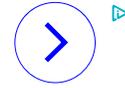




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Donor fatigue may be impacting aid to Puerto Rico

by Courtney Schoenemann



Puerto Ricans are trying to survive right now without gas, food or water in the wake of Hurricane Maria. (Photo: FEMA / MGN Online)



Puerto Ricans are trying to survive right now without gas, food or water in the wake of Hurricane Maria. Some hospitals are running on generators and have limited medicine and supplies.

The Pentagon is greatly increasing the active-duty military forces being sent in to help relief efforts on the island. Currently there are about 2,500 troops on the American territory. The Pentagon says it will possibly double that number in the next several days.

Hurricane Maria is the fourth natural disaster in the last month and the mayor of San Juan is begging for help. One local donation expert says the island may not be getting all of the help it deserves because of donation fatigue.

Monica Williams with [GivingCity Austin](http://www.givingcityaustin.com/) (<http://www.givingcityaustin.com/>) works with donors and nonprofits on a daily basis. She says donor fatigue is a real thing.

Williams said so many people jumped in to help after Hurricane Harvey hit so close to home, but now, many are left feeling helpless.

“People give as much as you can, but when you start to see the same ask over and over again, this time with Irma, and now for Mexico, and then Maria in Puerto Rico, you start to feel like maybe you're not making a difference. There's a sense of kind of hopelessness people are feeling about their giving and it's having an impact and I think that's unusual this year,” Williams said.

Just over a month ago, Hurricane Harvey wreaked havoc on the Texas gulf coast. Days later Hurricane Irma slammed through the Caribbean and Florida.

Donations came pouring in.

“When it's a disaster time you don't even have to ask people. They see the weather and they're ready to give,” Williams said.

But then, a 7.1 magnitude earthquake killed hundreds in Mexico, and now, Puerto Rico is in the middle of a humanitarian crisis following Hurricane Maria.

“When we call for help we're not calling for ‘give me a little bit more food’ help. we're calling for ‘give a baby some water help’,” said San Juan Mayor Carmen Yulin Cruz.

While assistance has been promised by federal agencies, it's not hard to see why some are left feeling helpless.

“Our people are without electricity, without basic services even running out of food and water,” said Ana Maria Maynard Tekina-eiru, founder of the Puerto Rican culture center in Austin.

Williams is in the business of donor education.

She said in years past, one major disaster each year won't impact overall giving, but this year is different.

“It's a very common and a very genuine feeling of 'I've given what I can to help people in a disaster to help people recover. I'm not sure I can give much more,’” Williams said.

Williams said that's where nonprofits need to step in to educate donors on where their money will end up.

“Really it's the burden of the nonprofit to talk to donors in a way that makes them see their donation is going to have an impact and lets them see they can make a difference,” Williams said.

Donors also need to realize the needs go beyond immediate relief.

“Most donations for disaster recovery, 70 percent of them happen for immediate relief. That's your food, water, diapers, clean up supplies. Only 30 percent goes to long term giving. And that's because most donors give with the intent of providing that immediate relief,” Williams said.

She adds that many donors get angry when they realize their donations aren't going to help people immediately.

“It's so much more than bottles of water. We need to rebuild homes, communities, schools,” Williams said.

That's also why the people of Puerto Rico hope their needs aren't forgotten.

“The island is going to take a long time to rebuild so we hope people don't get excited about doing their part on day one and go away, because the island is really going to need help for months and years to come,” Tekina-eiru said.

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