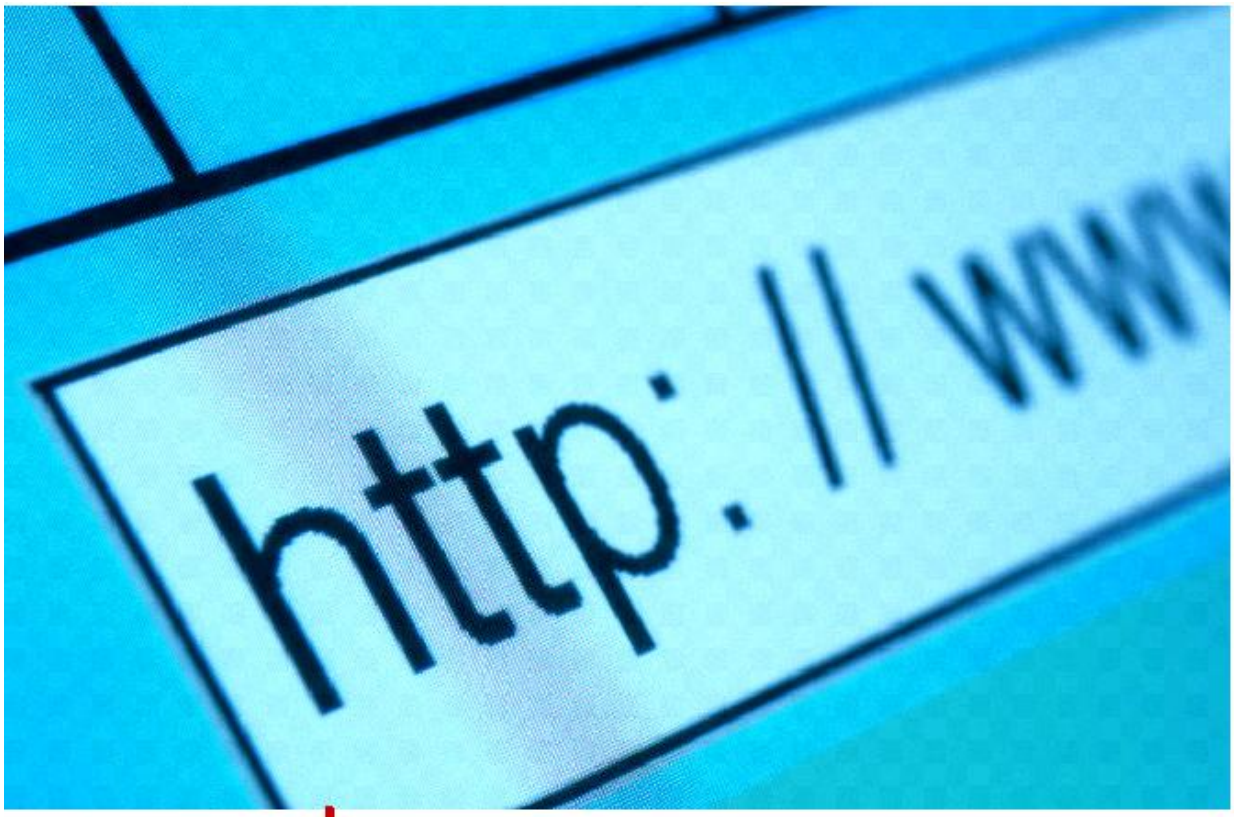

Creating An Online Lifeline

A Web Portal for
Emergency Preparedness &
Disaster Recovery

A Community Toolkit

Prepared for the Annie E. Casey Foundation by JustPartners, Inc. (JPI), www.justpartners.org. We thank the Casey Foundation, www.aecf.org, for its support; Delia Carmen of the Foundation for her guidance; LouisianaRebuilds.info, www.LouisianaRebuilds.info, for sharing its experience in creating a top quality web portal for residents of New Orleans; members of the Steering Committee for their feedback on an earlier version of this product; PolicyLink, www.PolicyLink.org, especially Josh Kirschenbaum, who facilitated the LouisianaRebuilds.info portal effort and the feedback session; and George Haddow for his expert advice. At the same time, we acknowledge that the findings and conclusions are those of JPI project staff alone.

August, 2008

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LouisianaRebuilds.info Steering Committee

***Preparedness** makes the difference between **vulnerability** and **disaster**. In an age of both known and unforeseen risks, **preparedness** is a key to family and community well-being.*

PREFACE

WHY YOU SHOULD CONSIDER AN ONLINE LIFELINE

Preparedness makes the difference between vulnerability and disaster. In just the last few years we have been reminded that communities are vulnerable in both known and unpredictable ways, to:

- "natural" forces like hurricanes, tornados, and floods[1]
- technological mistakes and malfunctions from power plants to shipping freighters
- violence from lone individuals with extreme emotional problems to attack from organized groups with political motives
- forms of risk not previously seen, such as anthrax or SARS.

For weeks after disasters, governments, advocates, and residents may face significant lapses in communication and organization. Too often relief processes lack coordination among multiple recovery initiatives and the critical information accompanying them. The good news is that we have learned a lot in the last few years about what works and how it works best to assist communities and keep them connected during disasters. This Toolkit is informed by what many dedicated people and organizations in New Orleans and the New Orleans diaspora learned about what works following the ravages of Hurricane Katrina.[2] **By sharing what was learned in the *aftermath* of disaster, the hope is that your community can be prepared *before* disaster strikes.**

Preparedness in the face of vulnerability. Disasters remind us that the fabric of families and communities—which we count on every day for our individual and collective well-being—can be frayed or come unraveled in crisis. Yet, it need not be so. Technology gives us ways to re-connect to one another, even when the places we usually inhabit and the spaces we have shared are disrupted. This Toolkit walks you through what it takes to create an **Online Lifeline** for emergency preparedness and recovery. The seeds of it may already exist in your community. And while this Toolkit specifically addresses the challenges of resident *displacement* and *dispersal*, its basic features can readily be adapted to the challenges of *sheltering in place*—the need to take immediate cover wherever you are.[3]

In an age of widely available online access, the internet is an invaluable tool for preparedness and recovery. In particular, web portals offer a single point of access to a variety of content and core services.[4] When a portal is dedicated to providing trusted information that families and communities need in the face of disaster, it can become an online lifeline to rebuild lives and re-establish civic participation, if and when unexpected forces hit. It can provide a sorely needed communications infrastructure to reconnect displaced residents to their communities, families, and friends. Through the use of technology, even displaced residents can have an important opportunity to participate *virtually* in the planning efforts and decision making about the future of their neighborhoods.

Technology gives us ways to re-connect to one another, even when the places we usually inhabit and the spaces we have shared are disrupted.

To be sure, the digital divide within communities –the uneven access to, and facility with, computer technology -- may make you reluctant to use a web portal as a key communications strategy in disaster. We certainly take that into account and identify some alternatives to a web portal. But the good news is that groups like the Community Technology Centers' Network (CTCnet) have made meaningful inroads into computer access and technology capacity for underserved communities. With over 700 members nationwide, CTCnet members in local communities offer critical infrastructures, know-how, and resident networks that can be invaluable for emergency preparedness and disaster recovery. They have learned that if you build it in collaboration with the community, people will come.

The portal described in the following pages can break through information blackouts and bottlenecks for **four key constituencies** involved in any recovery and rebuilding process:

1. **Displaced Residents** – All individuals need timely information about emergency preparedness and the recovery and rebuilding process following a disaster. They must be able to participate in rebuilding decisions and elections. ***The needs of these residents are the primary focus of this Toolkit.*** We especially focus on those residents with heightened vulnerability prior to and during disaster.

2. **Government** – State and local governments need to share information about the status of preparedness, recovery, and rebuilding efforts, such as emergency shelters, school availability, neighborhood toxicity levels, housing, social service programs, and voting. In addition, with the possibility of displaced residents scattered

throughout the nation, all units of government need to have a mechanism for receiving input from these residents on policies for rebuilding their communities.

3. **Community-Based Organizations** – These groups and social service workers will require data and information on how best to serve existing residents and returning residents with community-based services.

4. **Business and Industry** – The private sector must have detailed information on contracting opportunities, the development process, new business opportunities, and the rate of population return following a disaster in order to make informed decisions.

This Toolkit guides users to create virtual communities until our grounded ones can be restored. Even better, it offers a level of ***preparedness*** for disaster that strengthens communities—whether disaster strikes or not.

Without virtual communities or whatever their alternative may be, communities that have been disrupted face challenges of a magnitude many have not heretofore seen. For example:

- Displaced families with school-age children will not return if **schools are not functioning or need to be rebuilt**. Yet, many of these families have no idea of the status of school operations or reconstruction.

- If a housing agency has no information on **how many residents intend to return**, distortion can easily occur in the housing market.

- **Competition and redundancy** among federal, state, and local government activities can greatly reduce the effectiveness of government support.

- Local residents can miss out on **contracting and employment opportunities** because there are no mechanisms for broadcasting news about these jobs.

- Displaced residents will need to **vote in upcoming elections**, but no system exists to facilitate electronic voting.

Don't let these scenarios become yours!

Is the Toolkit for you? Communities are home to a range of people, organizations, and constituencies with the power, resources, and mission-relevant interest to consider using this Toolkit. If you are one of the following individuals or groups, you should consider offering leadership in an initiative to develop an **Online Lifeline** – perhaps with others who are listed. Together you can prepare your community for events that we hope you won't have to face. Do you represent any of these categories?

- ✓ Local elected officials
- ✓ Emergency preparedness personnel
- ✓ Community Technology Centers
- ✓ Community-based organizations
- ✓ Resident organizations
- ✓ Library networks
- ✓ Interfaith networks
- ✓ Community foundations
- ✓ Local affiliates of national nonprofit networks (e.g., the United Way)

What can you expect from this Toolkit? The Toolkit addresses two major scenarios: one where a community has the opportunity to build the portal as an emergency preparedness resource in advance of disaster, and the other where a community -- just having experienced a disaster -- needs help immediately. We hope you find yourself in the first category, but this Toolkit also offers hope to those thrust into the middle of high community need. In the pages ahead, you will be given component-by-component guidance about how to develop an **Online Lifeline** and a heads up about how issues may differ depending on whether you are in emergency preparation or disaster recovery mode. Each section starts with a quick overview using three summary boxes:

A "To-Do" List for the Component

Cautions Regarding the Component

Lessons Learned About the Component

The boxes preview the contents for that particular section for easy reference. So take a look at these first and then read further to see how the Toolkit can help you.

The guidance that follows should be understood as just that – guidance. There is no single recipe or formula for an effective web portal or its management. Your community will determine what works best for it. Rather, we give you things to think about based on grounded experience and a pathway that has worked well for a community experiencing massive disruption.

Is your community ready to take hold of the **Online Lifeline**?

When are you reading this – before or after disaster strikes?

Before Disaster Strikes?

You are in an enviable position. That is, you are likely to have the time and space to approach this work methodically, sequentially, without the pressure of crisis management, and with the opportunity to build the community's commitment to the portal under routine circumstances.

This is the perfect time to build a portal that can serve you and the community well in crisis. In fact, we propose that you think of the portal as a tool that can serve you and the community well *every day*. A one-stop information source for community members that links them to community, state, and federal information and resources and connects them to their decision-makers is a value-added resource at any time. Building a community's interest in such a portal prior to a disaster gives you a real head start on recovery if and when disaster strikes. As we mention later, the portal can become a new resource for civic engagement while it simultaneously stands ready to serve the community when it is in crisis. In other words, *if crafted well, an investment in emergency preparedness can pay off <u>today</u>*.

That said, it is essential to keep in mind that the portal's content and management require flexibility as circumstances change. In the face of disaster, things will need to move faster, new information will be needed, additional partners are likely to appear, and outreach strategies will probably change. At that point, you will want to be familiar with the parts of this manual that speak directly to disaster recovery so that the value of the portal remains strong under an emergency situation.

Let's get started while *<u>you still have the time</u>*....

After Disaster Strikes?

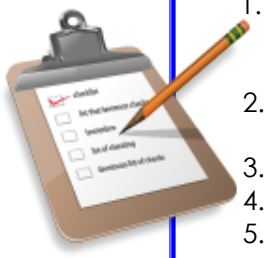
You are in the midst of crisis. Right now you realize that your community desperately needs a one-stop location that links them to trustworthy community, state, and federal information and resources and connects them to their decision-makers and to one another.

You do not have time to approach this work with anything other than urgency. In the face of disaster, work needs to move faster, new information is needed, heretofore unknown parties may appear on the scene, and everything you do will have to respond to changing conditions.

The good news is that others who went through community crisis have learned a lot that will prevent you from reinventing the wheel – or, in this case, the portal.

Let's get started, since *<u>there's no time to waste</u>*....

Component #1 • Planning Before or After Disaster: Web Portal Development



A "To-Do" List for This Component

1. Identify **an initial convener and initial group membership** from a wide range of important constituencies and functional areas to get a good mix of community voices and expertise.
2. Identify a **clear audience** for the portal and a **shared purpose** for the portal development group.
3. Determine who is best positioned to take the overall **lead**.
4. Develop guidelines for **collaboration** and **consensus building**.
5. Determine if an already **available website** would be appropriate for the **Online Lifeline**, or establish a dedicated site.
6. Plan for **phased-in build-out** that the community can depend on. In crisis, set an accelerated agenda.
7. **Identify** the key places where—and circumstances under which—**user constituents** are likely to reside under disaster scenarios.
8. Stick to agreed-upon **timelines** to establish trustworthiness.
9. Establish **operations** that are predictable and sustainable.

Cautions Regarding This Component

- Don't get too far down the road without the voices of a **variety of consumers** at the table.
- Don't be too quick to utilize an **available website** if its affiliate has different goals or if the affiliate's reputation is not strong with specific user groups.
- In the interests of timeliness, don't let the **desire for perfection** push out the good.
- Don't reinvent any wheels; **focus on "detailing"** your new vehicle.
- In crisis, **don't over-promise!**

Lessons Learned About This Component

- Add features that require greater technological capacity as **user needs** and funds permit, not at the start.
- The only way to meet the goals is to keep focused continually on identified **priorities**.

A. The Portal Development and Management Trajectory

Different stages of the portal development and management process call for different configurations of participants. The trajectory of involvement is somewhat like a horizontal funnel—more participants are important at the start while trust is being established, and fewer participants are required for the sustainability of the effort after trust and an infrastructure have been built. **Figure 1** illustrates the proposed trajectory for portal development and management that Component #1 builds out.

Figure 1.
A Participation Trajectory for Portal Development and Management

In this and the next section of the Toolkit we identify a possible configuration for each stage of development and management and describe key issues and functions at the several points in the trajectory.

B. Purpose of the Web Portal Development Group.

The Web Portal Development Group (WPDG) is the initial group responsible for designing the basic structure and functions of the portal as either an emergency preparedness tool or a disaster recovery tool. If a community can develop such a portal when it is not in crisis, it has distinct advantages of time and reflection that it otherwise will not have.

The WPDG has overall responsibility, at a minimum, to:

- Ensure that a **wide range of constituencies** is at the table, including most especially those residents and neighborhoods whose voices are too often left out of official conversations.
- Establish a **shared purpose** for the web portal.
- Build **consensus** and promote **collaboration** throughout the start-up work.
- Come to be known as **THE central web-based source** for timely and reliable information resources.

- Conceptualize a portal that will serve the needs of residents for critical and timely **information** and the needs of the community for **reconnection** and **engagement.**[5]
- Develop a realistic **implementation timeline** that the community can count on. In crisis, it will necessarily need to be an aggressive timeline.
- Anticipate and address the challenges of **resident dispersal** when disasters cause people to flee (or resident quarantine if you wish to adapt this Toolkit to disasters or threats that confine people to their homes or workplaces).
- Plan for eventual administration of the portal by a designated **management group** that will keep it current, relevant, and credible.

C. Composition of the Web Portal Development Group.

From the beginning, a successful portal will include representation from *both* the likely end-users *and* those whose information, functional support, and credibility are needed for robust and trustworthy website content and operations. Who among the lists in **Figure 2** would be crucial for your community to include? And who might be missing from these lists?

The primary way for the WPDG to become known as the central go-to group for web-based information resources is to have the right range of people at the table from the beginning and to work collaboratively around the shared purpose. That said, the credibility of this same group will come from its openness to emerging constituencies, leadership, and issues. The portal will need to function best as circumstances shift, and the WPDG should, too. It should avoid getting locked into an exclusive early membership, priorities that are never revisited, or processes that can't easily be revised as circumstances dictate.

Perhaps the biggest challenge faced around group membership occurs if a portal is under development following a disaster. Just when the need exists for end-user input, many end-users may be dispersed and unavailable, especially those who are lower-income and/or highly vulnerable. One way to address this dilemma is to ask for input from trusted service providers who have ongoing relationships and established networks with vulnerable constituencies. This group of trusted intermediaries may be experiencing some of the same traumas as their constituents. Yet, the best way to manage this situation, if possible, is to develop the portal in advance of disaster so that you are able to hear directly from those end-users who may be forced to disperse if disaster strikes.

Figure 2: A Checklist of Possible Members for the Web Portal Development Group

Possible End-Users	Sources of Information, Functional Support, Credibility
Residents ☑ Most vulnerable to disaster ☑ Less vulnerable to disaster ☑ Diverse neighborhoods ☑ Diverse racial-ethnic and cultural groups ☑ Specific needs groups (e.g., mobility, language access) ☑ Representatives for institutionalized persons (e.g., nursing homes, prisons) **Local businesses** ☑ Most vulnerable to disaster ☑ Less vulnerable to disaster **Faith communities** ☑ Most vulnerable to disaster ☑ Less vulnerable to disaster ☑ Large & small	**Local elected officials** ☑ Representative of chief executive ☑ City/County Commission representation **Local government agencies** ☑ Planning commission ☑ Human services ☑ School system ☑ Law enforcement/justice system ☑ National Guard ☑ Homeland security/disaster preparation/recovery ☑ Library system ☑ Child care providers **Local non-profits** ☑ Nonprofits for disaster response – e.g., Red Cross, Salvation Army ☑ Nonprofits critical for disaster recovery ☑ Community Technology Centers ☑ Community and neighborhood-based organizations ☑ United Way ☑ Community Foundation ☑ Other funders ☑ Faith networks ☑ Child care providers **Local institutions** ☑ Hospitals ☑ Universities, colleges ☑ Major employers

D. Building a Collaborative Relationship.

Trust among WPDG partners is prerequisite to building the trustworthiness of the website portal. If people who develop the portal are not convinced about the sincerity and commitment of their colleagues, this is likely to be evident to the intended end users of the portal—either through indiscreet word-of-mouth or through confusion and unnecessary duplication reflected on the site.

Groups that have had to put a portal together *after* disaster strikes report that such a crisis makes it more urgent (and, ironically, more likely[6]) that groups will put aside their differences to get something done. If you

are reading this before disaster strikes, we hope you won't wait until disaster hits to find ways and reasons to work together as a community!

Here are a few guidelines for promoting collaboration:

- Agree to **share** the credit and the challenges.
- Establish a **decision-making process** that has room for all voices at the table, and stick to it.
- Have **regular check-in** about leadership and facilitation effectiveness, group priorities, and website relevance.
- Be intentional to **analyze** what's working and what's not.
- Ensure that all members have the **information** and understanding they need to participate in informed ways.

Having trust in one another can't be accomplished through an initial agreement. Building trust is a process, so commit to trustworthiness in everything you do.

E. Initial Questions to Be Answered.

1. Who is the intended audience? From the outset, the group must agree about the portal's primary users. *This early decision affects all others.* The Toolkit specifically focuses on creating a portal that becomes an "electronic drum" to enable **residents** to stay connected to friends, family, community leaders, local advocates, service systems, and elected officials in the wake of disaster – or even without being faced with a disaster scenario.

It is not unusual to look for interventions that can satisfy a wide range of users simultaneously. But it is not likely that such interventions (in this case, a web portal) actually work well for different constituencies because of meaningful differences in:

- desired outcomes from the intervention; and
- each group's priority information needs in the midst of crisis.

So agreeing on and specifying the intended audience at the outset will help to avoid confusion and prevent points for disagreement down the road.

2. Who should take the lead? Whoever takes the lead to convene the Web Portal Development Group may or may not be the individual/office/organization that retains the lead once the group is assembled and ready to move ahead.

Why? A variety of reasons. Once the intended audience—in this case, residents—has been agreed upon, some individuals/offices/ organizations may become more credible, more interested in, or otherwise more likely or appropriate to lead the portal development process. Or, local members may choose to enlist the support and guidance of a credible nonprofit beyond the community because of its community-focused history and expertise and its advantage of seeing the community from a perspective that is independent of any single constituency.

Figure 3 offers some criteria to consider when you are deciding who should take the lead in ongoing responsibilities for portal development.

Figure 3:
Suggested Criteria for Lead Responsibility for a Successful Web Portal Development Process

Does the Individual/Office/Organization Have…
☑ **A favorable reputation across the user and source groups identified in Figure 2?**
☑ **Local knowledge across diverse groups and functional areas?**
☑ **Sufficient available resources (time, infrastructure) to coordinate the Group?**
☑ **A commitment to giving this responsibility priority?**
☑ **A commitment to the identified mission of the Group?**

3. Can we build on assets that already exist (e.g., websites, databases, technology sites)? The answer is yes and no. If you are developing the portal *before* disaster strikes, you may be more inclined to build a *dedicated* website from the start and then establish links to other important websites and data bases. If you are developing the portal *after* disaster strikes, you may need to start with an existing website and then migrate users to a dedicated website when it becomes available. Here's why we think a dedicated website may be the preferred long-term choice.

Existing websites already have their designated purposes and typical users. You are interested in achieving a new purpose with a particular point of view that integrates a broad set of information for a wide range of users. It is probably easier to work with a fresh "brand."

Thankfully, a website is not expensive to acquire; it can readily be linked to a wealth of existing information; and its biggest cost—information updating—would have to be done anyway, even if you used an existing website.

The "branding" opportunity that comes with a new website ensures that the Web Portal Development Group can capitalize on the broader credibility and reach of its constituent members rather than the singular credibility and reach of an existing website's host. A new website gives an unencumbered opportunity for the creative communication that the internet offers without the established policies and procedures that may accompany an existing website. Finally, a new website can remain dedicated to its purpose for as long as recovery takes, whereas an existing website may need to return to its original purpose sooner.

Of course, some cost is required for this new enterprise. Prospects for funding are discussed in Component #5 of the Toolkit.

The good news is that most of the work beyond establishing, branding, and advertising a new website can rely on information assets that already exist in the community or emerge through emergency preparedness and disaster recovery efforts. In the section on website content, Component #3, we help you think through what existing data may be most relevant to the new portal and the needs of its intended audience. At the stage of developing content for the portal, you will of necessity rely on existing websites from trusted sources for key links to the information portal users need.

Advantages of creating a dedicated web site rather than using an existing one:

- √ Allows the space to craft a **distinct purpose and identity**.
- √ Offers opportunity to invite a **broader range of users**.
- √ Builds on the **credibility and reach** of each Development Group member rather than any single one.
- √ Can be governed by **policies and procedures** developed specifically for the site.
- √ Has a **dedicated purpose** for as long as routine use proves successful or disaster recovery takes.

Many communities already have strong platforms from which portals can benefit enormously, resulting in less initial work. For example, over 65% of the U.S. population has access to United Way 2-1-1 call centers for one-stop information about:

- ***Basic Human Needs Resources*:** Food banks, clothing, shelters, rent assistance, utility assistance.
- ***Physical and Mental Health Resources:*** Medical information lines, crisis intervention services, support groups, counseling, drug and alcohol intervention, rehabilitation, health insurance programs, Medicaid and Medicare, maternal health, children's health insurance programs.
- ***Employment Support:*** Unemployment benefits, financial assistance, job training, transportation assistance, education programs.
- ***Support for Older Americans and Persons with Disabilities:*** Home health care, adult day care, congregate meals, Meals on Wheels, respite care, transportation, and homemaker services.
- ***Support for Children, Youth and Families:*** Quality childcare, 'Success by 6' programs, after school programs, Head Start, family resource centers, summer camps and recreation programs, mentoring, tutoring, and protective services.
- ***Volunteer opportunities and donations***.

The information available through these call centers could readily be mapped with portal content, and vice versa. The point here is not to duplicate the information or outreach resources already available in your community, but instead build on them.

A useful rule of thumb is that the WPDG wants to avoid becoming seen as a competitor to potential allies. Organizations and groups that may be perceived as doing something akin to the portal—but not so close that it could be modified to *become* the portal—should be considered for participation in the WPDC. The bigger the "tent" for portal development, the wider the credibility and reach it will have, the greater its reputation for collaboration will become, and the more allies it can count on throughout a crisis.

4. What basic information do we need to know in order to develop a useful resource? While you will of course develop your own list based on your specific circumstances, here are some issues to be sure to consider:

- ☑ ***Where are the most affected residents likely to be if disaster strikes?*** It is possible that your community planning or emergency preparedness office or perhaps a university or nonprofit data center already has geo-coded neighborhood-based data that map the area's vulnerabilities. Basic resident demographic data and important contextual information about neighborhood residents (e.g., those who are in nursing homes, incarcerated, linguistically isolated) is valuable here as well. If disaster has already struck, you may need to rely initially on local emergency responders and other disaster service units to get an understanding of where residents are. If you are in emergency preparedness mode, you may be able to enlist community leaders to host surveys of residents to get a close-up sense of where they might go in a disaster.

- ☑ ***What are each neighborhood's and the larger community's strengths?*** Mapping local assets gives you people, places, and sources you can count on in crisis – or everyday under regular circumstances. For example, what individuals are at the center of key social networks? How can their knowledge be useful in developing a user-friendly website? What places in the community do residents frequent, and thus would be good places to advertise the portal? Where do residents get their trusted information? Whether disaster has struck or not, you will want people who already know this information to be part of the Web Portal Development Group.

- ☑ ***What are the users' needs and circumstances?*** The section below on web content, Component #4, identifies typical information needs, but your circumstances will dictate details here. Be sure to anticipate emotional as well as physical needs, both during the crisis and often for a considerable time afterwards. Also keep in mind residents of different linguistic backgrounds and literacy levels as you proceed.

- ☑ ***What existing websites should we be familiar with so we can link to them and not duplicate their work?*** Since your goal is to create a one-stop information source, you can minimize your work by identifying existing credible resources in the specific issue areas for which the Online Lifeline will provide information. Whether disaster has already struck or not, you will want people connected to credible information resources to be part of the Web Portal Development Group.

- ☑ ***What existing technology capabilities can we count on?*** Here you will want to map locations in the area (both locally and in places where residents might disperse) where residents can go to access computers (e.g., Community Technology Centers, libraries, schools, colleges and universities). In the event of emergency, some of these sites may not be accessible, so it is important to have as robust an initial list as you can develop.

- ☑ ***How can we connect with residents who do not use computers or the internet?*** See Component #3, Section F, for a variety of alternatives.

F. Project Plan.

You will want to have a realistic plan for development and implementation of the portal. Thinking of it in phases will make it manageable, regardless of the pressures of the moment.

Figure 4 offers one logical set of ideas that starts with essential start-up tasks and moves to implementation. Its sequencing focuses on what communities beset by disaster have seen as their immediate needs and also offers options further out that require greater technological capabilities. If you have the time to experiment *before* a disaster strikes, you should test interactive technology features so that users will be familiar with them in the event of disaster. The beauty of creating a portal for emergency preparedness is that it can also be a powerful tool for information sharing and civic engagement in *routine* times. If you are developing the portal *after* disaster strikes, you will want to guarantee that the basic web-based function of information sharing is robust and well-used before considering functions that require more technological capacity on the part of both producers and users.

Obviously, the project plan must be accompanied by an understanding of budget and other resource requirements. Component #5 below provides guidance about these. Your plan must be flexible in order to align with the resources that do become available and adaptable in the face of any inability to obtain certain resources.

Figure 4: A Sample Sequence for Portal Development & Implementation

PREPARATION

Register the Domain Name
- Determine who should "own" it.
- Consider the name in the context of long-term branding.

Develop a Shared Vision and Mission Statement for the Portal
- Identify your shared aspirations
- Specify the intended audience and their needs

Do Local Reconnaissance
- What exists that can be built upon?
- Who has data we need?
- What information do residents need? Does the community need?

Secure Partners
- Government
- Technology
- Community
- Investors
- Data/information providers

Identify Access Sites/ Acquire Technology as Needed
- Acquaint users with sites.
- Offer technical assistance to ensure accessibility.

IMPLEMENT PHASE I

- Design website
- Secure content for site
- Install workstations in access sites as necessary
- Beta test the portal

IMPLEMENT PHASE II

- Offer free e-mail services
- Link to important websites re: housing, neighborhood services, schools and health
- Publish job postings
- Provide updates of critical information
- Enable online Listening Circles
- Evaluate and correct course as necessary

IMPLEMENT PHASE 3

- Provide public forms screening & application filing
- Plan for ongoing portal availability
- Evaluate and correct course as necessary

IMPLEMENT PHASE 4

- Undertake community webcasting.[7]
- Offer electronic voting.
- Evaluate and correct course as necessary

G. Operations.

Meeting Logistics. If the portal is being developed within a preparedness scenario, the usual questions and decisions about meetings will apply. However, you also have the opportunity to test meeting scenarios that will occur under emergency circumstances: conference calls, internet connectedness, and webcasting. If you can, use these while you have time to learn about them and their potential.

How meetings will occur under emergency conditions is an important issue. Local circumstances will dictate the possibility of on-site, in-person meetings or the need for alternative arrangements such as conference calls, internet connectedness, and webcasting.

Subcommittees. Given all of the work to be done, the WPDG can benefit from the creation of a select number of subcommittees. Other communities have found at least the following to be valuable:

- **Technology Subcommittee**: To identify and secure needed hardware.
- **Content Subcommittee:** To identify and access needed information.
- **Communications Subcommittee:** To direct users to the portal and keep its availability and utility fresh in residents' minds.

Timelines and Deadlines. The portal will be seen as reliable to the extent that it delivers what is advertised **ON TIME**. Information must be kept current so that users believe in its reliability. When the website is launched, it must provide sufficient reason for users to return—namely, because of the valuable and trustworthy information available in a single location at the time that users need it.

If you are developing the portal as an emergency preparedness resource, you have the benefit of time to anticipate its permanent home.

The permanent home should meet the same criteria identified in Figure 3. In addition, it should have explicit plans for functionality and continuity of operations in the midst of disaster.

Your Online Lifeline cannot afford to be knocked out of commission when it is needed most!

See Component #5 for more information about issues of sustainability.

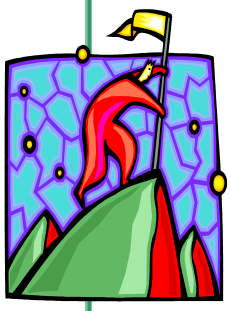
Component #2 • Portal Management and Implementation

A "To-Do" List for This Component

1. Create a **Web Portal Steering Committee**.
2. Identify Steering Committee **membership** from a **wide range of important constituencies** and functional areas so that you have a good mix of user voices and content expertise.
3. Hire an **Editor-in-Chief** and create **Editorial Boards**.
4. Determine the portal's **organizational home**.

Cautions Regarding This Component

- Be sure that the portal's **organizational home** shares the values of the portal project and enjoys broad-based credibility across a wide range of constituencies.



Lessons Learned About This Component

- **Honor processes** put in place for decision-making to maintain trust.
- Include on the Steering Committee **residents living in areas of vulnerability** as well as those who are **less likely to be disrupted or displaced** in a disaster.
- Give priority in the hiring of an **Editor** to someone who is **familiar with the local landscape**.

A. Purpose of the Web Portal Steering Committee.

The people tasked to launch the portal are often not the same people tasked to move it ahead on a day to day basis. The Web Portal Steering Committee (WPSC) represents the second stage of the Online Lifeline's growth. This stage is possible when all relevant groups feel buy-in for the mission and are ready to hand day-to-day oversight and implementation to a smaller contingent of participants.

The Steering Committee has overall responsibility, at a minimum, to:

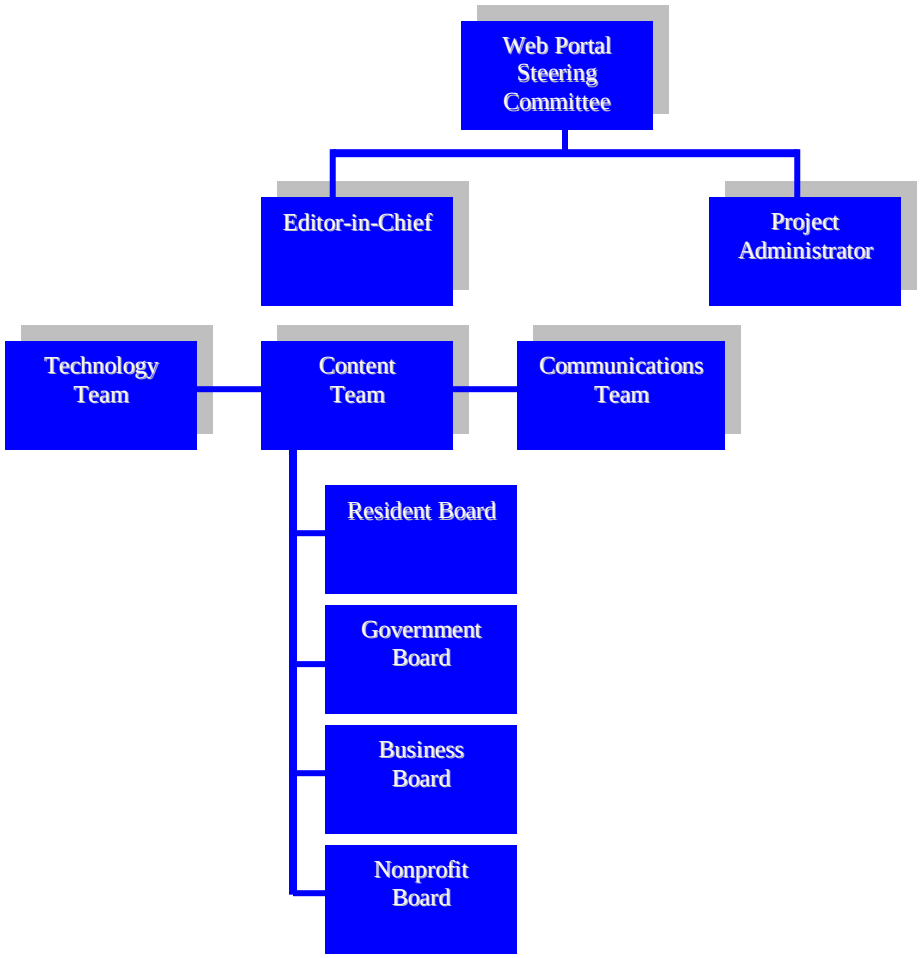
- Ensure that a **wide range of input and feedback** continues, including most especially from those residents and neighborhoods whose voices are too often left out.
- Sustain and codify the **shared purpose** for the portal.
- Build **consensus** and promote **collaboration** throughout the work.
- Maintain the portal with timely and current **information** that serves the needs of residents and the needs of the community for **connection** and **engagement**.
- Continue a realistic **implementation timeline** that the community can count on, adding valuable components to the original design as needed.
- Anticipate and address the **evolving challenges** of residents' circumstances.
- Plan for the **long-term presence** of the portal, if necessary or desired.

B. Structure and Composition of the Steering Committee.

At this phase, the structure of the portal effort will shift to some mixture of Steering Committee members, staff and volunteers. The Steering Committee will be considerably smaller than the Web Portal Development Group. This section lays out one possible arrangement, but certainly variations can also work.

Figure 5 suggests a possible organizational structure for the contributing personnel at this phase of the portal's operation.

Figure 5:
Possible Organizational Structure for a Web Portal Steering Committee And Other Portal Associates



As with the Web Portal Development Group, the Steering Committee should reflect the range of voices, information, and expertise needed from both user groups and source groups. However, it will not be as large as the WPDG, since the WPDG has already provided the breadth of early input needed for the portal and engendered the trust of constituency groups. One representative from each of the larger categories found in Figure 2—more than one from the resident category—is a good place to start when thinking about Steering Committee membership. The Steering Committee is entrusted to honor the earlier breadth of participation, adjust it as circumstances develop, and serve the shared mission over some greater length of time.

The same subcommittees that shaped portal development—technology (hardware), content, and communications (public relations)—can continue to serve this phase well. An overall **Project Administrator** is a valuable addition at this juncture to handle everyday functions and to become the

immediate point person—whether disaster has struck or not. The Project Administrator can be responsible for website protocols (with the Editor-in-Chief and the Editorial Boards), budgeting and fundraising, meeting facilitation, and partnership relationships (including the technology industry, governmental units, foundations, and data and service providers).

The job of **Editor-in-Chief** is a new key role for this phase of portal implementation. That person would be supported by a Content Team representing key user and source groups to ensure that web content meets everyone's needs and standards of trustworthiness. In important respects, the Editor's role is that of a community planner and organizer: finding and mobilizing the best information resources in response to resident needs; using web "traffic reports" to understand what people need; leveraging partners' information; and being continually attuned to the shifting landscape of preparedness or recovery information needs.

C. Portal Editor and Editorial Boards.

The Editor-in-Chief manages the day-to-day operations of a web-based information portal, and the offline communications strategy designed to support emergency preparedness/recovery/rebuilding efforts. A sample job description for this critically important position is found in ***Attachment A***.

Preference in the selection of an Editor-in-Chief should be given to **local individuals** for two critical reasons:

- Local **knowledge** is a strong platform for insightful decision making; and
- Awarding **jobs** to local people supports the local economy.

Additional considerations in hiring include:

- Whether or not to consider applicants already associated with the Web Portal Development Group;
- The potential to find applicants at local colleges and universities;
- Preference for good writing and bureaucratic facility over technological savvy; and
- The need for candidates who respect all portal constituencies but hold no allegiance to any one of them.

To review candidates for the position of Editor-in-Chief, the Steering Committee can appoint a **Hiring Committee** from among its membership. Careful attention to member selection will ensure that this committee is as representative as the WPCG itself. A sample hiring process for this committee is presented in **Attachment B.**

The Editor-in-Chief should be supported by **Editorial Boards** that oversee content for its value, timeliness, and trustworthiness. **Attachment C** describes typical roles for these board members.

D. Operations.

The Work. The day-to-day work is undertaken and overseen by the Editor-in-Chief and that individual's Editorial Boards. The Steering Committee should plan to meet quarterly, perhaps alternating in-person meetings and conference calls. The Steering Committee could also establish a special 'Team Member' feature on the portal website for discussions between Committee meetings. Of course, the Editor-in-Chief can seek input and advice from WPSC members as needs and issues arise.

Organizational 'Home.' At this phase, portal operations will need an organizational home. That home will, at minimum, serve as the fiscal agent for portal financial accountability. The organization may also house the Project Administrator and Editor, if the WPSC determines the need for a physical location in addition to a virtual operation. If the WPSC chooses to house the portal within an existing organization rather than creating a new 501(c)3, the existing organization should, at minimum:

- Have a **mission** that complements the portal;
- Share the **values** of the portal project;
- Have a good **reputation** with residents of all backgrounds; and
- Be able to **manage the financial resources** of the portal project.

Component #3 • Technology

A "To-Do" List for This Component

1. Determine **hardware and software needs** and how to fulfill them.
2. Identify a web **server location**, the level of capacity needed, and important security features.
3. Identify **community-based locations** for access points.
4. Identify the kinds of **technical assistance** needed.
5. If you have interactive features on the web, utilize **webcasts** strategically.
6. Develop **alternative channels for information** access for those who cannot use the web portal.

Cautions Regarding This Component

- In the midst of disaster, be wary of offers of technology assistance that appear **too good to be true** – they may be.

Lessons Learned About This Component

- Great ideas for pushing the technology envelope may not seem so once it's time to implement them. They are only **great ideas** if they directly **meet user needs** and funding can be obtained to move forward with them.

A. Equipment for Website Access.

Portal access requires ready availability of computers for residents, wherever they may be, whether for emergency preparedness or after disaster strikes. This issue should be considered in phases. First, what computers can be accessed immediately in the local area? Then, what plans are necessary for longer-term accessibility if residents are displaced from their homes, businesses, and communities?

Every community is likely to have certain sites that may already house computers for public or constituency use, such as:

- Community Technology Centers
- Libraries
- Public schools
- Youth and after-school programs
- Community colleges, colleges, and universities
- Nonprofit and faith settings

A likely choice for portal roll-out should be **Community Technology Centers** (CTCs), since they have a good track record of being able to bridge the digital divide by specifically serving lower-income communities. The Community Technology Centers' Network (CTCnet) has made meaningful inroads into computer access and technology capacity for underserved communities. With over 700 members nationwide, CTCnet members in local communities offer critical infrastructures, know-how, and resident networks that can be invaluable for emergency preparedness and disaster recovery. CTCs should be identified both in your own community and in any locations where residents are likely to go if they must disperse when disaster strikes. CTCs also can be designated in advance as Reunion Sites – predetermined places where people can reconnect – both for those who have been displaced and their loved ones.

If you are creating the portal for emergency preparedness, you can anticipate disaster scenarios and identify in advance where likely locales should be for public computer access (e.g., where FEMA trailers are concentrated). Where time allows, all locations should be evaluated for their availability and viability in the event of disaster. At the same time, backup plans should be made in case these sites become compromised by emergency situations or cannot accommodate the anticipated or actual volume of users. Obviously, sites should be identified across as many

neighborhoods as possible so that—emergency conditions permitting—residents can readily access the portal. When making decisions about the placement of public computers, ensure that communities currently with limited computer access receive priority.

If the evaluation of the number of available computers suggests the likelihood of a shortage in the face of disaster scenarios, the following strategies might be considered:

- Use available emergency preparedness **public funds** to increase the stock of computers and the scope of the sites where they might be accessed. Contact your county government to inquire about funding possibilities.
- Obtain donations of equipment and connections from **computer technology firms** (e.g., Dell, Cisco, HP, Google) and **communications providers** (e.g., Verizon, Bell South). Your local Chamber of Commerce may be a good place to start this inquiry. Or, if you have time to plan, identify community liaisons in these companies and help them understand how they can support community preparedness.
- Develop requests for **foundation funding** to increase the availability of necessary equipment. Find out the names of program officers, funding priorities, and grant cycles if you have time to undertake advance preparation. If not, be sure to include local foundation representatives on the Web Portal Development Group. Use their connections to the extent possible.
- Identify **readily accessible sites** that can fill any geographic gaps in availability, such as local colleges and universities. Get to know directors of local institutions' computer centers and libraries.

If possible, it is valuable to build relationships with the technology industry, computer site providers, and connections to funding well in advance of emergency circumstances.

Once a plan for local access is in motion, a second consideration is a **plan for access by residents who may be or have been displaced** from the local community because of disaster. The same questions that you answered about computer access in your own community should be investigated in those places that may become host communities for local residents until they can return home. Specifically:

- Who are the likely host communities?

- What public computer resources are available there for the creation of "Reunion Centers"?
- Should "Reunion Centers" be piloted first and then phased in?
- What arrangements are necessary so that displaced residents can get access to those sites as needed?
- What technical assistance might be needed (see below)?

B. Servers.

The **website server** (also called the "host") is the computer containing the software that your website uses so that it can provide information and documents via the World Wide Web.[8] Critical decisions must be made about:

- which **equipment** to purchase;
- the **number** of servers needed;
- server **location;**
- server **capacity;**
- server **administration;** and
- server **security.**

In addition to the website server, you will need a **database server** to hold all the information distributed through and collected by your website.

Choosing the Equipment. High-end web servers from any of the major computer manufacturers will be very similar in terms of their specifications and cost, so any of them will be suitable purchases. Prospective technology vendors will probably recommend that your server be a 1U rackmount unit, and that your database server be a 1U, 2U or 3U rackmount unit, depending on the amount of data you will store.[9] It also is more efficient, short- and long-term, to purchase a brand-name server rather than having one designed and built from scratch specifically for you.

The terms of purchase from a particular vendor may be an important consideration in selecting one brand of computer over another. For example, one vendor may not require payment for 60 days, which could be a critical factor if your community needs time to complete fundraising but would like to get the website up and running as quickly as possible. In addition, if the technology firm the community has hired is a small company,

it may not have the capital to make such a large purchase, and may be unable to wait for reimbursement from a local government that is severely challenged in the aftermath of a large-scale calamity.

Number of Servers. There will be a high number of users in a disaster situation, so for load balance and redundancy it is strongly recommended that you have at least one backup unit of your website server in the event that the primary unit crashes or is damaged.

Only one database server is recommended, since it would be necessary to replicate your data on any additional servers.

Location of Server. The primary server should be placed in a location that you think is unlikely to be affected by a disaster, and the backup server should be in a different location. In New Orleans, for example, the LouisianaRebuilds web server was located in a protected location in the City of New Orleans, and the backup server was placed 75 miles away in Baton Rouge, LA.

Using a data center or computer center run by a government or university may seem a logical choice, but there are some drawbacks. For example, a community may originally receive rent-free space for its server within a government agency's Data Center. However, if the agency has to begin charging for the space—which can include fully-loaded overhead expenses—the cost may become prohibitive. Another problem is access: a government office will probably have restricted hours of operation, and your technology contractors may not be able to enter the building during non-business hours. A commercial web server facility is always open, and authorized members of your technology team will have access to the server at any time.

Server Capacity. The potential volume of users after a disaster means that your server should have sufficient capacity, based on the number of people from your community that you believe will need to access the site before or after a disaster. Technology experts hired by your community will be able to advise you on this issue.

Server Administration. Hiring a technology firm to manage the server and provide technical assistance is strongly recommended. One option is to negotiate a multi-year, fixed-fee retainer where the firm would provide an unlimited number of hours of service to address all server issues that arise. Retainer fees would be higher in the beginning (when you would expect to have the most start-up problems and therefore need the most technical assistance) and would likely get lower over time.

Server Security. Again, it is recommended that your community use a commercial web server facility because they have the appropriate physical environment for servers (e.g., temperature controls) and also safety and access protocols.

C. Software.

The first software decision is which operating platform to use for the website server. There are numerous options, with Windows© and Linux (or other Unix-like systems using the Linux kernel) being the most common systems in use. Communities that are considering the Solaris Operating System (a product of Sun Microsystems), or Apple's Mac OS X operating system should keep in mind that there are many fewer technology firms that are familiar with these platforms—which will narrow the number of service providers and make it harder to find replacement staff.

The second software decision relates to what should be used to build the website. Many options are available (**Figure 6**). In New Orleans, the web portal team opted to use Drupal because a) the software was considered easiest to modify, given that community needs would probably change frequently, and b) the software was considered easiest for a non-technical person to learn to use.

Figure 6: Selected List of Website Software Options

DRUPAL	A free and open-source modular framework and content management system (CMS) written in the programming language PHP (Personal Home Page). Like many modern CMSs, Drupal allows the system administrator to create and organize content, customize the presentation, automate administrate tasks, and manage site visitors and contributors.
JOOMLA!	A free and open-source content management system for publishing content on the web and on intranets. The system includes features such as page caching to improve performance, RSS (Really Simple Syndication) feeds, printable versions of pages, news flashes, blogs, polls, website searching, and language internationalization.
MAMBO	A free software/open-source content management system for creating and managing websites through a simple web interface. Mambo also includes more advanced features such as page caching to improve performance on busy sites, advanced templating techniques, and a fairly robust Application Programming Interface (API). It can also automate many tasks such as web indexing for static pages. Mambo can provide RSS feeds, printable versions of pages, news flashes, blogs, forums, polls, calendars, website searching, language internationalization, and other possibilities.
TYPO3	A free and open-source enterprise-level content management system written in Hypertext Preprocessor (known as PHP, the recursive acronym for Personal Home Page). It has become a widespread content management system on the web and in intranets.
WORDPRESS	A blog publishing system written in PHP and backed by a MySQL database. The latest release of WordPress is version 2.5.1, released on April 25, 2008 and distributed under the GNU ("**G**NU's **N**ot **U**nix") General Public License.

Source: Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia. Information accessed 6. 9.08.

D. Technical Assistance.

Various support personnel will be required in order to ensure optimal functioning and maximum use of the website. Wherever possible, existing staff and volunteers from identified sites should be enlisted and trained on the portal so that they can assist users as needed. If your community or a key nonprofit such as the United Way already has a list of potential volunteers, this list can be mined for individuals capable of offering their time and skills on behalf of residents needing help with use of the portal.

For **hardware and software concerns**, a technology contractor who can provide on-call technical support may be more cost-effective than using technical support personnel who charge by the hour. Smaller local contractors are more likely to offer plan flexibility and can also assist in fielding outside vendor offers because they are more likely to understand what local people need.

E. Interactive Features of the Website.

We start this section with a **caution** before focusing on the potential of the more sophisticated features of web utility.

First, the caution: in creating the web portal, form should follow function. Users' needs should be in the lead, not technology. The WPDG and then the WPSC should determine users' *priority* needs and then identify the best technology features for meeting those needs. A website with a lot of bells and whistles can become a distraction if it drives out work around the bread-and-butter features that users rely on most, or drives off users who are intimidated by too much technology.

With that caution in mind, here are some possibilities for valuable web-based interaction for everyday community functions and later for disaster recovery:

- **Official Forms**: The portal could allow residents to complete and submit various kinds of application forms online.
- **Service/Entitlement Assessments:** The portal could have a mechanism for users to determine if they are accessing all of the resources for which they are eligible.
- **Webcasts:** Webcasting refers to transmission of video over the internet, and could be used for many purposes and by many audiences. For example, there could be webcasts of **town hall or City Council/County Commission/School Board meetings** that would include a mechanism

for listeners to submit questions that can be fielded by a moderator and used in e-polling; local government could prepare videos documenting neighborhood conditions, which could be webcast to help residents or businesses to determine whether they should return to a particular area; residents could transmit cell phone photos or videos to be considered (after an appropriate vetting process) for posting on the website.

- **Social Networking Sites:** Communities could promote **Facebook** and **YouTube** neighborhood and community connections where residents can tell their stories and stay in touch.[10]
- **Contractor Data:** Communities could sponsor a **contractor rating system** connected to a database that would allow residents to obtain information on licenses, complaints, and exemplary service providers. A web monitor would want to pay particular attention to issues like the website's credibility and reliability, given that such a feature can be vulnerable to misuse if there are no mechanisms for ensuring that the information provided is legitimate.
- **Online Voting:** Local governments could devise a trustworthy system for residents to **vote online**.

The more you can engage residents prior to disaster in use of such interactive features, the more potential exists for the resilience of community networks and bonds throughout a crisis. This is an emergency preparedness strategy that also pays off today. In the midst of crisis, residents' capacities may be challenged to adopt new technologies, so you will want to decide which interactive features are valuable and critical to resident and community well-being at which points in time.

F. Alternatives to Website Portal

Residents will differ in their ability to access and use computers. As a consequence, the ability to reach the widest possible range of residents will be dependent on both technical assistance with the portal *and* alternatives to the portal. Your group also should ask professionals about the best strategies for reaching **low-literacy, non-literate, and non-English-speaking residents** affected by an emergency.

Figure 7 lists alternative channels of communication with residents that should be among those considered. Note that **one- and two-way transmitters**[11]—i.e., pagers—have not been listed as viable communications options for residents. This is primarily because pager use among the general population has declined precipitously since the widespread availability and use of cell phones. There are, however, some

areas of the United States where cell phone coverage is limited, and many residents may continue to use pagers to send and receive messages.

One- and two-way transmitter systems are still used by first-responders, homeland security, government agencies, and critical-service industries such as hospitals. And because of their interoperability, these transmitters can be used to communicate with the public and others who are not part of the paging network. Some examples:

- Police and fire departments could send messages to **electronic billboards on highways** to direct residents to or away from particular areas, or to provide updates on critical issues.
- Universities could transmit warnings and other messages to students, faculty and staff in **buildings outfitted with electronic billboards**.

Figure 7: Web Portal Alternatives

PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS (PSAS)	Use radio PSAs (and TV if electricity is functioning) to get the word out about the portal and the latest critical information. Enlist well-known radio personalities to assist in this effort, and include radio and television stations that target non-English-speaking residents and specific racial/ethic groups that may not obtain information primarily through mainstream media outlets.
800 NUMBERS	Set up a 1-800 information and referral call center that could be linked to existing 211 systems.
KIOSKS & BILLBOARDS	Use kiosks at public events and billboards in high-traffic areas to communicate critical information.
COMMUNITY GROUPS AND INSTITUTIONS	Partner in communications with regional, ethnic, and neighborhood newspapers, disaster recovery groups, and other social service organizations already connected to residents.
TEXT MESSAGING	Use cell phones to broadcast text messages to subscribers on each provider's network.
COMMUNITY MEETINGS AND EVENTS	Conduct town hall meetings or community suppers to exchange information and receive resident input on key issues.

Component #4 • Website Design and Content

A "To-Do" List for This Component

1. Decide on a **name** and **look** for the website.
2. Develop criteria and a **vetting process** for selecting information for the website.
3. Identify **trustworthy** and **up-to-date** information sources.
4. **Prioritize** and phase in key information needs.
5. Review materials and presentation for **readability** and **user-friendliness**.
6. Build **interactive features** on the website as user needs and resources allow.

Cautions Regarding This Component

- Ensure that the website is accessible for those with **low literacy** and **limited English** proficiency.
- Maintain **information/content integrity**, especially where the website has interactive features.

Lessons Learned About This Component

- Acquire a **domain name** and its complements NOW! Likely names are already being reserved by those who seek to profit from others' misfortunes. The choice of ".info" makes sense, since the portal is an information resource.
- Other websites may not update their information as often as you do. Check links from your website regularly and provide your users with notice of how often the links are updated.

A. Establishing and "Branding" the Portal.

Your website portal will benefit from having a distinct and independent identity—even though, and perhaps *because*, it relies on so many other sources for its content. The portal's identity will be carried by its name, purpose, logo, look, and consistency from page to page.

The first essential step is to acquire a domain name, its complements (.info, .org, .com, .net), and—if necessary—names very close in title in order to minimize user confusion and make it easy to get to the portal. A logical choice for the portal is ".info," which conveys its main function.

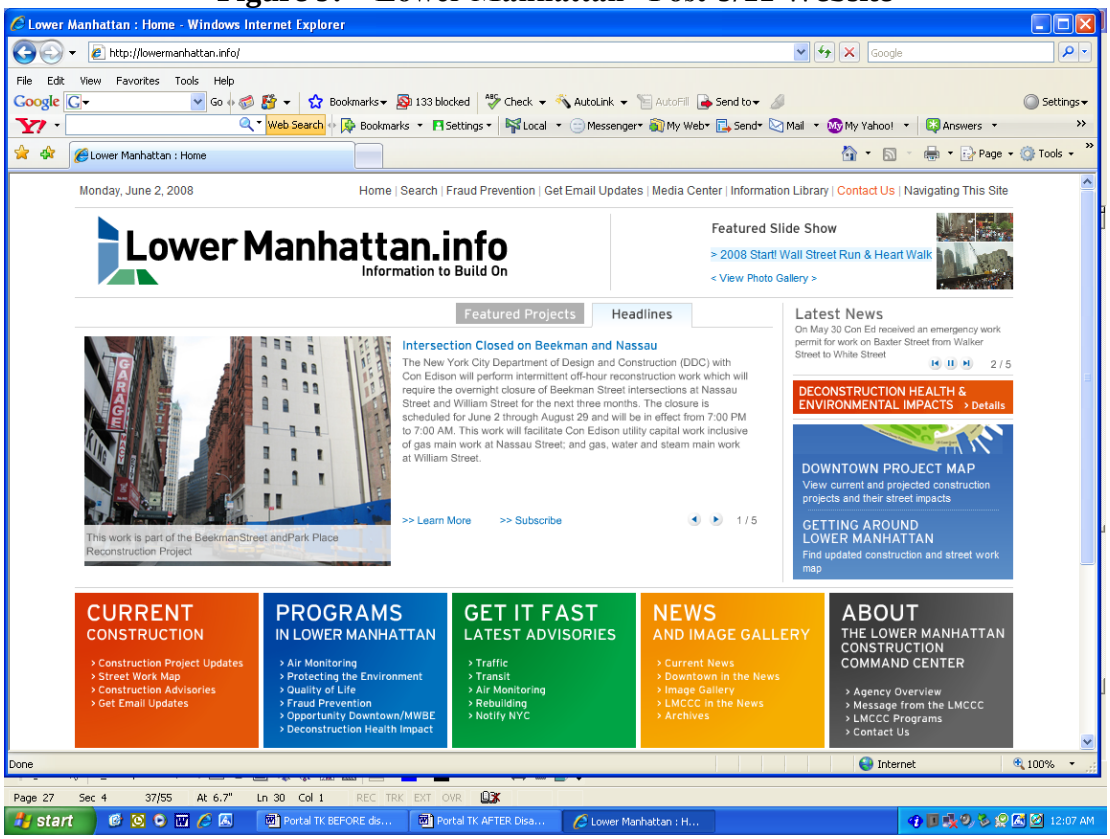
If the portal will complement an overall preparedness or recovery initiative, you may want to create an identity—a name or logo--that shows some relationship to that initiative. If no such initiative exists, it will be important to create an identity that as much as possible avoids inadvertent connection in users' minds to other undertakings. **Figures 8** and **9** portray, respectively, the website portals developed in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina (www.LouisianaRebuilds.info) and September 11 (www.LowerManhattan.info).

In earlier stages you sought appropriate buy-in so that expected users and key information sources endorsed the portal as the *go-to location* for up to date and trustworthy information about preparedness and recovery. This purpose should be featured prominently as some of the first information a user's eye encounters on the home page, perhaps as a "tag line."

While your content will consistently pull from key information sources, try to maintain an integrated website look from page to page. Providing information headlines on the portal, with direct links to the other sources, is the easiest way to maintain design consistency.

Figure 8: "LouisianaRebuilds.info" Website

Figure 9: "Lower Manhattan" Post-9/11 Website



B. Readability & Ease of Use.

In order for the portal to be successful, you will want to take into account a number of factors that make websites readable and easy to use. Your chosen web designer can offer its own list of such factors, but here are a few key ones:

- The **reading level** of expected users;
- Options for users with primary **languages other than English**;
- The number of **"pages" on the site**;
- **Commonsense names** for each page;
- The ability of the **search engine** to recognize the implicit and explicit meanings of typical searches;
- Use of colors and fonts that will make the site readable by **users with visual impairments**[12];
- Consideration of the use of **international symbols** (for hospital, police, etc.) instead of other graphics;
- **Ease of navigation** and ability to get to desired information quickly; and
- Use of **non-technical people to review content** to ensure user-friendliness.

C. Accurate and Timely Information.

The Web Portal Steering Committee should take steps to ensure that information posted on the website is high priority, timely, and accurate. This point cannot be under-stated. Any misstep using inaccurate information risks losing the confidence of portal users. And lack of timely provision of information undercuts users' interest in returning. Credibility and reliability are the watchwords of portal value.

Given the range of information that the portal could contain, some criteria must be established for what receives priority. Information may need to be phased in. The overriding question is: "What information is critical for what phases of portal launch and expansion?" One suggested anchor criterion is: "Will this information be critical for the recovery of residents in the face of disaster?" If the portal is developed before disaster strikes, an additional criterion might be, "Will this get residents to begin using the portal as their trusted one-stop source for important information?"

In general, information about housing, neighborhood services, schools, child care, and health is likely to receive priority based on either of these anchor criteria. (See **Figure 10**.)

Figure 10: Tips for Website Content

- Content must be **mission-driven, not partner-driven**. Select it with the end user in mind, not just because it's available.
- Filter the information you glean from partner sites to only the most **"community-useful"** news.
- Think **two months ahead** about content needs so that the site will **always** be fresh and useful.
- Indicate **timeliness of information**: "Data collected on mm/dd/yyyy"; "Information best used by mm/dd/yyyy"; "Frequency of updates [daily/weekly/monthly]."
- Conduct **regular audits** of all site information to maintain credibility.

Timely and accurate information will depend first on careful selection of portal partners for the Editorial Boards and then on their faithful implementation of the criteria they establish for their work. The Boards should consider asking key information sources to agree to "ownership" of a particular page or segment of information so that responsibility for accuracy and timeliness lies in those closest to the information. The Editor-in-Chief and, when necessary, the Steering Committee serve as final decision-makers about what goes on the site.

It is recommended that the Project Administrator, Steering Committee, and Editor-in-Chief, with input from the Editorial Boards, develop a document with **Editorial Protocols** grounded in the mission and goals of the portal. An example is provided in **Attachment D**.

Since accurate and timely information from a one-stop source is the "calling card" of the portal, attention to the protocol is critical to the credibility of the website.

D. Informational Content.

An initial web scan should be conducted to learn what sites already exist that can be linked to the portal. This will avoid duplication. The scan should identify how often the other sites are updated so you can determine their reliability. **Figure 11** suggests content areas that can be searched for official or credible information. It also provides a menu of types of information that users are likely to need addressed through the portal.

In addition, consideration should be given to:

- interactive maps and data of **neighborhood conditions**, with the capability of modeling using geographic information systems; and
- capabilities for user **e-polling, webcasts** of official meetings, and communications with elected representatives.

The caution about the above two ideas, once again, is that their choice should be driven first by user needs (assuming available resources), not by those who are enamored with the latest technological bells and whistles. Remember: function drives form!

Figure 11: Illustrative Content for Website (Site Map)

Louisiana REBUILDS.info
Your first stop on the way home

COMMUNITY

Recovery Assistance
- Resources
- Social Service
- Legal Assistance

Moving Back
- Making the Decision to Move Back
- Getting Back Home
- When You Arrive

Local Services
- Parish Websites
- Police and Fire
- Utilities
- Transportation
- Utilities
- Trash, Dumping and Recycling
- Report Blight and Other Nuisances
- What's Open

Public Safety
- Crime
- Crime Prevention
- Flood Prevention
- Emergency Preparedness

Volunteer/Donate

Neighborhoods
- Broadmoor
- Carollton
- Central City
- French Quarter/CBD
- Gentilly
- Jefferson Parish
- Lakeview
- Marigny/Bywater
- Mid-City
- New Orleans East
- Ninth Ward
- Plaquemines Parish
- St. Bernard Parish
- St. Tammany Parish
- Treme and 6th - 8th Wards
- Uptown/Garden District
- West Bank/Algiers

Local Life
- Local News and Radio
- Arts and Culture
- Neighborhoods
- Community Organization Profiles
- Community Opinion

HOUSING

Homeowners
- Financial Assistance
- Clean Your House
- Gut Your House
- Demolish Your House
- Rebuild Your House
- Permits

Buy A House
- First-Time Homebuyer Programs
- Home Loan Programs
- Adjudicated/Blighted Property Programs

Contractor Guide
- Hire A Contractor
- Contractor Reviews
- Check for a License
- Pricing Guide
- Protect Yourself from Fraud
- Report a Contractor

Renters
- Get Rental Assistance
- Find Housing
- Rental Market Information

Utilities
- Get Utility Assistance
- Contact Utility Companies

Insurance

FEMA Information
- Trailers
- FEMA Answers
- FEMA Flood Maps

EDUCATION & CHILDCARE

Schools K-12
- Open Schools
- School Contacts
- Other Useful Information

College

Childcare/Youth Activities
- Find Childcare
- Childcare Assistance
- Youth Activities

HEALTH & SAFETY

Hospitals and Clinics
- Open Hospitals and Clinics
- Healthcare Updates

Seniors

Mental Health
- Find Mental Healthcare
- Mental Healthcare Assistance

JOBS & LOCAL BUSINESSES

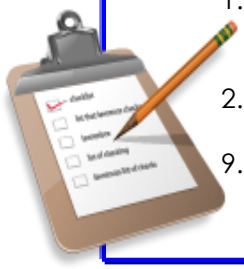
Job Resources

Job Training

Business Assistance
- Business Assistance
- Business Incentives
- New Orleans Resources

Component #5 • Portal Funding and Sustainability

A "To-Do" List for This Component

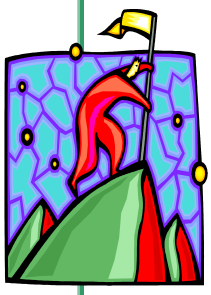


1. Develop a **multi-phase budget** for start-up, build-up, maintenance and sustainability, aligned with your project plan.
2. Identify potential **funders** for each element of each phase of the budget.
9. Agree on a **fiscal agent or permanent home** for portal operations.

Cautions Regarding This Component

- Resist **funding that would divert you** from your primary mission.

Lessons Learned About This Component



- Prior to seeking funds, be sure you can document that the portal is a **community priority.**
- **Think creatively** about how your funding request links to a potential contributor's exact mission or interest.
- To the extent possible, obtain **unrestricted funds.**

A. Developing A Budget.

A budget, no matter how preliminary, is essential in order to seek support. Potential supporters will want to know exactly what your "ask" is and how a positive response from them will contribute to an overall plan.

Portal development and maintenance is not a money-making proposition. It will probably require extensive in-kind contributions of time, space, data, and other resources, as well as flexible funds. While the development is very labor-intensive, the good news is that this sweat equity builds trust and commitment in the process.

The budget should be aligned with and mapped against the Project Plan discussed in Component #1. Obviously, the availability of resources and project plan implementation are interdependent, with adjustments being made as necessary at every phase. Two budgets are useful: a **minimal budget** containing only the top priority items, and an **optimal budget** that would enable full implementation. The second budget scenario offers guidance for making requests, but the first one helps direct discretionary resources as they come in. Estimated costs for the complete undertaking range from $875,000 to $998,000, most of which comes from government and foundation sources. A good rule of thumb is to keep administrative costs at a low level—no more than 10% of the overall budget.

Support for portal development and maintenance is likely to be available both through in-kind resources (e.g., computer center sites and technical assistance) and cash grants, donations, and public funds. Keep in mind that some of these may be able to be leveraged against others. If you are in an emergency preparedness mode, the first "ask" may be from planning funds that are available in your local community or from demonstration grants that focus specifically on emergency preparation.

Figure 12 offers a sample budget template that may be of help as you identify your resource needs.

Figure 12: Sample Budget Template for Website Portal (4-Phase Implementation)

Cost Center	TOTAL	*% of Total*	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4
Technology		15%				
Content		33%				
PR/Communications		12%				
Outreach - Offline		31%				
Administration		6%				
Evaluation		3%				
Annual Totals						
GRAND TOTAL		**100%**				

B. Identifying Funding Sources.

Funding sources will vary depending on your timing—whether you are building the portal as a preparedness tool, or are using it as a recovery and rebuilding resource. You should consider seeking resources from the following categories of possible funders, depending on the phase of operation:

- State and federal **emergency preparedness and first response** offices (e.g., Homeland Security, FEMA);
- State and federal **disaster relief** initiatives (e.g., Louisiana Disaster Recovery Authority following Hurricane Katrina);
- **Private and non-profit initiatives** mobilized or put in place in the face of disaster (e.g., Red Cross);
- National and community **foundations**;
- Local and national **faith networks**; and
- Private sector **businesses and corporations**.

Here are a few **tips** to keep in mind as you approach funding sources:

1. Be sure that you have documentation that the **portal is a priority** undertaking for your community. This testimony will be a key way that donors sort through the many requests they receive for help.
2. Ask your portal partners if they have connections through which you can identify funding prospects.
3. Some sources don't want to be "first in." So approach **your best prospect first**. Once they are on board, you can use their commitment to convince others.
4. See if funders who have supported earlier portals for recovery will provide **testimonials** to stimulate local giving.
5. Align your "ask" with the **funder's explicit mission** (e.g., funds in certain issue areas or specific geographic areas). This will make it easier for them to have a rationale for giving. For example, if a group funds housing, ask them for support of that particular content area on the website.

6. Resist the **lure of funding that may divert you** from your intended mission.

7. Consider a **"floor" on donations**. Too many small ones may create more administrative work than they turn out to be worth.

8. Always ask **donors** what **visibility** they would wish from their donation. Some will find visibility important, while others may wish to be below the radar.

9. **Keep your donors updated** on the status of the portal, including them in key public announcements and notice about evaluation benchmarks.

Just as you have developed a project budget, you should also create a document for projected revenues which you can use to track resources and modify as information changes. **Figure 13** provides a sample revenue template for the portal.

Figure 13: Sample Revenue Template for Website Portal
(Anticipated Revenue Sources for 4-Phase Implementation)

Cost Center	CASH "ASK"	IN-KIND "ASK"	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4
Technology						
Source A						
Source B						
Source C						
Content						
Source A						
Source B						
Source C						
PR/Communications						
Source A						
Source B						
Source C						
Outreach - Offline						
Source A						
Source B						
Source C						
Administration *(Also obtain from overhead costs in other proposals)*						
Source A						
Source B						
Source C						
Evaluation						
Source A						
Source B						
Source C						
Unrestricted Funds						
Annual Totals						
GRAND TOTAL						

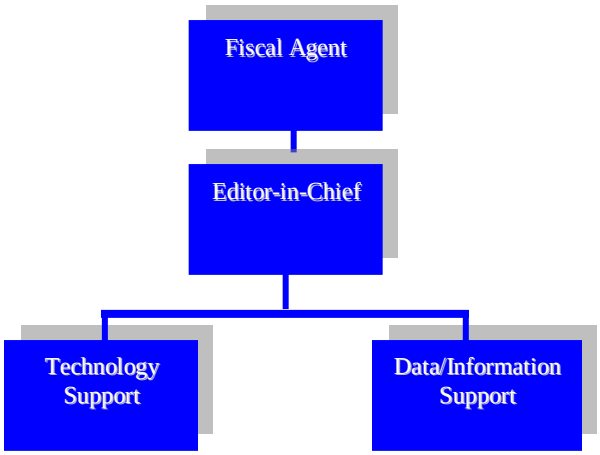
C. Obtaining A Fiscal Agent.

As mentioned earlier, if the portal effort does not choose to become a stand-alone 501(c)3, you will need a fiscal agent with an organizational home for financial accountability. The existing organization should, at minimum:

- Have a **mission** that complements the portal;
- Share the **values** of the portal project;
- Have a **good reputation** with residents of all backgrounds; and
- Be **capable of managing the financial resources** of the portal project.

At the point in the portal's evolution that an infrastructure is in place, ongoing management and operations can be undertaken by a core team under the auspices of a fiscal agent. The organizational structure could look similar to that in Figure 14.

Figure 14. Web Portal Management Team



D. Sustainability

The portal's value, at a minimum, depends upon: (a) its functionality during crisis—or even before then, if it is an emergency preparedness tool; (b) its sustained credibility with intended users; and (c) ongoing collaboration among critical partners.

At some point in the portal's life span, the question of its ongoing role post-recovery will arise. The answer depends on multiple variables, including the following:

- Implications of the portal's initial vision and mission for its life beyond disaster recovery (Does it provide a unique community "glue" apart from disaster scenarios?)
- Evolving needs in the community (For example, the functions of LowerManhattan.info changed over time.)
- Does the community have any alternative trustworthy resource for keeping residents informed about important information, resources, services, and events?

If the portal is developed within an emergency preparedness scenario and is used for routine but important everyday community connections, that same function remains important after recovery. And if the portal functions well during recovery and rebuilding, it may create its own momentum for continuation as a trustworthy resource following those processes. Possible ongoing uses might include:

- A hub for community organizing/mobilization efforts
- A direct link to neighborhood level administrative/qualitative data regarding the well being of the community, its families and children
- A community bulletin board where upcoming civic events, multi-cultural events, school meetings, planning board meetings and local voting decisions that affect the community will be discussed. The portal could be the place where community residents and political representatives can exchange ideas and weigh-in on issues that affect their community.

Component #6 • Website Launch & Evaluation

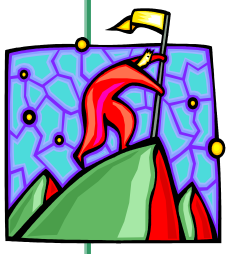
A "To-Do" List for this Component

1. Start with a **"soft launch"** beta test of the website.
2. Develop a **communications strategy** that identifies the audiences you want to reach and the best ways to connect to them.
3. Find **regular opportunities** for communication to keep the public aware of new information contained on the portal.
4. To the extent that circumstances allow, plan for **evaluation** from the beginning.

Cautions Regarding This Component

- Don't go live without **pre-testing**!
- Wait to **advertise** the availability of the website until it is **almost ready** to be accessed.
- Align launch events with others whose **credibility** is likely to stay intact in the midst of disaster.

Lessons Learned About This Component



- Allow a minimum of **six weeks between pre-testing and official launch** to incorporate needed changes.
- One approach to **cost-savings** is to piggy-back the launch and subsequent press releases with other major events.

A. Launch.

Going "live" with the website is the moment you've been working toward. Here's some guidance so that it doesn't turn into its own disaster!

Try starting with a **"soft launch."** Using limited content, conduct a "beta" test with a small group of users to work out any glitches in the system, improve any obvious shortcomings of the site, and ensure that it is user-friendly. You will then be more confident about a public launch. It will be easier to roll out content incrementally, so you need not delay going live if the website isn't fully built out. You can use the periodic rollout of new content and features as a way to sustain public interest and keep the website high on the media radar screen.

You should allow a minimum of **six weeks** between the soft launch and the official launch in order to incorporate the changes recommended after the soft launch.

Another useful early test of the website could be undertaken by incorporating it into community and neighborhood disaster exercises, if disaster has not already struck. Check with your local emergency management personnel and first responders to inquire about the prospects and timing of such an early opportunity to test the portal in a disaster-like scenario.

Here's what you'll need, at a minimum, for the **official public launch**:

- An overall **communications strategy** that identifies the audiences you want to reach and the best ways to connect to them.
- Advance **publicity**, broad and deep in its reach. Consider using traditional print and broadcast media, billboards, neighborhood signs, bulletins in houses of worship, flyers, and announcements at grassroots meetings.
- A highly public **media event** for the launch, perhaps piggy-backing on one already scheduled in order to minimize cost.
- A concise and substantive **press release**.
- **Talking points** for your spokespeople and partners. The best spokespeople will be those already at the table. Diverse resident

participation in the public event is critical to convey the anticipated reach of the website.

- An effective communications **update strategy** for additional content rollout (which could be linked to other public events like a jobs fair, school registration, or other events that will draw a crowd and the media).

B. Publicity.

Ongoing publicity for the portal is part of an overall communications strategy that identifies the audiences you want to reach and the best ways to connect to them. Some portal developers estimate that 30% of the budget should be devoted to outreach.

Attachments E and ***F***, respectively, offer (a) examples of talking points for an official portal launch and (b) a press release for subsequent rollout of a new feature. These provide ideas about what you might include in your publicity and demonstrate how each builds from and reinforces the portal as a central resource for residents.

The official launch and each subsequent rollout of new information or new website features provide important moments for collecting information that can feed into an evaluation of your effort. While we cover evaluation in the next section, note here that you will probably want to track the following kinds of data at these moments in your work:

- The quantity and quality of **media coverage;**
- **Quotations** about the portal from officials, users, and champions of the website; and
- **"Hits" over time** and whether publicity causes a spike in hits.

C. Evaluation.

Under normal circumstances, good evaluation starts at the beginning of a project. Planning for how to measure success keeps you focused on the right things from the start and brings you back to them whenever it would be easy to get diverted. In effect, figuring out what counts from Day 1—and adjusting it as community needs dictate—gives you an anchor to keep you steady when other things around you may not be.

If you are building the portal *before* disaster strikes, you have the advantage of preparing for evaluation from the beginning. It's up to you

what should be measured. You should not devote your energy to data collection and measurement for anything more than your initial planning suggests you will actually use. That said, be sure that data about the portal's value aligns directly with users' needs and donors' expectations. ***Attachment G*** provides a set of questions for you to consider. You can select from these questions—and add your own—as long as you know in advance how you will use the responses to improve your work and donors' returns on their investments.

At a minimum, it is suggested that you build the following data collection capabilities into the website:

- ✓ Total number of "**hits**";
- ✓ Total number of "**searches**";
- ✓ Mechanism for obtaining **user feedback**; and
- ✓ Information on **who's coming** to the website.

Component #7 "Spin-off" Possibilities

A "To-Do" List for this Component

1. From the beginning, anticipate how to build **"spin-off" good** into the work of portal development and operation.

Cautions Regarding This Component

- Never lose sight of the **primary responsibility** of portal development and operation.

Lessons Learned About This Component

- Funders who do not focus on emergency preparedness or disaster recovery may still be **willing to invest** in the spin-off features of your work.

Social innovations often create value beyond their original intent. Here we want to encourage you to find ways to create "economies of scope" with the website portal. Economies of scope are achieved when a single intervention—in this case the portal—addresses issues beyond the one it is intended to address.

Here's where you can be as creative as you wish, as long as you remain true to the mission of the portal. Just think: How can you use the work of the portal to create "spin-off" goods beyond it?

Three ideas come immediately to mind: (1) taking advantage of the technological skills of young people; (2) using technology to allow residents to be involved in the civic affairs of their home communities during routine times; and (3) strengthening social networks and mobilizing communities.

A. Youth Connections.

It's almost a truism that younger generations have greater facility with computer technology than older ones do. The development of a website portal and access centers for its use opens up many opportunities to use the computer skills of younger people on behalf of everyone. For example:

- How can youth's comfort with cutting edge computer technology contribute to the **design of the portal and offline alternatives**?
- How can youth be mobilized and trained to offer **technical assistance at designated computer centers**?
- How can youth be mobilized and trained to offer **technical assistance in neighbors' homes** or to those in **institutional settings**?
- How can youth be mobilized and trained to **collect user input and feedback** for continuous site improvement?
- Is it possible to offer youth a **stipend or classroom credit** for this assistance?

Foundations that invest in youth development may be willing to support this aspect of portal implementation, even if they do not specifically invest in emergency preparedness or disaster recovery.

B. Virtual Resident Engagement for Routine Community Input.

In disasters, the use of interactive computer technology for resident civic engagement may be the only available way to ensure that community members have input into planning and rebuilding efforts. If these interactive features can be tested *before* a disaster occurs, they may prove to be valued channels for obtaining community input in *routine* times. At a time in our history when confidence in public institutions is low, we need to examine every means available to alter that trajectory and restore the desire and opportunity for meaningful civic engagement. Foundations that invest in civic engagement may be willing in routine times to support this feature of a website portal, even if they do not invest in emergency preparedness.

C. Strengthening Social Networks and Mobilizing Communities.

Virtual communities can augment and supplement real community connections. Electronic connectedness has been put to use for a vast array of social goods. In "telemedicine," for example, medical clinicians transfer information "via telephone, the Internet or other networks for the purpose of consulting, and sometimes [to perform] remote medical procedures or examinations."[13] Its potential for applications in disaster situations is becoming more widely known (e.g., http://www.pubmedcentral.nih.gov/articlerender.fcgi?artid=61342). Networks can be established for people with common interests and needs (such as workforce development through www.gettheretexas.org) or for spontaneous organizing around shared concerns (such as www.nabuur.com, a global online volunteering network).

Foundations that invest in building social networks or community organizing may be willing to support such features or functions of a web portal, even if they do not invest in emergency preparedness or disaster recovery.

Concluding Thoughts

Given the power and potential of electronic connections for individual and community well-being, whether in disaster or in everyday life, it is incumbent on all of us to **ensure that the digital divide is closed**. Foundations and other organizations that invest in closing the digital divide may be willing to support organizations like Community Technology Centers, who work to close the divide, even if they do not invest in emergency preparedness or disaster recovery. Reciprocally, foundations and other organizations that invest in emergency preparedness and disaster recovery should be encouraged to give particular attention to addressing the digital divide in their work so that **all residents have the opportunity to prevail in the face of disaster.**

ATTACHMENTS

ATTACHMENT A:
Sample Job Description for Web Portal Editor-in-Chief

The **Editor-in-Chief** of the communications portal manages the day-to-day operations of a web-based information portal and an offline communications strategy designed to support the recovery/rebuilding efforts. This position reports directly to the Steering Committee.

The candidate will work closely with the technology, communications, and content committees and the four editorial boards (resident, government, business, and nonprofit) to produce and manage web and offline media content including e-newsletters, daily news, databases, and interactive segments. The Editor-in-Chief will also be responsible for monitoring portal functionality and overall project management.

This position will:

- Coordinate and publish content developed by the four editorial boards.
- Oversee brand consistency and quality and facilitate the flow and publication of information on the site and through offline media channels.
- Develop content topic ideas.
- Make article assignments.
- Manage freelance writing assignments.
- Review and edit articles.
- Process and filter potential story leads.
- Maintain style guide and editorial protocols as approved by the Steering Committee.
- Periodically conduct content focus group sessions to ensure content meets the needs of the targeted constituents.

The successful candidate will demonstrate competence in the following areas:

- Content strategy/development, publishing, information architecture, and usability.
- Self starter with excellent planning and organization skills.
- Managing multiple priorities/project simultaneously and efficiently.
- Team player manager with professional interpersonal skills.
- Proficiency with Word, spreadsheets, project management software, and content management software.
- Familiarity with basic HTML is a plus.
- Delegation to and management of freelance writers as necessary to generate timely content.

Requirements

- BA in English, Journalism or equivalent.
- At least 5 years progressive editorial experience – specifically with a news and/or public relations background.
- Ability to work well and effectively under pressure and meet deadlines.
- Track record of working effectively both within teams and alone.
- Strong e-media/web experience is required.
- Local resident.

ATTACHMENT B:
Sample Hiring Process for Editor-in-Chief

1. The **Hiring Committee** will finalize the job description. The job description will have two response mechanisms: email and digital fax. The response deadline on the job description will be (designated date). All applications will be routed to [a designated source].

2. The [designated source] will screen all applications and create a pool of applicants that meet the hiring requirements. The [designated source] will also develop a list of all applicants that will be shared with the Hiring Committee to insure transparency in the hiring process.

3. By [designated date], the [designated source] will distribute a package of all qualified candidates (including resume, cover letter, and references) and the list of all of the applicants to the members of the Hiring Committee. A ranking scorecard for each qualified applicant will also be distributed.

4. The members of the Hiring Committee will have one week from time of receipt of the applicant package to score and rank all of the applicants. The scorecards will be returned to the [designated source], which will share the overall results with the Hiring Committee.

5. The Hiring Committee will meet to discuss the results and then select those determined to be in the top 25 percent of the pool (if the entire pool is under 60) for phone interviews. If the qualified pool is larger than 60, the Hiring Committee will meet and develop a process to handle the volume.

6. A representative **Interview Subcommittee** will be formed to administer the interview process.

7. The Interview Subcommittee will conduct phone interviews of all of the candidates in one week.

8. The candidates that advance to the in-person interviews will be given a writing assignment that they will complete in 72 hours.

9. Once the writing assignments are completed, the Interview Subcommittee will conduct in-person interviews of the finalists in one week.

10. The results from the in-person interview process will be shared with the Hiring Committee, and a final decision will be made.

11. This decision will be presented to the **Steering Committee** for confirmation.

ATTACHMENT C:
Sample Roles for Web Portal Editorial Boards

1. Role of the **Residents** Editorial Board

The Residents Editorial Board will meet bi-weekly to develop an editorial calendar, and discuss specific content matters related to residents or former residents. The Editorial Board will be responsible for developing the protocols for resident content, which must be in compliance with the protocols for the portal. The Residents Editorial Board reports to the Editor-in-Chief and/or the Steering Committee.

2. Role of the **Government** Editorial Board

The Government Editorial Board will meet bi-weekly to develop an editorial calendar, and discuss specific content matters related to local, state, and federal government, policy and legislature issues as they pertain to recovery, rebuild or revitalization efforts in the area. The Editorial Board will be responsible for developing the protocols for Government content, which must be in compliance with the protocols for the portal. The Government Editorial Board reports to the Editor-in-Chief and/or the Steering Committee.

3. Role of the **Business** Editorial Board

The Business Editorial Board will meet bi-weekly to develop an editorial calendar, and discuss specific content matters related to business, business owners, or business issues as they pertain to recovery, rebuild or revitalization efforts in the area. The Editorial Board will be responsible for developing the protocols for Business content, which must be in compliance with the protocols for the portal. The Business Editorial Board reports to the Editor-in-Chief and/or the Steering Committee.

4. Role of the **Nonprofit Sector** Editorial Board

The Nonprofit Sector Editorial Board will meet bi-weekly to develop an editorial calendar, and discuss specific content matters related to community organizations, non-profits, and other interested groups relevant to the recovery, rebuild or revitalization efforts in the area. The Editorial Board will be responsible for developing the protocols for Nonprofit content, which must be in compliance with the protocols for the portal. The Nonprofit Sector Editorial Board reports to the Editor-in-Chief and/or the Steering Committee.

ATTACHMENT D:
Sample Editorial Protocols

Mission and Goals

1. **Mission Statement**
   a. Offer a single point-of-contact for both online and offline communications activities associated with rebuilding efforts
   b. Provide residents, businesses, government agencies, and community groups with essential news and information about rebuilding efforts
   c. Share information and data for rebuilding with other relevant stakeholders.

2. **Goals**
   a. Create a "one stop" information clearinghouse
      - Website
      - Offline media information resources (Radio, TV, Newspaper, Flyers, billboards)
      - Public involvement in recovery efforts
   b. Coordinate and incorporate content from key content partners
   c. Develop credible, reliable and timely information sources for:
      - Residents
      - Government Agencies and Officials
      - Businesses
      - Nonprofit Organizations

Content Guidelines

1. Regarding **material for publication**, the website will:
   a. Publish material that is of interest or relevance to the key constituents described in 1b
   b. Report on policy and legislative developments
   c. Strive to publish a balance of information for all of the affected areas, to the extent the information is available
   d. Publish verifiable material that balances points of view
   e. Demonstrate ethnic diversity across site content
   f. Represent expert interests across issues
   g. Be topical
   h. Maintain editorial protocols set forth by the Steering Committee

2. The website **will not:**
   a. Post advertisements
   b. Make product or service endorsements
   c. Sell products or services
   d. Publish material that is discriminatory, libelous, prejudiced or otherwise offensive, either by the nature of the content or by the manner of presentation

3. **Oversight**
   Policy development and editorial decision making for the website are subject to the overarching oversight from the Steering Committee.

ATTACHMENT E:
Talking Points for Launch of LouisianaRebuilds.info (3/8/06)

BASIC FACTS

- LouisianaRebuilds.info is the first comprehensive statewide resource for residents searching for information about rebuilding efforts in the state and what it means for rebuilding their lives. It is truly, "the first stop on the way home." The site is a state-of-the-art web portal that connects residents, business, nonprofit organizations, and government agencies to one another and to local and national sites for information about rebuilding in the state.
- The state-of-the-art portal features content and links to resources in the state and around the country. It is a one-stop compilation of information related to rebuilding and planning, including affordable housing, jobs, education, voting, and legislative issues, at the parish and state levels. It connects to FEMA, the LRA; local, state, and federal agencies; news media; and includes places for residents to tell their stories.
- Offline resources are in development to bring the same rich portal content to residents without Internet access. Those resources should be ready in a few weeks.

PORTAL RESOURCES

The portal provides information about:

- Individual neighborhoods, parish, and statewide rebuilding efforts, affordable housing, transportation, schools, and health care;
- Help for business owners and entrepreneurs;
- Pending legislation, policy issues, and voting; and
- Community resources and funding opportunities for nonprofits

The portal is also the entry point to the state's new housing assistance registry, *The Road Home*. Residents without Internet access can sign up for the registry by calling 1-888-Road2La.

FUNDING

- Initial funding for the site was provided by Living Cities, the national investor collaborative whose 15 major financial institutions, foundations, and government agencies that have invested more than $370 million to rejuvenate city neighborhoods throughout the nation[1].
- The Louisiana Disaster Recovery Foundation and the W. K. Kellogg Foundation have provided significant support to generate content for the displaced diaspora and to create offline communications strategies for those without Internet access.

TECHNOLOGY

- The portal was built by New Orleans-based Carrollton Technology Partners.
- Innovative Intermedia provided consulting and overall design and branding of the portal. Innovative Intermedia was started and is owned by the former lead project manager for the development of the post-9/11 site, LowerManhattan.info.
- Day-to-day portal oversight is the responsibility of the One Economy Corporation, the national nonprofit organization that uses technology to connect low-income people to information and tools that help them improve their lives.

PARTNERS

Agencies and organizations represented on the LouisianaRebuilds.info steering committee are:

- Louisiana Recovery Authority
- Louisiana Family Recovery Corps
- Louisiana Association of Nonprofit Organizations
- State of Louisiana
- City of New Orleans Neighborhood 1
- Greater New Orleans Nonprofit Knowledge Works
- New Orleans Virtual Diaspora Network
- Carrollton Technology Partners
- Innovative Intermedia, LLC
- Grassroots Enterprise, Inc.
- One Economy Corporation
- PolicyLink*

* *The national organization PolicyLink has guided the development of the portal. PolicyLink is known for its efforts to insure that the wisdom, voice, and experience of local constituencies are part of conversations about policies that support economic and social equity.*

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

ATTACHMENT F:
Sample News Release for "LouisianaRebuilds.info" Website Portal

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE **CONTACT: _____**

OPERATORS AT NEW CALL CENTER READY TO GIVE INFORMATION TO LOUISIANA RESIDENTS DISPLACED BY KATRINA AND RITA

1-877-LA-Rebuilds (1-877-527-3284) Operators Connect Callers to Information to Rebuild Homes, Lives, and Communities

Baton Rouge, LA—Louisiana residents seeking to restore lives upset by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita can now call 1-877-LA-Rebuilds (1-877-527-3284). This toll free number, like the LouisianaRebuilds.info web portal (http://www.louisianarebuilds.info/), connects Louisiana residents displaced by hurricanes and floods to reliable information about rebuilding efforts and available resources. The addition of the call center gives residents two ways to access this vital information: online and off.

Call center operators are available 24 hours a day and can respond in several languages, including English, Spanish, Vietnamese, and several Chinese dialects. They can answer questions about services, resources, and support networks that are necessary for rebuilding lives, homes, communities, and the state. Callers can feel confident that a live operator will answer their questions with the most current and reliable information. When necessary, callers are immediately transferred to operators at other centers—such as Louisiana's Road Home Housing Registry—for the most accurate information.

Like the web portal, LouisianaRebuilds.info, the LA-Rebuilds call center connects callers to up-to-date information about:

- Individual neighborhood, parish, and statewide rebuilding efforts, affordable housing, transportation, schools, and health care;
- Help for business owners and entrepreneurs;
- Pending legislation, policy issues, and voting; and
- Community resources and funding opportunities for nonprofits.

"LouisianaRebuilds.info has been a most valuable asset to displaced Louisiana residents," says Tierra Montgomery of the Joy Corporation, a community-based organization that provides the only Community Technology Center in the Baton Rouge area. "With the launch of the call center," she continues, "residents who don't have Internet access or who prefer to speak to someone on the phone, can still make use of the information available at LouisianaRebuilds.info."

The call center is operated by CALLS PLUS, a Louisiana company formerly based in New Orleans (where it was known as New Orleans Teleport). The center's owner, Barbara Lamott, a New Orleans resident who lived through the wrath of Katrina and the resulting floods, moved her business to Lafayette, LA, because many of her employees were homeless and had to flee New Orleans. By setting up in Lafayette, Lamott was able to provide work for the CALLS PLUS operators who are now in a position to provide needed support to other Louisiana residents. "I am very happy that my company is involved in this effort," says Lamott. "The operators and I are eager to talk to as many Louisiana residents as we can to help them reach the resources we all need to get on with our lives."

The web portal and the call center are the result of a public-private collaboration of national and local organizations, local government, and generous funders working together to support efforts by Louisiana residents to restore their lives in Louisiana. The 15 partners in the collaboration include such local and national organizations as the New Orleans Communications Network, Making Connections New Orleans, Louisiana Recovery Authority, the Louisiana Family Recovery Corps, the Louisiana Disaster Recovery Foundation, Living Cities, PolicyLink, and the One Economy Corporation and is committed to ensuring that displaced Louisiana residents have access to reliable information—the first stop on the way home.

# # #

Joy Corporation is a non-profit 501(c)3 community based organization that works to economically empower individuals and families within the Baton Rouge Parish and surrounding areas by providing educational, training, and rehabilitation programs designed to meet the holistic needs of the local community.

The Louisiana Recovery Authority is the planning and coordinating body that was created in the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita by Governor Kathleen Babineaux Blanco to plan for the recovery and rebuilding of Louisiana. http://www.lra.louisiana.gov/.

The Louisiana Family Recovery Corps coordinates and mobilizes a network of providers, organizations, and government agencies to deliver comprehensive humanitarian services to displaced Louisianans within the state of Louisiana. http://www.recoverycorps.org/.

Living Cities is a public-private collaborative of major financial institutions, national foundations and a federal government agency that has invested over $370 million in urban neighborhoods in 23 cities throughout the county.

PolicyLink is a national research and action organization that works in partnership with other organizations to advance policies to achieve economic and social equity. http://www.policylink.org.

One Economy Corporation is the national nonprofit organization that uses technology to connect low-income people to information and tools that help them improve their lives. http://www.one-economy.com.

ATTACHMENT G:
Minimum Data Needed for Website Portal Evaluation

A. How MUCH are we doing? (Quantitative data on portal use)

1. "Hits" on portal.
2. Number of **pages viewed** while visiting the portal.
3. Disaggregated data on:
   a. C**urrently residence** of portal user.
   b. **Prior residence** of portal user.
   c. **Housing status** of portal user (homeowner, renter, etc.).
   d. **Descriptive data on target groups** accessing the portal (i.e., number and percent of residents, business owners, government workers, not-for-profits, etc.).
   e. Data on **special populations** (disabled, children in foster care, veterans, etc.).
   f. Basic **demographics** of individual portal users, including race/ethnicity, education level, gender, age, disability status

B. How WELL are we doing it? (Quality of the portal)

1. Extent to which visitors find what they need.
2. Content of **questions/comments** posted to the Webmaster. (This will require analyses of questions posed by visitors to assess missing website content.)
3. Portal **ease of use**.
4. **Satisfaction** with portal and willingness to recommend it to others.

C. What is the IMPACT of the portal? Is anyone better off (for target groups)?

1. Content of **questions/comments** posted to the Web Master? (This will require analyses of questions/comments posted by portal visitors to assess impact of the portal on their lives.)
2. **Usefulness** of information obtained from the portal.
3. **Value of portal information** in making important decisions, such as:
   a. For Residents
      i. Whether or not to return to Louisiana?
      ii. What neighborhood/parish to live in?
      iii. Whether children should return to school?
      iv. What to do about your home?
      v. Whether to vote?
      vi. Where to find employment?
   b. For Business Owners
      i. The future of your business?
      ii. Where to find employees?
   c. For Government Workers
      i. How best to help clients?
   d. For nonprofits
      i. The future of your organization?
      ii. Connecting with the families you serve?
      iii. Types of services you need to provide, and whether your organization's mission should be modified?

D. Are online communities an effective way to use technology to reach and connect communities that have been displaced by disasters?

ENDNOTES

[1] See D. Joseph, *Hazards and Disasters, or What to Do in the Event of an Emergency*, Working Paper #2, PRDU, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, February, 2002, for a review of the debate over the distinction between "natural" and "man-made" disasters.

[2] New Orleans, in turn, benefited from conversations with the Lower Manhattan Construction Command Center, which communicates with the public through its web portal, www.Lowermanhattan.info about the work taking place following 9/11. In these two very different disasters, a web portal has proven to be an invaluable public communications strategy.

[3] "Shelter-in-place" means to take immediate shelter where you are—at home, work, school or in between—usually for just a few hours. Local authorities may instruct you to "shelter-in-place" if chemical or radiological contaminants are released into the environment. See http://www.redcross.org/preparedness/cdc_english/Sheltering.asp.

[4] http://kb.iu.edu/data/ajbd.html

[5] Users can review www.LouisianaRebuilds.info and www.Lowermanhattan.info for ideas from post-Katrina and post-9-11 locales, respectively.

[6] "Process Evaluation of the Louisiana Rebuilds Collaborative," Unpublished document, Pam Jenkins, 2008.

[7] See, e.g., http://www.fema.gov/videos/moflood/moflood.shtm

[8] University of California-Berkeley, "Glossary of Internet and Web Jargon." Accessed 06.18.08 at http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/TeachingLib/Guides/Internet/Glossary.html

[9] Servers are mounted in a rack, which is a metal framework that houses electronic equipment and usually contains bays designed to a piece of equipment like a server. The space used by your server(s) is measured in Rack Units (RU or "U-Space"). This is the unit of measurement used for defining the vertical space used. A 'U' is equivalent to 1.75 inches (4.45cm). For example:

- 1U Server= 1.75" of Vertical Rack Space
- 2U = 3.5" of Vertical Rack Space
- 3U = 5/25" of Vertical Rack Space
- 4U = 7.00" of Vertical Rack Space

A full rack can contains 40 to 42U 1/4 Rack=10U (10 servers of 1U) Half rack =20 U (20 Servers of 1U).

[10] The Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM) has partnered with YouTube to create an emergency management channel on the YouTube website. The channel will feature public service announcements, emergency messaging and video updates of emergencies and disasters. National Governor's Association Center for Best Practices, www.nga.org, accessed 5.13.08. See the VDEM website at http://www.youtube.com/user/VAEmergency .

[11] One-way transmitters allow you to send messages; two-way transmitters allow the recipient of the message to send a response. Information on one- and two-way transmitters was provided by Ron Mercer during a June 3, 2008 interview. Mr. Mercer is the founder of Paging & Wireless Network Planners, LLC, and also serves on the Paging Technical Committee of the American Association of Paging Carriers.

[12] See http://www.access-board.gov/sec508/summary.htm for Electronic & IT Standards for People with Disabilities.

[13] Information downloaded August 5, 2008 from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Telemedicine.

APPENDIX

LouisianaRebuilds.info Steering Committee

Amy Boebel	*Independent Consultant*
Chris Broussard	*Louisiana Association of Nonprofits*
Delia Carmen	*Annie E. Casey Foundation*
Deborah Cotton	*LouisianaRebuilds.info*
Milly Hawk Daniel	*PolicyLink*
Dominique Duval Diop	*State of Louisiana/PolicyLink*
Melissa Flournoy	*Louisiana Association of Nonprofits (formerly)*
Dorian Hastings	*City of New Orleans (formerly)/Central City CDC*
Ben Hecht	*One Economy Corporation (formerly)*
Catherine Heitman	*State of Louisiana*
Josh Kirschenbaum	*PolicyLink*
Gerrish Lopez	*Carrollton Technology Partners*
John Miles	*Joy Corporation*
Tierra Montgomery	*Joy Corporation*
Allison Plyer	*Greater New Orleans Community Data Center*
Chris Reade	*Carrollton Technology Partners*
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