



L O U I S I A N A

Family Recovery Corps

Driving Human Recovery

RECOVERY BRIEF

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Where Did They Go and Are They Coming Back?

An analysis of displaced Louisianans living in other states.

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Summary of Findings

- ◆ There are Louisiana residents displaced in each state with the largest concentrations in Texas, Mississippi and Georgia; to a lesser degree Florida, Alabama, Tennessee and California.
- ◆ Louisiana residents are located in more than 5,500 cities across the U.S., the largest concentrations in Houston, Dallas, Atlanta and San Antonio.
- ◆ Residents from Orleans and Jefferson parishes were more likely to migrate to major cities in Texas, while those residents from Plaquemines and St. Bernard parishes were more likely to migrate to cities in Mississippi.
- ◆ Displaced residents are evenly split by race—46 percent black and white, with 7 percent representing other races.
- ◆ A majority of displaced residents are women—59 percent compared to 41 percent men.
- ◆ Displaced residents are polarized by income—more than 40 percent earn more than \$40,000 per year while a third earn less than \$20,000 per year.
- ◆ More than 40 percent of displaced residents wish to return to New Orleans or to Louisiana, while 37 percent do not wish to return and 20 percent remain undecided.
- ◆ A majority of residents did not express specific plans for a return home—60 percent indicated they eventually wanted to return, but cited no timeframe for a return; 24 percent within 6 months and 19 percent within a year.
- ◆ Moving costs and finding housing were cited as primary barriers to returning. Concerns over finding employment, crime, and levee safety were also cited, but were less significant reasons affecting a move back to Louisiana.
- ◆ Of those not wishing to return to Louisiana, more than 70 percent expressed contentment in their current location as the primary reason for not returning.

BACKGROUND

The true, measurable effect of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita extend beyond monetary damages and physical loss—loss that is difficult to adequately quantify. Tabulations from the Federal Emergency Management Agency [FEMA] indicate that more than half a million Louisiana residents sought help through their agency from the effects of Katrina and Rita. Storm-related impacts sent Louisiana citizens to neighboring Louisiana cities and to other states—some as far away as Alaska and Hawaii. Recent population estimates from the U.S. Census suggest that more than 200,000 residents have left Louisiana since the storms. Nearly two years later, some residents have started a return to the city they once called home, but many remain out of state. Where are they? Do they have plans for coming home? Do they have barriers to coming home?

Little research has been completed regarding the thoughts and perceptions of those Louisiana residents that still remain displaced out-of-state. As the entity charged with addressing the needs of human recovery, the Louisiana Family Recovery Corps sought answers.

As part of the strategy for informing out-of-state residents about the services of the Recovery Corps' phone-based case management and information system—NOLA Bound—the Recovery Corps obtained the change of address listings from the postal service to perform a direct mail promotion to out-of-state residents. Included in this effort was a short, seven-question survey that residents were asked to complete and return. The sections that

follow represent an analysis of the baseline characteristics, the entire change of address sample and analysis of the generated sample from completed survey responses.

While not initiated as a scientific survey, the baseline sample and survey sample responses do represent valuable insight to a segment of the displaced, out-of-state population—of which there is little existing data. Their thoughts are useful in highlighting issues that are likely relevant to the larger group of displaced residents.

Using the records from the U.S. Postal Service change of address cards, 71,466 households were identified as still residing outside of Louisiana as of November 2006. Because the sample likely represents a household, rather than an individual, the total actual number of out-of-state displaced residents is assumed to be larger. Survey responses obtained in April 2007 generated a sample of nearly 3,100. Recent census tracking of displaced residents is consistent with the numbers contained within the change of address sample, which lends credibility to using the sample as a reliable data source.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Displaced resident households can be found in every state, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands.

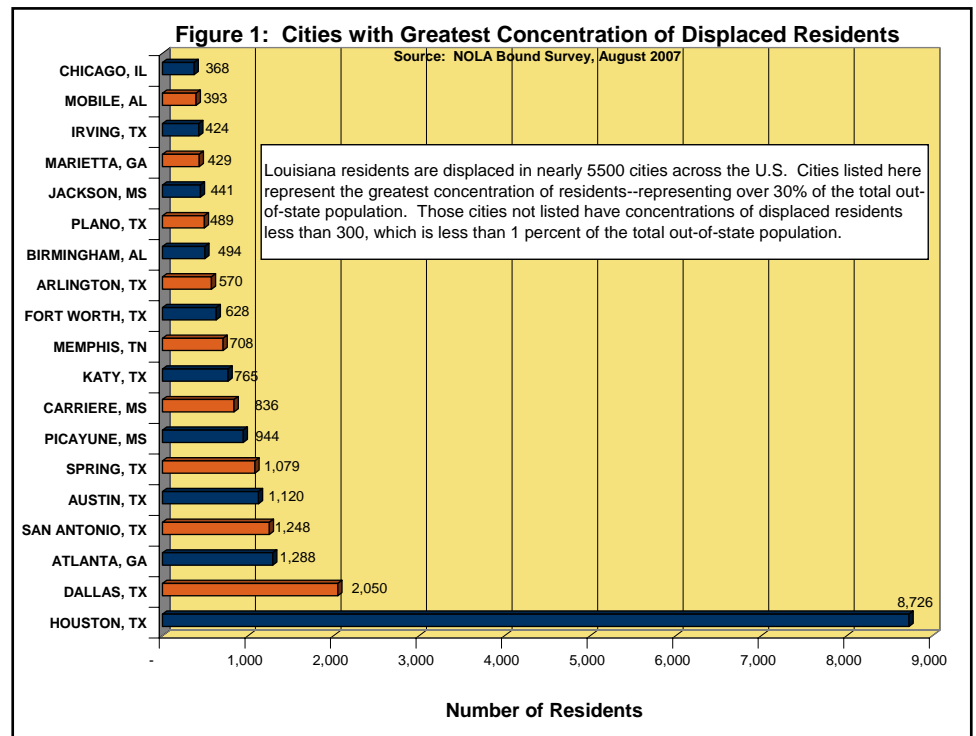
The greatest concentration of displaced residents continues to be in the South, with Texas, Mississippi and Georgia sharing nearly 60 percent of the displaced population. Florida, Alabama and Tennessee share the next tier at 13 percent; while California, North Carolina, Illinois, Arkansas and Virginia collectively account for 12 percent. The remaining states and territories have a much smaller representation of displaced residents—ranging from as few as 14 in places like South Dakota to as many as 935 in Colorado—individually accounting for one percent or less of the remaining displaced residents.

Within these states, resident households are displaced in nearly 5,500 cities, the heaviest concentration within Texas metropolitan areas. Figure 1 represents the individual cities with the greatest concentration of displaced resident households. Within the high concentration states, Texas alone claims the majority of

displaced residents at 27,337, most living in the metropolitan areas of Houston, Dallas, San Antonio and Austin. Most displaced residents in Mississippi are overwhelmingly residing in the cities of Picayune, Carriere and Jackson, with smaller concentrations evenly dispersed across cities like Hattiesburg, Poplarville, Diamondhead and Gulfport. Displaced residents in Georgia are centralized within the Atlanta metropolitan area, with areas such as Decatur and Savannah hosting much smaller numbers.

Of these out-of-state residents, the majority report their pre-storm parish of residence as Orleans [56 percent] followed by Jefferson [23 percent] and Plaquemines, St. Bernard and St. Tammany comprising the remainder.

These numbers do not likely represent the entirety of the displaced resident households living out-of-state as they include only those residents that completed a change of address with the post office. These numbers do, however, provide an accurate foundation from which to draw conclusions about the patterns of residence as a change of address can imply intentions of being stationary in a particular place for a given time.



WHO ARE THE DISPLACED RESIDENTS?

Displaced, resident households are a diverse group inclusive of equal numbers of both black and white. They encompass a variety of income ranges and represent all different types of households. However, there are some common characteristics shared by many residents.

Age

A fairly even distribution is observed across various age groups, as represented by Figure 2. Those in their early adult years and into their late 30's comprise about 46 percent of the total resident households, while roughly a third are between ages 41 and 60. Those over age 60 represent about 20 percent of the total. Many in this group are well into their 80's and 90's and a few reporting over age 105.

This observation has some important economic implications. First, the significant numbers of residents over age 60, particularly those in their 70's and beyond, are more likely to live with a fixed income, which may limit the available cash flow to pay for the expense of moving and obtaining adequate housing. In addition, the lack of available housing—particularly for seniors—means that even if economic barriers can be addressed, other housing challenges in securing living arrangements to meet their needs [i.e. safety, proximity to medical care, transportation, groceries, etc] may limit their ability to successfully return.

Next, a significant portion of the out-of-state population is at their highest earning potential [those aged 40-60] in their employment life cycle. This means that those in the 40-60

year range are earning near or at the maximum amount of income they will generate during all the years they will be employed in their lifetime. Not only does this represent a significant loss in tax base due to lost wages for the Greater New Orleans region, but it can have long-lasting implications for the New Orleans area economy if this group does not have plans to return, or if this tax base cannot be replaced by a comparable group through in-state migration.

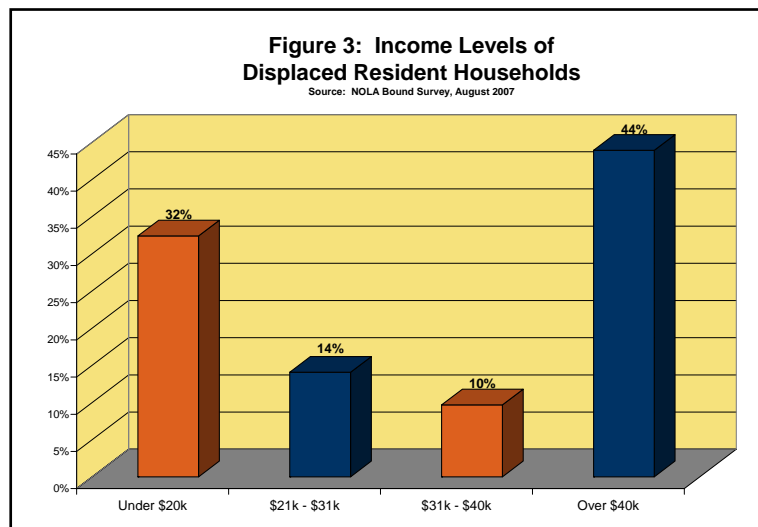
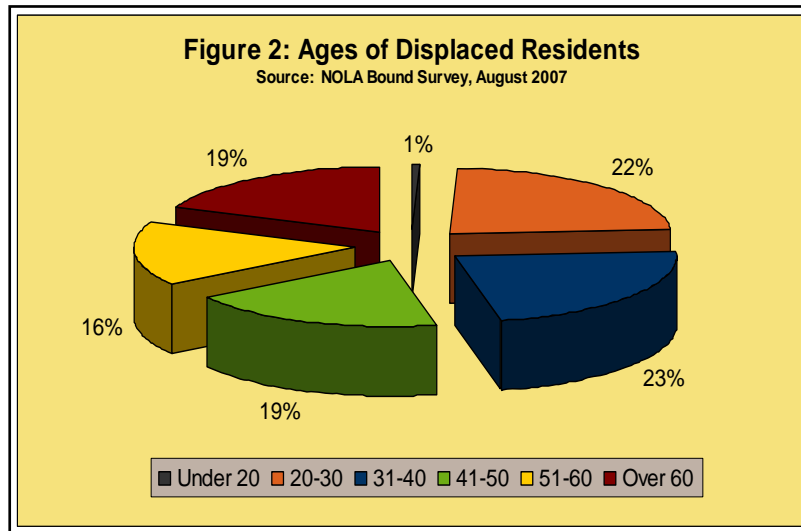
Race, Gender and Household Composition

Baseline data suggests that there is an even split among black and white residents—46 percent respectively, meaning there are equal numbers of both black and white residents represented in the out-of-state population. This proportion was consistent with the survey sample as well. That is not to say their experience is the same, but merely there are not singular characteristics that represent out-of-state, displaced residents.

Similarly, there are nearly even numbers of displaced women and men, although women represent a slightly larger proportion at fifty-nine percent.

The majority of displaced household respondents are adults without children in the home [60 percent], with near even levels of married couples, single adults and adults over 60 comprising this group. Single adults with children represent only 14 percent of those surveyed. However,

because single adults with children are a population that, in general terms, does not traditionally represent well in survey response instruments, the numbers reported for this report may be underrepresented.



Income

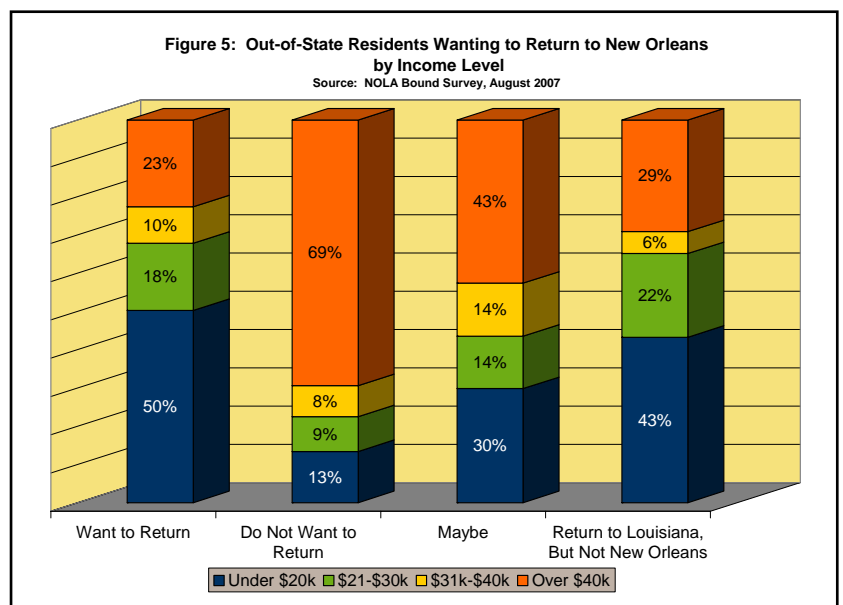
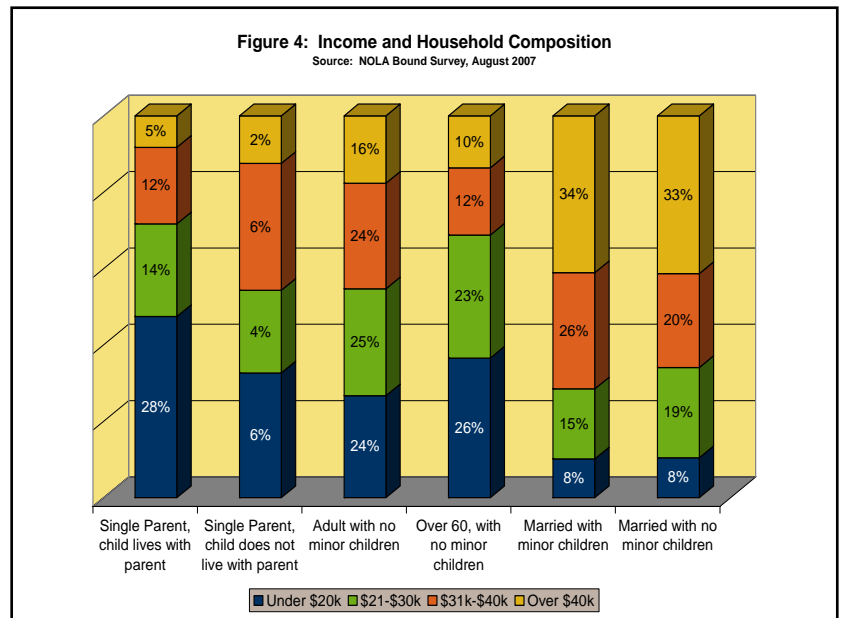
Survey respondents are polarized when examined by income as nearly half earn more than \$41,000 per year, and only a third report income levels below \$20,000 per year. These thresholds represent known markers for current federal poverty levels and can be used as a base for understanding the context for these earnings levels. For example, using an average family size of three, a household with income more than \$41,000 per year is 250 percent above the federal poverty level—placing them outside of the standard eligibility markers for most government assistance programs such as food stamps or Medicaid—providing some evidence that over half of respondents are not “low-income” by traditional measures. Conversely, those with income under \$20,000 per year would be slightly above the base level for poverty, and an indication that they can be considered “low-income” by the same measures.

Perhaps not surprisingly, those earning more than \$41,000 per year are more likely to be married, while those on the lower levels of income tend to be older or single parents with children [Figure 4].

ARE THEY COMING BACK?

Residents were asked if they were coming back and given a choice of answering “yes”, “no”, “maybe” or “yes, but not to New Orleans.” Their answers are mixed—as many want to come back as those that do not. Nearly half of all respondents indicated an interest in returning to New Orleans [36 percent] or to Louisiana [7 percent], while 37 percent indicated they did not wish to return. Another 20 percent remains undecided. Of those desiring to return, most [60 percent] had no time-bound plans to return. The remaining respondents were fairly evenly split citing plans to return in as little as 1 to 3 months [13 percent], within 6 months [11 percent], and within a year [16 percent].

Interest in returning to New Orleans [or Louisiana] varies greatly when data are examined according to income level and family composition. Single parents and adults over 60 comprise nearly half of those indicating an interest in returning; yet married couples represent the majority of resident households that do not wish to return. When examined by income, those earning less than \$20,000 per year are twice as likely to express interest in returning while those earning more than \$40,000 per year are more than double their counterparts in not wanting to return [Figure 5].

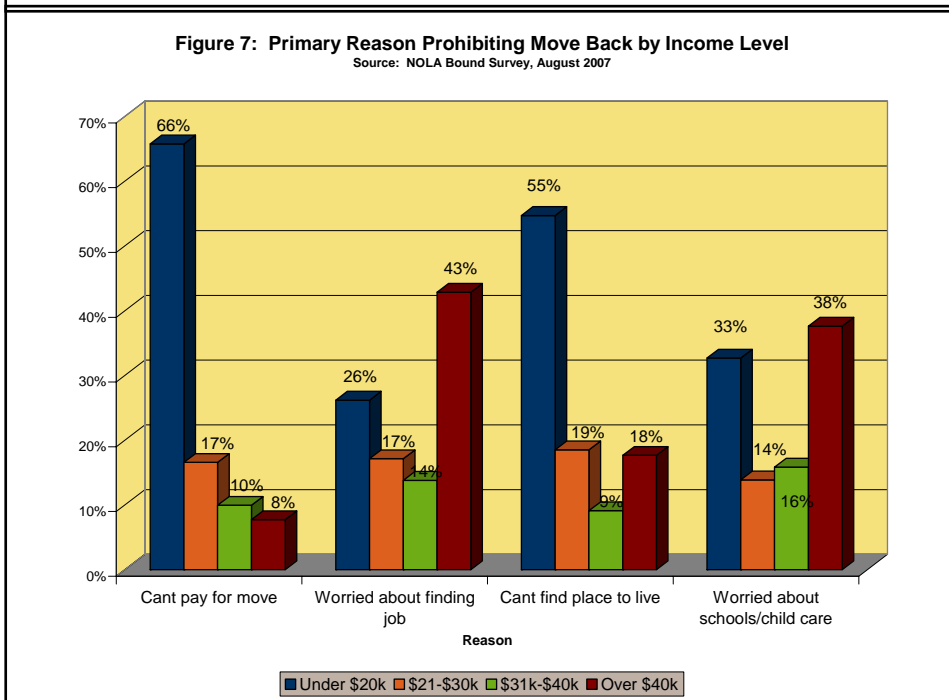
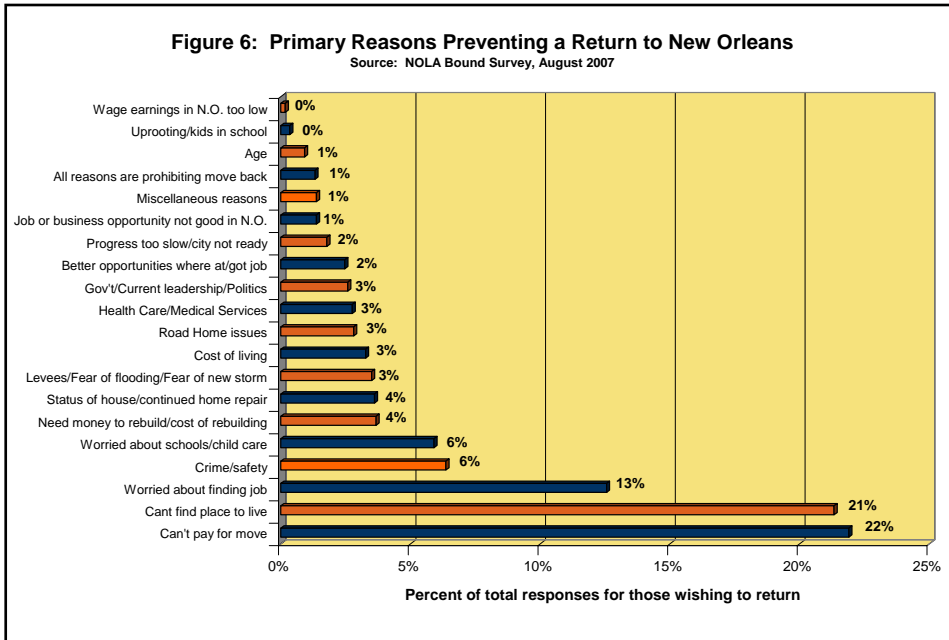


These data suggest that those with the greatest desire to return are also those least prepared to position themselves for a return. Given that income and household composition are closely aligned with both single parents and older adults, the desire to return may be an indication that home is associated with the familiar, and the stability and support systems they remember. Whereas married households [which also possess higher incomes], may have more easily adapted to new surroundings due to the internal support systems often associated with married household structures. Also worth noting, those that are undecided about whether or not to return are also those with higher incomes.

There are also differences when data is compared across race and gender as women and blacks express a stronger interest in returning than do men and whites. This variance is nearly equal among women and blacks as both groups are more than twice as likely to express an interest in returning [72 and 75 percent respectively] than are men and whites [28 and 23 respectively]. However, whites alone were overwhelmingly more likely than blacks to express no desire to return [75 percent], and women only slightly more likely than men to indicate this preference [58 to 41 percent].

Interestingly, for those yet undecided about whether or not to return, there was only small variation when examined by race [51 percent black, 41 percent white], but fairly strong indecision at 40 percent for those earning more than \$40,000. Women were more likely than men [70 percent to 30 percent] to be undecided.

Resident households that expressed no desire to return were also very resolute in their reasoning—73 percent indicated that they liked their current location, compared to 20 percent that felt New Orleans was not ready and only 8 percent feeling that they were not personally ready to return. The contentment in current location as a reason for not wanting to return was very consistent when data were examined by both race and gender. Both men and women showed no difference in their reasoning for not wanting to return—73 percent reported liking their current location.



While not as similar when examined by race, still a majority of blacks [60 percent] and whites [78 percent] indicated contentment in current location as reasoning for not wanting to return. This sentiment held when examined by income as both a majority of low-income resident households [58 percent] and higher-income households [78 percent] share this view.

Several respondents also provided unsolicited comments that included concerns over levee safety, crime and housing as supplemental reasons for not wishing to return. There were specific expressions of feeling hurt and anger over public statements regarding a perceived interest in the racial composition of post-Katrina New Orleans, such that they no longer felt welcomed to return, or that there was no stated interest in their return.

BARRIERS TO COMING HOME

Many factors contribute to a resident household's decision or inability to move back. In order to learn the primary or dominant issues affecting a return, respondents were asked to indicate the

single most critical issue affecting their ability to return. Respondents were offered a choice of categories to select such as paying for a move, housing, jobs and schools, or they could provide a write-in response for a different reason or explanation. Responses were tabulated based on the number of occurrences for a given answer; write-in answers were recorded and grouped according to common categories. Both were then combined and ordered according to frequency.

There was no singular response that emerged for a majority of respondents. But, money to pay for a move [22 percent] and worries over finding a place to live [21 percent] were indicated as the primary factors. Together, these accounted for 46 percent of the responses. With less frequency, issues such as finding a job, crime, schools and child care, and paying for the cost of repairs were cited as primary barriers. Figure 6 provides a ranking of all reasons cited by respondents.

Perhaps not surprisingly, those with lower incomes were more likely to indicate that paying for a move and finding a place to live were the main reasons preventing a move, while finding a job and concerns over schools and child care were significant for those with higher incomes.

Although more pronounced for those with lower incomes, the fact that financial barriers were reported across all income levels underscores the critical nature of cash flow for all groups wishing to return. Further, when combined with issues of paying for the cost of repairs and addressing the cost of living, having access to financial resources was important in whether or not displaced residents expressed interest in returning from out of state.

Although not listed as singular, primary barriers for a large number of resident households, the combined issues related to crime, concerns over levees and floods, government leadership and better opportunity become fairly significant for respondents. This may suggest that access to information about action or progress in these areas can provide an important trigger in the decision process about moving home.

Respondents also offered a number of unsolicited comments in addition to indicating their primary barriers. These comments ranged from pleas for better jobs, housing and schools, to concerns over government handling of recovery efforts and opinions about the pace of recovery efforts.

WHAT IT ALL MEANS

These data findings provide for three emergent themes from which to generate dialogue. These themes are useful for stakeholders interested in designing strategies or outreach targeted to residents displaced out-of-state.

- **There is equally strong interest in returning to New Orleans as there is remaining in the current state of residence.** However, the current interest is likely to wane as residents become even more settled in their current location. Given the resolute nature of those not wishing to return, it is unlikely that efforts to entice their return will be successful. With a significant population of residents that are still undecided about whether or not to return, the coming months are likely to become critical decision markers in which many households will either return, or continue to reside in their current location.
- **Financial barriers to returning are primary factors affecting a return, regardless of income.** Although more pronounced for those with lower income, cash flow to pay for moving, the cost of repairs and the cost of living are critical for all out-of-state, displaced residents and will likely affect their ability make a return. Especially for those with lower levels of income, access to resources in addition to moving expenses may help to sustain a successful return. .
- **Non-financial concerns about crime, levees, government leadership and the progress towards recovery are important, although less significant issues affecting out-of-state resident interest in returning.** Perceptions about these non-financial issues and access to accurate information about these issues may offer important trigger points for decisions about returning, including for those undecided about a return. Decisions about what, if any effort, should be made to address this population.

It is not likely that a singular entity is positioned—either with resources or the expertise—to develop solutions that address each of these themes. However, given the wide range of stakeholder—those impacted by taking part in the human recovery effort—involvement at all levels of the public and private domain, there does exist the real possibility that informed approaches can be comprehensively developed that are inclusive of the stated need, and differing needs, of people.

REACT AND RESPOND

How to react and whether to respond is perhaps predicated on the view of one's desired connection to out-of-state, displaced residents. Some may view their potential connection geared toward outreach in order to solicit the repopulation of the area for reasons related to tax base or cultural preservation. Others may hope to attract a workforce to New Orleans and still others may desire to fulfill a social service function in addressing the needs of citizens. Regardless, there is a role and related action regardless of the origination point.

The policy implications listed below are not directed toward a specific entity, nor intended as a stated position regarding existing efforts in recovery. Rather, the policy implications below are intended to provide a context for dialogue, one that stakeholders can actively seek amongst themselves.

- **The desire to return, or make a decision about returning, is unlikely to be sustainable without some effort to address interest and ability. Marked efforts that provide a demonstration of interest, or available resources, for those wishing to return, should be executed in the near future.** Given that less than half of displaced residents express interest in returning, as time passes, an interest in returning is likely to dwindle further. If efforts to replace not only a missing tax base, but a viable workforce, are not materialized, their absence will mark a permanent change in the characteristics of the Greater New Orleans area. Further, with such significant numbers [20 percent] remaining undecided, some effort to prompt informed decisions can provide a path of direction for families as they weigh options for their future.
- **Strategies designed to appeal to out-of-state residents should consider the financial and non-financial issues affecting interest levels in returning, and design approaches that are reflective of the diverse characteristics and issues identified by resident households.**

That households with differing income levels and household compositions express varying degrees of barriers, demands that approaches are diverse in their appeal and delivery.

Resident households report needing access to financial resources as well as information resources. Access to cash flow is a primary factor for all segments of those displaced out-of-state.

Arguably, those with higher income levels may be better positioned to sustain living in post-Katrina New Orleans, but may require as much financial help in actually making a move, or paying for the remaining expenses of home repair. When the availability of housing stock improves and with increased numbers of Road Home resources made available, access to resources that can help with moving costs, rental deposits and other "out-of-pocket" expenses needed to re-establish their household may be offered to assist in a successful transition home. Similarly, lower income households will have similar needs, and may have additional challenges to sustaining post-Katrina Louisiana.

Concerns regarding housing and job availability in addition to schools and child care may be tempered slightly by providing access to needed information sources in a coordinated way that is accessible to out-of-state residents, and with associated processes that enable access. For example, multiple websites, phone numbers and information brochures exist and are distributed in-state. However, for those residents residing out-of-state, obtaining access to those same resource listings, websites and phone numbers can prove challenging. Targeted outreach efforts that can provide this information may provide the needed connection points that residents will need to begin a transition home.

- **Communication efforts that speak to the realities of post-Katrina life—both the positive activity and progress, and also the remaining challenges that have affected recovery can be important tools for residents in their decision process.** Residents living in other states do not have ready access to Louisiana-based information—information about their neighborhoods and accurate information about the status of recovery. These residents are often advised of Louisiana developments not by Louisiana sources, but through the national news media, or others that may not have on-going or first hand knowledge of factual information. While these sources can be a source of information, they should not be *the* source of information for out-of-state residents. There is much progress in recovery efforts that occurs regularly, some of which is taken for granted internally but that outsiders have little awareness about. For example, progress with

levees, school openings and neighborhood revitalization have undergone tremendous progress, but these efforts are not routinely communicated to out-of state residents. Additionally, given the expressed concern over government leadership, progress in recovery and even statements regarding the demographic composition of the area, out-of-state residents may benefit from hearing messaging that is appropriately communicated, rather than simply reported. This may lend itself well to increasing the credibility of Louisiana stakeholders, and by extension, the recovery effort. It may also help to provide context to the varying types of perceptions that exist externally. While this information by itself is not likely to cause residents to return, its collective impact is likely to add significant value to the process of deciding on a return.

Regardless of role or position, there is much to be initiated in determining approaches to addressing the needs and perceptions of those that still consider themselves *Louisianans*, but have not made their way home. Collectively, stakeholders must challenge themselves to determine whether or not they will be bystanders or active participants during this next phase of disaster recovery.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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Through the coordination of the efforts of human recovery service organizations and creation of fill-the-gap programs, the Louisiana Family Recovery Corps, a private nonprofit organization, provides access to the resources disaster-affected families and individuals need to rebuild their lives. Since service delivery began in January 2006, the Recovery Corps has impacted more than 25,000 Louisiana households. Together, with its partners, the Recovery Corps is driving human recovery.