



Equity in Response,
Recovery, and Resilience:
An Action Report in **Five Parts**

Background

Nonprofit and philanthropic organizations are critical in filling service, funding, and support gaps in communities nationwide. These gaps are never more widened and sustained than in moments of crisis when nonprofit organizations are called on to handle a wide range of tasks to ensure children, families, and communities have access to the resources they need to recover and thrive.

During the 2022 Jackson water crisis, nonprofits in the City of Jackson, around the State of Mississippi, and across the United States worked to meet the urgent and emergent needs of citizens and communities left without water for weeks. Many of those efforts were uncoordinated—and sometimes redundant—resulting in time and funding not being used in the most efficient ways to address acute and long-term issues.

The Mississippi Alliance of Nonprofits and Philanthropy (Alliance) was established to increase coordination, collaboration, and communication among nonprofits to maximize the use of current philanthropy funding and expand the resources available to nonprofits to do their critical work.

Over the past few years, the Alliance has been digging deep into equity through internal examination and external communication to help nonprofit and philanthropic organizations have the information, tools, and inspiration required to ensure their work is informed by equity as a principle and designed to produce equity as an outcome.

The Alliance received funding from the US Water Alliance to understand the experiences of nonprofit and philanthropic organizations with equity in natural and person-made disaster response, recovery, and resilience efforts. Specifically, the Alliance sought to:

- Establish the gaps, opportunities, and capacity-building needs to address issues like the Jackson water crisis and 2023 tornadoes in Rolling Fork through a reflection on nonprofit response and
- Build capacity among nonprofits and philanthropy to understand and address water equity in their communities and use those learnings to support their ongoing recovery and resilience work.

The Alliance engaged Fahrenheit Creative Group, LLC (FCG) and The Alluvial Collective to facilitate a series of listening sessions with nonprofit and philanthropy professionals and plan a preconference event to gather perspectives, share information, and identify pertinent action items to enhance the operational and financial infrastructure to improve equity in local and statewide disaster response, recovery, and resilience efforts.



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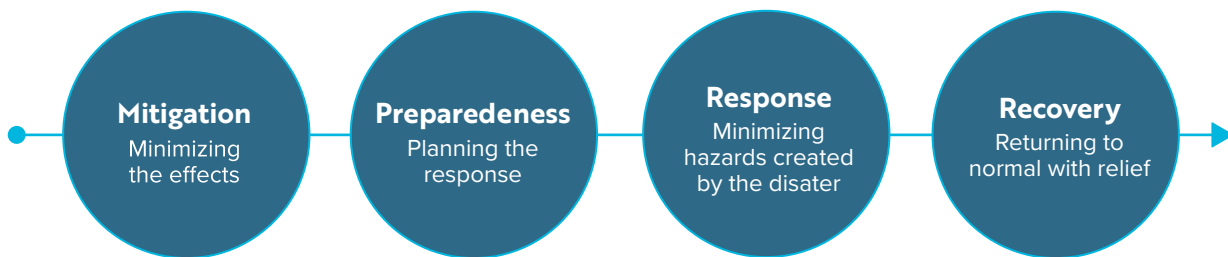
This document is organized into five parts, drawing from primary and secondary research conducted by FCG and The Alluvial Collective.

- 1. **Act One:** Before a Disaster
- 2. **Act Two:** During a Disaster
- 3. **Act Three:** After a Disaster
- 4. **Act Four:** Equity Checklist
- 5. **Act Five:** Establishing a Shared Language

The first three parts of the document present recommendations on actions the Alliance can take and nonprofits and philanthropy should take to improve the use of equity as a frame and increase the likelihood of equity as an outcome before, during, and after natural and personmade disasters. The fourth and fifth parts are tools organizations can use to guide their efforts and ensure they can effectively communicate about equity with partners and individuals in the communities they serve.

Act One: Before a Disaster

In its [Disaster Recovery Playbook](#), The Disaster Services Corporation – Society of St. Vincent de Paul (DSC) mentions the need to take a “longer, wider, and deeper” perspective on natural and personmade disasters and uses a simple graphic to depict the “disaster life cycle.” This cycle “consists of the steps that emergency managers take to plan for and respond to disaster.”



We have modified the DSC model to reflect the circular relationship between community resilience and mitigation—both of which rely heavily on equitable distribution of funding, resources, and opportunities at every stage of the disaster life cycle. In addition, we have revised the language to use an equity frame that focuses on building community capacity and helping communities recover from a disaster stronger and more resilient than before.



Resilience

Working with communities and partners to create healthy economic and social systems that ensure all residents are able to meet their current needs during normal times and are able to operate with some level of self-sufficiency and self-determination before and during a disaster

Recovery

Working with government entities, nonprofits, philanthropy, and communities to support community-led efforts to address gaps caused by a disaster and preexisting gaps that can aid with resilience and mitigation

Equity-Focused Disaster Life Cycle

Mitigation (Influenced by Equity and Resilience)

Working with community leaders to provide resources, information, and tools to reduce the impact of natural and personmade disaster

Preparedness

Working with nonprofit and philanthropic partners to identify roles and responsibilities, share information and resources, accurately assess risk, and conduct trainings at the local and state level

Response

Working with communities to effectively address immediate needs (e.g., water, clothing, shelter, transportation, medical support) while limiting duplication of efforts

The Alliance Disaster Response, Recovery, and Resilience Life Cycle

- **Mitigation** (influenced and informed by equity and resilience): Working with community leaders to provide resources, information, and tools to reduce the impact of natural and personmade disasters

This stage is an opportunity for funders to invest in multifarious projects that address communities' ability to respond to disasters, including housing stability, workforce development, infrastructure, and training for nonprofits.

- **Preparedness:** Working with nonprofit and philanthropic partners to identify roles and responsibilities, share information and resources, accurately assess risk, and conduct trainings at the local and state level

This stage should be marked by high levels of communication, coordination, and collaboration that result in nonprofits and funders better understanding existing gaps and risks, current resources and skills, and clearly defined roles and responsibilities for response, recovery, and resilience work. This work is already happening among many organizations. However, these groups aren't necessarily thinking about this work through a disaster recovery and resilience lens.

- **Response:** Working with communities to effectively address immediate needs (e.g., water, clothing, shelter, transportation, medical support) while limiting duplication of efforts.

During this stage, the communication and collaboration channels developed during the preparedness stage should be widened to ensure resources are allocated and distributed to the most appropriate nonprofits and communities.

The response stage is also important because oftentimes this is where inequity in resource allocation and distribution starts due to issues that plague nonprofit work. For instance, the most economically distressed communities often don't have well-resourced organizations that can immediately respond to disasters, and people who live in those communities have the least reliable transportation, least secure housing, and the least amount of disposable income.

- **Recovery:** Working with government entities, nonprofits, philanthropy, and communities to support community-led efforts to address gaps caused by a disaster and preexisting gaps that can aid with resilience and mitigation.

During this stage, funders and nonprofits should think beyond restoring communities to their pre-disaster state. Instead, organizations could consider what would fortify and future-proof these communities through the types of projects and programs that improve quality of life and self-determination.

- **Resilience:** Working with communities and partners to create healthy economic and social systems that ensure all residents are able to meet their current needs during normal times and are able to operate with some level of self-sufficiency and self-determination before and during a disaster.

We have identified several actions the Alliance can take to support each of the five phases of the equity-focused disaster life cycle.

- Create a collaborative relationship between the Alliance and Red Cross or United Way of the Capital Area to lead in coordinating disaster recovery resources, training nonprofits and philanthropic organizations, liaising with the state and federal government (policy work), tracking the available resources (including funding), and handling logistics for large-scale response and recovery efforts

- Establish a database of funding opportunities for preparedness work that includes a list of philanthropists and funders that have a high level of funding flexibility, an index of what funders can/can't fund in disasters, and opportunities for donor-advised funds at community foundations to support activities at each of the five stages
- Develop and manage a disaster recovery and equity network facilitated by the PT or FT staff member made up of regional tables that share information and resources based on the types of natural and person-made disasters likely to affect the region
 - The Alliance would convene an annual conference to provide updates, offer training, and share milestones
 - The Alliance would facilitate regular webinars to offer updates on funding, human capital allocation, policies, and support needs in other states
- Compile and house pertinent information about disaster response and recovery and water quality on the Alliance website

The Center for Disaster Philanthropy (CDP) highlights several actions philanthropic organizations can take to help communities be prepared for disasters in its Disaster Playbook, including:

- including business continuity planning in daily operations;
- hiring a new employee or recruiting a board member trained in emergency management;
- creating a restricted disaster fund;
- developing memos of understanding (which define parameters of emergency grants) with key grantees who will be called upon to act when a disaster strikes;
- supporting and convening preparedness training sessions for grantees (hosted by the Alliance).

Act Two: During a Disaster

The NAACP published In [The Eye of the Storm: A People's Guide to Transforming Crisis & Advancing Equity in the Disaster Continuum](#) in 2018 to provide guidance for “building equity into the ... phases of emergency management.”

Communities most adversely impacted by natural or personmade disasters are also communities most affected by pre-existing disparities created by systemic issues like environmental racism, economic injustice, political disenfranchisement, lack of access to quality healthcare, and poorly funded education systems. These issues must be addressed before and after disasters To help create communities of resilience.

Systemic change is a long and continuous project. During a disaster, immediate needs must be met despite the systemic challenges. The following are steps to take to help ensure that any disaster response is carried out with equity and respect for diversity as foci:

- Community leadership should inform every aspect of the emergency management continuum, including community-designed planning, response, and recovery.
- Ensure that principles of equity, justice, inclusion, transparency, and accountability govern all aspects of emergency management.
- Measures must be taken to ensure that human rights and civil protections are safeguarded and prioritized during times of disaster, including using international human rights law to shape policy on the federal, state, and local levels.
- People have a right to the resources required to create productive, dignified, and ecologically sustainable livelihoods. Emergency management should uphold peoples' rights to land, clean water, food, and other resources to survive and live well.

- All phases of emergency management must be built on principles of deep democracy, participatory decision-making, and self-governance.
- Emergency management practices should embody a spirit of care, cooperation, and collectivism among people and communities, including knowledge- and resource-sharing and mutual aid.

In addition to these points, **nonprofit and philanthropic organizations must operate with a high level of cultural humility to ensure they effectively meet the needs of Mississippians who are non-English-speaking, low-income, LGBTQ+, and members of other diverse and protected groups.**



Act Three: After a Disaster

The immediate aftermath of a disaster or crisis is typically marked by a level of charitable and volunteer activity commensurate with the scale or magnitude of the need. For the purposes of this report, the time period “after a disaster” is the recovery and resilience period that often begins after direct relief in the form of food, water, or emergency shelter has ceased.

During this period, the need for the work many nonprofits do year-round is amplified as individuals and families deal with economic disruption, physical displacement, and social disconnection. This period is also a time when philanthropy (along with local, state, and federal government) can examine ways to make impact investments differently, focusing on funding community-identified and community-led projects that are restorative, reparative, and inclusive.

CDP emphasizes that low-income families and seniors, individuals with disabilities, and immigrant populations face a greater risk of being displaced from their homes for a protracted period of time. In addition, working and middle-class families can enter into a cascading cycle of poverty due to the overwhelming hardship of being temporarily displaced and the crushing demands of financing the rebuilding of their homes and small businesses.

NAACP advises organizations to uphold housing as a human right, protect land from appropriation, and ensure access to a place called home for all. In addition, the organization emphasizes the need to rebuild or renovate structures with more resilient (and we would add sustainable) materials. We would add that this rebuilding or renovation process should include investing in local and disadvantaged businesses and building the capacity of micro and small businesses to increase their ability to respond to future disasters.



Act Four: Specific Equity Considerations, an “Equity Checklist”:

When preparing for response, recovery, and resilience in all communities impacted by natural or personmade disasters, nonprofits, government agencies, and other service providers must consider the current contexts of people in different communities and how disasters affect them. Considering the sources of the current inequalities, helping to mitigate current inequities in access to resources, including healthcare, economic opportunity, housing, and safety, plays a vital part in how these communities will be impacted by disasters.

The following checklist can help to inform the support that nonprofits can provide to communities before, during and after disasters strike.

Before:

- Have we built relationships in all the communities we serve?
 - Have we taken the time to get to know the gatekeepers in various communities, especially communities that are underrepresented in economic, political, and other social circles?
 - Have we taken inventory of available, community-based resources that could be utilized to help with disaster response?
 - Do we know the community members who can contribute and in what ways they can contribute?
 - Do we know where physical resources are currently (or can be) stored and distributed?
 - Do we know who the most vulnerable people in the community are, where they live (or areas they frequent), and what their needs are?
- How have we worked toward helping build the resilience of families and individuals through advocacy for just distribution of economic and political resources (i.e., job training, educational, and healthcare considerations-things that help mitigate and eliminate concentrated poverty)?
- Have we made ourselves present in the community and found ways to honor cultural, ethnic, and language diversity?
- Have we considered how the resource distribution needs of communities are influenced by their language, customs, and culture?

During:

- **Check lines of communication**
 - Can people who are included in disaster recovery plans be reached?
 - Are vulnerable people being reached?
- **Ensure resource distribution is community-led and grounded in the specific needs identified by community members**
 - Have we taken steps to ensure the work we are doing or plan to do does not enforce or reinforce individual or community norms of exclusion or hierarchy (weighing the needs of people based on migration status, religious norms, or other cultural considerations)?
 - Have we ensured that points of resource distribution are staffed by community-based, diverse, and culturally respectful and sensitive staff members or volunteers?
- Are we using the community relationships we build in the mitigation and preparedness stages to help with the efficient and just distribution of resources for recovery?
 - Have we expanded our network during this response process to include people we may have overlooked?

After:

- **Reflect on lessons learned during resource distribution.**
 - Did resources reach the most vulnerable? Who was left out? Why? Were people more prepared, more resilient, for this disaster? Why or why not?
- **Refine disaster recovery, response, and resilience plans.**
 - How well did we center equity in preparation, communication, and distribution of resources? Where can we improve?
- **Hold periodic community engagements to discuss equity issues in resilience, response, and recovery during disasters.**
- **Make available recommendations/lessons learned to government agencies and other nonprofits/services providers to help with raising issues of just resource distribution year round.**

Act Five: Establishing a Shared Language

Nonprofits and funders can't communicate if they don't agree on a shared language. While it is unrealistic to believe the hundreds of nonprofit organizations—and thousands of Mississippians who work for them—will agree on the meaning of every word or phrase, this report attempts to identify disaster recovery-related language for the Alliance to incorporate into its work. The Alliance should be clear about what it means when it uses these words in all forms of communication to ensure people know how communication is being framed.

Equity: The state of building individual and/or collective ability, safety, resilience, and stability due to just distribution to resources and opportunity for growth and autonomy.

Resilience: The ability of people maintain autonomy, stability, growth and safety in times of change of conditions, contexts, and or environment

Community: a collection of people defined by common interests, resources, spaces, customs, language, or traditions.

Systemic: the interconnected nature of institutions, resources, opportunities, policies/laws that serve to characterize lived realities/life chances of people.

Response: Immediate provisions of needs and resources to people in community impacted by natural or person made disasters

Recovery: The systemic provision of resources to help build back community functions and services to restore “normalcy” or pre-disaster ways or rhythms of life.

Capacity: The ability of individuals or institutions to provide services, safety, and establish autonomy for themselves and others.

Community resilience: the collective activity of a neighborhood or geographically defined areas to deal with stressors and efficiently resume the rhythms of daily life through cooperation following shock.

Social capital: the collection of resources linked to networks and access to these resources are secured through group membership

