



## RECOVER - REBUILD - ORGANIZE ACORN's Work in the Wake of Katrina

Low-income, African-American and Latino families - some of them ACORN members, many of them from ACORN-organized neighborhoods – are bearing the brunt of the suffering caused by Hurricane Katrina. ACORN's national headquarters are located in New Orleans, and as the largest community-based organization of low-income families in New Orleans and the nation, we are organizing our displaced communities – now united in the **ACORN Katrina Survivors Association** – to demand more effective relief efforts and a voice in the rebuilding process.

### Reaching Survivors

- ACORN has reached out to its 9,000 New Orleans ACORN member families, through text messages, public service announcements, a hotline, its website and organizing teams at shelters, motels, and apartments and connected them to ACORN families who opened their homes, and to the immediate necessities and services they need.
- ACORN's organizing has reconnected survivors to each other and their community. ACORN is distributing voicemail cards which provide a way for scattered families to get in touch and leave messages, and a conduit for distributing the critical disaster and recovery information. Meetings of survivors and other community members of the cities where they have relocated have initiated local campaigns for needed services.

### Turning Outrage into Action

- In the first two weeks after the Hurricane, ACORN members in over 35 cities across the country gathered to take part in Town Hall Meetings. Close to 1,000 community members and Katrina survivors all over the nation attended the meetings, in addition to city officials, state legislators, and representatives of the clergy.
- The Town Hall Meetings developed and built support for the “**ACORN Proposal for Hurricane Katrina Recovery and Rebuilding**” calling for a voice for survivors, affordable housing, living wage jobs, and the public services in a rebuilt New Orleans and Gulf Coast.
- At a September 9th ACORN Town Hall Meeting in Houston, Mayor Bill White committed to aiding families who are sheltering hurricane victims. A few days after the meeting, he announced a partnership with ACORN and other community groups to distribute \$25-\$100 food cards to families hosting survivors.



Text messaging ACORN members after the hurricane.



ACORN Mobile Action Center Van helps survivors.

*Houston ACORN partnered with the Houston Katrina Relief Fund to distribute 6,000 food cards worth between \$25-\$100 to families hosting survivors.*

- In Dallas, ACORN members followed up on a Town Hall Meeting with a protest at the Mayor's office targeting the city's refusal to partner with FEMA to provide housing for evacuees. After two weeks of public pressure, FEMA developed a plan provide housing directly to survivors.
- On October 7th, the Houston ACORN Hurricane Survivor Committee brought together survivors of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and their host families to confront Houston FEMA Director Tom Costello about a lack of response to the needs of the survivors. In negotiations a week later, FEMA agreed to a number of reforms to make services more accessible, including a shuttle bus to their service center, translated materials, and extending benefits to Rita survivors.
- Displaced New Orleans ACORN members have organized in shelters in Baton Rouge, and other parts of Louisiana, advocating for a "right to return" to New Orleans. At a September 28th ACORN meeting, New Orleans City Councilmember Cynthia Willard-Lewis, who represents the Lower 9th Ward, agreed to fight for right of return into lower income areas.
- On October 15th, ACORN members staged a caravan into the Lower 9th Ward to claim their right to return, placarding homes with signs that state "Do Not Bulldoze."
- Louisiana ACORN has co-founded the New Opportunity for Action and Hope (NOAH), a labor/community coalition that represents more than 151,000 people fighting for priority job placement and training for Louisiana residents, good wages, and immediate and long-term affordable housing.

### *Building a National Movement*

- In mid-October, displaced New Orleans residents living in Baton Rouge, Houston, and several other cities around the country came together to form the **ACORN Katrina Survivors Association**.
- At its inception, the Survivors Association had over 1,600 members who had already been organizing locally for better relief, with ambitious organizing plans to reach a total of 100,000 members in the next year.
- The Survivors Association will use public pressure, direct action, and dialogue with elected officials to win "respect and a voice" for survivors, the resources needed for families to survive, and a rebuilding plan that builds stronger communities for all.
- In Washington D.C. and in dozens of cities around the country, ACORN members are taking action--using rallies, media events, lobby visits, and actions – to prevent Congress and the Bush Administration from using the costs of Katrina relief as a pretext for cutting key programs that support families, like Medicaid, heating assistance, and the Earned Income Tax Credit.
- The **ACORN Community Forum on Rebuilding New Orleans** will convene in Baton Rouge on November 7th and 8th. This conference will bring together the low-income and minority residents of New Orleans and many of the top urban planning, architecture, and development professionals from around the country, to discuss the rebuilding of New Orleans. It will develop a rebuilding program for New Orleans that speaks to the interests and dreams of all New Orleans' residents, and a strategy for promoting this program in the public arena.

*ACORN member Vanessa Johnson-Gueringer says, "ACORN will fight to rebuild our community the way we residents want it rebuilt. And we are ready to fight for as long as it takes."*



Questions for FEMA from survivors at an ACORN Town Hall Meeting.



ACORN wants no bulldozing before residents can return to their homes.



Houston members make demands on Texas FEMA director.



ACORN founds new Louisiana coalition for jobs and housing.