

Introduction

On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina slammed into the Gulf Coast region of the United States. Katrina's wrath was felt in southern Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana, but was particularly intense in New Orleans. The greatest damage to that city came after Katrina had moved through, with levees giving way causing major flooding. Hurricane Rita, which followed Katrina by just four weeks, reopened levees and inflicted new damage on southwestern Louisiana and southeastern Texas. Now, many months later, experts agree that full recovery from the storms will take years.

America's Response

Response to this disaster from the American people has been unprecedented. As relief organizations began moving into the Gulf Coast area, individuals across the country opened their hearts, homes, and wallets to help the storms' victims. Communities, organizations, churches, and individuals collected food, equipment, and supplies and sent them south by the truckloads. Many volunteers, on their own and deployed by the American Red Cross and other disaster agencies, poured into the Gulf area to help the recovery.

Universities responded by offering displaced students and faculty enrollment and jobs on their campuses, often waiving fees and requirements. Student organizations initiated fundraisers and assembled books, supplies, clothing, and other necessities, and in some cases delivered them personally to people who were suffering. In areas that were housing Katrina evacuees, college students volunteered in shelters, schools, and community centers. Then they turned their sights on helping the Gulf Coast recovery by organizing teams to go to the region to aid in the long-term process of rebuilding.

From the fall semester on, colleges across the country have sent groups of students, faculty, and staff to the region. The crescendo of student involvement has grown steadily, with hundreds of groups arriving in the Gulf area, ready to help with the recovery. The groups represented all

types of institutions, and myriad organizations and interests: faith-based, student government, fraternity and sorority, student leadership, service learning, law students, medical students, vocational, and major-specific—all coming with the desire to make a difference in the lives of residents who had suffered this horrific calamity. Many institutions and organizations have made long-term commitments to hurricane-related service in the Gulf and intend to sponsor summer trips and alternative break opportunities for students for many years.

This Toolkit

The Corporation for National and Community Service has developed this toolkit to help university students and staff prepare for group trips to help rebuild the devastated areas of the Gulf Coast region. Besides providing practical information, the toolkit is designed to help campus organizers think through important elements of the travel and work experience: choosing the best sites and sponsoring organizations that fit the goals and needs of the group; orienting group members for the work trip, including training and education; and providing opportunities for individual and group reflection. Advanced planning can make service even more meaningful—perhaps life-changing. Not surprisingly, these factors are basic to the best practices of service learning and the programs of the Corporation for National Service.

This toolkit relies heavily on the materials and experiences of Break Away, the Alternative Break Connection. Other resources include the National Service Learning Clearinghouse, the National Crime Prevention Council, Learn and Serve America, Louisiana Campus Compact, Tulane University, and students and trip leaders who have served in the Gulf Coast.

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