

The National Service Response to the Deepwater Horizon BP Oil Spill



The Deepwater Horizon BP Oil Spill is one of the most challenging environmental disasters the country has faced. The communities whose livelihoods are dependent upon the Gulf of Mexico are being severely affected by the oil spill. Nonprofit organizations across the Gulf Coast report greater need among clients for social services at the same time many are facing a decline in donations and support.

The Corporation for National and Community Service, building off its experience responding to disasters, is working with its network of community partners and national service programs to launch a short- and long-term effort to address the economic, health, and environmental damages inflicted by the oil spill through citizen service. On August 24, the agency convened nonprofits, community leaders, and government agencies to develop a comprehensive plan to address social service needs in the region.

Service in Action in the Gulf Coast

The Corporation's primary focus in the wake of the disaster is to enhance nonprofit capacity to strengthen the economic status of communities and improve economic opportunity for individuals and families through direct service and mobilization and coordination of community volunteers. The Corporation is working with the Governor-appointed state service commissions in Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, and Mississippi and community organizations to expand their capacity to use volunteers to meet economic and social needs.

- During the early stages of the response more than 5,000 volunteers were engaged in providing a range of activities, including lining the shores of the Gulf, monitoring coastlines, performing shoreline patrols, and providing safety net services. Efforts soon shifted to providing safety net services including case management, implementing workforce development programs, providing claims assistance, and setting up job counseling programs.
- The Corporation dedicated one million dollars through its Volunteer Generation Fund to support the Gulf Coast state service commissions in developing and executing a regional strategy to respond more comprehensively to future disasters.
- The Corporation has provided 42 AmeriCorps VISTA members to help build the capacity of local organizations, address the financial hardships of those impacted, and help mobilize and manage volunteers.
- The Corporation deployed nearly 175 AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC) members to support Gulf state service commissions by operating Volunteer Reception Centers and offering community education programs and food safety programs.
- Senior Corps RSVP programs along the Gulf Coast recruited and engaged volunteers in environmental response efforts such as coastline monitoring and wildlife rehabilitation.
- More than 500 Learn and Serve America Summer of Service members assisted in public information and environmental restoration activities in summer 2010.

Supporting the Nonprofit Sector Response

On August 24, the Corporation convened a strategy session with government officials and social sector leaders to develop strategies to use citizen service to help address economic and social needs of communities affected by the oil spill, including:

- The Corporation is supporting the Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, and Mississippi state service commissions as they partner with tribal, state, and local organizations to create geographical councils to focus on the economic and social service issues affecting their communities.
- The Corporation is holding webinars and trainings for vulnerable communities focused on ways nonprofits can access national service resources.
- As part of the Federal Interagency Economic Solutions Team, the Corporation is working with the Chamber of Commerce to help address the financial stability of those affected by the oil spill.
- The Corporation is partnering with the Clean Economy Development Center to train and support a network of volunteers, sustainability coordinators, and grant writers as they develop local plans and pursue funding opportunities to support long-term economic development.
- Under the direction of the National Incident Command, the Corporation worked with Federal interagency teams and nonprofit sector leaders to determine how nonprofits can contribute to long-term recovery efforts. The Corporation wrote the Nonprofit Sector Recovery chapter of the Mabus report *America's Gulf Coast: A Long Term Recovery Plan after the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill*.

- The Mississippi Commission is working with community colleges and workforce development experts to develop an AmeriCorps program to address training needs for people unemployed as a result of the oil spill.
- As the state's lead agency for managing volunteers and donations in disasters, the Florida Commission is engaging volunteers in economic recovery efforts, including promoting tourism to bring more visitors to the state's beaches.
- Operation HOPE, Inc. in partnership with the Department of Housing and Urban Development, will provide economic education and financial literacy to individuals and families. Catholic Charities USA will continue to contribute funding, volunteers, personnel, equipment and supplies to address a variety of human service needs.
- Family Service of Greater New Orleans will continue to provide behavioral health services to Gulf residents and organize partners to help supply the region with basic needs.
- The Salvation Army will provide knowledge-based resources, volunteers, personnel, humanitarian aid, social services, case management, and emotional and spiritual care to victims in the Gulf.
- The Shinnyo-en Foundation pledged a long-term commitment to help meet the needs of the United Houma Nation including agriculture, cultural preservation, and case management.

Building Capacity to Address Tomorrow's Challenges

The Corporation is committed to a long-term response to build the capacity of communities impacted by the oil spill, including:

- Enhance nonprofit capacity to strengthen the economic status of communities and improve economic opportunity for individuals and families
- Enhance volunteer engagement, management and coordination capacity of nonprofits to strengthen the impact of volunteer service.

- Coordinate recovery efforts with key partners in accordance with CNCS strategy and catalyze efforts to use national service solutions to address pressing issues
- Increase the capacity of Gulf communities to serve vulnerable populations in the event of a disaster
- Synthesize community assessments from nonprofits and other agencies to inform tactical deployment of service assets

How Volunteers Can Help

Visit Serve.gov to learn about volunteer opportunities with Gulf Coast state service commissions. Volunteers are also encouraged to support disaster relief organizations and social service nonprofits in their own community. By

serving close to home, volunteers build the capacity of their own community to meet current social needs and respond to future disasters.

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