

Meta-Leadership Summit for Preparedness

SUCCESS STORY

SOUTHEAST LOUISIANA

Community Agencies used Meta-Leadership & a lot of Previous Experience

Contributor: Kay Wilkins

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Less than a year after the Southeast Louisiana Meta-Leadership Summit for Preparedness was held in New Orleans, the area, already fragile from the effects of Hurricane Katrina, began to experience the devastating long-term effects of the Gulf Oil Spill. Southeast Louisiana leaders, although thoroughly familiar with natural disasters, were unsure of what to expect from an environmental disaster of this magnitude.

Developing a Blueprint for this Response

When the spill first occurred in April 2010, the American Red Cross had daily phone calls with Catholic Charities to determine the immediate needs of the fishermen and their families who lived and worked in the areas surrounding the spill site in Plaquemines Parish. American Red Cross and “2-1-1” staff visited Plaquemines and St. Bernard Parishes to speak with affected families. With no blueprint for this type of disaster response, agencies used the community’s needs to drive relief efforts. While social service agencies were putting together a proposal to BP to meet the survival needs for these communities, the affected area grew from 2 parishes to a three-state region. BP responded by providing funds for immediate food and other basics needs and by committing funds for long-term mental health services.

Gathering the people and groups to respond

It was clear that emotional support services would be essential to long-term community resilience based on the experiences from the Hurricane Katrina response. With the spirit of the Meta-Leadership Summit still fresh in their minds, the American Red Cross and Catholic Charities convened a group to brainstorm the continuing challenges community members were facing and offer possible solutions. Group members included the local Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD), the Greater New Orleans Disaster Recovery Partnership agencies and about 20 other agencies. As a result of the meeting, a template for proposals for services that could be funded by BP was developed, along with a process through which proposals would be reviewed. Using the inclusive, multi-dimensional thinking that is characteristic of Meta-Leadership, the group then distributed the template to a broader audience, made broader still by an invitation to pass it along to other qualified agencies. A second meeting following this “viral e-mail” attracted about 75 individuals representing 40-45 agencies, reaching “non-usual” suspects. Kay Wilkins, CEO of the Southeast Louisiana Chapter of the American Red Cross, described, “What the Meta-Leadership Summit did was open avenues to other people and groups we might not have thought about.”

A panel comprised of representatives from Catholic Charities (the fiduciary agent for the BP funds), the United Way, American Red Cross and a local Foundation grants manager determined the distribution of funding. Many of those projects are ongoing, assisting Gulf Coast families in their emotional recovery from this unprecedented disaster.

The Meta-Leadership Summit for Preparedness empowered business, government and nonprofit leaders to act together in times of crisis. The five-year initiative connected 5,000 business, government and nonprofit leaders in 36 communities. For resources and more information about Meta-Leadership visit the [CDC Foundation Meta-Leadership Website](#).



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