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Katrina Aid Today: Working to rebuild lives

In November 2005, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) announced a \$66 million grant to the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR), the humanitarian development agency of the United Methodist Church, which has provided practical support to disaster survivors throughout the world for the past 65 years.

The funding - obtained from donations of the international community - is being used by the department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency to fund UMCOR's Katrina Aid Today consortium. The consortium is comprised of ten nonprofit organizations with nationwide reach, in-depth experience in case management and access to special groups such as people with disabilities and non-English speaking families.

Partners in the Katrina Aid Today consortium are: [Boat People SOS](#), [Catholic Charities USA](#), [Episcopal Relief and Development](#), [Lutheran Disaster Response](#), [National Disability Rights Network](#), [Odyssey House of Louisiana](#), [Salvation Army](#), [Society of St. Vincent De Paul](#), [United Methodist Foundation of Louisiana](#) and the [Volunteers of America](#).

Case management is a holistic approach to disaster recovery and focuses on face-to-face interaction with the ultimate goal of enabling families and persons to become self-sufficient once again. The consortium, as a whole, is overseeing 3,000 professional staff and volunteers who will assist more than 100,000 families displaced by hurricane Katrina. While their work is focused on the disaster zones - Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana - they are also working with families who have been relocated to areas all over the United States.

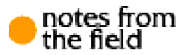
Douglas Gould and Company is working with UMCOR and the Katrina Aid Today partners on developing messages and promoting the project to the media; training UMCOR spokespeople on delivering these messages; and helping them to determine the appropriate Web site strategy and content so that information is easily accessible to partners and the media.

With all of the conflicting media attention being given to Katrina recovery - from the positive view on how quickly some areas seem to be improving to the all-too-often negative view on how FEMA and large nonprofits like Red Cross are handling the situation - it can be a difficult story to tell. However, the consortium has begun what can be considered the most important phase of recovery - working with survivors to develop a plan to regain their lives and a sense of stability in their shattered worlds.

To learn more about the partners and UMCOR, please visit www.katrinaaidtoday.org.

To see a map of the Katrina Aid Today consortium's coverage area please visit www.katrinaaidtoday.org/ourwork.cfm.

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DC VOICE: Improving Public Education in the District of Columbia

Prior to the start of the 2005 school year, DC VOICE wanted to find out how well prepared DC public schools were for the first day of school. How did they do it? They went straight to the source – the principal's office.

DC VOICE, a collaborative to improve public education in the District of Columbia, conducted over fifty interviews with principals from the district's elementary, junior, and high schools. The results are part one of a report entitled "Starting Off Right 2005: A School System in Transition." The report seeks to answer a very simple question: Do DC public school children have a full complement of supplies, resources, and teachers by the first day of instruction?

While the school system has made some notable improvements, the report found that many classrooms were less ready for learning on the first day as compared to last year. Of particular concern was that text books were not available on the first day for major subjects like math and reading.

Dozens of parents, teachers, and community volunteers participated in focus group discussions that will be the focus of the second half of the report, which is scheduled for release in the Spring. Committed to improving DC Public Schools (DCPS), Superintendent of Clifford Janey insists that the community "build upon this [report] so that three and five years out we can say, here's where we were, and here's where we are."

The reports are part of a broader effort, supported by the Ford Foundation, to forge new ground on education reform efforts in DC public schools. Douglas Gould and Company is helping DC VOICE raise awareness on issues surrounding the DCPS through increased visibility in targeted media outlets.

DC VOICE is a growing city-wide collaborative of teachers, principals, parents/guardians, youth, schools and school system personnel, community-based organizations, policy-makers and power-brokers committed to strengthening the public voice in public education.

For more information on the Ready Schools Report and DC VOICE, please visit www.dcvoice.org.

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Re-learning About Poverty from Katrina By Doug Gould

I recently returned from a weekend in New Orleans. This once vibrant city is now a

shocking heap of destruction. The French Quarter, Uptown and the Garden District are bustling with re-construction and are lurching back to life, but drive just a few blocks and you see boarded up buildings with their visible high water marks, lots full of drowned cars and upended houses, revealing the seemingly impossible task of re-building.

Battles over public policy, race and poverty erupted before the floods had a chance to subside: What parts of the city should be rebuilt and for whom? Who should pay? What about the levees and the vast environmental concerns about the cleanup and prevention of another flood?

Many anti-poverty advocates assumed that the racial and economic disparities exposed by the flood would dramatically alter public perceptions for good - finally making Americans more sensitive to the plight of African Americans and the poor, who were disproportionately hurt by the flood. But this has not been the case.

A [Pew Center for People and the Press Poll](#) concluded that "there is no evidence that the crisis along the Gulf Coast has fundamentally changed attitudes on race, poverty and the role of government."

Rather than ring our hands in frustration about this, advocates must remember certain lessons we learned after extensive opinion research on poverty and low wage work (see www.EconomyThatWorks.org).

- n When issues are framed in terms of "poverty" people respond with sympathy and charity, not support for changing public policies.
- n Poverty is seen as resulting from moral failings and bad personal choices, not systemic failures. Discussion of compelling personal stories of the poor only reinforces the "fix the person" mind set and distracts people from a closer look at larger issues.
- n White Americans, by and large, deny that racism ever plays a role. The racial fault line is demonstrated in the shocking disparities in perceptions about the response to Hurricane Katrina between whites and African Americans. Most whites see the battle for racial justice as having long been settled.
- n Lastly, government action has been devalued as a credible alternative over the last 25 years, and the fumbled response to Katrina did nothing to redeem respect in government.

Re-framing the message to be one about *economic development*, and *rebuilding the community for everyone* is likely to be more fruitful. Talking about the role of New Orleans in the national "community" should be stressed as should our collective ability to make decisions that engage the public, government and business to improve everyone's lives. Advocates should make connections between the importance of public education, access to health care, living wages and economic opportunity as critical for reviving the community.

Repetition of a successful message pays off. But people will need to hear it for years before they make the new connections we want them to make.

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Poverty and Katrina Resources

| www.economythatworks.org

| www.katrinaaidtoday.org

Online survey tools

| [Zoomerang](#)

| [Survey Monkey](#)

| [Tech Soup's article on using online surveys](#)

Other resources

| [GeneWatch](#) - America's first and only magazine dedicated to monitoring biotechnology's social, ethical and environmental consequences.

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Online survey tools

Looking for a way to get feedback from your stakeholders or build relationships with your supporters? One tool you can use is online surveys.

Knowing what your target audiences think of your organization, new or existing programs, or even your message platform, is an essential ingredient to practicing effective strategic communications. Depending on what you are trying to learn and the size of the intended audience, implementing an online survey may be the perfect solution. We have written, implemented, and analyzed a number of online surveys for our clients, including the Ford Foundation's Pathways to Higher Education initiative. We used surveys to find out how key audiences perceive the program and gain a better understanding of what role communications can play to advance the program's mission.

With several free and low-cost options available, sending out an online survey is relatively simple; it's the timing, number and types of questions, and evaluation that require strategy. Here are a few lessons we have learned:

- n As with any communications vehicle, start by defining the purpose and goals of your survey.
- n When possible, limit the number of open-ended questions and pages of your survey.
- n Test the survey internally before sending out externally.
- n Keep the invitation to take the survey short and choose a "sender" your recipients will recognize.
- n Spend some time crafting a good subject line that will motivate someone to open the message.
- n Select your list of recipients carefully and expect a 20-30% response rate. We've also found that using an incentive (e.g. a valuable publication or gift certificate) can help boost response.
- n Timing is everything. The middle of the week and morning or early afternoon work best.
- n Set a deadline and send reminders to anyone who has not filled out the survey.

- n Analyze the results and compare them with your initial perceptions. Use cross-tabulation to see if there are any significant differences of opinion within your respondents.
- n Share what you've learned with colleagues, and possibly your stakeholders.

For links to more information and online survey providers, visit our [Resources](#) section.

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