

**THE WHITE HOUSE**

Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives

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**WHITE HOUSE GULF COAST CONFERENCE EXPLORES WAYS TO  
STRENGTHEN AND EXTEND ROLE OF NONPROFITS IN  
DISASTER RESPONSE AND PREPAREDNESS**

**NEW ORLEANS, LA** – The White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (OFBCI) today kicked off a two-day Gulf Coast Conference on Disaster Relief and Preparedness, exploring ways to strengthen disaster recovery efforts through expanded partnerships with America’s nonprofit sector. As part of National Hurricane Preparedness Week, the conference also emphasized the critical and increasing role of faith-based and community organizations (FBCOs), and their armies of volunteers, in response and rebuilding plans for future disasters.

Hosted by OFBCI Director Jay Hein, joined by Federal Gulf Coast Coordinator Major General Doug O’Dell, the conference brings together more than 1,000 nonprofit, business, foundation and government leaders from across the region engaged in disaster planning and response. The two-day conference also includes a series of seminars to provide tools and training on a range of topics such as leveraging government resources for disaster preparedness and response, as well as ways to engage cross-sector partnerships to more effectively target need.

“When disaster strikes, America’s nonprofits are indispensable allies in the effort to help rebuild distressed communities,” said OFBCI Director Jay Hein. “Following Hurricane Katrina, these frontline armies of compassion offered extraordinary help to their neighbors in need and continue to do so today. This conference spotlights the successes of these kindhearted volunteers, as we explore ways to extend their reach now and in the event of future disasters.”

Today’s event highlighted ways the Federal government works to extend the efforts of faith-based and other community nonprofits to meet needs in communities across the Gulf Coast. For example, nearly \$56 million in competitive grants has been awarded by the U.S. Department of Labor to more than 100 faith-based and community organizations along the Gulf Coast for employment-related and supportive services. FBCOs also played a key role in helping the U.S. Department of Agriculture deliver 22 million pounds of food throughout the Gulf region, valued at \$27 million. Additionally, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, in partnership with USA Freedom Corps, FEMA and other public- and private-sector players, strengthened the National Response Framework, the nation’s guide for domestic disaster response, to ensure coordinated efforts and effective utilization of volunteers.

In 2006 alone, the Federal government awarded more than 2,100 direct, competitive grants to faith-based and other nonprofit organizations in Gulf Coast states totaling over \$1.8 billion. Of

these funds, Louisiana nonprofits won 314 competitive Federal grants totaling nearly \$200 million.

Effective disaster preparation, response and recovery are increasingly defined by cross-sector collaboration that draws upon the complementary strengths of public, private and nonprofit sector players. FBCOs, in particular, add much to these partnerships through their established role in the community, existing infrastructure, unique ability to mobilize resources and human capital, and other capabilities complementary to those of government. As disaster recovery models transition from government-centered delivery of services to innovative community-based partnerships, the role of FBCOs remains vital to ensuring that communities are equipped to respond effectively to both the short- and long-term impact of disasters.

“Faith-based and community organizations play a critical role in the long-term rebuilding process of the Gulf Coast region,” said O’Dell. “The contributions of time and effort from thousands of your volunteers have helped speed up the recovery and that attitude of neighbor helping neighbor, and in many cases neighbor helping stranger, have not gone unnoticed.”

President Bush’s Faith-Based and Community Initiative (FBCI) is built from the conviction that the most effective way to address our communities’ great needs is to draw upon the unique strengths of every willing community and faith-based partner. He launched the FBCI upon taking office in January 2001, to strengthen America’s nonprofit sector and extend its work in partnership with government. For more information on the OFBCI and the President’s compassion agenda, visit: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/government/fbc/>.

To find volunteer opportunities in your community through the USA Freedom Corps Volunteer Network, visit: [www.volunteer.gov](http://www.volunteer.gov).

To view the President’s proclamation on National Hurricane Preparedness Week, visit: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2008/05/20080523-3.html>.

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