



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
JUNE 12, 2006**



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\$900,000 Grant Awarded to Study the Impacts of 2005 Hurricanes on Gulf Coast Governments

Albany, NY — The Nelson A. Rockefeller Institute of Government of the State University of New York has received a \$900,000 start-up grant from the Ford Foundation to study the effects of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita on state and local governments in the three states devastated by the storms.

The study is being conducted jointly by the Nelson A. Rockefeller Institute of Government and the Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana. The Rockefeller Institute's Co-director, Dr. Richard P. Nathan, and Jim Brandt, President of the Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana, are the principal investigators. The research is based in Baton Rouge, at the Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana.

The study will explain how state and local governments, and community and business organizations responded to the storms and provide lessons for dealing with future disasters. It aims to be a trusted knowledge base for understanding what is being done (or not done) to improve and restore the living conditions of the people affected by the hurricanes.

Researchers from the Stennis Institute of Government at Mississippi State University and Jackson State University, along with other experts, are partnering in the network for this project. The Advisory Committee for the project is chaired by former Mississippi Governor William F. Winter.

“States and local jurisdictions were hit hard by the Katrina and Rita hurricanes,” said Winter. “Recovery from the nation’s most costly natural disaster requires courage, creativity, and unprecedented efforts from governmental and other institutions throughout the 150-mile coastline area destroyed by the storms.”

The project, *GulfGov Reports*, will examine jurisdictions (state and local governments, and school districts) in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. The sample includes both areas that experienced the highest levels of hurricane damage and those inundated with evacuees. Field researchers will probe what happens to these communities — their changed demographic

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\$900,000 Grant, Add One

and economic conditions, their public services and their capacity to function as viable institutions — and how governments, businesses, and secular and faith-based nonprofit organizations are (or are not) meeting community needs.

“A critical role of the project is to educate. It’s about institutional capacity. We want to communicate what has happened and what goes on over the next three years to the public and to government officials, the leaders of major nonprofit groups and businesses, and the media,” said Dick Nathan.

Jim Brandt added that the research network “will reach out to national and regional audiences. This three-year longitudinal look is crucially needed,” Brandt said. The study team will sponsor events, present testimony, participate in public dialogues, and maintain an active, accessible website on which frequent reports will be chronicled and permanently available.

The *GulfGov Reports* project will issue several reports, including an initial one-year-after assessment, four semi-annual update reports on the progress (or lack of progress) made, bulletins highlighting major findings and developments, and periodic special reports focused on major cross-cutting topics such as children’s services, schools and health care. The study will highlight future implications for how federal, state, and local governments plan for and respond to such disasters.

“Our goal is to put relevant and reliable information in the hands of those who need it most — governments, businesses, nonprofit organizations, and citizens working on the ground to rebuild lives affected by last year’s hurricanes.” said Susan V. Berresford, president of the Ford Foundation. “The lessons that emerge from this research can also help guide the response to future disasters in the Gulf states and the rest of the country.”

The Ford Foundation has made nearly \$15 million in grants to strengthen the capacity of grassroots and civil society organizations based in and working in the region. Many of these groups are longstanding grantees with a deep understanding of the diverse people, conditions and resources of the region.

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\$900,000 Grant, Add Two



PHOTO OUTLINE: The GulfGov Reports research team convened in Baton Rouge on May 31, 2006, to begin a three-year study of the recovery, role and capacity of state and local governments in Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama that were affected by the hurricanes of 2005. Members include researchers and advisors from the Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana, the Nelson A. Rockefeller Institute of Government, the Stennis Institute of Government at Mississippi State University and Jackson State University. Start-up funding for the project has been provided by the Ford Foundation.