

## Building Opportunity and Equity Into the *New* New Orleans: A Framework for Policy and Action

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*When communities are rebuilt, they must be even better and stronger than before the storm. Within the Gulf region are some of the most beautiful and historic places in America. As all of us saw on television, there's also some deep, persistent poverty in this region as well. That poverty has roots in a history of racial discrimination, which cut off generations from the opportunity of America. We have a duty to confront this poverty with bold action. So let us restore all that we have cherished from yesterday, and let us rise above the legacy of inequality.*

President George W. Bush, September 15, 2005

Long before the onslaught of Hurricane Katrina, the collapse of the levees, or the chaos of evacuation, the social infrastructure of New Orleans was failing many of the city's residents. Jobs and population had been leaving the city for decades; public school performance was dismal; and rates of unemployment, poverty, poor health, and hardship were high. Conditions were especially bleak in the city's poor neighborhoods, where decades of racial

segregation, disinvestment, and neglect fostered severe isolation and distress. People living in these neighborhoods faced daunting risks and few prospects for economic security or advancement. Scenes from the Superdome and the flooded streets of New Orleans exposed the poverty and vulnerability of many African American residents.

New Orleans' lower-income residents also face the greatest risks of lasting damage in Katrina's aftermath. Certainly, many people

Long before the onslaught of Hurricane Katrina or the chaos of evacuation, New Orleans' social infrastructure was failing. News coverage of the overcrowded Superdome and the city's flooded streets exposed the poverty and vulnerability of many residents, especially African Americans. As New Orleans begins to rebuild, can the city avoid the mistakes of the past, instead creating more effective social support for low-income and minority residents? Innovation and experience from other U.S. cities offer promising strategies for reducing the risks of poverty and opening up opportunities for economic security and success. This essay is from an Urban Institute collection that addresses employment, affordable housing, public schools, young children's needs, health care, arts and culture, and vulnerable populations. All these essays assess the challenges facing New Orleans today and for years to come and recommend tested models for making the city's social infrastructure stronger and more equitable than it was before Katrina.

who lived or had a business in New Orleans are experiencing uncertainty and loss. But for families with no financial assets, little work experience, limited education or skills, poor health, or disabilities, the challenges of starting anew can seem paralyzing. Moreover, some of the city's poorest neighborhoods were essentially washed away by the flooding that followed Hurricane Katrina, leaving their residents with no homes, schools, businesses, churches, or social networks to which to return.

As New Orleans begins to rebuild, what are the prospects for these families and their communities? Some will decide not to return—because they have simply lost too much, because the costs and uncertainties are too daunting, or because they have found new opportunities elsewhere. Current forecasts put the city's population at 247,000 by September 2008, just over half of its pre-Katrina level (Bring New Orleans Back 2006), and some experts argue that low-income and minority residents are the least likely to return (Logan 2006). Thus, policies aimed at giving victims of Katrina opportunities to put their lives back together must include initiatives targeted to the communities where they are living now.

But what about those who want to return to New Orleans? Federal, state, and local officials have all expressed a commitment to a safe return and a better future for all the city's residents. Despite the rhetoric, whether and how these commitments will be realized remains uncertain. Can a city that was failing its lower-income residents on so many fronts before the storm avoid the mistakes of the past and instead create the economic opportunities and supports that give people a chance at better lives?

There are good reasons to try. New Orleans' lower-income residents and their communities did possess important assets that contributed to the city's unique character and vitality. For example, despite the high poverty

of the Lower Ninth Ward, 60 percent of households there owned their homes. Many had lived in the neighborhood their whole lives in homes that had been in their families for generations. They had built strong social networks of family, friends, and neighbors that helped them weather hardship and join in producing New Orleans' distinctive Mardi Gras festivities. And they played irreplaceable roles in creating the distinctive music, art, architecture, and cuisine that made New Orleans unique and attracted millions of tourists to the city every year.

Over the coming years, massive sums of money—public, private, and philanthropic—will be invested in rebuilding. Much of this investment must go to physical infrastructure, beginning with reliable levees and other flood protection systems. But without parallel investments in affordable housing, quality public schools, effective job training, health care, and other social infrastructure, New Orleans will not attract back as many families, nor can it become a city where all residents enjoy opportunities for security and success. An unprecedented opportunity will be missed if some of the investments in the city's reconstruction are not used to rebuild stronger, smarter social support systems and avenues for economic advancement.

The challenges facing New Orleans today are unique. No other city in the country—however distressed its economy or frayed its social safety net—has had to rebuild almost everything at once. Nonetheless, almost every American city is grappling with unemployment, racial segregation, failing public schools, inadequate health care, unaffordable housing, poverty, and hardship. If New Orleans tackles these problems seriously and systematically as it rebuilds, it can become a model for the rest of the country. A sustained commitment to providing real economic opportunities and effective social supports for all residents could rebuild

not only New Orleans, but also the nation's collective vision of how cities should work for Americans, including the poorest and most vulnerable.

## Promising Models for the “New” New Orleans

Innovation and experience from other cities around the country offer promising strategies that can help reduce the risks of poverty and create economic opportunity. The essays in this collection assess the challenges facing New Orleans today and in the future and recommend tested models for rebuilding employment and training opportunities for low-skilled workers, affordable housing in healthy communities, a public school system that prepares the city's children for success, programs that give infants and preschoolers a healthy start in life, health care services for low-income families and their children, grassroots support networks for struggling musicians and artists, and help for the most vulnerable, including the elderly and the disabled.

## Employment

Although Hurricane Katrina shut down businesses and displaced hundreds of thousands of people from their jobs, rebuilding will create many new jobs in the years ahead, not only in cleanup and reconstruction, but also in the delivery of essential public services such as child care, health care, and education. In “Employment Issues and Challenges in Post-Katrina New Orleans,” Harry J. Holzer and Robert I. Lerman propose an aggressive and coordinated program of employment placement and training initiatives to ensure that former New Orleanians can gain access to the new jobs being created there and use these jobs to build their skills and credentials.

More specifically, employers should be encouraged (if not required) to make jobs and

training opportunities available to former residents of the city, particularly where the work is publicly funded. Public funds should support proven skill-building initiatives, such as formal apprenticeships and Job Corps slots. And intermediary organizations should be funded to reach out to the former residents of New Orleans—wherever they may now be living—and help them find suitable jobs or training opportunities. The longer-term need is for policies aimed at upgrading the skills and credentials of the New Orleans workforce, providing incentives for employers to create “career ladders” so that workers can build skills and advance over time, and offering reasonable workforce supports (like child care) that enable low-wage workers to stay employed.

## Affordable Housing

To return to New Orleans to work and rebuild, people need somewhere to live. Across the metropolitan area, roughly a quarter of a million housing units were flooded, and though residents are starting to return to repair homes in some parts of New Orleans, other neighborhoods are uninhabitable. Almost inevitably, residential rebuilding will have to proceed in stages, as outlined by the Bring New Orleans Back Commission (2006), and a redevelopment authority will be needed to assemble and clear land, compensate property owners fairly, and manage neighborhood redevelopment.

Within such a framework, Susan Popkin, Margery Austin Turner, and Martha Burt, in “Rebuilding Affordable Housing in New Orleans: The Challenge of Creating Inclusive Communities,” propose strategies for incorporating affordable rental and homeowner housing into healthy communities as they are rebuilt. Specifically, recent experience with inclusionary zoning programs, the revitalization of distressed public housing,

and the use of housing vouchers demonstrates the feasibility of building mixed-income communities that provide deeply subsidized units for the poorest households alongside units affordable to moderate-income working families, and market-rate homes and apartments as well. This type of development should occur in all neighborhoods, so that poor people are not trapped and isolated in a few distressed communities. In the short term, trailers or other types of temporary housing may be necessary to accommodate an expanding work force. But these temporary enclaves should be kept small, managed effectively, and phased out quickly as new neighborhoods are built, so that temporary accommodations do not become permanent housing of last resort for the city's poorest residents.

### Public Schools

Along with homes and jobs, Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans' public school system, with most schools damaged or destroyed and teachers, administrators, and students at least temporarily relocated. The single biggest challenge facing New Orleans' public school system is uncertainty—about how many schoolchildren will return to the city, when they will arrive, and where their families will live. However, schools and teachers must come back into service if families are to return. In response, Paul Hill and Jane Hannaway recommend a strategy that maximizes flexibility in the redevelopment of school facilities, the assignment of teachers, and the options available for students.

The hybrid approach Hill and Hannaway recommend in "The Future of Public Education in New Orleans" brings schools back incrementally as students return. Public funds would follow children to any school their parents choose for them, provided the

school meets high standards of teacher quality and student success. At the same time, qualified organizations would receive public funding to start up new charter schools as enrollment gradually expands. Returning families would have many high-quality options from which to choose. Because student housing patterns and needs would be hard to predict, no teacher could be guaranteed a permanent job in a particular school. But, say Hill and Hannaway, a variety of incentives, including high pay, would attract qualified teachers back to the city.

### Young Children

Infants and preschool children displaced and traumatized by Hurricane Katrina remain at risk of long-term damage, especially if their families were struggling with poverty and insecurity before the storm and are having difficulty rebuilding stable lives in its wake. Without high-quality care and support, the youngest New Orleanians are likely to experience lasting physical and emotional distress and may not be ready to learn when they enter public school. Moreover, their parents—especially single mothers—may fail to find or retain jobs if their children are sick or troubled and quality child care is impossible to find or afford.

To meet these extraordinary and urgent needs, in "Young Children after Katrina: A Proposal to Heal the Damage and Create Opportunity in New Orleans," Olivia Golden proposes a major expansion of services to young children, built around—but extending beyond—existing Head Start and Early Head Start programs. Eligibility for these programs would be expanded to include all children (though higher-income families would pay a share of the costs). Then funds would be provided to a wide variety of organizations to establish high-quality programs, hire trained staff, and reach out to enroll young children.

Gradually, as families return to New Orleans, these programs would expand in number and capacity, providing care in a variety of locations and settings, and linking with health care and mental health care providers to ensure that New Orleans' youngest generation gets the help it needs to succeed in school and in life.

### Health Care

As with public schools and affordable housing, any strategy for rebuilding New Orleans' health care system must address both demand-side and supply-side constraints. Prior to Katrina, the share of low-income adults receiving public health insurance was low by national standards (though low-income children were more adequately covered), and New Orleans relied primarily on a single public hospital to deliver care to low-income and uninsured residents. This hospital has essentially been damaged beyond repair, leaving low-income residents with no reliable source of care.

In "Initial Health Policy Responses to Hurricane Katrina and Possible Next Steps," Stephen Zuckerman and Teresa Coughlin argue for a more decentralized system of community clinics and smaller hospitals that could be rebuilt gradually as residents return and neighborhoods are rebuilt. Such a system would be more flexible and responsive to the health care needs of low-income residents, and care might be more accessible in community-based clinics. Ideally, such a system would be complemented by an expanded program of public insurance (or subsidies to buy private insurance) for uninsured adults. If, however, broadening public health insurance coverage is not considered politically (or financially) feasible, using federal funds to reimburse community clinics and small hospitals for uncompensated care, rather than relying on a single public hospital, could significantly

improve both access to care and low-income New Orleanians' health status.

### Arts and Culture

Planners and policymakers in New Orleans clearly appreciate the importance of arts and culture to the city's unique identity and future. Initiatives aimed at recovering and rebuilding New Orleans' cultural heritage already recognize the role of lower-income people and communities in inventing, producing, and sustaining the city's artistic traditions. Since some of these artists are self-employed or amateurs, efforts to bring artists back to the city need to go beyond reopening mainstream performance venues, hotels, and restaurants.

In "Rebuilding the Cultural Vitality of New Orleans," Maria Rosario Jackson argues that the challenge facing New Orleans is to ensure that resources are effectively channeled to community-based support networks for musicians, sculptors, dancers, actors, and visual artists, whether amateur or professional. Often these networks, though vigorous and resilient, are not the kinds of formal organizations that public agencies fund. And overreliance on tourism as an economic anchor for rebuilding poses risks; indeed, a short-sighted preoccupation with the most marketable of the city's cultural offerings could overshadow the crucial role of living artists and tradition bearers, allowing the cultural heart of the city to wither. Potentially, tourism-related businesses and philanthropies could be tapped for money to establish a local institution with responsibility for supporting and strengthening authentic artistic and cultural practices that have been rooted in poor communities and are critical to the city's cultural identity.

### Vulnerable Populations

Within New Orleans' low-income population, three groups—the elderly, the disabled, and



jobless single mothers—face particularly daunting challenges and need special support. It is impossible to predict how many of these people will come back to New Orleans. On the one hand, they may be among the least likely to return because relocating and finding a place to live will be so difficult. On the other hand, they may be unable to find opportunities elsewhere and may gradually follow family and friends back to the city.

If these vulnerable residents are overlooked as New Orleans rebuilds, they will likely remain mired in poverty and dependency, with little chance of achieving greater security or independence. In “Building a Better Safety Net for the New New Orleans,” Sheila R. Zedlewski argues for a holistic strategy that encourages and supports work through a stronger welfare system, reduces the incidence of teen pregnancy and single parenting, and provides supportive housing environments for those who cannot live independently.

Two groups—adults with disabilities and single mothers with serious barriers to work—typically need more than the package of job training and placement assistance discussed by Holzer and Lerman. Programs that include basic skills training and opportunities to achieve a high school equivalency degree, along with ongoing support services to help vulnerable workers retain their jobs, seem particularly promising as New Orleans rebuilds. Over time, reducing the number of single-parent families (especially families with a single teen parent) calls for enhanced teen pregnancy prevention and the promotion of healthy marriage, along with stronger child-support enforcement. Zedlewski also recommends asset-building strategies to help increase opportunity and reduce poverty over the long term. Finally, many elderly and people with disabilities need both accessible housing units and assistance with the activities of daily living. Experience teaches that small-

scale supportive housing developments can provide this assistance very effectively, allowing residents to maximize security and independence within their communities.

## Reality-Based Principles for Rebuilding

A short list of shared principles links the policy recommendations outlined in this collection, all of which respond to the unique challenges facing New Orleans today: a commitment to individual *choice* and the *information* people need to exercise choices, *flexibility* that goes hand in hand with high standards of *quality*, and *asset building* to help people and communities sustain themselves and advance over time. Taken together, these principles invite lower-income families into the *social and economic mainstream*.

As elected officials, community leaders, businesspeople, and returning residents sort through the innumerable challenges and choices they face, these principles can help shape public policies, philanthropic investments, and private-sector initiatives that promote opportunity and equity in place of exclusion, inequality, and social distress.

## Choice

The first of these principles is to offer people real choices. Both the hybrid system of educational vouchers and public charter schools proposed by Hill and Hannaway and the decentralized system of health clinics and small hospitals recommended by Zuckerman and Coughlin epitomize this principle. They would let New Orleanians—including low-income residents—decide for themselves which facilities best meet their needs for essential public services.

Similarly, Popkin, Turner, and Burt argue for including at least some affordable housing in every part of the new New Orleans, replacing isolated clusters of subsidized

housing with more diverse mixed-income communities and using housing vouchers to enable low-income residents to rent or buy in communities of their choice throughout the region. And Golden explains the necessity of offering diverse child care options, including both home-based and center-based programs, so that parents can choose the type and location of care that best meet their children's needs.

The issue of choice takes on special poignancy when it comes to the question of whether low-lying neighborhoods like the Lower Ninth Ward should be rebuilt at all. Depending on decisions about the reconstruction of levees and the need for marshes or parklands to buffer future flooding, some areas of New Orleans may be declared off-limits for residential rebuilding. And if the city's redevelopment occurs in stages, as many recommend, some neighborhoods may not be habitable for years. Some of the most severely damaged neighborhoods have been home to generations of African Americans, suffering in many ways from segregation and poverty concentration, but also rich with history, cultural traditions, and social networks. Historically, where whole communities (like Love Canal) had to be uprooted, residents received relocation assistance, fair compensation for lost property, and the option of rebuilding their lost community in a new location. The same kinds of choices should be offered to the residents of devastated neighborhoods in New Orleans.<sup>1</sup>

### Information

Choices are only meaningful if people have the information they need to understand and act on them. But providing reliable information to people who lack it is not a trivial undertaking.

Holzer and Lerman argue persuasively for publicly funded employment intermediaries

that would assemble and update information about jobs and training opportunities in New Orleans and reach out proactively to former residents to help them understand what opportunities are available, what skills may be required, and what training they need to qualify. Drawing on lessons from housing-mobility programs, Popkin, Turner, and Burt recommend counseling and search assistance that would help low-income families find out about affordable housing options, overcome barriers of racial discrimination and segregation, and take advantage of housing vouchers to move back to neighborhoods of their choice. And Hill and Hannaway propose a "parent information agency" to help returning families learn about schooling options, decide what is best for their children, and act on their preferences.

As New Orleans rebuilds, it should invest in qualified intermediaries that can reach out to former residents (wherever they may currently be living) and provide the information and decisionmaking help they need to return. As several of the essays in this collection point out, families making simultaneous decisions about jobs, housing, schools, and child care need information and guidance on all these issues at the same time. This does not mean that a single information and counseling agency has to be created to do everything, but it does mean that organizations providing employment outreach and counseling, housing-search assistance, and school-enrollment counseling all have to talk to one another, and clients should be able to move seamlessly back and forth among them.

Information will continue to play an essential part in effective social programs long after families return to New Orleans. Low-income parents struggling to create better lives for themselves and their children have been shown to benefit from programs that provide reliable information and counseling support. Thus, one prong of Zedlewski's strategy for

helping single parents achieve greater economic security is financial counseling and information about federal asset-building programs. And another is to help young teens understand the consequences of premarital pregnancy. Also, Golden calls for programs providing care to infants and young children to also become resource centers for parents, offering information and advice and helping people gain access to the array of services and supports they may need.

### Flexibility

Policies that promote choice also promote flexibility, which New Orleans sorely needs as it rebuilds. Hill and Hannaway point out the futility of trying to reconstruct the city's pre-Katrina school system when no one can predict how many children will return or how soon. All of New Orleans' social infrastructure will have to be built back incrementally, with facilities and services coming online at roughly the same pace as families return to the city. In short, strategies that give returning families and individuals the power to choose—and resources to pay for—the services they need, when and where they need them, can help direct the step-by-step redevelopment of public schools, affordable housing, health care facilities, and other essential services.

The importance of choice notwithstanding, New Orleans' social infrastructure cannot be effectively regenerated through demand-side (voucher) policies alone. Public funds must flow to service providers as well as to the consumer, so they can build the schools, child care and health facilities, and affordable homes from which families can choose.

The supply-side strategies proposed in this collection would support diverse providers, rather than funding a single public agency to carry out each task. More specifically, charter

schools could be launched and managed by groups of qualified administrators and teachers, local universities, or national organizations. Capital subsidies for constructing affordable housing would be allocated to nonprofit and for-profit developers as well as to the local public housing agency. And Golden's proposal to dramatically expand the system of care for infants and young children relies not only on existing Head Start facilities, but also on other home-based and community-based providers.

All components of the city's social infrastructure will need to be nimble to adapt to the coming changes in the city's population and economy. In particular, job training and placement programs must take both the skills of returning workers and the evolving needs of the city's employers into account. The most effective training programs are those that equip people with the skills that local employers are seeking. As New Orleans rebuilds, the mix of job openings may change quite dramatically, requiring training programs, high school career academies, and community college programs to retool their offerings relatively often.

### Quality

The intensity and urgency of problems facing New Orleans today and in the coming years may argue for quick fixes—tolerating less-than-ideal school facilities, housing construction, or child care in hopes of getting essential needs addressed quickly. But the contributors to this collection argue that low-quality remedies may do more harm than good. Troubled toddlers and school-aged children need smaller class sizes and more qualified teachers, or their emotional and learning problems are likely to intensify. Workers returning to the city must be able to earn decent wages, even though waiving Davis-Bacon provisions may have seemed like



a way to jumpstart cleanup. And encampments of trailers or other temporary housing facilities can too easily become isolated ghettos for the poorest families.

Instead of tolerating mediocre performance, New Orleans' new social infrastructure should be designed to meet high standards of quality, including—as outlined by Hill and Hannaway—explicit performance standards and accountability mechanisms. Making public dollars contingent on attaining high standards is especially important if a diversity of new organizations is being funded to deliver public services. Charter schools, neighborhood health clinics, neighborhood-based child care options, and dispersed affordable housing developments must be held accountable for their performance if the principles of choice and flexibility are to have teeth.

Well-established models of performance management and performance contracting provide tools for setting quality standards and performance targets, monitoring an organization's performance over time, offering financial incentives for high performance, and terminating support to organizations and facilities that fall short (Hatry 1999). Collecting and publishing performance data have the added benefit of providing information that households can use to decide which facilities or services best meet their needs, thereby reinforcing informed choice.

### **Asset Building**

To achieve greater economic security and brighter prospects for the future, low-income families need help building financial assets. Savings can cushion families from unexpected setbacks and may open up opportunities to acquire more training or education, start a business, send children to college, or enjoy a more secure retirement. Therefore, Zedlewski argues, rebuilding efforts in New Orleans

should encourage savings among low-income residents by allocating public and private funds to match family savings and by spurring families to take advantage of other federal savings incentives. And Popkin, Turner, and Burt recommend assistance for low-income homeowners as part of an affordable housing strategy for the city, not only for those who lost their property to Katrina, but also for first-time buyers.

But the goal of asset building should look beyond just financial assets. New Orleans and its residents had valuable social and institutional assets that should be restored and expanded as well. Reactivated, these assets may provide essential building blocks for helping low-income residents identify and seize new opportunities. For example, Golden points to the effective network of Head Start and Early Head Start programs that could be used to provide essential care to poor children, enabling their parents to return to the city right away and get jobs. And Jackson describes the dense network of connections linking amateur and professional artists through social and pleasure clubs, mutual aid societies, the Mardi Gras Indian tribes, and other community-based organizations as among New Orleans' key assets. Strengthening these networks as vehicles for informing residents about their options and linking needy families to assistance and opportunities represents an important form of social capital building.

### **Mainstream Access**

All the rebuilding strategies outlined in this collection are designed to forge stronger connections between low-income families and the economic mainstream. In other words, the underlying objective is not only to ameliorate poverty, but also to break down barriers that prevent people from escaping poverty.

As Holzer and Lerman argue most explicitly, the enormous public-sector

investment in cleanup and rebuilding should be used to create employment and training opportunities for former residents. Not everyone can be expected to move quickly to self-sufficiency, but Holzer and Lerman's apprenticeship and Job Corps proposals, as well as Zedlewski's proposal for more intensive training and work supports for people with disabilities and single mothers facing serious personal challenges, aim to draw people into the world of work. Similarly, Popkin, Turner, and Burt's argument for inclusionary zoning and mixed-income housing developments, as well as Hill and Hannaway's proposal for metrowide school choice, would also further economic and social integration.

Holzer and Lerman also highlight the importance of combating racial discrimination, which has historically limited employment opportunities for African Americans, not only in New Orleans but across the U.S. And Popkin, Turner, and Burt stress the role of racial segregation and exclusion in the concentration of poverty and neighborhood distress. Although the other essays do not address the issue of race as explicitly, expanding access to mainstream opportunities means tackling barriers that are based on both class and race. As a consequence, opening up access to mainstream institutions and neighborhoods is likely to provoke at least some fear and hostility. Indeed, residents in some of New Orleans' more affluent communities have blocked plans to install temporary trailers in neighborhood parks and other open spaces, due in part to prejudice and fear about the people who would live in them (as well as skepticism about the city's capacity to manage makeshift facilities effectively).

The challenges of prejudice and discrimination are likely to become more complex, since substantial numbers of Latinos have moved to New Orleans to work on cleanup and reconstruction projects. It is not

known whether these workers will stay on, but their presence may generate new fears and resentments on the part of both African Americans and whites worried about finding jobs and preserving the city's culture. Community leaders from all segments of New Orleans—including white, black, and Latino religious leaders—will have to work together to promote a sense of common purpose across lines of race and class as New Orleans rebuilds.

### Moving New Orleans Forward

The circumstances facing New Orleans are unique in the experience of urban planners and policymakers, because so many dimensions of people's lives were demolished at once. Now, all aspects of rebuilding must be synchronized in order to succeed. Without the prospect of jobs and income, few of the city's residents can afford to return and begin reestablishing homes and communities. But without at least temporary housing for their workers, many businesses may not risk reopening. Without schools for their children to attend, day care facilities, hospitals, and health clinics, families may postpone their return to the city. But until the families are back, neither the city nor the private sector can afford to hire teachers, child care workers, or health care providers.

In the short term, New Orleans is trapped in uncertainty about how these puzzle pieces will fit back together. This "catch 22" dimension is especially problematic for lower-income families, who lack the wealth and other resources to compensate for essential elements of daily life that may be missing when they try to return. Overcoming inertia and moving forward to rebuild the city's social infrastructure along with its physical infrastructure requires coordinated public-sector leadership, new partnerships with businesses, nonprofits, and philanthropies, and—of course—money. Resolving

uncertainty is critical for allowing private parties to begin reinvesting and rebuilding.

### Public Leadership

Any hope of crafting and implementing a coherent, long-term response to New Orleans' social needs will require systematic coordination of federal, state, and local plans and investments. As of this writing, the response of federal, state, and local governments to the needs of New Orleans' residents has been inconsistent and uncoordinated. Every level of government has at least one committee or commission (and sometimes more than one) jostling for attention and authority. Foundations and other private institutions are offering valuable resources and expertise, but there is no evidence that these resources are being channeled where they are needed most.

It may be tempting to look to the federal government to take the lead in directing a comprehensive rebuilding effort, particularly given the limited fiscal capacity—and in some areas, the history of mismanagement—at city and state levels. Unfortunately, however, the federal government has so far shown no inclination to use its resources or authority to effectively lead the rebuilding of New Orleans. The administration's refusal to support Congressman Richard Baker's proposed plan for compensating property owners and managing redevelopment raises new doubts about the federal government's commitment (Walsh 2006). Moreover, some aspects of rebuilding involve fundamental responsibilities of city or state government that the federal government should not usurp. And others involve systems that have historically been funded and managed jointly by federal and state or federal and local agencies.

For all these reasons, the only plausible solution to the urgent need for

intergovernmental coordination is to for the city and state to establish a formal institutional structure within which relevant agencies share information and plans, resolve conflicts, develop joint strategies, and coordinate their activities. The federal government (working through the coordinator recently appointed by President Bush) should support this joint venture with funding tied to clear performance requirements. Such a governance structure should be accountable to elected officials and to the public at large, reporting on its information gathering and decisionmaking processes, monitoring the use of funds to protect against fraud and waste, and creating open forums for current and former residents of New Orleans to express their views on and priorities for rebuilding.

### New Partnerships

To be effective, emerging forms of social support and access to opportunity have to interlock. At each stage of rebuilding—and as successive sections of the city are reopened and rebuilt—planners must look for strategies to bring all essential services back online together. Tulane University pursued this kind of coordinated strategy in preparing to reopen for the spring 2006 semester, including temporary housing for students, faculty, and staff whose pre-Katrina housing is uninhabitable, shuttle buses linking temporary housing with the campus, a school for the children of returning employees, and teachers to staff the school.

Other employers hoping to attract workers back to restart business in New Orleans are not big enough to do the same on their own. They need proactive “matchmakers”—publicly funded (but probably not public) agencies—to help link the staging of jobs and housing to that of schools, health care, and child care. For example, such an intermediary could help a small business partner with a new

charter school, several nonprofit housing developers, and a shuttle bus service to prepare for the return of employees and their families. The information sharing and negotiation necessary to make such partnerships work will not happen unless it is someone's job to make them happen.

A parallel set of intermediaries must then reach out to former residents of New Orleans who are currently living in other cities, bringing current and reliable information about employment and training opportunities and about where returning families can live, what schools are available for their children to attend, how they will find health care, and where young children can get care while their parents work. Such a network of information providers could help ensure that information flows in the opposite direction as well, giving the former residents of New Orleans—including those who lack money and political connections—an effective voice in decisions about how their city is rebuilt.

## Money

All the programs and strategies recommended in this collection will cost money; most call for public funding, from federal, state, or local coffers. But much of the funding required by the proposals presented here is already earmarked for the city's rebuilding. Indeed, the authors here have mainly recommended smarter and more effective ways to use existing funds—for public schools and public health clinics, for example—or better ways to deploy resources already allocated for rebuilding.

In the fall of 2005, the Congressional Budget Office reported that the federal government had committed more than \$60 billion to relief and recovery from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, in addition to expanded funding for TANF, food stamps, and Medicaid; unemployment insurance and job

placement assistance; emergency tax relief for businesses and individuals; small business loans; and housing reconstruction.<sup>2</sup> And although the Administration's 2007 budget submission includes no new money for Gulf Coast recovery or rebuilding, an \$18 billion supplemental funding package is anticipated (Jordan 2006). Certainly, money will remain an issue, but public funds will be pouring into New Orleans in the coming years; deploying them effectively is the biggest challenge.

## In Sum

Hurricane Katrina vividly exposed the exclusion, isolation, and distress of low-income African Americans, many of whom have called New Orleans home for generations. Unfortunately, it would be all too easy for these residents to be excluded and isolated again as the city rebuilds. But New Orleans' future could be more just and equitable. In his September 15 speech from Jackson Square, President Bush acknowledged the past failures of New Orleans' social infrastructure and called for greater equity and opportunity in the future.

The essays collected here provide models to guide the city's social reconstruction, including proven employment and training initiatives and ways to create affordable housing and healthy communities, a well-performing public school system, high-quality programs for infants and preschoolers, accessible health care for low-income families, flexible support for musicians and artists, and help for the city's most vulnerable residents. All these proposals hold promise for connecting New Orleans' low-income residents to mainstream social and economic opportunities—by providing people who want to return to the city with real choices and the information they need to act on these choices, by creating flexible systems that respond to the changing needs of the city's residents and

businesses, by adhering to high standards of quality, and by helping residents build up their financial and social capital. Billions of dollars are pouring into the city's reconstruction. If these resources are used strategically—rebuilding the social infrastructure along with the physical infrastructure—New Orleans can be reborn as a city of openness and opportunity for all its residents.

## NOTES

1. U.S. Representative Richard Baker, from Baton Rouge, introduced federal legislation to compensate property owners in the most severely damaged neighborhoods, so that they could rebuild on higher ground and New Orleans' redevelopment could be effectively managed. However, the Bush administration rejected this proposal, arguing that Community Development Block Grant funds appropriated late in

2005 would be sufficient to meet redevelopment needs (Walsh 2006).

2. Douglas Holtz-Eakin, statement to the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on the Budget, October 6, 2005.

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