

# Community in Crisis:

**A Look at How U.S. Charitable  
Actions and Civic Engagement  
Change in Times of Crises**



SCHOOL OF  
PUBLIC POLICY

DO GOOD INSTITUTE

May 2020

## Key Findings

There are very few historical precedents that can help us understand how the COVID-19 (novel coronavirus) pandemic might change charitable and civic life in America in the coming months and years. In this report, we examine three recent crises: the attacks of September 11, 2001, Hurricane Katrina (2005), and the Great Recession of 2007-2009.

In all three cases, charitable behaviors – volunteering with an organization, giving to charity, working with neighbors to fix or improve something in the community, and attending public meetings where community issues were discussed – rose in the years after the crisis, even in the areas most heavily affected.

### New York City

- Over 15 years of U.S. data collection, the percentage of adults who volunteered through or for organizations reached their highest levels nationally, and in the New York City metropolitan area, in the years directly after 9/11 (2003-2005). Volunteer rates from 2006 to 2015 have never been as high as the rates from the early post-9/11 years, either nationally or in metro NYC.

### New Orleans

- The volunteer rate in the New Orleans metro area similarly reached a sustained peak in the years following Hurricane Katrina. At the same time, more than 166,000 long-distance volunteers from other states also traveled to Louisiana to volunteer there in 2007. These long-distance volunteers appreciably increased the size of Louisiana's volunteer workforce during the recovery: counting both area residents and visiting out-of-state volunteers, the new long-distance volunteers comprised about 19 percent of the "total" number of volunteers in the state.
- Metro New Orleans also exhibited a surge in informal charitable behavior (working with your neighbors to fix or improve something) and civic behavior (attending public meetings) in the years after Katrina. Participation rates peaked for these activities even through the Great Recession, and stayed at high levels in the early 2010s.

### The Great Recession

- During the Great Recession, participation rates for all four civic activities we explored – volunteering, giving to charity, attending public meetings, and working with neighbors – changed significantly at the national level. All four rates increased significantly in either 2008 (attending public meetings and working with neighbors) or in 2009 (volunteering and giving), during the heart of the Great Recession.



Nonetheless, participation rates for all four charitable and civic activities declined significantly in the years following the Great Recession, both nationally and in New Orleans and New York City where the rates surged in the aftermath of crises.

We have already seen anecdotal reporting of a surge in charitable behaviors in response to COVID-19 despite the need for social distancing.

The recent history of past crises suggest that a charitable surge could be quite significant but requires our attention now and in the coming months if we hope to sustain this influx of good deeds and community engagement. The incredible challenges of our current pandemic will likely spark both a greater need from the community and a greater desire for generosity among individuals for some time. The challenge in the immediate post-pandemic era will be to maintain – or grow – any surge in charitable and civic activity that we are fortunate enough to experience.

#### Preferred Citation:

Dietz, Nathan, and Grimm, Robert T., Jr. 2020. "Community in Crisis: A Look at How U.S. Charitable Actions and Civic Engagement Change in Times of Crises." Research Brief: Do Good Institute, University of Maryland.

## Introduction: Civic Responses to National Crises

For the past several months, the world has struggled with the pandemic caused by the outbreak of novel coronavirus (COVID-19). The full scale of the economic and social impacts of the pandemic are not yet well understood, and the forecasts for the United States and other countries change on a daily basis.

The massive threat to public health has already disrupted most aspects of daily life in the U.S., including the ability of nonprofit organizations to provide needed services to communities, often with the help of volunteers!<sup>1</sup> The effects of this pandemic have already been compared to the most destructive events in recent American history: the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001; Hurricane Katrina, which devastated the New Orleans region in 2005; and the Great Recession, the prolonged economic downturn that lasted from 2007 to 2009. Nobody knows how the crisis will ultimately impact the nonprofit sector or charitable behaviors in America, let alone the rest of economic and social life.

In this brief, we examine trend data on volunteering and civic engagement from the Current Population Survey Supplement on Volunteering (CPS Volunteer Supplement), which was administered by the US

Census Bureau and Bureau of Labor Statistics each September between 2002 and 2015. The CPS Volunteer Supplement contained consistently worded survey questions about volunteering through or for an organization that allow us to examine trends in volunteering from 2002 through 2015. In 2006, questions about two informal civic activities (working with neighbors to fix or improve something in the community, and attending a public meeting where community issues were discussed) were added to the survey. In 2008, a question about giving to charity was added.

The CPS Volunteer Supplement data enable us to measure participation during the post-9/11 era; the period during<sup>2</sup> and following Hurricane Katrina; and the period before, during and after the Great Recession. The data allow us to focus on two areas that were especially affected by these events: New York City, which is the place that forever will be associated with the September 11 attacks, and New Orleans, which bore the brunt of Hurricane Katrina. By comparing trends in volunteering and civic engagement in these areas with national trends, we can gain an understanding of how Americans respond to local and national crises.



<sup>1</sup> See Laura Reiley, “Food banks are seeing volunteers disappear and supplies evaporate as coronavirus fears mount,” *Washington Post*, March 16, 2020 (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2020/03/16/food-banks-are-seeing-volunteers-disappear-food-supply-evaporate-coronavirus-fears-mount/>); and Jessica Contrera and Ian Shapira, “Volunteering and coronavirus: When helping people could mean putting them at risk,” *Washington Post*, March 17, 2020 ([https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/volunteering-and-coronavirus-when-helping-people-could-mean-putting-them-at-risk/2020/03/17/37755f04-6864-11ea-b313-df458622c2cc\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/volunteering-and-coronavirus-when-helping-people-could-mean-putting-them-at-risk/2020/03/17/37755f04-6864-11ea-b313-df458622c2cc_story.html)).

<sup>2</sup> Because the September 2005 CPS Supplement was conducted only after Hurricane Katrina, very few households in the New Orleans metropolitan area were surveyed. The CPS collected data from sampled households in other areas of the country, but detailed data on charitable and civic activities in New Orleans during, and immediately after, Katrina are not available.

In September 2002, the CPS Volunteer Supplement was conducted for the first time since 1989, and asked respondents to describe the volunteer work they had performed since September 1, 2001. The 2002 CPS Supplement revealed that 27.4 percent of adults nationwide<sup>3</sup> volunteered with an organization during the immediate post-9/11 period. In 2003, the following year, the volunteer rate rose to 28.8 percent, the highest rate ever recorded nationally in 15 years of measurement, and stayed there for the next three years. After the sustained post-9/11 peak in the volunteer rate, the national volunteer rate suffered its first large and statistically significant decline in 2006, falling by more than two percentage points to 26.7 percent. If not for this decrease in the volunteer rate, almost 5 million adults would have volunteered in 2006.

At the national level, participation rates for volunteering and other forms of civic engagement actually rose during the Great Recession, but the rates generally remained remarkably stable during this time period. Between 2006 and 2012 – a period that included the recession and the years immediately before and afterward – the national adult volunteer rate never rose above 27 percent or below 26 percent, although statistically significant year-to-year changes were occasionally observed. However, despite the

overall stability in volunteering, the participation rates for all four civic activities – volunteering, giving to charity, attending public meetings, and working with neighbors – did change significantly during this time period.<sup>4</sup> All four rates increased significantly in either 2008 (attending public meetings and working with neighbors) or in 2009 (volunteering and giving), during the heart of the recession.

After the recession, each of the four rates declined significantly at least twice between 2010 and 2015. For three of the indicators – volunteering, attending public meetings, and working with neighbors – the national participation rate decreased by a statistically significant amount in 2013, but the year-to-year changes after that were not statistically significant. The national volunteer rate continued to slide in 2014 and 2015, bottoming out at a fifteen-year low of 24.9 percent in 2015. The 2013 decline in the national giving rate was also statistically significant, and was followed by a significant decline in 2015 that lowered the giving rate below 50 percent for the first time since 2009. These results, which are consistent with trends that have been noted by others,<sup>5</sup> suggest that the United States had experienced all-time lows in volunteering and giving even before the current pandemic hit.



<sup>3</sup> We report statistics for the 16-and-over population, even though the CPS collects data from respondents who are 15 years old, to follow the convention of the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). In the annual brief series *Volunteering in the United States* (available at <https://www.bls.gov/bls/news-release/#VOLUN>), BLS defines adult volunteers as people ages sixteen or older who did work through an organization in the previous twelve months for which they were not paid. BLS imposes a minimum age of 16 because, in most states, residents must be 16 to work for pay without their parents' permission.

<sup>4</sup> For more details about the measurement of volunteering, giving and civic engagement and about the estimation of confidence intervals around participation rates, please see the Appendix in Grimm, Robert T., Jr., and Dietz, Nathan. 2018. "Where Are America's Volunteers? A Look at America's Widespread Decline in Volunteering in Cities and States." Research Brief: Do Good Institute, University of Maryland. Available at [https://dogood.umd.edu/sites/default/files/2019-07/Where%20Are%20Americas%20Volunteers\\_Research%20Brief%20\\_Nov%202018.pdf](https://dogood.umd.edu/sites/default/files/2019-07/Where%20Are%20Americas%20Volunteers_Research%20Brief%20_Nov%202018.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> Osili, Una, and Sasha Zarins (2018). "Fewer Americans are giving money to charity but total donations are at record levels anyway." *The Conversation*, July 3. Available at <https://theconversation.com/fewer-americans-are-giving-money-to-charity-but-total-donations-are-at-record-levels-anyway-98291>.

## Case Studies:

### New York City after 9/11, and New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina

To study the impact of recent crises that are most similar to our current situation, we focus on trends in civic engagement in metropolitan New York City and metropolitan New Orleans – the two cities most closely associated respectively with the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and Hurricane Katrina, which reached New Orleans in August 2005. The CPS Volunteer Supplement allows us to calculate statistics on volunteering and other civic activities for all states and regions of the country, as well as over 200 major metropolitan areas (metro areas, or MSAs).<sup>6</sup> Within the U.S., civic and charitable trends vary widely across states and metropolitan areas. Before presenting these specific trends for the New York City and New Orleans metro areas (in Figures 1 through 4) we discuss some of the characteristic features of these areas that influence participation rates for volunteering and other civic activities.

The New York City metropolitan area covers parts of four states (New York, New Jersey, Connecticut and Pennsylvania), but September 11, 2001 will always be associated with downtown Manhattan and the World Trade Center. Metropolitan New York City has several characteristics that are associated with high volunteer rates, as well as several others that are negatively associated with volunteering. These characteristics – including unemployment rates, educational attainment, income, and more (which have been featured in earlier work<sup>7</sup>) can be found in the Appendix.

Among the 215 metropolitan areas with sufficient data on volunteering, the NYC metro area ranks 17th in median income and 27th in the percent of residents with college degrees – two factors that are associated with higher socioeconomic status, which in turn is positively associated with volunteering. However, the area also ranks first overall in the percent of residents who live in multi-unit housing, which is correlated with weaker social ties and greater anonymity among community residents. And, NYC ranks first in average commuting time to work, which increases the costs of volunteering by placing time constraints on residents. Another challenge for generating volunteers in the city is its relatively low number (controlling for population size) of small nonprofit organizations, the organizations that are most likely to use, and rely heavily on, volunteers.

The New York City MSA has 1.89 small nonprofits per 1,000 residents, and ranked 178th among the 215 metropolitan areas.

As with the New York City metropolitan area, metropolitan New Orleans experienced a traumatic event – in this case, Hurricane Katrina, which touched down in late summer 2005. Volunteer and civic statistics calculated from the CPS are usually based on the survey responses from the sample of selected households. However, many Americans traveled from other parts of the country to the Gulf States to assist with post-Katrina cleanup. These out-of-state, or “long distance,” volunteers added a significant boost to the capacity of the volunteer workforce in the affected areas. If the “total” number of volunteers includes both area residents and those who travel to the area to volunteer, in 2007, the 166,000 long-distance volunteers from other states made up about 19 percent of the “total” number of Americans who volunteered in Louisiana.<sup>8</sup>

In the years following Hurricane Katrina, metro New Orleans came together and rebuilt and restored much of what was lost throughout its communities. However, the area has historically had a below-average volunteer rate – in part because many of the area’s demographic and socioeconomic characteristics are associated with lower volunteer rates. A relatively large number of metro New Orleans residents have income below the poverty level (18.6 percent in 2014, ranking 44th among all 215 U.S. MSAs with available data) or lack a high school education (86.3 percent have high school diplomas or the equivalent, ranking 156th). Small nonprofit organizations are somewhat more prevalent in metro New Orleans (2.25 small nonprofits per 1,000 residents) than they are in metro New York City, but the New Orleans metro area ranks only 124th among all reporting MSAs.



<sup>6</sup> In general, only some central cities and counties are identifiable in the public-use CPS data. For instance, during the 2004–2013 period, any households located in Orleans Parish are not identifiable in the CPS sample for the New Orleans–Metairie–Kenner metropolitan area.

<sup>7</sup> See “Where Are America’s Volunteers?” (cited above) for details about the measurement of these characteristics and interpretation of these relationships.

<sup>8</sup> *Long-Distance Volunteering in the United States*, 2007. July 2008. Research brief, Corporation for National and Community Service, Washington, DC. Available at [https://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/upload/Long-Distance\\_Volunteering.pdf](https://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/upload/Long-Distance_Volunteering.pdf).

## Trends in Civic Participation: New Orleans, New York City, and the U.S.

Figure 1: Volunteer Rates - New Orleans, New York City, and the U.S.

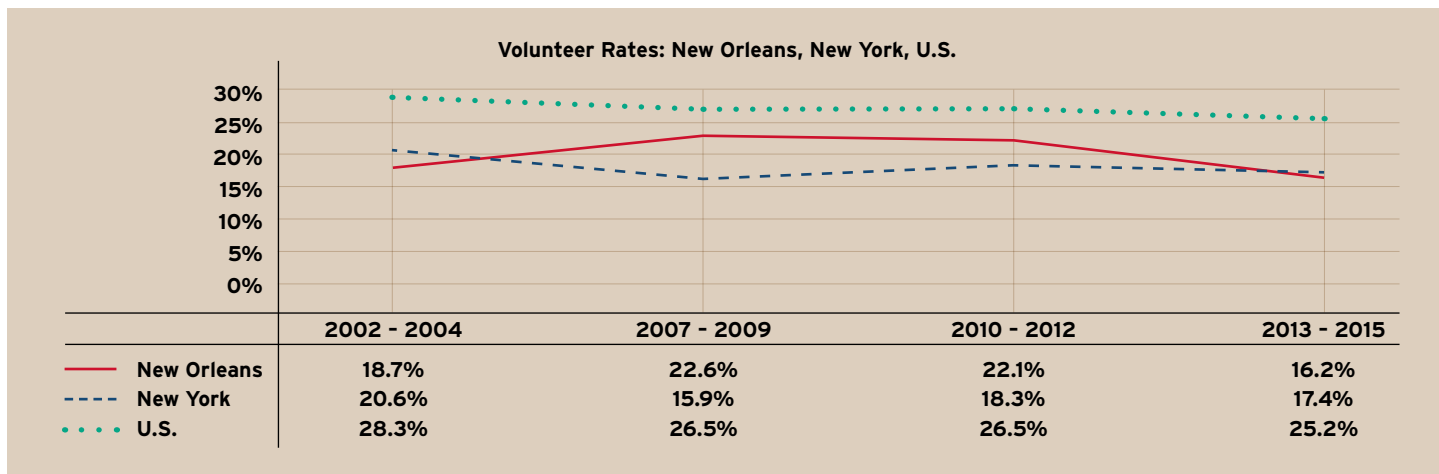


Figure 1 shows historical trend data for volunteer rates for the adult population (age 16 and over) for the New Orleans and New York City metropolitan areas, as well as the national volunteer rates. The figure shows volunteer rates during four points in time, with three years of data pooled for each time interval to enable more precise estimates. The 2002–2004 period corresponds to the post-9/11 surge in volunteering in New York City and nationally, and reflects the pre-Katrina level of volunteering in metropolitan New Orleans.<sup>9</sup> The 2007–2009 period captures the post-Katrina surge in volunteering in the New Orleans MSA, as well as the Great Recession.

The pre- and post-Katrina period (2002–2004; 2007–2009, respectively) saw the volunteer rate in metropolitan New Orleans moving in the opposite direction from the national rate and the rate in metropolitan New York City. While both metropolitan areas (NYC and New Orleans) tend to rank near the bottom in volunteering overall across all MSAs, both experienced surges around crises. The volunteer rate nationally and in metro New York City reached its highest point in 2002–2004, demonstrating a surge of civic activity following September 11.

While the volunteer rate in metro NYC dipped during the recession (2007–2009) from its 2002–2004 levels – as it also did nationally – it increased sharply

in New Orleans after Katrina among area residents (not counting the out-of-state volunteers who came to help with the recovery). The New Orleans metropolitan area volunteer rate reached an all-time peak in 2007–2009, as the area rebuilt following devastation from the hurricane. The 2007–2009, post-Katrina surge in volunteering in metro New Orleans continued during the 2010–2012 period. Meanwhile, at the national level, the US volunteer rate never really experienced a lasting rebound from the 2006 decline, staying steady during the recession (2007–2009) and post-recession (2010–2012) periods despite statistically significant year-to-year changes.

In the New York City metropolitan area, the volunteer rate did bounce back following the recession (2010–2012), though not quite to the pre-recession, post-9/11 level. After that, volunteer rates declined significantly in many parts of the country. The national volunteer rate decreased significantly in 2013–2015, mainly due to declines in volunteering in suburban and rural areas, but also in many larger cities. The volunteer rate declined substantially in metropolitan New Orleans too, even falling below the pre-Katrina level of 18.7 percent;<sup>10</sup> it also fell in metro NYC, although neither change was statistically significant.

<sup>9</sup> Every ten years, the Census Bureau changes the sample design of the CPS in response to changes in the boundaries of the nation's metropolitan areas, which are redrawn following the decennial census. Since metro area boundary changes occurred in 2004 and 2014, the data have been adjusted to account for counties that entered and exited the CPS sample for the New York-Northern New Jersey-Long Island, NY-NJ-PA and New Orleans-Metairie-Kenner, LA metropolitan areas.

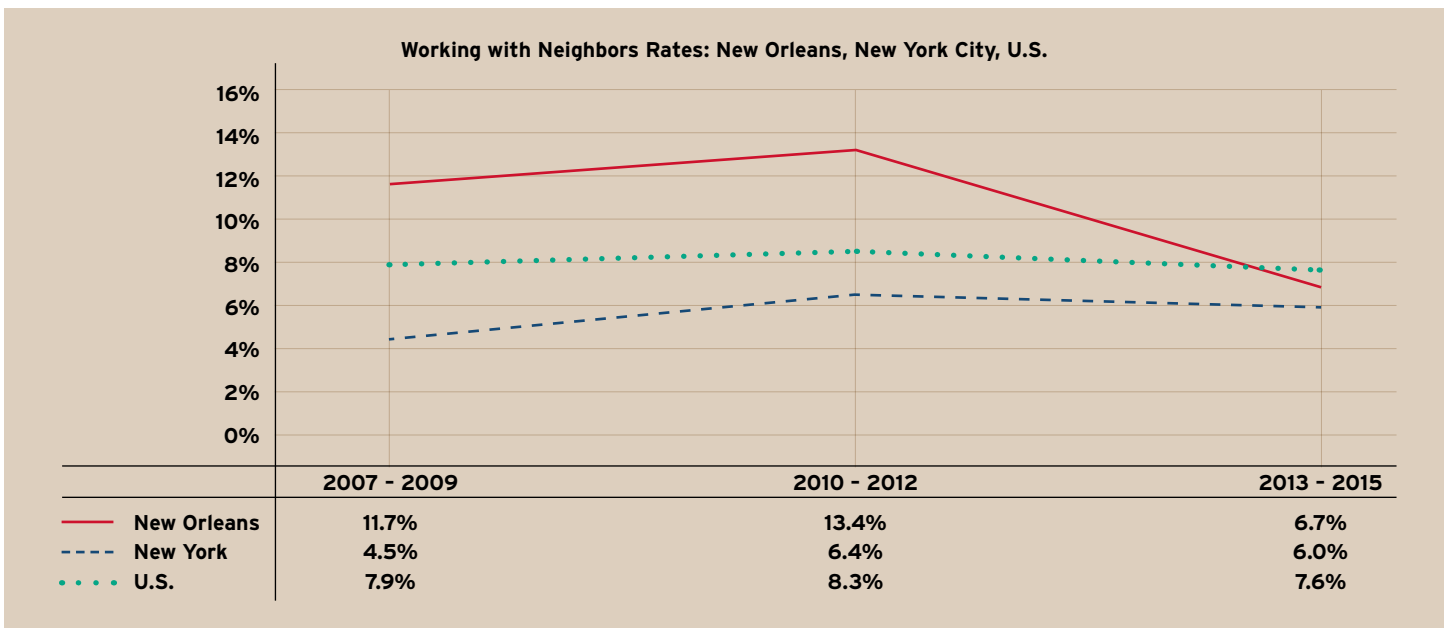
<sup>10</sup> Because of the annual sample sizes of the households surveyed in the New Orleans metropolitan area, the changes in the volunteer rates depicted in Figure 1 are not statistically significant. For more details about the measurement of volunteering, giving and civic engagement in states and metropolitan areas, please see the Appendix in Grimm, Robert T., Jr., and Dietz, Nathan. 2018. "Where Are America's Volunteers? A Look at America's Widespread Decline in Volunteering in Cities and States." Research Brief: Do Good Institute, University of Maryland. Available at <https://dogood.umd.edu/sites/default/files/2019-07/Where%20Are%20Americas%20Volunteers%20Research%20Brief%20Nov%202018.pdf>.

Two measures of “informal” community activities – working with your neighbors to fix or improve something and attending public meetings – were added to the CPS Volunteer Supplement in 2006. In general, Americans are much less likely to take part in these community activities than they are to volunteer “formally” (i.e., through or for an organization).

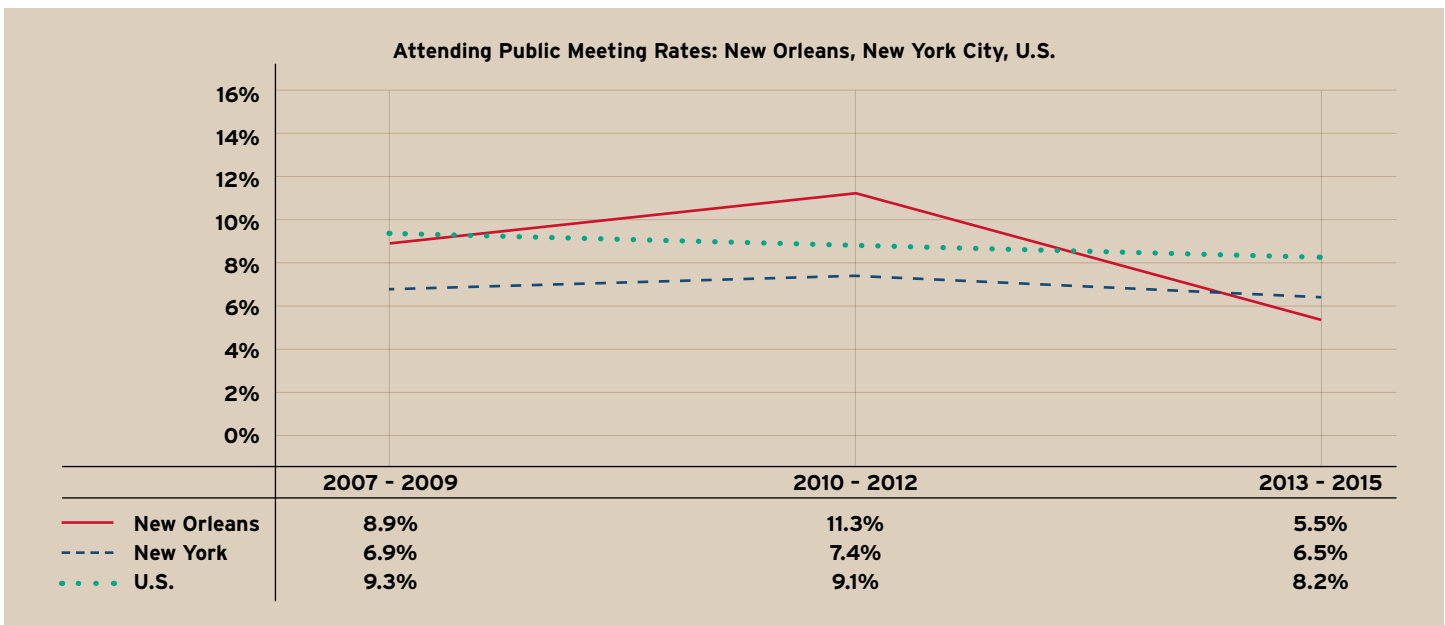
Figures 2 and 3 contain trend data for these two measures for the metro New Orleans, metro New York City, and the U.S. While data on these measures

are not available for the immediate post-September 11 period, the 2007–2009 timespan covers the Great Recession, as well as the post-Katrina recovery period in the New Orleans MSA. In metro New Orleans, the percentage of residents who reported working with their neighbors was above the national rate for 2007–2009, while the recovery from Katrina was happening simultaneously with the onset of the recession. The working-with-neighbors rate for metro New Orleans was also significantly higher than the national rate in 2010–2012.

**Figure 2: Working with Neighbors Rates - New Orleans, New York, and the U.S.**



**Figure 3: Attending Public Meeting Rates - New Orleans, New York, and the U.S.**



Like the percentage of metro New Orleans residents who worked with their neighbors to fix or improve something in their community, the attending-public-meetings rate reached its peak in 2010-2012. However, both rates dropped sharply in 2013-2015 in the New Orleans MSA; for both measures, the decline from 2010-2012 was statistically significant and much larger than the decline in the national rate, which was also statistically significant for both measures.

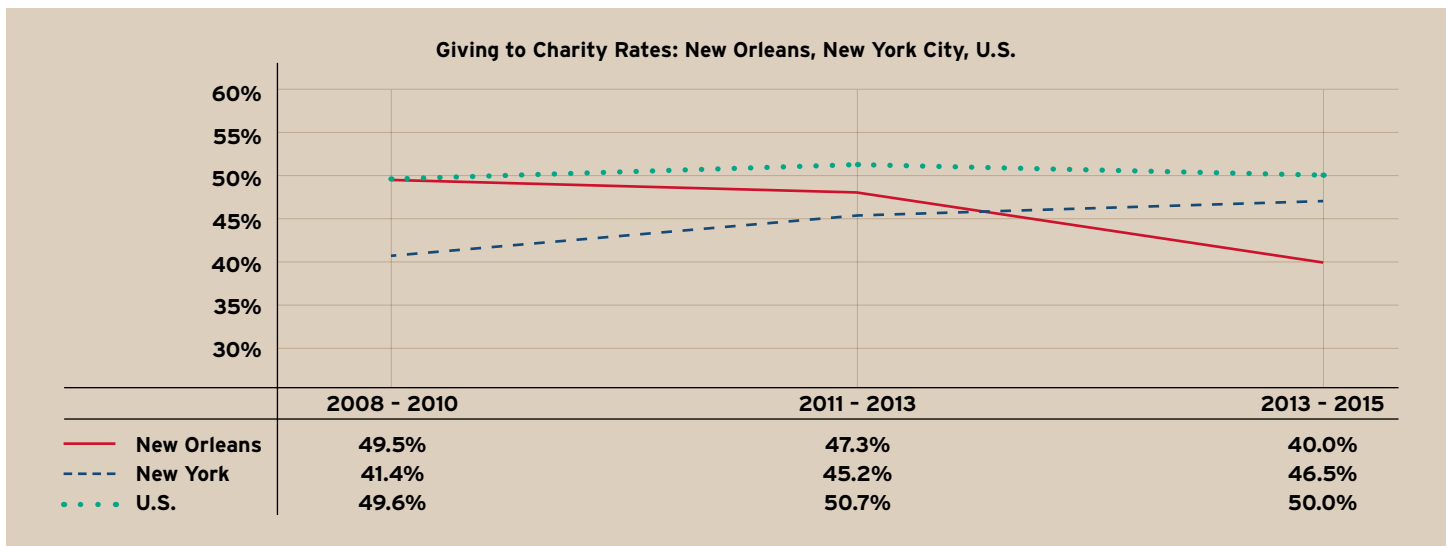
In contrast to New Orleans, residents of the New York City MSA were significantly less likely to engage in both of these activities than American adults nationwide. In the New York City metropolitan area, the trends for both activities were more stable, and more similar to the national trends, than they were in New Orleans. Following the recession, the rates in the New York City MSA rose for both activities during 2010-2012, but only the increase in working with neighbors was statistically significant. Both rates appeared to decrease slightly in metro NYC between 2010-2012 and 2013-2015, matching the national trend, though neither decline was statistically significant.

Figure 4 shows the percentage of adults in the New York and New Orleans metropolitan areas - and the U.S. - who reported making donations of \$25 or

more to charitable organizations in the previous year. Because the CPS added this question in September 2008, it is not possible to study giving rates before the Great Recession, Hurricane Katrina, or the September 11 attacks. However, the trends in the giving rate can be compared to the volunteering trends displayed in Figure 1. In particular, the giving rate declined nationally by a significant amount, and in New Orleans by a large but not significant amount, between the early and mid-2010s.

The national giving rate stayed remarkably consistent during the 2008-2015 period, although the increase in 2011-2013 was statistically significant, as was the fall back down to 50.0 percent in 2013-2015. However, the trend lines for New York and New Orleans look very different from each other, and from the national trend. Although the proportion of New Yorkers who gave to charity has always been lower than the national rate, the giving rate in metro NYC increased significantly from its lowest level in 2008-2010 (during the recession) to 2011-2013. Meanwhile, in the New Orleans metropolitan area, the giving rate during the 2008-2010 period was very close to the national rate, but by 2013-2015 had declined by almost ten percentage points (due to sample size constraints, this change was not statistically significant).

**Figure 4: Giving to Charity Rates - New Orleans, New York, and the U.S.**







## Conclusion

At the national level, civic engagement in America can often be characterized by its continuity. The percentage of Americans who volunteer through or for an organization has consistently been between roughly 25 percent and 29 percent since 2001, according to official government statistics collected by the U.S. Census Bureau and the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Going even farther back, data collected by the Census Bureau in 1974 and 1989 show that the volunteer rate changed by less than one-tenth of one percent between the mid-1970s and the mid-2010s.<sup>11</sup> Given the size of the U.S. population, even a one percentage point change in the national volunteer rate is significant: had the 2015 volunteer rate been one point higher (25.9 percent instead of 24.9 percent), over 2.5 million more adults would have volunteered. Nonetheless, the Great Recession, which (according to the official definition)<sup>12</sup> started in late 2007 and ended in mid-2009, barely moved the national volunteer rate. Between 2007 and 2010, the national rate never dropped below 26.2 percent or rose above 26.8 percent.

Given the dramatic and sudden changes in social life, many observers believe the novel coronavirus pandemic is likely to exert a much larger impact

on civic engagement in America than any other event in recent history. Already, observers are drawing contrasts with the Great Recession, which did not seem to have a lasting impact on many charitable and civic trends.

Some of the initial observed effects on charitable contributions during the Great Recession were negative. The annual Giving USA report features historical trend data on giving from all sources, including individuals, foundations, corporations, and bequests. In more than fifty years of historical data – a period that covers several national recessions – only the Great Recession period featured a sustained decline in overall dollars donated (controlling for inflation).<sup>13</sup> However, a recent analysis<sup>14</sup> of more detailed historical data showed that many nonprofit organizations experienced small declines in revenues from all sources, and that organizational closures were only slightly more common during the recessionary period than they were before or afterward.<sup>15</sup> Many organizations seem to have successfully adapted to the change in economic conditions by changing their revenue models – for instance, by relying less on contributed income and more on earned income.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Dietz, Nathan, and Robert T. Grimm, Jr. 2016. “Doing Good by the Young and Old: Forty Years of American Volunteering.” *Nonprofit Quarterly*, November 17. Available at <https://nonprofitquarterly.org/good-young-old-forty-years-american-volunteering/>.

<sup>12</sup> See the official definitions published by the National Bureau of Economic Research, available at <https://www.nber.org/cycles/>.

<sup>13</sup> Giving USA 2019: *The Annual Report on Philanthropy for the Year 2018*, a publication of Giving USA Foundation, 2019, researched and written by the Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy. Available online at [www.givingusa.org](http://www.givingusa.org).

<sup>14</sup> McCambridge, Ruth, and Nathan Dietz. 2020. “The Great Recession: Nonprofit Winners and Losers.” *Nonprofit Quarterly*, Spring 2020. Available at <https://nonprofitquarterly.org/the-great-recession-nonprofit-winners-and-losers/>.

<sup>15</sup> 8.6 percent of all reporting nonprofits with gross receipts of \$100,000 or more closed during the 2008–2010 time period, compared to 6.3 percent during 2004–2007 and 6.6 percent between 2011–2013. See McCambridge and Dietz, *op cit.*, for more details about nonprofit finances before, during, and after the Great Recession.

<sup>16</sup> McCambridge and Dietz, *op cit.*

## **“As the nation fights against the current pandemic and plans for the recovery, our challenge will be to build on likely increases in Americans’ impulse to engage in charitable and civic activities and find a way to sustain those valuable trends for the long haul.”**

The evidence also suggests that the Great Recession did not have an immediate or sustained negative impact on volunteering and other forms of civic engagement. Participation rates for the four forms of civic engagement considered here – volunteering with an organization, giving to charity, attending public meetings, and working with neighbors – all increased significantly at the national level in 2008 or 2009. One post-recession study<sup>17</sup> offers a possible explanation for why the economic downturn may have encouraged, not discouraged volunteering. An analysis of multiyear, nationwide CPS data suggests that the foreclosure rate – one of the most commonly used measures of economic distress during the recession – was associated with higher volunteer rates among homeowners in metropolitan areas, controlling for other characteristics of the individual and the MSA.

In other words, the recession might have encouraged prosocial behaviors among residents with the strongest connections to communities that suffered economic hardship, the negative trends of the mid-2010s among all four civic indicators show that those gains were largely reversed at the national level.

Because the Great Recession did not appear to have a lasting negative impact on civic engagement, the analysis in this brief focuses on two regions that experienced severe and immediate economic and social devastation: New York City in the early 2000s, after the attacks of September 11, 2001, and New Orleans in the mid-2000s, after Hurricane Katrina. Although data problems (a lack of pre-9/11 data for

metro NYC; relatively small sample sizes for metro New Orleans) limit our ability to draw definitive conclusions, the results suggest a surge in charitable and civic activities in the post-crisis recovery period in both areas. The volunteer rate rose to an all-time high nationally, and in metropolitan New York City, in the years following September 11, 2001, and New Orleans also experienced lasting surges in civic activity following Hurricane Katrina.

However, the results also suggest that engagement levels diminished between the early and mid-2010s, both nationally and in these areas that had overcome so much in the recovery from disaster. This decline can be added to the list of pressing questions about how the American charitable sector – and Americans themselves – will respond to COVID-19. How will donors and institutional funders with the means to contribute to community solutions respond to the challenge? When states and localities begin to lift the shelter-in-place orders that currently govern our lives, will charities and other nonprofit organizations be equipped to handle a surge in demand from potential volunteers? Most importantly, will Americans respond to the challenge as they did after September 11, 2001: with “altruism, camaraderie, and social solidarity at the community level rather than social breakdown, passivity, or escape”?<sup>18</sup> As the nation fights against the current pandemic and plans for recovery, our challenge will be to build on likely increases in Americans’ impulse to engage in charitable and civic activities and find a way to sustain those valuable trends for the long haul.

<sup>17</sup> Rotolo, T., Wilson, J., & Dietz, N. (2015). “Volunteering in the United States in the Aftermath of the Foreclosure Crisis.” *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 44(5), 924-944. Available at <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0899764014546669>

<sup>18</sup> Penner, L., Brannick, M., Weber, S., & Connell, P. (2005). Effects on volunteering of the September 11, 2001, attacks: An archival analysis. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 35, 1333-1360.

## Appendix: Metropolitan area profiles for New Orleans and New York

### Metro Area Name: New York - Newark - Jersey City, NY - NJ - PA Metro Area Metro Area FIPS: 35620

Indicator		Rank
Unemployment Rate (2014)	6.5%	70
Poverty Rate (2014)	14.6%	125
Percent High School Grads (2014)	85.6%	170
Percent College Grads (2014)	37.9%	27
% in Multi-Unit Housing (2014)	57.0%	1
Percent Homeowners (2014)	50.7%	213
Commuting Time (2014)	35.8	1
Median Income (2014)	\$31,680	17
Population Density (2014)	1,850.50	70
Large Nonprofits per 1000 Residents (2014)	1.14	83
Small Nonprofits per 1000 Residents (2014)	1.89	178

### Metro Area Name: New Orleans - Metairie, LA Metro Area Metro Area FIPS: 35380

Indicator		Rank
Unemployment Rate (2014)	6.4%	77
Poverty Rate (2014)	18.1%	44
Percent High School Grads (2014)	86.3%	156
Percent College Grads (2014)	28.9%	101
% in Multi-Unit Housing (2014)	33.4%	55
Percent Homeowners (2014)	61.2%	159
Commuting Time (2014)	25.2	51
Median Income (2014)	\$25,975	112
Population Density (2014)	158.81	77
Large Nonprofits per 1000 Residents (2014)	0.99	125
Small Nonprofits per 1000 Residents (2014)	2.25	124



SCHOOL OF  
**PUBLIC POLICY**

**DO GOOD INSTITUTE**

**Do Good Institute**

2105 Susquehanna Hall  
College Park, Maryland 20742

**[dogood.umd.edu](http://dogood.umd.edu)**


email: [dogood@umd.edu](mailto:dogood@umd.edu)

**Find Us on Social:**

 [DoGoodatUMD](https://www.facebook.com/DoGoodatUMD)

 [DoGoodatUMD](https://www.instagram.com/DoGoodatUMD)

 [@DoGoodatUMD](https://twitter.com/DoGoodatUMD)

 [company/dogoodinstitute](https://www.linkedin.com/company/dogoodinstitute)