

Harvey Community Relief Fund

March 2018

Recovery Update from Houston

It's been six months since Hurricane Harvey devastated Houston. Through your generous support we have raised over \$3 million, allowing us to help thousands of families and leading to the formation of the robust [Houston Rising Coalition](#), which is well-positioned in the fight for an equitable recovery for *all* Houstonians.

Congress' much-delayed action to approve further federal funds, and the fact that FEMA and other agencies have been operating in the wake of multiple natural disasters in 2017, has led to a chaotic recovery and heavy dependence on philanthropy.

These are some current points of reference in the recovery process:

- *The fight is on for federal funding priorities:* February finally saw progress for Texas receiving the long overdue federal relief funding with the notification from HUD for the release of \$5 billion approved in September and Congress voting for additional funding. The Texas General Land Office will be administering the funds based on its "Harvey Action Plan" to address housing needs and economic revitalization.
- *FEMA assistance denials:* As of last month, more than 900,000 people applied for FEMA assistance across Texas, but only 41% had been approved. Denials are especially heavy in Black and Latino neighborhoods and continue to need legal support to appeal denials.
- *Continued displacement and unfit housing conditions:* 3,420 households remain in hotels and thousands more are living in homes and apartments in dire need of repair. The storm exacerbated the epidemic of dangerous living conditions in apartments and shortage of affordable units, which was not being adequately addressed before Harvey hit Houston, particularly for immigrant and low income communities of color.

Groups have been accelerating their campaigns in the face of these conditions and political realities. The Houston Rising Coalition, [which now has 16 partner organizations](#), covers the range of capacities from grassroots organizing groups, policy advocates, legal agencies, and direct service groups that have been working together for months (and in some cases years) so they are well-equipped to help families and weigh in on the recovery process effectively at all levels. The Coalition identified equity concerns and [provided recommendations to the Texas GLO on how to alter its plan to actually achieve an equitable recovery](#). The [Coalition is focused](#) on long-term recovery to make Houston stronger, more resilient, and more equitable by making sure that federal, state, and philanthropic funds serve communities in Houston most affected by natural disasters.

The partners have been highly effective in keeping media attention on the real lives impacted by the storm, empowering communities to lift their important voices, and continuing the public call for inclusion and equity in recovery.

- Local news organizations cover the [press conferences](#), [hearings](#), and [testimonies](#) delivered to city officials by tenants and tenants' rights advocates about housing issues.
- Organizations, like FIEL Houston and Texas Housers, are influencing local coverage and opinions by [sharing stories](#) of those affected by dangerous apartment conditions and giving recommendations for improvements. The day after an event, the [Houston Chronicle editorial board](#) echoed many of Coalition recommendations to improve living conditions.

- *PBS NewsHour* did a three-part series on Harvey disaster recovery featuring [stories of those still displaced by Harvey](#) and organizations like West Street Recovery, examining [how decades of development in Houston added up to a flood risk](#), and asked the crucial question, [can Houston prevent disaster when the next storm comes?](#)
- Op-eds placed [locally by West Street Recovery](#) and [nationally by the Texas Organizing Project](#) have put a spotlight on the shortcomings of city, state, and federal officials and the reality on the ground in Houston for residents and organizations, as well as offering recommendations to improve.

We believe that an equitable recovery is a once-in-a-generation opportunity for Houston as it grows to meet the challenges of a modern city in a fragile environment. Without improving the resilience of communities, Houston will remain vulnerable to the storms that hit with increasing frequency and force. To that end, the Coalition has planned a strategy retreat this month to map out their shared goals for longer term advocacy campaigns. We look forward to providing you an update of our next steps and thank you again for your generous and ongoing support.

Onward,

Ginny Goldman
Chair
[Harvey Community Relief Fund](#)

P.S. – We have good news to share! Our interim campaign director, Sarah Labowitz, is now the Senior Advisor for Recovery at the City of Houston Housing and Community Development Department – a great opportunity for her and the Coalition. Now we need your help in finding a permanent [Campaign Director](#)! Please circulate the description widely to your networks in Texas and across the country to help us identify a talented leader in this fight!

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