (all hurricane locations);

[Disaster Response](#) program at Habitat for Humanity (all hurricane locations);

[Wings of Rescue](#) flies pets out of disaster areas to high-intake and/or no-kill shelters (all hurricane locations);

[Portlight Inclusive Disaster Strategies](#) is dedicated to providing humanitarian assistance to the disaster areas, with special focus on people with disabilities, the elderly, and those that care for them. (all hurricane locations);

The [Miami Foundation](#) is coordinating three different hurricane-related relief funds: Hurricane Relief Fund; US Caribbean Strong Relief Fund; and Irma Community Recovery Fund; [Hurricane Harvey Relief Fund](#) at Greater Houston Community Foundation; and [Hurricane Irma Community Recovery Fund](#), anchored by The New Florida Majority and partner organizations.

The Caribbean (including the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico):

[CARE \(Caribbean Assistance and Relief Effort\) Fund](#) at St. Croix Foundation for Community Development; [Fund for the Virgin Islands Hurricane Irma Relief and Recovery](#) at the Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands; [Grassroots International Community-led Hurricane Recovery Support](#); [Fundación Comunitaria de Puerto Rico](#); the community foundation in Puerto Rico; [Hurricane Maria Community Recovery Fund](#) at the Center for Popular Democracy.

Earthquake in Mexico:

[El Paso Community Foundation](#); [Hispanics in Philanthropy Earthquake Relief Fund](#); [Mexican Earthquake Relief Fund](#); [Global Fund for Women](#); and [American Jewish World Service](#).

Floods in South Asia:

[Save the Children Flood Emergency Fund](#); and [Give 2 Asia South Asia Flood Response Fund](#).

Wildfires in Pacific Northwest:

[Community Foundation of North Central Washington](#) has a detailed list of [Fire Relief Agencies](#); [Community Foundation of Kittitas County](#); [Okanogan County Community Action Council](#); and [Wildland Firefighter Foundation](#).

Additional Organizations:

[International Fund for Animal Welfare](#) is working around the world to help native animals affected by disasters; [International Planned Parenthood Federation](#) is working to provide disaster relief across their international partners.

The aforementioned list are but a few of the many organizations dedicated to helping the populations affected by the hurricanes, floods, earthquakes, and fires that have occurred. The best advice you can give your client is do your homework. Make your gift count.