

Tulane SoPA faculty study highlights lasting impact of Katrina-era giving

August 26, 2025 10:00 AM Roger Dunaway
roger@tulane.edu



The study found that post-Katrina philanthropy accelerated recovery and reshaped New Orleans' nonprofit sector, growing from 4,210 groups in 2005 to over 6,000 in 2024, as local grantmaking nearly doubled. (Photo by Getty Images)

The unprecedented wave of philanthropy that followed Hurricane Katrina not only fueled New Orleans' immediate recovery but also transformed the city's nonprofit sector, strengthening the city's resilience over the past two decades, according to a new study by a Tulane University faculty member.

The study found the number of nonprofits in the New Orleans area grew from 4,210 in 2005 to more than 6,000 in 2024, while local foundation grant-making nearly doubled, from \$69 million in 2005 to more than \$123 million in 2021. In 2023 alone, over \$731 million in grants flowed into the region.

The report, “Resourcing Resilience and Prosperity: Philanthropic Investment in New Orleans’ Nonprofit Sector after Hurricane Katrina,” was released as a part of the Data Center’s and Brookings Institution’s The New Orleans Index at Twenty Collection.

Authored by Halima Leak Francis, PhD, director of the John Lewis Public Administration Program at Tulane’s School of Professional Advancement, it traces how philanthropy shifted from urgent relief in 2005 to long-term investment in housing, small businesses, advocacy and leadership development.

In the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and the levee failures, charitable donations raised by nonprofits for relief efforts reached approximately \$3.27 billion within the first year, representing one of the largest philanthropic responses to a domestic disaster in U.S. history.

Donations after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita reached a total of \$6.5 billion by mid-2007. Individuals gave roughly 86% of that through private donations, while corporations and foundations contributed more than \$900 million. Local initiatives, including the Louisiana Disaster Recovery Foundation — now the Foundation for Louisiana — distributed millions to support housing and community rebuilding.

By 2006, funders turned to long-term recovery, with the Greater New Orleans Foundation awarding more than \$40 million in grants and a Community Revitalization Fund raising \$23 million to support nearly 10,000 new housing units. Over time, philanthropy evolved to strengthen nonprofit capacity and advance progress-focused work.

The report recommends four strategies for disaster philanthropy: integrate community knowledge with professional expertise, invest early in coordination, balance structure with flexibility and prioritize nonprofit sustainability.

“Working on this research provided a much-needed exploration of the role of philanthropy in bringing New Orleans back from Hurricane Katrina,” Leak Francis said. “While we know what was sorely needed to help the area recover, a deeper examination also reveals how philanthropy was used to shape people’s vision. I hope this provides clarity about the multiple dimensions of philanthropy and how there can be more robust community participation in leveraging philanthropy to build a thriving, prosperous New Orleans.”



Halima Leak Francis, PhD, director of the John Lewis Public Administration Program at Tulane's School of Professional Advancement, authored the report which explores how philanthropy reshaped New Orleans and strengthened its nonprofits. (Photo by Tulane SoPA)

"While we know what was sorely needed to help the area recover, a deeper examination also reveals how philanthropy was used to shape people's vision."

Halima Leak Francis, PhD