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2-1-1 In The Mid South Delta: A Collective Case Study

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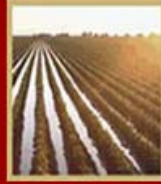
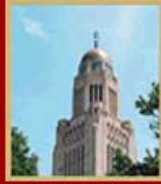
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2-1-1 IN THE MID SOUTH DELTA: A COLLECTIVE CASE STUDY

A Report to the United Way of America

Prepared by:
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The University of Nebraska Public Policy Center

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Anonymous interviewees

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the summer of 2005, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation awarded a \$200,000 grant to the United Way of America to demonstrate the ability of three Mississippi Delta states to develop 2-1-1 services and enable community resource data sharing. The three states, **Louisiana, Arkansas, and Mississippi**, face significant social and economic challenges, particularly in the Mississippi Delta region. The focus of the Kellogg Foundation funding was **development of resource databases** and **2-1-1** in Arkansas and Mississippi, with particular focus on the Mid South Delta area. The 2-1-1 for northeast Louisiana, located in Louisiana's Delta area, also received funding to **enhance their resource database** and provide **expertise** to the nascent 2-1-1 initiatives in Arkansas and Mississippi.

Only weeks after the award, Hurricanes Katrina and Rita devastated much of the Gulf Coast. The Hurricanes fundamentally altered the original scope and timelines envisioned by each state. This case study documents the journeys of the three states to develop 2-1-1s and community resource sharing during the one and one-half years of the Kellogg Foundation funding, and in the midst of disaster response and recovery.

THE STATES

Because Louisiana already had statewide 2-1-1, their experience in strengthening their existing system will be presented first. Neither Arkansas nor Mississippi had any 2-1-1s in place at the time of the Kellogg Foundation funding. Arkansas' planning-intensive process will be presented next. Finally, Mississippi's rapid statewide 2-1-1 deployment will be presented.

Louisiana already enjoyed statewide 2-1-1 coverage at the time of the Kellogg Foundation funding. 2-1-1 services were delivered through six separate organizations, each serving a region of the state. Although 2-1-1 is recognized nationally as a United Way initiative, only one 2-1-1 in Louisiana is operated by a United Way; the majority of Louisiana's six 2-1-1s received little to no United Way funding. All Louisiana's 2-1-1s operated independently, and had only just begun executing agreement for calls to be transferred to other 2-1-1s in the event of an interruption at one of the centers. Kellogg grant funds were directed to the United Way of Northeast Louisiana (Monroe) to enhance their Delta region database and to pay for their expenses to provide mentoring to Arkansas and Mississippi. When Hurricanes Katrina and Rita struck, the Monroe 2-1-1 performed heroically, answering all calls from New Orleans, statewide cell phone calls, and calls from other disabled Louisiana 2-1-1s. They accommodated hundreds of volunteer information and referral specialists from around the United States to keep 2-1-1 operational 24/7 throughout the disaster and months after. Their call volumes exploded from receiving hundreds, to receiving thousands, of calls per day, and have never returned to pre-Hurricane numbers. In the midst of the response and the year and one-half of recovery, the Monroe 2-1-1 has improved its community database. A staff member is now dedicated to ensuring database accuracy and comprehensiveness for the Delta region that Monroe serves. Monroe also provided pre- and post-Hurricane expertise to the other states. However, its experiences have mentored 2-1-1s well beyond the Mid South Delta area. Indeed, Monroe 2-1-1's response has been the subject of a report, *Shelter From The Storm: The Monroe Experience* (United Way of America, n.d.), and has served as a role model for 2-1-1s across the country. Within the state of Louisiana, the separate 2-1-1s are beginning to forge closer ties to create a more seamless 2-1-1 system and to be better prepared for future disasters or other events.

Arkansas had no 2-1-1s and very few information referral services of any kind in the state. The United Way of Benton County had been working to bring 2-1-1 to their northwestern part of the state. Kellogg Foundation funding was directed to the United Way of Pulaski County, located in Little Rock. It became quickly apparent that the two efforts needed to work together. It also became clear that, working together, a statewide 2-1-1 was not only possible, but preferable to one that served only selected geographic areas of the state (e.g., northwest and Delta). The 2-1-1 promoters joined forces to create a formidable planning effort that reached community leaders throughout the state and developed commitments from the public and private sectors. Although much of the initial planning and the driving force for 2-1-1 has come from Arkansas' United Ways, they have recruited participation and garnered widespread support from many organizations and individuals unrelated to United Way. The first several years' funding has nearly been secured. Two call centers have been sited and an Executive Director hired. They are working to create a statewide database. Although not yet operational, Arkansas has created a firm foundation for its statewide 2-1-1.

Although **Mississippi** did not have any 2-1-1 operating in their state, they did have numerous pre-existing information and referral services. Some of these information and referrals were operated or supported by local United Ways. The Kellogg Foundation funding was awarded to the United Way of West Central Mississippi (Vicksburg), located in the Delta region. The United Way immediately hired two part-time individuals to begin developing the community resource database. When the Hurricanes struck, it was determined that the 2-1-1 call center would be located in Jackson and operated by the United Way of the Capital Area. Given the pressures of responding to citizens and evacuees in need, the expectation of being able to ramp up quickly, and wanting an operational 2-1-1 in place prior to the start of the next hurricane season, the Jackson United Way,

unbelievably, publicly launched a statewide 2-1-1 by July of 2006. Mississippi was able to develop a comprehensive community services database, with a special, intensive focus on the Delta area. The quick start-up may have sacrificed some of the statewide buy-in and securing of financial support from other partners. However, the 2-1-1 has been working, after launch, to create partnerships and develop contracts with other organizations and public agencies that expand the 2-1-1 beyond simply information and referral.

CASE STUDY THEMES

Respondents feel strongly that 2-1-1 has been (or promises to be) beneficial to their states. There were several common **themes** that emerged from the interviews, as well. These were comments that came up again and again, from respondents from all the states.

- 2-1-1s provide a **critical connecting point** between people with needs and community services.
- 2-1-1s build **capacity** in communities.
- 2-1-1s operate best as a **partner** within the fabric of human services.
- Networks of **2-1-1s should work together** to ensure access.
- **Promotion and marketing** of 2-1-1 is crucial.
- Establishing a 2-1-1 **takes time** to do right.
- **Funding** to support 2-1-1 is needed.

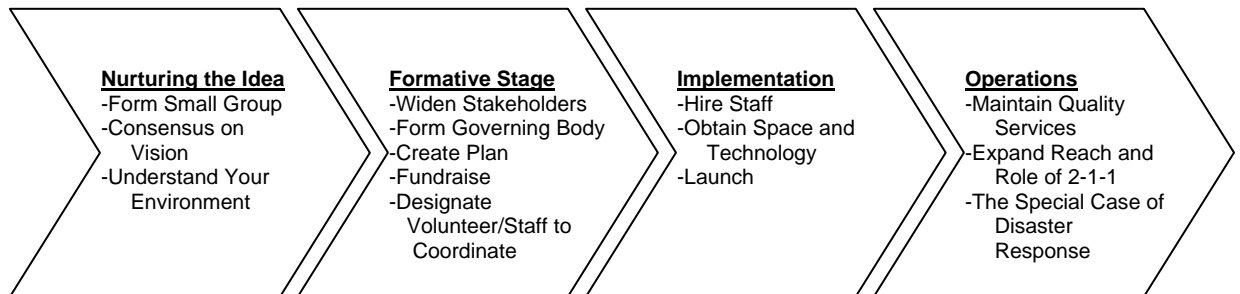
Each theme also has a number of sub-themes that are expanded upon in the body of this report.

LESSONS LEARNED

Respondents from the three states were generous in sharing their successes and failures. Their *Lessons Learned* focused on their 2-1-1 **Planning Process** and on how **2-1-1 National Support and Coordination** could have been useful to them.

Planning Process

Based on the interviews with key stakeholders, there are four key planning stages:



National Support and Coordination

Respondents believed that there is an opportunity for national 2-1-1 support and coordination, particularly around:

- **Funding**
- **Marketing/Promotion**
- National **Coordination** Among 2-1-1s
- National **Partnering** Opportunities

INTRODUCTION

2-1-1 is an easy to remember, three-digit telephone number that provides information about community human services and volunteering opportunities. 2-1-1 has become a premier social innovation of the 21st century with over 65% of the U.S. population now covered by a 2-1-1 service (United Way of America, 2006, p. 1). There are over 212 active 2-1-1s in 41 states (including the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico). Information and referral specialists direct callers to appropriate community-based and governmental organizations for:

- **Basic Human Needs Resource:** food banks, clothing closets, shelters, rent assistance, utility assistance.
- **Physical and Mental Health Resources:** health insurance programs, Medicaid and Medicare, maternal health, Children's Health Insurance Program, medical information lines, crisis intervention services, support groups, counseling, drug and alcohol intervention and rehabilitation.
- **Employment Supports:** financial assistance, job training, transportation assistance, education programs.
- **Support for Older Americans and Persons with Disabilities:** adult day care, congregate meals, Meals on Wheels, respite care, home health care, transportation, homemaker services.
- **Support for Children, Youth and Families:** childcare, after school programs, Head Start, family resource centers, summer camps and recreation programs, mentoring, tutoring, protective services.
- **Volunteer Opportunities and Donations.**

The 2-1-1 movement started in 1997 when the United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta launched the first call service. In 2000, the Federal Communications Commission set aside the three-digit code to be used for community information and referral. The Commission reserved 2-1-1 to provide:

...individuals and families in need with a shortcut through what may be a bewildering maze of health and human service agencies' phone numbers. By simply dialing 211, those in need of assistance are referred, and sometimes connected, to appropriate agencies and community organizations. (Federal Communications Commission, n.d., para. 1)

Funding for 2-1-1s comes from a mix of public and private sources. Most 2-1-1s must develop a portfolio of support to operate their 2-1-1s. In many cases, this funding comes from local resources. There is currently no federal funding designated to support 2-1-1 services. However, the Calling for 2-1-1 Act, introduced in both houses of Congress (S. 211 and H.R. 211), would provide financial support to designated state entities.

In 2005, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation awarded a grant to create community resource databases and develop or enhance 2-1-1s in three Mid South Delta states. This collective case study describes the challenges faced and successes enjoyed by each state:

- Louisiana
- Arkansas
- Mississippi.

Very little has been documented about the development of 2-1-1 across the United States. It is hoped that this case study may be productively used by those involved in 2-1-1 activities in the three states as well as others as a guide and a catalyst for action.

The report is divided into three sections. This section, the *Introduction*, gives the background of the project and information about the development of the report. Next, are three *Case Studies*, one case study for each state. The report concludes with the *Lessons Learned* section that integrates the experiences of the three states.

MID SOUTH DELTA REGION

The focus of the Kellogg Foundation funding was development of resource databases and 2-1-1 in Arkansas and Mississippi, with particular focus on the Mid South Delta area. The 2-1-1 for northeast Louisiana, located in Louisiana's Delta area, also received funding to enhance their database and provide expertise to the nascent 2-1-1 initiatives in Arkansas and Mississippi. These three states have some of the nation's highest percentages of citizens living in **poverty**.

State	Rate
Mississippi	21.6%
Louisiana	19.4%
New Mexico	19.3%
District of Columbia	18.9%
Arkansas	17.9%
<i>United States</i>	<i>13.1%</i>

The Mid South Delta Region is an area of particular challenge. The Kellogg Foundation's operational boundaries of the Mid South Delta consist of 55 contiguous counties and

parishes in northeastern Louisiana, eastern Arkansas, and western Mississippi. These areas share common geography, history, culture, resources, challenges and opportunities.

Some of the challenges that this region faces are lower levels of **education** and **income** than the rest of the nation. The region also battles higher levels of **unemployment**.

	Arkansas	Louisiana	Mississippi	<i>United States</i>
Less than High School Diploma	24.7%	25.2%	27.1%	19.6%
Associate's Degree or Higher	20.7%	22.2%	22.6%	30.7%
Median Household Income	\$32,182	\$32,566	\$31,330	\$41,994
Unemployment	4.8%	4.8%	7.9%	4.7%

FUNDING FOR 2-1-1 IN LOUISIANA, ARKANSAS, AND MISSISSIPPI

In July 2005, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation awarded a \$200,000 grant to the United Way of America to **enhance the development of 2-1-1** in the Mid South Delta area of Arkansas and Mississippi and creating a mentoring relationship with an experienced 2-1-1 in Louisiana. The project was designed to demonstrate the ability of a three-state region to work cooperatively to serve citizens in need and would feature:

- a mentoring relationship with the United Way of Northeast Louisiana providing technical assistance and consultation and proceeding with their own 2-1-1 development; and,
- a unique sharing of resources within the Arkansas and Mississippi Delta regions.

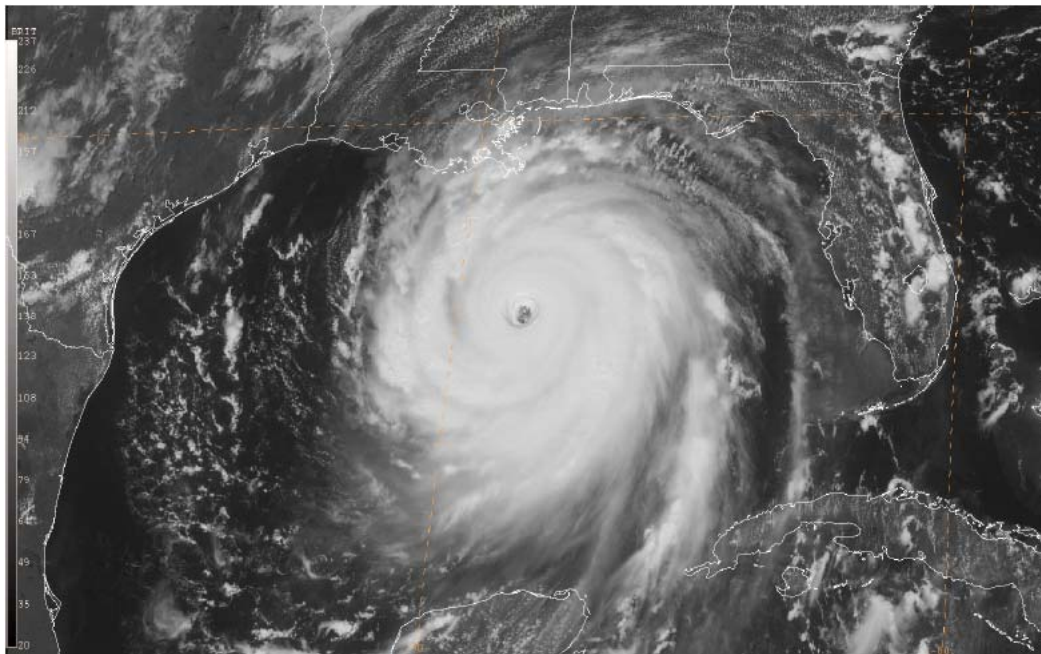
HURRICANES KATRINA AND RITA

When the Kellogg Foundation award was announced, Kelly Levy, the United Way's National Director of 2-1-1 at the time was quoted in a media release (2005):

We are very excited that the W.K. Kellogg Foundation has recognized the potential of 2-1-1, particularly in this key region of the country that is often subjected to natural disasters such as hurricanes and tornados (United Way of America, 2005, p. 1)

Little did the Kellogg Foundation, United Way of America, or the participating partners know how prophetic Ms. Levy's observation about the Delta's vulnerability to natural disasters would be. Just one month after the announcement of Kellogg Foundation funding, Hurricane Katrina, followed quickly by Hurricane Rita, devastated the Gulf Coast.

Katrina struck southeast Louisiana and Mississippi on August 29, 2005. Katrina became the **costliest** and one of the five **deadliest** hurricanes in the history of the United States: over 1 million people were evacuated and over \$81 billion in damage from winds, flooding, and tornadoes, was caused by Katrina (Knabb, Rhome, & Brown, 2005). The federal disaster declaration covered 90,000 square miles (FEMA, 2005). Weeks later, on September 24, another major hurricane, Rita, made landfall. The hurricane's flooding and tornadoes ravaged some of the already devastated areas (Knabb, Brown, & Rhome, 2006).



Hurricane Katrina over the central Gulf of Mexico on August 28, 2005, near the peak time of its intensity (from Knabb, Rhome, & Brown, 2005, p. 42)

STATE 2-1-1 PROFILES

Each of the three states in this report started at a very different place. Each pursued different paths to developing and enhancing 2-1-1 for their residents.

In summer 2005, **Louisiana** had statewide 2-1-1 coverage. However, there was very limited interaction between the six 2-1-1s in Louisiana. They each had a separate contract with the State of Louisiana to provide the call services. They each were responsible for developing complementary funding and for creating any other specialized call services.

The six 2-1-1s did not observe any common standards or benchmarks. They did not share resource data. They had only just begun to execute memoranda of understanding that would activate emergency call center back-ups. The lead agency for the Kellogg Foundation funding was the United Way of Northeast Louisiana, located in the Mid South Delta. The United Way of Northeast Louisiana was the only United Way that operated a 2-1-1.

At the time of the Kellogg Foundation award, the United Way of Benton County had been working to establish a 2-1-1 in northwestern **Arkansas**. They had been working mostly alone to create 2-1-1. Although they hoped that 2-1-1 might become statewide, their focus was an operational 2-1-1 for northwest Arkansas. There were few other general information and referral services in Arkansas. The lead agency for the Kellogg Foundation funding was the United Way of Pulaski County, located in Arkansas’ capital of Little Rock.

Several United Ways in **Mississippi**, most notably the United Way of West Central Mississippi (Vicksburg), had been working to promote the development of 2-1-1 statewide. However, the effort had failed to garner widespread support of many United Ways in Mississippi and had also not identified sustainable funding. Part of the challenge was placing 2-1-1 within the many other information and referral services in the state, some of which were operated by local United Ways. The United Way of West Central Mississippi, located in the Mid South Delta, was designated the lead agency for Kellogg Foundation funds.

The matrices below highlight some of the key features of each state.

	LOUISIANA
Operational 2-1-1s	YES - 6
Local United Way involvement	Only one 2-1-1 operated by a United Way; others receive support; still others have little to no affiliation with United Way
Characterization of 2-1-1's Working Relationships	Had been some efforts to share information and some had executed memoranda of understanding to provide back-up for each other
Funding	Each 2-1-1 received some funding directly from the State of Louisiana; each responsible for developing own funding portfolio
Coordinated Resource Database	NO
Common Operational Standards or Benchmarks	NO

	ARKANSAS	MISSISSIPPI
Operational 2-1-1s	NO	NO
Coordinated Resource Database	NO	NO
Many local information and referrals	NO	YES
Attempts to develop statewide 2-1-1	Yes, but efforts had been focused on Northwest part of state	Yes, but efforts had been unsuccessful

COLLECTIVE CASE STUDY

This **collective case study** follows 2-1-1 efforts in three states over the one and one-half year time period of Kellogg Foundation funding for 2-1-1. The **purpose** of this study was to describe the planning, implementation, delivery, and outcome aspects of 2-1-1 technology in the Mid-South Delta region in the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

The case study relied on multiple **sources** of evidence. The author worked with representatives from each state to obtain access to relevant documents, records, and key stakeholders. Three information sources were accessed:

- **Interviews** – both open-ended (respondents are asked to comment about certain events) and focused (respondent answers set questions). Telephone interviews were conducted from January through May 2007. Interview candidates were nominated by the Lead Agency for each state.
- **Meetings** – three meetings were convened by the United Way of America during the time of Kellogg Foundation funding. Representatives from the three states attended all meetings to share progress, discuss challenges, and make recommendations.
- **Documents** – such as reports, memoranda, agendas, administrative documents, newspaper articles.

A qualitative analysis of interview transcripts was conducted to create the case studies. Information from meetings and documents provided additional detail. Interviewees were invited to comment on a working draft of their state's case study. Member-checking is a useful tool that can help improve the accuracy of the report. A number of comments and suggestions were made.

CASE STUDIES

The following pages tell the **story** of the development of 2-1-1 in Louisiana, Arkansas, and Mississippi. United Ways in these three states partnered with the United Way of America to either enhance, or create, 2-1-1s for their communities.

Hurricanes Katrina and Rita both confounded and galvanized the importance of 2-1-1 in the states. The lead United Way in **Louisiana** was turned into a 24/7 disaster and recovery 2-1-1 virtually overnight. They and the other Louisiana 2-1-1s forged their own way in responding to an unprecedented disaster. **Arkansas**, unaffected physically by the Hurricanes, relied on planning and partnerships to create a foundation for eventual 2-1-1 services. **Mississippi** was devastated by the Hurricanes and was able to establish a call center less than a year later.

The case studies are based on information from telephone **interviews** and **meetings**, and from **documents**. Quotes throughout the case studies tell the story of each state through the words of those interviewed.

Because Louisiana already had statewide 2-1-1, the case studies will begin with their experience. They will be followed by Arkansas' planning process. Finally, the case studies conclude with Mississippi's rapid deployment of a statewide 2-1-1.

LOUISIANA – FROM STATEWIDE COVERAGE TO STATEWIDE COLLABORATION



Map of Louisiana 2-1-1 Call Centers (from the Louisiana 2-1-1 Web site: <http://www.211louisiana.com/statemap.htm>)

BACKGROUND

Louisiana is a state with distinct regions with their own histories and customs. In Louisiana, the traditional geographic divisions are the north from the south, the east from the west. Louisiana's Delta area covers approximately 11 counties in the northeastern part of the state. See Appendix for more detailed socio-demographic information about Louisiana.

Louisiana has a rich and storied background in the delivery of 2-1-1 services to its residents. Lafayette established the fourth 2-1-1 in the United States. Louisiana was one of the first states to have **statewide 2-1-1 coverage**. One of the major database software vendors in the information and referral world started in Shreveport.

Louisiana came to the United Way of America project with deep expertise in 2-1-1. The United Way of Northeast Louisiana, in particular, had indicated its willingness to mentor Arkansas and Louisiana. The United Way of Northeast Louisiana was also centrally-located in Louisiana's Delta counties, making its resource database a valuable addition to Delta residents in other adjacent states.

The challenge in Louisiana, despite its history, would be creating **greater collaboration** among the independent 2-1-1s. At the beginning of this project, none of the 2-1-1s shared information resources, there were only a very few memoranda of understanding for back-up, and no consistency in 2-1-1 hours or staffing.

2-1-1s IN LOUISIANA PRIOR TO HURRICANES RITA AND KATRINA

2-1-1s evolved in Louisiana as separate, **independent organizations**. Some 2-1-1s are part of other, larger organizations, and others operate primarily as call centers. Each 2-1-1 has defined for itself what its niche is in its community and how to be responsive to its community. Only one 2-1-1 is located in a United Way agency.

“2-1-1s all have evolved as many different kinds of agencies.”

“How each of the 2-1-1s has evolved will be as different as the communities that they come from.”

There are six regional 2-1-1 call centers. They are located in:

- Baton Rouge – Baton Rouge Crisis Intervention Center
- Lafayette – 232-HELP/2-1-1
- Lake Charles – 310 Info and Volunteer Center of Southwest Louisiana
- Monroe – First Call for Help, United Way of Northeast Louisiana
- New Orleans - VIA Link
- Shreveport - Centerpoint Information & Referral/2-1-1

Each center operates independently. That is, each determines how it will deliver services, what additional services they will offer, with whom they want to partner, and how to fund the service. A number of 2-1-1s blend information and referral with other services:

	Crisis/Suicide Prevention	Volunteer Center	Homeless Management Information System Lead Agency
Baton Rouge	X		
Lafayette			
Lake Charles		X	X
Monroe			
New Orleans	X	X <i>(prior to Hurricanes)</i>	X
Shreveport			X

For example, all the 2-1-1s were participants in their communities’ Homeless Management Information System Continuum of Care, with three serving as the lead agency. This has meant that 2-1-1s are contributing resource information directly to case managers in their communities.

“It allows the Continuum of Care or other agencies using that same database to benefit from 2-1-1s’ research and maintenance of resource data, so their case managers can make appropriate referrals. It also keeps down the costs for the 2-1-1s who manage a database because they’re splitting their costs with other agencies.”

Funding

Louisiana’s 2-1-1s have been responsible for developing a **mix** of funding to support their operations. One significant change occurred in 2004, when the Louisiana Department of Social Services began providing some funding to each of the state’s 2-1-1s. However, state support covers only a portion of the costs to operate 2-1-1s throughout the state. One 2-1-1 estimated that state funding supplied approximately one-quarter of their total annual budget. The funding distribution was based on population.

Our “success ...getting state funding a few years ago...totally changed our capacity in providing services and having staffing.”

“Prior to [state support], we were under-funded by the United Way and other grants or contracts we had not seen increased for years, so that money made a significant difference in this agency.”

“We have some state contracts, some federal contracts, and they are reimbursements.”

Before the Hurricanes, only a few of Louisiana’s United Ways provided some financial support for 2-1-1. The support, however, ranged from heavy funding to very minimal funding. This has changed since Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, with all but one United Way providing some support for 2-1-1.

Statewide Coordination

Although each 2-1-1 is operated independently, the 2-1-1s do work together. **The Louisiana Alliance of Information and Referral Systems, LA AIRS**, (a state-based affiliate of the national industry association, the Alliance of Information and Referral Systems – AIRS) worked together to create the regions and approach the Louisiana Public Service Commission to establish statewide coverage of 2-1-1s. LA AIRS also worked together to secure state funding for 2-1-1s. The group had made several unsuccessful attempts to obtain state support, including a tariff on phones. The group finally hired an experienced lobbyist to work with the state. This ended up being the strategy that resulted in state support.

“We had somebody very, very influential working in our behalf.”

Despite their impressive track record, Louisiana’s 2-1-1s faced some challenges. As independent and variably-funded organizations, the 2-1-1s did not have **telephone systems or databases** that easily interfaced. For example, as separate call center systems,

it was not possible to automatically route “overflow” calls to another Louisiana 2-1-1. Although five of the six 2-1-1s used a common database, for tracking resources, each 2-1-1 had a separate contract with the software vendor, and each was located in a separate server that did not interface with the other 2-1-1s databases. Neither were there commonly adhered-to **standards**, call hours, or even marketing campaigns.

“There is a clear distinction between statewide coverage and statewide collaboration. It’s an enormous difference.”

Trust between 2-1-1s was also strained at times. In particular, there had been long standing tension between 2-1-1s and Louisiana’s United Ways. 2-1-1 is known as a United Way initiative, yet, many United Ways in Louisiana were providing little or no financial support to the 2-1-1s. There was also a suspicion that the United Ways, or United Way of America, intended to “take” the 2-1-1 designation from the five non-United Way organizations. **The United Way Association of Louisiana** had not played a leadership role in coordinating 2-1-1. Although their meetings of local United Way executives were occasionally an opportunity to discuss and promote 2-1-1, it did not play a formal role.

“Some of the longer standing information and referrals and 2-1-1s have not had good experiences with the United Way in this state and that they’re suspicious of the United Ways’ objective. Some people believe that it’s...a smoke screen to take over control of the 2-1-1s and so being burned in the past has made them scared of the fire for right now.”

Disaster Planning

Prior to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, 2-1-1s in Louisiana had done very **little planning** around how they might work together in the event of a disaster. Ironically, just months prior to the Hurricanes, disaster planning had been an item on LA AIRS agenda. A draft memorandum of agreement had been discussed. The Memorandum was being circulated among 2-1-1s for formal consideration and signature. At the time of the Hurricanes, New Orleans had two signed Memoranda of Understanding, one with Baton Rouge Crisis Intervention Center and the other with the United Way of Northeast Louisiana.

Locally, again as befits the independence of the 2-1-1s, there were different approaches to formally working within the emergency or disaster infrastructures. The United Way of Northeast Louisiana, for example, had pursued and executed a formal Memorandum of Understanding with its Parish Emergency Preparedness and Homeland Security office to assist and support each other. Other 2-1-1s across Louisiana had no formal or even informal relationships with their emergency management organizations.

HURRICANES KATRINA AND RITA

On August 29, 2005, **Katrina**, a hurricane measuring as an upper-end Category 3 storm, made landfall in southeast Louisiana and Mississippi. The nation’s attention was on the

size and ferocity of the Hurricane and the tragic aftermath. Katrina's storm surge breached levees around New Orleans caused flooding of 15 to 20 feet over 80% of the city (National Weather Service, 2006). Several weeks later, the area was hit by Hurricane **Rita**. Rita's tornados and rainfall devastated entire communities in southwestern Louisiana and caused additional and prolonged flooding in New Orleans.

The United Way 2-1-1 report, *Shelter from the Storm: The Monroe Experience* (United Way of America, n.d.), well details the harrowing and heroic response, through the experience of United Way of Northeast Louisiana's 2-1-1 call center in Monroe, Louisiana. *Shelter from the Storm* (summarized in the Appendix of this report) includes practical lessons learned, including:

- Agreements, Cooperation And Memoranda Of Understanding
- Staff And Volunteer Expectations And Needs
- Technology And Connectivity
- Call Center Operations.

Louisiana's 2-1-1s Mobilize

Although Louisiana's 2-1-1s operated independently, they had established relationships and were just beginning to create formal reciprocal agreements for backing one another up. The pre-existing relationships meant that New Orleans and Monroe and the other 2-1-1s were able to effectively respond during Hurricanes Katrina and Rita *in the absence* of any detailed planning.

In August and September 2005, when the Hurricanes hit, the **2-1-1s activated** based on the brand new Memorandum of Understanding between New Orleans and Monroe. New Orleans and Monroe quickly agreed that all New Orleans' calls would be transferred to Monroe. All cell phone calls and Lake Charles' 2-1-1, also, later transferred calls to Monroe as well.

“At one point in Monroe they were answering calls from every region except Shreveport, because everybody had a hurricane, a flood or some problem. And so it shows that there is a need for the capacity of some entity, in state or out of state or somewhere, to be able to, on a short notice, handle calls when other call centers go down, and maybe their usual referral isn't available either.”

Very quickly, it became clear that Monroe had neither the **technology** nor the **personnel** to answer the onslaught of calls. CenturyTel generously and expertly set up the equipment lines to expand Monroe from a 4 line/8 am- 5 pm call center to a 56-seat call center with over 100 lines operating 24/7. Through CenturyTel's negotiations with other providers, all cell phone calls were routed to Monroe within days of Katrina's landfall. Staffing came from local volunteers, New Orleans and Lake Charles 2-1-1 call specialists, and from volunteer professionals across the U.S. recruited by the United Way of America, on behalf of the Louisiana 2-1-1s. Over the next two months, over 300 volunteers across the United States and internationally (France and Canada) traveled to Monroe to staff the 2-1-1 call center.



2-1-1 Call Center in Monroe, Louisiana during the Hurricane response (photo courtesy the United Way of Northeast Louisiana)

“CenturyTel Incorporated [located in Monroe]...came in and dropped some lines in very quickly, virtually overnight, to get a whole lot more phones up and running. ...And it became very clear very quickly after that the system just wasn’t going to handle things. We couldn’t transfer calls. There were just a myriad of technical problems with the way we brought these lines...With some expertise, expert help from CenturyTel and some of our own board members that have some background in that area, [they] assessed the situation and determined in very short order that we needed a switch that would handle this capacity and identified the kind of switch that was needed. And to my recollection it was \$80,000 or \$90,000 just for that piece of equipment.”

“The fact that we have 2-1-1 available on all cell phones in the state is a milestone... Not any of the 2-1-1s in the state had cell phone coverage. You could not access 2-1-1 from a cell phone prior to the hurricane.”

2-1-1 as a Communication Point

Evacuees who didn’t already know about 2-1-1 learned about it through a **variety of means**. Local and national news shows told viewers about 2-1-1 and also included 2-1-1 as the services number in crawls at the bottom of their shows. A United Way in Michigan produced a television public service announcement that was aired. 911s referred callers. Information was posted in emergency shelters. Word of mouth among evacuees led many to 2-1-1. FEMA, the Red Cross, and other emergency responders handed out information about and referred callers to 2-1-1.

Emergency Response

Louisiana's 2-1-1s were directly involved in emergency response, as well as connecting evacuees and others to community services. Indeed, when **911 went down** in New Orleans and FEMA's and Red Cross's lines were impossible to get through to, 2-1-1 became known as a place to call to get help – even emergency assistance. The 2-1-1s worked with their local and state emergency responders to assist in rescues, even. The 2-1-1s also assisted with missing person's calls, and other extraordinary calls during this period.

“We did connect to the emergency responders, who connected through ham radio on the phone and to our local emergency responders to the emergency responders there to actually rescue some people. [2-1-1] talked to people that were on their 2nd floor, and the water was rising.”

“I think you can make a case on how we were there when 911 wasn't and when lots of other people weren't. And we were still there even with all this federal FEMA money to entities to do things around the state, all these case workers who were coming in and funded through federal money, through state special groups to help in disaster recovery. They end up calling us, their clients end up calling us, and we end up doing what they're supposed to be doing anyhow.”

“Someone returned to their home in New Orleans and found their mother's body and called 2-1-1. That, of course, is staggering to image. They couldn't get 911.”

“There were a lot of rescue calls...and then we did a lot of missing persons. We did a lot of food and medicine that [was] life-saving. And then of course we were the only people answering with a live person, so we talked with a lot of people that were just unable to get Red Cross or FEMA.”

“The 2-1-1 center...would get the call and refer it to a 2-1-1 person who was sitting in [the] emergency operations center in Ouachita Parish. They would convey it to [the] emergency manager who then, through the email and internet system, would refer it down to Baton Rouge. Then Baton Rouge would deploy the National Guard or whoever was doing the rescue...”

“FEMA all of a sudden discovered 2-1-1 and thought we were the best thing ever...It was almost comical at some points when FEMA was the answer, but yet FEMA had talked to them and told them to call the information 2-1-1.”

“Probably some of the major referrals were FEMA and Red Cross. They had lots of busies. We would hear stories like there would be multiple families in one household wherever they'd evacuated to. They would call FEMA and take hours and hours of trying to get through. When they got through they would pass it from household representative to household representative while they had FEMA on. But there were a lot of busies and

difficult to get to FEMA because so many people tried to get through and [there were] not enough staff people, I'm guessing, to handle the number of calls.”

Mental Health Needs

The 2-1-1s had to quickly identify that in a massive disaster, such as the Hurricanes were, 2-1-1 received calls from persons with **mental health** needs. Working together, and with volunteers around the U.S., qualified crisis counselors were made available to those callers.

“[2-1-1] talked to folks that had successfully evacuated but had seen bodies floating in the water in the boat when they were evacuating and were concerned about the mental health, emotional aspect of what their children had seen and how to deal with that.”

“I know a lot of people were depressed and scared and that’s where the qualified crisis counselors who came were really helpful. One of the initial problems that we were having when everything was so busy and they were trying to ramp up the call center is that we understood clearly the difference between general information and referral calls [and] a real crisis intervention/suicide prevention call...”

Volunteers and Donated Goods

The 2-1-1s also served as a key point of contact for **volunteers** and **donated goods**.

“I know people were calling in to volunteer items and boats and all kinds of stuff, and I know they were helped.”

“There was one group called Angel flights...and it was an organization that allows pilots to donate their time and expense to fly jets to national emergencies...It was one of those things you think of like how in the world could you get from the person who was affected by a disaster evacuated to Las Vegas, to [a pilot] to borrow their private jet, I mean where’s this organization, bridges that gap. We just needed that last step of connecting with the person which is what 2-1-1.”

During September 2005, the United Way of Northeast Louisiana 2-1-1 call center answered 70,538 calls, **peaking at 7,358 on a single day**. The October/November total was 111,413 answered calls.

Coordination During Disaster

Louisiana’s 2-1-1s faced truly unprecedented challenges in delivering services during Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Never before had any 2-1-1s been required to do what these 2-1-1s did. As may be expected, nearly every aspect of the **operations** had to be invented during those chaotic days. At its most basic, the 2-1-1s had to figure out which 2-1-1 was in charge of what, when, and how.

“The first week or two we did not have an organization chart and division of duties... Then we got the organization chart, then we had ‘This is the group. This is what they do, and they answer to this, and this is how they do it.’ So one person is not responsible for all these other things, and it was just much smoother.”

Finding and Organizing Data

Equipping the call specialists with current, correct information was a challenge. During a disaster, particularly of this scale, **resources change constantly**. New Orleans’ resource database, given the scale of the disaster, simply was irrelevant. Most of the services listed in their database were inoperable.

For a period of time, the 2-1-1s had at-least daily calls with each other to share resource information. One of Baton Rouge 2-1-1’s staff ended up being housed at the **State Emergency Operations Center** through the Louisiana Association of Nonprofit Organizations. This individual was a valuable link from the state to 2-1-1s via Baton Rouge 2-1-1. In Monroe, information was also collected through their participation in their **local Emergency Operations Center** where they had a seat at the table.

“If you were not at the table at the Office of Homeland Security Emergency Preparedness then you did not know what’s going on. You were relying on the media. They did their best, but it was still not the most up-to-date.”

“So we all had up-to-the-minute information about resources... We did lots of conference calls.”

“The shelter information... was probably more than 30 pages of information and you’d have a shelter open one day and the next day it wasn’t open. The information was changing so quickly.”

In Monroe, there were “at least four daily briefings at our Emergency Operations Center when we were on state-wide conference calls listening to the situation reports from all the affected parishes. Homeland Security Emergency Preparedness managers and also sometimes the Governor would be on those calls getting information, [we’d] bring that back and try to disseminate that where it needed to go.”

“We talked to people in Florida and said ‘How did you do this?’ Well they had told us that they started out using just a paper directory, so we started out like that. It was constant copies, constant dissemination, trying to throw away the old, make sure people had the new. Then we tried to do a Word document. Then we had resource specialists from other communities that came in, that started in our data system to update information. There were several people working constantly to try to keep up with the information and disseminate it out to who needed to get the information. ... But trying to figure out an orderly way to communicate, what needed to be communicated on so many different levels about so many things, the state-wide information to the local

administrators here and the resource information to the people on the phone, and then the other nonprofits in the community trying to communicate them. It was just chaos.”

Other organizations were interested in accessing Louisiana’s 2-1-1 information about resources. The 2-1-1s convened a conference call to expressly determine with whom and how the 2-1-1 resource information would be shared. The 2-1-1s were able to work through these requests for information issues and present a uniform response.

Many of the 2-1-1s also are partners in their communities’ Homeless Management Information Systems Continuum of Care (nine HMIS instances), as mentioned previously. That unique role also ended up being very helpful as communities dealt with overwhelming numbers of **homeless** persons. HUD provided technical assistance, nearly \$100,000 for computers (with ownership under the HMISs), and other valuable resources to assist 2-1-1s and the HMISs. With funding from HUD the software vendor was able to combine the Homeless Management Information System resource databases from the six Louisiana 2-1-1s and HMIS databases from: Arkansas; Mississippi; and Waco, Texas. This created one of the largest Gulf Coast resource databases. Through a collaboration of the 2-1-1s, the Louisiana Family Recovery Corps and HUD, the database was then deduplicated and posted for a year on a public website: **gulfcoast2-1-1.org**. However, because there was no coordinated promotion, the site did not get the hits expected until near the end of its year online. There is now no statewide online resource.

The website “was used by the 2-1-1 in Monroe, as well as by various shelter workers at the Hirsch Coliseum, which was a temporary shelter. It was, kind of, used throughout the state. In Mississippi there were people using it, kind of sporadically. We made a license available to anybody who wanted one, but since there wasn’t any real leader to promote the use of it, it probably wasn’t as effective as it could have been.”

“The problem was nobody knew about [the website]. Some people went to it and the HUD Technical Assistants did some monitoring and helped promote it some. Toward the end of its life it had a lot of visitors.... They took the site down the beginning of this year. So right now there is no public statewide 2-1-1 system.”

Funding Implications to Coordination

One challenge to invoking 2-1-1 backup services is the impact on funding. Since some of the 2-1-1 had **reimbursement contracts** based on delivery of services, it wasn’t clear whether they would be paid since they were no longer delivering services out of their center. And, of course, there were the additional costs to the center that calls had been routed to and questions about how those staff would be paid.

“We have some state contracts, some federal contracts, and they’re reimbursements, so I had no idea whether, if they’d continue to reimburse us if we didn’t actually have our staff working.”

Even though “FEMA and the Louisiana Department of Social Services were telling us that we would be reimbursed, we had no contract. We had to make a decision as to whether or not to move forward with that, without having a written contract and to do it on faith.”

MOVING TO A NEW FUTURE FOR 2-1-1

Hurricanes Katrina and Rita have created significant shifts in the services system in Louisiana. Some services are gone, others have reconfigured their services, new services and collaborations have emerged. 2-1-1s have also undergone some major changes in their approach to providing information and referral to Louisiana.

Organizing for Statewide Coordination – The Next Horizon

In Louisiana the 2-1-1s have moved to greater coordination. The coordination will be supported through **centralized administration and coordination** including:

- Hiring a Louisiana 2-1-1 Statewide Coordinator. A full-time coordinator, El Cabrel Lee, was hired in September 2006 to provide staffing support and expertise to facilitate greater coordination among Louisiana’s 2-1-1s. This has meant that there is dedicated staff time to promote greater coordination among the 2-1-1s and to pursue new funding and services opportunities. The Coordinator also has been involved in coordinating response and providing technical assistance during a recent regional tornado. The position was funded through a grant from the United Way of America and administered by the United Way Association of Louisiana.
- Establishing a 2-1-1 Coordinating Council. The United Way Association of Louisiana and LA AIRS are establishing a 2-1-1 Coordinating Council that will serve as a steering committee for statewide 2-1-1 coordination. The vision for the Council is that all key stakeholders will be represented including: LA AIRS, local United Ways, Louisiana Association of Nonprofit Organizations, the Public Service Commission, the State Department of Social Services, the State Office of Emergency Preparedness, and volunteer centers. A number of workgroups of the Council have been established, including those for: marketing, advocacy, resources, telecommunications and technology, and program (the breadth of services and coordination)

The Coordinating Council is “trying to organize the six regional 2-1-1s into more of a statewide system.”

- Funneling State of Louisiana funding through a single organization. United Way Association of Louisiana, for disbursement to the six regions. The Louisiana Department of Social Services, prior to the Hurricanes, had a separate contract with each 2-1-1 region. Following the Hurricanes, the Department of Social

Services determined it was more efficient to contract for statewide 2-1-1 services through one, central organization. They also believed that this type of centralized disbursement could facilitate standards, ensure maintenance and backups, streamline reporting, and accelerate enhancements to 2-1-1 services. Contracts governing the scopes of work and responsibilities and disbursements have now been negotiated with each 2-1-1 region and the United Way Association of Louisiana. The switch has been welcomed by some 2-1-1s and not by others. Some 2-1-1s have complained that they have not received their reimbursements in a timely manner.

“The contract negotiation process took a long time, there was language that some of the 2-1-1s were not comfortable with that [they] wanted to be changed. Some of the 2-1-1s have even feared that the United Way of Louisiana wants to replace all their software that they’ve invested in.”

- Developing a stronger, formal role for United Way Association of Louisiana. The United Way Association of Louisiana “houses” the Coordinating Council and supervises the 2-1-1 Coordinator. The United Way Association of Louisiana has taken a stronger, formal role in coordinating 2-1-1s in Louisiana. The Association “houses” the 2-1-1 Coordinator and serves as the fiscal agent for the State of Louisiana funding that is disbursed to the 2-1-1 regions. The Association reportedly has new statewide energy for supporting 2-1-1 and the current President of the Association is proactive in public policy and securing support. A number of local United Ways are also supporting 2-1-1 for the first time. Currently 12 of the 13 United Ways now provide some support for the 2-1-1s in their regions.

“The problem is...there’s always a strain working with the United Way because even though they fund you, they also try to eat you up. You have to be very clear on what you do, and what they do. They’ve gotten much more into the concept of services, community impact. Traditionally they were to raise money to make these services possible. If you could keep them intact, it’s a very, very positive thing. For that reason we supported strongly their being the administrator of the statewide system. Also it was the only group we felt had the capacity to do it at the time.”

The creation and staffing of a statewide organization, and the centralized administrative of state financial support, have been major steps forward for Louisiana’s 2-1-1s. Not surprisingly, however, these types of changes do not happen without some serious debate.

“We had a tremendous amount of difficulty even getting agreement on the contracts to sign.”

2-1-1 Access, Redundancy, and Backup

During the Hurricanes, the need for people to be able to access 2-1-1 became apparent. Yet, there can be **difficulties** in accessing 2-1-1, even in Louisiana where there is

statewide coverage. For example, some offices and apartment complexes may have phone systems that aren't enabled to send non-emergency three-digit numbers. There are still difficulties with some cell phones. Pay phones continue to be an uncertainty. Louisiana's 2-1-1s are working together to address these issues.

“It's hard to figure out who [payphone operators] to even call to get them to agree to do 2-1-1. More likely than not, you'll go to a pay phone and it won't work. The other problem is a lot of cell phone companies, even though they've agreed to point to 2-1-1 in the state, [it doesn't] always work. And then all these little upstart companies, you think you have it covered because they use the main trunk lines of the main companies, but every once in a while there may be one that doesn't hook into one of the main companies, so they may not have 2-1-1. Until it becomes such en vogue to be able to call and you made a call and you couldn't get it, until the public really can say to their office building or their apartment building or to their phone company, 'I dialed 2-1-1 and I couldn't get it, and ...that it's not just something I'd like to have but this an essential utility that I need,' until it comes to that point, it's still going to be something we're working towards.”

The Hurricanes forced Louisiana's 2-1-1s to face how easily they were able (or not able) to rely on each other to provide redundancy and backup for 2-1-1 calls. In the two years since the Hurricanes, several 2-1-1s have since provided **back-up to one another** for a variety of reasons including disasters as and telephone technological system outages. These outages have ranged from several hours to several days.

“Our database is on the Internet on our website, and we also have a direct link. So if we have to forward calls, we just would tell people, 'This is where you go and they would know.' Now when you are hit by a natural disaster your website is useless because everything there [community services] isn't functioning...”

Emergency Response and Recovery

The Hurricanes have immersed 2-1-1s deep into the emergency response and recovery systems in Louisiana. The emergency response and recovery systems operate at the state and local level. 2-1-1s have found that if they are not included in **local and state plans**, their work is harder. It is harder to find current information in order to convey it to callers. And, the ability of 2-1-1 to reach citizens is left largely untapped.

2-1-1s in Louisiana have also commented that involvement in local and state emergency response and recovery must be a commitment, because organizations must be **prepared** to respond at any time.

[Being prepared] “is the expectation of OEP, and that's what you do when you pay to be ready. You got to have some rotational staff so that you can call them in and they're already trained.”

In “our emergency planning process, 2-1-1 is having a key role. It’s not a matter of if there will be another event, it’s just a matter of when and what kind. So in preparing for that, 2-1-1 has a key role as the designated go-to for coordinating volunteers, coordinating donations particularly spontaneous and unaffiliated volunteers, or just the unassigned, undesignated donations.”

At the state level, 2-1-1s are working together to ensure 2-1-1 is a part of emergency response plans. Additionally, 2-1-1s have partnered with **Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster** to ensure that 2-1-1 coordinates with other volunteer organizations. At the local level, 2-1-1s have been independently responsible for developing relationships with their local emergency preparedness systems. Prior to the Hurricanes, few 2-1-1s had relationships with local officials. Several 2-1-1s now are part of local emergency preparedness plans, for instance, as leads in communications.

2-1-1s “are now at the table, and are seen as a premier organization to be involved in disaster response and recovery. I think a lot of doors opened.... I think that really opened doors, opened relationships that are strengthening.”

Direct Recovery Assistance

Louisiana’s 2-1-1s have experienced **record-setting call volumes** during and in the aftermath of the Hurricanes. As well-known resources in their communities, they have assisted evacuees with all types of resource information and referral. Many of those 2-1-1s have assisted have lost, literally, everything they had. Some lost family members. 2-1-1 has been there to help evacuees piece their lives back together. 2-1-1s also serve as a contact point for evacuees who want to find out about the evolving status of their former communities. 2-1-1s have also helped other organizations in recovery efforts.

“We have quite a few evacuees who are still living in our area. They have utilized [2-1-1] quite a bit, so that additional usage continues. It’s kind of hard after almost a year and a half to continue to call them evacuees, but that’s what they still are. Many of them haven’t put roots down and I don’t know that they intend to, or they don’t know what they intend to do. But they’re...still in need of a lot of services.”

“As we went into the recovery aspect, 2-1-1 became the point of entry for our long term case management and for the networking of resources to assist folks through case management. But [2-1-1] also became a key contact for obtaining additional resources to replenish some of our local nonprofits and to actually bring in resources in to meet the needs. So they really serve on multiple levels.”

“People call who are out-of-state, who were evacuees, to get updated information regarding new neighborhoods that are being reestablished. So [2-1-1] will have information to tell folks, ‘Yes, there is a shopping center now,’ or ‘There are workforce or nonprofit organization groups that are surrounding these communities,’ and ‘You wouldn’t just be living by yourself next to 10 vacant homes.’”

A Post-Hurricane Local Emergency – the Mid South Delta

One example of the emerging role of 2-1-1s in local disaster response came in October 2006: one year after the Hurricanes. A **significant localized flooding** event hit some of the poorest and most remote parishes of the Mid South Delta area, effecting over 2,000 families. The local emergency response agency contacted 2-1-1 to alert them to the emergency and call them to the unified command center. At the initial gathering of the unified command, it quickly developed that responders would need information about property damage. FEMA designated 2-1-1 as the number for residents to call to **report property damage**. The media and a variety of other means were used to let residents know that 2-1-1 was the conduit for reporting damage and contact information. The 2-1-1 quickly ramped up to accept the highest call volume since the Hurricanes (about double of their typical call volume). 2-1-1 relayed information to callers about the type of assistance they would be eligible to receive. When further information became available from national disaster organizations about **eligibility** criteria, 2-1-1 **called back** those residents who had contact them initially to provide additional information. For this particular disaster, 2-1-1 prioritized callbacks to the elderly and persons with disabilities. If persons were in need, but not eligible for assistance, 2-1-1 was there to provide **other referrals**.

“We started calling the 80-year-olds first, working downward, and then everyone who was disabled, to see if they needed some other kinds of assistance, when Red Cross wasn’t going to help them. Don’t know how we did it, but whether it would be churches or clubs or did they need to be evacuated out of their homes... The point is 2-1-1 did more than [just] the intake. It calls back. It becomes multifaceted in how they help people in rural areas.”

The data collected was delivered to the Ouachita Office of Homeland Security, and the FEMA Geographical Information Unit in Baton Rouge. FEMA in Baton Rouge. FEMA inputted the information into a GIS system and produce **parish maps** that showed damage locations. Numerous responders, including FEMA, Red Cross, and state emergency responders, relied on the maps and information for response. Additionally, the information was made available to recovery programs, such as location of mobile FEMA Disaster Recovery Units. This innovative use of 2-1-1 is perhaps the first time 2-1-1 has been used anywhere to deliver this type of service and coordination in disaster response and recovery. According to the responders, the data was extraordinarily useful.

“The feedback that we’d gotten from the individuals who worked from the damage assessment...is that it had never gone so well anywhere else in the country, in their experience, because what they were able to do with 2-1-1’s intake system and then some of the GIS mapping that’s available. They could have a map with the individual’s name and the contact information when they go out into the field and already be ready... so that they could get right to the assessment.”

“This is the way to proceed with damage assessment information in the future.”

Building Partnerships with Other Organizations

Louisiana's 2-1-1s, as previously noted, are independent organizations that have each created their own sets and types of relationships within their service area. Some 2-1-1s offer a variety of services, beyond pure information and referral. Some of these services are provided through contracts with other organizations who wish to use the capabilities of 2-1-1s to meet their needs. 2-1-1s are continuing to develop **relationships and contracts**. A number of stakeholders indicated that the Hurricanes exposed 2-1-1s to organizations they had not previously worked with and that have since provided new partnering opportunities. A number of Louisiana's 2-1-1s have continued reaching beyond serving as a general 2-1-1 by providing more specialized call services.

“Louisiana Spirit deals with crisis call management services, and they actually outsource [to] the 2-1-1s. The 2-1-1s in essence, in essence, are Louisiana Spirit. But Louisiana Spirit is paid for and is under the billing of the state, particularly the Department Of Social Services. So that way, the Governor gets credit. The state department gets credit for being responsive and ensuring that they're fulfilling a kind of gap in service or unmet need.”

“We've had a couple of additional contracts for after-hours calls for...children and adolescents in crisis.”

“The need for our services here is greater, and we're doing better quality of work. The better you do the more you get opportunities.”

Approximately six weeks after the Hurricanes, the State of Louisiana established a not-for-profit organization, Louisiana Family Recovery Corps, to provide case management for evacuees. Louisiana's 2-1-1s, through a contract with the Corps, each contribute their resource data to populate the database and provide periodic updates. To obtain the best possible comprehensive database, the 2-1-1s have worked together to ensure data integrity and interoperability and responsibility for duplicates. This has created, essentially, a **statewide 2-1-1 database**. However, the database is currently, by contract, only used by Louisiana Family Recovery Corps and is not shared with any other organizations.

“[The Louisiana Family Recovery Corps] recognized early on when they tried to solicit requests from service providers across the state to build their own database of resource agencies, they realized what an undertaking that was and that it wasn't really something that they wanted to contend with. [They] entered into an agreement with each regional 2-1-1 to have their data imported into the...Louisiana Family Recovery Corps database, to be used by the case managers across the state.”

“This is a great opportunity for 2-1-1s to make a little cash and have somebody really focus on ensuring [the Louisiana Family Recovery Corps'] data was good.”

As 2-1-1s work with other organizations, they are re-conceptualizing the type of services they offer and the kind of information they need to maintain in their resource databases and from their callers. The data about community resources and callers is being used, for example, for human services **planning**.

“A lot of high-profile people and organizations have been working together to try to get more coordination of and more support of our community resource database, so it can be used for far more than information referral services. A lot of people think just because you collect this information that it’s information that can be used for mapping and planning and so forth, when in fact, you need many more fields than would be in a normal information referral database to do that kind of stuff.”

“When we do this, we’re doing a comprehensive survey and inclusion of [community resources] so that you could actually print directories of all the after school programs or all the medical resources. And we’re frequently updating it. The key entities are saying [to community resources], ‘You have to keep your information totally correct and up-to-date in the database.’ It’s a win for them; it’s a win for us. It’s wonderful.”

“We used to think, ‘Well, we need to be very protective of our data. We don’t want to give it away or anything.’ Now our philosophy is the more you make it available... We’re saying, ‘Yes,’ because the more they use it, the more they want it, and the more there is a chance of more contracts.”

Visibility

Even with all its successes, 2-1-1 is not as widely known as most stakeholders would like to see. Primarily respondents identified two types of stakeholders: state officials and citizens.

State Officials

Most felt that the 2-1-1’s exemplary performance during and after the Hurricanes has fostered **improved knowledge** of 2-1-1. Others pointed to the on-going financial support from the State of Louisiana as evidence of visibility. However, most respondents indicated that 2-1-1 is not widely-enough known.

“Policy makers are more aware of 2-1-1 now, than they were before the hurricane. I think [the Louisiana Association of Nonprofit Organizations] has helped to bring 2-1-1 to the forefront in some people’s minds.”

“We’re much wider known among elected official and policy makers than we were prior to the hurricane. With the developments that are taking place, [2-1-1’s will become] a more cohesive state-wide system, instead of six separate call centers.”

“Our legislators know about us, and we got the [Louisiana Department of Social Services] funding again.”

2-1-1s are more well-known because of “the fact that we have a statewide 2-1-1 system and the fact that it’s now being administered by the Louisiana Association of United Ways. The president of the Louisiana Association of United Ways is a very, very skilled person in working with legislators. We’re increasing in our visibility around the state.”

The “visibility is not nearly where it needs to be, but it is much more than it was before the hurricanes, and much more than it was before the Association was really kicked into gear. It has a long way to go, but the visibility is happening.”

“Federally, on a national level, we’ve got even further to go. I’ve made some contacts and calls trying to get this thing moved forward with the national bill for Congress.”

Funding

Funding continues to be a **challenge** for many of Louisiana’s 2-1-1s. Many fund the service through a variety of public and private grants and contracts. Additionally, many 2-1-1s have been active in promoting the Calling for 2-1-1 Act currently in Congress. One challenge is how to convey to potential funders the important role 2-1-1 plays in the service system on a daily basis, as well as in emergency situations.

“We are by far better, more effective, more streamlined organization, and we have more resources than we’ve ever had before. It’s not from any national grants or big money, it’s just mainly from increased United Way funding, as well as a little funding and other contracts.”

“[Funders] have not grasped the potential for accessing the most vulnerable of lives...there is so much creativity around connecting people without advocates, people who are the most vulnerable, people in the highest level of poverty. There are just very few people who do not have access to a phone.”

“It just doesn’t make sense to me why anybody wouldn’t see its value. It’s hard for me to perceive that people just don’t get it. I’m a huge advocate for it. We need to solidify its funding.”

“We’ve been able to get all of our state legislators to sign on and sponsor the Calling for 2-1-1 Act.”

2-1-1 LOUISIANA: THE FUTURE

Funding

Stable funding for 2-1-1 was mentioned over and over as a need to **sustain** Louisiana’s 2-1-1 system. Many 2-1-1 centers are under funded. The economic toll the Hurricanes have wrought on Louisiana’s communities and the pre-Hurricane economic malaise has meant that many United Way campaigns have struggled. Most respondents felt that a

combination of federal, state, and local dollars from the public and private sectors offered the best mix of funding for 2-1-1. Others suggested approaches such as surcharges on telephone service. Without stable, adequate funding, most felt that it would be difficult, if not impossible, to continue to enhance 2-1-1s' ability to provide needed services to Louisianans. Among the important enhancement that are crucial are funding for improved technology and capacity-building.

“First and foremost, funding...That’s always an issue.”

“Funding and how funding is secured and allocated is going to continue to be a big challenge.”

“The Calling for 2-1-1 legislation is critical.”

A number of respondents were frustrated by the **proliferation** of toll-free numbers for specialized call services. The multiplying numbers not only appeared redundant and costly, but also not as accessible or professionally staffed. A workgroup has been convened to document toll-free numbers in the state and make recommendations about how 2-1-1 could be integrated into these services. The workgroup includes representatives from the Louisiana Association of Non-Profit Organizations, Louisiana United Ways, the Coordinated Assistance Network, Louisiana Rebuilds, Louisiana Recovery Authority, and the Louisiana Family Recovery Corps.

“It’s almost a signature thing that you have to do as a public official: to roll out a hotline so that your constituents know that you are doing something. But they could know you are doing something, and doing it more efficiently and effectively, if you actually partner with a pre-existing service that provides...the assistance that you’re trying to get to the public.”

“We have put together a workgroup to...get a better understanding of what each of these 1-800 numbers does, what the websites do, and how we...[can] work more efficiently. This workgroup is challenged to deal honestly with a number of issues. But it’s one that certainly is worthwhile. We’re hoping that ultimately the Governor or the state will mandate a process that will ensure that, if there is another 1-800 number or website, they would have to address this group or find out and see if this is something that has already been provided.”

Statewide Organizational Development

The 2-1-1s are **striving** to work together through the new centralized administrative structure formed under the United Way Association of Louisiana. Many 2-1-1s have embraced the benefits of statewide administration. However, not surprisingly given their history as independent organizations, a number of 2-1-1s continue to be reluctant to fully embrace a centralized administration.

[We need] “continued strong staff leadership of centralized administration as well as each of the six regions: strong leadership meaning competent, and ability to cooperate and coordinate with others.”

The “biggest challenges are...the politics and the turf. It’s about putting the system and putting the results and the performance ahead of everybody’s individual, petty control issues and turf issues.”

Because funding from the Louisiana Department of Social Services is centrally managed by the United Way Association of Louisiana, there have been some conflicts among the 2-1-1s about how to best **allocate** the state dollars among the 2-1-1s.

“The state and the statewide administration of 2-1-1 are working together to see if [the size of a region’s population] will be one of the factors [for allocating state funding], or if...there are other factors, such as running 24 hours a day, answering information referral and crisis calls, volume of calls, nature of calls, and costs for staffing.”

Technology

Louisiana’s 2-1-1s, prior to the Hurricanes, were very much stand-alone systems. Their phone systems and computer systems did not interface. **Telephone** systems that can handle calls are the mainstay of 2-1-1s. However, Louisiana’s 2-1-1s have not been able to easily transfer or re-route calls. Each 2-1-1 maintained separate resource **databases** that others could not easily access. The 2-1-1s are now seeing the need to provide Louisiana with a seamless statewide 2-1-1, with the cooperation and involvement of all six regions. The technological improvements planned include both telephone systems and computer systems. A primary desire is implementation of a call management system shared by all the 2-1-1s so that calls could be easily transferred and re-routed. Additionally, there are continuing concerns that all cell phones and pay phones should be assured free access to 2-1-1.

“There were a lot of positive things that we were able to do during...Hurricanes Rita and Katrina. But if it was a more seamless, integrated network,...there probably could have been even greater impact...”

“Absolutely you must have a statewide coordinated system with centralized administration... You have to have an administration of the statewide 2-1-1 system for coordination and development. We’re just in the beginning stages of that, but we’ll get stronger and stronger. We have growing pains because we’re all very different.”

“Our next step is to purchase technology that would enable us to have call volume monitored and answered around the state. [We need] a uniform database so, whether you’re in Shreveport or Monroe, you can look up the answer to the question.”

“It is a clear-cut strategy to have a seamless, integrated call management system. There are several reasons why we’re trying to do that. It would be of extraordinary benefit.”

“The technology is the most important next step. As spring approaches it’s terrifying to me that we might go into that period without it. We can’t face June without that technology in place.”

“The value of having a...publicly accessible statewide 2-1-1 database [is] that if I’m in Shreveport and I need to find out what’s available for my aging mother in New Orleans, I can go to one website and find that very easily. Or if I’m thinking about moving her to a different part of the state, I can go to that same website and find out what’s available. It’s a good idea to have one, but in terms of maintaining it, until control over what happens to that data is figured out, they’re never going to actually get there.”

“If I were in power at the Louisiana Association for United Ways, I would broker a deal with [Louisiana Family Recovery Corps] to take a copy of their database, their resource database only, and publish it to the web, and there you have a statewide 2-1-1 database that will require no effort at all.”

Emergency Response

Louisiana’s 2-1-1s have plans for improving their involvement in emergency response. Internally, they are planning for **improved preparedness** in a number of areas:

2-1-1 Support Agreements

- Creating internal, formal memoranda of understanding among 2-1-1s that realistically assesses what call volumes could be accommodated.
- Determining what relationships may be created with 2-1-1s in other states for redundancy.
- Creating legal power of attorney among organizations in the instance that leadership is dispersed.

Governance

- Creating governance protocols from activation to dissolution of backups and delineating rights and authorities.

Operations

- Defining operational roles and responsibilities for 2-1-1 staff.
- Creating protocols for communicating information to public (via website/voice mail) about disabled 2-1-1s.
- Developing a statewide 2-1-1 emergency orientation/checklist.

Funding

- Determining funding limitations and flexibility when 2-1-1s are disabled/transferred.

Telephone

- Evaluating the maximum number of lines that each 2-1-1 is able to accommodate.

- Evaluating capacity for number of phones/headsets/etc.
- Documenting telephone wiring (e.g., fiber optics or old copper wire).
- Ensuring that each 2-1-1 is on the federal telephone service priority program (for priority re-instatement of phone repair/expansion) following a disruption.

Resource Data

- Evaluating capacity for greater volume of call specialists to access database (e.g., number of computers, number of persons able to simultaneously use system, determining how emergency accounts will be established).
- Ensuring access to the resource database, whether hosted through an application service provider (ASP) or self-hosted on an on-site server.
- Collecting data in advance of a disaster (e.g., fields for FEMA districts that would enable 2-1-1s to quickly identify whether resources are located in presidential disaster areas).

Physical Site

- Cataloging physical plant for expandability and access.
- Determining whether 2-1-1s want to share database information with other recovery organizations and who makes that decision.

Callers' Needs

- Being prepared for mental health/substance abuse calls.
- Determining protocols for assisting callers needing access to medical records or prescriptions.

Call Specialists' Needs

- Planning for how to communicate implementation of a support agreement with staff and how they will be deployed.
- Developing a mental health/self-care process (e.g., setting mandatory maximum shifts and breaks, debriefing and counseling) during and following emergencies.
- Creating a plan for food and housing for call specialists in a host community.

Across the state they are working to become better integrated into **local emergency preparedness**, where there may still be a lack of understanding about how 2-1-1 may play a valuable role.

“Inclusion of 2-1-1 into your unified command structure is definitely a plus. Just in overall collaboration that you can have with 2-1-1, it is also a plus...getting out public information, as well as accepting public information.”

“Some of the emergency management people out in the little parishes...could benefit [from] a little bit better understanding of what 2-1-1 is and what it can do. We still have a lot of people out there who don't grasp the concept of 2-1-1 yet.”

The 2-1-1s are also working to coordinate better with other **n11 numbers**, including particularly 311 and 911. During emergencies 2-1-1s have proven themselves to be an

invaluable companion to 911s both as a back up and as a way to relieve 911 of non-emergency calls.

“People knew about 911 and there were many 2-1-1 calls that were coming into [911]. To the extent that they could rapidly say, ‘Please call 2-1-1,’ or they could do a transfer, [it would be beneficial].”

2-1-1s have become experienced in understanding the assets and limitations of **other emergency response organizations**. For example, a number of national volunteer organizations switched out key contact people every week, making it hard to maintain coordinated efforts. The 2-1-1s have increased sophistication in their own planning to overcome those types of challenges.

Expansion of Services and Contribution to Services Planning

Louisiana’s 2-1-1s are working to **expand** their services beyond answering information and referral calls. The 2-1-1s are considering how 2-1-1 is positioned to educate residents about such important programs as the Earned Income Tax Credit, prescription drug assistance, and literacy. In this role, 2-1-1s become a key member in community planning.

There is potential for “furthering community, targeted community planning...We’ve talked about it, but it’s not really utilized as much. It would be more utilized if there was a concerted push.”

“2-1-1 needs to be much more comprehensive than information and referral.”

“2-1-1 has to be more than a call center...They have the ability to provide seamless referrals [and] to make the experience for the consumer better. [With 2-1-1], the consumer’s not having to repeat information every time they go to a new agency.”

Louisiana’s 2-1-1s are also continuing to seek out opportunities for their **data** (resource and call) to be used in human service planning.

“2-1-1s can be really the go-to source when it comes to inventory assessment...A number of different organizations spend a tremendous amount of money [to document] resources that are already fairly compiled by the 2-1-1 systems. But the 2-1-1 systems are, in some cases, rarely asked to provide these inventory assessments.”

Ensuring Quality

Louisiana’s 2-1-1s have had no real standards for assessing the quality of 2-1-1 services. The statewide organization is working to create these. A number of respondents believe that all Louisiana 2-1-1s should be **accredited** by the Alliance of Information and Referral System’s (AIRS) standards for call specialists and sites. However, some thought

that the AIRS standards weren't specific and stringent enough and that Louisiana should move beyond the AIRS standards.

“We all want to move toward [Alliance of Information and Referral Systems'] accreditation in the next few years. It's a very challenging accreditation. We do want to move toward more uniformity in delivery of service. That's what we'll get with the statewide administration.”

Within individual 2-1-1s, the Hurricanes have precipitated a number of internal changes. The 2-1-1s have experienced dramatic **turnover**.

“The statement ‘You'll have a 40% turnover after disaster’? It happened.”

The 2-1-1s have enhanced training to improve call specialists **skills** through training.

“We now have a new [staff] position...planning the trainings and making sure everybody understands all the requirements of all the different contracts and doing any in-service training that we need. We beefed up the regular, basic 60-hour training to include a lot of mental health and very standardized protocols and ...nationally accepted models for crisis counseling.”

Statewide, the 2-1-1s are identifying the basic **equipment** needed.

All 2-1-1s should have “a weather radio ... We need dual screens for the call centers because they jump from websites to their resource information, their database, and they need those things up simultaneously...Each 2-1-1 call center should have a television...[Each 2-1-1 should have] laptops they can use in case power does go down. These laptops should have wireless access to them. [2-1-1s should have back-up] walking databases on flash drives.”

Marketing and Promotion

Marketing and promotion continues to be a priority for Louisiana's 2-1-1s. However, many 2-1-1s have found it is difficult to allot staffing and dollars to this function. Many funders do not want to pay for these activities, yet they are **essential** for a strong 2-1-1.

“One of the things we need the most is increased advertising, marketing, promotion of 2-1-1. An obstacle is not having saturation in the community; people knowing what it is.”

The 2-1-1s have a number of ways they are promoting 2-1-1 among policymakers/funders and the public.

Policymakers/Funders

Many 2-1-1s have found that **education** and **information** are helpful in building relationships with policymakers and funders. In some cases this may happen through **tours** of the 2-1-1 facility. When potential partners are able to actually see call specialists

answering live calls, the role and capability of 2-1-1s is evident. Even during the Hurricanes and subsequent disasters, the 2-1-1s were extremely proactive in allowing policymakers and funders to see their operations at the height of response.

Some 2-1-1s regularly provide **data** (e.g., resource information and call statistics) for community planning. A number of respondents commented that it is helpful for policymakers and funders to receive explicit and specific information about the needs of their constituencies.

Many 2-1-1s emphasize their role in human services **collaboratives** and thus are able to demonstrate the important center that 2-1-1 holds. The 2-1-1s also are able to discuss their role in effectively bridging the gap between needs and volunteers and other assets that basically create **capacity** within the community.

Some 2-1-1s have found that experienced policymakers and funders intuitively recognize that often people do not know where to go for assistance. This results in underutilized programs, worsening problems, and duplication of services. For sophisticated policymakers and funders, 2-1-1s are able to focus on educating them about 2-1-1's **efficiencies, accessibility, availability, and quality staffing**.

2-1-1 “hooks up resources with needs, and also accesses resources. I would also look for some sort of case studies on successes and you know because that always helps: examples of how it works.”

Citizens

On-going visibility-raising among the general public continues to be a priority for Louisiana's 2-1-1s. Some 2-1-1s have found that **marketing and call volumes and funding** are intertwined.

“The marketing of 2-1-1 in Louisiana is certainly not enough.”

“It's a two-sided sword because the more you promote it, the more calls you get. The more calls you get, the more you need more staff and better trained staff. If you get calls and you can't handle it, it's a good rationale to get more funding, but it's frustrating to the community. So it has to go in hand: advertising and resources.”

“If you did any wholesale marketing, you would flood the lines. That's already the case in some of the communities. We have to be prudent about the timing of the marketing.”

As 2-1-1 has become more ingrained in Louisiana's communities, some 2-1-1s are finding very good awareness. The **Hurricanes** seemed to have been a key in raising the visibility of 2-1-1 among the public.

“Before the hurricane, they were getting 100 calls a week and now they're getting 300 calls a week. So you definitely have an increased population of users out there.”

“2-1-1 [the brand] puts a name on what we do. It has brought not only [2-1-1] providers together, but it’s helped the public identify a service that has, heretofore, been more nebulous.”

“Our citizens...have become much more aware of the existence of 2-1-1 and of its potential and what it can do and how it can help. So they’re using it.”

Louisiana’s 2-1-1s have individually and jointly used numerous **strategies** for promotion of 2-1-1 including:

- Billboards
- Television and radio spots and interviews (particularly targeted toward low-income communities)
- Radio
- Included in newspaper’s daily listing of “important numbers”
- Listing in the front of local phone books
- Produced brochures and other written materials
- Articles for newsletters and pieces for specialized segments of population, such as public schools
- Collaborating with employers to promote 2-1-1 to employees

Of particular interest has been promoting 2-1-1 among the **poorest regions** of Louisiana, including the Mid-South Delta area. The 2-1-1s have worked hard to get information to these residents and it appears to be working.

“Our 2-1-1 has done a number of spots on cable and they have been real good. The reason they have been good is the people in them...a good cross-section: male/female, black/white, old/young. To the extent it’s promoted by television it needs to be clearly diverse. But I also think that few people recognize how much the lower income and minority communities actually get their connectivity through the radio.”

KELLOGG GRANT

In Louisiana, the 2-1-1 grant was originally planned to support the United Way of Northeast Louisiana (Monroe, Louisiana) in further development of its resource **database** development and in providing expertise and **mentoring** to the emerging 2-1-1s in Mississippi and Arkansas. The United Way of Northeast Louisiana was a logical choice, given its location in the heart of the Mid South Delta region, one of the poorest and most disadvantaged in Louisiana. Literally weeks after the beginning of the grant, however, the Hurricanes hit. Monroe, partially by planning and partially by happenstance, became 2-1-1 command central of sorts, answering all calls from New Orleans and statewide cell phone calls. Monroe also answered phones for other 2-1-1s that went down during this time period. Their call center expanded to 56-seats almost overnight and they hosted hundreds of volunteers from across the United States. The call volumes exploded and remained at extremely high levels for months following the disaster. They have never returned to their pre-Hurricane volumes.

Prior to the Hurricanes hitting the Gulf Coast, the United Way of Northeast Louisiana had already provided consultations and hosted tours of their call centers to representatives of Mississippi and Arkansas. They had already also been at joint meetings to develop working relationships and share expectations. However, the Hurricanes eliminated, for a period of time, Monroe's ability to provide consultation assistance. The Kellogg Foundation and the United Way of America, in recognition of the unprecedented disaster and response, reworked the timeframe and adjusted the scope of the grant to the United Way of Northeast Louisiana. Months after the Hurricanes, when the disaster was becoming more manageable, the United Way of Northeast Louisiana, stepped back into its mentoring role to the other two states funded through the Kellogg grant. By then, however, the United Way of Northeast Louisiana had become widely-known and regarded by 2-1-1s **across North America**. Monroe's heroic response and experiences have become the touchstone for 2-1-1s planning for and responding to emergencies. Staff from the United Way of Northeast Louisiana have spoken at conferences across the United States, consulted on conference calls, and been the subject of an in-depth case study, *Shelter from the Storm: The Monroe Experience* (United Way of America, n.d.). The United Way of Northeast Louisiana, true to its original intent, did dedicate the Kellogg Funding, also, to resource development. Indeed, little did the United Way of Northeast Louisiana realize how valuable that additional resource person would be during and in the aftermath of the Hurricanes. Monroe now has a dedicated staff person responsible for maintaining and improving the database.

“Our commitment was to enhance our resources and to improve their accuracy. We were able to do that through use of the Kellogg funds. Now we have a dedicated staff position. That's her job... We've been through a systematic, complete review of our 900-plus resources.”

The United Way of Northeast Louisiana sees ongoing opportunities to further integration of 2-1-1 into the Kellogg Foundation's commitment through the Mid South Delta Initiative.

“Kellogg has made a commitment, a significant commitment, to this rural quadrant of the state where there are high poverty, low employment, and low job skills. The continued involvement of Kellogg in 2-1-1 is a vehicle for such things as the Earned Income Tax Credit, job training, a number of the things that enhance financial stability and economic self-sufficiency [is important]. There are many ways that 2-1-1 can play a major role in that. When this flood occurred in the outlying parishes, it [impacted] some of the poorest and some of the most remote parishes. So by advertising 2-1-1 [during that response], we really got a lot of calls from people who live in that area.”

The United Way of America served as the lead agency for the Kellogg Foundation grant. The United Way of America provided key financial and staffing support during the Hurricanes and has continued its support following the Hurricanes. The United Way of America coordinated the national call for volunteers just days after Hurricane Katrina struck. Staff from the United Way of America provided expertise and consulting during

and after the Hurricanes. The United Way of America provided funding to support the statewide coordinator position. The United Way of America has also granted long-term recovery funds to support Louisiana's 2-1-1s.

The United Way of America “have been instrumental and in support of 2-1-1 in lots of ways—publicity, information, expertise, funding, to help strengthen 2-1-1’s condition in the state.”

The United Way of America “played a role in increased awareness of 2-1-1 in the state and maybe sort of nudged us toward being more mindful in connecting with people who make policy, the decision-makers on other levels.”

“I think the United Way’s interest in 2-1-1 and their financial support made it a tighter network. They were the ones who actually put out a call for people to come from all over the United States to help [during the Hurricanes].”

“They had networking and educational conference calls that has helped nationally, not just state-wide.”

However, the Hurricanes and changing staff at the United Way of America complicated the original, straightforward scope of the project. Both the United Way of America and the United Way of Northeast Louisiana were forced to make substantial revisions to scope and timeframe.

“The shifting sand made it very difficult.”

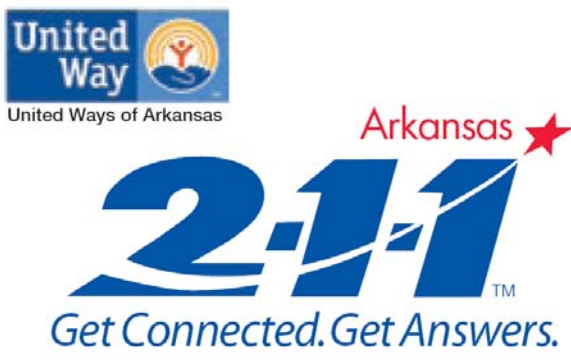
On a national level, the United Way of America has taken in the lead in promoting passage of the Calling for 2-1-1 Act. This has been seen by Louisiana’s 2-1-1s as a significant and important goal.

“United Way of America’s policy people have been instrumental in a coordinated effort to call attention to 2-1-1 for the Calling for 2-1-1 Act, the federal funding.”

SUMMARY

The 2-1-1s in Louisiana, during the time period of the Kellogg funding, have moved from fairly siloed 2-1-1s, to the beginnings of a statewide seamless network. The six regional 2-1-1s had operated quite independently. During the time of this grant and the experience of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, there has been a movement toward greater collaboration. The collaboration may mean some standardization to ensure continuity in type and quality of service delivery. The collaboration may also enhance 2-1-1s’ ability to provide service, even in times of disaster. It is expected that the statewide network will be even better prepared to assist the most vulnerable persons in Louisiana with assistance with human service needs on a daily basis and, as so amply-demonstrated, in times of emergency.

“We’ve come a long way, baby. We’ve got a long way to go. I am proud of the progress that’s been made and look forward to the 2-1-1 future in Louisiana.”



BACKGROUND

Like many states, Arkansas has a number of very distinct cultures within its borders. Northwest Arkansas is booming economically. Little Rock, in the center of the state, is the state capitol. The Delta extends from north to south along the eastern border, encompassing about 27 counties. See Appendix A for more detailed socio-demographic information about Arkansas.

There were no 2-1-1s in Arkansas at the time of the award of Kellogg Foundation funds. Indeed, there were very few information and referral programs of any kind in Arkansas. In northwest Arkansas, however, there already had been planning for the creation of a 2-1-1 center for their region. The challenge in Arkansas would be bringing the vision of meeting the needs of persons in the economically-challenged Delta together with the planning process underway in the affluent northwestern part of the state, as well as having a 2-1-1 develop that all of Arkansas could support. In the Delta, perhaps the neediest and most disadvantaged region, could the 2-1-1 goal of connecting people with resources actually turn into a program that assists residents who reside in an area with few community supports?

EXISTING SERVICES AND PLANS

As noted, prior to the Kellogg grant the United Way in Benton County had been working for a number of years to bring 2-1-1 to their northwestern region of the state. Their long-range goal was to eventually roll 2-1-1 out statewide. When the United Way of Pulaski County (Little Rock) received funds from the Kellogg Foundation through the United Way of America, more partners came to the 2-1-1 table in Arkansas. Not only did the Kellogg funding mean that Little Rock and the central part of the state was now involved, it also meant that the Delta region would also be a focus for delivery of 2-1-1 services, since that region is an on-going focus for the Kellogg Foundation. Working through the interests and plans already being formulated in northwest Arkansas and marrying them

with the vision as outlined in the Kellogg Foundation grant became one of the most important challenges in the beginnings of the effort.

“Benton County was already pushing forward on 2-1-1, and had meetings with the Public Service Commission. Little Rock was not interested at all in 2-1-1. But the Kellogg grant coming to Little Rock forced us to work together. That was good.”

One challenge faced in some states is resistance from existing information and referral services. In Arkansas, most respondents indicated that there were few information and referrals in the state. One respondent indicated that although their organization had planned to start an information and referral service, they had intentionally suspended those plans because of the development of 2-1-1.

“There’s only, I think, two or three information referrals in Arkansas right now”

“It’s a challenge for Arkansas that we don’t have information and referrals, and we don’t have that database. [But] there are a lot of ways I think it’s helped us or, it’s made it easier for us, because you don’t have...all those established information and referrals that are competing and worried about what’s going to happen with them.”

WORKING TOWARD 2-1-1

When the United Way of Pulaski County was awarded the Kellogg Foundation funding through the United Way of America, the 2-1-1 landscape in Arkansas changed dramatically. What had once been an endeavor of only northwest Arkansas was suddenly opened to new partners. Northwest Arkansas, in fact, had been caught somewhat off-guard at the award and interest in 2-1-1 from central Arkansas.

“When Pulaski County gets this Kellogg grant, out of the blue that nobody knows about,...it did create lots of questions and trouble and ‘What’s going on?’ and ‘Why can’t we work together?’ We probably, for over a year, had some geographical lines drawn in the sand...But just finally coming together as a state and eliminating these geographical boundaries which, by being a statewide 2-1-1, helped us do, that was an obstacle for us to come together as a state. It was also a challenge. I’m going to say this Kellogg grant created some controversy and some challenges because the right hand didn’t know what the left hand was doing in the state.”

“Rather than having one United Way oversee that [the Kellogg grant], it would have been nice if maybe a partnership could have been formed between the United Way that was currently already working on 2-1-1 and a United Way that was closer to the Delta area...I wish initially more communication would have been done up front.”

United Ways

Much of the drive for 2-1-1 in Arkansas has come from United Ways. However, the United Ways have also been extremely intentional about developing a coalition that extends well beyond the United Ways. In doing so, the United Ways of Arkansas have moved from being an informal group that met periodically for information sharing and social purposes, to a formal statewide organization that is heading up the development of 2-1-1.

“United Ways of Arkansas, in the past, have always been a nice little social group that met quarterly, but since 2-1-1’s coming about, we’ve had to formally incorporate to a 501(c)(3) for the United Ways of Arkansas. We have had to formalize ourselves, collaborate, and form a new board to get this going. That’s been a milestone to our success.”

“We now have a vision for the United Ways of Arkansas that would not have come about if it weren’t [for] 2-1-1. For instance, now we can envision the United Ways of Arkansas having a staff person to work on endowment giving for the entire state. Then [could do for] all of our United Ways, one combined central campaign in the state of Arkansas. So forming the state of Arkansas United Ways is very good. It’s giving us some vision on where we can move. That happened because we had to do it for 2-1-1.”

“This is a big challenge: to take this on and hire staff and do those kinds of things that we’re not used to. We’ve had a lot of turnover, a lot of new executives that haven’t been there a long time, so it seems like it’s kind of falling on just three or four people because we don’t have a lot of large United Ways. I think there’s only like 13 or 14 active United Ways in the state.

Even though not all of Arkansas is covered by United Ways, the leadership maintained a vision that 2-1-1 would serve all Arkansans.

Time and Process to Work it Out

The organizations interested in 2-1-1 worked together until they could figure it out. By many accounts, it was difficult to navigate the turf and political barriers to working together. There was long-standing geographic-based skepticism. There were people already deeply invested in 2-1-1 now joined by partners who did not have the history. There were politically-connected individuals, and others who were connected to important economic resources. These supporters simply kept communicating until they were able to come to agreement about how to move forward.

“There’s been some frustration, trying to make it a statewide effort, which I’m sure always happens. But that once the Kellogg grant came, that kind of like took over.”

“We’ll just do this a step at a time and try to do the right thing now and the right thing then. And sometimes you can’t see the second step until you’re into the first step. It’s

hard to conceive of a brand-new organization and write down the step-by-step-by-step that you're going to take. You know generally where you're going to go, but that plan is going to have enough flexibility that it will allow you to make some adjustments.”

“It's taken a lot longer...it just seems like it's really slow.”

Statewide Vision

An early decision of the initial partners was to move from a rolled-out implementation to a statewide implementation. This had been a different vision than the planners in Benton County had been working toward.

“The Public Service Commission announced it, saying [2-1-1] has to be a statewide effort. As we got into it more we realized that doing it statewide was the way to go...if we didn't do it statewide, it probably would never happen in some [poor, rural] areas. I think them pushing us to make it statewide has been very beneficial, because to get state funding,...it has to be available in all parts of the state. Arkansas has a lot of haves and have-nots. We did not want it to become that, so we felt it was important that we did it across the state.”

“Looking back, it was very good that we did not start a call center in one area and then branch off of that for several different call centers, [because] our state and each local United Way would not be able to support their own call center.”

After developing a joint statewide vision, representatives from the United Way met with Arkansas' Public Service Commission, to gain their endorsement. The Commission was excited that a new statewide 2-1-1 was now being planning. Their enthusiastic endorsement then paved the way for their next steps – developing a coalition.

“One meeting with Public Service Commission brought several United Ways closer together [in their vision]. Then the next step,...we said, ‘Hey it's a good idea if we get all areas of the state involved.’ So we went out and sought out United Way directors from around the state, mental [health] people, foundation kind of people, business leaders, and we started picking off different people all around the state.”

Coalition Development

Although 2-1-1 has been driven by United Ways, it is not solely a project of the United Ways. A coalition representing stakeholders from around the state was formed to vision the statewide 2-1-1. The coalition was recruited to represent stakeholders from across Arkansas. The coalition was responsible for obtaining the buy-in of state and local policymakers, developing the implementation plan, creating funding streams, and hiring the executive director. The members met approximately monthly and also had a number of subcommittees focusing on particular aspects of the planning, including, for example, funding, marketing, and technology.

“The reasons for putting together coalitions: it’s too big for you to do by yourself so you enlist others. Two or three people saw the need, [but] nothing happens unless somebody moves. So from the beginning, United Way heads started talking to United Way heads. Then suddenly you get a blend and say, ‘Okay let’s come to the table and make it happen.’ Essentially that’s what happened; everybody realized, ‘We still have a void with our service to the people, and it’s not only with me, it’s with people from all over the state. So, what do we do?’.”

“We always tried to hold to our vision is that it’s going to be statewide when we start it. And being statewide means that we want statewide representation, which means board members from around the state, and the makeup of our board would be made up of different types ...business, majority would be United Way, government, telephone, fundraiser type people, people who knew who could help us through our central government.”

“We had meetings all along the way in an effort to distribute information involving folks in the private sector as well as the public. We had a number of specialty committees that were set up to handle public awareness.”

By early 2007, the Coalition had completed its work. The Coalition was then prepared to turn over the vision of 2-1-1 to a new, permanent advisory board, under the auspices of the United Ways of Arkansas.

Advisory Board

The advisory board that oversees 2-1-1 in Arkansas will operate as part of the United Ways of Arkansas. This ensures that all United Ways have a voice in 2-1-1.

“Systemically this thing has got to be owned by a broad group of people and not a single United Way and the administrative structure should be its own thing. It should not be subordinated [under a single United Way].”

At the time of the interviews, the 21 member advisory board was to include the eight United Way executives, community and state representatives, and others. Each member would serve three year terms.

STATE AND LOCAL LEADERSHIP

Obtaining the support of state and local leaders has been a focus for the Arkansas 2-1-1 effort. At the state level, they have systematically reached out to both governors (there was a change in governor during this time



period), and policymakers in state agencies. Supporters of 2-1-1 primarily used personal meetings with state elected and appointed officials to brief them on 2-1-1 and to ask for support.

“We had a press conference and [the Governor] participated in it and presided over it and was very supportive.”

“The organization or state government has slowed us down a little bit. Getting through all of this and we changed governors, it’s been a slow thing in getting everybody on board. In the momentum of getting a plan it was pretty quick because...everybody supported it.”

The support of the Governor and Public Service Commission has been important in building **credibility** and support throughout Arkansas.

“We have had someone with us every step of the way representing the Public Service Commission and the Governor’s office, so we always knew of when we faced people, they always knew what our backing was, what our support was,”

Supporters have also conducted a series of **Town Hall meetings** across Arkansas to familiarize community leaders and residents about 2-1-1. Over 500 persons attended the meetings. The 2-1-1 organizers worked with local United Ways and other community representatives to make special invitations to local leaders and to publicize the events. They found that personal invitations were important. State legislators attended every Town Hall meeting. This ended up being an important way to educate this constituency about 2-1-1, given the fairly high turnover (reportedly 32%) of legislators during the year of planning.

“In the meetings that I organized, people came because I invited them.”

“It allowed enough time for a better understanding of the intent of 2-1-1 and, at the meetings I attended, we always had a number of people there. In most instances we had the mayor, the county judge, the 911 director, if the service was in that community, and we also had state senators and state representatives, along with a pretty good cross-section of the community. And never one time did anyone say, ‘We don’t need this, it’s not needed.’ Their voices were in unison that ‘Hey, we need this.’”

Organizers of 2-1-1 have **personally** reached out to contacts, used some **printed** materials, and have presented 2-1-1 at **conferences** across the state.

“We have a brochure that we’re sending out to everybody plus were calling them and talking to them. We’ve had some promotional meetings. We talked to the 911 providers as a group, and we’ll talk to the county managers as a group, so we have some group meetings. All these conferences tend to take place in the spring. So we’ll be wandering around talking at them.”

County administrators also were an important constituency that 2-1-1 organizers reached, in part, through Town Hall meetings, but also through personal contact, and with representation of the group on the initial coalition and permanent Advisory Board.

[If you get] “the endorsement from the various counties in the municipal league, [then] you’ve got a buy-in in a geographic basis. This, in effect, creates a momentum of critical mass [of support].”

Telephone companies have been a special constituency that the organizers have included every step of the process. Telecommunications companies participated in the original coalition and also on the new Advisory Board.

“When they’ve had their statewide telecom [conference with] about 26 different phone companies at the same table, we were able to give them a 15 minute presentation. We started that work over a year ago and we’ve been to them twice.”

“It really seemed like that the majors [phone companies] understood that once the Public Service Commission was supportive, they would service us and do it for us. I didn’t get any pushback from them.”

WHY SUPPORT 2-1-1?

Although there had been little initial awareness about 2-1-1 across the state, the Arkansas 2-1-1 promoters have said, again and again, that they faced very little resistance to the idea of 2-1-1 and mostly found enthusiastic support. In general, supporters felt that it was a needed service.

“I think, the most significant thing is the general view across the state that 2-1-1 is a very needed service”

“I think that, once people find out about 2-1-1 and what it’s all about, it’s an easy sell.”

More specifically, supporters believe that 2-1-1 can directly:

- Assist people who don’t know where to turn for help
- Improve efficiency in the human service delivery system
- Enhance disaster response
- Relieve other n11 calls
- Improve human services planning
- Connect donations of time and resources
- Assist people across the entire state

People Don’t Know Where To Turn For Help

Many respondents believe that people do not know what services are available to help them. 2-1-1 will help connect these individuals to needed services. There is also the

understanding that, many times, persons have multiple needs and that 2-1-1 can serve as a connector to many different kinds of programs.

“Our United Way did a community needs assessment in 2003, before we even started talking 2-1-1. Out of that community needs assessment it came up over and over and over with every group we visited with: people do not know where to turn for help.”

“We know that many times people need help but they get so frustrated after the fifth or sixth call and getting, ‘We don’t do that, call here,’ ‘We don’t do that, call over there.’ We think it’s going to be a great service from that standpoint.”

[The current system] “works fine if you have one need or a couple of collateral needs. It doesn’t work very well if you’re somebody who shows up and need everything. Then you wind up making 14 phone calls and waiting for a response.”

Related, some people don’t know that community services or programs are even available to help them. In the case of the Hurricane evacuees, many evacuees missed out on assistance because they wrongly thought they weren’t eligible.

“Only 15% of those who were eligible applied for a loan or grant for vehicle replacement. That’s because, I guarantee you, they looked at [the application] and it said *Small Business Assistance Loan* on top of the page, and they said, ‘Hell, I’m not a small business. There’s no point in reading this,’ and they discarded it.”

2-1-1 is easy to remember, during disasters and for daily needs.

“Definitely the ease of the number itself, everybody is very attuned to that. We talk about it. We certainly give examples of 9/11 in New York City and having so many 800 numbers after the disaster... though we tell them 99% of times it’s going to be people seeking help and the ease of the number...”

Efficiencies in Delivery of Services

Supporters also note that 2-1-1 may provide cost efficiencies in the human services delivery system.

“People are seeing the possible cost-saving advantages, the possible advantage of synchronizing services, just like we are synchronized [for] other types of emergencies. The one destination to call and being able to get service or get somebody to respond or get pointed in the proper direction.”

“I see something else that helped us...when we were selling [2-1-1] was the University of Nebraska study...That worked to get that out that this is not just a new cost that’s coming up, but it is a real community pay back as well.”

Disaster Response

Arkansas was not directly impacted by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, as were the other two states (Mississippi and Louisiana) in this project. Arkansas suffered no physical damage. However, Arkansas was indirectly impacted as it received thousands of evacuees. Many of these evacuees came to Arkansas's communities in a very short time period. Some respondents indicated that, per capita, Arkansas received more evacuees than any other state.

In Arkansas, United Ways and communities responded by setting up temporary shelters, opening camps, working with faith-based organizations, and others to meet the needs of evacuees. Many communities operated in fair isolation in identifying resources and matching donations to needs. Most communities were not aware of federal funding that may have been available to offset the costs of helping the evacuees.

“We had to make sure that each of these site locations had a case manager on site that we worked with on a daily basis, trying to make sure that they knew the services that were available in the community so then they could pass that on.”

“We did not know that funding could have come down from FEMA, so by the time we learned that we could get a case manager in our area, it was already passed. And to my knowledge no one applied for reimbursement to FEMA because you had to go through who appointed and all that mess, so it was volunteer driven.”

“When evacuees came in we had one plane load of 50 elderly people. We had to have 50 wheelchairs at the airport within 10 minutes...We found that United Way played a critical role in being on-site in that processing center.”

“The biggest challenge probably was the fact that there was no centralized system where [evacuees] could access that information, and the information was provided sporadically piecemeal. It depended, to a very substantial degree, on what your intake source was. Keep in mind that in this state at least 95% of the services were not provided by the Red Cross. They were provided by faith-based groups. They were provided by city public housing departments or they were provided by the Boys Scouts ...[and other] various groups [that] are not traditional emergency services providers.”

Arkansas' experiences with working with Hurricane evacuees, and their vicarious experience of watching their neighboring states respond to the emergency, seems to have been helpful in solidifying support for 2-1-1 in Arkansas.

The Hurricanes “greatly enhanced the awareness of a need for a service like 2-1-1. It pointed out to us immediately the need for something like that, and of course once the event happens it's too late to start working on it. Now with the statewide effort that we have underway, we'll be ready. But in the meantime, we'll also have this service that will benefit greatly the many thousands of Arkansas residents who are looking for resources to help them and their families.”

A new individuals to our state “dialed 2-1-1 and then she called our office. She said, “I dialed 2-1-1 and got nothing. Do we not have that in the state of Arkansas?” That’s a great success of why we needed it.”

“We use those examples of...the hurricane,...what happened in Florida, these are the examples of how people got assistance quicker.”

911 and Others Who Receive Calls

In some states, 911s have been reluctant to support 2-1-1. In Arkansas, however, 911s have been enthusiastic advocates for 2-1-1. They have grasped that 2-1-1 may improve their response time as it will relieve them of non-emergency calls.

“Our 911 operators are tickled to death because they think that we’ll eliminate some of the calls coming their way.”

“Folks in the emergency response right now are very excited about it, especially the 911 operators who feel that 2-1-1 will likely cut their non-emergency calls that they’re handling now by 40 percent or more.”

“With the mayor and the county judge and the 911 directors, it’s going to be a great relief to them.”

“Now when we talk to a group ... we would have a police chief or fire chief in there and we’d talk about taking volume off of the 911 system. They are just like really [nodding] their head and really supportive.”

Human Services Planning

Supporters recognize that 2-1-1 can provide data about unmet needs that may be used in human service planning. Of particular interest to them is how 2-1-1 helps under-resourced areas, like the Delta, identify needs.

“I want our [2-1-1] state director to be plugged in to the right source and say, ‘Food banks you might consider expanding in this area if you want to develop something,’ and take it to our state government.”

Donated Goods and Services

2-1-1’s role in matching donations to needs is also an important component of why 2-1-1 is supported in Arkansas.

“The other one is the volunteering side. Everybody usually is like that’s a great idea; I didn’t know I could call a number and volunteer.”

Statewide Access

The fact that 2-1-1 will be available throughout Arkansas has been another important component of gaining support for the service.

Supporters are “very excited and understand the need for 2-1-1, more so excited because in Arkansas we’re doing the full statewide effort rather than a couple of call centers operating independently. They see it as a win-win for our entire state.”

2-1-1 OPERATIONS

Staff

Volunteers and paid staff were responsible for shepherding the vision of 2-1-1. The Kellogg Foundation grant paid for a consultant, Leon Matthews, who was a retired United Way Executive from Central Arkansas. Also of note were United Way volunteers Perry Johnson and David Bean from the United Way of Benton County, along with Jill Darling the Executive Director. Additional support came from the Executive Directors and staff of United Ways throughout Arkansas. This small core of staff oversaw the development of 2-1-1.

Sustainable leadership for 2-1-1, however, was ultimately to come from a full-time Executive Director for 2-1-1. In the spring of 2007, after a nationwide search, a 2-1-1 Executive Director was hired. The Executive Director will report to the United Ways of Arkansas organization.

It is anticipated that other staff will include: an operations manager, a technical systems manager, administrative assistance, resource specialist, 10 counselors full-time and 7 part-time counselors.

Call Center Locations

The location of the 2-1-1 call center(s) became an important discussion. Fairly quickly, however, it was determined that two call centers would be ideal. Two would give some visibility and ownership in two separate areas of the state and they could serve as built-in back-ups for one another. In order to maximally serve the Delta, it was determined that the prime call center, operating 24/7, would be located in Pine Bluff – in the heart of the Delta. The United Way of Southeast Arkansas had recently built a state-of-the-art center that could easily house the call center. The Arkansas 2-1-1 Executive Director will office out of this site. The center will also furnish accounting services and information technology services to 2-1-1. The ancillary call center would be located in Bentonville.

“Most people have accepted that [two centers: Pine Bluff and Bentonville] is a good way to handle it. I think there was at first ...if most of the funding was going to come from Wal-Mart it probably ought to all be in Bentonville. But I think people recognize that

there needs to be probably two call centers and this facility that was available in Pine Bluff. It makes a lot of sense to have most of the operation there and then have a secondary center where, if one should be down, you would always have the other to go to in case of a Katrina style catastrophe in Arkansas that might hit a Pine Bluff. We'd at least have a backup center."

Pine Bluff has "a wonderful facility that is 41,000 square feet, [and] houses, all of the United Way agencies except one or two...It anchors downtown redevelopment"

Telephone System

It is anticipated that the **integrated call management system** will enable calls to seamlessly roll from Pine Bluff to Bentonville, or back, to accommodate busy signals, emergency back-ups and overnight calls. The 2-1-1 organizers continue to work to ensure that cell phones are able to access 2-1-1, but that has not yet been accomplished.

Data

One of the original visions for the Kellogg Foundation grant was to create a robust database that could serve as a database for Delta residents and be used to support a 2-1-1 in the Delta. The 2-1-1 organizers quickly determined that a sustainable and meaningful 2-1-1 for the Delta must necessarily mean 2-1-1 for the state. This was because of concerns for long-term viability of a Delta-only 2-1-1. Additionally, there was concern that many important resources for Delta residents are located outside the region.

Faithful to the scope of the grant, Arkansas 2-1-1 has worked to create a statewide database of resources. They have selected a database vendor. They were particularly enthusiastic to select the same vendor as was selected by Mississippi, as this would expedite Delta resource sharing. In Arkansas, 2-1-1 identified existing databases that could be adapted to create the 2-1-1 database. There were several databases, including one from the State Department of Human Services and from United Ways. However, there have been gaps, so significant time has been spent identifying and coding resources. Volunteers have spent nearly 500 hours on identifying and coding Mid South Delta resources alone. They expect to have approximately 8,000 resources when the statewide database is complete.

Funding

The Coalition worked hard to secure funding for at least the first two years' operation of 2-1-1 in Arkansas. Their strategy was to first, create seed money, through local United Way commitments. Having made their own financial commitment, they then approached local corporations and foundations. Their goal was to obtain private funding for the first two years' start-up and then later secure state funding to support 2-1-1 in the subsequent years. By the end of its work, the Coalition had nearly reached its goal of full funding for the first two years. The funds have come from United Ways, grants from private corporations, and grants from local foundations. Some of the funding has been targeted,

for example, a local not-for-profit charitable organization granted \$30,000 for the purchase of the software program for resources. The organizers were strategic about their approach to potential grant makers: preparing for the ask and sending persons with pre-existing relationships.

“It showed our commitment on the front end that we were funding [2-1-1] with private funds to start with. In the long term [we’re] hoping to get help with government funding down the road.”

A success was “getting the coalition going and then finding some funding sources. Wal-Mart came through with a good allocation and some other foundations have stepped up. They are willing to help fund it. We’ve obtained a pretty good commitment from the Governor to help in the future if we need help from the state government.”

“We also took the approach that we wanted to raise private funds before we went after legislatures or federal funding or state funding. We asked the United Way agencies to go back in to their organizations and we’d like to have your money that you raise, give a little bit of it. Secondly we’re going to go after some foundations in our state for that funding and we got approval from one major foundation-Wal-Mart foundation that’s going to help us.”

“I’ve done fundraising long enough to know that who asks is more important than why you asked.”

Organizers are investigating additional means of support through contracts. For example, they are exploring with the Veterans Administration and mental health programs whether reimbursement contracts may be developed.

Supporters of 2-1-1 also believe that federal funding will be important for on-going sustainability of 2-1-1 in Arkansas.

“For 2-1-1 to be a long-term reality in our state, we have to have the federal funding that would come down. That federal legislation’s going to be important.”

“The challenge down the road is just securing sustainable funding, which is a challenge for all 2-1-1s. Hopefully there will be some federal funding that will be able to sustain that. The worst thing would be to get it up and going and then not be able to sustain it.”

Marketing and Promotion

Planning for the marketing and promotion of 2-1-1 to the public has been the focus of one of the Coalition’s subcommittees. A budget for marketing and promotion in is the start-up budget and a local advertising firm has assisted in organizing the press conference and is advising the group on statewide strategies. Some local United Ways have also received coverage from their local media about 2-1-1. Some of the marketing and promotion strategies that Arkansas is considering include:

- Television and radio: paid, news coverage, public service spots
- Billboards
- Telephone book (front and back cover, as well as inside)
- United Way marketing materials
- In-store closed-circuit televisions at retail stores (in check-out lines)

Organizers have recognized that promotion during the early start-up of 2-1-1 must be done carefully so as not to overwhelm the new system.

“There are not public promotional efforts and there won’t be public promotional efforts until after the system is ready to go.”

“We have told ourselves marketing wise that our marketing will have to start slow: that you start getting your calls and then you ramp it up a little, and get more calls.”

Political Action

Arkansas’ 2-1-1 organizers have worked to garner support from their U.S. legislators for the Calling for 2-1-1 Act: All six Representatives and both Senators have signed on to support the 2-1-1 legislation.

MID SOUTH DELTA

The organizers of 2-1-1 have been particularly focused on the special challenges in the Mid South Delta area. Numerous residents of the Delta region served on both the Coalition and the Governing Board. Multiple Town Hall meetings were conducted throughout the Delta to ensure the buy-in of local leaders.

“We’ve got people on [the Board] who are with certain health centers and other kinds of service agencies in that area in the extreme northwest Mississippi and upper northeast Arkansas”

There is also concern that a dearth of resources may make it difficult for Delta residents to connect to services. Organizers have worked hard to identify all services, but recognize that the Delta is lacking in services. However, organizers hope that identifying gaps in needed services may assist in bringing new services to the Delta.

“In the Delta our biggest concern is we’re not going to have the agencies and the services available to meet the needs.”

“We’ll be able to identify those gaps. But then our challenge in a small state is ‘How are we going to get the funds to make those, to fulfill those gaps?’ We’ll work on that.”

Some special marketing and promotion efforts may be implemented to reach hard-to-reach Delta residents. Written materials may be ineffective to some residents with low literacy. Particularly important, organizers believe, will be tying into existing networks.

2-1-1 promotion “through the schools and through the churches will be very important.”

“One of the things...we will do [in the Delta] is to aggressively promote it through local community institutions where we know there is a contact mechanism, Southern Good Faith Fund and banks ...VA halls. Probably we would not use them so much here because the concentration of population lends itself to effective communication through presentation and conferences in public media...There are no United Ways in the Delta so we...can't use that mechanism...We're going to have to find surrogates in the Delta to be the promotional resources for us on an interpersonal one-on-one or direct marketing basis.”

“I want us to run local newspaper, local radio, through the schools, maybe through some churches and a lot of it needs to be done through television.”

Organizers believe that having the main call center in Pine Bluff will also raise the visibility of 2-1-1 in the Delta region.

“Having the main center in Pine Bluff will help because we'll be visible in that area. But it's going to be a challenge, it's going to be.”

Ultimately, 2-1-1 organizers believe that 2-1-1 will assist in connecting the Delta region to resources in the rest of Arkansas and perhaps lead to improved integration and delivery of services.

“But the issue is ‘Can you possibly be of any assistance in places like the Delta?’ Well my response to that is ‘Yes, for particular kinds of circumstances.’...There virtually are no Delta services: that's the whole point. If you're going to get the services in there, you are going to have to import them, except for the county operations offices...”

“I'm sitting there saying, ‘Okay, how can we integrate the Delta with the rest of the state to get economic development that will benefit the Delta?’ They say, ‘Okay, how can we benefit the Delta?’ And the answer to that is you can't unless you're willing to make it part of the integrated whole.”

KELLOGG GRANT

The Kellogg Foundation funding, through the United Way of America, played a crucial role in the development, not only of a **database of community resources for the Delta**, but also for a **statewide** database and development of the **2-1-1** infrastructure. Organizers quickly understood that a database of only Delta resources would be insufficient, even to meet the needs of Delta residents. Thus, a statewide resource database was required.

Further, they knew that a stand-alone database, without a means of accessing it (i.e., through 2-1-1), would be meaningless. As a result, the Kellogg Foundation funds have ultimately **leveraged significant private funds** to plan for a robust database and statewide 2-1-1. The Kellogg funding, however, was specifically dedicated to pay, in part, for the consultant and an administrative support person to create the resource database.

“They were focusing on building a developmental data base for the Delta. You can’t do that if you don’t have a [2-1-1] for the whole state. You can’t do that if you’re just looking at the Delta, because the service components that will predominantly be providing services in the Delta don’t originate there.”

“The Kellogg money was crucial it provided the upfront support they got the thing going.”

“I think the Kellogg grant...allowed the state to engage in a lot of planning and a number of meetings and getting people involved who needed to be involved.”

In Arkansas, the Kellogg Foundation grant also gave them the opportunity to build relationships with colleagues in Louisiana and Mississippi. These relationships were extremely helpful.

“There were some collaborative efforts between us and Mississippi particularly around the database, because we had no prior experience... We used their professional staff person, quite a bit, to make decisions related to technical stuff associated with both the data retrieval and ultimately...made a commitment to acquire the same system they did.”

“We...made trips to Mississippi and to Louisiana to look at their operations and talk to their people and get some 2-1-1 insight...[We] went [with] a regional planning standpoint, ‘What should we do when 2-1-1 is part of our software and our phone systems? Should they be able to talk to [other] states, regionally?’”

Hearing about Monroe’s experiences, “helped to broaden my vision of what might happen and what people can do when they must. So I think it’s helped me to share the value of 2-1-1 as I have talked with our board, with the town hall meetings.”

The United Way of America, particularly, was helpful in providing expertise about other states, beyond the Delta and providing consultation. During part of the grant, of course, many resources were diverted from this kind of assistance to direct relief and recovery for Louisiana. Some also noted that the changes in national 2-1-1 leadership were challenging, as well.

“We have appreciated United Way of America’s leadership and guidance in 2-1-1. [Their] taking 2-1-1 on as a top initiative drives us.”

United Way of America helped by “keeping us on track...[sharing] best practices from other communities...acknowledging that we’re going about the right way and that we can. It’s taking us longer than other states, but we’re going to be statewide and [have learned] from other states’ mistakes.”

“So the [United Way of America’s] corporate memory on this [project] was clearly diverted first by Katrina and then by transition [at the] staff level.”

SUMMARY

At the point of receiving Kellogg Foundation funding, there had already been planning for a 2-1-1 in northwest Arkansas. The Kellogg-funded effort was to have focused on the eastern Delta region. The northwest organizers and Kellogg-funded organizers were able to expand each vision to a single, statewide 2-1-1. During the time of the grant, Arkansas concentrated on development of financial and political support for a sustainable resource database and 2-1-1. Much effort was spent spreading the vision of 2-1-1 and ensuring that key stakeholders had committed to the vision. Effort was also made to secure the first several years’ operational budget through private sources. The organizers of Arkansas’ 2-1-1 are enthused by the work they have accomplished and feel that their planning efforts will result in a statewide system that is truly supported across the state and will be financially sustainable.

“We’re excited. We appreciate the Kellogg grant helping us come together as a state. 2-1-1’s going to be great for the state of Arkansas.”

MISSISSIPPI – LAUNCHING A STATEWIDE 2-1-1 HEADED BY A LOCAL UNITED WAY



An aerial view of Jackson, Mississippi (from the Mississippi 2-1-1 Website: <http://www.2-1-1ms.com/>)

BACKGROUND

Mississippi is located in the heart of the South. Mississippi has bustling cities, but approximately one-half of its population lives in **rural** areas. Mississippi's capital is Jackson, located in the center of the state. The Delta area of Mississippi covers 18 western counties along the Mississippi River. Mississippi, as a state, has the highest rate of **poverty** (21.6%) of any state in America. See Appendix A for more detailed socio-demographic information about Mississippi.

“If you know anything about Mississippi you know that we have a very rich area, and we have a very poor area: that’s called the Mississippi Delta.”

There were **no 2-1-1s** in Mississippi at the time of the award of Kellogg Foundation funds through the United Way of America. However, a number of Mississippi's United Ways and other organizations were operating **information and referral services**. One United Way in Mississippi, had been attempting to organize support for 2-1-1, but had found it difficult to marshal the funding needed. In Mississippi, the challenge would be identifying resources in the economically-challenged Delta area and then providing access to that information through 2-1-1. The question remained, too, how to develop a 2-1-1 that provided value-added, rather than duplication, within an existing network of isolated information and referral agencies. Finally, there was the vexing issue of funding to maintain the resource database and provide the call services.

EXISTING SERVICES AND PLANS

Prior to the United Way of America award of Kellogg Foundation funds to Mississippi, a number of years' work had been done to **create interest in 2-1-1**. The United Way of West Central Mississippi (Vicksburg) had convened meetings of United Way executives to spur interest and organize funding strategies. A planning committee was created to spearhead the effort. However, the United Ways were unable to achieve meaningful consensus and support for 2-1-1. Part of the issue may have been that numerous United Ways already operated or funded information and referral programs in their communities. They were unable to vision how 2-1-1 fit into these existing relationships.

“They lacked the vision to see that this was not going to replace what they were doing with information and referral in their local community...”

Small United Ways “have either one staff or no staff ...At some point they might support it monetarily but they just don't have the staff power to...spend a lot of time helping to work with it.”

“It ended up only being a few of us [United Ways] that were actually interested in a 2-1-1 system, which remains the same today.”

Although there did exist an association of United Ways in Mississippi, it was a fairly unstructured group and had no history of building this type of collaborative endeavor, so it did not play any significant role in bringing the United Ways together. Because many of Mississippi's United Ways are **small**, they also faced funding challenges and had not, necessarily, been exposed to the United Way of America's efforts to promote 2-1-1.

The Association of United Ways in Mississippi is “more professional support for each other, but not necessarily [positioned] to support a statewide initiative or anything like that.”

“A lot of the United Ways here are small United Ways that never attend any of the major conferences. So they don't have the national perspective.”

WORKING TOWARD 2-1-1

Starting Out

When Mississippi first received the Kellogg Foundation funding through the United Way of America, the lead agency was the United Way of West Central Mississippi in **Vicksburg**, located in the Delta region. The United Way hired two part-time individuals to begin developing the Mississippi **database** for community services.

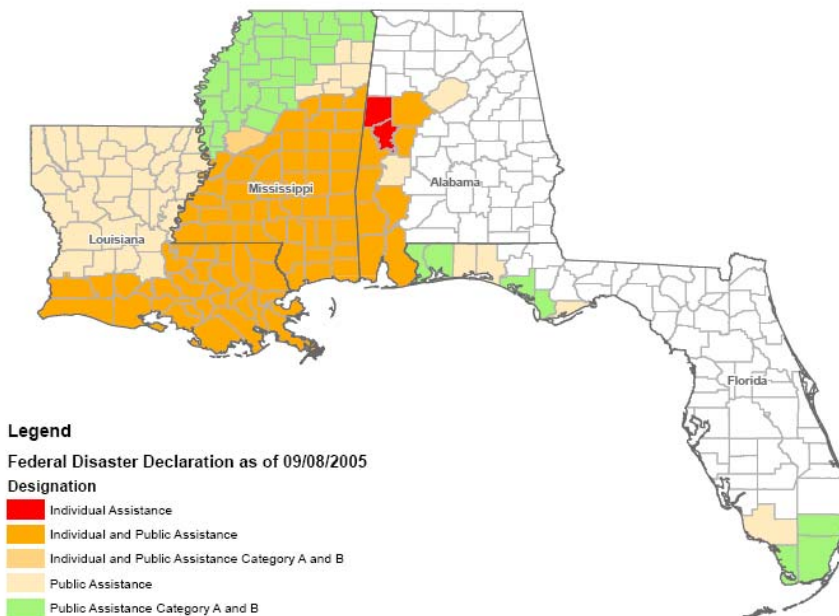
Hurricanes Katrina and Rita

The project had been underway for only weeks when Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast. Aside from the major relief and recovery efforts that the Hurricane precipitated, it also resulted in an unexpected change in leadership for 2-1-1 in Mississippi.

Although much of the nation's attention focused on Katrina's impact in New Orleans, Katrina also brought staggering **devastation** to Mississippi. After making landfall on the border of Louisiana and Mississippi, on August 29, 2005, Katrina moved north *through* Mississippi. Katrina maintained hurricane intensity almost 100 miles inland (National Weather Service, 2006). The National Hurricane Center report (Knabb, Rhome, & Brown, 2005) on Katrina characterized its impact as follows:

The storm surge of Katrina struck the Mississippi coastline with such ferocity that entire coastal communities were obliterated, some left with little more than the foundations upon which homes, businesses, government facilities, and other historical buildings once stood. (p. 12).

Several weeks later, **Hurricane Rita** brought **tornadoes** and very heavy rains and **flash flooding** to Mississippi (Knabb, Brown, & Rhome, 2006).



Federal Disaster Declaration as of 09/08/2005 (from U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Website: http://www.huduser.org/maps/disaster_areas_09082005.pdf)

Mississippi provided information and referral, and coordinated volunteers through a variety of means. Many of United Way **information and referral** programs provided disaster information. Some communities compiled and distributed resource booklets, nearly from scratch. The Mississippi Commission for **Volunteer** Service mobilized a 40

line call center that operated for months following the Hurricanes. For a time the call center ran 24/7.

“We got the key players in town together...[and asked them] ‘What have you got to offer? What do you need?’ Then we put together the information we already knew about our particular agencies. We pulled information off web sites and we just put it together, made copies and got it out to them.”

Not surprisingly, however, developing resource directories and call centers during the disaster was **difficult**.

People “literally started calling MEMA [Mississippi Emergency Management Agency] and their system bogged down. Then the Governor’s office set up a hotline. There were so many hotlines set up and [none] of the hotlines knew what the other hotline[s] were doing. So for the first three to four weeks it was total chaos.”

“It took us probably a week to start to figure out that there was a disconnect. That there were agencies who were trying to do the same things and they weren’t working together. It was only because they didn’t know what somebody else was doing. Once we became aware that was happening we said, ‘No, we can’t let that happen,’ ...[We] brought them all together so they could sit down together and say, ‘Here’s what needs to be done. Who’s going to be best equipped to do it? If your agency is going to provide food then our agency can concentrate on something else.’”

“There was so much confusion. It was really bad...People were just everywhere and nobody...[knew] where to call, who to call. We had a lot of wasted resources because we didn’t have the ability to coordinate those resources.”

It is believed that 2-1-1 **could have** played a valuable role in expediting information dissemination.

“It would have been great if 2-1-1 had been the ones to provide that information whether...in booklet form or whatever if they could have... We would not have had to spend so much time pulling all of the information together. They would have already had information on those services that we could have immediately accessed and gotten out.”

“People couldn’t...remember an 800 number. If 2-1-1 would have been already established people would have had 2-1-1 in their head.”

“There was tremendous desperation in the first couple weeks...getting supplies, keeping hospitals and critical facilities, nursing homes up and running, getting the food, the supplies, the water, the clothes, the needs for young children, whether it’s diapers or formula, getting information to people who are on dialysis, that are diabetic or had specific health care problems. So we were fielding all of those calls, much like 2-1-1 does today, and trying to assist, give them the help that they needed.”

Unexpected Leadership Change

United Way of America staff deployed quickly to Mississippi. Just days after the Hurricane Katrina struck, United Way of America staff decided that the 2-1-1 would be located in **Jackson** (United Way of the Capital Area), rather than in Vicksburg or some other location. Although some of the early planning for 2-1-1 in Mississippi had conceptualized several call centers, United Way of America staff reportedly were insistent that a single call center be located in Jackson. This caught the former lead agency, United Way in Vicksburg, and the United Way in Jackson by surprise.

“United Way of America made the decision to send someone...to look at starting a 2-1-1 in Jackson.”

The United Way of America “just decided that they were going to [establish the call center in Jackson], that we needed that call center immediately, if not sooner.”

“Vicksburg had no idea that the United Way of America decided to go ahead and push to open a call center and open it in Jackson.”

The geographically **central** Jackson location, for some, did have the benefit of being located in the state capital and away from the more vulnerable coastal region.

“I think the decision to put it in Jackson was a good one. And that’s because it’s [in the] central part of the state. It’s the state capital. You wouldn’t want to put one down [in the Coastal region] because of its vulnerability...It really would not be practical unless you put it far enough inward and so that it would be protected. I don’t disagree with the decision to put it in Jackson because I think, as the largest United Way in the state, they probably have greater capacity to handle it and recruit volunteers and maintain this should a disaster hit the coast.”

Accelerated Timeframe and Early Challenges

United Way of America staff and a national volunteer set to work attempting to bring in partners, contacting the state Public Service Commission and others, and making plans to locate the 2-1-1 in Jackson. United Way of America staff presented reportedly exaggerated information to the United Way of the Capital Area that the call center could be established within a month and that it had already approved by the state Public Service Commission. Between the pressing needs of the Hurricane evacuees and the quick start-up presented to the Board, the United Way of the Capital Area found itself in the pressured position of being responsible for implementing a statewide 2-1-1 with within an extremely **challenging timeframe**. Adding to the difficulty, United Way of America staff reportedly damaged some **relationships** by pressuring local officials and policymakers, and misfiled for Public Service Commission designation of 2-1-1, thus delaying approval for 60 days.

The United Way of America staff person “told the board that we could have 2-1-1 up and running in 7 to 10 days.”

“United Way of America people wanted us to have that thing up and running in January. There was just no way.”

Going live 24/7 “was also something that [United Way of America staff] pushed.”

The United Way of America also recruited **volunteers** from across the United States to assist in creating a resource directory. Lacking training, standardization, or direct supervision, the volunteers’ work did not always result in usable data.

“It was a disaster. The Hawaii people would come in and put in this information, and then the North Dakota people would come in and put in this information, and then the Iowa people would put in this information. There was not consistency to what information they gathered or how it was put in.”

“A lot of [the community resource information] was duplicated. For example, an agency may have been in there three times and with three different names. It was really just a mess.”

Because of the time pressures they faced, the United Way of the Capital Area was forced to focus on the mechanics of establishing the call center. They were unable to devote time to building statewide support, developing marketing, or doing other things that could have built a strong **foundation** for 2-1-1. The United Way of the Capital Area was not even, in a meaningful way, able to catalyze the support of Mississippi’s other United Ways.

“When we got down to one call center I think people [were] feeling, “This is not my call center. This belongs to the central region.””

“It’s a done deal and we weren’t included in it. The planning the implementation, all those kinds of things, we didn’t have the opportunity to grow into it or with it. I’m not sure that now there is a whole lot of interest in it.”

“United Ways...could have been included in the development of [2-1-1] ...[and] could have been asked from the very beginning ...”

“It’s kind of a territorial ownership thing, it’s almost like the other United Ways and the other statewide agencies feel like Jackson is trying to tell the state what to do.”

“The catalyst for accelerated development of 2-1-1 in Mississippi is Katrina. And there was just a constant need of providing information to agencies and volunteer groups as to where the shelters are, where the volunteer groups can go. You’re seeing a lot of mental health issues come out of the storm, and those mean both the physical health also the mental health. The needs of our state really led...everyone wanted to work together and

could quickly see the benefit of 2-1-1 system. So any type of resistance to change was also a resistance to something new.”

“Hurricane Katrina forced us to [establish the] 2-1-1, but [Arkansas] has been able to go throughout the state and gather support as well as funding. [Arkansas] has had the opportunity for almost two years now to go out and make people aware of 2-1-1...This was what we wanted to do in the first place, and what we were planning on doing. It just didn't work out that way.”

WHY SUPPORT 2-1-1?

Although the Mississippi 2-1-1 had a chaotic start, there were a number of persons and organizations that **supported** its development. Some of the reasons given for supporting 2-1-1 included:

- Assisting People in Need
 - Answers from live Specialists
 - Consistent, reliable, accurate information
 - Statewide in coverage
- Efficiency in Human Services System
 - Reducing duplicative calls
 - Reducing inappropriate calls to agencies and allowing them to focus on what they do.
- Assistance During Disasters
 - For persons needing assistance
 - For emergency management agencies to disseminate information and track public needs
- Matching volunteers and donated resources to needs
- Logical extension and complement of 411 and 911 call centers
- Bringing a known service to Mississippi that others have

LAUNCHING 2-1-1

Preparing to Launch 2-1-1

Getting to the successful launch was a chaotic time for the United Way of the Capital Area. The United Way's challenges included recruiting a 2-1-1 Director and other staff, developing the resource database, and securing funding for initial operations.

2-1-1 Director

Mississippi 2-1-1 has experienced **turnover** in its 2-1-1 Director. The first 2-1-1 Director started in January 2006. She was experienced in 2-1-1 operations in another state. The Director was faced with the daunting challenge of implementing a statewide, 24/7 2-1-1 in six months.

“We didn’t know what building we were going to use, what software, what phone system, we needed more computers.”

There was “such a time constraint and [we were] forced to be open for hurricane season...She was so busy, picking out software, phones, computers, cubicles, ...She was so focused on that that she wasn’t able to go as much to educate the public about 2-1-1.”

By October 2006, after the launch of 2-1-1, the Director had left the United Way of the Capital Area. An Interim Director, Valari Kyzar, served for approximately three months and then was named the permanent Director and continues in that role.

Database and Call Specialists Staff

The 2-1-1 also experienced **turnover** with its head database coordinator. A database coordinator was already on staff at the time of the hurricanes, and this individual became responsible for coordinating the statewide resource database. However, it was difficult to effectively communicate the type and depth of resource information that was to be collected. Information was collected in waves with several people, over several months attempting to collect the information and properly code it. A National Employment Grant (Department of Labor) provided funding to fourteen to eighteen persons to be hired to further develop the database and serve as call specialists. However, between the two resource consultants hired through the Kellogg Foundation grant, the national volunteers rotating through in the aftermath of the Hurricanes, and the cadre of workers through the National Employment Grant, it was difficult to efficiently **coordinate the many people** responsible for locating and updating what resource information. A new statewide database coordinator was hired in March.

“If you’re going to split the state up, that sounds great... ‘We’re just going to do these counties, and you do these counties, and you do these counties.’ [But because] there are so many services [whose] headquarters are in one county and they have feeder sites in all these different counties, you’re still going to overlap information, especially if you don’t know what the chain of authority is for the agency.”

“There’s not a real good way to have a lot of people working on the database.”

“We had no idea what we really needed to be putting in as far as services and finding out hours and eligibility and all that stuff...that means that two or three people are going to have to touch that same [resource] to ever get it complete.”

“It just makes a lot more sense to get all the information you need. It devolved into us bickering that out, but it was just a lot of mistakes made, a lot of trial and error things.”

Several weeks after 2-1-1’s July launch, the Department of Labor notified the United Way of the Capital Area that the **National Employment Grant** funding had run out. It had been expected to extend through November. The United Way had depended on this

grant to pay for some of its call specialists. Instead, the United Way was able to secure some funding and also committed funding to continue support of 2-1-1.

“Here we had just gone live, all the media in the state was here television, radio, and newspaper...and now we’re fixing to lose 85% of our staff because the grant had been pulled.”

“So that was awful. I mean that was a terrible experience. It killed morale. People’s emotions were shot. I mean, it was awful.”

Currently, the United Way of the Capital Area has approximately six full-time and three part-time staff. Many are cross-trained both as call specialists and resource database specialists; however, there is usually some division in duties. One part-time resource specialist continues to work from Vicksburg.

There is a “group of people that takes incoming calls and ...a group that makes outgoing calls and works in the database and applies the taxonomy. [There are only] two or three people...familiar enough with taxonomy...to apply the taxonomy.”

Data

During the start-up phase, the United Way of the Capital Area moved their resource database from their community’s Homeless Management Information System software package to another information and referral **software**. Although this caused some disruption in migrating data from one system to the other, the staff generally supported the move.

“When we did the conversion we had to clean up and we are still cleaning up a lot of files.”

The Launch

Mississippi 2-1-1 had its soft, statewide launch in June 2006. The unpublicized launch meant that it gave staff a smaller volume of calls to answer while it worked out inevitable glitches and gave call specialists experience in answering calls. The soft launch, however, was statewide and 24/7.

“The soft launch means all of our counties were turned on, but we were not announcing that it had gone live.”

The soft launch “enabled the call specialists to be trained...it was on the job training.”

The public launch was celebrated on **July 7, 2006** with a press conference. The 2-1-1 has received calls from each of Mississippi’s 82 counties. Within six months, the center had received 19,910 calls with 17,504 referrals made. The average call was answered in 11 seconds. The call center is staffed by 10 employees and numerous volunteers who provide callers with needed information to access services in their community. The

database has a total of 21,470 resources, 4,230 agencies and 5,554 sites. The database is being updated daily (United Way of West Central Mississippi, n.d.).

Several months after operating 24/7, the United Way of the Capital Area found that 24/7 operations, while convenient for callers, was difficult to justify based on the very few overnight calls they received. The hours were **reduced**.

“After running call reports and call records and call volume, we suddenly realized that we did not have the call volume to substantiate 24/7 operations. So, we did scale our hours back, which is what we are still currently. We are 7 am to 11 pm seven days a week.”

“I wish I had the money back in my budget that I spent on overtime” for 24/7 coverage.

The Calls

Although Mississippi’s 2-1-1 was not established until almost a year after the devastation of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, it has played a vital role in assisting **evacuees** and others impacted by the Hurricanes.

“Today, even almost two years after the storm, [2-1-1] is receiving about 200, on average, calls per day. One-third of the calls come in from the Katrina-affected counties.”

“About a third of [all calls] are coming from those lower 6 counties that were affected by Katrina. So there’s a strong, strong need for this system.”

The Mississippi 2-1-1 has also played a successful role in assisting people beyond Hurricane recovery to those with important **non-disaster** needs.

“From United Way to Red Cross to our churches to our state agencies to volunteer organizations, everyone is very thankful and grateful that 2-1-1 is up and operating. It is well-organized. It covers 100 percent of the state, and there’s a daily presence. Remember, that’s 200 calls per day of helping individuals get the information or the help that they need.”

2-1-1 is “matching individuals with volunteer organizations or churches or state agencies. You have example after example, from helping someone who’s maybe in an abusive situation, domestic situation, they get to a shelter and have protection and safety for themselves and their children.”

BEYOND INFORMATION AND REFERRAL

Promotion of Initiatives

Mississippi's 2-1-1 has been an active **promoter** of specialized information when appropriate. For example, the Earned Income Tax Credit provides low-income taxpayers the opportunity to reduce their tax burden. Yet, many low income persons are not aware of the program. Mississippi 2-1-1 has promoted the tax credit to its callers.

“If we have a call and we refer people to the community action agencies, we are making them aware of the [Earned Income Tax Credit]...in fact I was over there in the second week that we had been publicizing it. They had done over \$2 million worth of taxes.”

Contracts for Specialized Services

Mississippi 2-1-1 has been actively seeking **contracts** to provide specialized call center operations. This not only expands and more deeply integrates 2-1-1 into human services systems, but also provides funding to support the center. Through a contract with the Mississippi Department of Human Services, 2-1-1 is now monitoring availability and accessibility of services through Mississippi's Community Action Agencies.

“Those types of opportunities [contracts for specialized call center services] would be an asset to build on because if we can get more contracts and more agreements then naturally call volume goes up, as well as funding.”

“I think that other organizations are realizing that this is a valuable tool that can help...That's probably one of the more positive things that has come out of this.”

Mississippi 2-1-1 is pursuing possible contracts with:

- Mental health counseling referral hotline
- Children's health insurance and other health-related referral hotline
- Child abuse and vulnerable adults hotline

Part of the strategy for seeing opportunities for expanding to these types of relationships has been based on past positive **relationships** and showing the **call center in action**.

“It's being able to pick up the phone and call and say, ‘Hey, I need to talk to you.’ Another thing that we did, we did have an Open House with state agencies to come and just look at our 2-1-1 system and see what it is. At others times are we are inviting folks in to look at it, because...if somebody comes to see it, it's sold. It sells itself. We don't have to sell it.”

However, there continues to be frustration that 2-1-1 could efficiently provide services and reduce the **proliferation** of new telephone numbers and services that are to assist people looking for resources.

“You need somebody with the big picture idea to do this...to say, ‘Now wait a minute, don’t set up another call center. Let us do this for you.’”

Human Services Planning

Mississippi 2-1-1 has found that its information is valuable to others for human services **planning**. They run weekly reports for Mississippi’s Department of Human Services about referrals made to and complaints about Community Action Agencies. They have also provided specialized reports to other organizations seeking information about **resources** or **calls**.

“People are just blown away...[by] what we have in our database and, of course, we can run reports. The Urban League called a few weeks ago and they were trying to get a grant for homeless shelters. They called here and asked us to run a report of how many homeless referrals we had made in Hinds, Madison and Rankin County. Our reporting abilities have really impressed a lot of people. Anybody that’s working with a disaster can call and say, ‘How many calls have you received from Harrison County in Gulfport, MS?’ They’re just ecstatic about the reports we’re able to run. You know that helps them do their job, in tracking needs and things of that nature, so there is a lot of positive feedback when people are aware and educated that it exists.”

Political and Bureaucratic Leadership

Mississippi 2-1-1 has garnered political support from U.S. **Congressional** members and **state elected officials**. Notably, Mississippi’s Congressman Chip Pickering has been a vocal supporter of the Calling for 2-1-1 Act. There has also been some support at the state and local level.

“We have gotten strong, strong support from Congressman Chip Pickering. He actually came and kicked off...2-1-1 here. He is a strong, strong proponent of 2-1-1 and ...both he and Senator Cochran [have supported] the 2-1-1 bill.”

“So we do have quite a [few] of our elected officials on board. [But] there has not been enough education about 2-1-1 throughout the state.”

However, many respondents believed **not enough** appointed and elected officials know about 2-1-1.

“There are still so many folks who have no clue what 2-1-1 is.”

Around the time of 2-1-1 launching...“I think the last thing legislators or politicians wanted to hear was anything about 2-1-1. I think they did a presentation in Jackson and I think it went in one ear out the other one. You could probably touch them six months later and say, ‘What do you think about 2-1-1?’ and they’d say, ‘2- what?’ I think there has been not a lot of communication done on a state level or a local.

OPERATIONAL CHALLENGES

It is inevitable to have operational challenges with any start-up. With a start-up as aggressive as Mississippi's 2-1-1 service, it is even more to be expected.

Funding

Funding is the **largest challenge** right now. The United Way of the Capital Area was aggressively pursued grants and contracts to support 2-1-1 and the expansion of the call center's scope. The United Way of America has provided start-up and on-going grants that have been significant. Two Mississippi United Ways have also made contributions, but these amount to only a small fraction of the operating expenses necessary to run the 2-1-1. The United Way of the Capital Area continues to provide significant support.

The biggest challenge is “going to be funding for all of us everywhere [2-1-1s across the United States]. Then as money gets tighter and tighter and tighter, that's my fear: How are we going to be able to sustain it?”

The lack of financial partners can be, in part, attributed to the very quick roll-out of 2-1-1. It allowed very little time to create **buy-in** for 2-1-1.

“I would truly advise anybody that is getting ready to [establish a 2-1-1] to take time to plan and get your financial resources lined up before you open it. Sell it. Market it. Make sure people understand what it is and you have your financial resources in hand. It takes a lot of pressure off of you [if you do].”

“If there had been any kind of buy-in from partnerships prior to the launch, then perhaps after the launch there would have been some sustainability” of the [2-1-1].

A likely group of supporters could be **other United Ways in Mississippi**. However, there appears to be reluctance among United Ways to support Mississippi's 2-1-1. Some United Ways appear to be unsure how 2-1-1 assists their community or should be interacting with information and referral services they operate or fund. Others feel 2-1-1 is a service of the United Way in Jackson to which they are not connected. Many of the United Way's campaign have been impacted by the difficult economic conditions now facing Mississippi.

“That's going to be an issue for [the 2-1-1]...trying to get people to send their money to Jackson and know that their people in their county are actually getting benefit from it.”

“Our [annual] campaign was [dramatically less than] what we normally raise...”

“I'm not sure it would do any good to go to the legislature and ask for funding because there are still so many special projects because of the hurricane and everything.”

However, there is a belief that local United Ways have not been **approached** to provide support.

“We haven’t been asked to support them.”

Quality of Service

Some have been very **pleased** with Mississippi’s 2-1-1.

“We were just very impressed with how well it was set up, the information that they had, their capability of being able to answer calls even if the call center went down.”

“2-1-1 has now gotten up and running. They have performed with distinction and they’ve built up a good reputation. It’s not [about] gaining the credibility now, it’s just simply informing everyone as to the service, getting the word out and maintaining the resources to support what they have organized and established.”

However, a few individuals believed that staff **did not provide as high a quality** service as needed.

“I think there has been a new group of [call specialists] and I am still not sure that they have been adequately trained to do what they’re doing. I have had people to call, I have called myself, and I’m just not sure that the training has been adequate.”

“It was not a pleasant person on the other end. It was like, ‘What are you bothering me for?’ ... You might get the information but you’ve been so turned off with the way that your call was handled, or the way you were talked to, that ‘Why would I want to call them again for any information?’”

Resource Database

The completeness and accuracy of the resource data has been a challenge. When the 2-1-1 call center was initially launched, it was felt that there were significant **gaps** in available resources. However, there is the belief that the database has **improved** dramatically since those early months.

“There was no way to make sure we had everything accurate before we opened that call center.”

“We didn’t [refer people to 2-1-1] for a while, because the database was not sufficient to support the kind of calls that people were placing....So we knew like any other start-up business that things would progress once things got up and moving and they began to see where the gaps were. But they had to start somewhere...We just tried to handle as much as we could here until we felt like things had stabilized there because when you’re trying to do a database for the entire state it just takes time.”

Cell Phones

Mississippi has statewide coverage for landline telephone calls. However, they are working to secure 2-1-1 coverage for all **cell phones**.

“When I have had conversations with people about it they say, ‘Well, maybe I have heard about 2-1-1. Is it operational where I am?’ The way to test that is to pull out your cell phone and dial 2-1-1 and see if you get it. Sometimes you do and sometimes you don’t.”

“The only problem that we have had [in our area] is that so many people use cell phone these days. Most of the cell phones, 2-1-1 will not work in our area, so we just give them...an 888 number.”

OPPORTUNITIES FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF 2-1-1

Mississippi 2-1-1 has achieved the impressive **implementation of statewide coverage in a very short time period**. Numerous individuals and organizations have provided leadership, dedication, and support for 2-1-1. Respondents identified opportunities for 2-1-1 to further develop. Some of the development suggestions were precipitated by the aggressive start-up (e.g., building broader statewide support) and other suggestions appear to be natural progressions in developing the service (e.g., ensuring disaster readiness).

Funding

The financial sustainability of Mississippi’s 2-1-1 was a **primary concern** of many respondents. A number of respondents identified United Ways, other Mississippi agencies and programs, and federal programs and funding sources as possibilities.

United Ways

Although a number of efforts have been attempted to garner greater buy-in, those efforts have not succeeded. There appears to be greater support for 2-1-1 in the southern, more populated part of Mississippi. In general, however, 2-1-1 **lacks broad ownership among all United Ways** in Mississippi.

“I feel there is a great deal of support for [2-1-1] in the southern part.”

“We have done everything from trying to start an advisory committee...[to] sending emails... *United Way* gets the credit for all of it. It’s *United Way*; it’s not United Ways of the Capital Area. Our information says ‘United Way.’ So if you’re a United Way [you’re benefiting], regardless [of whether] you’re...supporting it and that’s frustrating.”

A number of respondents suggested that buy-in for Mississippi 2-1-1 could be enhanced through a **statewide organizational structure**. Some suggested that the state United Way Association could be engaged in a more meaningful way and perhaps provide an

organizational structure. Some respondents suggested that naming 2-1-1 “leads” for each region of Mississippi could enable supporters to promote 2-1-1.

“I’d like to talk with all the United Way to try to come together and actually sit down and try to work through this. I think that there were initially a lot of hurt feelings.”

The Mississippi Association of United Ways “needs to adopt a kind of inter-agency agreement on how to implement 2-1-1 statewide, or just support it, or take on part of the responsibility of it, because it’s a useful tool for every United Way.”

“We could divide the [state] up and I would be responsible for X number of meetings in [a part of] Mississippi, that kind of thing.”

There was also a feeling that the United Way of the Capital Area may be **reluctant** to truly invite other United Ways or other organizations to share in decision-making and supportive roles.

“If people have ownership in what’s happening and don’t feel like they’ve been dictated to, I think they eventually come on board.”

[2-1-1 could improve buy-in, but] “don’t own it like it’s your prize cow and you don’t share. If it’s a resource that’s across the board then roll it out that way, not just like, ‘Oh, this is our corner of the block and we invite you in.’”

“For something that can benefit so many people and for there to only essentially be one United Way in the state...working on it and they’re the only ones that really know what the status is. The lack of communication, the lack of information, even reminders, unless something really turned it around, it’s probably not going to be something that we would all get as excited about.”

Federal Support

Many respondents believe that **federal support is necessary** for on-going financial sustainability of 2-1-1.

“We need to pass the national legislation, there needs to be at least a threshold of [federal] funding that can be matched.”

Other Possible Partners

Some non-United Way partners were puzzled by the lack of support of Mississippi 2-1-1 by the United Ways. They felt that **United Ways’ support for 2-1-1 was necessary** before they committed funding.

“I would want to know how 2-1-1 is supported by all of the United Ways in the state. That it’s got more than just Jackson’s buy-in, and I would want to see demonstrations of a stable infrastructure.”

“It seems odd to me that a statewide 2-1-1 is solely supported by the Jackson metro area United Way. I don’t know why it wouldn’t be supported, at least in part, by multiple United Ways from across the state.”

Most respondents felt that United Way funding should provide only part of the support. A number of respondents suggested developing closer formal linkages with **other officials and organizations** such as supportive state senators, telephone company executives, county supervisors, VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America), and VOADs (Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster). There was also some feedback about linking with state and federal programs. Although many of the respondents were not aware of the **contracts** that Mississippi 2-1-1 has been working to obtain, many did feel that this type of specialized contracting and partnering could be important to securing 2-1-1’s future.

“There has to be a commitment from MEMA to say, ‘Okay, we’re going to fund at least a position.’ There has to be an exchange of resources because it’s going to always be a useful tool to MEMA. They just have to bring resources to the table to make that commitment. MEMA has to see that it’s important enough to fund.”

“One way to get good funding for 2-1-1 is to create partnerships with established groups. For example, you could talk to the Red Cross and say, ‘We’ll deal with all your excess phone calls,’ or get a contract with the state to run their emergency phone bank.”

Respondents also mentioned that it has been difficult to pursue a serious partnership with Mississippi 2-1-1 because of the **turnover** in 2-1-1 leadership.

There has been “no consistency as far as the leadership...turnover of people that have been hired to manage the system and no training.”

“It was hard to build a relationship with a specific person because they seemed to have some turnover.”

Communications with Partners

A component of lack of buy-in with 2-1-1 involved equipping partners and potential partners with **more information** about 2-1-1.

“They’re going to have to do a really good job of showing, ‘This is how many calls we’re getting from your area,’ and ‘These were how many people we were actually able to help.’ Not just that they called, but that we were able to give them resources....Trying to gain people’s trust and you really have to go after the leadership in that community first and try to get them to buy into it and then try to get that leadership to lead the rest but it’s not easy to do.”

“We get virtually no communication about 2-1-1 at all and had not been asked to do much of anything except to lend a letter.”

“I’m not requesting a lot, but when I request something, I get it and I get it in a timely manner.”

“I think communication is going to be a key... We haven’t heard anything in several months now from the 2-1-1 people in Jackson. I would be nice, to have some update as to what’s going on, and then a little more information about where we can help them, and making sure that we get the publicity and get the word out.”

“I’d like to have, if not a regular monthly report, I sure would like to know what kind of calls they’re getting and how many from the coast and what the questions are or what the needs are, what people ask for most often and then to check to make sure that all of that information is as current and accurate as we possibly can make it. The other thing I would like to know is what the usage is statewide.”

“I think if we had some idea about what’s going on we would be much more likely to come forward with funding. It’s just that we don’t have any idea.”

“If you’re ever going to expect people to buy into it and understand [2-1-1] and be all for it, you’ve got to let them know what it does... Not enough of that has been done by any means.”

Disaster Response

Mississippi 2-1-1 was launched after Hurricanes Rita and Katrina. However, the 2-1-1 is working to become a part of disaster response and recovery efforts in the future. Most people were **extremely supportive** of the role 2-1-1 could play in the aftermath of a disaster.

“If we had had [2-1-1], how much more effective things would have been and how much easier it would have been for people to find help...”

“We would have loved to have had 2-1-1 in place because, as you can imagine, all of the phone lines, all of the cell phone lines, all kinds of inquiries about assistance, and ‘Where do I go?’ We tried to handle, on a local basis, without any way to hand over any of those calls to assist people.”

“It was truly a nightmare for people to try to figure out where to go with all the 800 numbers when communications were down, cell towers were down...electricity was not back on, and people were really in a state of, ‘Well, I’ve got to call that 800 FEMA number, but nobody answers, or I’m put on hold or the Red Cross for hours.’”

“I don’t think anyone realizes how useful [2-1-1] could be yet, because it hasn’t been used in a disaster.”

Mississippi’s 2-1-1 has executed a memorandum of understanding with the **Mississippi Emergency Management Agency** to participate in the Joint Information Center to

obtain up-to-date information. Mississippi 2-1-1 is working to ensure it has the physical and human resource capacity needed during a disaster including: trained local volunteers, transportation and housing for national volunteers, emergency power, back-ups/agreements with 2-1-1s in other states, capacity for quickly expanding phone lines, and obtaining Telecommunications Service Priority status. However, a number of respondents were unsure whether Mississippi 2-1-1 had the **phone and human capacity** to adequately respond in a disaster situation.

“They’re going to need to have a way to expand their...physical/technical setup. I don’t think they’ve got enough phone lines. I don’t think they’ve got enough space for the number of volunteers that they would need.”

“They would need to have a set number of incoming phone lines, a set number of outgoing phone lines, the ability to operate at an independent source of electricity, keep their lines up, and that sort of thing. You know, having an updated database and...a group of volunteers who can come in and staff, if not 24/7 then at least 18 hours a day.

Many respondents emphasized the need to ensure **partnerships with existing response infrastructures** across the state. One respondent suggested, however, that it is impossible to know exactly how 2-1-1 will work in an emergency situation until tested. This individual suggested that 2-1-1 should be included in tabletop simulations to improve their preparedness.

“The practice and the actual ‘This is what we would do,’ the simulations have to occur for people to actually know what it’s going to be.”

Data

Maintaining an accurate database will be an **essential component** to ensuring 2-1-1 is providing credible referrals.

“The need for continuous updating is always going to be a real challenge.”

A number of partners are **unsure** how data will be accurately maintained. Although a number of partners were willing to notify Mississippi 2-1-1 about changing community resources in their area, most were unsure how to do that.

“We need an update on where [2-1-1] are with [updating community resources] and we really don’t have a system in place to make sure that they get that information.”

Marketing/Promotion

Nearly every respondent was concerned that Mississippi 2-1-1 was **not well-known enough** across the state.

“What hasn’t worked is the marketing, because there hasn’t been any.”

“We still have a lot of people in this state that have no clue what 2-1-1 is.”

A number of respondents recognized that it is difficult to secure funding for marketing and promotion activities.

Marketing and promotion “always falls by the wayside, if they did have more of a budget, to do some marketing, or to be able to really let the public and some officials know who they are, and what they do. And it’s the same thing with all non-profits and the amount of money they can spend to promote themselves. But anytime it’s a new program, it’s essential ...to be able to let people really understand.”

A number of marketing and promotional **activities** have been conducted by Mississippi 2-1-1; however, no mass media or print advertising has been done up to this point.

- Press event for the launch of 2-1-1
- Promotional materials
- Television interviews
- Presentations to United Way Boards and promotional CDs for United Ways
- Presentations and booths at professional conferences and agency fairs
- Presentations to state officials
- Marketing campaign and presentation to Mississippi’s job training centers (including posters, fact sheets, rack cards, CDs)
- Call center tours
- Website presence

Mississippi 2-1-1 is exploring other marketing and promotion partnerships, such as with **local utility companies** who might include information about 2-1-1 in their bills. Mississippi 2-1-1 also attempted to create a **Speaker’s Bureau** to designate individuals from different regions of the state to seek and respond to requests for presentations about 2-1-1. However, that effort has, thus far, not materialized.

“They tried to get a Speakers Bureau together that everyone would go out and promote 2-1-1 in their local community, but that never really developed either. The first group we were going to tap was the United Ways in Mississippi [and] strong proponents of 2-1-1 on their board or local bank presidents [for example]. We would depend on [local United Ways] to make those decisions and help us choose the Speakers Bureau people.”

Local United Ways have promoted 2-1-1, both through annual campaign materials and through other media.

“We have a very good relationship with the owner of our local paper and he’s done splashes for us. He’s done front page information...[2-1-1 will be presented] at [a community interagency] meeting about 2-1-1. Our local television station will be here, the newspaper will be here, the radio will be here.”

“We have sent out some press releases...Last year we gave out probably 30,000 little cards for people to contact 2-1-1.”

“We’ve been constantly putting it in the newsletter that we sent out to our agencies and to our supporters.”

Others seemed **confused** whether Mississippi 2-1-1 was ready for more aggressive marketing.

“I know that a year or so ago...they were telling us then that they were going to be a little slow about getting the word out about 2-1-1, simply because they did not want to be overwhelmed...I was waiting for them to let us know, ‘Okay go get the word out,’ or ‘We’re going to come and get the word out,’ and I really haven’t had any communication with them about it.

Working through Local United Ways

A number of respondents believed that local United Ways could be harnessed to **do more to promote** 2-1-1 in their communities.

“Get the word out to the United Ways...you’ve got a great marketing machine there and I believe that’s how 2-1-1 could gain recognition, appreciation, and to be able to garner additional support our board. If we had information for bankers and power companies and all these major business leaders in our community they would go back and tell their human resources people or tell us to make a real effort to get with every single campaign we run to ask if we can please visit with their human resources people about the 2-1-1.”

“Let us know how many calls a day are coming and what kinds of things people are asking for most often. That would give us a reason to go back to the newspaper and say, ‘We’d really like to have a couple of feature stories on it, and we can give you some success stories if you’ll cover this for us.’ [We’d] begin to push it and do drop-in ads. It would really be beneficial on the coast.”

Respondents recognized that some of the small United Ways in the Mississippi are already understaffed and overwhelmed. Suggestions were made that those United Ways might be able to use **volunteers** to promote 2-1-1.

The small United Ways “are going to need training and they’re going to need some strong volunteers because they are already maxed out [with] fundraising and community impact...It’s a struggle for them to actually implement new programs and work on new initiatives without training for volunteers or additional staff persons.”

Other Suggestions

Promoting through **television and radio** was frequently mentioned as a foundational approach.

“There’s nothing about [2-1-1] on television in Mississippi. There’s nothing about it on the radio in Mississippi. There were probably some newspaper releases around the time of the kickoff, but I don’t see anything about it in the newspaper when I read it today. It’s just kind of basic marketing. I mean you can strategize and think outside the box after you’ve covered your basics. But if you haven’t even covered your basics, then there’s plenty of room for growth.”

Respondents had additional suggestions for promoting 2-1-1. In particular, some respondents would like to see a **statewide marketing plan** for 2-1-1. Several respondents suggested that Mississippi might investigate **no-cost** opportunities to develop marketing plans by partnering with statewide or local “Leadership” groups (e.g., Leadership Jackson or Leadership Hattiesburg), VISTA, or a local college.

“I hope that we could develop a marketing plan for the state of Mississippi. I think that’s a missing component of all that we’ve done. People still don’t know about 2-1-1.”

“I think what a statewide campaign would do is to give the success stories...And I think if we had success stories like that to...pique the interest of our community that they would be more likely to give us some good coverage.”

[It would be effective] “if there was a big statewide push that the local United Ways would be willing to pick up and push in their individual community.”

“Go to the state Leadership folks and say ‘Okay, y’all help me figure this out,’ because they all choose a year-long project to work on. It’s free. It’s bright, brilliant people who are committed to a project for a year...I think there are some inexpensive, creative ways to do that. It’s just somebody being deliberate about it.”

“That’s where the [Volunteers in Service to America] might come in to figure out, ‘How do I market this?’ So it’s a retired person in the community that decides, ‘Yes, for one year, I’ll give up my time and do this.’...Or get a marketing major that graduated from a university that for one year to take that \$5,000 that they get at the end of their year and pay off their student loans and use their skills.”

Other respondents suggested that additional 2-1-1 **events** could draw attention to the service.

“It needs to come to come from a state level also. It is such a tremendous tool for the state. Have the Governor and the mayor of communities convene and declare 2-1-1 Day...Start from the Capital area and target X number of communities ...and at the end of X number of months and years to make sure that we’ve made a 2-1-1 presentation to someone in every county in the state of Mississippi....I would like to see a timeline done for the first three months we’re going to target north Mississippi. Then we’ll target the southern part of the state. Then we’ll work the central area. At the end of the year we’ll come back together.”

Other suggestions included reaching **citizens** through public service campaign, fliers in churches, outdoor advertising, “Penny Pincher”-type free takeaways, and presentations in local communities. Some respondents also urged marketing and promotional efforts be directed at **agencies and charitable and state organizations**, as well. Specific suggestions included presentations at the Mississippi Economic Council and other Chamber of Commerce-type events, statewide volunteering conferences, at local “Leadership” programs, and through articles in others’ (e.g., MEMA) newsletters.

MID SOUTH DELTA

The Mid South Delta area of Mississippi was a special area of emphasis and concern for many respondents. Great effort was particularly focused on identifying community **resources** within the Delta area. This ensured that callers to 2-1-1 would be referred to the most appropriate, most local resource possible. A number of individuals mentioned that Mississippi Delta residents may have a particular **profile of needs** and that 2-1-1 must be fully-equipped to promote assistance for and then actually respond to those needs.

“A full time person and a part time person [worked] in the Delta...to gather information.”

“In the Mississippi Delta, you have a great need for educational workforce training, as well as other human services, from health care to rehabilitation services. And to help address a number of problems that are clustered around the poverty.”

Respondents believed that special marketing and promotion focused on Delta residents would be helpful. Most felt that using networks of **in-person promotion and one-to-one contact** would be particularly effective. Still, traditional **mass media** was also seen as a good channel, as well.

Promotion “would almost have to be word of mouth. That is sending a representative and having town meetings to talk about the benefits of 2-1-1...You have to do a grass roots approach to marketing for whatever you’re doing.”

“It’s going to take visiting the local grocery stores and the local barber shops and the local churches and their community meetings. It’s going to take being there and people getting to know you and getting to understand that, ‘I’m here to help you. I’m not here bringing something that’s going to...be a detriment to the Delta. But these are some things you can do by just calling 2-1-1...You will be able to know where there are free clinics and where there are free clothes and tutoring programs for your children and summer enrichment programs.’ And so it’s just a different, harder state and it’s going to take people that just don’t mind knocking on some doors and meeting with some local pastors and meeting with some key movers and shakers in the Mississippi Delta...”

“In some communities, churches will be a very effective...The community health centers can be very effective, [as can] schools and libraries, and public campaigns on the radio and TV.”

“I could knock on some doors in the Mississippi Delta and say this is a service we’re offering and go to some local churches in that area and talk with the pastor. I would be willing to do that.”

KELLOGG GRANT

Funding from the Kellogg Foundation enabled the United Way of West Central Mississippi (Vicksburg) to create a **database of Mississippi Delta resources**. Two part-time resource specialists started documenting community resources in the Delta at the beginning of August 2005. These individuals continued working through the disruptions of the Hurricanes. One continues today.

The resource specialists quickly determined that **non-traditional** ways of locating resources were most effective.

“If you just look in the phone book or you just look for state agencies or publicized non-profits you might think [there are few resources]. You have got to pick up the phone and call these little towns and say, ‘Do you have a food pantry? What happens if somebody’s homeless? Do you have a congregate feeding site?’ You’re not going to get that information by looking in a catalog or a phone book. You’ve got to call and actually make an effort because...I can’t tell you how many churches in Vicksburg have food pantries or have assistance with bills and so forth. There are places that do these things. [But] it does take work to find them.”

[Start with the]...“Mayor’s Office or the First Baptist Church or ... the Chamber of Commerce...and talk to the secretary. That’s where you get the information.”

[The resource specialists]...“collected tons of resource directories from all the local United Ways, from any agency that would volunteer to mail them their resource directory...[and then] started calling and see if it was an agency for us to put in our database....You have to call them....So many people’s databases are so outdated, if you don’t call you are putting information in there that’s not valid....You’re going be telling them to call places that aren’t in business or you’re going to be sending them for services that aren’t available. I mean you have got to call every place that you put in.”

The Kellogg Foundation funds, it was mentioned again and again, enabled Mississippi to create a very **comprehensive directory** of community resources in the Mississippi Delta.

[Without the Kellogg Foundation funding]...“we would probably not have the database that we have. I had tried to get volunteers to do that to come in and to research. And it’s just nothing that a volunteer is going to do on a consistent basis...[The resource

specialists] verified everything they put into a database and they just spent hours...A lot more than what [was] paid either one.”

“We were just able to gather a lot of data, a lot more data than they would have ever been able to [without funding].”

“I don’t know what we would have done had the grant not been in place. That’s genuinely the way I feel.”

Mississippi 2-1-1’s experience as a grantee of the United Way of America is **mixed**. Early in the process, United Way of America staff were directive in changing the lead agency from the United Way of West Central Mississippi (Vicksburg) to the United Way of the Capital Area (Jackson). United Way of America staff reportedly committed numerous missteps and conveyed unsupportable information in the early phases of implementing 2-1-1.

Since then, the United Way of America has provided valuable **financial and technical support**. In particular, the United Way of America provided some startup funding to support phone system purchase and other telecommunications costs. The United Way of America has also provided some significant on-going **funding** to support the current year’s operations.

“Anytime [we call, we get] a lot of support from United Way of America and from other 2-1-1s.

“I would call [United Way of America] when I felt like I was hitting a rough spot ...For example these contractual service agreements...to get some direction as to what others have done that worked or what didn’t work and when people would call about cost per call.”

“They have been very supportive so I can’t give ...United Way of America enough credit now. I don’t appreciate the way they did it, but after it was done they have supported it.”

“They have been good partners with us on funding it.”

There is also the feeling that the United Way of America could be effective in promoting 2-1-1 among **other Mississippi United Ways**.

“If Brian Gallagher [President and CEO of United Way of America] would send out a letter to all the Mississippi United Ways...I think that could be helpful to us and maybe that’s something we need to ask for.”

SUMMARY

By the completion of the Kellogg Foundation grant through the United Way of America, Mississippi had moved from having scattered information about Mississippi Delta community resources and no 2-1-1 to having a **robust database of Delta resources** and a **statewide 2-1-1**. Mississippi faced incredible challenges to launching an operational 2-1-1 during the time of the Kellogg grant. Mississippi now, despite the odds, has a statewide 2-1-1. The quick implementation may have sacrificed the buy-in and financial support of other possible partners. However, the 2-1-1 continues to build awareness and is seeking opportunities to integrate 2-1-1 into Mississippi's human services system. Despite 2-1-1's aggressive and sometimes difficult implementation, most respondents were positive about how 2-1-1 assists Mississippians in need.

“I still feel like it's the best thing for Mississippi...it's a key factor in helping states to become stronger.”

“[2-1-1] has been very vital in providing information to people needing it. But they've also been very efficient in organizing and getting complete coverage of the state in a short period of time.”

“I believe that [2-1-1] is a key to [addressing] a lot of the problems in Mississippi. I think we can solve so many problems with people being able to access services through 2-1-1.”

CASE STUDY THEMES

Several themes emerged from the three case studies. The themes provide an overview of significant points and point to the meaning of 2-1-1s in communities. Because the case studies followed three states at different phases of development, these themes may be generalizable to the experience of other 2-1-1s.

2-1-1s provide a critical connecting point between people with needs and community services.

- 2-1-1 call centers provide personalized information and referral to people in need. This helps persons with day-to-day and emergency human service needs. 2-1-1 also plays an important role in times of disaster in responding to overwhelming needs of victims.
- There is tremendous commitment to 2-1-1 from those who understand the crucial connecting point 2-1-1 plays in connecting people in need with community services that offer help to them.

2-1-1s build capacity in communities.

- When communities are equipped with a means to both understand and respond to needs, they will. 2-1-1 builds capacity in communities by serving as a means of identifying volunteer and resource need and then matching individuals and donations with those needs.
- 2-1-1s have data that is useful for community response and planning. The data may include information about needs (met and unmet), locations and types of community resources, and satisfaction/barriers to accessing human services programs. 2-1-1s may also be a point of information gathering in response to a particular need or disaster (e.g., 2-1-1 as number to call to report damage).

2-1-1s operate best as a partner within the fabric of human services.

- 2-1-1s that are integrated into their community's human services systems are able to:
 - Track community resources
 - Coordinate with and promote other's initiatives (e.g., Earned Income Tax Credit, Homeless Management Information Systems)
 - Identify opportunities for streamlining services
 - Develop mutually beneficial contracting services
 - Respond quickly and knowledgeably in times of disaster

- Because human services systems transcend any individual jurisdiction, 2-1-1s should work to ensure connectivity at not only the local level, but also the state and national levels.

Networks of 2-1-1s should work together to ensure access.

- As 2-1-1s become even more integral to communities, they must ensure that people can reach 2-1-1. Working together, 2-1-1s should ensure redundancies in service are in place, for not only phone systems but also for access to data.
- Multiple 2-1-1s should work together to ensure specialists are available to respond to disasters. The specialists should be trained to respond in difficult situations and some should have accreditation in mental health and crisis counseling.
- 2-1-1s across the United States should work together to ensure cell phone, pay phone, and office phone networks have access to 2-1-1.

Promotion and marketing of 2-1-1 is crucial.

- 2-1-1 has not achieved widespread recognition. Promotion and marketing are essential to ensure that people with needs know that 2-1-1 is available to help them.
- Policymakers, state and local officials, funders, and other community leaders do not have enough awareness of 2-1-1. Knowledge about the success and potential of 2-1-1 must be improved.
- Promotion and marketing must be enhanced at the local, state, and national levels to build greater awareness of 2-1-1.

Establishing a 2-1-1 takes time to do right.

- It is time-consuming to plan and implement a 2-1-1. While a 2-1-1 is being established it is imperative that partnerships are built that create a strong organizational and financial foundation for 2-1-1.
- Before a 2-1-1 launches, care must be taken to ensure that the 2-1-1 is prepared (e.g., staff and data) to answer the expected volume of calls with quality information and referrals. Soft launches and staged launches can be helpful to ensure that the 2-1-1 is able to provide quality, timely, and appropriate referrals.

Funding to support 2-1-1 is needed.

- Funding is an on-going, critical issue for 2-1-1s. A mix of public and private funding is desirable.

- Local United Ways are natural financial partners, but do not always support 2-1-1s.
- Specialized contracts can play an important role in funding part of 2-1-1 operations.
- Federal support for 2-1-1 is needed and is appropriate, given the increasingly national presence and role of 2-1-1.

LESSONS LEARNED

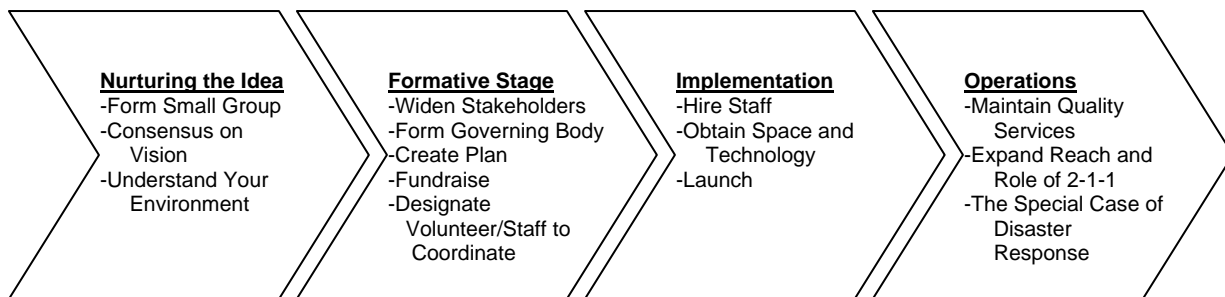
The respondents were enthusiastic about sharing their successes and failures in developing and evolving 2-1-1 in their states. Many provided “lessons learned” to help others interested in creating stronger 2-1-1s. These lessons learned were culled from three states facing very different challenges. Louisiana, Arkansas, and Mississippi each faced different constraints and pressures. Certain areas were emphasized in one state may have been given scant attention in another state. Each state was in different stages of 2-1-1 development. Each had different pre-existing information and referral environments. The human services collaborative infrastructures, particularly of the United Ways, varied dramatically. Taken together, the Lessons Learned provide a preferred roadmap, designed by people who have traveled the path, of signposts to look for along the 2-1-1 journey.

The first section of the Lessons Learned section focuses on the **Planning Process** of 2-1-1 implementation. This focuses on the particular issues of implementation of 2-1-1 within a jurisdiction, be it local or state. Specific recommendations are presented.

The second section features “bigger picture” ideas about how 2-1-1 could be working together better across jurisdictions. These are lessons learned about how **2-1-1 National Support and Coordination** could have been useful to these states’ efforts.

THE PLANNING PROCESS

Many respondents believed that the planning process was a key in creating sustainable 2-1-1s that deliver quality service. There were four stages of the development process. First was the very earliest stage of 2-1-1: **Nurturing the Idea** when a small core of people catches the vision of 2-1-1 and wants to develop it. The next part of the planning process is the **Formative Stage** when 2-1-1 is explored more deeply and developed. During the **Implementation**, structures are set in place, staff is hired and trained, and the service is launched. Finally, the **Operations Stage** focuses on maintaining quality and creating new opportunities and partnerships.



Nurturing the Idea

At its very initial stage a **small group** of people must come to believe that 2-1-1 holds great promise for their community. These must be people with a passion, vision, and energy that are able to catalyze support for 2-1-1 from others. One of the important first steps of this group will be to have a general **consensus of the vision** for 2-1-1.

“We had three core people that really drove the initial planning but we always told ourselves, we know we’re going to have a bigger board and we want to just lay this on the table and let a broader perspective of people at least check this for the state...So to have a few key people get it started to lay the foundation and to be continual drivers through it has helped us keep it statewide...”

The small group should understand the **environment** into which they want to introduce 2-1-1. Many respondents indicated that 2-1-1 must be developed within existing contexts, so if there are turf issues/cultural differences before 2-1-1, there will be turf issues as the group is attempting to develop 2-1-1. Some of the important areas of difference included traditional cultural/historical divisions within states (e.g., urban vs. rural, capital vs. non-capital areas, affluent vs. poor, lifestyle, economic/industrial base). An important consideration is how other existing information and referral services will be accommodated or absorbed by 2-1-1.

“If [a] state is looking to create a 2-1-1, they want to make sure that there is nothing like a 2-1-1 already and if there is then maybe that structure can be assimilated in 2-1-1 or maybe you don’t need it at all. But look close and see if anybody is already providing that kind of service and how you can partner with them before you rush in and declare 2-1-1 to be the statewide phone service.”

“States that are working on a statewide development would do well to do a lot of planning before taking action...Looking at coordination—what all goes into having a seamless 2-1-1 system, because that is the goal. It’s not a whole bunch of individual 2-1-1s, but ...a seamless 2-1-1 system...Work through all the things, the wrinkles, and the turf-ism...You want to be seamless, but at the same time being seamless means [individual 2-1-1 providers] give up something.”

Formative Stage

It is during the formative stage when partnerships can be created or broken. Local United Ways were seen as a crucial partner. However, they were seen as one partner of many important partners. Again and again, respondents urged future 2-1-1 promoters to **carefully consider what other stakeholders** are necessary to achieve good buy-in, political support, financial sustainability, and community promotion. A number of respondents counseled that it is during this stage that stakeholders who represent the geographic vision for 2-1-1 must be recruited. For example, if the eventual goal of a 2-1-1 is statewide, then statewide stakeholders must be recruited. It was also mentioned that relaying the stories of other 2-1-1s’ experiences and using others’ studies (e.g.,

cost/benefit analyses) can be very helpful to describe what 2-1-1 can be. This call for involving other stakeholders elicited some of the most decisive recommendations.

“It’s got to be beyond United Way. United Way needs to lead it, but it needs to have a lot of other parties at the table.”

“Bring all your United Ways to the table. Get indications of interest and who would be willing to work with you in developing or work on the development of establishing either regional 2-1-1 or statewide. Look at it as a statewide United Way program as opposed to a single local United Way.”

“Get your United Way people and see if they’re motivated enough. Get the people that have some contacts with some of the potential revenue sources and see if they’re interested and ...bring all those together and see if you can’t make it move.”

“Do it from a statewide point of view and not just in the communities...Try to get people who have political influence [and see] if you can get state money, because it’s never going to work if there’s not significant money...That’s a good partnership: to be a partner with area United Ways.”

“Find out who the key stakeholders are and to bring everyone to the table to discuss the future and vision of how they see this system working. Be as open and transparent as possible so there aren’t misunderstandings and conflicts down the road. Let the public know that there’s a consortium or there is a group that is tasked to do this, because it drums up interest. It also keeps certain entities at bay from recreating what’s already established.”

“You’re always going to have to partner with government or you’re always going to have to partner with United Way or whoever else stakeholders are. Put them out on the table at the beginning so people can make educated decisions of whether or not they want to play ball. And then also people will have a greater idea and understanding of where their support is truly going to come from.”

“I think statewide is the way to go...I would have a statewide planning group that is not just solely United Way. I would make sure there were state level officials,...state emergency organizations, ...a representative county board of supervisor. I would make sure that it was a committee, a planning group that actually not only could plan it [and] implement it, but also could sell it.”

“Be sure that you build on existing local networking. It should be relationship-based from its start and it should maintain and build relationships as it grows. That’s not something that you can impose.”

A diverse group of the most committed and important stakeholders should form the initial **governing body**. It was noted that face-to-face meetings are vital to develop collaboration.

“Put dollars into your budget...to ensure that people have means to get to meetings and to really talk with full collaboration in mind. I didn’t do that. I did it by e-mail and I talked to people individually. It doesn’t work.”

One of the most important tasks during this phase of development is creating a **plan** that the major stakeholders will support. The plan may include the vision, geographic coverage, governance, number of centers, operations, and financial projections. This plan will provide needed information for others to support the effort, not the least of which is the funds needed to start and maintain 2-1-1.

“Make sure you have a plan. Make sure who you know who your key players are. Make sure you communicate with them openly and honestly. Make sure there’s some kind of commitment from them and they actually buy-into the overall process.”

If there are already information and referral programs, or even 2-1-1s, it is important to create consensus about how these organizations will **coordinate** and **standardize** and how they will **support** each other.

“Think about coordinating on a state level. [Think about] having some uniform operations procedures, what taxonomy terms to use, what kind of computer system and phone system you’re using, some of those operational kinds of things. [Have] lots of pre-work,...building-the-case, and bringing people along in baby steps.”

Fundraising should be an important part of this stage. Persons who will be approached to support 2-1-1 should be involved in developing 2-1-1. It was noted that a mix of funding would be ideal: public and private, and local/state/federal. The Calling for 2-1-1 Act was very frequently mentioned as a crucial funding source.

“Anybody who is thinking about doing this is going to have to consider where their funding sources are in their particular states and how they might access people that can get [funding] to support the establishment of 2-1-1. Involving the political leaders, the governor and some of the local leaders, is probably a good strategy because they may be called on to help.”

Funding should “to the greatest degree possible [come] from private charities and private sources [with] state and local funding ...It’s something that should be funded through Congress [to] assist the development of the service, but the most effective organizations are the ones that have a broad base of support from the private sector, from organizations like the United Way and then from state, local and other sources. Then the federal resources can supplement and complement it, but truly it’s an organization led by the local individuals and communities.”

“The Calling for 2-1-1 legislation is critical.”

“It’s going to have to have federal funding, and that’s the only way it’s going to become a true social service access system.”

There is a lot of **relationship-building and coordinating work** needed during this phase of development. The effort needs either committed volunteers or staff. A number of respondents indicated that it is helpful to have volunteers/staff that are already well-connected in the community.

[It’s very helpful to have]...”somebody with experience...somebody that’s...been around these type services and these type agencies for some years.”

The relationship building phase will **take time**. Respondents urged that time spent during the Formative Stage should not be rushed. The relationships and buy-in created at this stage are the foundation for long-term success.

“Be patient and to do things right each step along the way, and [don’t] get too impatient to get it started. [Don’t rush to] announce to the public, ‘We’ve got this,’ [without being able to] provide the service.”

[Planning a 2-1-1] should take...“at least 12 months.”

“I really do like the way Arkansas is doing it. They’re taking their time and they’re doing it right...”

Implementation Stage

At the point of implementation, 2-1-1 should have buy-in from crucial stakeholders and funding commitments to support at least the first one to three years’ operation. Hiring experienced **staff** can be very helpful. A number of respondents suggested that 2-1-1s are now widespread enough that hiring a director from another, successful center can provide “instant” expertise. Call specialists and resource developers should be well-trained prior to launch.

It is important to secure adequate physical resources (space, computers, software) not just for initial expected call volumes, but to plan for later expansions in volume, both through growth in use of the system and for contract opportunities and for disaster response.

The initial launch should be well-planned. Respondents suggested that staging the launch, for example by geographic region, can be helpful to address glitches and ensure readiness. It was additionally suggested that it is difficult and costly to immediately launch a 24/7 2-1-1. Staged launching also allows opportunities for repeated media coverage.

“Start with a small area... [to be sure] all the data accurate and thorough, complete and everything. Then start opening more counties up ...”

“I also think not going 24/7 out of the hatch.”

Operations

Even after a successful, initial launch, 2-1-1 centers will continue to face challenges. **Funding** may continue to be a challenge. It is essential that call centers maintain quality services. **Staff** training is important. A number of respondents indicated that AIRS¹ (Alliance of Information and Referral Systems) training and certification programs are helpful tools. Ensuring that staff have opportunities for debriefing after difficult situations was also mentioned.

“The self-care for call takers is very important to maintaining the quality of the service.”

Mentioned several times, was the challenge of maintaining accurate and up-to-date **resource information**.

“Make sure the information is clean.”

“Continual updating of organizations that can help people and match people with needs and volunteers is something that is necessary to be as effective as you can be.”

Marketing and promotion were mentioned as key to the success of 2-1-1. Other organizations and citizens need to know about 2-1-1. Too many times, people who need services are simply are not aware that 2-1-1 can help.

“Get buy-in from your government agencies, all of your charities, really reach out into the faith communities to inform and to provide the information that these services are now available [and are] all part of making 2-1-1 work.”

“Have an impressive public relations campaign to make people aware of these services. And if you do that, things will quickly build and the service will become stronger and more effective very quickly.”

Several respondents urged 2-1-1s to not become complacent with current infrastructures. They see opportunities for improvement in delivery of services with new **technologies**.

“We have to make sure that technology keeps up with it and is willing to support it.”

Numerous respondents suggested that 2-1-1s need to be proactive about sharing their information for **human services planning**.

“It’s a unique position to give a community feedback on what the unmet needs are and ...to feed that back to community leaders. [It is] helpful to the community overall.”

¹ The Alliance of Information and Referral Systems is the North American industry association for information and referral centers and professionals. For more information: <http://www.airs.org/>

“2-1-1 has totally raised the level of our understanding of what our service and service delivery is. It’s given information and referral a much higher profile in the community and enabled a greater understanding of what it is.”

Disaster Response

In times of disaster 2-1-1 has proven itself as an invaluable way of conveying information, assisting victims, and coordinating volunteers and donations. There are a number of “lessons learned” detailed in *Shelter from the Storm: The Monroe Experience* (United Way of America, n.d.).

Ideally, local and state emergency management agencies, Red Cross, Salvation Army and state volunteer organizations should be included in the initial planning process. Regardless, respondents mentioned over and over that, for 2-1-1 to be effective in times of disaster, 2-1-1 must be written into local and state emergency plans. Memoranda of understanding should be executed to clearly define roles and responsibilities. Additionally, many believed that a presence in the emergency operations center is key to giving and getting accurate information. Staff from 2-1-1 should be active members of their emergency response communities. Respondents noted that this work should be done prior to a crisis, because it’s hard to build partnerships during a crisis. Then, 2-1-1’s must be prepared to respond with when needed and as needed. This includes having the physical and human resources available.

“Go to those [Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster] meetings every month. Emergency management is involved in those, and don’t be afraid to call....contact those Individual Assistance officers. Let them know [2-1-1’s] there...Don’t be afraid to reach out. Everyone gets busy and doesn’t have time to call someone, so don’t let it be something stupid that keeps it from happening.”

“Don’t wait until a disaster hits. To be honest, this service would have been a godsend right after the disaster...So I would urge and recommend and advise communities and states to move now. Don’t wait for a disaster...”

2-1-1 NATIONAL SUPPORT AND COORDINATION

Respondents in Louisiana, Arkansas, and Mississippi suggested a number of ways in which regional or national efforts did or could have assisted them in developing 2-1-1 in their states.

Funding

Numerous respondents praised United Way of America’s efforts in promoting the Calling for 2-1-1 Act. Nearly unanimously, respondents volunteered that the Calling for 2-1-1 Act and federal support were necessary for sustaining 2-1-1 as a national resource.

Some respondents felt that the United Way of America could do more to reinforce the importance of supporting 2-1-1 to local United Ways.

Marketing/Promotion

Marketing and promotion was a significant concern for many respondents. Some commented that 2-1-1 is becoming more widely known across the United States. For example, emergency personnel from other states responding to the Hurricanes asked whether 2-1-1 is available.

[Individuals from other states] “have seen it work in other states and they’ll come here and they’ll say, ‘Well, do we have a 211?’ That was a common question.”

Most felt that 2-1-1 should be promoted nationally, rather than solely locally. A number of people pointed to the United Way of America’s efforts during the Hurricanes as extremely helpful in getting information out about 2-1-1. Some wondered whether the United Way of America could create some longer-term partnerships with national media partners such as CNN for on-going mention of 2-1-1. Many believed that more widespread, national promotion could considerably complement their efforts.

[We need, at the] ”national level, to get some committee together to form some kind of a big marketing campaign.”

National Coordination among 2-1-1s

A number of respondents pointed to the United Way of America’s support for 2-1-1 having been helpful. The United Way of America’s promotion of 2-1-1, for some, was how they first heard about 2-1-1 (e.g., at a United Way of America conference). For others, the United Way of America’s support meant that it was easier to get buy-in from local United Ways or other partners.

Some respondents indicated that they wished there had been more locally-oriented materials about 2-1-1 that they could have used to initially gain buy-in.

Technical Information

A number of respondents indicated that they wish there had been some **templates** or a **library** of information for developing a 2-1-1 that they could use and share with possible partners.

- Information about setting up a 2-1-1
- Promotional information (e.g., What is 2-1-1? How does 2-1-1 benefit a community or state?)
- Library of memoranda of understanding with partners (particularly for back-ups with other 2-1-1s, and with partners in time of disaster)

[It would be helpful if there were locally-oriented information materials,] “that way, every time a 2-1-1 is starting, everyone’s on the same page and someone in Wisconsin

and someone in Louisiana don't have two completely different ideas of what 2-1-1 can bring to the table. You've got to have that done first, then everyone agrees 'These are the overriding principles of 2-1-1,' and they're all singing off that sheet of paper. Then you can always tailor it depending on your state and your community. But we should all have that one mission statement. Then it's easier to spread the message to other areas."

[It would be helpful to have a template for starting a 2-1-1 on] "2-1-1.org that a state can use as a basis and tweak as they want to. If you put together a road map or a game plan is that already out there [about] how to get one started."

Any national materials will have to be sensitive to the variations of 2-1-1s across the United States. For example, some 2-1-1s are operated by United Ways and others have no affiliation with their United Way. Funding for 2-1-1s varies dramatically, some receive large portions of state funding and others receive none, for example.

Coordinating Cross-State Backups

A number of respondents indicated that creating back-ups between 2-1-1s was a crucial component of ensuring readiness. Some 2-1-1s have been aggressive in establishing back-ups with 2-1-1s in other states or other call facilities. One suggestion was that these kinds of back-ups could be coordinated at a national level.

"We shouldn't just think state... We need to think regions [and] multi-states ... I'm not sure we shouldn't have a 24-hour get-ready call center somewhere [in the region or United States]..., whether it's a corporation or a university [that] could be activated quickly and [where] you'd have places to stay and could get there easily."

Volunteer Mobilization

The ability to respond to disasters is a special role for 2-1-1s. Many respondents believed that the ability to amass trained volunteers was a critical function that the United Way of America played in Louisiana. They believe that this function should continue and be improved.

"I think United Way has planned... to have a cadre of 2-1-1 specialists that had disaster training that would be... a SWAT team that would go travel."

National Partnering Opportunities

A number of respondents pointed to their own work in creating local partnering relationships. But, they indicated that some of these local partnerships were with national organizations and organizations with local affiliates. Therefore, they suggested that it would be helpful to make connections on the national level. National-level partnerships could also improve dissemination of information about 2-1-1 and assist local 2-1-1s in relationship-building. Some suggested that joint-conferences could be convened with partnering organizations. Others suggested that national partnering opportunities could develop in collaborations for expanding and enhancing 2-1-1 operations.

“There just needs to be...an overlaying model that can come down for each state. It’s not that complicated to do this. Those things are free; those are just people taking initiative to create...the policy. It doesn’t take an act of Congress to do those kinds of agreements.”

Some examples of national partnerships include:

- U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (e.g., homeless programs)
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (e.g., Medicare Prescription Benefit)
- Red Cross
- Corporation for National and Community Service (e.g., VISTA)
- FEMA
- Salvation Army
- National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster
- National media outlets (e.g., CNN)
- Alliance of Information and Referral Systems (e.g., enhancing standards)

“There should be a brokering with FEMA with 2-1-1s...FEMA needs to see this as an important tool.”

Finally, it was suggested that national grants and contracts could be brokered that could assist 2-1-1s.

“All of the United Ways need to understand that there’s some other resources that they could tap into beyond the corporate sector...The United Way can broker a national [Volunteers in Service to America] grant and say, ‘Okay, we’re going to make sure that at least 50 [Volunteers in Service to America] are given slots.’”

SUMMARY

Supporters of 2-1-1 in Louisiana, Arkansas, and Mississippi have taken different paths to create 2-1-1s. Indeed, in their **differences**, they are like others all over the United States who have traveled different roads to develop 2-1-1s for their communities. Although there have been challenges, supporters not only see the necessity for 2-1-1s in their communities, but for the entire United States. To them, it is a **vital component** of our nation's human services system.

“It just absolutely makes so much sense...It should just be just like 911 and should be everywhere.”

“It's just such an obvious good thing that works and it leverages all of our other resources and not just in the emergency situation but on the day-to-day connecting all of these services that are out there.

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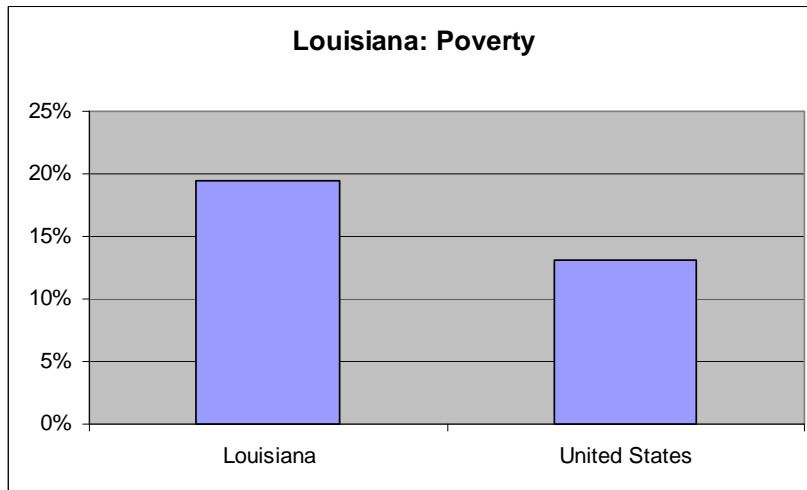
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APPENDIXES

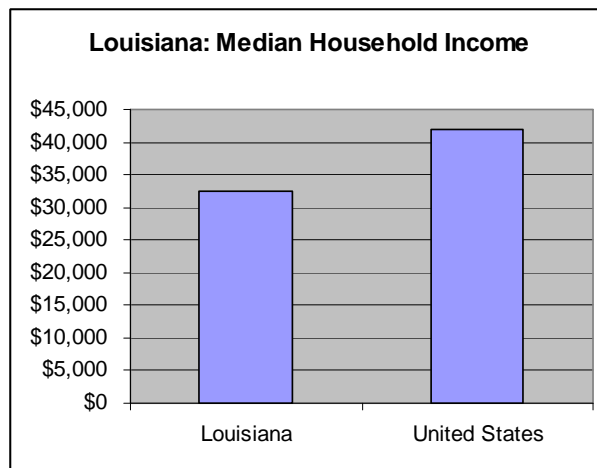
LOUISIANA SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

As of July 1, 2005, Louisiana's **population** was estimated to be 4,523,628 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). In the wake of Hurricane Katrina it is difficult to estimate the state's current population. Before the hurricane, the largest metropolitan areas were New Orleans with 1,300,000; Baton Rouge with 728,000; Shreveport with 381,000; Lafayette with 246,000; and Lake Charles with 195,000 residents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005). After Katrina, it is estimated that New Orleans has at least 400,000 fewer citizens. Baton Rouge has gained 40,000 new residents. There are an additional 70,000 residents in St. Tammany and Tangipahoa parishes. A significant number of New Orleans evacuees are now living in Mobile, AL and Houston, TX.²

The percentage of Louisiana citizens who live in **poverty** is 19% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). This is the second highest percentage in the country.

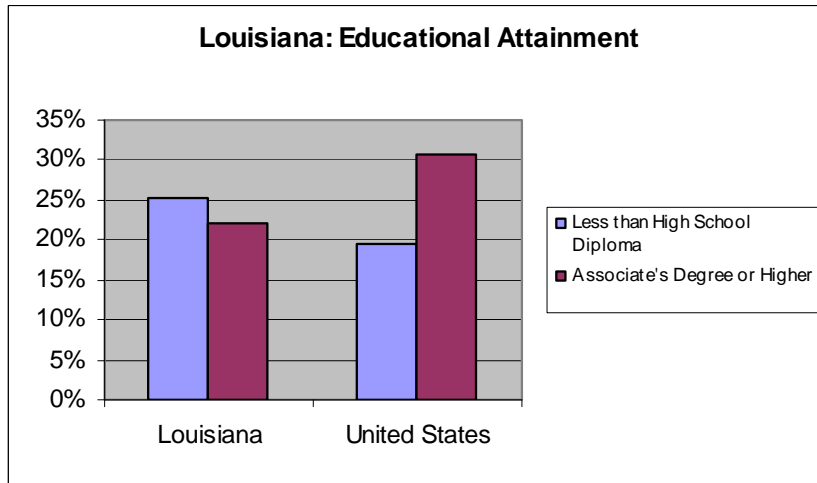


The median household income is \$32,566. This is \$9,500 below the national average.

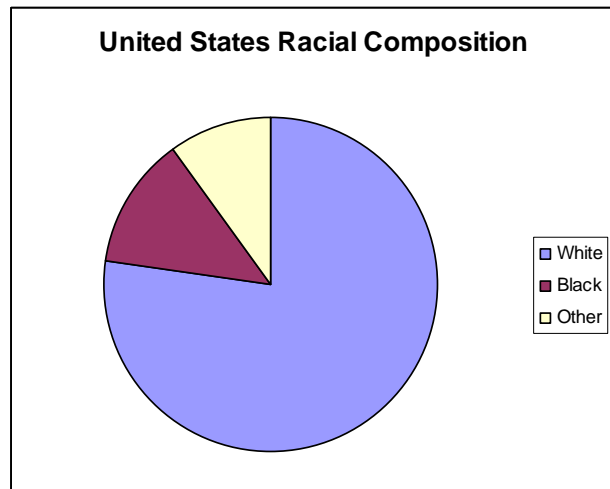
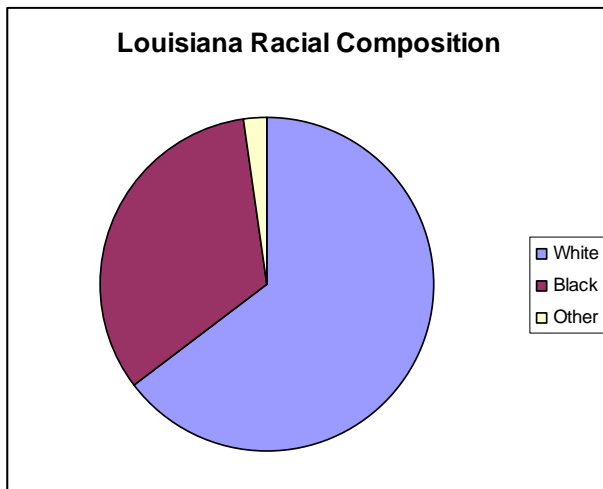


² This estimate comes from Claritas. Retrieved May 15, 2006 from http://www.claritas.com/claritas/Default.jsp?ci=1&pn=hurricane_katrina_data

In considering **educational** attainment, slightly over 22% of the state’s population has attained an associate’s degree or higher, while 25% have not received a high school diploma or equivalent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

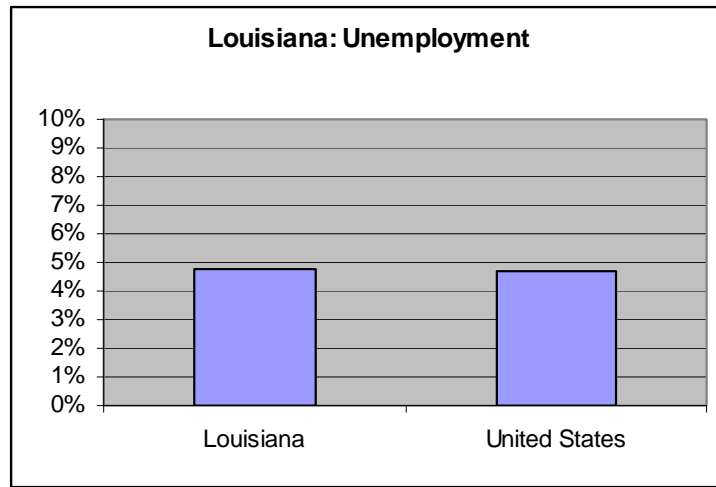


Louisiana’s **racial composition** has a higher percentage of African American residents than the nation does, with 33% of the population. Louisiana’s percentage of African Americans is the second highest in the country next to Mississippi. The state is underrepresented by Hispanics and Asian Americans (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Louisiana is unique because of its Cajun population that primarily resides in the southwestern part of the state. The Cajuns have maintained much of their original culture, including the French language and Roman Catholicism.



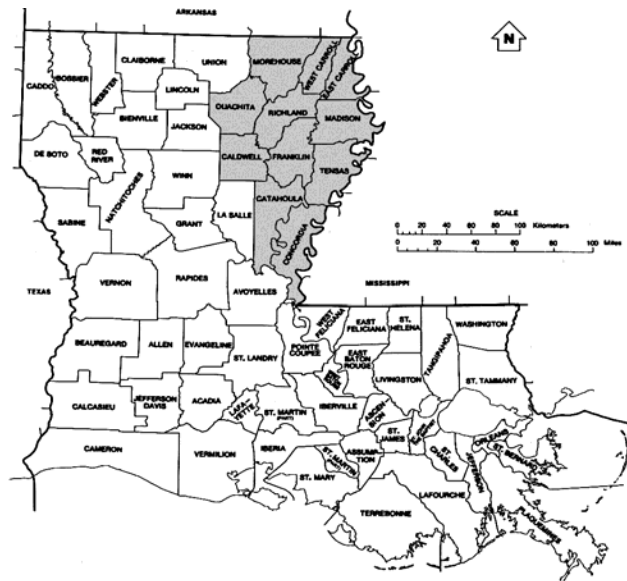
With Louisiana’s shrinking population, the economy has been in decline since Hurricane Katrina. The main components of the **economy** are mineral production, especially oil and natural gas. Tourism was a significant part of the economy, but it has been severely impacted by Hurricane Katrina. Louisiana accounts for 25% of the seafood production in the United States

(State of Louisiana, 2006). The **unemployment** rate is 4.8% (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2006). This figure is very similar to the national average.



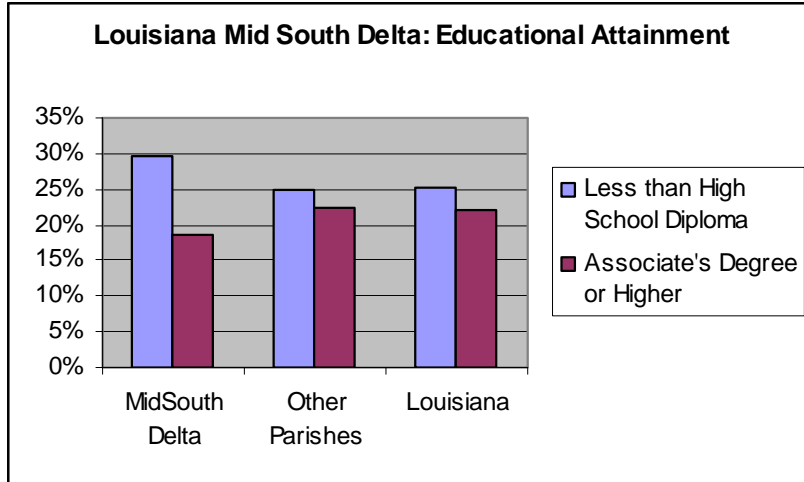
LOUISIANA MID SOUTH DELTA

The Mid South Delta has 304,323 residents. This constitutes on 6.8% of the state’s population.

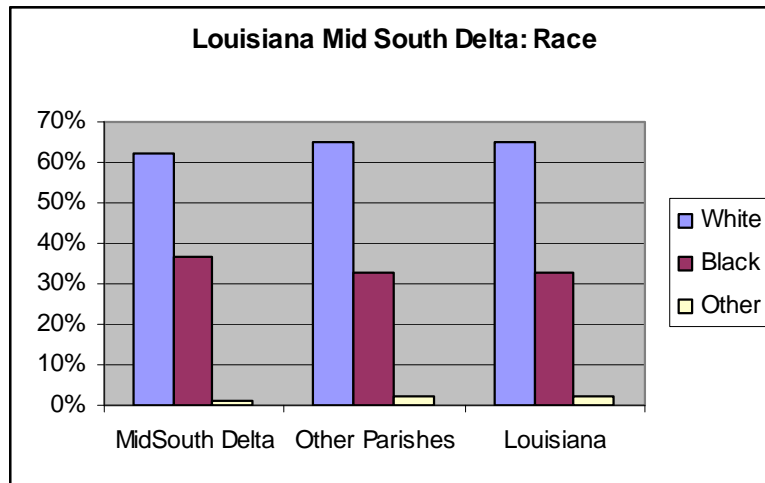


Shaded parishes indicate Mid South Delta areas as designated by the Kellogg Foundation

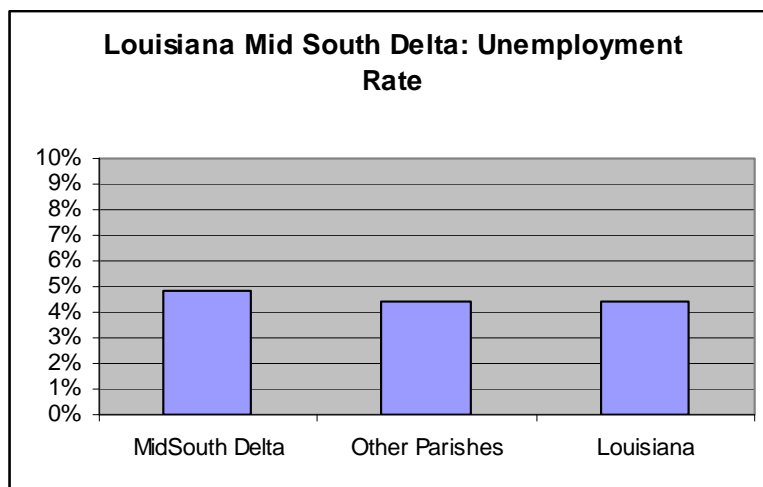
The Delta is **less educated** than the rest of the state. 30% of residents of the Delta have less than a high school diploma. Fewer than 20% of Delta residents have at least an Associate’s degree (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).



Mid South Delta parishes feature a population that is **slightly more African American** than the rest of the state.



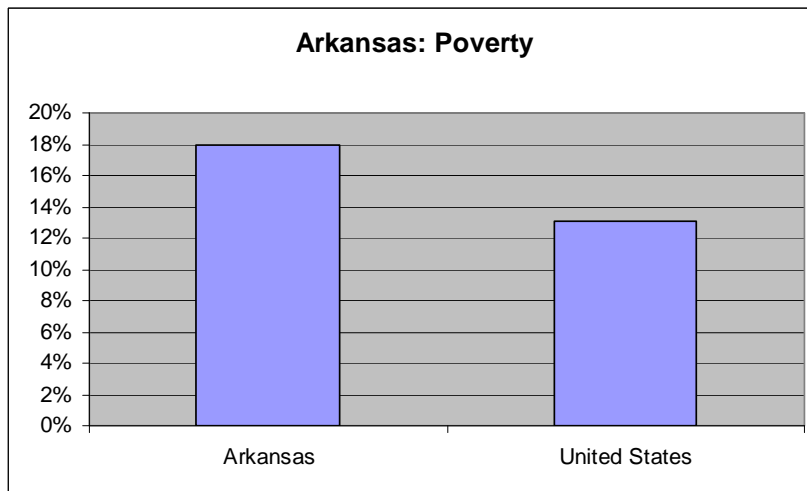
The **unemployment** rate in the Delta counties is slightly higher than the rest of the state (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2006).



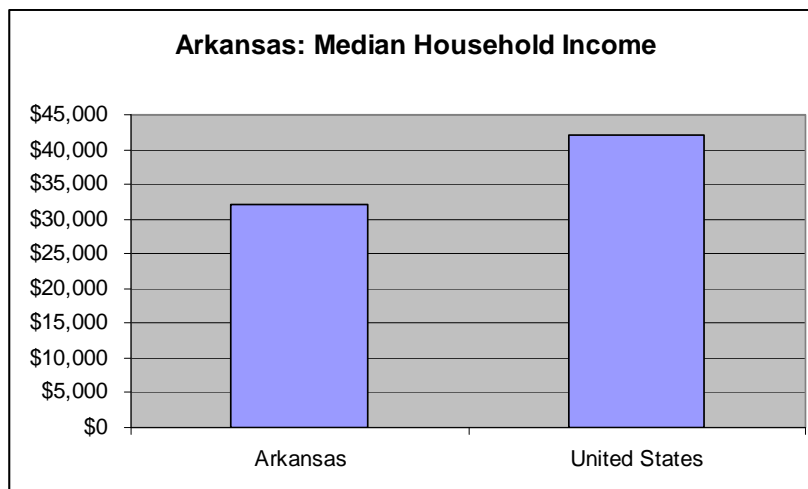
ARKANSAS SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Arkansas features a **population** of 2,779,154 (United States Census Bureau, 2006). The most populous metropolitan area is Little Rock which has a population of over 636,000 residents. Other metropolitan areas include Fayetteville with 390,000 and Fort Smith with 282,000 residents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005). Arkansas has steadily shifted to an urban population with 53% of the residents living in urban areas (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

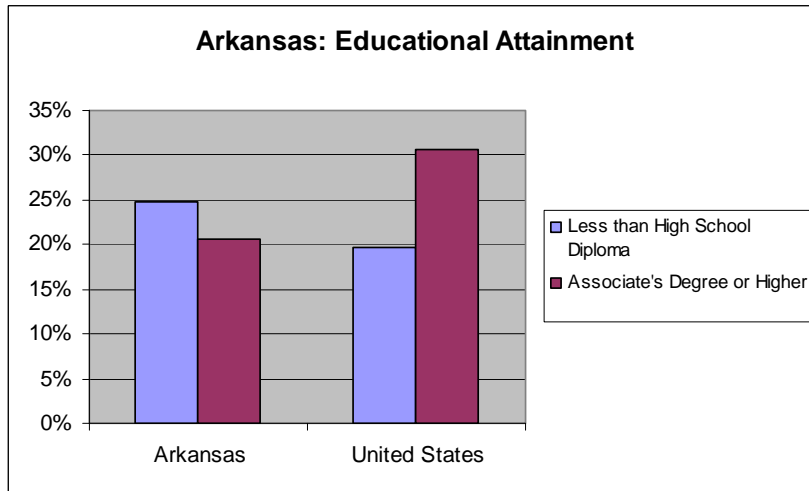
It is estimated that 18% of Arkansas' population currently lives in **poverty**. This is the fifth highest rate in the country (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004).



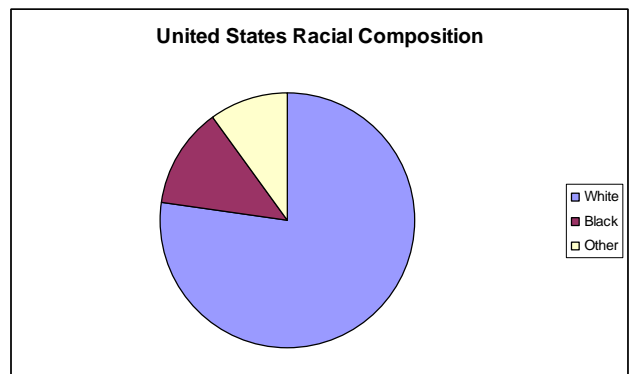
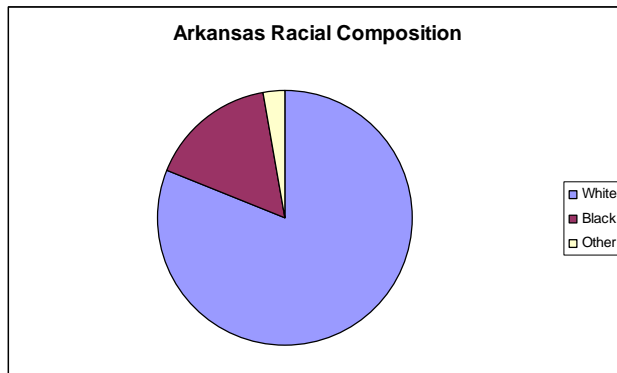
The median household income is \$32,182, which is approximately \$10,000 below the national average.



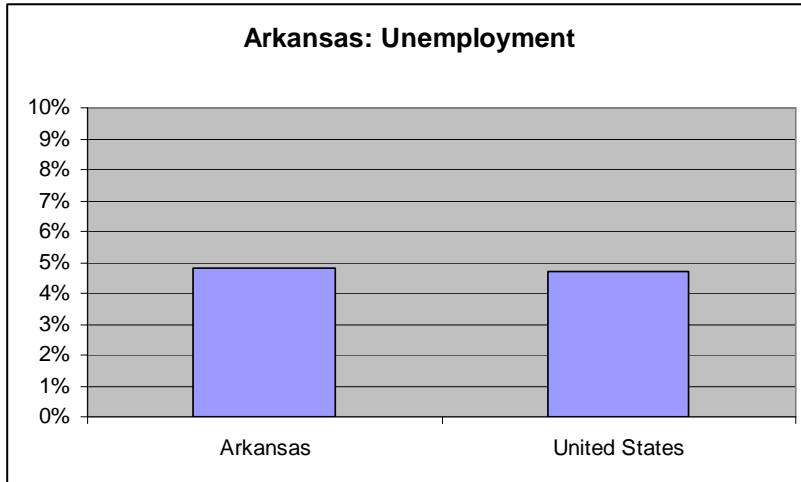
Educationally, 25% of those 18 and older have not received a high school diploma and only 21% of the population has attained an Associate's degree or higher (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).



The state's **racial composition** is made up of 81% Caucasian and 16% African American. The percentage of Caucasians is higher than the national average and than other Mississippi Delta states. A mere 3.2% of the state's population is Hispanic and 1% is Asian-Americans (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Both of these are well below the national average.



Services and manufacturing **industry** are the leading segments of Arkansas's gross product at 19% and 18% respectively. Arkansas's principal agricultural products are rice and poultry where the state ranks first and second nationally (Arkansas Department of Economic Development, 2005). The unemployment rate is 4.8%, and is only slightly higher than the national average (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2006).



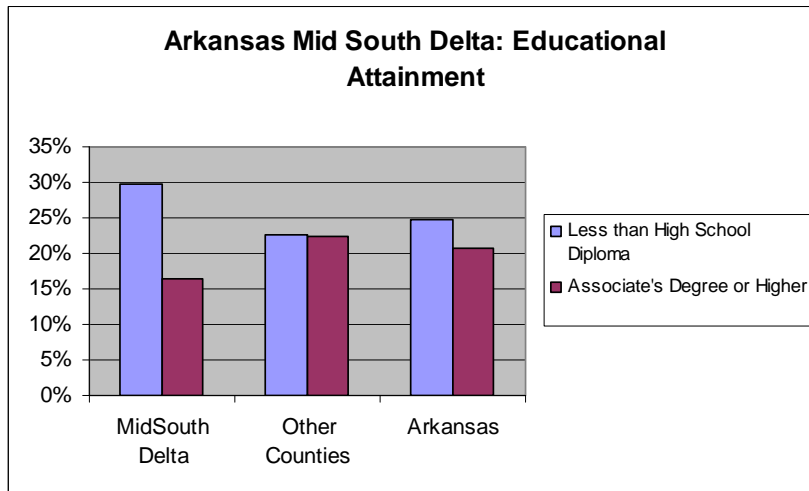
ARKANSAS MID SOUTH DELTA

The Mid South Delta counties in Arkansas have a **population** of 782,463. This represents 29% of Arkansas' population.

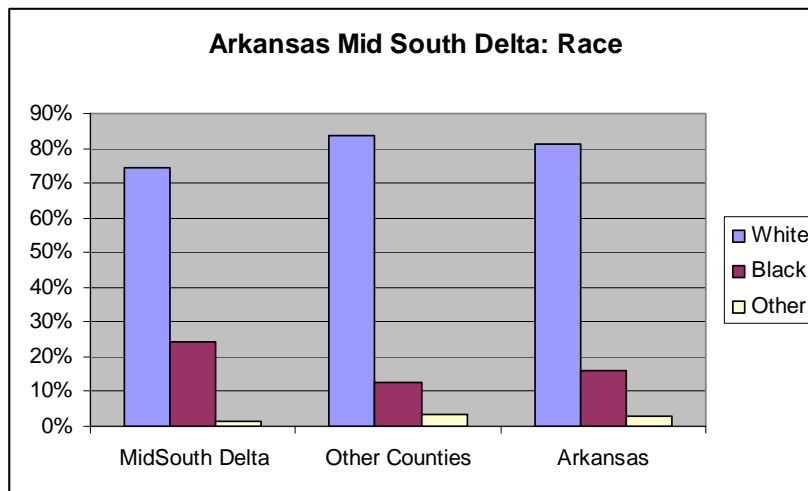


Shaded counties indicate Mid South Delta areas as designated by the Kellogg Foundation

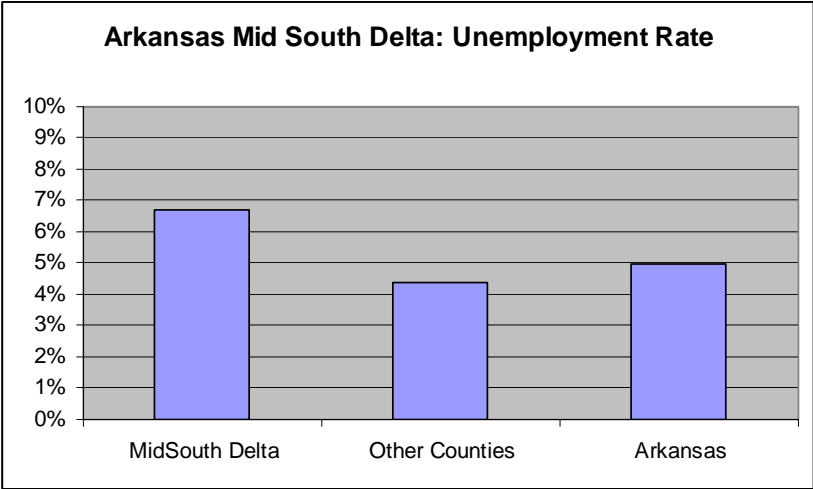
Delta counties are **less educated** than other counties. Nearly 30% of adult Delta residents have not received a high school diploma. Only 16% of the population has received at least an Associate's degree (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).



Mid South Delta counties have twice the percentage of **African Americans** than other counties in Arkansas.



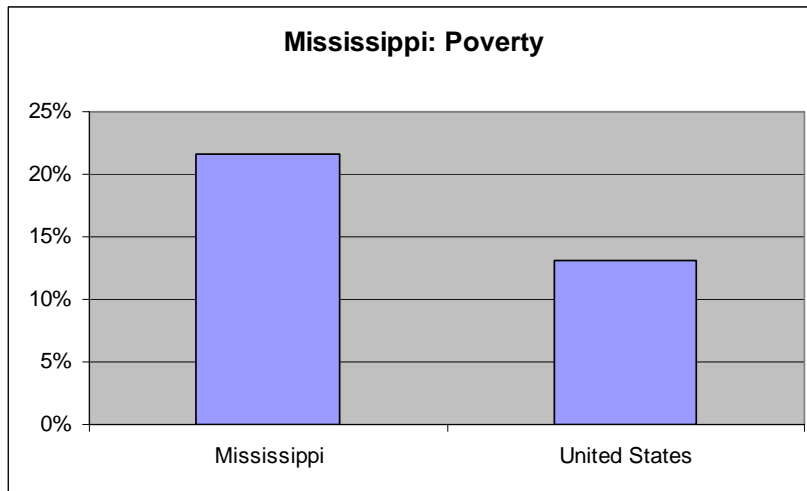
The **unemployment** rate for Delta counties is 2% higher than the rest of the counties in the state (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2006).



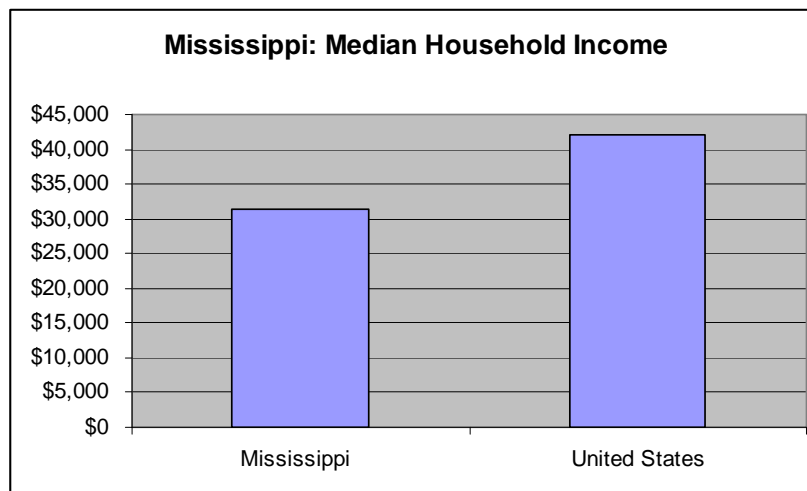
MISSISSIPPI SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

The state of Mississippi has a **population** of 2,921,088 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). The largest metropolitan areas are Jackson with 517,000; Gulfport-Biloxi with 252,000; Pascagoula with 159,000; and Hattiesburg with 129,000 residents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005). Only 49% of the population lives in urban areas giving Mississippi a higher percentage of rural residents than the nation as a whole (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

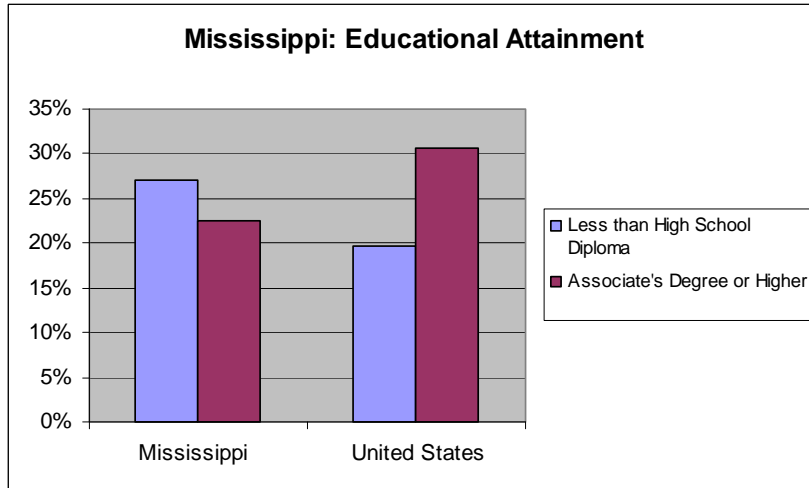
Over 21% of the state's population lives in **poverty**, which is the highest percentage in the nation (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004).



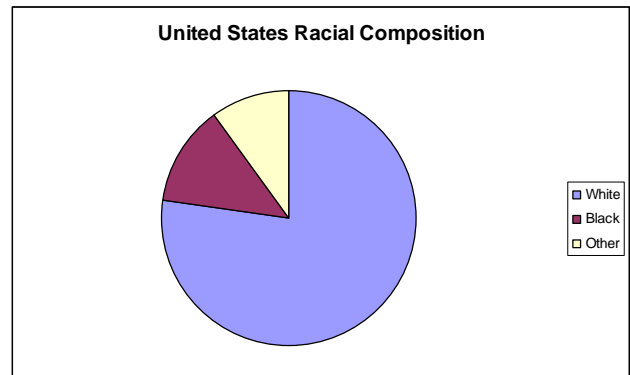
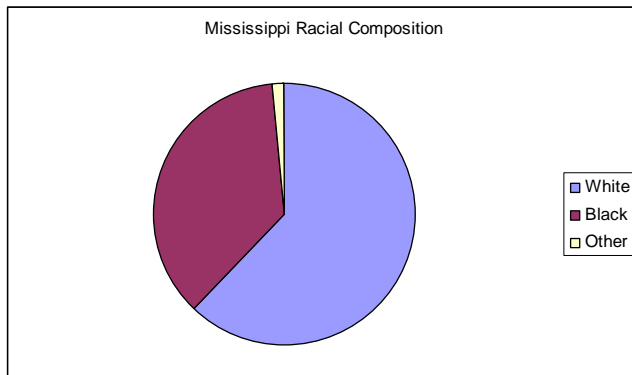
The median household **income** is \$31,330. This number is \$11,500 below the national average.



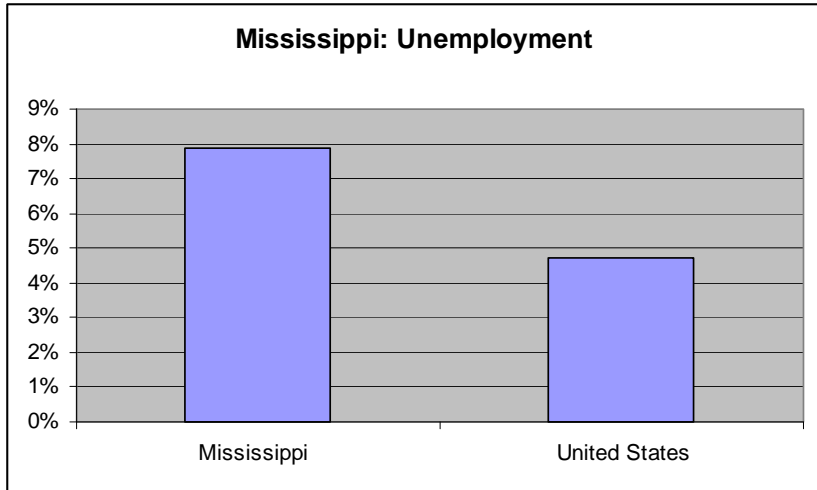
Educationally, 27% percent of adult Mississippi residents have not attained a high school diploma. 23% of the state’s population has attained an Associate’s degree or higher (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).



Mississippi has a **racial** composition consisting of 62% Caucasians and 37% African Americans. The state’s percentage of African Americans is the highest in the nation and nearly three times larger than the national average. Mississippi is drastically underrepresented by Hispanics and Asian Americans: these populations comprise 17% of the population nationally, but only 2% of Mississippi’s population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).



Agriculture is the states leading **employer**. Approximately 30% of Mississippi workers are directly or indirectly employed in the agricultural sector. Leading agricultural products include poultry, timber, and cotton (Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce, 2005). Natural gas and petroleum are important parts of Mississippi’s economy too. The **unemployment** rate is very high at 7.9% when compared to the 4.7% national average (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2006).



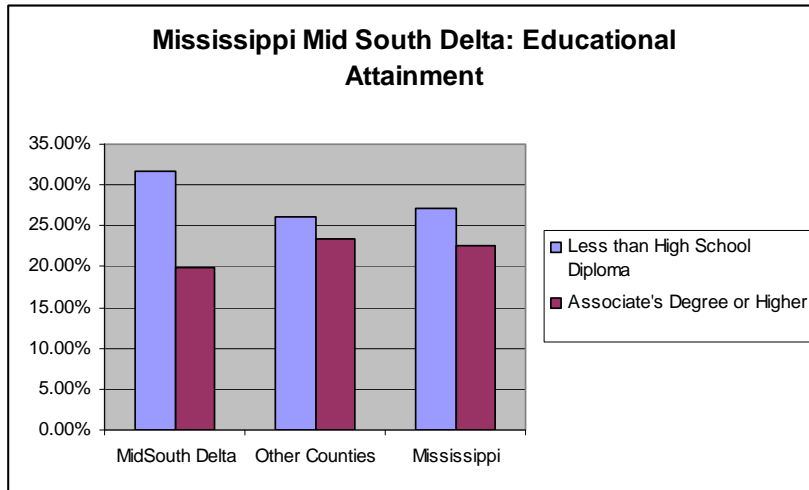
MISSISSIPPI MID SOUTH DELTA

Mississippi’s Mid South Delta **population** totals 537,869 people. This is 18.9% of the entire state’s population.

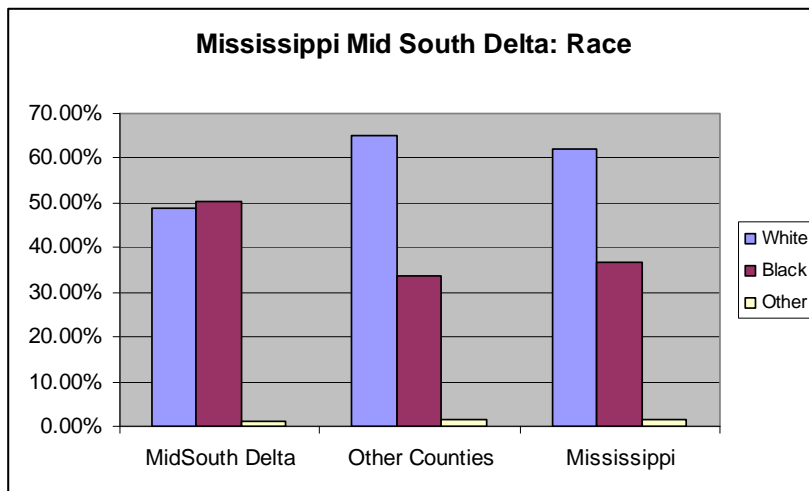


Shaded counties indicate Mid South Delta areas as designated by the Kellogg Foundation

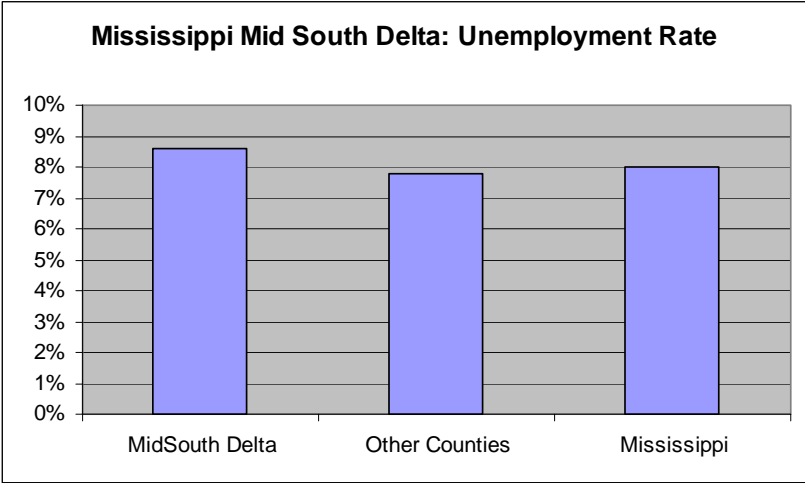
Delta counties are **less educated** in Mississippi as they are in the other Delta states. Nearly one-third of Delta adult residents do not have a high school diploma or equivalent. This gives the Mississippi Delta the highest percentage of Delta residents with less than a high school diploma. Almost one-fifth of Mississippi Delta residents have at least an Associate's degree (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).



The Delta is drastically different in terms of **racial** makeup than the remainder of the state. Over half of the Delta population is African American. This is nearly 17% higher than the rest of the state.



In a state with a very high employment rate, **unemployment** in the Delta is even higher at 8.6% (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2006).



Summary of Lessons Learned and Other Notes
Excerpted From
Shelter from the Storm: The Monroe Experience

Agreements, Cooperation and Memoranda of Understanding

- 2-1-1s should have a Memorandum of Understanding with their local OEP/Office of Homeland Security that allows a 2-1-1 representative a place at the table when real-time information is being shared. If a statewide 2-1-1 exists, that organization should have an agreement with the state OEP/Office of Homeland Security.
- 2-1-1s should have agreements in place with all stakeholders, including other call centers and the telecommunications providers in the state that detail when and how a community will roll its telephone lines. In drafting these agreements, it is important to remember that the technology needs to be working for this to happen. In other words, do not wait until it is too late and the systems are down.
- Cell phone service providers are critical 2-1-1 partners during a disaster. In developing these partnerships, 2-1-1 needs to help the cell phone companies understand the sense of urgency around cell phone usage and access to 2-1-1 during a disaster. The cell phone companies also need to understand the importance of having adequate 800 number trunk capacity prior to a disaster to handle the surge in call volume that results. At a minimum, all 2-1-1s should have the names and contact information for cell phone providers in their area so that they can have immediate access to this information.
- The state still created other hotlines, which created confusion for callers. It is important for someone connected to 2-1-1 to have a close enough relationship with the state OEP or Office of Homeland Security to preempt any additional hotlines from being created.
- A Memorandum of Understanding should exist between United Way and the Red Cross setting out the roles, responsibilities, and expectations of both parties, including what happens if the relationship begins to break down or if one party is not able or willing to perform its part of the agreement. If a formal MOU is not possible or practical, then there should be a 2-1-1 liaison who works closely with the Red Cross to facilitate communications and a long term working partnership.

Staff and Volunteer Expectations and Needs

- When a disaster strikes a community, forcing a 2-1-1 call center to close and some of its staff to move to a different center, the host center should be clear about what is expected of the re-located staff. In so doing, the host center needs to understand that the re-located staff may be experiencing personal traumas of their own.

- The Points of Light Foundation was a valuable partner in assisting with volunteer management, sponsoring volunteer professionals from other communities to come to Monroe to assist during this disaster.
- Training evolves as needs evolve. At certain times, trainings should be held several times a day, while at other times once a day works well. Specific “crisis training modules” should be created for staff and volunteers, with training adapted to the level of expertise of the volunteer.
- For identification and record-keeping purposes, it is important to have a photo of every volunteer, as well as their complete contact information, emergency information and driver’s license information if they are driving rental cars.
- During a crisis, limit the time that staff and volunteers can answer phone calls. Insist that they take breaks during their shifts. While they may insist that they are “fine” and want to work 12 hours straight, evidence shows that in these high-stress situations, people must take breaks or “they break.” Provide an opportunity for staff and volunteers to debrief with someone at the end of their shift. This provides a sense of continuity and an opportunity to share some of the intensity of their day with someone who is trained to take the information in.
- To reduce potential tensions between volunteers and staff, a few things should be in place from the beginning: (1) a clear organizational chart that sets out who was in charge and who reports to whom, (2) clearly stated expectations for the host agency staff, and (3) a clear set of expectations and ground rules for volunteers, including how long they can work every day and what their relationships are to the rest of the staff and to the community. At minimum, everyone should understand that the CEO of the host organization, working with his/her Board of Directors, is ultimately responsible for all decisions.
- Open calls for national volunteers may not be the best way to go, and under no circumstances should community volunteers who are not paid staff be flown into a crisis environment. One option is to form a SWAT Team of 2-1-1 call center staff from around the country; train them on the technical, physical and emotional aspects of disaster relief work; and prepare them to be deployed in case of disaster. Another option is to screen the national volunteers, matching their expertise with the community’s needs, being clear about what will be expected of them, and then weeding out the ones that might not fit the profile.
- 2-1-1s must be prepared to fire a volunteer who is not working out. Certain volunteers (even those who get through the screening process) may not be equipped to deal with disasters; they may become victims themselves and/or display inappropriate behaviors. Once a determination is made that someone is not helping the effort, that person should be asked to leave. It does no good to wait—their behavior rarely improves!

- Before national volunteers arrive, they should be asked about their health issues and food preferences. This might be included in the “contract with national volunteers.”
- When volunteers arrive, rules and expectations for staying in community members’ homes should be made clear, including whether there are penalties for transgressions. For example, if the host says “no smoking in the house,” but the volunteer needs to smoke, what happens? Are there curfews that must be respected? How about kitchen privileges?
- Shorten the shifts to 8 or 10-hour shifts. This will allow volunteers to network and process the events. Please be aware, this could be a transportation logistic nightmare. But needed!
- Volunteers scheduled to be onsite for more than 10 -14 days should have a day or two off. Please be aware once again, transportation logistic nightmare.
- Rental cars: Not sure what the answer is...not everyone needs one, but there does need to be one or two available for volunteers in certain situations. A policy should be developed to cover this situation. Location of the call center, housing, food and mass transportation will play important parts in this decision.
- Make sure professional and local volunteers feel they have “left their mark” when they leave. You want the experience to be positive for the volunteers so it is reflected in how they are handling the calls.
- Evaluation of professional volunteers in areas such as: best practices, do’s and don’ts, success stories and thoughts on how to strengthen 2-1-1; would be helpful upon departure from the disaster call center and again 4-6 months afterward.

Technology and Connectivity

- UWNELA [*United Way of Northeast Louisiana*] could not have performed as effectively as it did without the help of its valuable corporate partner, CenturyTel. While not every 2-1-1 will have this type of relationship, or the fortuitous set of circumstances that seemed to grace this situation, every 2-1-1 should have as a top goal creating a strong partnership with a major telecommunications provider in its area. Appendix 1 includes a helpful primer from the technical staff at CenturyTel that sets out what needs to be in place to allow a 2-1-1 call center to go to scale quickly and effectively.
- A broadband internet connection is absolutely essential. T1, T2, or T3 line speeds are preferable, but cable, hi-speed DSL, and possibly even a satellite connection are sufficient. A dial-up connection simply will not work during this type of crisis. UWNELA was fortunate to have fiber-optics already running into

its building from Bayou Internet. Had the fiber-optics not been available, internet access would not have been available and the quick ramp-up and expansion of the call center by CenturyTel would not have been possible.

- UWNELA started with wireless internet access but soon had to hard wire most of the computers because the wireless ones were frequently losing their connection to the internet.
- Whether a 2-1-1 chooses wireless access or something else, it is very important to have an IT person on the premises or on-call to handle issues in a timely manner. In Monroe, the IT consultant, who usually comes in for four hours on three afternoons a week, became full-time and on-call 24-hours a day.
- Finally, if computers do not have the specifications to allow the staff and volunteers to effectively do their work, they can become more of a hindrance than a help. Appropriate hardware specifications and software suggestions are included in Appendix 2.
- Digital phones: Digital phones allow much more flexibility to make quick changes in phones, features and how the queues are set up, which phones are a part of queues, restricting certain phones to certain features, etc. They also typically allow a far more robust reporting with less difficulty. Most digital phones also allow for Voice over Internet Protocol (VOIP) which could be a very important feature in being flexible about how the call center is set up, with VOIP, you could have remote sites operating at the same time the main, or central call system is operating. While this feature could be set up immediately following a disaster, it is better set up ahead of time and tested thoroughly.
- 2-1-1s that are not connected to Volunteer Centers may be unprepared to deal with the outpouring of donations and volunteers. Even ones that are connected to Volunteer Centers should assess their computer software needs to make sure that they have volunteer management software and a system for managing donations. This does not have to be accomplished by one software package, but the 2-1-1 should have a plan for handling both.
- During a disaster, connectivity between Volunteer Centers is critical for a seamless, statewide system. Volunteer Centers in unaffected areas should be prepared to partner with centers in affected areas in order to place volunteers in the most appropriate assignments. Uniform software facilitates this process. In “non-disaster” times, all of the Volunteer Centers in a state should discuss and agree on using uniform software. Two well-known packages available for recruiting and managing volunteers are the Points of Light Foundation’s 1-800-Volunteer.org and United Way of America’s Volunteer Solutions.

Call Center Operations

- 2-1-1 Disaster Core Team should consist of each needed component of a 2-1-1 Call Center:
 - Resource/Data/Protocol
 - Volunteers: 2-1-1 professional volunteers, local volunteers, national volunteers
 - ◆ Someone who is bilingual
 - ◆ Call center floor supervisor(s)
 - ◆ Crisis Intervention
 - ◆ Professional Volunteer Call Center Director
 - ◆ Technology person is a must
 - ◆ Donations: What are you going to do with all the semi trucks full of food, water and clothing on the way to YOU?, local donations of housing, food, etc...
 - Improvement of the volunteer screening processes mentioned earlier is a MUST.
 - Preparation tips for professional volunteers:
 - ◆ Be ready to be flexible
 - ◆ Pack heavy socks, closed-toe shoes, pants, sweatshirt/sweater and one professional outfit even in warm climates due to air conditioning usage. Consider reverse for colder climates. Many people in the call center became sick.
 - ◆ In call centers or big rooms it can be difficult to maintain a controlled temperature.
 - ◆ Bring a camera and journal to document your journey.
 - ◆ Business cards.
 - ◆ Take advantage of debriefing opportunities.
- In initial days, TV news in call center provides context for disaster. The TV news must be monitored by Resource Specialist. Information Specialists are living the disaster through the callers. We found it was best if the TV was only used by the night shift.
- Change any information banners during non-peak phone hours. This is something night shift can do. If a big change happens during peak call volume, post it another way without taking down the information banners. Use bright easy-to-read markers when printing the banners, and be aware of light glare on the banner.
- ANYONE coming into the call center MUST sign a confidentiality clause. Control traffic through the call center including Board of Directors and the press.
- Post names and positions of each shift -- key personnel should have a unique identifier i.e. clip-on colored name tag.

- ALL staff and volunteers must have nametags.
- Have alcohol swabs or Clorox wipes available.
- Commemorative T-shirts for volunteers.
- Be sure to include the night shift in everything you do.
- Provide debriefing opportunities on a regular basis.
- The core team needs to have a morning or afternoon meeting to keep up to speed with a set time and place. Be careful not to conflict this meeting with OEP/FEMA morning AND afternoon meetings. Things change so fast and it isn't efficient going from department to department with updates. This would also allow for professional volunteers to be briefed by local staff with status updates and changes when necessary. Special needs and personnel issues for each department could also be handled at this meeting.
- Shift supervisor briefing should occur 30 minutes before shift begins.

AUTHOR

The University of Nebraska Public Policy Center has been involved in a number of 2-1-1 projects since its founding in 1998. In 2000, Associate Director (and author of this study), Nancy Shank, along with Dr. David Rosenbaum (College of Business Administration, University of Nebraska-Lincoln), and Dr. Gregg Wright (Center on Children Families and the Law, University of Nebraska-Lincoln), co-authored *Survey Of Existing I&R Services And A Nebraska 211 System Cost/Benefit Analysis* (University of Nebraska Public Policy Center). This report described the existing information and referral environment in Nebraska, presented operational steps and alternatives, and calculated cost/benefit ratios. This report has generated considerable interest and has served as the basis for analysis and policy discussion in a number of other states. It has also been cited in supportive documentation for the Calling for 2-1-1 Act that has been introduced in Congress. Ms. Shank was the principal investigator for a three-year U.S. Department of Commerce Technologies Opportunities Program grant that brought partners together across the U.S. to develop the technological link between propriety software and XML standards to enable interoperable information and referral resource sharing. She has published several articles about information and referral services. Ms. Shank is a member of the Alliance of Information and Referral Systems and a member of the XML Data Standards Workgroup.



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