

## CUSTOMER SPOTLIGHT

## The Houston Food Bank



“Over all, what I learned from the hurricane, more than anything, is there is no way to overestimate the generosity of people. It is amazing and humbling when you go through it. If you provide the tools to do so, they will surprise you every time.”

—Heather Icenogle, Director of Annual Giving and Events

The Houston Food Bank is among America’s largest food banks, serving more than 800,000 individuals in southeast Texas. As a member of Feeding America®, a nationwide network of member foodbanks, it is committed to leading the fight against hunger.

## Preparedness and an Agile Message

Carrying out the Houston Food Bank’s mission every day requires a massive undertaking. But it took on a unique urgency in the fall of 2017: Hurricane Harvey struck Houston, resulting in more than 100 lives lost in Texas and the displacement of an estimated 30,000 people.

Houston Food Bank’s services were more imperative than ever—the resulting flooding, damage, and displacement were catastrophic for families already struggling to meet their basic needs. At the same time, the storm had unleashed an outpouring of generosity, as Houstonians and people around the world came to the aid of those impacted by the hurricane.

Facing an urgent need and more potential support than ever, Houston Food Bank was uniquely positioned—and prepared—to respond.

**The Houston Food Bank is powered by Blackbaud’s solutions for:**

- ✓ Marketing
- ✓ Analytics
- ✓ Payment Services
- ✓ Peer-to-Peer Fundraising
- ✓ Fundraising

The ability to be nimble can mean the difference between capturing donor support or missing out. Equipped with Blackbaud cloud solutions, which they could access anytime and anywhere, and marketing automation, Houston Food Bank was ready to respond—even when flood waters prevented access to their building.

“We were able to quickly revamp our messaging in an email marketing campaign we had [prepared] weeks in advance of hurricane season. Having a solution that allows us to have messages pre-staged and ready to go is very much what we relied on,” testifies Heather Icenogle, director of annual giving and events.

Heather explains that they had initially anticipated their first post-hurricane email would be an update to their network that the food bank was up and running, with details on how to support it. But with no access to their building and their community reeling from the unprecedented devastation in the weekend of the storm, she noted, “It became very clear by Sunday evening that was not going to be the message that we could send on Monday.”



“We were able to very quickly design a simple lightbox for our home page that would pop up and say, ‘Are you looking to donate for hurricane Harvey relief?’ We put that up, and within the first two weeks, we had over \$7.3 million in donations come through that lightbox.”

—Heather Icenogle,  
Director of Annual Giving and Events

They quickly pivoted to a more urgent message, which Heather sums up as: “If you need help, here is how you can find it; if you’re in a position to help others, here’s how you can do that as well.” That message had a 27% open rate and raised \$125,000.00. “It was really an amazing thing,” she shares.

“Working from home that Sunday evening, we were already seeing donations beginning to come in from all over the country,” Heather shares. Although the disaster had triggered significantly increased transaction volumes, their Blackbaud cloud solutions seamlessly scaled to meet their needs. They could tell that site visitors were looking for a digital donation form; and, with their Blackbaud solution, Heather states, “We were able to very quickly design a simple lightbox for our home page that would pop up and say, ‘Are you looking to donate for Hurricane Harvey relief?’ Within the first two weeks, we had over \$7.3 million in donations come through that lightbox.”

Throughout the response, Heather says, “[I could pull] reports in real-time to report back to our leadership team and to our donors.” Within a week of the storm, her team was able to send out an impact report, updating donors on what their support had made possible. She was also equipped to communicate appropriately with new donors. “[Blackbaud] made the segmenting so easy. We don’t want to actively solicit donors in another food bank service area,” Heather explains. “So, we were able to very quickly and easily segment all [donors] to determine how we talk to them moving forward.”

## Crowdfunding for Good Takes the Lead

While the donation lightbox proved to be a vital fundraising channel, Heather and her team also quickly saw that their supporters were interested in rallying their own networks to give.

“This is the first time we’ve really seen people seeking out peer-to-peer fundraising platforms. That is not something that we had nine years ago with Hurricane Ike,” says Heather. Leveraging their Blackbaud peer-to-peer solution, they could support this surge in interest at scale, and ensure that more funding stayed with their mission.

“Ultimately, we were going to get so much more of the funding [by leveraging Blackbaud’s peer-to-peer capabilities], rather than go through other third-party platforms,” says Heather. The flow of donations came in seamlessly, she said, but then payment processing quickly became a question.

“We were not with Blackbaud [payment services] during the hurricane, [but] we switched as quickly as possible once we realized how much that would have saved us,” says Heather. The benefits extended beyond just processing fees. “Unfortunately, when disasters like this strike, all the scammers come out. Working closely with Blackbaud [payment services], we’re tracking and avoiding fraudulent transactions. Although we’re getting a lot of fraudulent transactions hitting our website, at least now we know, and we are catching them. With our former merchant services, we didn’t.”

## Growing Forward Together

In a time of disaster, the Houston Food Bank was prepared and able to respond to a surge in generosity to meet unprecedented needs. Their Blackbaud solutions enabled Heather and her team to harness the momentum, and even to equip and activate members of their donor base to fundraise on their behalf.

As a result of the outpouring of support, Houston Food Bank has been able to expand their programs and to purchase equipment, providing more support in their service areas than ever before.

Ready to learn how Blackbaud solutions can help increase your organization’s growth?

[Learn more](#)

### About Blackbaud

Leading uniquely at the intersection point of technology and social good, Blackbaud connects and empowers organizations to increase their impact through software, services, expertise, and data intelligence. We serve the entire social good community, which includes nonprofits, foundations, corporations, education institutions, healthcare institutions, and the individual change agents who support them.



563%

Increase in transactions

