

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Generosity After the LA Fires:

Charitable Giving and the Road Ahead to Rebuilding

In January 2025, the Los Angeles region faced not one but two catastrophic urban conflagrations. The Eaton and Palisades fires killed 31 people and destroyed over 16,000 structures.¹ About 100,000 people evacuated, and one year after the fires started, thousands of residents remain displaced.²

The story of the fires is a narrative about human tragedy, community resilience, and suffering, which persists for thousands of Angelenos. It is also a story of generosity. Mere days after the fires sparked, dedicated fundraising efforts and commitments broke records, exceeding \$650 million by the end of January.³ Looking at 2025 overall, the Milken Institute estimates charitable commitments to LA fire relief and recovery amounted to **\$860 million to \$970 million**.

Impressive as they are, charitable giving resources still pale in comparison to the cost of rebuilding. Looking at property damage and capital losses alone, estimated charitable giving reflects merely 1–2 percent of the cost to rebuild (without accounting for insurance or settlement proceeds).⁴

Figure 1: Estimated Charitable Giving Versus Estimated Property and Capital Losses After the Fires

Charitable Giving Estimate
(Dec 2025) | **\$1 B**

**LA Fires Property Damage &
Capital Loss Estimate**
(Mar 2025) | **\$131 B**

Source: Li and Yu (2025)

Private generosity cannot sustain a long-term rebuilding effort; renewed government support and new approaches to recovery finance are needed. Limited philanthropic pilots have started to rebuild some housing and fill other gaps. Habitat for Humanity and other organizations are rebuilding homes in the burn areas.⁵ And the CAP.LA program—funded chiefly by the R&S Kayne Foundation and delivered by Loyola Marymount University; University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA); and Purdue University—offers much-needed environmental testing that survivors might have otherwise expected from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the US Army Corps of Engineers.⁶

However, these efforts represent only a drop in the bucket of unmet needs. Following previous comparable disasters, the federal government has delivered tens of billions of dollars in recovery aid within weeks.⁷ After receiving \$5.7 billion from the Small Business Administration and FEMA for LA wildfire recovery, the state of California has stated it needs far more support.⁸ However, the Trump administration has sought to reduce the scale and role of FEMA, shifting more responsibility for disaster relief and recovery to state and local governments.⁹

Amid the uncertainty of long-term recovery funding, the region navigates a precarious shift from short-term relief to long-term rebuilding. As crowdfunding ebbed, institutional giving has shifted toward longer-term and leveraged uses of grants and program-related investment that catalyze other private capital to rebuild housing. The *Think Big and Act Boldly* report by Climate Resolve & Resilient Cities Catalyst identifies four such potential investment recommendations—including the Resiliency Company’s LA Delta Fund, which will provide low-interest loans to homeowners to finance the extra cost of rebuilding to Insurance Institute for Building and Home Safety Wildfire Prepared Plus standards—for philanthropy seeking to capitalize long-term rebuilding and resilience efforts this year.¹⁰ Private-sector and government collaboration should advance ideas like these, and other innovative blended finance ideas, to stretch private dollars as far as possible in support of an efficient rebuild.

At the same time, flexible disaster relief remains essential. According to Department of Angels quarterly surveys and other analyses, survivors are facing a “liquidity crunch” and still need direct and flexible cash assistance.¹¹ And a slowing economy may further strain families and individuals in immediate need. Crowdfunding and direct giving platforms, such as GiveDirectly, GoFundMe, and The Change Reaction—if powered with additional funding—can continue to help individuals and families weather financial challenges ahead. The anniversary of the fires should help rekindle public attention and crowdfunding to this end.

Methodology

To characterize the scale of charitable giving for recovery, the Milken Institute gathered data on charitable giving using third-party databases, press releases, and news coverage. Our analysis encompassed 30 wildfire recovery funds, over 250 donor organizations, more than 300 receiving organizations, and nearly 1,000 donation transactions. We employed two methodologies to estimate the size of charitable commitments:

- **Donations**—The Institute looked at nearly 1,000 discrete announced donations that went either to intermediary recovery funds or directly to organizations. (Analysis treated giving raised via crowdfunding platforms—e.g., GoFundMe—as one single donation rather than millions of donations.) This conservative method avoided double-counting but significantly underestimated giving.
- **Funds and non-fund donations**—The Institute identified 20 recovery funds that publicly announced total fundraising. Our analysis then added discrete donations that did *not* flow to any of said funds and went directly to nonprofits. However, because recovery funds made grants among each other (e.g., a grant from the SoCal Fire Fund and Community Organized Relief Effort [CORE]), this method double-counted certain dollars.

Both methods still underestimate the extent of charitable giving. First, a significant share (43 percent) of announced corporate and philanthropic donations did not disclose dollar amounts. Second, the published fundraising for wildfire recovery funds is dated and fails to account for donations received since the updates earlier in 2025.

View the full report in winter 2026 at

<https://milkeninstitute.org/content-hub/research-and-reports/reports/generosity-after-la-fires-charitable-giving-and-road-ahead-rebuilding>.

Endnotes

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