

# **Delivering Legal Aid after Katrina: The Equal Justice Works Katrina Legal Initiative**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On August 29<sup>th</sup>, 2005, Hurricane Katrina, the most destructive hurricane in the nation's history, hit the Gulf Coast, followed by Hurricane Rita less than a month later. The Hurricanes led to a myriad of legal needs. Many local attorneys, however, were displaced, and legal infrastructures in many communities were wiped out due to limited staff support and lack of office space, funding, electricity, and technological resources. Equal Justice Works, a non-profit organization located in Washington, D.C., identified the important legal needs in the Gulf Coast region and implemented an innovative legal aid disaster relief program to assist a number of the communities affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The program, designated the Katrina Legal Initiative (KLI), was comprised of three components: the Katrina Legal Fellowship program, the AmeriCorps Legal Fellowship program, and the Summer Corps program. Non-profit legal organizations served as host sites for KLI Fellows and Summer Corps members. Equal Justice Works selected and funded host sites for the two fellowship programs, and these sites then selected candidates for the Fellowship positions. Equal Justice Works selected and directly funded Summer Corps members who were interested in working at eligible host sites.

The Urban Institute was contracted by Equal Justice Works to evaluate the Katrina Legal Initiative. The purpose of the current report is to describe the evaluation of the three components of the Katrina Legal Initiative and to highlight findings from this study. This report details the implementation of the Katrina Legal Initiative; describes the program goals, activities, and impacts of the three programs; analyzes whether the programs met the stated goals; and offers recommendations for comparable programs in the future.

### **Methodology**

#### ***Data Collection***

In order to document the scope and nature of the Legal Initiative, researchers at the Urban Institute gathered information from multiple sources, including data collected by Equal Justice Works throughout the duration of the Initiative, interviews and focus groups with program participants and stakeholders, and site observations of five host organizations.

Progress reports documenting the Fellows' activities were completed by 100 percent of the 11 Katrina Legal Fellows and 63 percent of the 16 AmeriCorps Legal Fellows. AmeriCorps Legal Fellow grantee organizations were also required to complete host site reports which served as the document of record for reporting to the Corporation for National and Community Service. These reports provided information on various activities performed within host sites through the AmeriCorps grant but did not specify activities at the level of the individual attorneys (e.g. one grantee organization in Mississippi reported on the



combined activities of four different AmeriCorps Legal Fellows). Summer Corps members completed an exit survey on activities, program satisfaction, and legal skill development at the end of the summer term. This survey was completed by 86 percent of the 98 Summer Corps members.

To better understand the Katrina Legal Fellowship and AmeriCorps Legal Fellowship programs, the evaluation team attempted to contact every participating attorney for phone or in-person interviews. Seven of the 11 (64 percent) Katrina Legal Fellows and 11 of the 16 (69 percent) AmeriCorps Legal Fellows were reached for an interview. Interviews covered activities performed, perceived impacts of their work, satisfaction with the program, and general challenges and lessons learned about delivering legal assistance after a disaster. Phone interviews, similar in content to those performed with the Katrina Legal Fellows and AmeriCorps Legal Fellows, were conducted with a small sample (11 percent) of the 98 Summer Corps law students to obtain a detailed picture of their contributions to the KLI program.

The research team conducted two individual stakeholder interviews and one stakeholder focus group to gather impressions of the Katrina Legal Initiative from those individuals who initiated and ran the program at Equal Justice Works during its implementation. Stakeholders included executive- and management-level staff and the Equal Justice Works consultant who performed a legal needs assessment.

Five host sites were selected for a more in-depth case study analysis of the Katrina Legal Initiative. The five sites included two Legal Services Corporation (LSC) funded organizations, a legal funding agency that supports other state organizations to provide free legal aid, an advocacy organization that focuses on systemic social injustices, and an organization whose mission was to find and match pro bono volunteers with clients in need. During these site visits, executive directors from these agencies were interviewed, focus groups were held with selected host site staff, and a sample of case files were reviewed to better understand of the scope and nature of legal services provided by KLI attorneys. Interviews with directors and staff covered the same areas as described above in the Katrina Legal Fellow and AmeriCorps Legal Fellow interviews.

The evaluation team also attempted to collect quarterly (dating January 2005 to June 2008) client services data from the case study host organizations to determine how the Legal Fellows affected the capacity of host organizations. However, concerns over limited data and unstable baselines prohibited meaningful analyses on changes in organizational capacity caused expressly by the Katrina Legal Fellows and AmeriCorps Legal Fellows.

A small sample (N=25) of clients served at three of the case study host sites was also interviewed to determine client perceptions of services. These interviews were used to further develop the researchers' understanding of services provided and satisfaction with



these services and are not intended to serve as a representative view of all clients. Clients were selected by KLI Fellows after it was determined that random sampling was impractical due to unusable and out-of-date contact information.

### *Analyses*

Interview responses were coded and analyzed with qualitative software to identify themes, and basic descriptive statistics were used to analyze Equal Justice Works survey data, host site reports, and data on activities performed from progress reports and interview and focus group responses. Both AmeriCorps and Summer Corps program outputs were compared to established performance measurement goals. However, due to the timing of the Hurricanes, the information gathered through host site reports did not align with the grant cycles. Therefore, the evaluation team compared the outputs of both AmeriCorps terms to the combined performance measurement goals of 2005 and 2006. While this method does not allow the level of detail to determine whether the AmeriCorps Legal Fellowship program met its goals each grant period, it will provide an indicator of the success of the program overall. Some goals were estimated based on a set of performance measurement goals for a larger AmeriCorps and Summer Corps class, including attorneys and law students who were not part of the Katrina Legal Initiative. No performance goals were set for the Katrina Legal Fellowship program; therefore program outputs are not compared to any pre-established goals.

Administrative records from three sites were used to illustrate general trends in client demographics and legal needs over time in the Gulf Coast region. Trends were first examined individually by site, but data was then combined once it was seen that patterns were similar across the three sites.

### *Caveats and Cautions*

Some caveats to the study findings should be noted. While data were collected from a variety of sources to obtain a wide range of perceptions on the impacts of the Katrina Legal Initiative, estimates of activity participation and program outputs may be imprecise due to (a) self-reporting, (b) missing progress reports, and (c) limitations of host sites' client services data. An additional caution is given to remind readers that the sample of interviewed clients is extremely small in comparison to the number of clients served through the Katrina Legal Initiative. Due to both sample size and the non-randomized selection strategy, the included client opinions should be viewed as a small subset of possible client experiences and should not be interpreted as a representative sample.

Regarding the analyses comparing program outputs to performance measurement goals, readers should take caution in interpreting comparisons made to estimated performance measurement goals (e.g. all of the PMG for Summer Corps members and five of the PMG for the 2006 grant cycle) because these were not established with the special needs and



circumstances of the Katrina Legal Initiative in mind. A final caution is given that while we believe this report will be helpful to informing responses to other types of natural and manmade disasters, some of these findings may be specific to the particular circumstances of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita or the regions that were affected.

### **Implementation of the Katrina Legal Initiative**

The Katrina Legal Initiative grew out of a desire to help those along the Gulf Coast after stories emerged about the vast unmet legal needs arising after the Hurricanes. During the initial planning stage, Equal Justice Works staff developed a plan and budget, emailed a large group of attorney colleagues to gauge the level of interest in participating in a Katrina-related fellowship program, and conducted a needs assessment by sending a consultant to travel around the area to identify legal needs and prospective partners. The JEHT Foundation awarded a planning grant to assist with this process. Through the needs assessment, Equal Justice Works demonstrated an immense need for legal assistance in the Gulf Coast region, especially in the areas of housing, insurance, consumer matters, FEMA and other disaster benefits, and family law (see sidebar for examples of hurricane-related legal needs). Equal Justice Works raised additional funds from the JEHT Foundation, the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), sponsoring law organizations, and individual donors to implement a three part program to address the unmet legal needs along the Gulf Coast. The three components of the Katrina

#### **Legal Needs After a Hurricane**

The following are examples of some of the most pressing hurricane-related legal issues:

##### *Housing*

- Tenant evictions so landlords can rent property at higher rates due to scarce housing
- Disagreements over obligations to pay rent or make repairs related to whether properties are inhabitable
- Lack of information about foreclosure moratoriums and failure to make mortgage payments on destroyed homes
- Auctioning of homes when evacuated homeowners cannot be located
- Contractor fraud for home repairs

##### *Insurance*

- Disputes over insurance denials based on damage being caused by water rather than wind
- Obtaining the appropriate amount of insurance benefits

##### *Consumer Matters*

- Bankruptcies and credit problems
- Hurricane Katrina-related fraud

##### *Claims for FEMA and*

##### *Other State Disaster Programs*

- Filing for FEMA and other disaster program (e.g. Road Home) benefits
- Appealing FEMA decisions to take back previously distributed benefits
- Documenting the amount of damage to a home
- Documenting legitimate ownership of properties passed down without official wills

##### *Family Law Matters*

- Interstate child custody disputes when parents evacuate and remain in different states
- Increased domestic violence and divorce due to extreme stress





Legal Initiative included: (a) the Katrina Legal Fellowship program, which funded two-year placements for more experienced attorneys, (b) the AmeriCorps Legal Fellowship program, which funded 9 to 11 month placements for attorneys, and (c) the Summer Corps program, which funded first- and second-year law students for 300 hour summer internships. Host organizations for the three components across multiple terms included eight Katrina Legal Fellowship sites, five AmeriCorps Legal Fellowship sites, and over 30 Summer Corps sites.

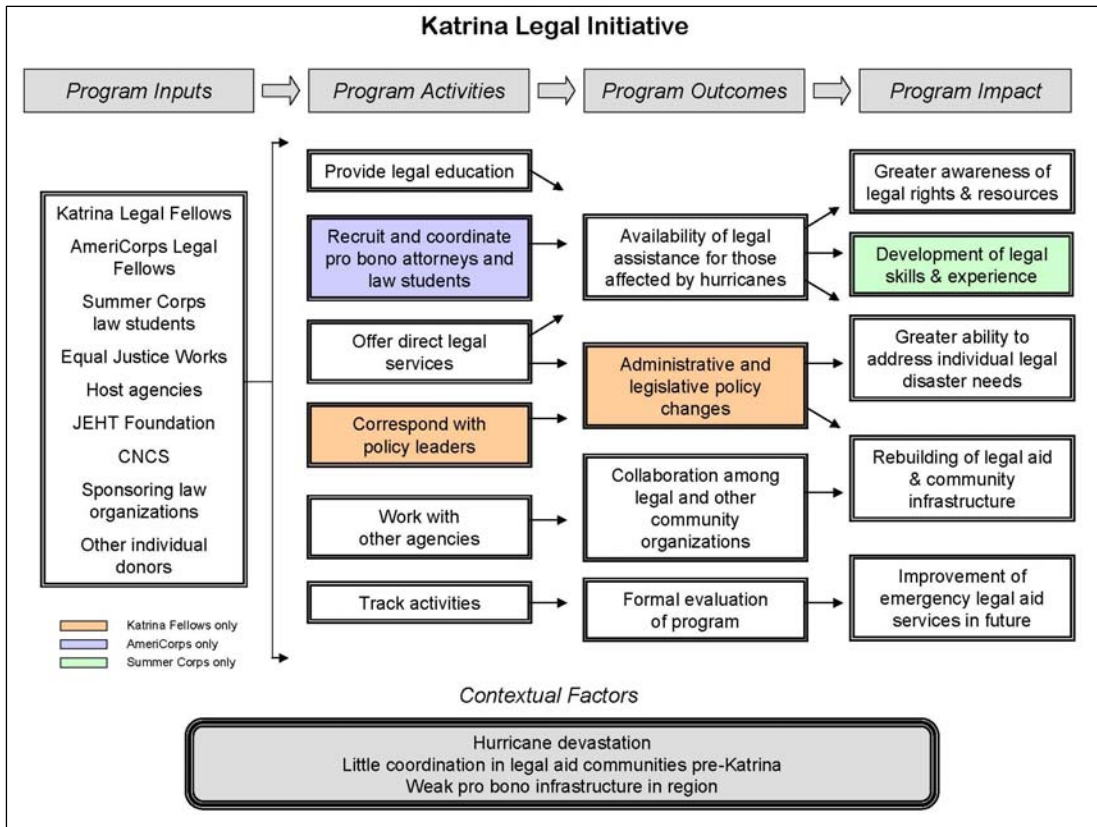
Equal Justice Works staff in Washington, D.C. provided training to both the Katrina Legal Fellow and AmeriCorps Legal Fellow participants and the host site staff. Summer Corps members received an orientation manual. Katrina Legal Initiative participants also convened on other occasions to share experiences and thoughts on best practices, including conferences and KLI meetings. Host organizations also participated in site visits from Equal Justice Works staff. Only one of the five host organizations we spoke with organized any training or orientation specifically for the new fellows; otherwise, KLI Fellows were trained on-site through routine office trainings or through “on-the-job” training. Participants in the Summer Corps program who were interviewed often did not receive formal training from Equal Justice Works or their host organization. However, Equal Justice Works provided a formal luncheon with speakers to recognize and reflect on the Summer Corps members’ work in both summer terms.

Program stakeholders reported many challenges in implementing an initiative of this scope in a compressed time period. Equal Justice Works had to devise a novel legal program designed for disaster relief, as no other legal disaster programs of this type were known to exist at the time. Equal Justice Works also encountered challenges with funding acquisition, development of relationships with host organizations, placing attorneys in the field in a timely manner, selecting sites in one the weakest areas in the country for public interest law while the region was still in crisis, and handling the immense burden on Equal Justice Works in terms of time, money, and emotional strain. Although Equal Justice Works reported many difficulties in implementing the Katrina Legal Initiative, stakeholders reported being incredibly proud of the program and found their role in the program development to be very personally rewarding.



## Analysis of Katrina Legal Initiative

**Figure 1. Logic Model for the Katrina Legal Initiative**



### *Target Population and Client Needs*

The Katrina Legal Initiative was intended to reach traditionally underserved individuals with legal needs who were impacted by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Most of the KLI members reached the target population by being located in the midst of the devastated areas, making frequent outreach trips to the affected areas, manning statewide legal call centers, or focusing on finding and matching pro bono volunteers for other areas of the state. However, two AmeriCorps Legal Fellows at the Alabama host site did not come in contact with many hurricane survivors due to their distance from the areas most strongly affected by the storms. Katrina Legal Fellows and AmeriCorps Legal Fellows described the clients they saw as typically being low-income, and many were single with a minority or disability status. Administrative data from three host sites shows a general rise in clients after the Hurricanes with stronger increases in Hispanic, African American, female, and middle-aged clients.



The legal needs in Gulf Coast communities grew dramatically after the Hurricanes, increasing burden on legal aid organizations that were experiencing their own impacts of the storms. The number of open cases initially dropped in the third quarter of 2005 when the Hurricanes struck, but then substantially rose and remained at higher levels than before the storms, even as far out as 2008. Participants handled legal matters directly related to the Hurricanes (e.g. insurance claims, federal and state disaster program benefits), legal problems caused indirectly by the storms (e.g. contractor fraud, divorce, domestic violence), and some seemingly non-disaster related, albeit still much-needed, casework (e.g. drafting wills, working on wrongful convictions).

Importantly, Katrina Legal Fellows and AmeriCorps Legal Fellows who served for longer periods of time also faced the challenge of adapting to changing needs in the community. Some interviewed individuals reported a progression of the legal issues they saw in the community. For instance, FEMA benefits and housing were two legal needs that manifested immediately after the disaster. Legal issues such as insurance, family law, and employment followed later, while consumer matters and contractor fraud were issues that emerged further out. Katrina Legal Fellows and AmeriCorps Legal Fellows had to identify these changing needs and prepare accordingly to meet these needs. Administrative data from a sample of host sites showed significant increases in home title succession, family law, landlord-tenant, and employment cases.

### ***Program Activities***

The activities performed by the KLI participants align with the anticipated program activities described in the program logic model (p. vi). Through direct legal assistance such as client representation, legal clinics and phone work, Katrina Legal Fellows and AmeriCorps Legal Fellows provided direct legal assistance to at least 5,411 individuals and 7,132 individuals, respectively. Katrina Legal Fellows also participated in three class action lawsuits and community lawyering. Summer Corps members assisted in the provision of direct legal services for at least 4,504 clients within their host organization through activities such as drafting legal documents, interviewing clients, and performing legal research. Furthermore, AmeriCorps Legal Fellows increased legal assistance indirectly through recruiting and coordinating 4,065 pro bono attorneys and law students who performed additional legal services for clients. Katrina Legal Fellows also worked with about 1,060 pro bono attorneys and law students and helped to train volunteers across the country through web-based training modules and seminars in different states.

Additionally, participants in all three program components helped inform the community on particular legal issues and on legal rights and resources for legal help. AmeriCorps Legal Fellows presented to an estimated 2,400 people and created or helped create materials distributed to an estimated 5,700 individuals. Summer Corps members reached an even



greater number of people through educational endeavors, including an estimated 5,313 people through presentations and 13,765 people through distributed educational materials. While the researchers were unable to reliably estimate the number of individuals reached by Katrina Legal Fellows' educational efforts due to interview limitations, it is likely that the Fellows produced similar numbers.

Katrina Legal Fellows also addressed policy issues. Katrina Legal Fellows helped to modify and monitor disaster relief policies and programs through media attention, legislative advocacy, and educating other legal professionals and program administrators about how procedures could be best changed in light of their experiences working with clients "on the ground." These interactions with policymakers and other advocacy work occurred both locally and nationally and often were the product of collaborative alliances with other organizations. Katrina Legal Fellows estimated these activities improved the lives of well over 143,900 community members.

Through the above listed activities, the Katrina Legal Fellows, AmeriCorps Legal Fellows, and Summer Corps members formed partnerships with other organizations in the community. Combined, an estimated 670 collaborative relationships were made through the work of the Katrina Legal Initiative. When compared to performance measurement objectives established at the outset of the program implementation, both the AmeriCorps Legal Fellowship and Summer Corps programs met and, in many cases, far exceeded the expected goals. The research team was unable to compare Katrina Legal Fellowship outputs to performance measurement goals as there were no previously set quantified objectives.

**Table 1. Katrina Legal Initiative Activities**

Activity Outputs	KLF Quantity	ALF Quantity	SC Quantity
Clients Served	5411	7132	4504
Legal Clinics	154	357	N/A
Pro Bono Attorneys	315	2860	N/A
Pro Bono Law Students	745	1205	N/A
Collaborative Relationships	222	209	240

### ***Program Impacts***

KLI participants, host site staff, and program stakeholders reported the program activities led to significant impacts. These impacts were felt in four primary areas: the host organizations, individuals in the community, the program participant, and the community. The direct legal



services provided by Katrina Legal Fellows, AmeriCorps Legal Fellows, Summer Corps members, and their pro bono volunteers increased capacity at various legal aid organizations in the Gulf Coast region. The passion and energy of the AmeriCorps Legal Fellows was also credited with revitalizing other overwhelmed staff members who were feeling “burnt out.” The Katrina Legal Fellows and AmeriCorps Legal Fellows were also perceived as improving the host organization’s relationships with other entities, increasing awareness about the organization, and, particularly in the case of the Katrina Legal Fellows, raising their credibility or expertise. Furthermore, some directors felt the increased awareness of their organization helped open options with other national funders; Equal Justice Works also continued to fund some organizations after the Katrina Legal Initiative ended.

Finally, two organizations that did not focus on direct legal work prior to Hurricane Katrina have continued to offer or coordinate legal assistance with the help of AmeriCorps Legal Fellows and a Katrina Legal Fellow who have remained at the organization as permanent staff. When asked about burdens, additional reporting requirements and the need to train less-experienced attorneys were listed as drawbacks for the AmeriCorps Legal Fellowship program. However, host site staff felt that the assistance provided by Equal Justice Works far outweighed these inconveniences. No interviewed host organization staff felt burdened by hosting Katrina Legal Fellows.

Through direct legal assistance, many individuals received legal help that would otherwise have been unaffordable. Program participants also made a particular effort to try to reach out to individuals through going door to door in FEMA trailer parks, recruiting pro bono volunteers who speak Spanish and Vietnamese to reduce language barriers, and traveling to homeless shelters and rural areas to conduct legal clinics. These outreach and other education efforts helped to increase awareness of legal rights and legal resources in the community. Katrina Legal Fellows and one AmeriCorps Legal Fellow also had widespread effects through impact litigation. Through two class action lawsuits, FEMA was required to halt recoupment efforts and publicize a phone number for reporting violations of disability-accessible trailers.

Interviewed clients reported varying levels of satisfaction. Clients who only received brief advice or whose cases were refused or never responded to expressed dissatisfaction. On the other hand, clients who obtained legal assistance reported extremely high satisfaction, even if their case was still pending or did not necessarily turn out in their favor. The most common suggestions for improved services were increased advertising, more staff, and faster services.

Beyond the host organizations and individuals in the community, the Katrina Legal Initiative also impacted those who participated in the program. Summer Corps participants reported improving their legal skills and building professional networks through the



experience. Katrina Legal Fellows, AmeriCorps Legal Fellows, and Summer Corps members reported continued or strengthened commitment to helping underserved populations. Furthermore, Equal Justice Works stakeholders also reported that the Katrina Legal Initiative raised the profile of their organization, opened up new funding avenues, boosted morale in the organization, and brought Equal Justice Works into the arena of disaster relief.

Finally, the Katrina Legal Initiative appeared to have impacted the local communities and their ability to rebuild. Katrina Legal Fellows helped to modify and monitor disaster relief policies and programs through media attention, legislative advocacy, and educating other legal professionals and program administrators about how procedures could be changed to best help community members. Through these efforts, Katrina Legal Fellows fought against funds being diverted away from individuals to a state port construction project, modified the application process and eligibility requirements of existing programs, and guided the development of new programs. Many of those interviewed felt that the AmeriCorps Legal Fellows helped strengthen the pro bono infrastructure in areas traditionally considered weak in the area of public interest law.

### ***Program Perceptions***

Satisfaction with the Katrina Legal Initiative was, for the most part, high all around, and many of the staff and KLI participants gave enthusiastic endorsements of Equal Justice Works and the support they provided. Subjective ratings of program participants' experience tended to be high. The average rating (on a scale of 1-10) of the overall experience was 8.9 for Katrina Legal Fellows, 7.7 for AmeriCorps Legal Fellows, and 8.5 for Summer Corps members.

Although no burdens were mentioned by host site staff in regards to the Katrina Legal Fellowship program, one drawback mentioned by multiple executive directors was the reporting requirement for the AmeriCorps Legal Fellowship. Furthermore, a few of those interviewed felt that local attorneys may have been better equipped since they were more connected with the local community. While most KLI members reported positive experiences, some program participants reported dissatisfaction with host sites and problems with funding. The most common suggestions for improvement included making the Katrina Legal Fellowship longer to encompass the full life of cases and more of the recovery process, facilitating a greater sense of community for the Summer Corps members by having more contact with Equal Justice Works and other Summer Corps participants, and increasing opportunities for horizontal networking and coordination among the AmeriCorps Legal Fellows and Katrina Legal Fellows in order to learn from each other's experiences.



### *Challenges of Disaster Legal Aid and Lessons Learned*

Delivering services after a disaster presents challenges that require special support. KLI participants and host site staff described a variety of situations hindering their ability to provide legal assistance. Host organizations and KLI participants dealt with crumbled infrastructure within organizations and within the region in general. Some organizations lost office space, staff, technological resources, and basic needs such as electricity for long periods of time. KLI participants noted the importance of being able to work in a mobile fashion in the aftermath of a disaster and reported substantial need for equipment to facilitate this type of work such as laptops with roaming wireless internet and portable copy machines. In addition, some sites had trouble offering adequate supervision while working in a crisis mode.

Another major challenge was dealing with novel legal issues introduced by the disaster. For instance, some issues had not occurred before on such a widespread level (e.g. custody issues when parents have evacuated to different regions), and attorneys needed to navigate new disaster programs, which many complained lacked transparency and had frequently changing policies. With the emergence of novel legal issues, new government programs, and the necessity for innovative modes of service delivery, KLI participants felt that information resources such as handbooks and resource guides would have been extremely advantageous to their work. Many Fellows suggested the best assistance would be talking with another legal professional who has either performed this type of work in the past or who is currently doing disaster legal aid. Interviewees also mentioned flexibility and creativity as crucial traits for individuals involved in this type of work.

Many KLI stakeholders and participants felt attorneys needed to be in the field as soon as possible, whether to help out with the Disaster Relief Centers, handle the outpouring of volunteer offers, perform assessments of the legal system, or be on the ground for early guidance in policy decision-making. Equal Justice Works felt the role of the consultant who performed the initial legal needs assessment was a critical component to the success of the Katrina Legal Initiative.

Overall, most people found the post-disaster work to be very difficult and emotionally draining, and the theme of personal care frequently came up with those who were interviewed. Some of this strain and frustration was related to managing the drastic increase in caseload, continually hearing difficult and traumatizing stories, and dealing with special client challenges such as illiteracy, lack of transportation, client transience, and mental health problems.



## Conclusions and Recommendations

The Katrina Legal Initiative was formed by Equal Justice Works, with the support of the Corporation for National and Community Service, the JEHT Foundation, sponsoring law firms, and private donors, to provide legal assistance for individuals and communities impacted by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The three components to this Initiative (the Katrina Legal Fellowship, AmeriCorps Legal Fellowship, and Summer Corps programs) were designed to provide assistance through legal education, direct legal services, and the building of a pro bono network of volunteer attorneys and law students. In addition, KLI members were expected to interact with policymakers and work with other organizations to help build collaboration between and among legal organizations and other community groups. Using the logic models as guides for the evaluation, the activities and perceived impacts described by those interviewed throughout this study appear to meet the expected program characteristics and goals. Furthermore, when compared to performance measurement objectives established at the outset of the program implementation, both the AmeriCorps Legal Fellowship and Summer Corps programs often met, and in many cases, exceeded the expected goals. The Katrina Legal Fellowship program did not have set performance measurement objectives.

While the Katrina Legal Initiative boasts significant benefits, there were some challenges that should be mentioned. Program stakeholders at Equal Justice Works reported large burdens on the organization in terms of emotional stress, staff time, and money. Equal Justice Works faced additional challenges in implementation, particularly with selecting suitable host sites, building relationships, and maintaining strong communication links over several years. Many of the challenges encountered by Equal Justice Works were associated with the circumstances of the disaster: (a) the Hurricanes hit a region that already had a weak infrastructure in terms of pro bono and public interest law, (b) the local organizations were dealing with devastating impacts of the storms on their own organizations, which made it more difficult for them to support the additional responsibilities of a fellowship placement (although these organizations in crisis were in most need of outside help), and (c) the urgent need for assistance required an immediate response from Equal Justice Works staff, which did not allow for as much preparation time as some program stakeholders desired. Equal Justice Works dealt with these challenges through applying more flexibility to the program guidelines (e.g. allowing AmeriCorps Legal Fellows to provide more direct legal services themselves or focusing on recruiting private attorneys rather than law students if there were no local law schools) and modifying placements when necessary.

Host organizations reported few negative impacts; a few directors mentioned additional reporting requirements and the need to train less-experienced attorneys as somewhat inconvenient. However, these directors agreed that the substantial benefits of the program outweighed these drawbacks. Program participants, in general, appreciated the opportunity





to participate in the Katrina Legal Initiative, although some AmeriCorps Legal Fellows reported difficulties with host organizations and Summer Corps members requested more contact with Equal Justice Works and other Summer Corps members.

The evaluation concludes that Equal Justice Works and its partners succeeded in implementing a much-needed and much-appreciated program that assisted not only individuals in the communities impacted by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita but also helped rebuild the legal infrastructure in these communities. It is laudable that Equal Justice Works was able to implement a program of this scope and novelty within the short implementation period required by the urgency of the disaster. In fact, they not only achieved their goals but exceeded many of them, even in the face of the extraordinary circumstances of a chaotic disaster aftermath. Furthermore, several interview respondents and stewards of organization records cautioned that information given was likely underestimated due to unreliable recording of all service contacts (e.g. in the beginning months after the Hurricanes or in alternate venues such as legal clinics or call centers). Therefore, it is possible that the described activities and impacts do not fully capture the entirety of this program's benefits.

With the purpose of improving future disaster relief legal aid efforts, recommendations are made to consider the following:

- (a) For programs specifically targeting disaster populations, resources should be placed in the most affected areas to have the largest impact on clients and broken legal infrastructure. More distant sites may be better suited for short-term disaster relief efforts when residents have evacuated to outside areas.
- (b) Fundraising efforts should begin as early as possible to take advantage of the period immediately after a disaster when most people choose to donate.
- (c) Program administrators should participate in training to recognize the special difficulties of disaster aid, acquire more cultural competency, identify symptoms of post-traumatic stress in others, recognize signs of stress in one's self, and learn how to effectively deal with the emotional burden of assisting those providing disaster aid and hearing about their experiences. It is also suggested that when requesting funds for program administration, some attention is paid to the special needs of program administrators dealing with extra burdens inherent to disaster programs.
- (d) Attention should be paid to sending Katrina Legal Fellows and AmeriCorps Legal Fellows into the field quickly so as not to lose the momentum of pro bono generation in the first few months when people are most likely to volunteer their time and organizations are in high need of someone to coordinate the outpouring of volunteers.



- (e) It is also recommended that there be more opportunities for Katrina Legal Fellows and AmeriCorps Legal Fellows to convene for the purposes of networking and exchanging ideas while having the chance to speak with others experiencing similar difficult and sometimes emotional challenges.
- (f) To obtain the most informative data and reduce frustration at host sites, it is important to set clear expectations from the beginning about what data is needed and take steps to improve capabilities of performance measurement.
- (g) Additional site visits by Equal Justice Works staff members are suggested to help with (a) selecting sites, (b) developing relationships with host sites that may have negative perceptions of federal programs because of other federal responses, (c) understanding dissatisfaction or issues with host sites, and (d) understanding client needs, the nature of work, and challenges faced by participating attorneys.
- (h) Recognizing that supervision and other ethical responsibilities may become a lower priority in a crisis environment, it is recommended that Equal Justice Works make supervision guidelines explicit with host sites at the outset of the program, provide materials to assist supervisors, and frequently monitor the supervision situation.

The Katrina Legal Initiative has had great success in the Gulf Coast region, helping to repair and expand the legal aid infrastructure following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The Katrina Legal Initiative can serve as a model for future disaster relief programs and for efforts to respond to other types of crises, such as the foreclosure crisis. Lessons learned from the experiences of those involved in the Katrina Legal Initiative can be employed to improve future responses to situations with mass legal needs.



## **DELIVERING LEGAL AID AFTER KATRINA: THE EQUAL JUSTICE WORKS KATRINA LEGAL INITIATIVE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Project Overview**

On August 29<sup>th</sup>, 2005, the United States Gulf Coast experienced the most destructive hurricane in the nation's history.<sup>1</sup> After a previous landfall in Florida, Hurricane Katrina hit land for the second time in southeast Louisiana in Plaquemines Parish near Buras, Louisiana, tearing through Louisiana and Mississippi and inflicting an estimated \$81 billion<sup>2</sup> to \$125 billion<sup>1</sup> of damage across the United States and as far north as Quebec.<sup>3</sup> The deaths of more than 1,800<sup>2</sup> individuals were attributed to Hurricane Katrina, although the exact number remains unknown due to an outstanding number of missing persons. Vulnerable communities in southern Louisiana and Mississippi were thrown into crisis as they took the brunt of the storm and experienced devastating post-storm impacts such as the breaking of levees in New Orleans. Less than a month later on September 24<sup>th</sup>, 2005, another storm, Hurricane Rita, hit the Gulf Coast along the Louisiana-Texas border between Sabine Pass, Texas and Johnson's Bayou, Louisiana. Hurricane Rita bombarded communities still recovering from Hurricane Katrina, causing an estimated \$10 billion of damage and killing at least 62 people.<sup>4</sup> After the devastation of these communities, those affected by the hurricanes had a myriad of legal needs in addition to basic survival needs. Many local attorneys, however, were displaced, and legal infrastructures in many communities were wiped out due to limited staff support and lack of office space, funding, electricity, and technological resources.

Equal Justice Works, a non-profit organization located in Washington, D.C., administers various programs to place both attorneys and law students in public interest organizations. The organization provides lawyers and legal support to needy communities through Equal Justice Works Fellowships, AmeriCorps Legal Fellowships, and a Summer Corps program.

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<sup>1</sup> National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. 2007. "Hurricane Katrina- Most Destructive Hurricane Ever to Strike the U.S." <http://www.katrina.noaa.gov/>.

<sup>2</sup> Knabb, Richard D., Rhome, Jamie R., and Daniel P. Brown. 2006. "Tropical Cyclone Report: Hurricane Katrina." Miami, FL: National Hurricane Center.

<sup>3</sup> Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. 2005. "Rain from Katrina Washes Out Quebec North Shore Roads." Toronto, Ontario: CBC News. [http://www.cbc.ca/canada/story/2005/09/01/Quebec\\_roads\\_out20050901.html](http://www.cbc.ca/canada/story/2005/09/01/Quebec_roads_out20050901.html).

<sup>4</sup> Knabb, Richard D., Brown, Daniel P., and Jamie R. Rhome. 2006. "Tropical Cyclone Report: Hurricane Rita." Miami, FL: National Hurricane Center.



Already equipped with this role and experience, Equal Justice Works was well-positioned to implement similar programs to provide additional legal assistance to residents in the hurricane-affected areas. Soon after the hurricanes hit, Equal Justice Works sent a consultant to travel through the affected areas to perform a needs assessment, to identify the most pressing legal needs, and to learn about the status of the legal aid infrastructure throughout the devastated area. Equal Justice Works then began investigating how to best address those needs. Through the acquisition of additional resources, Equal Justice Works implemented an innovative legal aid disaster relief program to assist a number of the communities affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The program, designated the Katrina Legal Initiative (KLI), was comprised of three components: the Katrina Legal Fellowship program, the AmeriCorps Legal Fellowship program, and the Summer Corps program. The Katrina and AmeriCorps Legal Fellowships provided funding for public interest legal organizations in the Gulf Coast region to serve as host sites for both local and out-of-state attorneys. The Summer Corps program provided AmeriCorps education award vouchers to first- and second-year law students for service within public interest legal agencies during the summer. In total, 125 attorneys and law students were placed by the Katrina Legal Initiative in the Gulf Coast region to assist those affected by the disasters.

The Urban Institute was contracted by Equal Justice Works to evaluate the Katrina Legal Initiative. The purpose of the current report is to describe the evaluation of the three components of the Katrina Legal Initiative and to highlight findings from this study. This report details the implementation of the Katrina Legal Initiative; describes the program goals, activities, and impacts of the three programs; analyzes whether the programs met the stated goals; and offers recommendations for comparable programs in the future.

## **Methodology**

To document the scope and nature of the Katrina Legal Initiative, researchers at the Urban Institute gathered information between July 2008 and June 2009 from multiple sources, including data collected by Equal Justice Works throughout program duration, interviews and focus groups with program participants and stakeholders, and observations of five host organizations<sup>5</sup> where Fellows and Summer Corps members were placed.

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<sup>5</sup> Non-profit legal organizations served as host sites for KLI Fellows and Summer Corps members. Equal Justice Works selected and funded host sites for the two Fellowship programs, and these sites then selected candidates for the Fellowship positions. For the Summer Corps program, Equal Justice Works selected and directly funded Summer Corps members who were interested in working at eligible host sites.



### ***Equal Justice Works Data***

The evaluation team reviewed data previously collected by Equal Justice Works, including progress reports, host site reports, and exit surveys. Progress reports documenting the Fellows' activities were completed by 100 percent of the 11 Katrina Legal Fellows and 63 percent of the 16 AmeriCorps Legal Fellows. AmeriCorps Legal Fellow Grantee organizations were also required to complete host site reports which served as the document of record for reporting to the Corporation for National and Community Service. These reports provided information on various activities performed within host sites through the AmeriCorps grant but did not specify activities at the level of the individual attorneys (e.g. the Mississippi grantee organization reported on the combined activities of four different AmeriCorps Legal Fellows). Summer Corps members completed an exit survey on activities, program satisfaction, and legal skill development at the end of the summer term. This survey was completed by 86 percent of the 98 Summer Corps members.

### ***Interviews with AmeriCorps Legal Fellows, Summer Corps members, and Stakeholders***

To better understand the Katrina Legal Fellowship and AmeriCorps Legal Fellowship programs, the evaluation team attempted to contact every participating attorney for phone or in-person interviews. Seven of the 11 (64 percent) Katrina Legal Fellows and 11 of the 16 (69 percent) AmeriCorps Legal Fellows were reached for an interview. While locating participating attorneys proved challenging, no fellows refused to participate. Interviews covered activities performed, perceived impacts of their work, satisfaction with the program, and general challenges and lessons learned about delivering legal assistance after a disaster.

Phone interviews, similar in content to those performed with the Katrina Legal Fellows and AmeriCorps Legal Fellows, were conducted with a small sample (11 percent) of the 98 Summer Corps law students to obtain a detailed picture of their contributions to the KLI program. Summer Corps law students were selected based on a random, stratified selection process based on gender, year of term, and state of host site. Out of the 98 Summer Corps members, the evaluation team attempted to interview 10 former members. Due to outdated contact information, the initial round of contacts yielded only three interviews. A second random, stratified selection to replace those individuals who were unreachable yielded an additional four interviews. The evaluation team obtained the final three interviews in a third random, stratified selection. One additional Summer Corps member was purposefully selected due to his role in founding the Student Hurricane Network, an association of law students that coordinates volunteer opportunities for other students across the country. Again, as with the previous interviews, anyone whom we were able to locate agreed to participate.

The research team conducted two individual stakeholder interviews and one stakeholder focus group to gather impressions of the Katrina Legal Initiative from those individuals who



initiated and ran the program at Equal Justice Works during its implementation. Stakeholders included executive- and management-level staff and the Equal Justice Works consultant who performed the needs assessment.

### *Case Studies*

Five host sites were selected for a more in-depth case study analysis of the Katrina Legal Initiative. The five sites included two Legal Services Corporation<sup>6</sup> (LSC) funded organizations, a legal funding agency that supports other state organizations to provide free legal aid, an advocacy organization that focuses on systemic social injustices, and an organization whose mission was to find and match pro bono volunteers with clients in need. During these site visits, executive directors from these agencies were interviewed, focus groups were held with selected host site staff, and a sample of case files were reviewed to better understand of the scope and nature of legal services provided by KLI attorneys. Interviews with directors and staff covered the same areas as described above in the Katrina Legal Fellow and AmeriCorps Legal Fellow interviews.

The evaluation team also attempted to collect quarterly (dating January 2005 to June 2008) client services data from host organizations to determine how the Legal Fellows affected the capacity of host organizations specific to:

- (a) number of clients served
- (b) time between requesting help and opening a case
- (c) time between opening and closing a case
- (d) available assistance for different legal areas
- (e) case outcomes
- (f) different types of service contacts

However, selected host organizations did not track all of the needed data for these analyses and, in some instances, were not confident in some of the data due to inconsistent reporting of all service contacts during the chaotic aftermath of the hurricanes. More importantly, the legal needs in the community and the host organizations' resources were highly unstable. Concerns over limited data and unstable baselines prohibited meaningful analyses on changes in organizational capacity caused expressly by the Katrina Legal Fellows and AmeriCorps Legal Fellows. However, the evaluation team was able to use data from three sites to examine trends in legal cases, as described in more detail below.

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<sup>6</sup> The Legal Services Corporation uses funding from Congressional appropriations to support local organizations providing civil legal aid with significant restrictions and oversight.



A small sample (N=25) of clients served at three<sup>7</sup> of the case study host sites was also interviewed to determine client perceptions of services. These interviews were used to further develop the researchers' understanding of services provided and satisfaction with these services and are not intended to serve as a representative view of all clients. The researchers initially attempted to gather a randomly selected sample of clients; however they found the majority of client contact information to be out of date or unusable (e.g. address listed is a temporary homeless shelter). Therefore the researchers instead selected clients based on the recommendations of the Katrina Legal Fellows and AmeriCorps Legal Fellows who provided services and had better knowledge on which clients were likely to have accurate contact information. While there was a high rate of not being able to locate clients (62 percent), only one contacted individual refused to participate.

### *Analyses*

Interview responses were coded and analyzed with qualitative software to identify themes, and basic descriptive statistics were used to analyze Equal Justice Works survey data, host site reports, and data on activities performed derived from progress reports and interview and focus group responses. Program outputs, such as the number of clients served, were taken from the progress reports for the Katrina Legal Fellows component, from the host site reports for the AmeriCorps component, and from the exit survey for the Summer Corps component. To determine whether or not a Katrina Legal Fellow or AmeriCorps Legal Fellow participated in various activities, information was combined from interviews with the Fellows, progress reports, director interviews, and staff focus groups. If any of these sources stated that the individual participated in an activity, this was counted as an affirmation of the activity. In cases where there was conflicting information (i.e., one source said they performed a certain activity and another source said they specifically did not do this activity), the researchers relied on the individual's self-report, as it is believed they are more knowledgeable about their own activities. There were two AmeriCorps Legal Fellows for which we did not have any individual-level data; these individuals were excluded from analyses on activities performed by program participants. Summer Corps activities and program perceptions were obtained through analyzing responses on the exit survey. Information gathered through phone interviews supplied a more in-depth view of the law students' activities and skill development, as well as their perspectives on challenges and lessons learned regarding disaster legal aid.

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<sup>7</sup> The two remaining case study sites were unable to give the researchers client contact information. One was unable to obtain this information because they did not maintain these records, while another site could not provide the information within the study time period.



Both AmeriCorps and Summer Corps program outputs were compared to established performance measurement goals. Equal Justice Works set performance measurement goals for each grant period based on discussions with and applications from host site stakeholders in addition to the typical performance of new sites. However, due to the timing of the hurricanes, the information gathered through host site reports did not align with the grant cycles. The 2005-2006 host site report covers half of the AmeriCorps term for the 2005 grant cycle. The 2006-2007 host site report covers the second half of the 2005 AmeriCorps term and the first half of the AmeriCorps term for the 2006 grant cycle. The 2007-2008 midyear host site report covers the final portion of the second AmeriCorps term. Because information in the 2006-2007 host site report cannot be separated between the two terms, there is no way to compare the 2005 performance measurement goals with the 2005 grant cycle outputs, nor to compare the 2006 performance measurement goals with the 2006 grant cycle outputs. Therefore, the evaluation team compared the outputs of both AmeriCorps terms to the sum of the performance measurement goals of 2005 and 2006. While this method does not allow the level of detail to determine whether the AmeriCorps Legal Fellowship program met its goals each grant period, it will provide an indication of the success of the program overall.

Seven performance measurement goals were specifically set for the AmeriCorps Legal Fellows participating in the Katrina Legal Initiative in 2005, while only three goals were established for 2006. However, additional performance measurement goals were given for the entire AmeriCorps Legal Fellowship class in 2006. Therefore, the researchers estimated five additional performance measurement goals based on those goals set for the entire class. These goals were created by (a) dividing the output goal by the total number of AmeriCorps Legal Fellows in the 2006 class to obtain the goal outputs expected, on average, for each AmeriCorps Legal Fellow and (b) multiplying this individual output goal by the number of expected KLI AmeriCorps Legal Fellow slots. The report clearly indicates which performance measurement goals are calculated from a larger class of AmeriCorps Legal Fellows within Table 5 (p. 57) so that readers can be aware that these goals were estimated based on available information.

Equal Justice Works did not establish performance measurement goals for the Summer Corps members participating specifically in the Katrina Legal Initiative. Therefore, the researchers also calculated performance measurement goals for the KLI Summer Corps members based on the overall performance measurement goals set for the entire Summer Corps class each year. In order to calculate these goals, the researchers (a) divided the set goals for the entire Summer Corps class by the total number of Summer Corps members to obtain the average individual expected output and (b) multiplied this number by the number of Summer Corps members who completed the exit survey each term. No performance goals were set for the Katrina Legal Fellowship program or the class of traditional Equal Justice Works Legal Fellows; therefore outputs will not be compared to any pre-established goals.





Administrative records were used to illustrate general trends in client demographics and legal needs over time in the Gulf Coast region. Data on open cases was combined across three sites that were able to provide this level of detail: two sites in Louisiana and one site in Mississippi. Figure 12 (p. 53) only includes data from the two Louisiana sites, as the Mississippi site did not have a separate category for disaster program benefits and there was no way to extract this information out from the available data. Trends were first examined individually by site, but data was then combined once it was seen that patterns were similar across the three sites.

### *Caveats and Cautions*

Some caveats to the study findings should be noted. While data were collected from a variety of sources to obtain a wide range of perceptions on the impacts of the Katrina Legal Initiative, some sources are self-reported and may be imprecise due to (a) social desirability or the tendency to respond in a way that others will view favorably, (b) a reluctance to “toot one’s own horn,” and (c) telescoping (i.e. difficulty in remembering events occurring in the past). This is especially true for the Summer Corps component, as almost all reports on Summer Corps activities were derived from either the exit survey or individual interviews. In addition, because we were unable to interview every KLI member, it is possible that the reported rates of participation in various activities are underestimated, as individuals may have failed to report on activities about which the progress reports did not specifically address. In addition, not everyone completed a final progress report or exit survey at the end of his or her term. When earlier progress reports were available, these were used in place of the final progress report; however, estimates for these individuals may be low.

While administrative records were not used to measure effects on organizational capacity as originally planned due to data limitations, they were used in a limited fashion to illustrate legal service needs and trends. It should be noted that issues were detected in collected administrative records, intrinsic to the situation of providing services immediately following a disaster. Two of the five sites selected for case study did not provide legal services before the hurricanes and therefore did not have a system in place for tracking service delivery. Sites in this position relied on less sophisticated methods to track their work.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, sites that had tracking systems in place were still under incredible burdens and did not consistently record services delivered in the initial months following the disaster. Particularly, outreach events and phone hotlines or call centers were not well-documented. Finally, as the various sites had different management, funding, and missions, different data were recorded at

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<sup>8</sup> Both of these sites left staff attorneys with the responsibility to individually track service delivery in their own chosen method, most often a personal spreadsheet. One of these sites did not have any information other than the number of clients served by each person.



different sites. The absence of a uniform method of tracking service delivery made it difficult to compile data across all five sites to obtain a complete picture of services rendered or to compare and contrast experiences across sites. Due to these issues of reporting reliability, inconsistent uses of database systems, and differences across sites in reporting methods, analyses of official records should not be viewed with high confidence.

An additional caution is given to remind readers that the sample of interviewed clients is extremely small in comparison to the number of clients served through the Katrina Legal Initiative. The researchers originally tried to obtain random samples from all of the requested sites but soon discovered that an extremely high percentage of clients identified in this way were unreachable. Therefore, while clients were randomly selected from one site, clients were specifically chosen by the remaining two sites in an effort to reach clients who had known, updated contact information. These clients may have had different experiences from those who were more transient or those who did not remain in contact with the legal organization. Also, while host sites were instructed to select clients in a somewhat random and diverse manner so as to learn about both positive and negative experiences, it is possible that clients were purposefully chosen who had more successful outcomes. Furthermore, the majority of clients were unable to give a comprehensive explanation of the types of services they received, and some could not remember receiving legal help at all or could not differentiate the legal services they received from a multitude of other services obtained in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Due to both sample size and the non-randomized selection strategy, the included client opinions should be viewed as a small subset of possible client experiences and should not be interpreted as a representative sample.

Regarding the analyses comparing program outputs to performance measurement goals, readers should take caution in interpreting comparisons made to estimated performance measurement goals (e.g. all of the PMG for Summer Corps members and five of the PMG for the 2006 grant cycle) because these were not established with the special needs and circumstances of the Katrina Legal Initiative in mind. A final caution is given that while we believe this report will be helpful to informing responses to other types of natural and manmade disasters, some of these findings may be specific to the particular circumstances of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita or the regions that were affected.



## IMPLEMENTATION OF THE KATRINA LEGAL INITIATIVE

The Katrina Legal Initiative grew out of a desire to help those along the Gulf Coast after stories emerged about the vast unmet legal needs arising after the hurricanes. Prompted by these legal “horror” stories and an inquiry from a long-time Equal Justice Works board member asking what should be done about the situation, Equal Justice Works staff began brainstorming ways to help. During the initial planning stage, Equal Justice Works staff developed a plan and budget, emailed a large group of attorney colleagues to gauge the level of interest in participating in a Katrina-related fellowship program, and conducted a needs assessment by sending a consultant to travel around the area to identify legal needs and prospective partners. The JEHT Foundation awarded a planning grant to assist with this process. Through the needs assessment, Equal Justice Works demonstrated an immense need for legal assistance in the Gulf Coast region, especially in the areas of housing, insurance, consumer matters, FEMA and other disaster benefits, and family law (see sidebar for examples of hurricane-related legal needs). To compound matters, the already fragile infrastructure of legal aid in the area was devastated. For instance, about 50 percent of the Louisiana Bar Association members were displaced according to the needs assessment. One program stakeholder acknowledged that this immediate needs assessment was one of the most important steps of the planning and implementation of the Initiative.

Equal Justice Works applied for additional funding from the JEHT Foundation and the

### Legal Needs After a Hurricane

The following are examples of some of the most pressing hurricane-related legal issues:

#### *Housing*

- Tenant evictions so landlords can rent property at higher rates due to scarce housing
- Disagreements over obligations to pay rent or make repairs related to whether properties are inhabitable
- Lack of information about foreclosure moratoriums and failure to make mortgage payments on destroyed homes
- Auctioning of homes when evacuated homeowners cannot be located
- Contractor fraud for home repairs

#### *Insurance*

- Disputes over insurance denials based on damage being caused by water rather than wind
- Obtaining the appropriate amount of insurance benefits

#### *Consumer Matters*

- Bankruptcies and credit problems
- Hurricane Katrina-related fraud

#### *Claims for FEMA and*

#### *Other State Disaster Programs*

- Filing for FEMA and other disaster program (e.g. Road Home) benefits
- Appealing FEMA decisions to take back previously distributed benefits
- Documenting the amount of damage to homes
- Documenting legitimate ownership of properties passed down without official wills

#### *Family Law Matters*

- Interstate child custody disputes when parents evacuate and remain in different states
- Increased domestic violence and divorce due to extreme stress



*“If I could take you back to the moment when [our consultant] came back with her report, and you heard about 24 hour evictions... [preventing] that requires a lawyer, there’s nobody else who can help solve that problem.”*  
-Program Stakeholder

Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) to implement a three part program to address the unmet legal needs along the Gulf Coast. The three components of the Katrina Legal Initiative included: (a) the Katrina Legal Fellowship program, which funded two-year placements for more experienced attorneys, (b) the AmeriCorps Legal Fellowship program, which funded 9 to 11 month placements for attorneys, and (c) the Summer Corps program, which funded first- and second-year law students for 300 hour summer internships. The host sites for the three components were non-profit legal aid organizations in the Gulf Coast region. These three components were based on models of the usual Equal Justice Works programs; however, modifications were made to the process to allow for a faster implementation.

Placements for Katrina Legal Fellowships were funded by a sponsoring law organization, the JEHT Foundation, and individual donors. Equal Justice Works obtained a Disaster Augmentation Grant from CNCS to administer ten additional AmeriCorps Legal Fellowships along with 65 AmeriCorps education award vouchers for the Summer Corps program. AmeriCorps placements usually require host organizations to provide funds to match the sub grant supported through CNCS. However, money from the JEHT Foundation and other donors supplied the matching funds to relieve the burden on organizations already dealing with financial stress from the hurricanes. Through the support of the JEHT Foundation and other donors, Equal Justice Works was able to supply \$284,453 in matching funds to the host organizations across the two terms. While the model of the previous two components is to award funding to the host sites who then hire Fellows, the Summer Corps program is slightly different in that funds (in the form of education award vouchers) are supplied to the individual law student applicants who pick a suitable host site falling within Equal Justice Works requirements and complete the necessary hours.

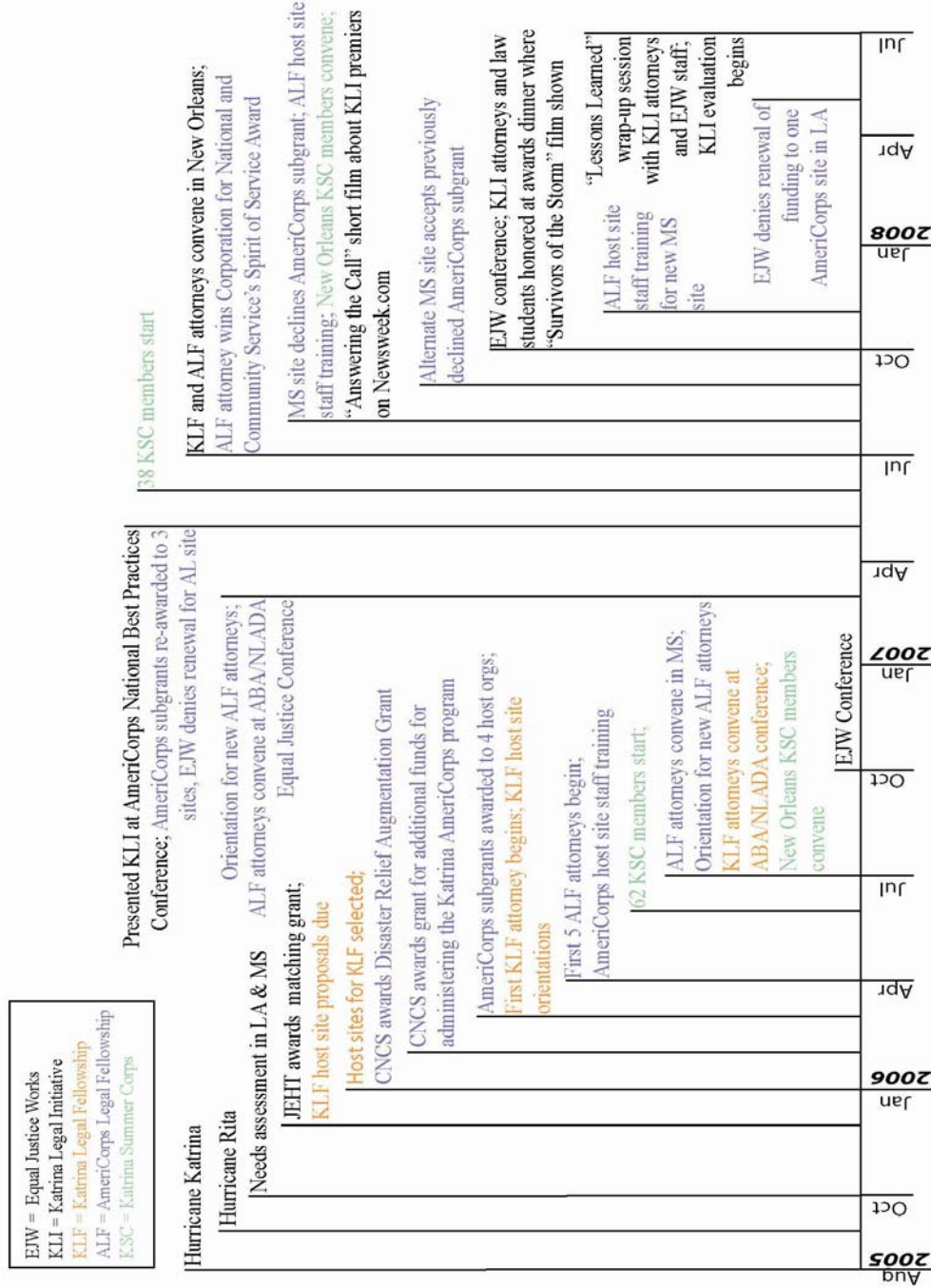


Figure 1. Timeline of Katrina Legal Initiative



## Selection of Sites and Program Participants

The selection process differed across the three Katrina Legal Initiative programs. Equal Justice Works issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) for the Katrina Legal Fellowship program and selected host organizations based upon these submitted proposals. AmeriCorps host sites were chosen based on information gathered during the needs assessment about the key players in the legal aid field in the affected states. Some stakeholders highlighted the importance of having someone in the field that was not personally traumatized by the event to provide information about the

organizations in the area. Equal Justice Works emphasized proximity to law schools and the capacity to host a fellow in their selection process of AmeriCorps sites. Summer Corps sites, as mentioned previously, were chosen by prospective Summer Corps members who applied for funding. Sites had to be non-profit legal services or civil rights organizations. Equal Justice Works conducted outreach to recruit students for the 65 Summer Corps positions for the 2006 summer term. Students then had to go through the application process to be selected.

In January of 2006 (see Figure 1), Equal Justice works notified nine organizations that they had been accepted for the Katrina Legal Fellowship program and could recruit lawyers for these positions. The first Katrina Legal Fellow began on March 1, 2006, and eight other attorneys began their terms by August of that year. Four Katrina Legal Fellows ended their fellowships early: two because Equal Justice Works was unable to procure funding to continue their positions after the first year and two left for personal reasons. In 2007, two attorneys replaced the Katrina Legal Fellows who left early on their own decision.

### **Katrina Legal Fellowship Host Organizations**

*Advocacy Center (LA)*

*Lone Star Legal Aid (TX)*

*Louisiana Capital Assistance Center (LA)*

*Mississippi Center for Justice (MS)*

*Mississippi Center for Legal Services (MS)*

*Mississippi Immigrant Rights Alliance (MS)*

*Southeast Louisiana Legal Services (LA)*

*Texas Appleseed (TX)*

### **AmeriCorps Legal Fellowship Host Organizations**

*Legal Services Alabama (AL)*

*Louisiana Bar Foundation (LA)*

*Mississippi Center for Justice (MS)*

*North Mississippi Rural Legal Services  
(MS)*

*The Pro Bono Project (LA)*

Four organizations received sub grants from Equal Justice Works in March of 2006 for 10 AmeriCorps Legal Fellowship positions: Pro Bono Project (two placements), Louisiana Bar Foundation (two placements), Legal Services Alabama (two placements), and North Mississippi Rural Legal Services (four placements). North Mississippi Rural Legal Services administered placements for three different organizations: Mississippi Center for Justice (one placement),



Mississippi Center for Legal Services (two placements), and North Mississippi Rural Legal Services (one placement). A month later, in April 2006, five attorneys began their AmeriCorps Legal Fellowships, followed by another three in May, and one in June (one slot remained unfilled). Within this first grant cycle, two AmeriCorps Legal Fellows were terminated by their host organizations due to mutual dissatisfaction. For the second AmeriCorps term, the sub grant recipients remained the same with three of the AmeriCorps Legal Fellows continuing in the same positions. The Mississippi placements, managed by North Mississippi Rural Legal Services, changed somewhat and were as follows: Mississippi Center for Justice (one placement), Mississippi Center for Legal Services (one placement), North Mississippi Rural Legal Services (one placement), and Mississippi Volunteer Lawyers Project (one placement). Partway through the grant period, Equal Justice Works transferred the management of the Mississippi sites from North Mississippi Rural Legal Services to the Mississippi Center for Justice. Also within the second term, Equal Justice Works decided not to renew the AmeriCorps sub grant at Legal Services Alabama for the third term, as there was not as much of a need for Katrina-related services as they had originally anticipated at this location. One AmeriCorps Legal Fellow left shortly after the second term began to accept another job.

Once a Katrina Legal Fellowship or AmeriCorps site was selected to receive a fellowship from Equal Justice Works, the organization held the responsibility to fill the position. Across the two terms, 11 Katrina Legal Fellows served at eight different organizations and 16 AmeriCorps Legal Fellows served at seven different organizations. Ninety-eight law students served in over 30 organizations in the Summer Corps program, 62 students in 2006 and 38 in 2007.<sup>9</sup> Katrina Legal Fellows learned about the fellowship opportunity through the host sites or through other organizations such as NLADA and state bar associations. Most often the AmeriCorps Legal Fellows reported learning about the program through the host organizations, while interviewed Summer Corps members most often discovered the opportunity through their law schools' career services offices. Some KLI participants also encountered the program through Internet searches. Most Katrina and AmeriCorps Legal Fellows who were interviewed wanted to join the Equal Justice Works program because they felt a need to assist with the recovery efforts. Many of the AmeriCorps Legal Fellows had previous contact with the affected areas, either through personal connections or from prior volunteer experiences. Summer Corps members reported different reasons. The most common response of those who were interviewed said they joined the Katrina Legal Initiative for financial reasons, citing the additional funding as the most important factor.

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<sup>9</sup> Two law students served in both summer terms, causing the number of Summer Corps placements across the two terms to exceed the actual total number of participants.



## **Training and Networking**

Training for disaster relief programs is critical, as people are forced to deal with new situations and are placed under extreme pressures and stress. Equal Justice Works staff in Washington, D.C., did not participate in any training themselves; however, they provided training to both the Katrina Legal Fellow and AmeriCorps Legal Fellow participants and the host site staff. Summer Corps members received an orientation manual. Each term, Equal Justice Works provided AmeriCorps host sites with training for two roles: project directors and fiscal managers. This training covered responsibilities of host sites, policies and grant requirements, instructions for financial reporting, project planning, effective supervision, disaster management, best practices, and useful resources. Host organizations also participated in site visits from Equal Justice Works staff.

Equal Justice Works provided leadership development training for both Katrina Legal Fellows and AmeriCorps Legal Fellows at their annual October conference in Washington, D.C. Katrina Legal Initiative participants also convened on other occasions to share experiences and thoughts on best practices, including the American Bar Association/National Legal Aid & Defender Association conference and a meeting with AmeriCorps Legal Fellows in New Orleans the following summer. Orientation for the first term of the AmeriCorps Legal Fellows was held in Jackson, Mississippi, in July of 2006. Within the second grant period, AmeriCorps Legal Fellows participated in an orientation program before the American Bar Association/National Legal Aid and Defender's Association conference in March of 2007 and then had the opportunity to convene with other non-KLI AmeriCorps Legal Fellows during the conference. Some AmeriCorps Legal Fellows took advantage of additional opportunities, such as attending training on trial advocacy.

Case study host organizations reported giving Katrina Legal Fellows and AmeriCorps Legal Fellows training through their routine office training sessions, if these were available. Only one of the five host organizations we spoke with organized any training or orientation specifically for the new fellows; this organization created a training manual to assist the AmeriCorps Legal Fellows. Also at this site, previous AmeriCorps Legal Fellows helped train the incoming attorneys since there was some overlap in their terms. Other directors reported they needed the AmeriCorps Legal Fellows to "step in and start working" because they were in crisis mode. One director thought this method worked well because the AmeriCorps Legal Fellows were of such high caliber and eager to learn. Another director said the outside training Equal Justice Works provided through conferences and other events was essential for their AmeriCorps Legal Fellow, as the organization did not have much time to devote to training.

Participants in the Summer Corps program who were interviewed often did not receive formal training from Equal Justice Works or their host organization. However, Equal Justice





Works provided a formal luncheon with speakers to recognize and reflect on the Summer Corps members' work in both summer terms.

### Implementation Challenges

Program stakeholders reported many challenges in implementing an initiative of this scope in a compressed time period. One challenge Equal Justice Works faced was devising a novel legal program designed for disaster relief, as no other legal disaster programs of this type were known to exist at the time. Without a guidebook or template, Equal Justice Works needed to rely on their own ingenuity and past model programs to create a new program tailored to the circumstances and particular legal needs of Hurricane Katrina. Equal Justice Works also encountered funding challenges in the development stage. Equal Justice Works did not initiate extensive fundraising efforts for placements until November, which stakeholders felt was too late, as many potential donors had already contributed to other relief organizations by that point.

The Katrina Legal Initiative differed from other Equal Justice Works programs in that there was an expedited period to implement the program. Program stakeholders reported difficulty in general with selecting sites in such a short time, especially when it was unclear whether a site was in disarray because of the impacts of the hurricane or because they were mismanaged before the storms. The need to place people quickly necessitated taking risks in the hasty selection of host organizations. An RFP process was used for the Katrina Legal Fellowship in order to provide a criteria framework for selection and lead organizations to strategize in a forward-thinking manner. However, some stakeholders questioned whether this was helpful when organizations were working in a crisis mode. They reported that few proposals were high quality, and the review process delayed implementation further.

*“I would say that for a number of them [subgrantee host sites], this was their first partnership with a national organization. There were some that were not accustomed to working with a national partner.”*  
-Program Stakeholder

Many of the program stakeholders also felt that the region was one of the weaker areas in the country for public interest law, if not the weakest. Stakeholders reported some organizations had pre-Katrina issues with the management of pro bono casework, low coordination between legal aid agencies, a weak pro bono culture and infrastructure, less technological advancement, and a lack of experience with partnerships with national non-profits. Stakeholders reported, however, that this was not the case across all organizations in the area and they did find some “gems.” However, due to these geographical weaknesses and the abbreviated planning period, some sites were chosen that had weaker infrastructure and less familiarity with the Equal Justice Works program models than sites selected for the other Equal Justice Works programs. Later, Equal Justice Works encountered problems with some



of these organizations regarding supervision compliance and capacity to effectively manage and supervise AmeriCorps funds.

In addition to these issues of timing and short implementation periods, there were also some concerns regarding the relationships between Equal Justice Works and some host organizations. Stakeholders reported that many people in the region had negative perceptions of Washington, D.C. and federal funding sources due to problems with other federally-funded disaster relief efforts. Although stakeholders reported trying to be sensitive to these regional culture issues, Equal Justice Works still felt they should have conducted more site visits and been more “culturally appropriate” in order to build better relationships with host organizations.

Finally, program stakeholders reported intense efforts on their part to manage the program. One stakeholder stated that the effort required to oversee sites and work with program participants in the Katrina Legal Initiative was four times the amount of effort needed for their traditional programs. The planning period also occurred during Equal Justice Works’ busiest time of year. Stakeholders said the Katrina Legal Initiative caused a lot of stress for Equal Justice Works staff. One program administrator in particular reported being severely “burnt out” by participating in the program. Multiple stakeholders said there needed to be more support for program administrators. Stakeholders also reported the Katrina Legal Initiative was more expensive than other Equal Justice Works programs.

Although Equal Justice Works reported many difficulties in implementing the Katrina Legal Initiative, every Equal Justice Works staff member who was interviewed reported being incredibly proud of the program. Many recognized the team efforts of Equal Justice Works in implementing such a challenging program with no forewarning. While stakeholders wished they could have placed people in the field earlier, many were nonetheless proud of how quickly they were able to implement the program, considering the circumstances. Stakeholders also found their role in the program development to be very personally rewarding.

### **Publicity and Honors**

The Katrina Legal Initiative received media attention throughout its duration. Katrina Legal Fellows became spokespersons on post-Katrina issues and brought the program to the national stage through appearances on news programs and participation in newspaper stories. A video with clips featuring several participants, titled “Answering the Call,” was posted on the Newsweek.com website. A short documentary about the Katrina Legal Initiative produced by Equal Justice Works, “Survivors of the Storm: Securing Justice in Post-Katrina America,” was widely distributed and received top honors in the 2007 Aurora Awards, a prestigious independent film and video competition. In addition, AmeriCorps Legal Fellow



Crystal Utley was selected from 75,000 AmeriCorps members to be honored with the Corporation for National and Community Service's Spirit of Service Award. The Supreme Court of Louisiana recognized Kelly Wilson, the Equal Justice Works Katrina Legal Initiative Project Manager, along with other attorneys and legal professionals for their service in an October 2007 ceremony in New Orleans. Finally, as the second grant period for AmeriCorps Legal Fellows neared completion, Equal Justice Works honored all KLI participants at their Annual Awards Dinner in Washington, D.C.

### **Moving Forward**

After the second term ended, Equal Justice Works hosted a "lessons learned" wrap-up session with Katrina Legal Fellows and AmeriCorps Legal Fellows to discuss program successes and brainstorm ways to improve the program. In July of 2007, the Urban Institute was contracted to perform an independent evaluation of the Katrina Legal Initiative to better understand the program's implementation and impacts. Two reports resulted from this evaluation: (a) an evaluation of the CNCS-funded components, the AmeriCorps Legal Fellowship and Summer Corps programs and (b) an evaluation of the entire Katrina Legal Initiative, including the Katrina Legal Fellowship program. Findings from these reports are designed to inform future disaster legal aid responses.

One legacy of the Katrina Legal Initiative is a continued presence in the Gulf Coast Region for Equal Justice Works. Four terms later, Equal Justice Works continues to provide funding for AmeriCorps Legal Fellowship positions in three of the organizations that participated in the AmeriCorps Legal Fellowship program and one additional organization that hosted a Katrina Legal Fellow. Prior to the Katrina Legal Initiative, no organizations in Louisiana or Mississippi participated in the AmeriCorps Legal Fellowship program. One traditional Equal Justice Works Legal Fellowship position has also continued at one of the Katrina Legal Fellowship sites.

Equal Justice Works has discussed their future role in other disaster and crisis situations. Stakeholders said they would most likely respond again in the future; however they might use a different approach since the Katrina Legal Initiative was very burdensome on the

organization. Various options discussed were having a smaller scope so that people could be placed more quickly, using an alumni disaster team that can "parachute" in for shorter time periods, and being part of a larger relief effort such as the Red Cross organization. In fact, Equal Justice Works has already begun to help with other disasters; within three months after Hurricane Ike hit the Texas coast on September 13, 2008, Equal Justice Works responded by placing a new AmeriCorps Legal Fellow in Houston, Texas.

*"I think we have learned that our model is nimble, and whatever crisis a community experiences, our work can be a good intervention."*

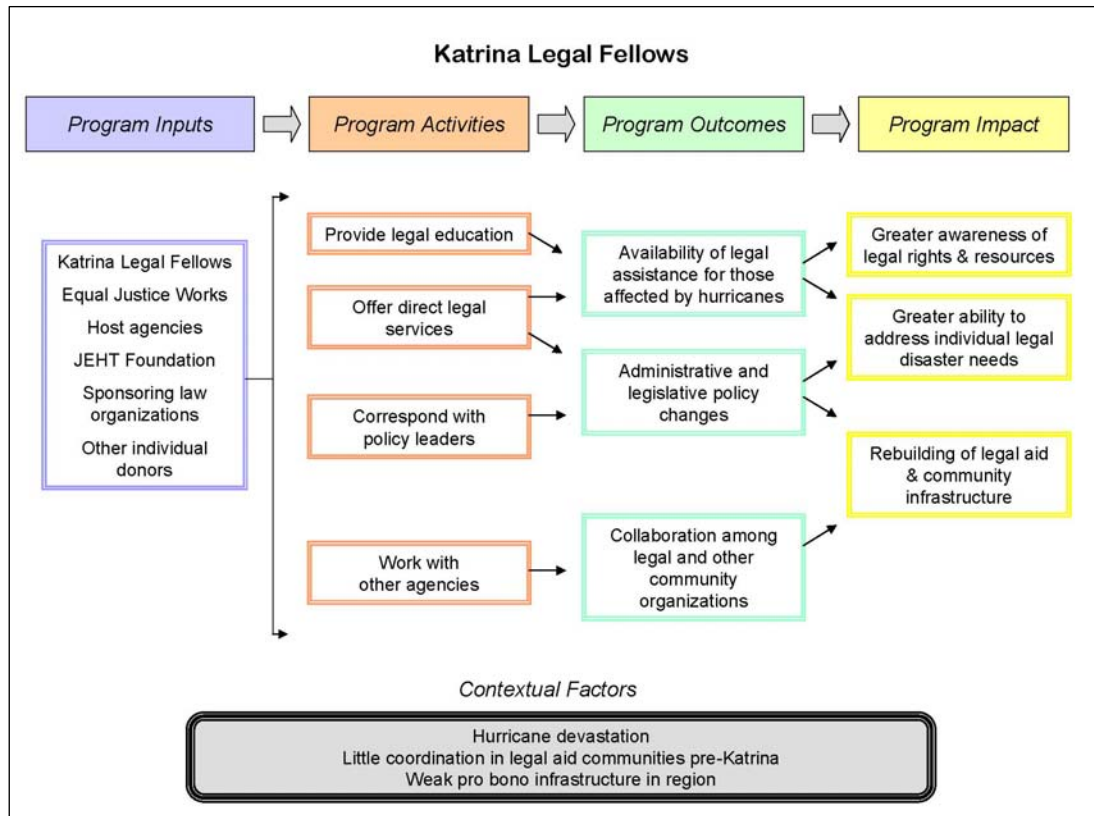
*-Program Stakeholder*



## KATRINA LEGAL FELLOWSHIP

### Program Description

Figure 2. Logic Model for Katrina Legal Fellowship Component



The Katrina Legal Fellowship was administered by Equal Justice Works and funded primarily by the JEHT Foundation, sponsoring law organizations, and individual donors. The Katrina Legal Fellows program placed experienced attorneys with host agencies in the Gulf Coast region for two year terms. Working within these host agencies, Katrina Legal Fellows were expected to perform certain activities to fulfill the program mission (see Figure 2).

Katrina Legal Fellows were expected to provide education through published materials and presentations, offer direct legal services such as legal clinics and case representation, and correspond with policy leaders. In these activities, it was anticipated that Katrina Legal Fellows would work with other community agencies. All of these activities were intended to increase the availability of legal assistance for those affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, particularly those from lower socio-economic backgrounds and those traditionally



underserved by the legal community. With more legal resources in the community provided by Katrina Legal Fellows, access to legal services and the range of legal services provided could potentially be expanded. Consequently, it was hoped that this would lead to a greater awareness of legal rights and resources in the community and a greater ability to address individual legal needs such as receipt of FEMA benefits, legal protection from eviction or foreclosure, and support with insurance claims.

Class action lawsuits along with interaction with policy makers were intended to affect administrative and legislative policy change, resulting in greater ability to assist those affected by the hurricane on a broader scale and to rebuild the local community. The Katrina Legal Fellowship program was also designed to contribute to the rebuilding of local communities and legal infrastructures through collaboration with other legal and non-legal organizations. Finally, in order to fully understand this program, one must be aware of certain contextual factors. The devastation caused by the Hurricanes Katrina and Rita impacted the community and agencies' abilities to function. In addition, the legal aid communities in the areas hit were already at a disadvantage before the hurricanes due to a weak pro bono infrastructure and a lack of coordination among many legal aid agencies.

### **Katrina Legal Fellow Activities**

The following section describes the activities performed by the Katrina Legal Fellows as reported through interviews with host site directors, focus groups with host site staff, progress reports completed by the Katrina Legal Fellows, and phone and in-person interviews with Katrina Legal Fellows. Through these sources, it was clear that the Katrina Legal Fellows performed many activities to achieve program goals.

#### ***Direct Legal Services***

According to self-reported progress reports, the Katrina Legal Fellows served at least 5,411 clients through their own direct service work or through that of volunteer legal service providers whom they had recruited. Information from progress reports and interviews suggested Katrina Legal Fellows participated in a variety of direct legal service work, including case representation (90 percent of Katrina Legal Fellows represented clients directly), legal clinics (73 percent), and legal call center or phone intakes (30 percent). The services provided at legal clinics and through call centers were often brief consultation or advice. Overall, Katrina Legal Fellows participated in at least 154 legal clinics. Many Katrina Legal Fellows attended clinics sponsored by the host agency or other organizations; however some (22 percent) also reported they helped to create or manage legal clinics.

While recruiting and managing pro bono legal service providers was not a main goal of the Katrina Legal Fellowship program, every Katrina Legal Fellow reported working with



volunteer law students (745) and attorneys (315). Some also reported creating information and training materials for recruitment purposes, while others helped match clients to pro bono attorneys. Beyond training, many of the Katrina Legal Fellows also supervised volunteers. Many volunteers were from out of state, either coming in for short periods of time or representing clients remotely. This work was facilitated by state Supreme Courts, which provided waivers that allowed out of state attorneys to practice law in the aftermath of the disaster.

Four of the Katrina Legal Fellows reported contributing to class action lawsuits. A Katrina Legal Fellow at the Mississippi Center for Justice acted as local counsel in *Brou v. FEMA*, a class action lawsuit against FEMA for failing to provide disability-accessible trailers. Another Katrina Legal Fellow at the Louisiana Capital Assistance Center filed a class action lawsuit with the Tulane Criminal Law Clinic and the American Civil Liberties Union against four New Orleans municipal judges for practicing “pay or stay” sentences where individuals who cannot afford to pay a fine are jailed instead. A third Katrina Legal Fellow at Texas Applesseed interviewed potential plaintiffs and worked collaboratively with other lawyers on case strategy for the *Ridgely v. FEMA* case, a class action lawsuit against FEMA for violating due process in the administration of its rental assistance program. In addition, another Katrina Legal Fellow provided consulting for the initial development of the *Ridgely* litigation, as she represented some of the plaintiffs in their original, individual appeals to FEMA. She was unable to take a larger role in the case due to LSC restrictions against performing class action lawsuits. Finally, a fourth Katrina Legal Fellow assisted in *Watson v. FEMA* to allow recipients of rental assistance to use their benefits for utility payments. Other Katrina Legal Fellows also said they were unable to perform class action lawsuits due to LSC restrictions at their host organization.

*“While there are numerous nonprofit organizations on the Mississippi Coast addressing the overwhelming needs of post-Katrina residents, there remains a huge dearth of affordable legal aid to those who can not afford an attorney. I have often been told by clients that they had no where else to turn to.”*

*-Katrina Legal Fellow*

The Katrina Legal Fellows covered a wide breadth of legal issues in their direct service work, including immigration, housing, healthcare access, disabilities, contractor fraud, and obtaining government benefits. The government benefit work mainly involved helping clients apply for benefits, tracking the status of their application, and filing appeals if they were denied benefits. One Katrina Legal Fellow also participated in community lawyering, providing representation to non-profit organizations in the region. While most of the Katrina Legal Fellows dealt with civil matters, one Katrina Legal Fellow at the Louisiana Capital Assistance Center worked on the inmate backlog at correctional facilities and did some public defense work. Working with Tulane Criminal Law Clinic, the Katrina Legal Fellow



helped to identify inmates who were awaiting trial and had no representation. He also helped the Public Defender's Office when they were beyond capacity or if a Public Defender was conflicted out of a case.

Most clients receiving services were described by Katrina Legal Fellows and host site staff as low income individuals who were negatively impacted by the hurricanes. Other common client characteristics included being single, African American, disabled, mentally ill, and elderly. In addition, some attorneys served Hispanic and Vietnamese clients, including some immigrants. A couple of interviewees stated that their clients spanned multiple races, ages, and socioeconomic class and felt there was no "typical" client.

### ***Educational Outreach***

Katrina Legal Fellows also reported working on educational materials and presentations for recruiting purposes and to educate the community about legal resources, legal rights, and how to handle various legal problems. The majority (80 percent) of Katrina Legal Fellows contributed to the creation of educational materials for pro bono volunteers and people in need of legal aid services, including flyers, pamphlets, and training materials.<sup>10</sup> These materials covered a variety of issues. For example, some Katrina Legal Fellows created an orientation DVD for visiting pro bono attorneys and web-based trainings for attorneys dealing with disaster legal issues; one developed a manual for working with mentally ill clients. Another Katrina Legal Fellow co-wrote a journal article on the challenges of delivering legal aid after a disaster and authored a report on environmental justice for the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. In order to illustrate inequity in the provision of disaster relief funds, a Katrina Legal Fellow created a video of bar charts that broke down the allotment of the Mississippi's Community Development Block Grant funds across various income levels.

Other Katrina Legal Fellows focused on educational resources for clients and community members such as FAQ handouts on topics such as insurance and housing or pro se materials to help individuals handle their own legal matters without needing to hire legal help. Most educational materials were distributed through host agency offices, partner agencies, or placed on the internet through various websites.

The majority (80 percent) of Katrina Legal Fellows also tried to inform both the legal and general community through presentations. Some Katrina Legal Fellows presented to legal audiences on pro bono opportunities at venues such as the ABA/NLADA Equal Justice Conference; one Katrina Legal Fellow at Southeast Louisiana Legal Services (SLLS)

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<sup>10</sup> This number includes those who created educational materials on their own and those who collaborated with others or supervised others to create educational materials.



traveled to Massachusetts, Iowa, and Washington State to train lawyers on disaster legal assistance. Other Katrina Legal Fellows gave “Know Your Rights” talks and spoke to community members about how to obtain government benefits from FEMA and the Road Home program.

Katrina Legal Fellows also educated the community about legal and policy issues by speaking at Fair Housing conferences, community events, and neighborhood meetings. One Katrina Legal Fellow went door-to-door in a FEMA trailer park to raise residents’ awareness about their legal rights; other Katrina Legal Fellows traveled to other surrounding regions to attend community events or hold clinics. A Katrina Legal Fellow at Lone Star Legal Aid targeted outreach to non-English speaking clients by recruiting Vietnamese- and Spanish-speaking volunteers.

Finally, a few Katrina Legal Fellows used the media to highlight issues of importance. For example, a Katrina Legal Fellow at SLLS spoke about FEMA recoupment problems in New Orleans on CBS Evening News, and a Katrina Legal Fellow at the Mississippi Center for Justice highlighted the region’s legal needs through media coverage by National Public Radio, New York Times, LA Times, Bill Moyers Journal, Dan Rather Reports, and USA Today. Other Katrina Legal Fellows leveraged local news media to advertise clinics and disaster relief benefit programs.

### ***Advocacy and Policy***

The Katrina Legal Fellows’ two year term enabled them to pursue long-term problem-solving goals more than the AmeriCorps Legal Fellows or Summer Corps members. Most (82 percent) Katrina Legal Fellows used this

extended time to fight for improvement in the community-rebuilding process or to advocate for the legal rights of those in the hurricane-affected region, often as part of a collaborative effort with other legal and advocacy organizations. Some Katrina Legal Fellows provided education to government workers and policy makers. For instance, a Katrina Legal Fellow at the Mississippi Immigrant Rights Alliance met with state and federal lawmakers to highlight post-Katrina immigrant labor abuses. While some Katrina Legal Fellows were unable to communicate directly with federal lawmakers due to LSC restrictions, they were still able to inform others about the issues at hand. For instance, a Katrina Legal Fellow at Lone Star Legal Aid drew attention to disaster issues needing national reform by speaking on a panel at the NLADA conference. A Katrina Legal Fellow at SLLS informed organizations such as the Center on Budget and Policy and the National Housing Law Project about legislation concerns from the perspective of attorneys working on the ground in the affected areas. These organizations were then able to educate lawmakers about this important perspective.

*“[Our Katrina Legal Fellow] gave a voice to the unfair, unjust part of the recovery process.”*  
*-Host Site Staff*





Katrina Legal Fellows often spoke with community organizations to raise awareness and inform them about various issues affecting the community on a local level and produced policy reports to reach a wider audience.

Many Katrina Legal Fellows also worked with agencies at the state and federal level to help them develop or revise procedures and policies. Two Katrina Legal Fellows at SLLS utilized relationships with other agencies to suggest improvement for Road Home, FEMA, and HUD programs based on their experiences and knowledge working with clients. A Katrina Legal Fellow assisted in developing the application and appeal guide for Mississippi's Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program, while Katrina Legal Fellows in Texas collaborated with other housing advocacy groups to change eligibility requirements and shorten the application for a Texas CDBG.

One Katrina Legal Fellow at the Mississippi Center for Justice became particularly involved in advocacy and policy efforts, testifying before Congress twice, briefing Congressional staff and policy institutes, meeting with the state Governor and senior aides, producing an accountability report card on the Mississippi CDBG Recovery Fund, and giving a United Nations Human Rights Representative a tour of the affected areas of Mississippi. Many of these efforts were directed towards monitoring the use of recovery funds to ensure federal assistance reached low-income residents, particularly in relation to the "People Before Ports" campaign. Working with the Steps Coalition, the Katrina Legal Fellow's advocacy and collaboration efforts helped lead to Congressional oversight hearings and proposed legislation to reverse Mississippi State's plan to divert Community Development Block Grant funds away from housing assistance to the expansion of a state-owned port. Site staff said the Katrina Legal Fellow "lead the charge" against the state's plans to divert federal recovery funds. This Katrina Legal Fellow also succeeded in urging Mississippi policy makers to start two low-income housing programs.

### ***Collaboration with Other Organizations***

Every Katrina Legal Fellow worked with other organizations beyond their host site to collaborate on projects and work towards mutual goals. According to progress reports, Katrina Legal Fellows formed at least 222 working relationships with other organizations. Examples of this collaboration include supervising volunteers from the Student Hurricane Network, working with the Access to Justice Commission to create public service announcements, and attending other organizations' legal clinics. One Katrina Legal Fellow participated in community lawyering to help local organizations gain non-profit status, comply with corporate governance regulations, and deal with other legal issues. This same attorney also co-founded the Steps Coalition, a social justice union of over 50 member organizations. In addition, a Katrina Legal Fellow at SLLS worked with HUD, the residents of a previously destroyed public housing project, and the housing developers to work



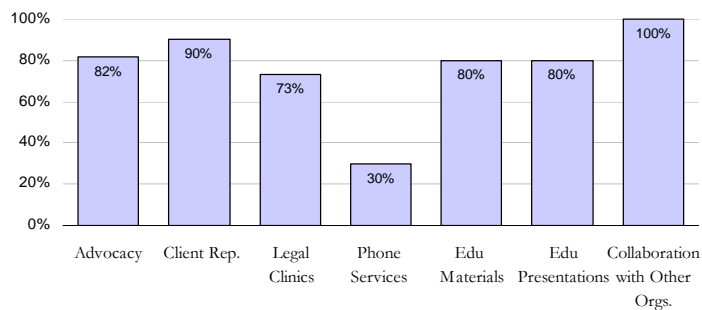
together towards the development of a new housing project. She assisted residents of a public housing project to develop a covenant with the housing developers and helped organize a Resident Summit for both residents and developers to meet and discuss important issues. A second Katrina Legal Fellow at SLLS helped to develop the Medical Legal Partnership of New Orleans, which connects attorneys with medical professionals to identify patients who may be in need of legal assistance. Collaborative relationships even reached beyond the state and national levels with one Katrina Legal Fellow meeting with a delegation of tsunami survivors from India to exchange knowledge and experiences.

Katrina Legal Fellows also developed relationships through collaborative projects such as creating educational materials. For instance, one Katrina Legal Fellow co-authored FAQ materials on public housing tenant rights with the Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights. In addition, much of the broad, large-impact advocacy and class action work performed by Katrina Legal Fellows was a collaborative and joint effort with other legal and advocacy organizations. Furthermore, many Katrina Legal Fellows formed relationships with organizations through participating in boards and committees. For example, Katrina Legal Fellows served in leadership positions including Chair of the Louisiana Housing and Consumer Law Task Force, Board Member for the Housing Justice Network Conference, Board Member of Harrison County Long Term Recovery Committee, Commissioner of the National Commission on Environmental Justice on the Gulf Coast, and Board Member of the City of Gulfport’s disaster preparation and response institute among others.

**Table 1. Katrina Legal Fellow Activities**

Activity Outputs	Quantity
Clients Served	5411
Legal Clinics	154
Collaborative Relationships	222
Pro Bono Attorneys	315
Pro Bono Law Students	745

**Figure 3. Percentage of Katrina Legal Fellows Participating in Different Activities**





## **Katrina Legal Fellow Impacts**

The evaluation examined the influence of the Katrina Legal Fellowship on host organizations, clients, program participants, and local communities. A variety of impacts were reported in these different areas.

### ***Impact on Host Sites***

Directors and host site staff all agreed the activities of the Katrina Legal Fellows positively affected their organizations, particularly through building capacity, increasing organization visibility, and strengthening relationships with other community organizations and agencies. Many host site staff mentioned the significant effect of having another staff member during such a critical time period, particularly one that was experienced. Having an additional staff member increased the capacity of the organization to serve clients and perform outreach. For the seven sites that performed direct legal service work, Katrina Legal Fellows reported serving between 13 and 2000 clients at each site over the two year period.<sup>11</sup> On average, Katrina Legal Fellows served 598 clients per host site, indicating potential for a substantial increase in capacity for the host sites. Beyond direct legal services work, one director described how the fellowship expanded the organization's mission to do advocacy work in light of the fact that other staff attorneys normally did not have time for this type of work.

Both Katrina Legal Fellows and host site staff also reported positive effects on the host sites' relationships with other organizations. Host sites generally attributed the Katrina Legal Fellows' community and media work to raised awareness of their organization. In particular, host organizations felt the Katrina Legal Fellows lent more credence to their organizations and positioned them as experts in the field of disaster legal aid. Host site staff also said the Katrina Legal Fellows helped their organizations in other ways, such as helping to establish a new, permanent Gulf Coast office, giving the organization a "seat at the table" for policy decision-making, and mentoring junior staff. In fact, the interviewed host site directors found the experience to be so rewarding for their organizations that they could not list any drawbacks to hosting a Katrina Legal Fellow. Katrina Legal Fellows also felt they positively contributed to their host site's relationships, most commonly through raising awareness or building new relationships with community organizations. Other contributions mentioned by Katrina Legal Fellows included obtaining new funding sources, unifying the host organization, and improving the reputation of the host site.

Through participation in the Katrina Legal Initiative, some host organizations reportedly experienced long-term impacts. Some Katrina Legal Fellows continued to lend their talents

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<sup>11</sup> Wide variation in clients served is due to differences in fellowship and host agency missions. For instance, the fellow who served 13 clients was working at a primarily advocacy-oriented organization.



to their host organizations; seven of the 11 Katrina Legal Fellows have joined the host site as permanent staff. Furthermore, Equal Justice Works has continued their relationship with two of the host organizations, funding a traditional Equal Justice Works Legal Fellowship placement at one site and a traditional AmeriCorps Legal Fellowship program at the other site.

### ***Impact on Clients***

Through direct legal services, Katrina Legal Fellows reached thousands of individuals in need of help. While exact data on case outcomes and client benefits are not available because most sites did not track such information in a reliable fashion, Katrina Legal Fellows and host site staff reported they were able to provide some type of help for the majority of people who requested assistance. In some instances, the help provided was not case representation but instead was a referral or brief advice. Katrina Legal Fellows estimated that between 50-90 percent of clients were satisfied with the services, and clients who were unsatisfied tended to be individuals who wanted more than the legal system could give them or wanted quicker outcomes. As an example of impacts on clients, directors at two host sites stated that their Katrina Legal Fellows helped many people avoid homelessness through eviction defense and obtaining disaster relief funding to rebuild their homes. Furthermore, representation of non-profit organizations through one Katrina Legal Fellow's community lawyering work helped these organizations pursue their missions and goals to help the region.

Katrina Legal Fellows also increased the availability of legal services by recruiting, training, and supervising pro bono attorneys and law students. For instance, one director reported that the organization's Katrina Legal Fellow helped leverage about 600 law student volunteers. Furthermore, Katrina Legal Fellows helped clients indirectly through their collaborations with other organizations. One director said that their Fellow's participation in community events with other agencies allowed the host organization to become more familiar with other services in the area and to make better referrals to clients. Katrina Legal Fellows also helped increase awareness and remove barriers to service through education and outreach activities. Presenting information at community events and legal clinics helped community members locate appropriate resources, and creating pro se materials helped individuals handle their legal matters without hiring an attorney.

Thirteen clients were interviewed to obtain their perceptions of the services they received. These clients had very positive experiences with the Katrina Legal Fellows. They received assistance for a variety of legal problems, including FEMA benefits and recoupments, home title successions for the Road Home program, landlord-tenant issues, wills, housing vouchers, foreclosures, and helping organizations to gain non-profit status. Most of these clients' cases had outcomes in their favor; however some cases were still pending. Every interviewed client felt satisfied with the help they received from the Katrina



Legal Fellows with all clients rating their satisfaction as a 10 except for one client who rated it as a 5 due to the fact that attorneys handle too many cases at once due to the large need after disasters. Clients reflected a generally high awareness of the legal organizations in the community; however, a few clients said awareness could be increased through advertising on billboards, television, internet, and radio. The majority of clients did not feel the services could be improved, but the most common suggestions for improvement were increased advertising of services and more attorneys to help clients.

### ***Impact on Participating Attorneys***

The attorneys serving as Katrina Legal Fellows also reported being personally affected by their experiences. According to every Katrina Legal Fellow interviewed, the experience increased or maintained their commitment to continue public interest work. In fact, all of the interviewed Katrina Legal Fellows were currently working at their public interest host sites at the time of the interviews, and two Katrina Legal Fellows said the experience brought them to the realization that they want to do this type of work for the rest of their lives. Most Katrina Legal Fellows felt the fellowship term also helped them believe in their ability to help the community with legal skills. However, one Katrina Legal Fellow said she learned that many people are resistant to working with lawyers, thus impeding her ability to improve her community.

### ***Community and Other Impacts***

The Katrina Legal Fellows had a unique role in the Katrina Legal Initiative in that one of the main goals of this component was to bring about positive administrative and legislative policy change. Some Katrina Legal Fellows were constrained by host agencies' LSC regulations. However, most influenced policy on some level, whether educating other lawyers through conference presentations on the larger policy issues at hand or testifying before Congress on the use of federal recovery funds. These advocacy pursuits had community-level impacts (see Table 2) and were expected to affect over 143,900 people.



**Table 2. Katrina Legal Fellow Contributions to Changes in Policy and Procedures\***

Issue	Description of Change
<i>National</i>	
Due Process of FEMA Housing Programs	Problems with FEMA tracked by Fellow used in Senate report recommending changes to FEMA housing programs
Due Process of FEMA Rental Assistance Program	Currently ongoing class action lawsuit, <i>Ridgely v. FEMA</i> , has resulted in preliminary injunction against FEMA recoupment efforts of rental assistance program benefits
Payment for Utilities from FEMA Rental Assistance Program	Preliminary injunction won in class action lawsuit, <i>Watson v. FEMA</i> , prohibiting FEMA from discontinuing assistance if FEMA funds were used for utilities. Injunction was eventually vacated, but FEMA agreed to extend deadline for housing assistance.
Disability Access in FEMA Trailers	Settlement for class action lawsuit, <i>Brou v. FEMA</i> , required publicized phone number to report non-compliance with disability accessibility issues with FEMA trailers
HUD Voucher Ports	Convinced HUD to look at denials of voucher “ports,” or the request for the use of a voucher in a different location; HUD now has task force to investigate refusal of voucher ports to ensure that public housing authorities are making legitimate denials
HUD Disaster Housing Assistance Program (DHAP) Termination	Obtained extension for more gradual tapering of termination of DHAP and transition to Section 8 program
HUD Disaster Housing Assistance Program (DHAP)	Problems with disaster housing programs tracked by Fellow were used to assist HUD in revising Disaster Housing Assistance Program for Hurricane Ike (e.g. new practice of providing assistance for rental deposits)
<i>Louisiana</i>	
Jefferson Parish Ordinance to Remove FEMA Trailers	Jefferson Parish agreed to implement additional hearing procedures and extended deadline to remove FEMA trailers from personal property after receiving communications detailing the adverse impact this would have on trailer residents
Disability Access in Group Home	New Orleans group home made settlement agreement to make facility accessible to people in wheelchairs after lawsuit filed against Department of Health & Hospitals and two group homes
Public Housing Vouchers	Obtained exemption from Housing Authority of New Orleans (HANO) and HUD that allowed the reinstatement of vouchers to individuals residing in other states who were terminated from public housing programs for “abandonment” reasons when they came home to visit their families
Public Housing Custody Verification	HANO ceased policies to require more custody verification from fathers than from mothers for individuals entering voucher program from DHAP
Relocation to Public Housing Developments	HUD began providing moving assistance and help negotiating out of leases to allow tenants to move into the Iberville Development if they were already renting elsewhere; HANO began providing more moving expenses for residents of Lafitte Development



Jail Alternative to Fines	After a class action lawsuit was filed against New Orleans municipal judges for incarcerating individuals who are unable to pay fines, the municipal court voluntarily agreed to stop this practice.
<i>Mississippi</i>	
Low-Income Home Grant Program	State created home grant program targeted for low-income grantees; increased grant cap from \$50,000 to \$100,000; expanded eligibility
Small Rental Assistance Program	State created forgivable loan incentive program to encourage landlords to rent to low- and moderate-income tenants
Diversion of \$600 million from State CDBG to State Port Construction Project	Congress conducted oversight hearings on Mississippi's spending; 12 members of Congress called for legislation that would reverse the decision to divert funds
Environmental Issues with State Port	Mississippi State Port Authority modified design of port to remove proposed inland terminal which was determined to be environmentally unfriendly due to destruction of wetlands and pollution
FEMA Evictions	Senator Lieberman approached FEMA and persuaded them to stop evicting 3,000 individuals who they had incorrectly determined were ineligible for temporary FEMA trailer housing
<i>Texas</i>	
Eligibility for State CDBG Disaster Homeowner Assistance Program	State agreed to accept Affidavit of Heirship in place of a clear home title; shortened application from 54 pages to 17 pages

\*It is important to note that these accomplishments were often the result of joint efforts among various organizations

Staff at two different host sites described Katrina Legal Fellows as providing a “voice” for community members in need of help. Some Katrina Legal Fellows used their legal skills to help a large number of community members through impact litigation. Two Katrina Legal Fellows and one AmeriCorps Legal Fellow were involved in some way with the *Ridgely v. FEMA* class action lawsuit, which challenged FEMA’s actions requiring people to return money they had previously received through a disaster rental assistance program. The Fellows’ work on this litigation contributed to an injunction on FEMA recoupment efforts of these benefits. At least 130,000 people are expected to be impacted by this decision according to one Katrina Legal Fellow. One Katrina Legal Fellow was involved in another class action lawsuit, *Brou v. FEMA*, which provided a settlement to plaintiffs who were not given disability-accessible trailers. This settlement also required the advertising of a phone number to report and resolve disability access issues.

Another Katrina Legal Fellow helped persuade the Mississippi Governor to create a low-income Homeowner Grant Program and a Small Rental Assistance Program. The renter’s program was anticipated to assist 6,000 renters through forgivable loans to landlords who agree to rent to persons of low- and moderate-income for 5 years. The grant for homeowners was expected to result in a \$100 million increase in benefits for 5,000 additional homeowners. This Katrina Legal Fellow also used the media to spotlight FEMA’s practice of



evicting residents in temporary FEMA housing by incorrectly saying they were ineligible. In response to these stories being exposed through the media, Senator Lieberman approached FEMA on the issue and convinced them to stop erroneously evicting people.

Other Katrina Legal Fellows also influenced policy in federal and state disaster relief programs through speaking with agency contacts and suggesting changes based on their experiences with clients. For example, two Katrina Legal Fellows in Texas collaborated with other organizations to convince the state to change eligibility requirements and shorten the application for the state's Disaster Relief CDBG, which had only been used to help 13 people affected by the hurricane. One of these Katrina Legal Fellows expected the change to result in 1000-4800 more grantees.

The class action lawsuits described previously had widespread impact not only on those clients involved in the litigation but also on others in the community receiving or trying to receive FEMA benefits. Katrina Legal Fellows fought for changes to FEMA policy along with other area attorneys and agencies, securing an injunction on recoupment efforts and a publicized phone number to report violations in the requirement to provide disability-accessible trailers. In addition to these impacts, the Katrina Legal Fellows strengthened their community through forming collaborative relationships among other legal and community organizations in the pursuit of class action lawsuits and policy change.

*It raised our [Equal Justice Work's] profile quite a bit; we got a lot of fabulous press. We were able to bring in some new funders like JEHT and a couple law firms we hadn't worked with before. It boosted morale in the organization. We also now have a legacy. For instance, when the wild fires were really bad a year ago, people were emailing us to get in touch with the attorneys who worked on the coast."*

*-Program Stakeholder*

Finally, the Katrina Legal Initiative also impacted Equal Justice Works as an organization. Media attention on the work of the Katrina Legal Fellows and AmeriCorps Legal Fellows helped to raise awareness of Equal Justice Works programs and mission.

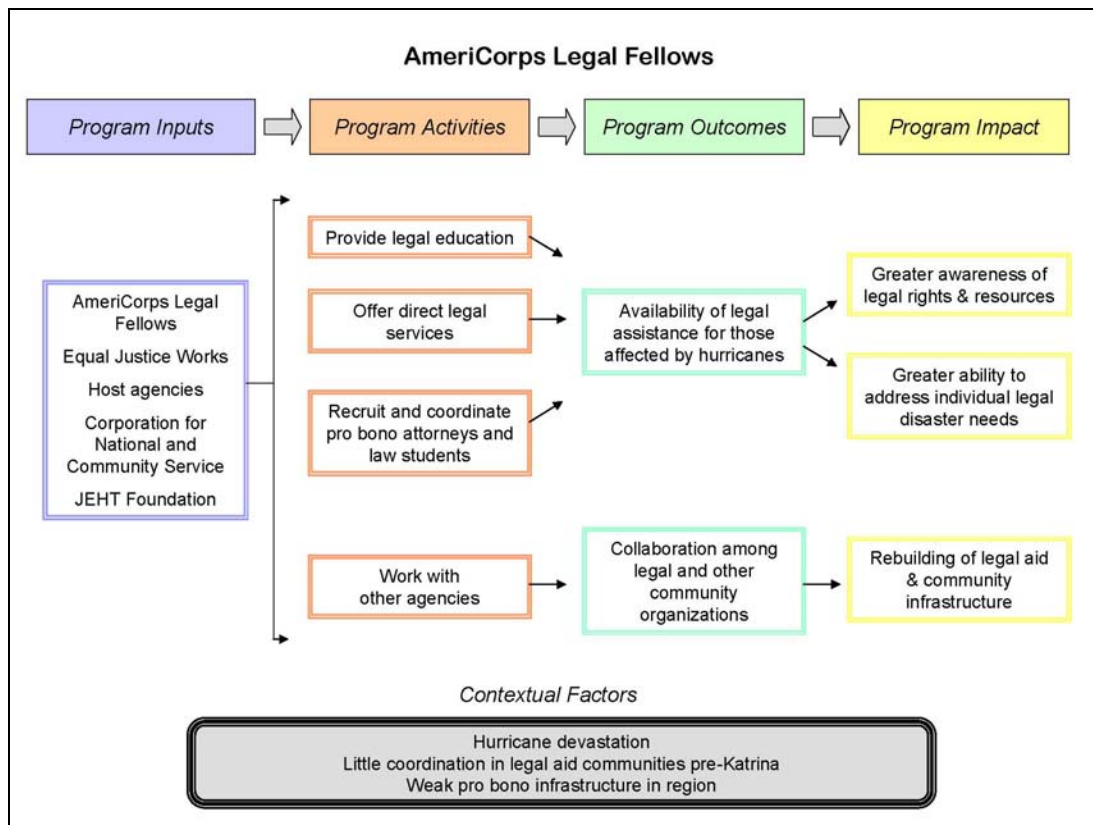




## AMERICORPS LEGAL FELLOWSHIP

### Program Description

Figure 4. Logic Model for AmeriCorps Legal Fellowship Component



The AmeriCorps Legal Fellowship was funded primarily by the Corporation for National and Community Service’s AmeriCorps program and administered by Equal Justice Works. Additional support was provided by the JEHT Foundation and other funding sources. The AmeriCorps Legal Fellows program placed AmeriCorps attorneys in host agencies in the Gulf Coast region for nine to 11 month terms. Working within these host agencies, AmeriCorps Legal Fellows were expected to perform certain activities to fulfill the program mission (see Figure 4).

AmeriCorps Legal Fellows were expected to recruit pro bono attorneys and law students and coordinate pro bono casework by matching volunteers with cases, training volunteers for pro bono work, and supervising the work of law students. AmeriCorps Legal Fellows were



also expected to offer direct legal services through activities such as coordinating legal clinics, managing hotlines, and providing individual case representation. In order to provide responsive services, AmeriCorps Legal Fellows needed to continually assess the legal needs of the community. Furthermore, it was hoped that AmeriCorps Legal Fellows would educate clients in the community by developing educational materials and giving educational presentations.

All of these activities were intended to increase the availability of legal assistance for those affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, particularly those from lower socio-economic backgrounds and those traditionally underserved by the legal community. As with the Katrina Legal Fellowships, the hope for the AmeriCorps Legal Fellowships was that the resulting rise in legal resources in the community would lead to greater access to legal services and an expanded range of provided legal services and, consequently, greater awareness and ability to address legal needs. In addition to providing legal aid services for clients, the AmeriCorps Legal Fellowship program was designed to contribute to the rebuilding of local communities and legal infrastructures through collaboration with other legal and non-legal organizations. It is important to also take into account the listed contextual factors when studying this program.

### **AmeriCorps Legal Fellow Activities**

The following section describes the activities performed by the AmeriCorps Legal Fellows as reported through host site reports,<sup>12</sup> interviews with host site directors, focus groups with host site staff, progress reports completed by the AmeriCorps Legal Fellows, and phone and in-person interviews with AmeriCorps Legal Fellows. Through these sources, it was clear that the AmeriCorps Legal Fellows performed many activities aimed at achieving the goals set out at the beginning of the program.

#### ***Direct Legal Services***

According to host site reports, the KLI AmeriCorps Legal Fellows served 7,132 clients through their own direct services work or through that of volunteer legal service providers whom they had recruited. Information from progress reports and interviews<sup>13</sup> indicated that AmeriCorps Legal Fellows participated in a variety of direct legal services work, including case representation (92 percent of AmeriCorps Legal Fellows represented clients directly), legal clinics (100 percent), and legal call center or phone intakes (29 percent). Overall, AmeriCorps Legal Fellows participated in 357 legal clinics. Some of these clinics were one-

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<sup>12</sup> See methodology sidebar for more information on host site reports.

<sup>13</sup> Note that information was obtained for 14 of the 16 AmeriCorps Legal Fellows. Analyses were performed on these 14 individuals.



time events while others were ongoing. Many AmeriCorps Legal Fellows attended clinics sponsored by the host agency or other organizations; however half (50 percent) reported they helped to create or manage legal clinics.

In addition, two of the 11 interviewed AmeriCorps Legal Fellows said they contributed to class action lawsuits. Many of the remaining AmeriCorps Legal Fellows said they were not allowed to perform class action lawsuits due to Legal Services Corporation restrictions at their host organizations.

*“I went into an area where everything was destroyed with my laptop and created legal documents on my laptop and traveled back to [host organization] to print them out, and then went back again to execute the documents with the client.”*  
-AmeriCorps Legal Fellow

The AmeriCorps Legal Fellows covered a wide breadth of legal issues in their direct services work, including family law, tax law, consumer law, immigration law, estate law and successions, and obtaining government benefits. AmeriCorps Legal Fellows reported the same client characteristics as Katrina Legal Fellows described, including being low-income, single, African American, disabled, and elderly. In addition, some attorneys served Hispanic and Vietnamese clients, including some immigrants. AmeriCorps Legal Fellows at the Pro Bono Project also focused efforts on providing legal assistance to homeless individuals at shelters.

### ***Pro Bono Legal Services***

In addition to his or her own direct legal services, every AmeriCorps Legal Fellow also worked with law students and other lawyers to provide pro bono legal aid for clients. Throughout the two AmeriCorps terms, at least 4,065 individuals were recruited to provide legal aid services. AmeriCorps Legal Fellows recruited 1,205 law students through activities such as making presentations at law schools, “tabling” in common areas, and attending student functions. Some of the AmeriCorps Legal Fellows utilized relationships with the Student Hurricane Network to connect with law student volunteers. One AmeriCorps Legal Fellow reported not being able to recruit law students because there were no law schools in the vicinity.

At least 2,860 lawyers were also recruited; however this number is likely underestimated, as organizations were not asked about recruited lawyers in the host site reports for a portion of the first term. AmeriCorps Legal Fellows often recruited lawyers for pro bono work by attending law functions. A few AmeriCorps Legal Fellows reported not needing to recruit due to an outpouring of lawyers from other states requesting the opportunity to volunteer or their host organizations already having lists of pro bono attorneys they could call upon.

Beyond recruitment, the AmeriCorps Legal Fellows served a vital function in coordinating and managing the pro bono casework. There was a broad range of work in this



area. Some AmeriCorps Legal Fellows found pro bono volunteers to take caseloads referred to their host agencies, others matched recruited attorneys and law students with outside existing pro bono opportunities, while others worked to create pro bono opportunities for volunteers. At the Louisiana Bar Foundation, AmeriCorps Legal Fellows developed a website where law students could track their pro bono hours. In addition, most AmeriCorps Legal Fellows trained volunteer attorneys and law students. There was a range in the type and extent of pro bono help. Some volunteers were local attorneys and law students, others provided pro bono services remotely from other states, and finally some pro bono attorneys and law students assisted during brief or long-term trips.

### ***Educational Outreach***

AmeriCorps Legal Fellows also reported working on educational materials and presentations for recruiting purposes or to educate the community about legal resources, legal rights, and how to handle various legal problems. The majority (91 percent) of AmeriCorps Legal Fellows contributed<sup>14</sup> to the creation of educational materials for pro bono volunteers and people in need of legal aid services, including flyers, pamphlets, and training materials. For example, one AmeriCorps Legal Fellow worked with an Equal Justice Works Katrina Legal Fellow to create a training video for visiting pro bono attorneys. Another AmeriCorps Legal Fellow created training manuals for volunteers who worked at a legal call center and a legal clinic held at a homeless shelter. Education materials for community individuals covered the topics of government disaster relief programs, landlord-tenant laws, identity theft, contractor fraud, taxes, bankruptcy, debt collection, creating wills, family law, domestic violence, and legal rights. These materials were most commonly distributed through legal clinics, the host site office, public outreach events, and by placing them in other community organizations including libraries, churches, and community centers. A couple AmeriCorps Legal Fellows also distributed their educational materials through mail; another handed out information door-to-door at a FEMA trailer park.

All AmeriCorps Legal Fellows also educated both the legal and general communities through presentations. Presentations focused on topics similar to the educational materials mentioned previously, such as “Know Your Rights”, identify theft, and debt education. AmeriCorps Legal Fellows also made presentations at law schools and law firms about pro bono opportunities. Some AmeriCorps Legal Fellows gave presentations for community nonprofit organizations or spoke at other types of events, such as Continuing Legal Education seminars, a Katrina symposium, and an Access to Justice Commission meeting. One AmeriCorps Legal Fellow at the Mississippi Center for Justice used the local television

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<sup>14</sup> This number includes those who created educational materials on their own and those who collaborated with others or supervised others to create educational materials.



news media to discuss important legal issues and advertise legal clinics, while another AmeriCorps Legal Fellow at the Mississippi Center for Legal Services organized and spoke at conferences where law enforcement, prosecutors, and mental health professionals convened to discuss domestic violence, as this became a critical issue after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

### ***Collaboration with Other Organizations***

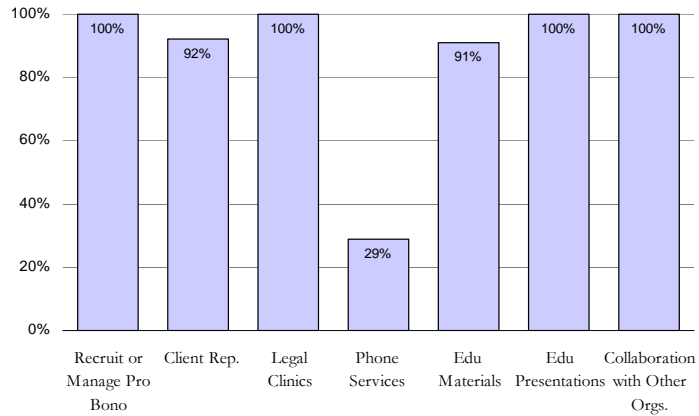
All of the AmeriCorps Legal Fellows worked with organizations beyond their host sites to collaborate on projects, participate in outreach or legal clinic events, or become involved in community education efforts. AmeriCorps Legal Fellows formed at least 209 working relationships with other organizations according to host site reports. This number is also a conservative estimate, as this question was not asked for a portion of the time period of the first term. Many AmeriCorps Legal Fellows worked with the Student Hurricane Network to recruit volunteer law students and match students with pro bono opportunities. AmeriCorps Legal Fellows often volunteered at legal clinics hosted by other organizations such as the Common Ground Collective, Thirst for Justice, and Loyola University. Given that recruiting law students was a large part of the AmeriCorps Legal Fellowship mission, many of the AmeriCorps Legal Fellows worked with local law schools. This ranged from coordinating “tabling” efforts in the law school common areas to working with faculty and the administration to develop new opportunities at law schools such as a class on disaster issues, incentives for public interest work, and public interest externships. AmeriCorps Legal Fellows also developed relationships with local and non-local law firms to provide pro bono services to clients and collaborate on creating educational materials. One AmeriCorps Legal Fellow worked on a steering committee with other legal aid organizations to help develop a statewide unified call center for legal assistance (this individual is still working toward this goal.) Finally, AmeriCorps Legal Fellows often relied on other community organizations to help facilitate outreach events and legal clinics. Churches, community centers, malls, and other non-profits allowed the AmeriCorps Legal Fellows to hold legal clinics on their property. These organizations also helped advertise legal services through distributing educational materials created by the AmeriCorps Legal Fellows.



**Table 3. AmeriCorps Legal Fellow Activities**

Activity Outputs	Quantity
Clients Served	7132
Legal Clinics	357
Collaborative Relationships	209
Pro Bono Attorneys	2860
Pro Bono Law Students	1205

**Figure 5. Percentage of AmeriCorps Legal Fellows Participating in Different Activities**



### AmeriCorps Legal Fellow Impacts

The Urban Institute examined the impact of the AmeriCorps Legal Fellows on host organizations, clients, program participants, and local communities. A variety of impacts were reported in these different areas.

#### *Impact on Host Sites*

Directors and host site staff all agreed that the activities of the AmeriCorps Legal Fellows had positive impacts. Many of the case study host sites described strong impacts on their ability to function after a disaster. A common theme mentioned among host site directors and within staff focus groups was the importance of having another staff member or “another body” in the office. Interviewees made sure to clarify, however, that this was no small thing. After a disaster resulting in displaced or lost staff along with overwhelming community need, another staff member is an important commodity for which the host sites were incredibly thankful. In the host site reports, each AmeriCorps grant recipient<sup>15</sup> reported between 467 and 4,327 clients being served through

*“The AmeriCorps Legal Fellows energize those of us who have been here a while and are tired.”*  
-Host site director

<sup>15</sup> Legal Services Alabama reported 467 clients being served, Louisiana Bar Foundation reported 1026 clients being served, Pro Bono Project reported 1312 clients being served, and the North Mississippi Rural Legal Services/Mississippi Center for Justice (this particular grant included four sites over the two-year period) reported 4327 clients being served. These numbers include clients seen directly by AmeriCorps attorneys and clients seen by pro bono attorneys and law students recruited or managed by AmeriCorps attorneys.



the work of the AmeriCorps Legal Fellows at each site over the two term period. This indicates a substantial increase in capacity for the host sites, especially for those organizations that lost staff after the hurricanes. One executive director said the Equal Justice Works funding allowed for their organization to begin providing direct legal assistance which they had not done prior to the storms. A staff member who handled intakes at a New Orleans organization said she saw a noticeable difference in capacity to serve clients between AmeriCorps Legal Fellow terms; during these gap periods she was overwhelmed with too many clients to handle. At some sites, AmeriCorps Legal Fellows served all of the organization's clients.

Host site directors also mentioned that the AmeriCorps Legal Fellows influenced organizational capacity through the coordination of pro bono volunteers. Some of the directors suggested that the explosion of volunteers from across the country would have been impossible to manage without the coordinating efforts of the AmeriCorps Legal Fellows. One director said that before the AmeriCorps Legal Fellows came into their organization, volunteers were calling in from across the country and becoming frustrated that the organization was not able to match them with volunteering opportunities. Both AmeriCorps Legal Fellows and host site staff also reported impacts on the host site's relationships with

*"Because of the exposure from the Equal Justice Works program, we are able to fundraise and recruit attorneys on a more national level."  
-Host site director*

other organizations. Often, the work of the AmeriCorps Legal Fellows was seen as promoting the organization, raising awareness, and in some cases increasing the credibility or expertise of the organization. One host site director said the AmeriCorps Legal Fellows "triple your network through their activities." When host site staff were asked about the most important contribution of the program to their organizations, the most common response was having an additional "staff" member. However, staff also listed the following among the largest contributions to their organizations: educational workshops; a realization of the value of law students as volunteers; and the energy, passion, and enthusiasm of the AmeriCorps Legal Fellows. Staff from a couple of host sites said this energy and passion served to re-energize office staff who felt overwhelmed and were starting to become burned out. When asked to describe any drawbacks to hosting an AmeriCorps Legal Fellow, directors pointed to additional reporting responsibilities and the need to train less-experienced attorneys. However these directors still felt that the benefits far outweighed these minor drawbacks.

Hosting an AmeriCorps Legal Fellow led to long-term impacts for some of the organizations in the case studies. Two of the sites permanently hired AmeriCorps Legal Fellows as staff, and three organizations began participation in the traditional Equal Justice Works AmeriCorps Legal Fellowship program after the KLI ended. The Louisiana Bar Foundation, an organization that did not coordinate direct legal assistance prior to Hurricane



Katrina, continues to coordinate pro bono services through ongoing support from Equal Justice Works and a previous KLI AmeriCorps Legal Fellow now on staff supervising current AmeriCorps Legal Fellows. The Mississippi Center for Justice, another organization whose mission prior to the storm did not include legal assistance to individual clients, has also retained their AmeriCorps Legal Fellow as permanent staff to coordinate pro bono volunteers in a continued effort to provide legal aid to the region. Furthermore, one director stated that their organization's AmeriCorps Legal Fellow and Equal Justice Works Katrina Legal Fellow helped ensure that their new Biloxi office become a permanent office rather than a temporary emergency outpost. Another director stated that the presence of the AmeriCorps Legal Fellows led to a stronger volunteer infrastructure in the long term. Furthermore, staff at two of the case study host sites believed that the AmeriCorps Legal Fellows' work expanded their agency's funding options due to more exposure of their organizations.

### ***Impact on Clients***

The AmeriCorps Legal Fellows' work within the host sites also impacted individuals in the community in need of legal aid. Again, it is clear from the sheer number of 7,132 clients seen by AmeriCorps Legal Fellows and their recruited pro bono help that there was a large impact on individuals in the community. One host organization director said the most important contribution of the program was allowing more people to receive legal aid who would not be served otherwise. Furthermore, AmeriCorps Legal Fellows who were interviewed stated that they were able to provide some type of help for most people who came to them. Many of them noted that oftentimes the help people needed most was appropriate referrals or obtaining information on how the system worked or on steps to take. While the AmeriCorps Legal Fellows reported that their clients were generally satisfied, opinions varied on the degree of success in terms of outcomes. Some AmeriCorps Legal Fellows indicated that they worked on cases that were hard to win (e.g. FEMA appeals, evictions for unpaid rent), others said that a large number of their cases were still open, and a few reported high rates of success, including three AmeriCorps Legal Fellows who reported successful outcomes for more than 90 percent of their clients.

In addition to these direct services, an estimated 5,700 people received educational materials and an estimated 2,400 people attended educational presentations according to interviewed AmeriCorps Legal Fellows. Because not every AmeriCorps Legal Fellow was interviewed, this estimate is likely very conservative. AmeriCorps Legal Fellows stated that audiences responded favorably to these presentations, asking a lot of questions and signing up for volunteer opportunities.

AmeriCorps Legal Fellows also helped increase awareness and remove barriers to service through outreach activities, such as attending community fairs or working at a soup





kitchen to identify people with unmet legal needs. Some AmeriCorps Legal Fellows even traveled long distances to reach clients in rural areas or closer to the hurricane devastation area. One AmeriCorps Legal Fellow at the Mississippi Center for Justice organized a legal clinic for Vietnamese individuals and arranged to have Vietnamese-speaking attorneys fly in from across the country to remove the language barrier and serve this special population. In fact, directors specifically stated that the AmeriCorps Legal Fellows had a particularly strong impact on the level of outreach in the community.

AmeriCorps Legal Fellows also handled a wide variety of legal issues as mentioned above, leading to more expansive services. Because some of the host agencies explicitly said they would not be able to hire an additional staff member at the time without Equal Justice Works funding, at least some of these additional clients contacted through outreach activities and served through legal services and education would likely not have received assistance without the Katrina Legal Initiative.

Clients who were interviewed (N=12) had mixed opinions about the services provided by AmeriCorps Legal Fellows. Satisfaction ratings ranged from 1-10 with an average rating of 7. Five of the 12 clients reported they did not receive the services they requested for the following reasons: (a) their case had no legal basis, (b) their call was never returned, (c) the client had found another attorney by the time the AmeriCorps Legal Fellow returned their call, or (d) the case could not progress due to specific facts of the case. Clients who did obtain legal help found assistance for issues such as divorce, bankruptcy, credit card debt, foreclosure, FEMA benefits, insurance, and being a victim of

*“I work in New Orleans, a community that physically and emotionally was devastated by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The storms affected the court system and all other government functions as much as it did the people. Sometimes I think that just learning how to navigate a dysfunctional system has been and continues to be a major accomplishment. What I have benefited from the most has been getting out in the community, taking in the enormity of the devastation, seeing the commitment of people to rebuild, and being a part of that process.”*  
-AmeriCorps Legal Fellow

battery and theft. Clients had varying opinions on how aware members of the community were of legal assistance services, and one quarter of interviewed clients suggested awareness could be improved by advertising through flyers, internet, and the yellow pages.

Recommendations for improvement included quicker services, more staff, and actual delivery of legal help (as opposed to refusing cases or not returning calls). It should be noted that, unlike the clients for the Katrina Legal Fellows, one of the AmeriCorps Legal Fellowship sites was conducive to random selection of clients. The higher rate of negative responses by clients of AmeriCorps Legal Fellows may be due to this fact rather than a reflection on the AmeriCorps Legal Fellows’ work as compared to that of the Katrina Legal Fellows.



### *Impact on Participating Attorneys*

In addition to the impacts on the host organization and individuals in need of legal aid, the AmeriCorps Legal Fellows themselves were also affected by their experiences. Nearly all of the interviewed AmeriCorps Legal Fellows reported that the experience increased or maintained their commitment to continue public interest work. This commitment can be seen in the fact that one AmeriCorps Legal Fellow remained at a host organization in a fellowship position after the KLI ended, two out of the 11 AmeriCorps Legal Fellows continued to work at their host organizations as permanent staff after completing their AmeriCorps terms, three left their host organizations but found other public interest jobs, and three AmeriCorps Legal Fellows were working for private firms but providing pro bono services. Many said their AmeriCorps term also helped them believe in their ability to help the community with legal skills. However, one AmeriCorps Legal Fellow felt that the experience “killed” her belief in using legal skills to improve the community. This AmeriCorps Legal Fellow felt that legal non-profits took the wrong approach and suggested that they should use more business strategies to accomplish their goals. However, this AmeriCorps Legal Fellow still reported an increased commitment to working on behalf of low-income and underserved populations. In fact, every interviewed AmeriCorps Legal Fellow reported a continued or increased commitment to working on behalf of low-income and underserved populations, even though two of those interviewed said the experience shed light on the large difficulties encountered in this type of work. One AmeriCorps Legal Fellow stated, “I will never take a regular job; I will never go back.”

### *Community and Other Impacts*

AmeriCorps Legal Fellows were not alone in their strengthened commitment to working with underserved populations. In fact, many of the recruited pro bono volunteers also reported more commitment to pro bono and public interest law. During the first half of the first term, 77 recruited law students were surveyed by the host agencies, and 97 percent of the surveyed law students said they were more likely to continue public service work activities as a result of their volunteering experience. Sixty-four percent already had a plan to do so. Survey responses were also obtained from 379 volunteer law students recruited during the remaining portion of the first term and the full

*“[Our AmeriCorps Legal Fellow] served as a catalyst for pro bono recruitment, because pro bono work was really not on the radar screen in our community before.”*

*-Host site staff member*

*“The Louisiana legal community is interested in helping the community, but the lack of an infrastructure made it difficult and unappealing. Now, with two attorneys focusing solely on developing new projects and recruiting volunteers, everyone seems so much more at ease with joining in.”*

*-AmeriCorps Legal Fellow*



*"I'd say my proudest accomplishment was working with my law school to organize a Katrina law class being given this semester. It includes an action component in which 40 law students, professors, and alumni will be coming to New Orleans to do volunteer legal work. It meant a lot to get my school to teach a class on Katrina and facilitate the volunteer trip."*  
-AmeriCorps Legal Fellow

second term. Ninety-six percent said they had a positive experience volunteering, and 95 percent were willing to volunteer in the future. In addition, three quarters reported that they were more likely to consider pursuing a full-time career in public interest law because of their volunteer experience. These promising survey results indicate a positive effect on recruited volunteers. If these recruited law students continue to harness the energy and commitment

they exhibited in the surveys, the recruiting efforts of the AmeriCorps Legal Fellows may continue to have a long-term impact on legal aid services long after they have left the area, serving to bolster the pro bono legal infrastructure in the Gulf Coast communities. Other staff at host organizations also recognized this important impact of the AmeriCorps Legal Fellows' work. Specifically, staff at a couple of the host sites thought that the AmeriCorps Legal Fellows helped create a pro bono culture that was not previously in the region. One staff member of the Louisiana Bar Foundation stated that the most important contribution of the AmeriCorps Legal Fellows was developing an atmosphere of volunteerism at LSU that previously did not exist. Staff at another host site described the volunteer recruiting efforts as a "catalyst" for pro bono volunteering, reporting that pro bono work was not previously "on the radar screen." They recognized their AmeriCorps Legal Fellow as the primary force behind the 26,000 hours of pro bono work performed in 2006 and 2007 through the Mississippi Center for Justice.

In addition to this impact, the AmeriCorps Legal Fellows likely influenced the legal community through building relationships with other legal organizations and with other community organizations. For example, AmeriCorps Legal Fellows helped strengthen relationships between various legal assistance organizations through participating in outreach events together, volunteering in each other's legal clinics, working towards developing a unified legal call center, and using each other as resources for assigning pro bono volunteers to clients. Some stakeholders also viewed the AmeriCorps Legal Fellows as having a role in increasing the level of collaboration among local legal aid organizations. However, one stakeholder said that while these gains have been maintained, some of these systems are still very dysfunctional in terms of their coordination. AmeriCorps Legal Fellows also formed connections between their host organizations and law schools, private attorneys, and law firms through their recruitment efforts. In forming these initial networks or through continuing to nurture these relationships, the AmeriCorps Legal Fellow team has provided new legal resources to their host organizations and wider availability of services for clients in the community.



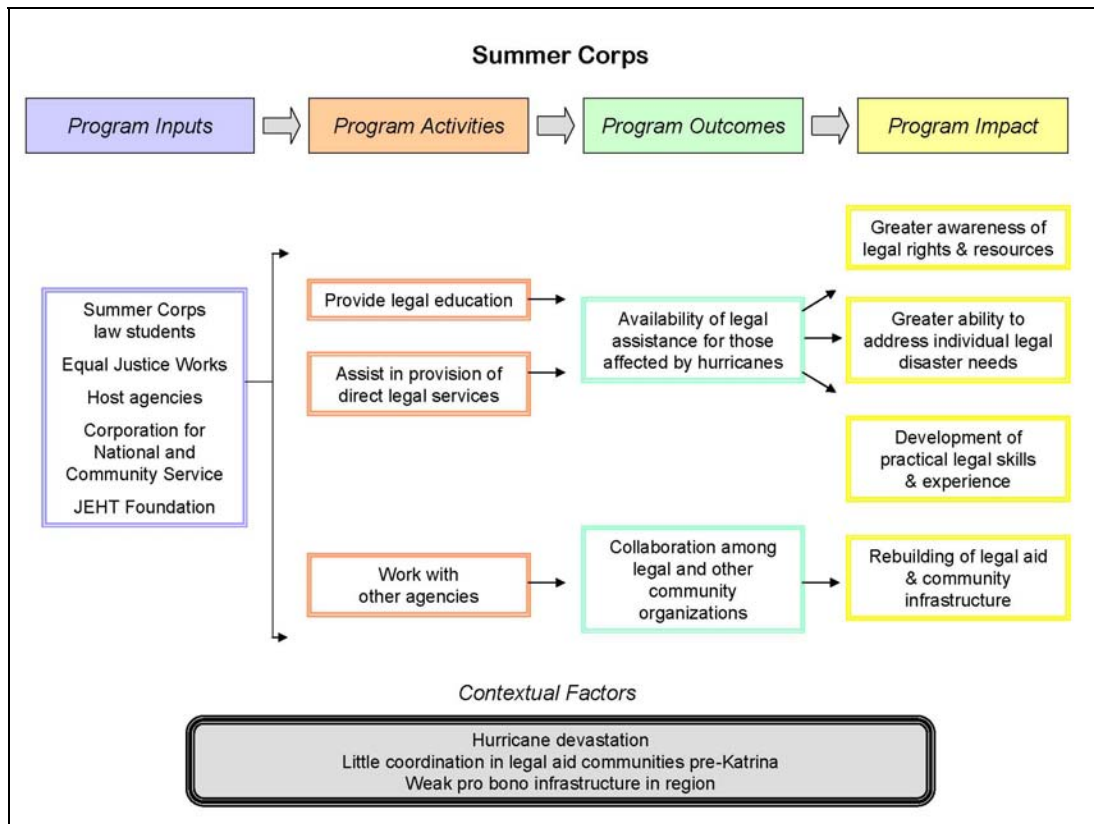
During this time of disaster, the legal aid community also had to reach out to other community organizations to host legal clinics and other outreach events. AmeriCorps Legal Fellows mentioned that building relationships with other community organizations helped them become more aware of community services and, consequently, make better referrals. Finally, the Katrina Legal Initiative's AmeriCorps Legal Fellowship program also impacted Equal Justice Works as an organization. One stakeholder felt that the program helped evolve Equal Justice Works' concept of their traditional AmeriCorps Legal Fellowship program, allowing for a larger client focus with an emphasis on providing as many people as possible with legal assistance rather than focusing primarily on increasing law student pro bono work.



## SUMMER CORPS PROGRAM

### Program Description

Figure 6. Logic Model for Summer Corps Component



The Summer Corps component of the Katrina Legal Initiative was also primarily funded by the Corporation for National and Community Service and coordinated by Equal Justice Works. Ninety-eight first- and second-year law students earned an AmeriCorps education award voucher in exchange for working at least 300 hours in a Gulf Coast non-profit organization. Summer Corps members attempted to increase available legal aid for those affected by hurricanes through education and assisting other legal professionals in direct legal aid (e.g. through research and case preparation). This increased availability of legal assistance for hurricane survivors was intended to lead to a greater ability to address individual legal needs and a greater awareness of legal rights and resources in the community. Furthermore, as with the AmeriCorps Legal Fellows, Summer Corps members' work with other agencies was hoped to increase collaboration among organizations in the



area and, consequently, help rebuild the community. Through these experiences, Summer Corps members had the opportunity to enhance their skill set, add valuable experience to their resume, and network with practicing attorneys and public interest law organizations. The Summer Corps program faced the same preexisting challenges in the region as the AmeriCorps Legal Fellowship, including attempting to execute a program in the aftermath of a disaster, lack of coordination among legal aid agencies, and a weak pro bono infrastructure in the legal community.

### Summer Corps Activities

Since the Summer Corps members were not licensed attorneys, they engaged in somewhat different activities than members of the other two KLI components. Most (94 percent) of the Summer Corps members<sup>16</sup> assisted with direct legal services - primarily performing intakes, drafting legal documents, following up with clients, and conducting legal research. Some Summer Corps members were also able to give brief legal advice and observe court sessions. Through these various activities, 4,504 clients received direct legal assistance. Over three-quarters (78 percent) of the Summer Corps members also provided additional legal assistance through education. Many (58 percent) Summer Corps members participated in presentations and other outreach activities. For example, Summer Corps members presented on how to obtain disaster program benefits and explained ethics laws to New Orleans city council members. Additionally, 61 percent helped create educational materials, such as instructional pro se videos, pamphlets on housing assistance programs, and guides on how to register children in schools after Katrina.

*“One of the projects I worked on was conducting exit interviews with prisoners as they were released from the Orleans Parish Prison. The OPP is now infamous for having evacuated prisoners onto the Broad St. Bridge at gunpoint during Hurricane Katrina, where they waited, without water, for four days to be transported out of the disaster-struck city. Our office, along with the coalition efforts of other prison-monitoring groups, did interviews to document poor conditions and treatment of the prisoners before and after the storm. All of the accounts that we recorded were passed on to the other groups we worked with to either be used to expose the facility through data reports, or to possibly become part of class action suits if their statements proved to be egregious enough.”*

*-Summer Corps member*

More than two thirds (68 percent) of the Summer Corps law students worked with other community based organizations, resulting in about 240 partnerships. Most commonly, this work entailed attending meetings, educating organizations about legal issues, and

<sup>16</sup> Unless otherwise mentioned, statistics on Summer Corps activities are taken from a survey completed by 86% of Summer Corps participants.



*“I assisted members of [my host organization] in their work with the New Orleans Workers’ Justice Coalition on ... the exploitation of guest workers by the employers who brought those workers to the United States. While still ongoing, the meetings and work between these organizations is focused on finding a quick and just result for these underserved guests of our country.”*  
-Summer Corps member

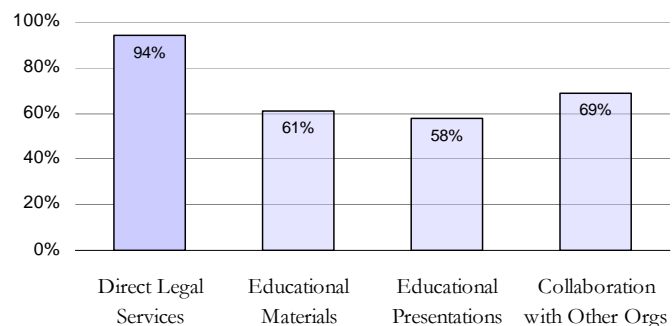
volunteering at legal clinics or for the Student Hurricane Network. For instance, one Summer Corps member from the New Orleans Legal Assistance Corporation (SLLS) served as a legal observer for the Jena 6 Defense, while another SLLS Summer Corps member worked with community organizations, such as UNITY and ACORN, to assist the homeless in disaster evacuation preparedness. Other examples of inter-agency collaboration include a Summer Corps member at SLLS who helped place legal

interns at various legal aid organizations in the city, an individual at the Alliance for Affordable Energy who participated with other organizations in a Sustainable Rebuilding Summit, and a Summer Corps member who served at Moving Forward Gulf Coast, Inc. and met with other grassroots organizations to strategize about effective Katrina-related advocacy. Summer Corps members also worked with groups such as juvenile courts, local police, religious organizations, domestic violence groups, the Steps Coalition, and the Safe Streets Campaign.

**Table 4. Summer Corps Activities**

Activity Outputs	Quantity
Clients Served	4504
Presentations/Outreach events	159
Educational Materials	127
Collaborative Relationships	240

**Figure 7. Percentage of Summer Corps Members Participating in Different Activities**







## Summer Corps Impacts

While the Summer Corps members served a much shorter length of time than those in the Katrina Legal Fellowship and AmeriCorps Legal Fellowship programs, they still found a way to have a substantial impact in the Gulf Coast region. Directors and one Equal Justice Works Katrina Legal Fellow stated that the Summer Corps placements were very helpful in supporting staff activities and reducing some of the burden on staff. Summer Corps members'

legal services work supported 4,504 clients receiving direct legal services. On average, each Summer Corps member helped provide direct legal assistance to about 45 individuals. Summer Corps members also served members of the community through their education efforts. Summer Corps participants estimated that about 5,313 people attended their 159 presentations and that their educational materials reached about 13,765 members of the community. Through these education and outreach activities, the Summer Corps program was able to reach a larger portion of the community. In interviews, Summer Corps members expressed that their largest impacts were helping to relieve the burden on other staff members and listening to clients and people in the community so they knew someone was "on their side" or "in their corner." Some Summer Corps members mentioned specific outcomes of cases in which they helped such as aiding juveniles in getting out of detention, assisting

*"I believe I used my legal skills to improve the conditions in the community I worked in by helping alleviate the large amount of work the attorneys in my organization had. By being able to do the intake and write the petitions, the attorneys had more chance to focus on preparing for cases and representing more people."*

*-Summer Corps member*

people in obtaining child custody, helping children become registered in schools, and preventing evictions. Interviewed Summer Corps members did not report many strong effects on their host organizations' relationships with other groups in the community; however some perceived an increase in the host agency's awareness of other community groups through outreach work or by facilitating the creation of a new advocacy organization.

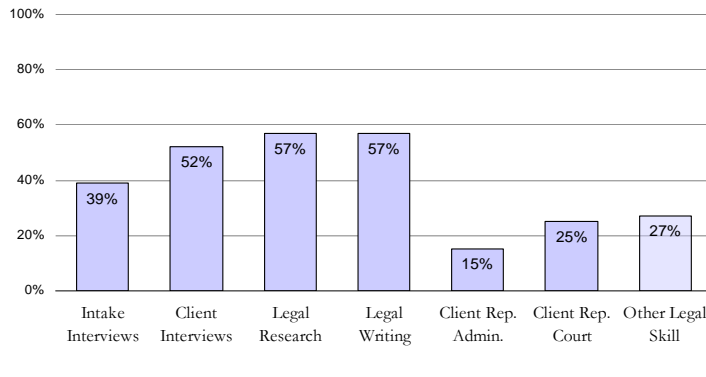
*"At all times, but especially in the wake of a disaster, there are individuals looking to take advantage of other people's ignorance of the law or their financial inability to access the law. Providing these people with free legal information and assistance lets them assert their rights in the manner that the law intended."*  
*-Summer Corps member*

The Summer Corps program, unlike the AmeriCorps Legal Fellow component, also had an explicit goal of improving the Summer Corps participants' legal skills. In the survey Summer Corps members completed at the end of their term, they were asked several questions about legal skills development. Every surveyed Summer Corps participant (100





**Figure 8. Gained Summer Corps Legal Skills**



percent) reported improving their legal skills in at least one area (see Figure 8).

Respondents most commonly cited legal research and writing skills as areas of improvement. Perceptions on skill building were further explored through phone interviews with a small randomly<sup>17</sup> selected sample of 11

Summer Corps members

who were asked to rate their skill level both before and after their Summer Corps experience on a scale of 1 to 10. On average, these individuals reported an increase from 3.9 to 7.3 in client interviewing, from 5.0 to 6.7 in legal research, from 5.0 to 6.5 in legal writing, and from 4.0 to 6.4 in case representation skills. A few Summer Corps members also mentioned improving their interpersonal skills, reporting that they learned to adapt their personal interaction style in response to the local culture or for particular populations (e.g. imprisoned individuals). Those interviewed also said the experience assisted them in networking with other legal professionals in the region, and some believed it helped them obtain a future job, either through gains in skills, having an unforgettable story to tell in interviews, or through exhibiting positive character traits. Some Summer Corps participants also reported more personal impacts such as gaining a better understanding of the challenges facing impoverished individuals, realizing a desire for a career path in public defense, and feeling moved by observing people in the community unite to help each other.

*“In addition to doing work this summer, I was exposed to the most extraordinary group of people in the legal field. I had the opportunity to meet judges, lawyers, and community organizers who were dedicated to serving the public and improving the New Orleans community.”*  
-Summer Corps member

At the end of the experience, every Summer Corps member who completed an exit survey agreed that the program had strengthened their belief that they were able to use legal

<sup>17</sup> One Summer Corps phone interviewee was purposefully selected to learn additional information about the Student Hurricane Network, as this individual was instrumental in its development. The remaining interview participants were part of a random, stratified selection, based on state, year of participation, and gender.



skills to improve community conditions, and almost all<sup>18</sup> reported a continued or strengthened commitment to work on behalf of low-income or underserved populations. Of the Summer Corps members who were interviewed, three out of the eight who were employed were currently working in public interest jobs.

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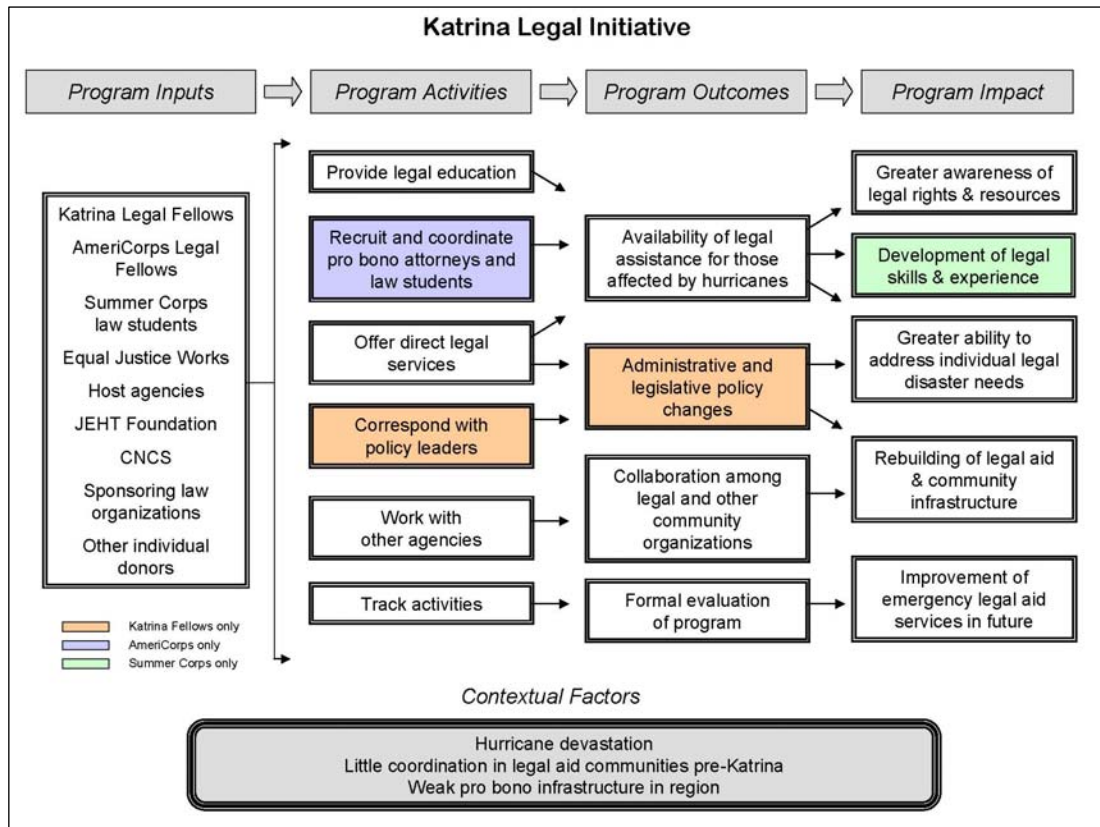
<sup>18</sup> Since the response options of this survey item changed across years, we cannot report an exact number for the overall sample. However, in 2006 52% reported an increased commitment, 48% reported a continued commitment, and 0% reported no commitment or a decreased commitment. In 2007, 97% reported strengthened commitment while 3% did not report a strengthened commitment.



## ANALYSIS OF KATRINA LEGAL INITIATIVE

This section assesses the extent to which the Katrina Legal Initiative met its intended objectives as outlined in the logic models and performance measurement goals. The target population, activities, and impacts of the entire program are discussed along with perceptions of the program by host organizations, program participants, and stakeholders.

**Figure 9. Logic Model for Katrina Legal Initiative**



### Target Population and Client Needs

The Katrina Legal Initiative was intended to reach traditionally underserved individuals with legal needs who were impacted by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Most of the KLI members reached the target population. However, two AmeriCorps Legal Fellows at the Alabama host site did not come in contact with many hurricane survivors due to their distance from the areas most strongly affected by the storms. Because of this issue and loss of funding, Equal Justice Works chose not to renew the sub grant for that particular host site in the second term of the KLI program. Another AmeriCorps Legal Fellow placed in central Mississippi also had less contact with hurricane survivors than other attorneys in the AmeriCorps program, although this individual handled most of the Katrina-related cases that came into their office



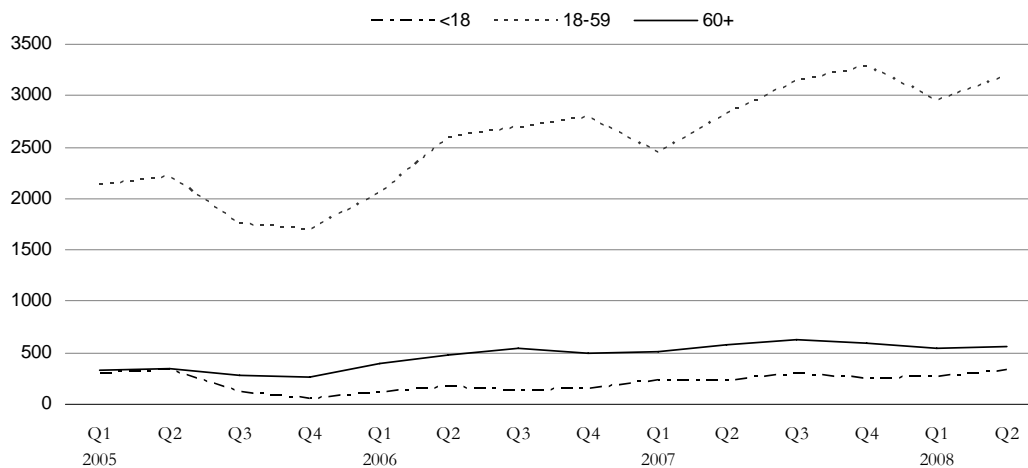
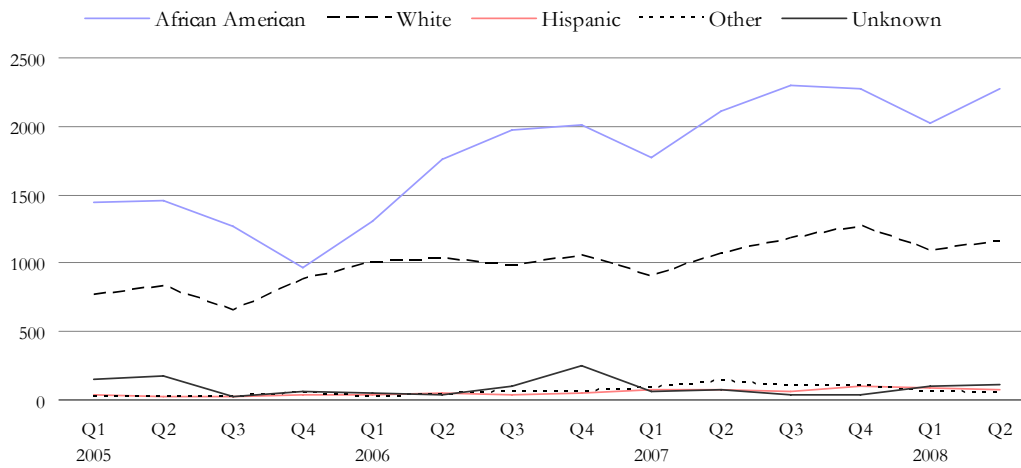
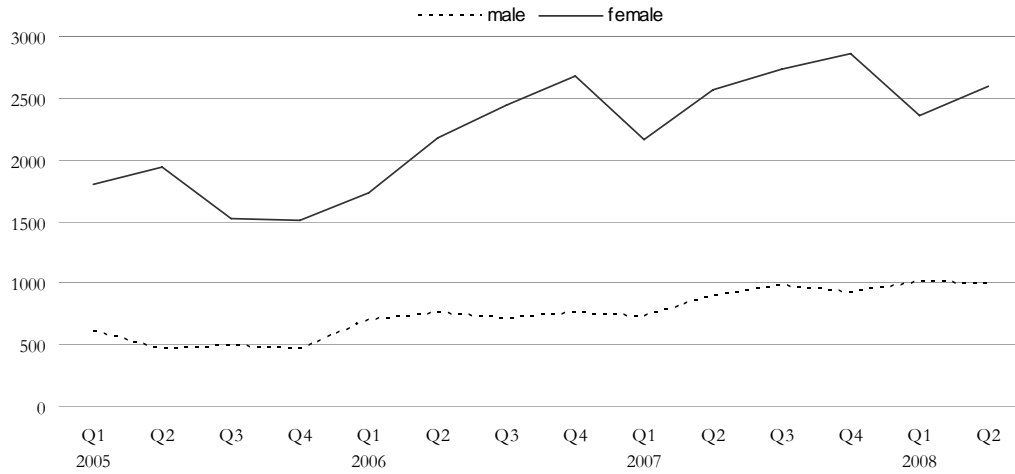
and made some outreach trips to the Mississippi coast. Other AmeriCorps Legal Fellows who were farther north in Mississippi managed to devote most of their efforts to people affected by the hurricanes by manning statewide legal call centers, finding and matching pro bono volunteers for other areas of the states, or making frequent trips to the Gulf Coast region.

Of the Summer Corps members who were interviewed, all dealt with populations impacted by the hurricanes in some way. However, two of the 11 interviewed said their work did not deal directly with Katrina-specific issues (one Summer Corps member assisted with trial and appellate work for death penalty cases while the other worked at an organization trying to free wrongfully convicted individuals serving life without parole). Of the remaining Summer Corps members who were not interviewed, it is difficult to determine with confidence the extent to which they assisted people impacted by the hurricanes. From the locations of some of the host sites, it is reasonable to assume that a small portion of the Summer Corps members may have been less able to provide direct legal assistance to hurricane survivors as occurred with a few of the AmeriCorps Legal Fellows. However, in contrast to the experience in Alabama, one individual who worked with a legal services agency as far north as Tennessee reported serving a large number of Katrina survivors through direct legal services work.

Katrina Legal Fellows and AmeriCorps Legal Fellows also described the clients they saw as typically being low-income, and many were single with a minority or disability status. Figure 10 shows client demographic information for the three case study host sites that provided legal services before Hurricane Katrina. As can be seen from these graphs, the demographic composition of clients did not appear to substantially change after the hurricanes in the third quarter of 2005. Hispanic and “other” ethnicities increased somewhat after the storms, possibly due to the influx of migrant workers for construction projects. Compared to the first quarter of 2005 before Hurricane Katrina hit, the first quarters of 2007 and 2008 had two to almost three times as many Hispanic clients, respectively. However, these numbers were still low relative to the number of African American and White clients. Also, in the fourth quarter of 2005 the gap between African American and White clients narrowed. While the number of clients in general was rising, African Americans, women, and middle-aged clients had the highest rates of increase.



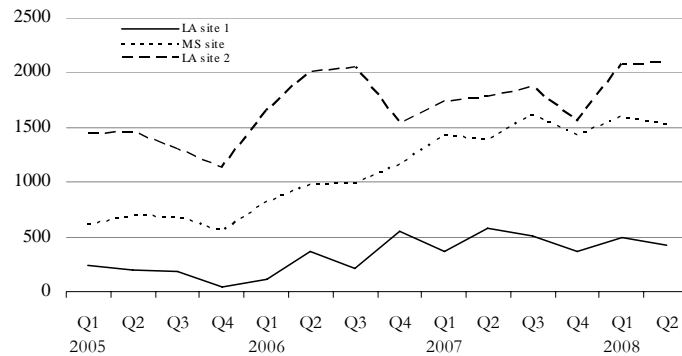
**Figure 10. Client Demographics (Gender, Ethnicity, Age) for Number of Cases Opened at Three Sites Across Time**





The legal needs in Gulf Coast communities grew dramatically after the hurricanes. Figure 11 shows the increase in overall cases at three host organizations,<sup>19</sup> two in Louisiana and one in Mississippi. This graph serves as a rough indicator of the legal need in these areas and signals how the burden increased at legal aid organizations as a

**Figure 11. Number of Open Cases at 3 Legal Aid Agencies**



result of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. As can be seen, after a brief dip in the third quarter of 2005 when the hurricanes struck, the number of open cases substantially rose and remained at higher levels than before the storms, even as far out as 2008.

While the majority of the program participants appeared to work with individuals affected by the hurricanes, not all legal assistance dealt with disaster issues. Participants handled legal matters directly related to the hurricanes (e.g. insurance claims, federal and state disaster program benefits), legal problems caused indirectly by the storms (e.g. contractor fraud, divorce, domestic violence), and some seemingly non-disaster related, albeit still much-needed, casework (e.g. drafting wills, working on wrongful convictions).

Importantly, Katrina Legal Fellows and AmeriCorps Legal Fellows who served for longer periods of time also faced the challenge of adapting to changing needs in the community. Some interviewed individuals reported a progression of the legal issues they saw in the community. For instance, FEMA benefits and housing were two legal needs that manifested immediately after the disaster. Legal issues such as insurance, family law, and employment followed later, while consumer matters and contractor fraud were issues that emerged further out. Katrina Legal Fellows and AmeriCorps Legal Fellows had to identify these changing needs and prepare accordingly to meet these needs.

*“If you’re flexible to the types of work that you’re willing to do, you’re going to be most effective. There [are] going to be times when you’re working on things that have nothing to do with law. For example, someone needs you to drop off blankets- there [are] going to be times you’re going to need to do that.”*

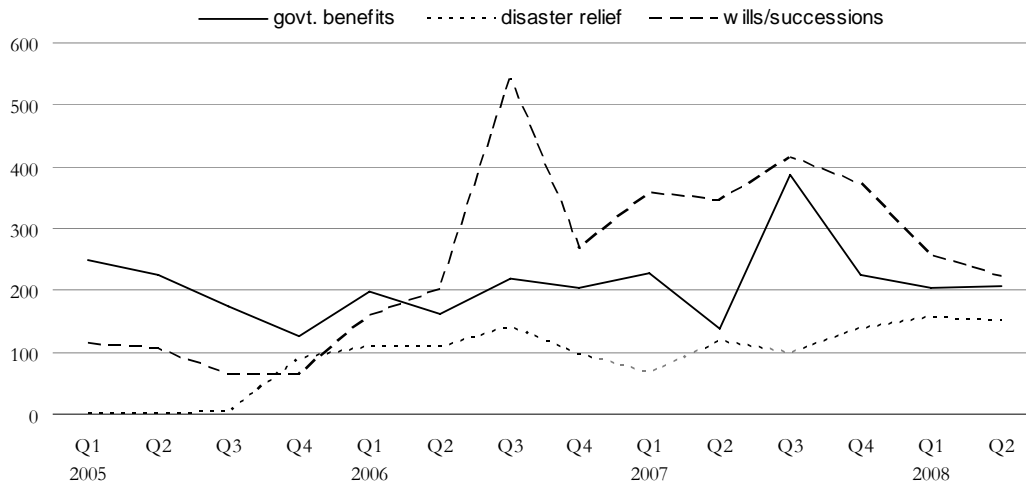
*-Summer Corps member*

<sup>19</sup> The remaining two host sites who participated in the case study approach did not provide legal services before the hurricanes and therefore cannot serve as an indicator of how service levels changed.

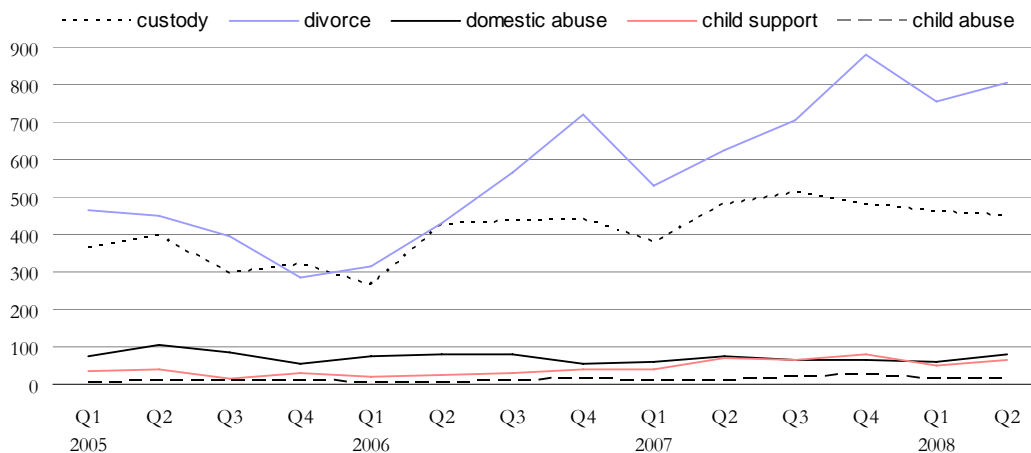


Estate and “successions” cases were one example of responding to the changing and sometimes unexpected needs in the community. This issue became particularly pressing in Louisiana where a clear home title was required for eligibility in the “Road Home” program, which provided money for destroyed homes. Many Louisiana residents had acquired homes through an informal inheritance and did not have legal documentation of ownership. Attorneys helped to provide evidence and documentation of home ownership for these disaster programs. Figures 12-16 show trends in legal cases from the beginning of 2005 before the hurricanes through the second quarter of 2008. Data on open cases was combined across three sites that were able to provide this level of detail: two sites in Louisiana and one site in Mississippi. As can be seen in Figure 12, the number of cases for handling successions or estate matters rose drastically after the hurricanes. There was also a spike in family law cases due mainly to divorce and custody cases. Some interviewees explained that this increase was mostly due to the stress of the evacuation and disaster impacts.

**Figure 12. Number of Open Cases at 3 Agencies: Government Assistance, Disaster Program Benefits, and Wills or Successions Cases**



**Figure 13. Number of Open Cases at 3 Agencies: Family Law**





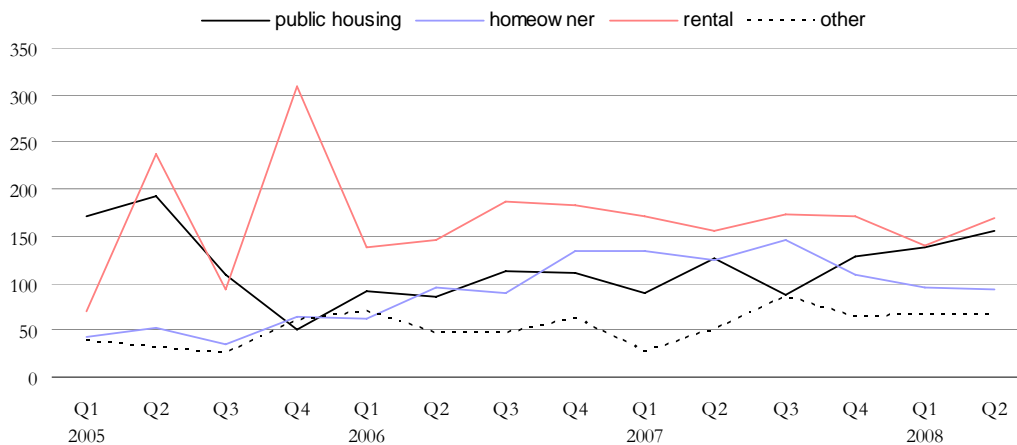
KLI participants and host site staff said the most pressing client needs included access to information (educating people about legal rights and avenues, answering questions, explaining disaster relief programs, etc.), “advocates” to navigate the “red tape” of the government benefit programs, successions or title law, and housing assistance. As might be expected, housing assistance was a prominent concern

*“There were about 7000 public housing units before the hurricane and now there are only 1,000 occupied units. Affordable housing desperately needs to be a priority of the long-term rebuilding plan in Louisiana by the state, local, and federal government.”*

*-Katrina Legal Fellow*

because many individuals were left without shelter after the storms. KLI participants helped clients to avoid eviction, apply for inclusion in the moratorium on foreclosures, find new public housing, and obtain financial support to rebuild their homes, among other things. Data from three host sites shows that the largest spike was in landlord-tenant issues, occurring shortly after the storms (see Figure 14). Interviewed KLI participants said many of these rental issues involved illegal evictions so that a landlord could rent out the property at a higher rate. Other common rental issues included landlords not providing a safe living environment in damaged homes and landlords not wanting to rent to individuals using FEMA rental assistance which could be held up in slow, bureaucratic processes.

**Figure 14. Number of Open Cases at 3 Agencies: Housing**

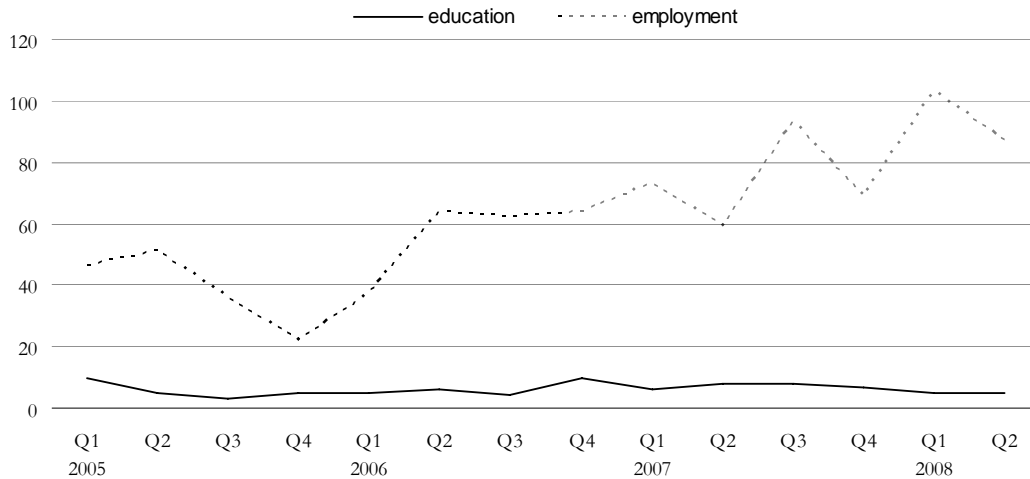


Data from host sites also demonstrates some increases in legal issues that were not raised frequently by KLI interviewees. Employment and medical legal matters had steady increases after the hurricanes, although these areas escalated later than other seemingly more urgent matters such as finding and maintaining shelter (see Figure 15 and 16). Also, the rate of bankruptcy cases reflected what another AmeriCorps Legal Fellow had reported: that the expected jump in bankruptcies was not nearly as prominent as experts had forecasted. In fact, bankruptcy cases decreased from pre-Katrina levels.

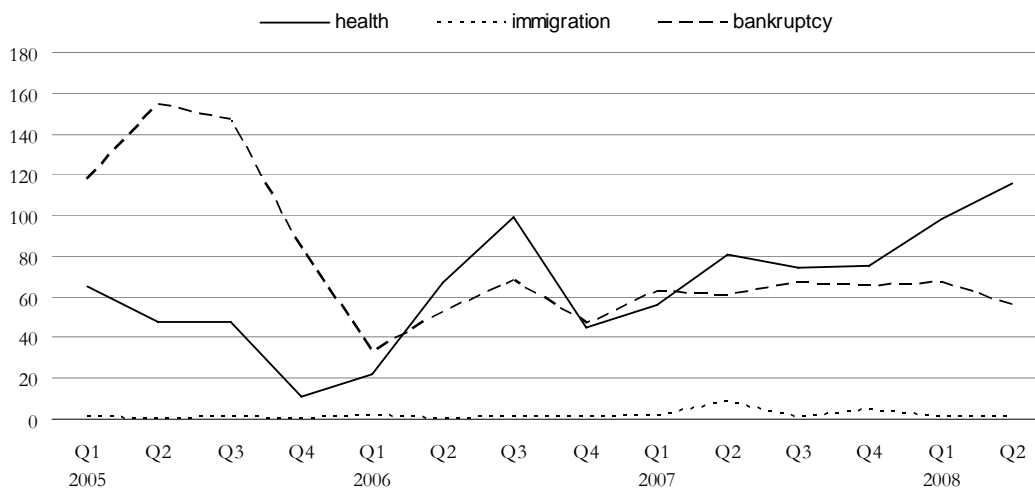




**Figure 15. Number of Open Cases at 3 Agencies: Education and Employment**



**Figure 16. Number of Open Cases at 3 Agencies: Health, Immigration, and Bankruptcy**



### Program Activities

The activities performed by the KLI participants align with the anticipated program activities described in the program logic model (p. 49). Through direct legal assistance such as client representation, legal clinics and phone work, Katrina Legal Fellows and AmeriCorps Legal Fellows provided direct legal assistance to at least 5,411 individuals and 7,132 individuals, respectively. Katrina Legal Fellows also participated in four class action lawsuits and community lawyering. Summer Corps members assisted in the provision of direct legal



services for 4,504 clients within their host organization through activities such as drafting legal documents, interviewing clients, and performing legal research. Furthermore, AmeriCorps Legal Fellows increased legal assistance indirectly through recruiting and coordinating 4,065 pro bono attorneys and law students who performed additional legal services for clients. Katrina Legal Fellows also worked with about 1,060 pro bono attorneys and law students and helped to train volunteers across the country through web-based training modules and seminars in different states.

Additionally, participants in all three program components helped inform the community on particular legal issues and on legal rights and resources for legal help. AmeriCorps Legal Fellows presented to an estimated 2,400 people and created or helped create materials distributed to an estimated 5,700 individuals. Summer Corps members reached an even greater number of people through educational endeavors, including an estimated 5,313 people through presentations and 13,765 people through distributed educational materials. While the researchers were unable to reliably estimate the number of individuals reached by Katrina Legal Fellows' educational efforts due to interview limitations, it is likely that the Fellows produced similar numbers. However, Katrina Legal Fellows more often presented to policy and government audiences than participants in the other two programs. They also created more educational materials for the web, another reason it is difficult to estimate the number of viewers.

Katrina Legal Fellows also addressed policy issues. Katrina Legal Fellows helped to modify and monitor disaster relief policies and programs through media attention, legislative advocacy, and educating other legal professionals and program administrators about how procedures could be best changed in light of their experiences working with clients "on the ground." These interactions with policymakers and other advocacy work occurred both locally and nationally and often were the product of collaborative alliances with other organizations. Katrina Legal Fellows estimated these activities improved the lives of well over 143,900 community members.

Through the above listed activities, the Katrina Legal Fellows, AmeriCorps Legal Fellows, and Summer Corps members formed partnerships with other organizations in the community. Some KLI participants also served on various boards and commissions. Combined, an estimated 670 collaborative relationships were made through the work of the Katrina Legal Initiative. Finally, KLI participants tracked their activities through progress reports and exit surveys to help Equal Justice Works evaluate their program's success.

Equal Justice Works established performance measurement goals at the outset of the program by which to measure the activities of program participants for the AmeriCorps Legal Fellowship and Summer Corps programs (see Table 5). It is important to note a few things about the performance measurement goals and the following analysis. The host site



reports do not align with the two KLI AmeriCorps terms because the program was implemented off-cycle in order to send assistance as quickly as possible to the affected region. The performance measurement goals also changed during the two grant periods. As explained in more detail in the Methodology section (see p. 6), due to this misalignment, the researchers focused on comparing the combined outputs with the combined performance measurement goals from both terms. Some goals were estimated (this process is described in the Methodology section) based on overall performance goals for the entire class of AmeriCorps Legal Fellows (estimated goals are shown in a second column in Table 5). For the Summer Corps program, performance measurement goals were determined by calibrating the overall goals for the entire Summer Corps class to the 83 individuals (86 percent of KLI Summer Corps members) who completed the survey from which activity statistics were collected. Estimated goals should be interpreted with caution as these goals were not specifically established for the Katrina Legal Initiative.

**Table 5. Performance Measurement Outputs for Overall Program**

	<i>AmeriCorps Legal Fellowships</i>			<i>Summer Corps</i>					
	05-08 Goals	05-08 Estimated Goals	05-08 Actual	2006 Goals	2006 Actual	2007 Goals	2007 Actual	06-07 Goals	06-07 Actual
Clients	7000	---	7132	2333	3238	2040	1266	4373	4504
Legal Clinics	234	---	357	---	---	---	---	---	---
Orgs. Collaborated With <sup>†</sup>	50	---	209	78	163	68	77	146	240
Educational Materials	---	---	---	19	80	15	47	34	127
Gained Practical Legal Skills	---	---	---	95%	100%	95%	100%	95%	100%
Recruited Law Students	---	815	1205	---	---	---	---	---	---
Recruited Attorneys <sup>†</sup>	---	71	2860	---	---	---	---	---	---
Volunteer Law Students Felt (+) Experience <sup>†</sup>	---	90%	96%	---	---	---	---	---	---
Volunteer Law Students More Willing Volunteer <sup>†</sup>	---	85%	95%	---	---	---	---	---	---
Volunteer Law Student More Likely to Pursue Public Interest <sup>†</sup>	---	50%	75%	---	---	---	---	---	---

<sup>†</sup> Performance measurement goals listed are for 2006 grant period while output data is for 2006 grant period combined with half of 2005 grant period.

--- denotes a performance goal that was not measured for particular grant period



Over the two terms, the AmeriCorps Legal Fellows exceeded every performance measurement goal. The program served 7,132 clients, meeting the original performance measurement goal (PMG) of 7,000 clients (102 percent of the PMG). The AmeriCorps Legal Fellows also exceeded the overall performance measurement goal of 234 clinics (153 percent of PMG) and recruited law students (148 percent of PMG).

It should be noted that some of the output measures in Table 5 were not requested in the first host site report (those marked with a †). In these cases, the performance measurement goal is set with a one-term time period in mind while the actual output recorded is for a 1.5 term time period. While this should not substantially affect those items that are percentages (e.g. the percentage of volunteer law students who thought the experience was positive), the success associated with the number of recruited lawyers (4028 percent of PMG) and collaborative partnerships with other organizations (418 percent of PMG) is likely inflated. However, after recognizing this inflation, it is still clear that the AmeriCorps Legal Fellows far exceeded these performance measurement goals. Even if it is assumed that only two-thirds of the 2,860 attorneys and 209 partnerships occurred in 2006 (since these figures are for one and a half terms), the AmeriCorps Legal Fellows would still have recruited more than 26 times the expected number of attorneys and formed 2.8 times the number of expected collaborative partnerships with other organizations.

Because the performance measurement goals changed across the two periods, we will also briefly discuss the 2005 KLI AmeriCorps Legal Fellowship goals that were not continued for the 2006 term. Because the available data only covers half of the first term, these comparisons serve only as indicators of progress during that term. At the halfway point of the 2005 term, the AmeriCorps Legal Fellows had already exceeded their full-term performance measurement goals for legal clinics by 68 percent, law school presentations by 19 percent, and the percentage of volunteer law students who were more likely to continue public service by 14 percent. However, they had not yet reached their full-term goals for number of clients served (42 percent of PMG), educational materials (46 percent of PMG), number of recruited law students (51 percent of PMG), or the number of volunteers who had a plan to continue volunteering (82 percent of PMG) but were well on their way to reaching these objectives by the end of the term.

The Summer Corps program also attained many of its goals. In the summer of 2006, Summer Corps members saw 39 percent more clients than originally anticipated. In the summer of 2007, however, the Summer Corps class did not meet the performance measurement goal (62 percent of PMG). Summer Corps members exceeded the performance measurement goals for educational materials (421 percent of PMG for 2006 and 313 percent of PMG for 2007), number of community organizations with which they collaborated (209 percent of PMG for 2006 and 113 percent of PMG for 2007), and the percentage of Summer Corps members who reported gaining practical legal skills (105 percent of PMG for both



2006 and 2007). When looking at the program as a whole across the two summer terms, the Summer Corps members surpassed every performance measurement goal, including the number of clients served.

### **Program Impacts**

KLI participants, host site staff, and program stakeholders reported the program activities led to significant impacts. These impacts were felt in four primary areas: the host organizations, individuals in the community, the program participant, and the community. Host organizations felt strongly that the presence of an additional “staff” member was invaluable during a time of increased legal need and, in many cases, reduced numbers of staff. The Summer Corps members reduced the burdens on other staff attorneys by taking over responsibilities that could be performed by non-licensed staff that were knowledgeable about law. This assistance, along with the direct legal services provided by Katrina Legal Fellows, AmeriCorps Legal Fellows, and their pro bono volunteers, increased capacity at various legal aid organizations in the Gulf Coast region. The passion and energy of the AmeriCorps Legal Fellows was also credited with revitalizing other overwhelmed staff members who were starting to feel “burnt out.”

The Katrina Legal Fellows and AmeriCorps Legal Fellows were perceived as improving the host organization’s relationships with other entities by promoting their mission, increasing awareness about the organization, and, particularly in the case of the Katrina Legal Fellows, raising their credibility or expertise. Furthermore, some directors felt the increased awareness of their organization helped open options with other national funders; Equal Justice Works also continued to fund some organizations after the Katrina Legal Initiative ended. Finally, two organizations that did not focus on direct legal work prior to Hurricane Katrina have continued to offer or coordinate legal assistance with the help of AmeriCorps Legal Fellows and a Katrina Legal Fellow who have remained at the organization as permanent staff.

When asked about burdens, additional reporting requirements and the need to train less-experienced attorneys were listed as drawbacks for the AmeriCorps Legal Fellowship program. However, they felt that the assistance provided by Equal Justice Works far outweighed these inconveniences. No interviewed directors felt burdened by hosting Katrina Legal Fellows.

*“However, even successes had elements of heartache. While people may have gotten money, people needed much more than we were able to help provide.”*  
-Summer Corps member

Data indicates that participants in all three programs served numerous individuals in the community in need of legal help through direct legal service work, educational activities, and



outreach work. Through these efforts, many individuals received legal assistance that would otherwise have been unaffordable. Program participants also made a particular effort to try to reach out to individuals in need of legal help

*“[The Summer Corps program] makes public interest work financially feasible for students.”*

*-Summer Corps member*

through going door to door in FEMA trailer parks, recruiting pro bono volunteers who speak Spanish and Vietnamese to reduce language barriers, and traveling to homeless shelters and rural areas to conduct legal clinics. These outreach and other education efforts helped to increase awareness of legal rights and legal resources in the community. Katrina Legal Fellows and one AmeriCorps Legal Fellow also had widespread effects on community individuals through impact litigation. Through two class action lawsuits, FEMA was required to halt recoupment efforts and publicize a phone number for reporting violations of disability-accessible trailers. Katrina Legal Fellows also assisted with other class action lawsuits which helped to extend the deadline for housing assistance and to change municipal court policy towards jailing individuals who cannot afford to pay minor fees.

A small sample of interviewed clients demonstrated varying levels of satisfaction, mainly related to whether a client’s case was accepted. Clients who only received brief advice or whose cases were refused or never responded to expressed dissatisfaction. On the other hand, clients who obtained legal assistance reported high satisfaction, even if their case was still pending or did not necessarily turn out in their favor. The most common suggestions for improved services were increased advertising, more staff, and faster services.

Beyond the host organizations and individuals in the community, the Katrina Legal Initiative also impacted those who participated in the program. Every Summer Corps participants reported improving their legal skills through the experience. Many of those interviewed also said the program helped them to build networks within their field and assisted them in obtaining a future job. Katrina Legal Fellows, AmeriCorps Legal Fellows, and Summer Corps members reported continued or strengthened commitment to helping underserved populations. Equal Justice Works stakeholders also reported impacts of the program on their own organization. On the one hand, the Katrina Legal Initiative was very burdensome on Equal Justice Works in terms of emotional stress, time, and money; on the other hand, stakeholders reported the Initiative raised the profile of their organization, opened up new funding avenues, boosted morale in the organization, and brought Equal Justice Works into the arena of disaster relief.

Finally, the Katrina Legal Initiative appeared to have impacted the local communities and their ability to rebuild. Katrina Legal Fellows helped to modify and monitor disaster relief policies and programs through media attention, legislative advocacy, and educating other legal professionals and program administrators about how procedures could be changed



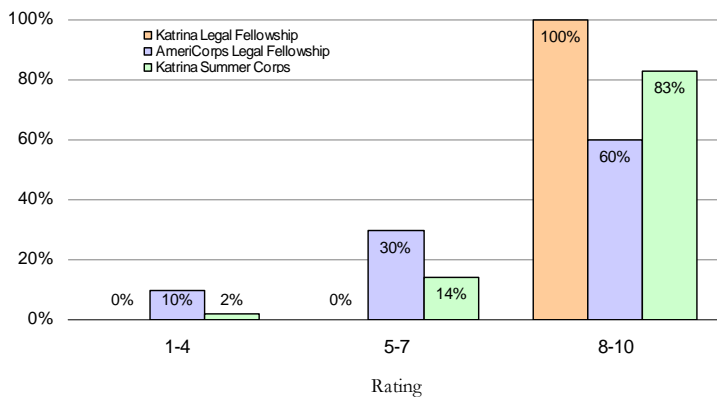
to best help community members. Through these efforts, Katrina Legal Fellows fought against funds being diverted away from individuals to a state port construction project, modified the application process and eligibility requirements of existing programs, and guided the development of new programs. Many of those interviewed felt that the AmeriCorps Legal Fellows helped strengthen the pro bono infrastructure in areas traditionally considered weak in the area of public interest law. More than 90 percent of surveyed law students who participated in pro bono work through the AmeriCorps Legal Fellows’ activities reported a willingness to continue pro bono or public service work. Furthermore, relationships built and maintained during the Katrina Legal Initiative have the potential to continue connecting legal aid agencies with other legal and non-profit organizations. Some of these relationships seem to remain after the exit of the KLI attorneys; however, some thought these networks could be strengthened further.

### Perceptions of Program

Satisfaction with the Katrina Legal Initiative was, for the most part, high all around. Program stakeholders reported pride in the program and believed the Katrina Legal Initiative had strong positive impacts. One stakeholder reported that their timeliness, level of organization, and the length of time they spent in the area allowed them to have stronger impacts than other relief efforts. Interviewed directors of host organizations were incredibly thankful for the “free” additional staff, and one director who hosted a Katrina Legal Fellow also appreciated the autonomy their organization had in selecting and supervising their Fellow. Although no burdens were mentioned in regards to the Katrina Legal Fellowship program, one drawback mentioned by multiple executive directors was the reporting requirement for the AmeriCorps Legal Fellowship. One director said it would have been helpful to know up front what would be required to track in order to

*“When I wake up on my 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, this is the thing I’ll think about and say ‘I was a part of that.’”*  
-Program Stakeholder

**Figure 17. Percentage of Respondents Rating Satisfaction**



program their case management system accordingly. Another director said that the AmeriCorps Legal Fellows were more interested in providing services than documenting their work. This made it difficult to track statistics for funders. This same director also mentioned



that it can sometimes be difficult to have new, inexperienced attorneys for an already overwhelmed organization that does not have the resources to commit a lot of time towards training and guiding staff. The director said it took nearly the entire Fellowship term to train an AmeriCorps Legal Fellow and then he or she left. Furthermore, with pro bono recruitment relying heavily on relationships, this director suggested this task was more difficult for non-local attorneys. Two Katrina Legal Fellows and a program stakeholder also echoed this belief that local attorneys may have been more equipped and committed since they were more connected with the local community.

Program participants were equally thankful for the opportunity, and subjective ratings of their experience tended to be high (see Figure 17). The average rating (on a scale of 1-10) of the overall experience was 8.9 for the Katrina Legal Fellowship, 7.7 for the AmeriCorps Legal Fellowship, and 8.5 for Summer Corps. Furthermore, 99 percent of the Summer Corps members who completed the exit survey said they would recommend the program to other law students. Two Katrina Legal Fellows also said they felt the fellowship should be longer, because the recovery process and many individual legal issues last longer than two years. AmeriCorps Legal Fellows who rated their overall experience as less than an 8 most often indicated their dissatisfaction was due to issues with their host site. By far, the most common recommendation from Summer Corps members was a request for more contact with Equal Justice Works and other Summer Corps participants for a greater sense of community within their program. Those who mentioned the luncheon gathering in New Orleans really appreciated this opportunity to meet others in their program. Some Summer Corps members also thought the amount of paperwork required was overly demanding considering the amount of financial support. A small portion of Summer Corps members also wanted more guidance from their host sites.

*“Attorneys need support to know what to do because no one specializes in disaster.”*

*-AmeriCorps Legal Fellow*

*“Some of the cultural norms of the Gulf Coast region are different than those of the Northeast. That was a problem; I don’t think it was an insurmountable challenge, but there were subtle differences that you learned. It’s going to change your style and it makes a world of difference dealing with people who are already overly stressed.”*

*-Summer Corps member*

*“We needed places out on the Gulf Coast, out in the rural areas, places where we could sit down with people and meet and hold workshops and legal clinics. That got a lot better in my second term, but in my first term so many folks were without anywhere to meet.”*

*-AmeriCorps Legal Fellow*

*“Getting back in touch with [clients] was a challenge; they weren’t at their home. Home lines were wiped out and so they would call you from one place and then wouldn’t be there when you called back. A lot of times you wouldn’t be able to get back in touch with them.”*

*-AmeriCorps Legal Fellow*





*“This is an amazing program and is sorely needed for law students. I feel like we all have these lofty ideals when we enter law school, and then get sidetracked by the shock from loans, and such. It’s programs like these that make it possible for students to remember why they wanted to be lawyers in the first place.”*  
-Summer Corps member

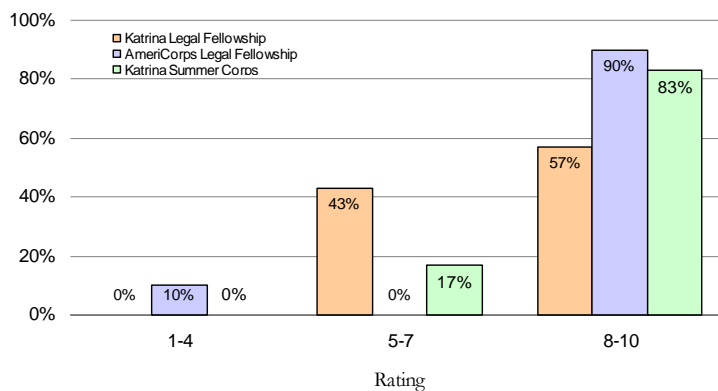
Equal Justice Works provided assistance through training, problem-solving, and emotional support. In terms of Equal Justice Works support, many positive things were said by host site staff and program participants. Many of the staff and KLI participants gave enthusiastic endorsements of Equal Justice Works, saying they were always available for assistance and that they tried to make the

experience positive for them. Host sites were grateful for the financial support offered through the program. The directors at organizations hosting AmeriCorps Legal Fellows were especially thankful for the waiver of matching funds. One director was also appreciative of the flexibility of Equal Justice Works to modify typical requirements for this special Katrina-related program. In this case, an AmeriCorps Legal Fellow was placed at an organization where there was no nearby law school. Therefore, the AmeriCorps Legal Fellow was unable to recruit law students (although this individual did recruit private attorneys).

When asked if they wished for any additional support from Equal Justice Works, one supervising attorney suggested Equal Justice Works provide some information targeted especially for supervisors. As mentioned previously, two directors also suggested that Equal Justice Works explain better what data would be needed for reporting purposes from the beginning. Although stakeholders reported providing intensive support, which was corroborated by the AmeriCorps Legal Fellows’ enthusiastic reviews of Equal Justice Works, one stakeholder reported that there should have been more opportunities for horizontal networking and coordination with more formal interaction between and among the AmeriCorps Legal Fellows and Katrina Legal Fellows so that they could learn from each other.

Program participants also viewed Equal Justice Works positively. On average, interviewed Katrina and AmeriCorps Legal Fellows rated Equal Justice Works assistance as 8.8 and 8.5, respectively, on a scale of 1-10. Summer Corps members who completed the exit survey rated their

**Figure 18. Percentage of Respondents Rating EJW Assistance**





assistance as 8.9. Only a small portion gave ratings below 5 (see Figure 18). Katrina and AmeriCorps Legal Fellows along with host site directors frequently mentioned the high availability of Equal Justice Works staff, saying

*“I love my host organization. They are like a second family.”*

*-Katrina Legal Fellow*

they could call them for anything. Two criticisms of Equal Justice Works regarded financial support. One Katrina Legal Fellow did not feel like the stipend reflected the increased cost of living after a disaster, and another Katrina Legal Fellow was dissatisfied with having funding cut off after one year. One Katrina Legal Fellow also wished for more communication between Equal Justice Works and the host sites so that the host organization better understood the expectations and role of the Katrina Legal Fellow. Interestingly, while Summer Corps members rated the assistance from Equal Justice Works as incredibly high, those who were interviewed did not feel that Equal Justice Works provided much support beyond the initial funding. Exit survey ratings of the Member Orientation Guide were high (average 8.3); interviewed Summer Corps members did not recall any additional training provided by Equal Justice Works. Also, some Summer Corps members wished there was more information about how to acquire the AmeriCorps education award voucher once the term ended.

In general, many of the KLI members found their host sites to be supportive. In fact, 98 percent of Summer Corps members stated they would recommend their host site to other law students. AmeriCorps Legal Fellows had varying opinions on their host organizations ranging from ecstatic endorsements to extreme dissatisfaction. A little over half of interviewed AmeriCorps Legal Fellows had suggestions for improvement on the part of their host sites, the most common being more acceptance of the fellowship mission and better supervision.

### **Challenges of Disaster Legal Aid and Lessons Learned**

Delivering services after a disaster presents challenges that require special support. KLI participants and host site staff described a variety of situations hindering their ability to provide legal assistance. Recurring themes included challenges regarding community and organization infrastructure, novel problems and the lack of information resources to handle these problems, emotional strain, and client difficulties.

#### ***Community and Organization Infrastructure***

The hurricanes crumbled infrastructure within organizations and within entire cities. Some attorneys were working in a tent, at home, or by car, because offices had been destroyed. In the first few months before new office space had been found, it was difficult to find places to



meet clients to discuss cases. Normal means of communication such as phone, postal mail, and fax were also unavailable or unreliable during this initial period. Furthermore, other agencies and court systems were closed or functioning intermittently.

KLI participants noted the importance of being able to work in a mobile fashion in the immediate aftermath of a disaster due to destroyed offices and outreach efforts in other communities. Multiple KLI participants emphasized the need for certain equipment, such as cellular phones, laptops with mobile or “roaming” wireless internet, portable printers and copier machines, and cameras for documenting evidence at residences. Beyond equipment, interviewees said that organizations needed more resources in general, both in terms of funding and staff. Without extra resources, it is difficult for an organization to balance increasing community needs with decreased capacity due to lost offices, destroyed equipment, and a reduced staff. KLI participants also mentioned other organization needs such as general office supplies, staff training, and furniture.

*“The tendency is just to get overwhelmed. I would hear about problems all day long and sometimes I couldn’t help them and at times it got to be overwhelming. In a disaster it’s even worse, because people are displaced and other problems and everyone is just desperate.”*

*-Katrina Legal Fellow*

The disaster resulted in large client caseloads with clients who often had multiple legal needs. Client needs were often immediate; clients might come in to request help the day before their scheduled court date or eviction. While dealing with these emergency cases, host sites found it difficult to find time for other responsibilities such as handling the outpouring of volunteers, and thus, were very thankful to have an AmeriCorps Legal Fellow to fulfill the role of managing and coordinating pro bono casework. A few participating attorneys and a program stakeholder reported frustration at the process of assisting individuals one by one and in a triage fashion when large-scale class action litigation may have been better suited to helping a large number of people at once. Also, many KLI stakeholders and participants felt attorneys should be in the field sooner, whether to help out with the Disaster Relief Centers, handle the outpouring of volunteer offers, perform assessments of the legal system, or be on the ground for early guidance in policy decision-making. Equal Justice Works felt the role of the consultant who performed the legal needs assessment was a critical component to the success of the Katrina Legal Initiative.

### ***Lack of Information Resources to Handle New Challenges***

Another major challenge was dealing with novel legal issues introduced by the disaster. KLI participants said it was difficult to know how to approach a problem without any “playbook” or guidance from past legal work. For instance, some state disaster programs were completely new, and other issues had not occurred before on such a widespread level (e.g. custody issues when parents have evacuated to different regions).



In general, KLI participants and host site staff found it extremely difficult to navigate government bureaucracy to obtain disaster relief benefits for clients. Complaints included FEMA not being upfront and forthcoming about policies and procedures; local, state, and federal systems being overwhelmed or broken; mistakes being made and re-made in the application review process; frequent changes in government disaster benefit procedures; and long benefit processing periods caused by bureaucratic “red tape.” Guidance from FEMA was reportedly inconsistent with attorneys reporting different responses and answers from different FEMA employees. Furthermore, attorneys dealing with immigration issues faced an additional challenge in working with FEMA to obtain help for undocumented clients since FEMA is housed under Homeland Security, which is also responsible for enforcing immigration laws.

Beyond learning new legal issues and how to deal with new government bureaucracy, legal service providers also needed to explore varied avenues of service in the aftermath of the hurricanes. One KLI participant said the most important thing they learned was how to conduct a legal clinic. In addition, being able to work remotely became particularly important as clients relocated to other areas and legal organizations relied more and more on out-of-state pro bono volunteers.

*“You end up developing your own work because no one’s done disaster work before. There were no procedures from before. There was no playbook for how to do it.”*

*-Katrina Legal Fellow*

*“Attorneys need support to know what to do because no one specializes in disaster. There should be a handbook or a ‘how to’ guide.”*

*-AmeriCorps Legal Fellow*

With the emergence of novel legal issues, new government programs, and the necessity for innovative modes of service delivery, KLI participants felt that information resources would have been extremely advantageous to their work. Interviewees mentioned the need for disaster preparedness manuals, a handbook on disaster law, information on FEMA, and resource guides on local agencies and non-profits. People also requested more training on various legal topics, cultural competency, and how to deal with clients experiencing post-traumatic stress. However, some attorneys noted that even with this knowledge it would be difficult, because different disasters will require different legal responses, new programs will appear, and established programs can change. One Katrina Legal Fellow who has provided legal assistance through three different hurricanes felt that each hurricane had a different “personality” with different needs, government responses, and policies and procedures for relief programs.

Many Fellows suggested the best assistance would be talking with another legal professional who has either performed this type of work in the past or who is currently doing disaster legal aid. For instance, some organizations found it helpful to contact legal professionals from Florida and North Carolina to learn about their past experiences with



hurricanes. Many KLI participants appreciated talking with others who were currently involved in the program in order to exchange ideas and experiences. In fact, a common suggestion for improvement was to have more opportunities for this type of exchange, whether in-person or by web interface.

*“Personally, the biggest challenge I faced was finding a way to not be consumed by the overwhelming needs of the community and adjusting to living and working in a setting that remains in crisis mode. Professionally, the biggest roadblock to doing the work was the constant change in policies and agency positions that continued to adversely impact the ability of residents to recover with dignity.”*  
-Katrina Legal Fellow

### ***Emotional Strain***

Some KLI participants also appreciated the chance to talk with others going through the same experience for emotional support. Most people found the post-disaster work to be very difficult and emotionally draining, and the theme of personal care frequently came up with those who were interviewed. Many cautioned about the need to understand one’s limits, pace oneself for a long fight, and know that everyone cannot be “saved.” Participating attorneys felt it was important to set boundaries and make an effort to take care of themselves so that they were best able to help others. One Katrina Legal Fellow encouraged mental health counseling for those doing this type of work. Some interviewed KLI participants also said it was important to remember that other attorneys in the office, pro bono recruits, other local agencies, and community members were also impacted by the emotional strain of living and working in a post-disaster area. Additionally, a few program participants also found it challenging to become accustomed to a different region and cultural norms. Beyond the attorneys in the field, Equal Justice Works stakeholders also reported a great deal of strain in those involved in administering and managing the program. Stakeholders reported that the sites would have benefitted from a more experienced administrator managing the initiative.

### ***Client Difficulties***

Beyond issues of organizational resources and emotional strain, there were also challenges in working with clients. Program participants reported difficulties with client transience, saying it was often hard to locate clients when needed. In fact, some cases had to be closed because clients never returned to the office and they could not be reached through other contact methods. Clients also had transportation difficulties, because many public transportation systems were disrupted by the hurricanes, and roads and bridges had been damaged. Many clients were illiterate, and attorneys sometimes found themselves spending more time reading applications and forms to clients than performing actual legal work. Furthermore, KLI members sometimes found it challenging to work with mentally ill clients.



### *Additional Challenges and Themes*

For some host sites, offering adequate supervision became a challenge. Two of the host agencies were unable to provide consistent in-person supervision for KLI participants. One site did not have a staff attorney, so they arranged for alternate legal supervision by an outside attorney at the Louisiana Bar

Association who conducted both in-person and telephone supervision. Another organization had in-house supervisors but encountered problems consistently complying with supervision guidelines. Supervision is especially important in disaster situations when staff and volunteers are coming in from different states. It was helpful that state Supreme Courts authorized a special waiver that allowed out-of-state attorneys to practice even if they were licensed in a different state. However, unfamiliarity with local laws and practices was an additional challenge, especially in a state such as Louisiana which functions under the Civil Law tradition.

*“The challenge in that kind of situation is to remain nimble. Flexibility is probably more important than IQ or GPA or anything else in that type of situation, because the world’s going to operate with an irrational and different set of rules.”*

*-Katrina Legal Fellow*

KLI participants and host site staff also brought up the importance of relationship-building and flexibility. Many interviewees reported the vital role of relationships in pro bono recruitment. They also noted the need for flexibility and creativity in problem-solving. When new legal issues are emerging, it is a challenge to find direct legal precedent. There may not be an established “right” answer yet, and legal professionals need to find new ways to accomplish clients’ goals. Other advice program participants had for conducting this type of work was to be compassionate and sensitive to distressed clients, to engage the media and internet as recruitment and advocacy tools, and to promote the collection of good data including client service data and reliable statistical community data to measure progress.

Some host sites already used some of their own “lessons learned” during the imminent threat of Hurricane Gustav. When Gustav hit, every case study host site had a detailed disaster manual, and they prepared for the evacuation by creating “phone trees” of all staff, communicating with other legal aid organizations about their evacuation plans, making accommodations for alternate office space, talking with state officials about temporarily suspending evictions, and practicing technology preservation such as backing-up electronic information and moving and wrapping computers in protective covering. Lessons learned from the previous disasters helped to improve the preparation for and response to Hurricane Gustav.



## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Katrina Legal Initiative was formed by Equal Justice Works, with the support of the Corporation for National and Community Service, the JEHT Foundation, sponsoring law firms, and private donors, to provide legal assistance for individuals and communities impacted by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The three components to this Initiative (the Katrina Legal Fellowship, AmeriCorps Legal Fellowship, and Summer Corps programs) were designed to provide assistance through legal education, direct legal services, and the building of a pro bono network of volunteer attorneys and law students. In addition, KLI members were expected to interact with policymakers and work with other organizations to help build collaboration between and among legal organizations and other community groups. Using the logic models as guides for the evaluation, the activities and perceived impacts described by those interviewed throughout this study appear to meet the expected program characteristics and goals. Furthermore, when compared to performance measurement objectives established at the outset of the program implementation, both the AmeriCorps Legal Fellowship and Summer Corps programs often met, and in many cases, exceeded the expected goals. The Katrina Legal Fellowship program did not have set performance measurement objectives.

While the Katrina Legal Initiative boasts significant benefits, there were some challenges that should be mentioned. Equal Justice Works appeared to be the entity most negatively impacted by the Initiative. Program stakeholders reported large burdens on the organization in terms of emotional stress, staff time, and money. Equal Justice Works faced additional challenges in implementation, particularly with selecting suitable host sites, building relationships, and maintaining strong communication links over several years. Many of the challenges encountered by Equal Justice Works were associated with the circumstances of the disaster: (a) the hurricanes hit a region that already had a weak infrastructure in terms of pro bono and public interest law, (b) the local organizations were dealing with devastating impacts of the storms on their own organizations, which made it more difficult for them to support the additional responsibilities of a fellowship placement (although these organizations in crisis were in most need of outside help), and (c) the urgent need for assistance required an immediate response from Equal Justice Works staff, which did not allow for as much preparation time as some program stakeholders desired. Equal Justice Works dealt with these challenges through applying more flexibility to the program guidelines (e.g. allowing AmeriCorps Legal Fellows to provide more direct legal services themselves or focusing on recruiting private attorneys rather than law students if there were no local law schools) and modifying placements when necessary.

Host organizations reported few negative impacts; a few directors mentioned additional reporting requirements and the need to train less-experienced attorneys as somewhat inconvenient. However, these directors agreed that the substantial benefits of the program outweighed these drawbacks. Program participants, in general, appreciated the opportunity to



participate in the Katrina Legal Initiative, though some AmeriCorps Legal Fellows reported difficulties with host organizations. Summer Corps members were very pleased overall although some wished for more contact with Equal Justice Works and other Summer Corps members.

The evaluation concludes that Equal Justice Works and its partners succeeded in implementing a much-needed and much-appreciated program that assisted not only individuals in the community impacted by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita but also helped rebuild the legal infrastructure in these communities. It is laudable that Equal Justice Works was able to implement a program of this scope and novelty within the short implementation period required by the urgency of the disaster. In fact, they not only achieved their goals but exceeded many of them, even in the face of the extraordinary circumstances of a chaotic disaster aftermath. Furthermore, several interview respondents and stewards of organization records cautioned that information given was likely underestimated due to unreliable recording of all service contacts (e.g. in the beginning months after the hurricanes or in alternate venues such as legal clinics or call centers). Therefore, it is likely that the described activities and impacts do not fully capture the entirety of this program's benefits.

## **Recommendations**

The Katrina Legal Initiative successfully met and exceeded Equal Justice Works' original goals. However, some areas were identified as particular challenges. Recognizing that many of the perceived weaknesses of the program were due to a need to immediately implement a new, unprecedented program in a chaotic disaster situation, we hope that the suggestions below can assist in a smoother implementation should a similar situation arise again. Therefore, with the purpose of improving any future efforts<sup>20</sup> of executing a similar disaster legal program,<sup>21</sup> the following recommendations are made:

- **Host Site Location.** While the KLI participants appeared to have strong positive impacts across the region, some individuals who were located farther from the most devastated areas were less able to reach the intended population of individuals affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. For programs specifically targeting disaster

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<sup>20</sup> At the outset of this evaluation, this purpose seemed more abstract. However, at the release of this report, efforts were currently underway to implement another AmeriCorps Legal Fellowship placement to respond to legal needs related to Hurricane Ike in Texas, serving as a reminder of the vast importance of continually evaluating and improving these types of programs before the need arises again (since disasters usually arrive somewhat unannounced).

<sup>21</sup> Note that while we believe many of these recommendations would apply to other disaster situations, some of the findings may be only relevant to the particular disaster situations of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.





populations, resources should be placed in the most affected areas to have the largest impact on clients and broken legal infrastructure. Organizations in more peripheral sites should be required to demonstrate how they are better able to reach the target population (e.g. a call center) if they seek funding. More distant sites may be better suited for short-term disaster relief efforts when residents have evacuated to outside areas.

- Fundraising. Equal Justice Works stakeholders reported losing some opportunities for funding sources because individuals and organizations had already made donations to other nonprofits engaged in disaster relief by the time Equal Justice Works approached them. Therefore, future fundraising efforts should begin as early as possible since most people donate immediately after a disaster.
- Administrator Needs. It is recommended that when implementing a program with disaster populations, program administrators participate in training to recognize the special difficulties of disaster aid, acquire more cultural competency, identify symptoms of post-traumatic stress in others, recognize signs of stress in one's self, and learn how to effectively deal with the emotional burden of assisting those providing disaster aid and hearing about their experiences. A more experienced program manager may be best suited for managing similar types of programs. It is also suggested that when requesting funds for program administration, some attention be paid to the special needs of program administrators dealing with extra burdens inherent to disaster programs.
- Immediacy of Placement. Stakeholders recognized the lengthy delay between the hurricane events and the placement of attorneys in Fellowship positions. Attention should be paid to sending Katrina Legal Fellows and AmeriCorps Legal Fellows into the field quickly so as not to lose the momentum of pro bono generation in the first few months when people are most likely to volunteer their time and organizations are in high need of someone to coordinate the outpouring of volunteers. One possibility to facilitate quicker assistance is to have fellowship alumni "parachute" in during the immediate aftermath for short-term periods. This strategy could be used in conjunction with more long-term programs, allowing for organizations to receive some immediate support while Equal Justice Works is involved in planning and fundraising for more long-term solutions. Subsequently, this could also serve as a way to "test drive" potential host organizations and assess the fit for a fellowship placement.
- Opportunities for Exchange. Although Katrina Legal Fellows and AmeriCorps Legal Fellows regarded Equal Justice Works as highly accessible and supportive, the Summer Corps members described Equal Justice Works as more "hands off." While



it is recognized that the nature of the Summer Corps program is different from the other two components, it is recommended that minor efforts be made to make Summer Corps members feel more supported and part of a community. For instance, one Summer Corps member suggested forming a listserv while another mentioned the possibility of previous alumni serving a mentorship role. It is also recommended that there be more opportunities for Katrina Legal Fellows and AmeriCorps Legal Fellows to convene for the purposes of networking and exchanging ideas while having the chance to speak with others experiencing similar difficult and sometimes emotional challenges.

- Data Collection. To obtain the most informative data and reduce frustration at host sites, it is important to set clear expectations from the beginning about what data is needed. Before accepting a grant, host organizations and fellows should understand clearly the documentation procedures and view the measurement instruments (e.g. blank host site reports). To improve capabilities of performance measurement at sites or by program administrators, it is recommended that clear goals be set from the beginning, thought be put towards how to measure progress, and data collection tools be pilot-tested with current or past program participants for comprehensiveness and clarity so that measurement tools do not change significantly over time. Particularly after a disaster, sites may need additional support and/or encouragement to pay attention to tracking data. Some sites may not have case management systems if they were not providing legal assistance before the disaster. In these situations, Equal Justice Works may want to offer some level of technical assistance to Fellows or host site staff to implement a tracking system to accurately record the necessary data. Also, if a disaster program's documentation procedures do not align with regular grant cycles, additional reports should be considered to measure outputs during the time period of comparison for performance measurement goals. Finally, if client perspectives are of interest, client exit interviews or surveys should be administered immediately after services have been provided, as clients will be difficult to locate post-disaster when people have been displaced and communication infrastructure is destroyed.
- Site Visits. Additional site visits by Equal Justice Works staff members are suggested to help with (a) selecting sites, (b) developing relationships with host sites that may have negative perceptions of federal programs because of other federal responses, (c) understanding dissatisfaction or issues with host sites, and (d) understanding client needs, the nature of work, and challenges faced by participating attorneys.
- Supervision. Recognizing that supervision and other ethical responsibilities may become a lower priority in a crisis environment, it is recommended that Equal Justice



Works make supervision guidelines explicit with host sites at the outset of the program. If host organizations do not have the ability to provide this supervision or find an alternate solution (such as using an outside supervising attorney), they may not be suitable grant recipients. Supervision training materials provided by Equal Justice Works may be helpful as some organizations may not usually provide supervision for less-experienced attorneys. Equal Justice Works staff should also frequently check in with Fellows to ensure that they are receiving appropriate supervision.

The Katrina Legal Initiative has had great success in the Gulf Coast region, helping to repair and expand the legal aid infrastructure following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The Katrina Legal Initiative can serve as a model for future disaster relief programs and for efforts to respond to other types of crises, such as the foreclosure crisis. Lessons learned from the experiences of those involved in the Katrina Legal Initiative can be employed to improve future responses to situations with mass legal needs.



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### **KATRINA RESEARCH AT THE URBAN INSTITUTE**

The Urban Institute has conducted numerous projects related to Hurricane Katrina, from studies on the impact on the criminal justice system to papers and testimony on economic ramifications to essays on policies and models that can be used in the rebuilding process. For a complete list of Katrina papers and publications, see <http://www.urban.org/afterkatrina/>.