

December 2008

DISASTER ASSISTANCE

Federal Efforts to Assist Group Site Residents with Employment, Services for Families with Children, and Transportation



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Abbreviations

DHS	Department of Homeland Security
DOT	Department of Transportation
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
FRRATS	FEMA Response and Recovery Applicant Tracking System
FTA	Federal Transit Administration
HHS	Department of Health and Human Services
NEMIS	National Emergency Management Information System
UI	Unemployment Insurance
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
WIA	Workforce Investment Act

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United States Government Accountability Office
Washington, DC 20548

December 11, 2008

The Honorable Joseph I. Lieberman
Chairman
Committee on Homeland Security
and Governmental Affairs
United States Senate

The Honorable Mary Landrieu
Chairman
Ad Hoc Subcommittee on Disaster Recovery
Committee on Homeland Security
and Governmental Affairs
United States Senate

In August 2005, Hurricane Katrina caused more damage than any other single natural disaster in U.S. history, with Hurricane Rita adding to the devastation. The hurricanes hit some of the most distressed areas in the country. Louisiana and Mississippi had the highest poverty rates in the United States, according to the 2000 U.S. Census. Hurricane Katrina destroyed or made uninhabitable an estimated 300,000 homes, many of which had families with children.

In response to this destruction, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) provided many affected households with trailers for temporary housing in Louisiana and Mississippi. Those trailers not placed on homeowners' property were located in group sites.¹ Although FEMA's guidance suggests that group sites should be located near existing supermarkets, public transportation, schools, and health care facilities, FEMA officials said the agency was not always able to locate temporary housing in these settings because of the level of destruction and, sometimes, opposition from communities. As of May 2008, several thousand households remained in group sites.

Given the number of people who remained in group sites more than 2 years after Hurricane Katrina, GAO was asked to address a range of disaster assistance services and is conducting work looking at case

¹For the purposes of this report, group sites refers to both sites established by FEMA and commercial sites that already existed and were used to house hurricane victims.

management, housing, health care, and the role of not-for-profit organizations in disaster recovery. This report focuses on the federal government's efforts to assist group site residents with employment, services for families with children,² and transportation. Specifically, this report addresses the following key questions: (1) What is known about the number and location of the group sites and their residents? (2) What did the federal government do to assist group site residents with employment, services for families with children, and transportation? (3) What challenges did federal and state agencies face in providing this assistance to group site residents?

To develop our findings for this engagement, we reviewed relevant law, regulations, and guidance on disaster-related programs and grants, as well as other selected programs that provided assistance to hurricane victims. We also reviewed available FEMA data on the demographics of group site residents. We assessed the reliability of the data by (1) performing electronic testing of required data elements, (2) reviewing existing information about the data and the system that produced them, and (3) interviewing agency officials knowledgeable about the data. We determined that the data were sufficiently reliable for the purposes of this report. (See app. II for a further description of how we tested and used the FEMA data.) For employment services, we reviewed those programs and services administered through the Department of Labor (Labor). For services for families with children, we reviewed nutrition assistance programs administered through the Department of Agriculture (USDA), educational programs administered through the Departments of Education (Education) and Health and Human Services (HHS), and other available social support programs such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families administered by HHS. For transportation services, we reviewed services provided by the Department of Transportation (DOT). We also reviewed the role that FEMA plays in providing these types of services during a disaster.³ We focused our review on Louisiana and Mississippi. (Other states affected by the storm had few group sites.) In addition, we interviewed officials from the relevant federal agencies and, from Louisiana and Mississippi, state agencies and not-for-profit organizations

²These services include nutritional assistance programs, educational programs, and other support programs for low-income families.

³Under the Stafford Act (42 U.S.C. §§ 5121-5201), FEMA is authorized, among other things, to provide or fund temporary housing, disaster unemployment assistance, nutrition assistance, and temporary public transportation.

that provide employment services, services for families with children, and transportation. We conducted site visits to Baton Rouge and New Orleans; these included visits to three group sites, including Renaissance Village—the largest group site—to better understand the living conditions.

Finally, we reviewed relevant literature, including GAO, Office of the Inspector General, and Congressional Research Service reports. Drawing on information collected from prior audit work, we conducted this performance audit from June 2008 to December 2008, in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

On September 5, 2008, we briefed your staff on the results of our analysis, which are included in appendix I. This report formally conveys information provided during that briefing.

Results in Brief

FEMA located more than 500 group sites, housing over 20,000 households over time, throughout counties in Louisiana and Mississippi. About another 106,000 households received trailers that were placed on their property while repairs were being made to their homes. The majority of group sites had less than 50 households, although some group sites had several hundred households residing in them. Most of the households who were placed in group sites reported that they were renters before the storm. While the majority of individuals who received a FEMA trailer reported being employed, about 65 percent reported less than \$20,000 in income. About one-fifth reported no source of income, in some cases, they were unemployed and disabled. While FEMA does not update data on group site residents to reflect current employment status or income levels, some state and FEMA officials we spoke with in early 2008 stated that those who remained in the sites the longest were the hardest to serve people including the elderly, persons with disabilities, and unemployed people.

Federal agencies provided assistance to hurricane victims through a variety of programs; group site residents may have received services, but data generally do not distinguish group site residents from other recipients. Federal agencies offered flexibilities within existing programs, distributed additional funding, and created new programs to assist states

in providing employment services, services to families with children, and transportation for all eligible hurricane victims. For example, USDA relaxed eligibility verification requirements and issued guidance to states for its school-based breakfast and lunch programs. Labor encouraged states to apply for new and previously existing waivers available for some of its employment programs and created new programs, including the Reintegration Counselor program that provided intensive career and life counseling to displaced persons. (See app. I for a listing of examples of specific federal actions.) Many of these federal actions were time-limited and available in 2005 and 2006. For example, the Reintegration Counselor program provided services in Mississippi and Louisiana through February 2006. When these programs ended, however, hurricane victims could apply for ongoing programs that were available before the hurricanes and continue now. For example, when the Disaster Food Stamp Program ended, affected persons could apply for and receive, if eligible, benefits from the long-standing Food Stamp Program. While federal agencies took actions to help all eligible hurricane victims, we identified only one federal program—LA Moves, a bus service—that specifically targeted group site residents, but services were limited and underutilized. This program started in January 2007, but the retirement of routes began immediately, with only two group sites receiving services as of June 2007. LA Moves' services were limited to FEMA-defined "essential services," specifically to banks, grocery stores, and pharmacies; it did not include transportation to welfare-to-work sites, employment, or human and medical services. The limited nature of the LA Moves' services may have contributed to the decline in ridership. Some state agencies and not-for-profit organizations did provide outreach for other services to group sites. For example, Louisiana Department of Social Services officials told us that they conducted outreach at group sites to connect residents with services like disaster food stamps. The largest group site, Renaissance Village, had several services offered on-site, including early childhood education programs, after-school programs, employment services, and transit for persons with disabilities, but was unique in this regard, according to some service providers. In terms of future disasters, FEMA released its draft of a mandated disaster housing strategy in July 2008, 1 year after its due date. The strategy did not contain all required elements, such as an outline of disaster relief programs for low-income and special needs populations, methods to provide housing where employment is available, and the operations of group sites. However, FEMA said it intends to form a task force that would develop more detailed plans. According to FEMA it anticipates the final strategy will be released before the end of calendar year 2008.

Federal and state agencies faced challenges obtaining information about group sites and group site residents and having available guidance to determine the type and scope of emergency transportation to fund. Regarding the first challenge, state agencies said they faced challenges in obtaining information from FEMA about group sites or their residents. However, these state officials may not have been aware of or understood FEMA's information sharing guidelines or procedural requirements for requesting data. According to FEMA, it shared information when the request met its information sharing guidelines but turned down requests that did not. FEMA bases its decisions on its Privacy Act routine use notice that outlines when FEMA may share information from its Disaster Recovery Assistance Files. For example, FEMA shared information with one state agency in order to prevent duplication of benefit receipt but not with another that wanted the information to help employers find displaced workers. In some cases, states requested information on the location of group sites. FEMA met one such request from Mississippi 6 months after it was made, but, to date, has not met a similar request from Louisiana. FEMA officials said they did not have a record of Louisiana's request. Regarding the second challenge, FEMA did not have clear guidance or criteria to assist with emergency transportation planning including guidance that defined the types or scope of transit it would fund or criteria for determining the duration of that funding. In the absence of such guidance, FEMA had to make difficult decisions about the extent of its authority to fund transit operations. We previously recommended that FEMA develop this guidance and criteria.⁴ Such guidance and criteria would provide a frame of reference for federal, state, and local officials involved in responding to future disasters and could expedite future funding decisions. FEMA has said it would take our recommendation under advisement but has not implemented it.

Concluding Observations

The five agencies we examined made diverse adjustments to their programs in order to serve those affected by the hurricanes. While these actions were not generally targeted to group site residents, they had the potential to help this population. However, we do not know to what extent group site residents received services from these programs. It will be important for FEMA to complete its mandated disaster housing strategy with the required elements, such as programs to meet the needs of low-

⁴GAO, *Emergency Transit Assistance: Federal Funding for Recent Disasters, and Options for the Future*, [GAO-08-243](#) (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 15, 2008).

income and special needs populations and methods to provide housing assistance where employment is available. The required elements have the potential to better ensure these populations receive needed services. However, a more complete evaluation of FEMA's progress in developing the housing strategy was beyond the scope of this report on group site services, but it will be addressed in ongoing GAO work.

Because the issue of information sharing in a disaster is broader than the challenges we found with regard to group sites, we are not making a related recommendation at this time. Instead we are conducting work that will address such issues among the broader population affected by the disasters. However, the challenges that state agencies faced in obtaining such information highlight the importance of having clear and understandable guidelines and processes regarding information sharing in place when disasters occur. While FEMA did offer some transportation services, the timeliness and effectiveness of those services were limited by a lack of guidance and criteria for both types and duration of services funded. Transportation services can provide a vital link to other services and employment for displaced persons. We continue to believe that FEMA should implement our previous recommendation to develop such guidance and criteria.

Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

We provided a draft of this report to the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) FEMA, HHS, Labor, DOT, Education, and USDA for review and comment. DHS provided written comments on the draft of this report in a November 18, 2008 letter, which is reprinted in appendix III. DHS did not disagree with our report. It provided additional information on the release date for the National Disaster Housing Strategy, which we incorporated in the draft, and restated information it had provided earlier about its information sharing policy. Finally, while it did not directly address our findings or recommendation on transportation, it said that it generally consults with state and local government when planning transportation routes. Our recommendation on transportation, originally made in February 2008, was that FEMA develop guidance that defines the types and scope of public transportation services it will fund and criteria for determining the duration of that funding. FEMA has still not provided the written response to the recommendation as required by law. Additionally, we received technical comments from DHS, Labor, and USDA, which we incorporated where appropriate. HHS, DOT, and Education had no comments.

As agreed with your offices, unless you publicly announce the contents of this report earlier, we plan no further distribution until 30 days from the report date. At that time, we will send copies to relevant congressional committees and other interested parties. The report also will be available at no charge on the GAO Web site at <http://www.gao.gov>.

If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-7215 or brownke@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. Key contributors to this report are listed in appendix IV.

Kay C. Brown

Kay Brown
Director, Education, Workforce,
and Income Security Issues

Appendix I: Briefing to Staff of Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate



Disaster Assistance: Federal Efforts to Assist Group Site Residents with Employment, Services for Families with Children, and Transportation

Briefing for Congressional Requesters

September 5, 2008



Introduction

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- In August 2005, Hurricane Katrina caused more damage than any other single natural disaster in U.S. history, with Hurricane Rita adding to the devastation.
 - The hurricanes hit some of the most distressed areas in the country. Louisiana (LA) and Mississippi (MS) had the highest poverty rates in the United States (U.S.), according to the 2000 U.S. Census.
 - Hurricane Katrina destroyed or made uninhabitable an estimated 300,000 homes, many of which had families with children.
 - As a result, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) placed thousands of displaced individuals and families in travel trailers or mobile homes at group sites.¹

¹ For the purposes of this briefing, group sites refers to both sites established by FEMA and commercial sites that already existed and were used to house hurricane victims. FEMA also placed temporary housing units on the property of homeowners who were repairing their homes.



Objectives

- To assess the federal government's efforts to assist Hurricane Katrina and Rita victims, especially those in group sites, we were asked to look at range of federal services for hurricane victims, including housing, health care, employment, transportation, services for families with children, and the role of not for profits.
- This report¹ addresses employment assistance, services for families with children,² and transportation. Specifically, for residents of group sites in LA and MS, it examines the following key questions:
 1. What is known about the number and location of the group sites and their residents?
 2. What did the federal government do to assist group site residents with employment, services for families with children, and transportation?
 3. What challenges did federal and state agencies face in providing this assistance to group site residents?

¹GAO has Katrina and Rita work under way examining housing, health care, case management, and the role of not for profits.

² These include nutritional assistance programs, educational programs, and other support programs for low-income families.



Scope and Methodology

To answer these questions, we

- reviewed relevant laws, regulations, and guidance on disaster-related programs and grants, as well as other selected programs that provided assistance to hurricane victims;
- interviewed officials from FEMA, the Departments of Health and Human Services (HHS), Labor (Labor), Transportation (DOT), Education (Education), and Agriculture (USDA);
- interviewed officials from LA and MS state agencies and not-for-profit organizations receiving federal funds;
- conducted site visits to Baton Rouge and New Orleans, LA, where we met with state and not-for-profit organizations to discuss services for group site residents; these included visits to three group sites, including Renaissance Village—the largest group site established;
- reviewed available FEMA data on the demographics of group site residents and found it sufficiently reliable for our purposes; and
- reviewed relevant literature, including GAO, Office of the Inspector General, and Congressional Research Service reports.

4



Scope and Methodology

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- Drawing in part on previous audit work, we conducted this performance audit from June 2008 to December 2008, in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.



Summary of Findings

- About 20 percent of the households who resided in trailers in the aftermath of the disaster did so in more than 500 group sites across the counties of LA and MS. Most group site residents reported being renters and having income of less than \$20,000; in some cases, they were unemployed and disabled.
- Federal agencies provided assistance to hurricane victims through a variety of programs; group site residents may have received services, but data generally do not distinguish group site residents from other recipients.
 - Federal agencies offered flexibilities within existing programs, distributed additional funding, and created new programs to assist states in providing employment services, services to families with children, and transportation for all eligible hurricane victims.
 - For example, USDA relaxed eligibility verification requirements and issued guidance to states to facilitate operation of its breakfast and lunch programs.



Summary of Findings (cont.)

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- We identified only one federal program—LA Moves, a bus service—that specifically targeted group site residents; however, its services were limited and underutilized.
 - Some state agencies and not-for-profit organizations did outreach to group sites. For example, LA Department of Social Services officials told us that they conducted outreach at group sites to connect residents with services like disaster food stamps. In addition, one large group site had on-site services, such as Head Start and job search services.
 - When these temporary measures expired, eligible individuals and households could receive benefits and services from the longer term programs that were available prior to the hurricanes.
-



Summary of Findings (cont.)

- While the programs we examined collected data on eligible persons who received services, these data generally do not distinguish group site residents from other recipients. As a result, data are not readily available to determine to what extent group site residents received services.
- FEMA released its draft of a mandated disaster housing strategy in July 2008, 1 year after its due date. The strategy did not contain all required elements, such as an outline of disaster relief programs for low-income and special needs populations and methods to provide housing where employment is available. However, FEMA said it intends to form a task force that would develop more detailed plans. According to FEMA, it anticipates the final strategy to be released before the end of calendar year 2008.



Summary of Findings (cont.)

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- Federal and state agencies faced challenges in obtaining information about group site residents and guidance to determine the type and scope of emergency transportation to fund.
 - State officials, working with their federal counterparts, said they did not always receive information on group sites, and they may not have fully understood FEMA's policy for sharing information. According to FEMA, it based its decisions on whether the proposed use of the information was consistent with the reason for which it was originally collected.
 - Another challenge was that FEMA did not have clear guidance or criteria to assist with emergency transportation planning including guidance that defined the types or scope of transit it would fund or criteria for determining the duration of that funding. GAO has previously recommended that FEMA develop this guidance and criteria.

Background



The Stafford Act

- The Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act¹ (the Stafford Act) is the primary authority under which the federal government provides major disaster and emergency assistance.²
- Under the Stafford Act, FEMA is authorized, among other things, to provide or fund:³
 - Temporary housing units directly to disaster victims, who, because of a lack of available housing resources, would be unable to make use of financial assistance to rent alternate housing accommodations. This generally can be up to 18 months after a disaster but may be extended.
 - Disaster unemployment assistance, such as benefits or reemployment assistance for generally up to 26 weeks, to individuals unemployed as a result of a major disaster when the individual is not entitled to any other state or Federal unemployment compensation.
 - Coupon allotments to low-income households who are unable to purchase adequate amounts of nutritious food.
 - Temporary public transportation services to meet emergency needs and to provide transportation to governmental offices, supply centers, stores, post offices, schools, major employment centers, and such other places that may be necessary for a community to resume its normal pattern of life as soon as possible.

¹42 U.S.C. §§ 5121-5201.

²The Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act of 2006, Pub. L. No. 109-295, § 689f, amended the Stafford Act so that it now includes a provision for case management services to meet the needs of survivors of major disasters.

³While FEMA provides funding for these programs, they are generally administered by the relevant federal and state agencies.

Background



FEMA Provided Temporary Housing Units in Several Settings

- These included:
 - units that remain on the homeowner's property while repairs are being made to his or her home, and
 - units at group sites, which are primarily provided to people who were renting before the disaster.
- According to FEMA, its policy is to use existing commercial parks whenever possible rather than build any group sites.
- In instances where FEMA creates group sites,
 - FEMA guidance states that services to group sites should include security, emergency services (fire and medical response), utilities (water, power, sewage), and other essential services.
 - FEMA guidance also suggests that group sites should be located near existing supermarkets, public transportation, schools, and health care facilities.
- FEMA officials stated that given the level of destruction and, in some cases, opposition from communities, FEMA was not always able to locate temporary housing in places with easy access to existing infrastructure.¹

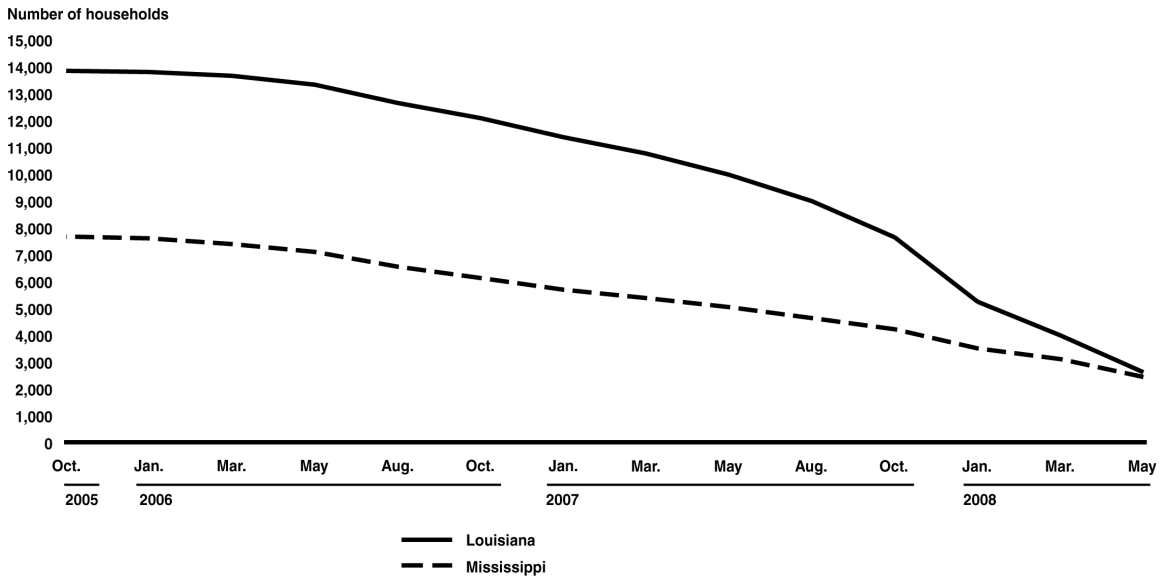
¹According to FEMA, commercial sites may also lack proximity to existing infrastructure.

Background



Thousands of Households Lived in Group Sites Nearly 3 Years After the Storms

Figure 1: Estimated Number of Households Remaining in Group Sites¹



Source: GAO analysis of FEMA data.

¹Group sites refers to both group and commercial sites. The number of households remaining represents the number of applicant cases that did not have a lease vacate date at the start of the month. FEMA officials stated that this may not be an exact representation of the number of households remaining because sometimes there is a difference between the time the household vacates and the date recorded.

Background



A Variety of Factors Probably Contributed to the Depopulation of the Group Sites

- These include:
 - FEMA's announced closure dates,
 - the discovery of formaldehyde levels that may have posed a health hazard in the trailers leading to some residents requesting to be relocated,¹ and
 - residents moving back to their prior residences or to another area.
- FEMA officials at the Transitional Recovery Office in Louisiana stated that its primary goal when transitioning residents out of group sites was to find safe housing for the households. Officials acknowledged that the housing options may not be permanent or affordable in the long-term.

¹ According to FEMA officials, issues with formaldehyde levels did not affect closure dates. However, FEMA did offer hotel/motel assistance to occupants who asked to be moved due to health concerns, and this may have contributed to the depopulation of the sites.

Background



Labor, HHS, Education, USDA, and DOT Oversee Federal Programs and Services for Employment, Families with Children, and Transportation

Examples of some of the programs and services overseen by these agencies are as follows:¹

- Labor offers assistance with job search and training, which may include career and individual counseling, case management, and necessary support services, through One-Stop Career Centers established under the Workforce Investment Act (WIA).²
- Among other things, HHS, Education, and USDA provide assistance for low-income children, including: the Head Start program which offers educational, health, nutritional, and other services; the Education for Homeless Children and Youth grant which helps ensure equal access to free and appropriate public education; and school lunch and breakfast programs, respectively.
- Transportation's Federal Transit Administration (FTA) administers a number of transit program grants that can be used for capital improvements, such as purchasing buses, as well as provides operating assistance to transit systems located in areas with populations under 200,000.
- These programs are generally administered through state and local agencies.

¹See appendix I for a list of selected programs available on an ongoing basis for employment, and families with children.

²The Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA), Pub. L. No. 105-220, as amended, requires that the services of 16 federally funded programs, administered by the Departments of Labor, Education, Health and Human Services, and Housing and Urban Development, be provided through the one-stop delivery system established in each local area. 14

Finding One: Group Site Locations and Residents



Group Sites Were Dispersed Across Counties and Housed Residents Who Had Been Renters, Had Less than \$20,000 in Income and, in Some Cases, Were Unemployed and Disabled

Overview of Finding

- About 20 percent of the households who resided in trailers in the aftermath of the disaster did so in more than 500 group sites across the counties of LA and MS.
- Most group sites residents had been renters and reported having limited income; in some cases, they were unemployed and disabled.

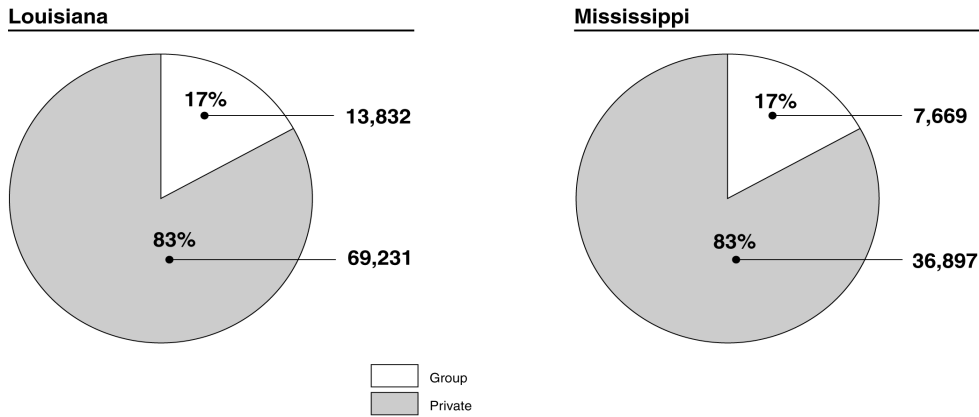
Finding One: Group Site Locations and Residents



The Majority of FEMA-Provided Trailers Went To Households Who Placed Them on Their Property

- 21,501 households in LA and MS lived in group sites.¹
- 106,128 households in LA and MS lived in FEMA trailers on their own property.

Figure 2: Number and Percentage of Households Who Lived in a Trailer Anytime between 2005 and 2008, by Trailer Site Type



Source: GAO analysis of FEMA data.

¹Group sites refers to both group and commercial sites.

Finding One: Group Site Locations and Residents



Most Group Sites¹ at Their Peak Occupancy Had 50 or Less Households Living in Trailers

- FEMA placed trailers in:²
 - 368 group sites across LA
 - Almost 80 percent of these group sites had 50 or fewer households living in trailers.
 - The largest site housed almost 540 households.
 - 189 group sites across MS
 - Approximately 70 percent of these sites had 50 or fewer households living in trailers.
 - The largest site housed about 190 households.

¹Group sites refers to both group and commercial sites.

²Source: GAO analysis of FEMA data.

Finding One: Group Site Location and Residents



Group Sites¹ Residents Had Been Renters, Had Less than \$20,000 in Income and, in Some Cases, Were Unemployed and Disabled

- According to demographic data available from FEMA:²
 - About three-quarters reported they were renters before the hurricanes.
 - Approximately 70 percent were under the age of 50.
 - Approximately 21 percent of applicants reported no source of employment. Of that percentage,
 - 37 percent reported a disability, and
 - 29 percent reported being retired.
 - While the majority of applicants reported being employed, approximately 65 percent reported earning less than \$20,000.

¹ Group sites refers to both commercial and group sites.

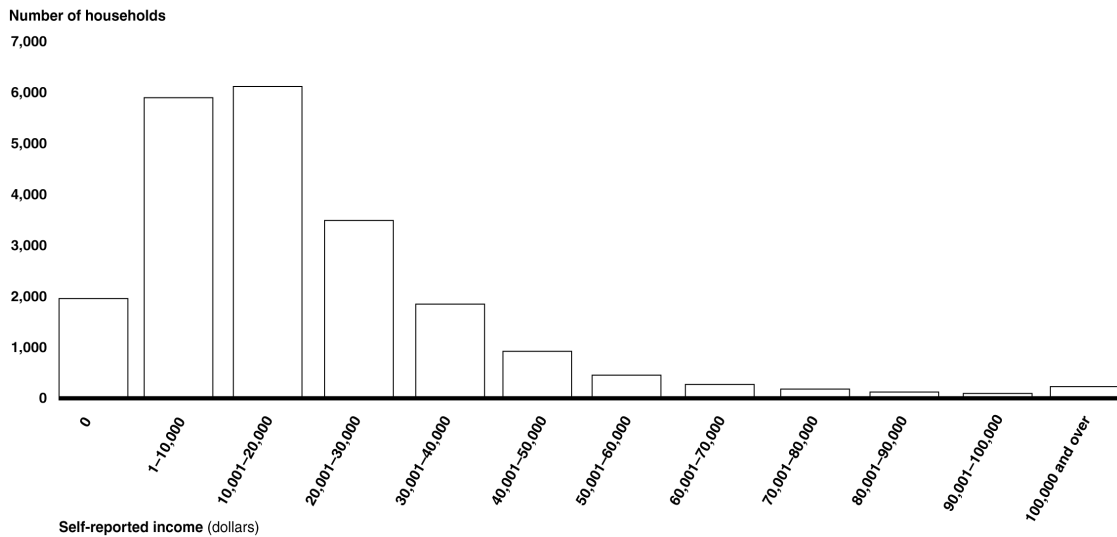
² These data represent information individuals self-reported as part of their application for FEMA assistance. Percentages are based on the number of applicants reporting each characteristic.

Finding One: Group Site Locations and Residents



Group Sites¹ Residents Had Been Renters, Had Less than \$20,000 in Income and, in Some Cases, Were Unemployed and Disabled (cont.)

Figure 4: Self-reported Household Income of Group Site Residents at the Time of Registration



Source: GAO analysis of FEMA data.

¹Group sites refers to both commercial and group sites.

Finding One: Group Site Locations and Residents



**Group Sites Residents Had Been Renters, Had Less than
\$20,000 in Income and, in Some Cases, Were
Unemployed and Disabled (cont.)**

- While FEMA does not update data on group site residents to reflect current employment status or income levels, some state and FEMA officials we spoke with stated that those who remained in the sites were the hardest to serve people including the elderly, persons with disabilities, and unemployed people.

Summary of Finding Two: Federal Efforts



While Federal Agencies Assisted States in Providing Services to All Eligible Hurricane Victims, Services Specifically for Group Sites Were Limited, and Data on Services Provided Generally Do Not Distinguish Group Site Residents from Other Recipients

Overview of Finding

- Federal agencies provided assistance to hurricane victims through a variety of programs; group site residents may have received services, but data generally do not distinguish group site residents from other recipients.
 - Federal agencies offered flexibilities within existing programs, distributed additional funding, and created new programs to assist states in providing employment services, services to families with children, and transportation for all eligible hurricane victims.
 - For example, USDA relaxed eligibility verification requirements and issued guidance to states for its school-based breakfast and lunch programs.
 - We identified only one federal program—LA Moves, a bus service—that specifically targeted group site residents, but services were limited and underutilized.
 - Many of these federal actions were time-limited. When they ended, hurricane victims could apply for ongoing programs that were available before the hurricanes and continue now.

Finding Two: Federal Efforts



While Federal Agencies Assisted States in Providing Services to All Eligible Hurricane Victims, Services Specifically for Group Sites Were Limited, and Data on Services Provided Generally Do Not Distinguish Group Site Residents from Other Recipients (cont.)

Overview of Finding

- Some state agencies and not for profit organizations did outreach to group sites. For example, LA Department of Social Services officials told us that they conducted outreach at group sites to connect residents with services like disaster food stamps.
- One large group site had on-site services, such as Head Start and job search services.
- While the federal programs we examined collected data on eligible persons who received services, these data do not distinguish group site residents from other recipients. As a result, it is not possible to isolate group site residents to determine whether they received these services.
- FEMA released its draft of a mandated disaster housing strategy in July 2008, 1 year after its due date. The strategy did not contain all required elements, such as an outline of disaster relief programs for low-income and special needs populations and methods to provide housing where employment is available. However, FEMA said it intends to form a task force that would develop more detailed plans. According to FEMA, it anticipates the final strategy to be released before the end of calendar year 2008.

Finding Two: Federal Efforts



Federal Agencies Offered Flexibilities within Existing Programs to Assist All Eligible Hurricane Victims

For example:¹

- Labor waived some reporting requirements and encouraged states to use funding and service flexibilities under WIA to develop workforce strategies to assist hurricane-impacted individuals and businesses.
- USDA relaxed eligibility verification requirements and issued guidance to states for its school-based breakfast and lunch programs.
- HHS eased Head Start program requirements for income eligibility and birth certificate documents and offered waivers of class size requirements.
- FTA waived matching share requirements and allowed transit providers to use capital grants for operations and disaster recovery.

¹See appendix II for a summary of selected actions federal agencies took to assist individuals with employment needs, families with children, and those needing transportation after the hurricanes.

Finding Two: Federal Efforts



Federal Agencies Distributed Additional Funding for Existing Programs to Assist All Eligible Hurricane Victims

For example:

- Labor distributed more than \$200 million (including \$125 million in supplemental emergency grant funds) to affected states.¹ According to LA and MS employment officials, these states used these funds for a range of services including temporary jobs and job training.
- HHS distributed \$550 million in supplemental funds for the Social Services Block Grant, a grant that provides funding to assist states in providing social services to eligible low-income individuals or families.¹ MS and LA received a portion of these funds, which they used for a variety of purposes including health-related services, assistance for day care centers, and hiring youth counselors.
- Education distributed \$5 million in supplemental funding¹ to provide assistance to local educational agencies for the education of children and youth made homeless by the hurricanes, as required by section 106 of the Hurricane Education Recovery Act.² This assistance was provided consistent with the existing Education for Homeless Children and Youth program. Examples of authorized uses of the funds included identification of displaced students, transportation, and purchasing supplies.

¹Department of Defense, Emergency Supplemental Appropriations to Address Hurricanes in the Gulf of Mexico, and Pandemic Influenza Act of 2006, Pub. L. No. 109-148.

²Title IV, Division B of Pub. L. No. 109-148.

Finding Two: Federal Efforts



Federal Agencies Distributed Additional Funding within Existing Programs to Assist Eligible Hurricane Victims (cont.)

- Between 2005 and 2007, FEMA provided \$88 million to DOT to fund regular and supplementary transportation services through public transit providers in LA and MS, including funds to serve displaced Katrina populations.
 - \$67 million to the New Orleans Regional Transit Authority, in part, to provide transit services to residents of FEMA group sites in Baton Rouge.
 - \$19 million to the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development to provide public transportation service to 62 parishes in Louisiana including new routes and new services to group sites.
 - \$1.4 million and \$0.3 million to the Coast Transit Authority in Gulfport, MS, and to the Mississippi Department of Transportation, respectively, to provide public transportation services, including service to group sites.
- Funding for these services ended in December 2006.¹

¹ Certain services provided through LA Department of Transportation and Development ended in April 2007.

Finding Two: Federal Efforts



Federal Agencies Created a New Program Specifically for Group Sites

- *LA Moves*: provided free, statewide transit service for residents in LA group sites starting in January 2007 to replace the transportation services FEMA funded through DOT using public transit providers.
 - FEMA contracted with DOT's Volpe National Transportation Systems Center¹ to develop the system.
 - FEMA did not follow the Volpe Center's proposal to continue to use public transit providers.
 - Use of public transit providers, in some areas, would have provided broader coverage than LA Moves did.
 - LA Moves' service was limited to FEMA defined "essential services"—specifically, banks, grocery stores, and pharmacies. LA Moves did not include transportation to welfare-to-work sites, employment, and human and medical services. FEMA did not provide a rationale for this decision.

¹The Volpe Center is a federal, fee-for-service organization within DOT known for its transportation expertise, which conducts studies and analyses for federal, state, and local governments, industry, and academia.

Finding Two: Federal Efforts



Federal Agencies Created a New Program Specifically for Group Sites (cont.)

- When it began in 2007, LA Moves had 50 routes and served a total of 111 group sites in 26 parishes.¹
- However, the retirement of routes began immediately, as ridership declined. By June 2007, 2 routes remained, and only \$2.7 million of the \$55 million LA Moves contract was spent.
 - The decline in ridership was likely caused by factors such as the ongoing closure of group sites and the limited nature of the services. We did not determine the extent to which each factor contributed to this decline.
 - DOT's Volpe Center requested that FEMA allow it to conduct a ridership survey of group site residents to obtain a more accurate figure for determining the need for the LA Moves service, but FEMA instead estimated that 25 percent of all group site residents would use this service. This may have contributed to service being underutilized.

¹The implementation of LA Moves service was delayed twice—July 2006 and September 2006.

Finding Two: Federal Efforts



Federal Agencies Created New Programs to Assist All Eligible Hurricane Victims

For example:

- *LA Swift*: provided bus service between Baton Rouge and New Orleans from January to November 2006.
 - FEMA provided \$8.5 million through DOT to fund the service.
 - In November 2006, the service continued with funding provided through the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development.
- *Reintegration Counselors (Labor)*: provided intensive career and life counseling to eligible hurricane victims who were displaced because of the hurricanes.
- *Pathways to Construction Employment Initiative (Labor)*: supported economic revitalization in LA and MS by helping persons to enter the construction industry through apprenticeships or basic craft training.

Finding Two: Federal Efforts



Generally Flexibilities within Existing Programs, Additional Funding, and New Programs Offered by Federal Agencies Were Time Limited

- Many of the actions federal agencies took in response to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita were available between 2005 and 2006.
 - For example, reintegration counselors who provided intensive career and life counseling to hurricane evacuees to support their reemployment provided services through February 2006.
- When these temporary measures expired, eligible individuals and households could receive benefits and services from the longer term programs that were available prior to the hurricanes.¹
 - For example, when the Disaster Food Stamp program ended, affected persons could apply for and receive, if eligible, benefits from the long-standing Food Stamp Program.

¹GAO is currently conducting work looking at case management services for victims of the hurricanes. These services could include an assessment of needs and referrals for both short-term and longer term disaster assistance, if needed.

Finding Two: Federal Efforts



Some State Agencies Made Efforts to Connect Group Site Residents with Federal Programs Available to All Eligible Hurricane Victims

- Despite there being limited programs and services developed specifically for residents at group sites, some state agencies did use federal funds to connect residents with programs available to all eligible hurricane victims. For example:
 - LA and MS labor agencies stated that Disability Program Navigators—who connect persons with disabilities to employment or appropriate benefit programs—and Reintegration Counselors worked with residents at some of the group sites.
 - LA Labor officials also said that they used mobile units to connect residents in group sites with employment services.¹
 - LA Department of Social Services officials stated that they conducted outreach at group sites to connect residents with services like disaster food stamps.
 - Head Start officials in Region IV, which includes MS, stated that their staff went to group sites to identify previously enrolled families.

¹The Flexibility for Displaced Workers Act of 2005, Pub. L. No. 109-72, expressed the sense of Congress that one-stop operators should increase access for workers affected by Hurricane Katrina to the one-stop delivery systems by, for example, providing services on-site to individuals in temporary housing.

Finding Two: Federal Efforts



One Group Site Had On-site Services

- Some not-for-profits and state agencies provided services on-site at the largest group site—Renaissance Village—which at its peak had over 500 households.¹ Services available included:
 - Head Start and Early Head Start,
 - after-school programs for children,
 - job search and employment services, and
 - transit service including service for persons with disabilities.
- In addition, a social service resource fair was held there in March 2008.
- However, some of the providers of these services stated that no other group site received this number or variety of services on-site.

¹Some of these services were provided in facilities established through private donations.

Finding Two: Federal Efforts



Although Agencies Collected Data on Those Receiving Services, the Data Generally Do Not Distinguish Group Site Residents from Other Recipients

- The federal programs we examined collected data on eligible persons who received their services.
 - For example, labor agencies collected information on unemployment receipt, types of employment services provided, and the numbers served through other Labor programs such as the Reintegration Counselor program.
- However, most of these programs were not designed specifically to serve group site residents, and agencies focused their efforts on serving disaster victims in general. The data they collected generally do not distinguish group site residents from other recipients. As a result, data are not readily available to determine whether group site residents received these services.

Finding Two: Federal Efforts



Although Agencies Collected Data on Those Receiving Services, the Data Generally Do Not Distinguish Group Site Residents from Other Recipients (cont.)

- The exception was transportation programs, which did conduct ridership counts for routes serving group sites.
- While state agencies conducted outreach, no data are readily available to determine whether this outreach connected residents of the group sites to services they may have needed.

Finding Two: Federal Efforts



FEMA Has Begun, but Not Completed, a Strategy to Address the Needs of Displaced Persons in Disasters

- Our prior work recognized a disaster can exacerbate the long-standing challenges at-risk populations have in accessing needed assistance from multiple programs.¹
- In 2006, Congress directed FEMA to develop a National Disaster Housing Strategy² that addresses the short-term and long-term housing needs of individuals and households affected by a major disaster. This strategy was to be completed by July 2007.
 - The strategy was to outline, among other things:
 - programs directed to meet the needs of special needs and low-income populations;
 - methods to provide housing assistance where employment and other resources for living are available; and
 - plans to address access to public services, site management, security, and site density.

¹GAO, *Hurricanes Katrina and Rita: Federal Actions Could Enhance Preparedness of Certain State-Administered Federal Support Programs*, [GAO-07-219](#) (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 7, 2007).

²The Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act of 2006, Pub. L. No. 109-295, §683.

Finding Two: Federal Efforts



FEMA Has Begun, but Not Completed, a Strategy to Address the Needs of Displaced Persons in Disasters (cont.)

- The draft strategy FEMA released for public comment in July 2008 did not address all of the required information. According to FEMA, it anticipates the final strategy will be released before the end of calendar year 2008.
 - The draft strategy says, that in future disasters, group sites will be created as a last resort.
- The draft strategy leaves much of the planning on how this should be done to a task force.

Summary of Finding Three: Challenges



Federal and State Agencies Faced Challenges in Serving Residents of Group Sites

Overview of Finding

- State agencies said they faced challenges in obtaining information about group sites and group site residents.
- FEMA said it shared information when requests met its information sharing guidelines but turned down requests that did not.
- Federal and state agencies faced challenges in determining the type and scope of emergency transportation to fund.
 - FEMA did not have clear guidance or criteria to assist with emergency transportation planning including guidance that defined the types of transit it would fund or criteria for determining the duration of that funding. GAO has previously recommended that FEMA develop this guidance and criteria.

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Finding Three: Challenges

State Agencies Said They Did Not Always Receive Requested Group Site Information; FEMA Said It Met Requests That Were Consistent with Allowed Uses

- Some state agency officials said they requested, but did not receive, information from FEMA that they believed would have helped them serve group site residents. However, in some cases these officials may not have been aware of or understood FEMA's information sharing guidelines or FEMA's procedural requirements for requesting data.
- Under the Privacy Act, an agency may disclose information without the permission of the individual to whom the information relates for a number of statutorily permitted purposes, including if it is determined to be a "routine use" - a use compatible with the purpose for which the data was collected. FEMA has published a routine use notice outlining the instances where it may share data from its Disaster Recovery Assistance Files.
- FEMA officials told us they fulfilled many requests for information on individuals and group sites and worked with states on how to request information.
 - For example, FEMA approved LA Department of Social Services' (DSS) request for information on persons who LA DSS identified as having been provided disaster-related human services, including cash assistance and food stamp benefits, to prevent duplication of efforts or benefits in determining eligibility for disaster assistance, a purpose FEMA has identified as compatible with the purpose for which the information was collected.

Finding Three: Challenges



State Agencies Said They Did Not Always Receive Requested Group Site Information; FEMA Said It Met Requests That Were Consistent with Allowed Uses (cont.)

- However, in some cases, FEMA officials said the requests did not meet their requirements for information sharing. For example:
 - LA Labor officials said they requested individuals' contact information to help employers locate their employees, but FEMA did not provide this information. According to FEMA, it would not provide such information because it does not meet the Privacy Act's requirement that the information release be compatible with the purpose for which the information was collected.
 - In May 2008, LA DSS submitted a request to FEMA for contact information for individuals living in trailers who had or would receive an eviction notice to connect them with state assistance programs. FEMA did not fulfill the data request due to a misunderstanding between FEMA and DSS over the language required to fill the request. A FEMA official said DSS needed to submit a new data request using the correct terminology, and that FEMA had provided this information to DSS.

Finding Three: Challenges



State Agencies Said They Did Not Always Receive Requested Group Site Information; FEMA Said It Met Requests That Were Consistent with Allowed Uses (cont.)

- LA and MS labor agencies said they requested information on the location of group sites from FEMA to allow them to offer employment services to group site residents. According to MS officials, they received the information about 6 months after making the request. LA officials said they had not yet received the information.
 - As a result, these agencies relied on other means, such as the use of mobile one-stops, to locate group sites.¹
 - FEMA officials told us they did not have any record of this request.
- In a previous report, we identified as a lesson learned the value of standing agreements for data sharing among FEMA and state not-for-profit agencies as a means to expedite recovery services. Such agreements can clarify what data can be shared and the procedures for sharing it while protecting the data from improper disclosure.²

¹As shown in figure 2, the 368 group sites in LA were widely dispersed throughout the state.

²GAO, *Lessons Learned for Protecting and Educating Children after the Gulf Coast Hurricanes*, [GAO-06-680R](#) (Washington, D.C.: May 11, 2006).

Finding Three: Challenges



FEMA Did Not Have Clear Guidance or Criteria to Assist with Emergency Transportation Planning

- GAO's February 2008 report¹ on Emergency Transit Assistance found that FEMA lacked guidance and criteria for the types and duration of transit services it would fund and recommended that FEMA
 - develop guidance or regulations on the types of transit operating assistance FEMA will or will not fund following a disaster, and
 - develop criteria for determining the duration of such funding.
- In the absence of such guidance, FEMA had to make difficult decisions about the extent of its authority to fund transit operations.
 - Such guidance and criteria would provide a frame of reference for federal, state, and local officials involved in responding to future disasters and could expedite future funding decisions.

¹GAO, *Emergency Transit Assistance: Federal Funding for Recent Disasters, and Options for the Future*, [GAO-08-243](#) (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 15, 2008).



Concluding Observations

-
- The five agencies we examined made diverse adjustments to their programs in order to serve those affected by the hurricanes. While these actions were not generally targeted to group site residents, they had the potential to help this population; however, we do not know if group site residents received services.
 - It will be important for FEMA to complete its mandated disaster strategy with the required elements, such as programs to meet the needs of low-income and special needs populations and methods to provide housing assistance where employment is available. The required elements have the potential to better ensure that these populations receive needed services.



Concluding Observations (cont.)

- Because the issue of information sharing in a disaster is broader than the challenges we found with regard to groups sites, we are not making a related recommendation at this time. Instead we are conducting work that will address such issues among the broader population affected by the disasters. However, the challenges that state agencies faced in obtaining such information highlights the importance of having clear and understandable guidelines and processes regarding information sharing in place when disasters occur.
- While FEMA did offer some transportation services, the timeliness and effectiveness of those services were limited by a lack of guidance and criteria for both types and duration of services funded. Transportation services can provide a vital link to other services and employment for displaced persons. GAO continues to believe that FEMA should implement our previous recommendation to develop such guidance and criteria.



Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

- We provided a draft of this report to the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) FEMA, HHS, Labor, DOT, Education, and USDA for review and comment.
- DHS provided written comments on the draft of this report in a November 18, 2008 letter. DHS did not disagree with our report. It provided additional information on the release date for the National Disaster Housing Strategy, which we incorporated in the draft, and restated information it had provided earlier about its information sharing policy. Finally, while it did not directly address our finding or recommendation on transportation, it said that it generally consults with state and local government when planning transportation routes.
 - Our recommendation on transportation, originally made in February 2008, was that FEMA develop guidance that defines the types and scope of public transportation services it will fund and criteria for determining duration of that funding. FEMA has still not provided the written response to the recommendation as required by law.
- Additionally, we received technical comments from DHS, Labor, and USDA, which we incorporated where appropriate.
- HHS, DOT, and Education had no comments.



Appendix I: Examples of Existing Federal Programs Available to All Eligible Individuals

Table 1: Examples of Existing Employment Programs

Programs and services	Purpose
WIA Youth, Adult, and Dislocated Worker Programs	Provide youth, adults, and dislocated workers ^a with employment services, such as job search, placement, and training through one-stop centers.
National Emergency Grants	Fund, among other things, disaster relief employment—temporary jobs for cleanup, restoration, and humanitarian assistance to communities that have been affected by a disaster—and dislocated worker training.
Disability Program Navigators	Provide staff expertise on disability and workforce issues to enhance comprehensive, seamless services for job seekers with disabilities.
Unemployment Insurance (UI)	Provides temporary benefits to eligible workers who are unemployed for non-disqualifying reasons (as determined under state law) and who meet other UI eligibility requirements.
<i>Disaster Unemployment Assistance</i>	Provides temporary benefits to individuals whose employment or self-employment has been lost or interrupted as a direct result of a major disaster and who are not eligible for any other state or Federal UI benefits.
Job Corps	Provides no-cost education and career technical training for low-income persons ages 16 through 24.

Source: GAO review of selected federal programs.

^aIn general, dislocated workers are those who have been laid off and are unlikely to return to their previous employment. See WIA §101(9).



Appendix I: Examples of Existing Federal Programs Available to All Eligible Individuals (cont.)

Table 2: Examples of Existing Programs for Families with Children

Programs and services	Purpose
Education for Homeless Children and Youth	To ensure that homeless children, including preschoolers and youth, have equal access to free and appropriate public education.
Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)	Provides cash assistance and services targeted to needy families including emergency payments, child care, transportation assistance, and other social services.
Head Start	Promotes the school readiness of low-income children by enhancing their cognitive, social, and emotional development by providing a range of individualized services to preschool aged children and their families.
Food Stamp Program ^a	Provides nutrition assistance to low-income households.
National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program	Provides free or reduced price lunches and breakfasts to low-income children.
The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)	Provides nutritious foods, nutrition education, and referrals to health and other social services to low-income women, infants, and children.

Source: GAO review of selected federal programs.

^aRecently renamed Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.



Appendix II: Examples of Actions Following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita

Table 1: Examples of Labor’s Actions to Assist States

Programs and services	Examples of actions taken	Duration
WIA Youth, Adult, and Dislocated Worker Programs	Labor identified flexibilities in the law, as well as statutory provisions, which could be waived that may have enabled states to better serve hurricane victims. Labor also informed states of the procedures for requesting waivers.	<i>Not time limited</i>
Disaster Unemployment Assistance ^a	Labor extended the time period for filing DUA claims from 30 to 90 days.	Sept. 2005—June 2006
National Emergency Grants	Labor issued a guidance letter on preexisting and new flexibilities for the use of NEG funds including expanded eligibility for employment services and the opportunity to apply for grant use extensions for an additional 6 months (up to 12 months total). ^b	Waivers still available on a case-by-case basis NEG grants continue to be offered
Pathways to Construction Employment Initiative	Labor provided grants of \$5 million to LA and MS to fund partnerships between the state workforce agencies and community colleges to train individuals for construction careers and help them pursue construction employment opportunities.	LA: Dec. 2005—March 2008 MS: March 2006—Feb. 2009

^aThe Katrina Emergency Assistance Act of 2006, Pub. L. No. 109-176, extended DUA benefits 13 weeks beyond the 26 weeks typically available.

^b New flexibilities were made available through the Flexibility for Displaced Workers Act, Pub. L. No. 109-72.



Appendix II: Examples of Actions Following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita (cont.)

Table 1: Examples of Labor’s Actions to Assist States (cont.)

Programs and services	Examples of actions taken	Duration
Katrina Recovery Job Connection Site	Labor created this Web site to connect impacted workers with employers who want to hire them and to support hiring associated with critical clean-up efforts, as well as permanent employment.	Sept. 2005—July 2007
<i>Pathways to Employment Initiative</i>		
<i>Job Corps</i>	Labor modified its program by expediting the enrollment process for hurricane victims.	Expedited process ended in Feb. 2006
<i>Reintegration Counselors</i>	In response to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, Labor committed \$15 million in grants to 12 states to secure reintegration counselors who would provide intensive career and life counseling directly to hurricane evacuees to support successful reemployment and reintegration.	Sept. 2005—Feb. 2006
<i>Disability Program Navigators</i>	Labor coordinated the temporary reassignment of DPN staff from other states to LA and MS along with several mobile One-stop units.	-Reassignment of counselors in MS ended Nov. 2005 -Reassignment of counselors in LA ended Dec. 2005

Source: GAO review of selected federal programs.



Appendix II: Examples of Actions Following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita (cont.)

Table 2: Examples of Education’s Actions to Assist with Services for Families with Children

Programs and services	Examples of actions taken	Duration
Assistance for Homeless Youth	As required by the Hurricane Education Relief Act, Education assisted local educational agencies serving homeless children and youth displaced by the hurricanes. ^a This assistance was provided consistent with the existing Education for Homeless Children and Youth program. Examples of authorized uses of the funds included identification of displaced students, transportation, and purchasing supplies.	Dec. 30, 2005 ^b — Sept. 30, 2007
Emergency Impact Aid for Displaced Students	As required by the Hurricane Education Relief Act, Education administered this program for the purpose of assisting local educational agencies with the cost of educating students displaced by the hurricanes. ^a Examples of authorized use of funds for this program included providing basic instructional services, acquiring classroom supplies, and paying reasonable transportation costs for displaced students.	School year 2005— 2006

Source: GAO review of selected federal programs.

^a Title IV, Division B of the Department of Defense, Emergency Supplemental Appropriations to Address Hurricanes in the Gulf of Mexico and Pandemic Influenza Act of 2006, Pub. L. No. 109-148.

^b We have used the date the legislation was enacted as start date of availability. Fund may have been provided to recipients at a later date.



Appendix II: Examples of Actions Following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita (cont.)

Table 3: Examples of HHS' Actions to Assist with Services for Families with Children

Programs and services	Examples of actions taken	Duration
Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)	As authorized by the TANF Emergency Response and Recovery Act of 2005, HHS reimbursed state for TANF benefits provided to assist families from other states affected by Hurricane Katrina and made additional loan funds available to Alabama, LA, and MS. ^a Some states used TANF loan funds to provide one time, emergency payments to victims, and LA established a contract with LA Family Recovery Corps to provide case management services.	Reimbursement: Sept. 2005—Aug. 2006 Additional loan funds available to AL, LA, and MS: Sept. 2005—Sept. 2006
Head Start	HHS provided short-term emergency funding to grantees, eased program requirements for income eligibility and birth certificate documents, and offered waivers of class size requirements.	A Head Start official stated that funding was available from Sept. 2005 to Dec. 2005 and waivers were available for the 2005/2006 program year.
	As authorized by Congress in 2005, HHS distributed supplemental funds to provide services to displaced children and to cover the costs of replacing or repairing facilities that were not covered by insurance or FEMA ^b	Dec. 30, 2005 ^c —Sept. 2006
	HHS approved the redistribution of some of the funding for the New Orleans program to other areas of the state to accommodate population shifts.	Oct. 2006—June 2009 (end date estimated by Head Start officials)
Social Services Block Grant	As authorized by Congress in 2005, HHS distributed supplemental funds for hurricane relief efforts. ^b LA used these funds for a variety of purposes including preventative and primary health care and provisions for clothing and other immediate needs. MS also used the funds for a variety of purposes including assistance for day care centers and hiring youth counselors to work in heavily impacted areas.	Dec. 30, 2005 ^c —Sept. 30, 2009 ^d

Source: GAO review of selected federal programs.

^a TANF Emergency Response and Recovery Act of 2005, Pub. L. No. 109-68.

^b Department of Defense, Emergency Supplemental Appropriations to Address Hurricanes in the Gulf of Mexico and Pandemic Influenza Act of 2006, Pub. L. No. 109-148.

^c The start date of the availability of these funds is based on the date the legislation was signed.

^d As provided by the U.S. Troop Readiness, Veterans' Care, Katrina Recovery, and Iraq Accountability Appropriations Act, 2007, Pub. L. No. 110-28, § 4702, states have until September 30, 2009 to expend these funds.



Appendix II: Examples of Actions Following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita (cont.)

Table 4: Examples of USDA’s Actions to Assist with Services for Families with Children

Programs and services	Examples of actions taken	Duration
Disaster Food Stamp Program	USDA adopted a policy authorizing states across the country, not just those areas where the disaster occurred, to provide food stamp benefits to any Katrina evacuee.	Applications accepted during Sept. and Oct. 2005.
Food Stamp Program	USDA allowed states to provide most regular Food Stamp Program recipients with benefits to replace food destroyed in the disaster, as well as automatic supplements without having to apply at a disaster site.	Duration of automatic supplements varied by county. At most, the automatic supplements were available between Sept. and Dec. 2005.
National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program	USDA relaxed eligibility verification requirements and issued guidance that provided flexibility in program operations to states.	School year 2005-2006
The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)	USDA allowed state agencies to mail up to a 3-month supply of food instruments to program participants who were scheduled to receive them at a nutrition education class, but would be unable to attend the class due to a gasoline shortage in some states.	Oct. 2005 – Dec. 2005

Source: GAO review of selected federal programs.



Appendix II: Examples of Actions Following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita (cont.)

Table 5: Actions to Assist with Transportation

Programs and services	Examples of actions taken	Duration
<i>Louisiana</i>		
New Orleans Regional Transit Authority	Supplemented public transit in Baton Rouge following the influx of displaced persons from New Orleans; provided emergency transit services to residents of FEMA group sites in the Baton Rouge area; reestablished transit in New Orleans (\$67.3 million).	Oct. 2005—Dec. 2006
Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development	Supplemented public transit service to 62 parishes in Louisiana (excluding Baton Rouge and New Orleans). Services included new routes and new service to group sites, and paratransit service (\$19 million).	Jan. 2006—Apr. 2007
<i>Mississippi</i>		
Coast Transit Authority	Provided emergency fixed-route and demand-response public transit service in three Gulf Coast counties, including transit service to temporary housing shelters, medical transportation, and FEMA group sites (\$1.4 million).	Oct. 2005—Feb. 2006
Mississippi Department of Transportation	Provided supplemental emergency public transit services to three counties located north of the Gulf Coast which included transit service to temporary shelters and demand-response service to local residents and hurricane victims (\$.3 million).	Oct. 2005—Feb. 2006

Source: GAO review of selected federal programs.

Appendix II: Analysis of FEMA Data

We collected and analyzed data from FEMA to identify the number and characteristics of those families who received a FEMA trailer anytime following hurricanes Katrina and Rita through June 24, 2008. For this report, we only analyzed data for the disaster declarations related to Katrina and Rita in Louisiana and Mississippi. We did not include Alabama and Texas in our scope because these states had a limited number of group sites.

We obtained information from two of FEMA's databases—the FEMA Response and Recovery Applicant Tracking System (FRRATS) and the National Emergency Management Information System (NEMIS).

- FRRATS data are collected through FEMA field offices. Information obtained from FRRATS included trailer receipt, the type of site the trailer or mobile home was located on, lease and vacate dates for the applicants, and the state.
- NEMIS data are collected through the national FEMA office. Information obtained from NEMIS included: date of birth, age, employer (or source of income), income, owner or renter status, damaged and current addresses, state, and disaster number.
- Both FRRATS and NEMIS contain a unique registration ID that we used to match the data we collected from these databases.

We assessed the reliability of the NEMIS and FRRATS by (1) performing manual and electronic testing of required data elements; (2) comparing the data with published FEMA data, when applicable; and (3) interviewing agency officials knowledgeable about the data. We interviewed staff who worked with these databases to understand how data were collected and used. We also conducted basic reasonableness tests and contacted FEMA for any clarifications or discrepancies. Where data was not consistently reported or collected, we did not use these data.

We determined that the data provided were sufficiently reliable for the purposes of this report. However, it is important to note that the demographic data in NEMIS are largely self-reported by applicants, and FEMA does not independently verify all of the data it collects. As an example, while some of FEMA's assistance programs are based on income, it does not verify reported income in NEMIS. Our analysis was based on the highest reported income by an individual. Additionally, FEMA collected employer data by asking applicants to report either their employer or source of income. We recoded the employer data FEMA provided to identify applicants' employment status, including sources of

income such as disability or social security for those who did not report an employer. As a result, these data may be an underrepresentation of reasons for unemployment status. Our analysis was limited to individuals who provided the information. We did not analyze whether nonrespondents were likely to differ from those who responded.

Most of our analysis focused on applicants who resided in FEMA group sites (including group and commercial site). (Most trailers were on the private property of homeowners fixing their homes.) We did not review the use of industrial sites or the characteristics of residents in these sites. To identify characteristics of applicants in group sites, we matched data obtained from FRAATS and NEMIS using the unique registration number assigned by FEMA. The total number of unique records used for our analysis was 127,629 applicants who ever received a trailer following the hurricanes through June 24, 2008. This included 21,105 persons who lived in group sites and 106,128 who had a trailer on their own property. Generally, our analysis was limited to applicants' pre-disaster characteristics. FEMA does make corrections to the data if it finds duplicates or a recipient provides new information. For example, FEMA may correct employer, income, address, or date of birth information that was reported at registration. Where information was likely to have corrections, we used the most current data.

Appendix III: Comments from the Department of Homeland Security

U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528



Homeland
Security

November 18, 2008

Ms. Kay E. Brown
Director
Education, Workforce, and Income Security
Government Accountability Office
Washington, D. C. 20548

Dear Ms. Brown:

Thank you for providing the Department of Homeland Security with an opportunity to provide comments on draft GAO Report 09-81 entitled *Federal Efforts to Assist Group Site Residents with Employment, Services for Families with Children, and Transportation*.

While the report did not contain any specific recommendations for the agency, the report stressed the importance of: 1) the completion of FEMA's National Disaster Housing Strategy; 2) the need for clear and understandable FEMA guidelines for sharing information with State agencies; and, 3) the need for clear FEMA guidance and policies on transportation services and assistance for disaster victims.

Updates on each of these elements are offered below.

National Disaster Housing Strategy: On July 23, 2008, FEMA published the preliminary National Disaster Housing Strategy pursuant to the Post Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act (P.L. 109-295). The strategy provides the overarching vision, goals, and principles for a national disaster housing effort and brings together all levels of government, nongovernmental organizations, and the private sector to meet the urgent housing needs of disaster victims. The strategy also draws on best practices and lessons learned to identify actions that must be taken to improve disaster housing assistance, which includes renewing planning efforts, building baseline capabilities, and providing a broader range of flexible disaster housing options.

A series of annexes to the strategy will address: 1) housing programs and resources available through Federal, State, Tribal, local, and nongovernmental organizations; 2) access to comprehensive wrap around services (such as employment resources, child care, health care, and senior services) for group site residents; 3) programs available to address unique recovery needs of low income and special needs populations, along with housing requirements for individuals with disabilities; and 4) comprehensive group site operations guidance.

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**Appendix III: Comments from the Department
of Homeland Security**

The strategy, minus the annexes, was recently posted for a 97 day public comment period, which ended on September 29, 2008. The agency is currently reviewing strategy comments received and incorporating changes into the strategy as appropriate. The annexes are nearing completion and still require final review and comment by partner agencies.

The final strategy will be released before the end of the calendar year.

Information Sharing: FEMA guidelines for sharing information on persons displaced as a result of a disaster are outlined in 44 CFR Section 206.

FEMA may share information on displaced persons, including those in FEMA trailer group sites with Federal and State agencies under FEMA Routine Use (a)(1). FEMA would only share information with Federal and State agencies under Routine Use (a)(1) if they administer disaster relief programs and were able to make available additional disaster assistance. Additionally, FEMA may share information on displaced persons to other Federal agencies (OFA) for planning purposes as related to hazard mitigation planning efforts, debt collection efforts, litigation, etc.

FEMA may share information on displaced persons, including those in FEMA trailer group sites, to local governments in accordance with FEMA's Routine Use (a)(2) if they administer disaster relief programs and were able to make available additional disaster assistance. The local government would be required to provide FEMA the applicant's name, FEMA registration number and damaged dwelling address in order to receive specific information under Routine Use (a)(2). However, Routine Use (f) specifically allows FEMA to release the location of the FEMA temporary housing unit to local government emergency managers for the sole purpose of preparing emergency evacuation plans.

FEMA does not share information with non-profit agencies under the Routine Uses unless they meet the specific requirements as set forth in 44 CFR 206.2(a)(27), voluntary organizations ("Any chartered or otherwise duly recognized tax-exempt local, State or national organization or group which has provided or may provide needed services to the State, local governments, or individuals in coping with an emergency or major disaster") and meet the requirements of FEMA's Routine Uses under (a)(2) & (a)(3). FEMA's Routine Use (a)(3) requires the requestor to have an established disaster assistance program, be actively involved in the disaster and be a member of the National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster OR a member of that disaster's Long Term Recovery Committee).

Transportation: Whenever FEMA constructs Group Sites during disasters, we typically try to locate them near schools, supermarkets, public transportation, and other types of essential services, e.g., health care facilities. In some instances, however, this is not possible. At these times, FEMA can provide public transportation assistance from the Group Sites to some of the essential services, to include places of employment. As with most community based disaster assistance, this assistance is provided in a collective manner, with some consideration given to individuals with disabilities. FEMA's transportation assistance from group parks is not fashioned to meet the individualized transportation needs of individual occupants (e.g. FEMA does not offer a car service). FEMA coordinates with local officials to determine the best and most effective transportation routes, drop-off/pick-up points, etc. It is during the planning stages

**Appendix III: Comments from the Department
of Homeland Security**

that the State and local government have the opportunity to identify the best routes for public transportation, to include making sure routes go near social service agencies, employment agencies, etc.

Also, the transportation authority assigned to FEMA under the Post Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act is only for evacuation/return, and not daily commutes.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on the draft report.

Sincerely,



Jerald E. Levine

Director, Departmental GAO/OIG Liaison Office

Appendix IV: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact

Kay E. Brown, (202) 512-7215, brownke@gao.gov

Staff Acknowledgments

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