

A man with a grey beard, wearing a yellow hard hat and safety glasses, is focused on his work. He is wearing a blue t-shirt and dark work pants. He is working on a wooden structure, possibly a wall or a partition, with vertical wooden studs. The background is a light blue wall. A dark green semi-transparent box is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing the title text in white.

# NONPROFIT, PHILANTHROPY, AND VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATIONS





**All Hands and Hearts volunteers on St. Thomas**  
*All Hands and Hearts*

**The Territory's nonprofit, philanthropy, and voluntary organizations stepped forward immediately to play critical leadership roles in coordinating relief and recovery in both the direct aftermath of the storms and in the long-term recovery efforts that followed.**

After the storms passed, local community-based organizations and volunteers quickly rallied to offer support and assistance. Temporary shelters were opened to serve displaced residents, and supply distribution sites were established to provide food, water, clothing, medical kits, and other necessities. Volunteers canvassed neighborhoods to assess damage, identify vulnerable residents, and coordinate evacuations. Teams were formed to remove debris, clean out damaged homes, and make repairs to compromised structures. As recovery progressed, these same organizations and volunteers joined together to form long-term recovery organizations focused on identifying each community's most critical outstanding rebuilding needs.

Local philanthropic organizations played a vital role in this work. In addition to providing leadership and organizational support, these groups quickly raised millions of dollars, then rapidly deployed funds to support local nonprofit, public sector, and private

partners. This remarkable charitable effort was made possible through the compassion and generosity of donors from across the Territory and globe.

As long-term recovery work continues, the sector has an important opportunity to build on the successes of the response and leverage lessons learned for future disasters. Among the overarching problems identified by the Governor's Task Force were a lack of communication and coordination between community-based organizations and the territorial government. Local groups had conducted minimal emergency preparedness planning or training and were not plugged into the Territory's emergency response plans. The hurricanes' damage to nonprofit service providers' offices and equipment impeded the provision of necessary services. In-kind donations helped to meet vital basic needs in the immediate hours and days after the storms, but in many cases unsolicited donations of unneeded commodities became burdensome to manage. While volunteers made substantial contributions to relief and recovery operations, they were not always deployed efficiently and effectively. And although monetary donations flowed to a range of worthy causes, some opportunities to maximize and further leverage those contributions were missed.



A useful first step in addressing these challenges would be the appointment by the territorial government of a dedicated, high-level nonprofit recovery liaison to coordinate directly with community-based organizations on disaster relief and recovery operations. Community emergency preparedness planning and the development of continuity of operations plans for service providers would enhance organizational and community resilience and ensure the quick restoration of essential services. The Territory should also work with local nonprofits to refine and strengthen volunteer and donations management plans to enable better matching of volunteers and donations with community needs. To support stronger charitable fund-raising and maximize the impact of giving, systems should be developed to enable better coordination and communication of recovery needs and to strengthen ties to large national funders.

which were already engaged in hurricane recovery operations across the region, also made important contributions. Each group leveraged its unique expertise, networks, and resources to fill needs and gaps.

The combined leadership, generosity, and spirit of collaboration of the nonprofit, philanthropic, and voluntary sector are playing an important role in the Territory's recovery and rebuilding. Many families and communities across the islands still face a difficult and uncertain path forward to recovery. Significant unmet needs still exist, as much of the Territory remains vulnerable to future storms. These community-based organizations continue to support those still impacted by the storms and are leading the way in recovery and preparedness planning. Providing them with the resources they need to achieve their missions will enable them to help build a more resilient US Virgin Islands community.

## HOW THE SYSTEM WORKS

The Virgin Islands features a robust and dynamic sector of community-based organizations that provide a broad range of essential services. These groups include nonprofit service providers, houses of worship and faith-based organizations, voluntary organizations, community foundations, and other charitable organizations. Collectively, they provide invaluable services to the community on a daily basis, with services ranging from food pantries to health care and case management to supporting children through after-school and youth development activities to economic revitalization and workforce development programs.

Because of their close proximity and familiarity with community needs, philanthropic, nonprofit and volunteer organizations have been vital at all stages of the Territory's recovery, from coordinating initial relief operations to fostering an inclusive long-term planning process. The Territory's well-established community foundations and nonprofit organizations played a critical role in mobilizing resources and volunteers. At the same time, new organizations formed to help meet the vast needs of local residents, many of them grassroots operations that evolved to play leading roles in recovery. Larger national disaster response groups, many of



**Catholic Charities distributes diapers, toiletries, detergents, and toys to families**  
*Catholic Charities USVI*

# IMPACT OF THE HURRICANES

## Relief and recovery operations

Philanthropic and voluntary organizations immediately began to mobilize relief operations in the aftermath of the two hurricanes. Initially, efforts focused on gathering and distributing essential supplies, including food, fuel, water, medical supplies, and generators, as well as heavy equipment for debris removal and repairs. Local chapters of Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD) groups, including volunteers from organizations such as the American Red Cross, Catholic Charities, The Salvation Army, and United Way, played a leading role in these efforts.

*21 USVI Hurricane Help* (organized by retired NBA star and St. Croix native Tim Duncan) was among the larger relief supply distribution operations. This group worked in close collaboration with VOAD groups, the VI National Guard, and unaffiliated local volunteers to set up large-scale supply collection and distribution sites on St. Thomas and St. Croix.

Local community-based organizations also provided valuable help. *Lutheran Social Services* deployed Lutheran Disaster Response (LDR) volunteers to deliver food,



**Volunteers helping restore a local day care on St. Thomas**  
*All Hands and Hearts*



**Michael Bloomberg and Tim Duncan deliver supplies after the hurricanes**  
*Bloomberg Philanthropies*

provide shelter, and assist with home reconstruction and mitigation work. A number of groups worked outside the scope of their regular mission. For example, *My Brother's Workshop*, a local youth development and job training group focused on at-risk youth, utilized the program's shops wood on St. Thomas and St. Croix to provide support to help repair 225 damaged homes and cleared and removed over 89,000 cubic yards of debris to date at no cost to the homeowners. The organization also lent the program's café on St. Thomas and established it as a disaster relief hub, distributing 37,500 free meals and other necessities from that location.

Other groups formed spontaneously. On St. John, *Love City Strong*, which began as a grassroots effort of local residents who came together in the direct aftermath of the storms worked to mobilize volunteers to identify vulnerable residents and meet immediate recovery needs. This group later registered as a formal nonprofit organization and dedicated its efforts to long-term recovery operations.

Musician and part-time St. Johnian Kenny Chesney launched the *Love for Love City Foundation*, which flew supplies and equipment to the Territory, including a plane full of pet food, and helped to transport materials across St. John.

Additional help came quickly to the Territory from large national recovery organizations. Massachusetts-based *All Hands and Hearts* immediately deployed teams





**Bloomberg L.P.'s Michael Bloomberg and Tom Secunda volunteer after the storms**  
*Bloomberg Philanthropies*

of skilled volunteer labor to lead debris clearance and muck-and-gut operations, as well as rebuild homes and schools on St. Thomas and St. John. AmeriCorps volunteers also worked to support volunteer and donations management, assist with blue-tarp roofing repairs, and provide valuable manpower for debris removal operations. The ecumenical *Disaster Recovery Support Initiative* also sent teams to St. Thomas to provide expertise on case management and assistance with long-term recovery and rebuilding efforts.

Led by company co-founder Tom Secunda, *Bloomberg L.P.* was one of many generous corporate donors who contributed to the Territory's recovery. In addition to shipping in over 200 tons of supplies and equipment, Bloomberg brought in a team of emergency management and disaster experts—many from former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg's administration—to assist the territorial government. The company also flew a disaster medical team from Johns Hopkins University to help storm victims, coordinate evacuations, and set up emergency care centers.

These relief efforts, large and small, from well-established groups and start-up operations alike, played an important role in meeting immediate post-storm needs. Many mobilized long before government resources or larger relief groups were able to establish services. All of them depended heavily on the assistance of volunteers who generously contributed their time and energy to assist with debris clearance, supply distribution, and other essential needs. Yet volunteer

management also posed a challenge due to a lack of coordination between relief groups, Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency (VITEMA), and government officials. Plans and systems must be put in place to more effectively connect volunteers to the groups that can best use their varied skill sets, and then thoughtfully deploy appropriate teams to areas that most need assistance. In addition, local service providers would prevent overlapping efforts and enable a more rapid response to more victims by establishing a centralized USVI Recovery webpage. This site would serve as a primary platform for information on local recovery efforts, as well as a portal for volunteers to learn about service opportunities and connect with community-based organizations.

Another particular challenge after the storms was the volume of unsolicited donations, clothing in particular, that accumulated at sites throughout the Territory. While well-intentioned, without an adequate plan for storage and distribution, these unsolicited donations are often left exposed to the elements and subsequently damaged or spoiled. These goods can overwhelm local logistics, crowd out more critically needed items, and even pose potential safety and sanitary concerns. Local organizations worked together to sort and manage the extensive material donations, but it remained difficult to manage the sheer volume. The Territory must create a triage system for donation collection, storage, and distribution.

A lack of safe, available workspaces also posed an obstacle to the vital work being done by community-based organizations. At the same time that local groups were providing services to storm victims, in many cases, heavy damage from wind and rain and widespread power outages displaced them from their own offices. The *St. Croix Foundation for Community Development* and the *St. John Community Foundation* helped to fill this gap by opening their doors to other local nonprofits and response organizations. This enabled groups to quickly resume services and also provided collaborative spaces that fostered communication and information exchange. The territorial government and community-based organizations should collaborate to develop continuity of operations plans to understand how the government can best support local groups to quickly resume services after disaster.



**Catholic Charities assists with meal distribution after Hurricane Irma**  
Catholic Charities USVI

## Philanthropy

Local community foundations played an enormous role in the response. Their extensive knowledge of each island's demographics and their corresponding rich networks of relationships positioned them to immediately lead as conveners, information clearinghouses, and coordinators of relief efforts. Philanthropic funds were used to acquire critical resources in the immediate days and weeks after the storms, and additional grants were awarded to support a multitude of areas impacted by the storms, including housing recovery, health and human services, environmental sustainability, education, youth development, and economic development. The funds were deployed flexibly to meet recovery needs that were not funded by other sources or where government resources were inadequate or too slow to be helpful.

*The Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands* (CFVI) launched a number of funds dedicated to support recovery needs. The largest was the *Fund of the Virgin Islands*, a public-private philanthropic collaboration operated in partnership with Bloomberg Philanthropies and Governor Mapp. The fund raised \$8 million to support local service providers engaged in relief and recovery efforts.

The *Stephenson Family Foundation*, which has long-standing ties to the Virgin Islands, also partnered with CFVI to launch the *HelpUSVINow! Fund*, which raised \$5 million for recovery. The Stephenson family also contributed in a number of other ways, flying in supplies, medical equipment, food, and generators, as well as assisting with evacuations for vulnerable USVI residents. The *St. Croix Foundation for Community Development* launched the Caribbean Assistance and Relief Effort (CARE) Fund, which provided immediate relief needs as well as support for longer term recovery efforts. The *St. John Community Foundation* played a leading role in managing donations, identifying service gaps, and leveraged its partnerships to connect resources and funds to groups serving those with critical needs.

While funds quickly flowed to many groups engaged in recovery, others lacked strong pre-existing relationships with national funders and recovery organizations, limiting their ability to coordinate and leverage much-needed funds at a critical time. Looking forward, local charitable organizations should band together to launch a standing USVI Recovery Funders Forum, which would provide a mechanism to develop and strengthen relationships with large philanthropic organizations and other potential funders.



# CLIMATE RISKS

The US Virgin Islands will remain vulnerable to the risk posed by hurricanes, earthquakes, and other natural disasters. The Territory's community-based organizations will continue to face challenges, particularly in the form of damage to key facilities and equipment. While Hurricanes Irma and Maria primarily resulted in damage from excessive wind and rain, future weather events may result in increased risk of storm surge and coastal flooding, which could put many service providers at risk. Furthermore, the heightened frequency and volatility of future storms will increase the demands on service providers to quickly respond and provide essential post-disaster services.

## Long-term recovery

As the response shifted from immediate relief to longer term recovery, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) worked with VOAD groups and volunteer coalitions of civic, nonprofit, and faith-based organizations to establish *Long-term Recovery Groups* (LTRGs) on each of the islands.

Each LTRG is made up of work groups focused on issues like housing, volunteer management, donations/resources management, health and social services, and economic and workforce development. These groups serve as inclusive forums for information sharing and resource coordination, working to identify the most pressing post-storm needs and helping to ensure the efficient and effective provision of assistance to the Territory's most vulnerable residents and populations.

The LTRGs received outside support from FEMA's Voluntary Agency Liaisons (VALs), who helped build the capacity of the groups and played an important role in helping them to navigate the often overwhelming suite of federal programs and resources available to support long-term community recovery. The success of the LTRGs demonstrates the importance of collaboration between local service providers and government.



**Catholic Charities distributes care packages**  
Catholic Charities USVI

# INITIATIVES FOR IMPROVING THE RESILIENCE OF NONPROFIT, PHILANTHROPY, AND VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATIONS

The Task Force has reached out to leaders of local and national philanthropic and volunteer organizations to solicit their feedback on lessons learned. These recommendations identify initiatives that will lay the groundwork for more efficient and effective preparation and response for future disasters. If implemented, they will maximize the resilience of local community-based organizations, establish platforms for information sharing, and strengthen relationships between local groups and national philanthropic organizations.

## *Initiative 1*

### **Appoint a nonprofit Recovery Liaison**

The Governor's Office should create a full-time senior staff position dedicated to coordinating directly with community-based organizations, with a primary focus on disaster recovery and emergency planning and preparedness programs. A Recovery Liaison would serve as the principal communicator between the territorial government and community-based service providers, ensuring community needs are communicated and that government resources are efficiently and effectively deployed to augment and support local recovery operations. This liaison would also work closely with VITEMA to coordinate and communicate needs and response, as well as partner with philanthropic organizations to help identify and prioritize outstanding needs.

## *Initiative 2*

### **Develop a USVI Community Emergency Planning Toolkit**

Local community-based organizations should partner with VITEMA to create a Community Emergency Planning Toolkit to provide direction and resources for local groups to develop community-based approaches to emergency preparedness and resilience. The toolkit should take into account the unique planning and preparedness needs of the US Virgin Islands. This model has been used successfully in other localities to help community-based organizations identify existing assets and resources, and develop and strengthen key community networks. This approach will provide a clear understanding of VITEMA's plans and capabilities, as well as how local resources can most effectively support a unified recovery effort. Workshops can be held on each island to help local organizations develop or enhance their own plans, accompanied by annual simulated emergency exercises to test and enhance the local plans.

## *Initiative 3*

### **Develop Continuity of Operations Plans (COOP) for community-based organizations**

VITEMA should develop a user-friendly template to guide local nonprofits, philanthropic, and volunteer organizations through the process of developing comprehensive COOP plans for their organization. These plans help organizations continue or quickly resume services after a disaster, allowing them to provide essential services to their communities. As with Hurricanes Irma and Maria, electricity, telephones, and computers may be offline or unavailable, and buildings may be damaged or inaccessible. Local service providers need to develop plans that pinpoint essential assets and identify alternative solutions. Organizations should create plans that identify alternate work sites, protect important documents and back up essential data, and establish plans for communicating with essential staff or volunteers. Each organization should schedule regular reviews to ensure these plans enable quick response to a disaster. Workshops should be held on each island in conjunction with community foundations and LTRGs to help groups build and refine their plans.



*Initiative 4***Update and strengthen volunteer management and donations management plan**

VITEMA should partner with FEMA and each island's VOAD and LTRGs to update and strengthen volunteer and donation management plans that address the issues of unaffiliated volunteers and unsolicited donated goods and services. These plans should detail the establishment of Volunteer Reception Centers for donated goods. An essential element of these plans should be a proactive volunteer and donations messaging strategy to be developed by the Recovery Liaison and VITEMA in conjunction with community partners to ensure unified messaging.

*Initiative 5***Establish a USVI recovery website**

The Governor's Office should establish a user-friendly clearinghouse website to serve as a centralized platform for information on recovery efforts and as a portal for volunteers to connect with service opportunities at community-based organizations engaged in relief and recovery work. The webpage will serve as a publicly accessible resource directory and compile information on all local groups engaged in recovery, including the types of services they provide, volunteer support they require, and donations that might be needed. Local service providers and recovery groups should have access to provide updates to ensure real-time updates on recovery progress, resource needs, and service opportunities.

*Initiative 6***Launch a USVI Recovery Funders Forum**

Local charitable organizations should band together to launch a standing USVI Recovery Funders Forum, which would provide a mechanism to develop and strengthen relationships with large philanthropic organizations and other potential funders. Local groups can use the forum to provide updates on recovery and communicate needs when disasters occur and provide potential donors with the relationships and information they need to decide which projects and groups to support. The forum could offer updates on how groups are spending contributions so donors will have a better sense of how their dollars are helping recovery efforts across the Territory. Once established, the forum should consider hosting quarterly meetings or webinars to provide regular updates on recovery progress and maintain relationships. Each meeting could have a particular area of focus, such as housing, economic development or health care, highlighting the diversity of groups providing recovery services in the Territory.