

A Letter From Jerry Silverman

President and CEO of the Jewish Federations of North America

Dear Colleagues,

As the scope of the impact of Hurricane Harvey on the Houston area and other area becomes clearer we are dramatically escalating our emergency response. You will be receiving regular updates from us about the various facets of the response but we want to focus you on three immediate things we need your help with:

Funding – the funding needs of this situation are going to be enormous and long-term. It will be days or even into next week before anyone can even begin to assess because the rain and flooding have not stopped. But we know already this is on the magnitude of Katrina and Sandy impacts. We will have immediate cash needs to address by the end of the week; please forward funds from initial fundraising or emergency grants immediately. And please use these next days to focus people in your communities on responding generously, and to calibrate your emergency grant processes accordingly. We have already reached out to the Jewish Funders Network and several major Jewish foundations for support.

Boots on the Ground – we plan to put a team of senior professionals on the ground by the end of the week to help support the community's immediate emergency efforts. This will involve tracking down where community members have ended up; distributing emergency cash grants and Home Depot vouchers; and helping local agencies get back up and running. We are close to finalizing who this will be for the first week but we will likely need to sustain this over several weeks. If you have senior professionals who are ready and available for week-long deployments starting next week or beyond please let your local Federation know ASAP -<https://jewishnola.com/harvey>

Coordination – a disaster of this magnitude requires the highest possible degree of coordination so that time and efforts aren't wasted or duplicated. We need to be able to support and enable the local community leadership to drive the efforts. It won't be helpful for people to just show up unplanned. We urge you in the strongest possible way to avoid our tendency to fragment efforts and customize responses. Houston's leadership is overwhelmed in the moment and can't possibly respond to individual offers of assistance. Our impact will be greatest if we can coordinate a system-wide response and this is what Houston wants and needs from us all.

Sincerely,
Jerry Silverman
President and CEO, JFNA