

FIRMES, UNIDOS Y RESILIENTES CON LA ABOGACÍA (FURIA INC.)



We are a non-profit organization created to accompany community leaders around the archipelago of Puerto Rico in advocacy processes, supporting their efforts and initiatives. We promote resiliency through participatory advocacy, offering educational services and promoting the proper participation of our communities in processes that concern and affect them.

One of our main actions has been to fight for the right to fair housing and to ensure conditions for the well-being and safety of our people.

RECOVERY PROCESS: THE PRIORITIES OF THE COMMUNITIES HAVE NOT BEEN FULLY ADDRESSED

Thanks to community leaders of Puerto Rico por el Derecho a una Vivienda Digna, a community summit was held in March 2019, with a participation of over 400 leaders from all over PR. They had the opportunity to discuss the recovery process and present their needs, recommendations and proposals to address the problems they still faced.



THESE PROBLEMS WERE IDENTIFIED IN THE SUMMIT:

- DESTROYED HOUSES
- POWER OUTAGES
- LOW PRESSURE OR LACK OF POTABLE WATER
- INSECURITY AND ANXIETY ABOUT EVICTIONS AND DISPLACEMENT
- LACK OF MITIGATION PLANNING

As a priority, the leaders wanted to ensure the efficient use of recovery funds in reparations of affected homes by the hurricanes, many of them that were denied help by FEMA or were poorly amended by Tu Hogar Renace. Just in May, the Governor confirmed that there were still 3,646 blue tarps, with no certain timeline to eliminate them. This data does not necessarily consider cases of temporary repair, others where FEMA money was not enough for a proper construction of roofs, and the ones that were never reported to the system.

Our communities also confront energy instability with high costs, water insecurity because of lack of support to community water systems, among others situations that leave people without a secure home and fair living.

Because of these circumstances, that might lead to displacements, it was important for them to develop participatory planning processes that addressed post-disaster recovery and future solutions. Some CDBG programs respond to this, but do not have an assigned budget to carry out these plans.

ASK: PRIORITIZE MITIGATION PLANNING BY SECURING FUNDS TO DEVELOP THOSE PLANS, IN ORDER TO AVOID DISPLACEMENT AND ENSURE COMMUNITY INTEGRITY

COMMUNITY CENTER: ESSENTIAL TOOL FOR TRUE RESILIENCE IN OUR COMMUNITIES

Every time FURIA visits a community, the Resilient Community Centers emerges as the mechanism that would guarantee its residents safety when facing a natural disaster. These spaces would serve as an emergency response and collection center, a place to provide food through community kitchens, among other educational and support services.

Although at first it was a program in itself, currently the CDBG-DR funds allocated to the creation of Resilient Community Centers are assigned to the City Revitalization Program. Unfortunately, when we examine the list of projects under it, these centers do not seem to be a priority for the municipalities as sub-recipients, nor do they necessarily impact the low-income population as is supposed. It is important that the funds for the construction and development of these centers be accessible to community groups, who are the ones facing the problem. This would be achieved by reverting the allocated money to a program by itself and eliminating the reimbursement requirement, which would expand the capacity of grassroots organizations to access and develop such centers.

REAL CITIZEN PARTICIPATION: KEY TO SUCCESS IN THE RECOVERY

Despite the constant demand for effective citizen participation mechanisms, this has not been fully complied with. The Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC), a requirement established in the notice regarding CDBG-MIT funds, has not yet been formally activated, as its members have not been named. This Committee is of the utmost importance to ensure that the recovery process is efficient, fair and transparent, reason why it must be activated immediately but also expanded to cover everything related to the funds managed by Housing, not only those related to mitigation.

We also recognize that the recovery process is not limited to the funds administered under the PR Department of Housing. We know that there are other entities, such as COR3 and federal agencies that play a leading role in the process. That is why, to ensure that the use of recovery funds responds to the needs of the communities and the population that it is supposed to serve, it is necessary to create a civil society committee that oversees the recovery process. It will benefit from the feedback of the communities, and by hearing and considering their voices, the recovery process can finally guarantee safe housing, permanence and justice for their residents.

MAKE THE RESILIENT COMMUNITY CENTERS PROGRAM A PRIORITY AND ELIMINATE THE REIMBURSEMENT REQUIREMENT TO ENSURE COMMUNITIES CAN DEVELOP THEIR OWN COMMUNITY CENTERS

EXPAND THE CITIZENS' ADVISORY COMMITTEE REQUIREMENT TO ALL CDBG PROGRAMS. CREATE A REPRESENTATIVE COMMITTEE OF CIVIL SOCIETY WITH VOICES OF COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP TO SUPERVISE THE USE OF ALL RECOVERY FUNDS, AND ENSURE THAT THEY ARE USED FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE COMMUNITIES

Five years after Hurricanes Irma and María, many of the concerns identified by the communities remain unaddressed, as the government has not been able to guaranteed secure housing for our people There have been victories, but much remains to be done. By considering our recommendations, we can ensure finally a fair and successful recovery process for our communities.

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