FULFILLING THE PROMISE, MAKING

NEW ORLEANS

A **JUST** AND **RESILIENT** CITY

The Greater New Orleans Funders Network is a coalition of local, regional and national grantmakers committed to equity and economic opportunity in the Greater New Orleans region. The network is managed by Grantmakers for Southern Progress, a project of Neighborhood Funders Group. Members of the Greater New Orleans Funders Network include:

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Today, there is positive momentum in the Greater New Orleans region—a growing population and rebounding economy demonstrate that this place is increasingly one where people from all walks of life want to live and work.

Ten years ago, Hurricane Katrina and the failure of the levees protecting the region unleashed an unprecedented disaster upon one of America's most charismatic cities. Hurricane Rita quickly followed, with Hurricanes Ike, Gustav and Isaac causing additional extensive damage in subsequent years. Punctuating the damage wrought by these storms was the 2010 explosion of the Deepwater Horizon oil rig, which killed 11 workers and caused immense additional injury to the natural systems and communities in coastal Louisiana and beyond. This cavalcade of disasters catapulted the region into the national spotlight, prompting questions about whether and how New Orleans could or even should rebuild. But, as has been demonstrated repeatedly over the city's nearly 300-year history, the communities of the Greater New Orleans region have shown phenomenal resilience, adaptive capacity and a commitment to once again building back better than before. Working as a partner to community members and policy-makers, philanthropy has and can continue to play a positive role in that path forward.

As reports like the Data Center's The New Orleans Index at Ten clarify, progress has been real and substantial, but it has not produced growth that has benefited everyone. Persistent challenges—in the form of poverty, racial inequity and exclusion—remain prevalent. Fortuitously, significant investment in the region will be made in the coming years, allowing an opportunity to build on lessons learned in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and maximize the opportunities for the Greater New Orleans region going forward.

Growing income inequality, lack of affordable housing, vulnerability to rising seas, antiquated infrastructure and ongoing racial inequalities are not challenges unique to New Orleans; indeed, cities and regions all over the world are grappling with these same issues. An unforeseen benefit of the last ten years is that New Orleans has become a living example for testing principles, policies and projects for rebuilding a more just, resilient and equitable city; the lessons learned from the past decade can inform other cities and regions facing similar issues. The cumulative effect of these disasters has forced the region to confront deep-seated, entrenched barriers. While much work remains, progress has been the result of meaningful partnerships and collaborations across sectors, across industries and with leadership, broad input and participation from residents themselves.

We, the Greater New Orleans Funders' Network, represent members of the local philanthropic community and of national philanthropic institutions, drawn together at this moment in time to reflect on the past, inventory the present and imagine a just future. We think about the region in terms of both the people and the place. We want to ensure that large investments in the region result in a more sustainable and resilient place, as well as afford the people who live here a chance to participate in the decision-making and benefit from its improvements.

This paper serves to set the context of how New Orleans has made progress in some key areas over the past decade, and to invite you to join a conversation about the work we recognize remains to be done. We want to use this moment of reflection together to lift up aspects of what has gone well in the months and years since the storms shone a spotlight on the people of Greater New Orleans, learn from what mistakes were made and assess what opportunities were missed. We recognize that there is not unanimous agreement about these successes and failures, but we invite all perspectives into conversations. Most importantly, we want to look to do better, together, as we tackle the challenges on the road ahead.

TRANSFORMATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES: BUILDING A RESILIENT NEW ORLEANS AND A SUSTAINABLE PLACE

Over the past ten years, billions of dollars have been invested in the physical recovery of the Greater New Orleans region. Visitors to New Orleans today notice new and renovated homes and apartments; new and refurbished schools, community centers, libraries and grocery stores; repaved roads with bike lanes and streetcars; and, though mostly out of sight, a more than $14 billion state-of-the-art hurricane protection system. While much of the Katrina recovery funding from FEMA and HUD has been spent, a silver lining to the tremendous destruction of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill is that the region stands to receive billions of additional dollars over the next 15 years from fines and penalties associated with the spill. The scale of these investments will be second only to the post-storm recovery spending, and they inherently offer a chance to learn from successes and failures in managing Katrina-era funds to ensure equity, transparency and leverage.

Having endured the exacerbated land loss and environmental destruction of multiple storms and the oil spill, the state passed (and subsequently updated) a rigorous, science-based $50-billion-dollar strategy for managing flood protection and coastal restoration over the next 50 years. Created in partnership with local, regional and global experts, nonprofit organizations, industry representatives and community voices, the plan seeks to address the immediate threats of the fastest rate of land loss in the world, to restore the natural systems that built the land beneath our feet and to manage the ongoing relationship with a dynamic, changing ecosystem in the face of future threats, including sea level rise and more intense and frequent storms. While many communities globally have begun to prepare for the new realities of a changing climate, Louisiana is in the unique position of having a down payment toward implementation of restoration solutions in the form of the nearly $7 billion dollars the state stands to receive from the oil spill.

In addition to the regional coastal challenges, the city of New Orleans' 115+-year-old water system is not equipped to serve the growing city or adapt to its changing physical environment, leaving the system out of compliance with federal laws and wasting as much as 40% of the city's drinking water through leaks and broken pipes. The potential price tag for rebuilding the system in the traditional fashion is staggering. Over the next ten years, the city will spend an estimated $3 billion to modernize the system and infrastructure. Included in the city's plan are innovative, cost-effective methods including pilot projects ranging from green roofs to water literacy curriculum in elementary schools, management of public spaces, and innovative financing approaches. Furthermore, the City Council has enacted a new Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance that includes, for the first time, regulations for stormwater management requiring new developments to use new materials and to landscape to build resilience. Fortunately, these investments are not without a road map. The Greater New Orleans Urban Water Plan—developed in partnership with local, regional and global experts, community organizations, industry representatives and city officials with financial support from the public, private and philanthropic sectors—offers a framework for these improvements.

At the same time, the city's Sewerage and Water Board (SWB) is facing a tremendous generational shift in technical expertise and workforce with the expected retirement of hundreds of employees within the coming three years. Modernizing the city's water system presents an opportunity to train new SWB workers in skills that allow for living with water rather than fighting against it. This approach exemplifies the post-Katrina mindset of acknowledging vulnerability, planning to mitigate harm, adapting to a changing landscape and turning challenges into growth opportunities.

The triple threats of disappearing coastal wetlands, climate change and failing municipal infrastructure are not unique to New Orleans, and the region has learned much from solutions implemented elsewhere. Yet the billions of dollars allocated to these projects provide New Orleans with an unprecedented opportunity not only to protect this place, but to transform the regional economy with the creation of a new knowledge-based, globally exportable industry. If we are intentional about building economic resilience in addition to environmental resilience, these investments in place promise to catalyze opportunities for people who live throughout the region.

WE BELIEVE THAT NEW ORLEANS CAN BE TRULY RESILIENT & SUSTAINABLE ONLY IF **PEOPLE** ARE CENTRAL TO THE STRATEGIES & INVESTMENTS IN PLACE

Much of our work in the years since Katrina has focused on support for people who have been marginalized, oppressed and impoverished by historical institutions and systems. In some cases, policy decisions and recovery funding have exacerbated and magnified these pre-Katrina inequities. In other ways, local and statewide leadership is helping to expand economic opportunity through diversification into industries that promise higher wages, including advanced manufacturing, creative digital media, health services and trade & logistics—in addition to the sustainable industries mentioned above. Yet the years since 2005 are also defined by an important shift in civic leadership and community engagement, as residents of the region harnessed their entrepreneurial spirit to inform policy and planning, develop innovative solutions and lead the recovery.

This thread runs from the neighborhood leaders and volunteers who doggedly worked to bring their neighbors back to the region, through the development of the Unified New Orleans Plan (UNOP) in 2006, to the public process to develop ProsperityNOLA, the official economic development plan of the City of New Orleans, released in 2013. Significant philanthropic investment in the development of these plans ensured robust and meaningful community participation. As we now consider how to build upon changes to our economic, education and criminal justice systems, philanthropy has an ongoing obligation to ensure that decision-makers and policy-makers work with community members to design solutions that work for and in conjunction with the people who live here.

While debates rage over the effectiveness of the reforms impacting the city's public schools, few question the imperative of providing better educational opportunities for the city's children than those that existed prior to Katrina. Philanthropy has contributed hundreds of millions of dollars to support the pursuit of excellent public education in New Orleans, and this support is widely acknowledged. Yet many older youth and young adults, already out of school, have been disconnected from quality learning and training opportunities. Recognizing that real change cannot be accomplished in isolation, social

service providers have taken the importance of collaboration to heart. With support and coleadership from local funders and national partners, a wide range of over 20 organizations formed a cross-sector collaborative called EMPLOY to help build a more sustainable system of supports for the metro area's "opportunity youth," more than 26,000 young people ages 16 to 24 who are neither working nor in school. EMPLOY includes representatives from youth-serving nonprofit organizations, economic and workforce development, city government, post-secondary education, social justice, law and advocacy, and philanthropy. The collaborative has spent the past two years building a robust network of seamless programs, systems and supports to address the obstacles commonly faced by these especially vulnerable young people.

As we aim to build pathways and supports to connect residents to opportunity, we must simultaneously address the barriers that stand in the way to mobility and prosperity. The consent decrees that the Department of Justice reached with the Orleans Parish Sheriff's Office and the city's police department capitalize on years of criminal justice reform efforts that predated the storm, many of which were led by community organizations. An equitable society demands the pursuit of justice at every stage of the justice system, from arrest to trial and in the process of sentencing—and these decrees are a clarion call for change. New Orleans now increasingly recognizes the limitations of detention and imprisonment as a crime control strategy, and the city has an unprecedented mandate to create a criminal justice system that serves the interest of justice by maintaining a critical eye on its outcomes.

And although systems change is inevitable and desired, we must continue to honor and protect the culture of New Orleans that maintained the heartbeat of the city through its darkest days and early recovery. While the social and economic values of the cultural sector are profound, investments in those that produce and preserve the culture are meager. Many community institutions—particularly those led by people of color, neighborhood-based groups like social aid and pleasure clubs and Mardi Gras Indian tribes, as well as musicians and independent artists—struggle to sustain themselves economically. While some philanthropic dollars and modest investments from the public sector benefit this community as a whole, there remains an imbalance between the large, historically white-led institutions and those groups led by people of color. This disparity is not only an economic justice issue but one of social and cultural equity, too.

CONSIDERATIONS

For the first time in decades in New Orleans, there is a unique combination of political will, plans based on good science, civic leadership capacity and substantial, dedicated funding to drive implementation of some of the largest civil works and social innovation projects ever undertaken in the region. Projects called for under the state's Coastal Master Plan and the city's Urban Water Plan will require a wide range of skill sets and provide thousands of jobs, many of which will require technical training and certifications rather than a four-year college degree. Responding to these immediate opportunities, informed by the last ten years, poses the question: How do we harness the power of these investments in water management in a way that builds resiliency and equity across sectors and industries?

Prosperity NOLA, the comprehensive vision for the city's economic future, explicitly includes equity as a growth strategy in recognition of the vital role equity plays in securing the region's long-term health. The plan identifies small businesses and workforce development institutions as fuel for the city's growth across a range of sectors, including Sustainable Industries. Similarly, the City of New Orleans launched The Network for Economic Opportunity to connect institutions across sectors to create more equitable economic and social outcomes in the heart of the city, the Claiborne Corridor. And on the eve of the Katrina anniversary, the city will release a Resilience Strategy, created in partnership with the Rockefeller Foundation's 100 Resilient Cities Initiative. Codified in a belief that the community's resilience can be catalyzed only through a cross-sector approach to community change, the City's strategy will serve as a bridge between the sustainability of the place and the people who live here.

Commitment from the city on these initiatives is an important asset, but our takeaway across the field over the past ten years is that no entity or sector can achieve lasting, equitable community change acting alone. Our road to collaboration today has not been easy. In the past ten years of recovery, resources have been squandered, opportunities lost, voices ignored—and some plans have failed our community's residents. We contend that explicit integration of ideas and action among and between sectors and actors is the linchpin to ensuring that the lessons gleaned from ten years of post-Katrina investment and efforts are not lost. In a process of alignment, introspection and discovery still underway, we offer the following for your consideration:

1. While the city works to grow and diversify its economy across sectors, billions of dollars are committed to investments in environment and infrastructure. Yet there is a critical need for supporting the capacity of communities to engage in the development, execution and monitoring of these public and civic works projects. How do we build a data-driven civic-engagement infrastructure that demands transparency, accountability and improvement—not merely the act of compliance, the absence of corruption or worse, the parroting of residents' voices? As a field, can we identify what authentic civic capacity looks like, and do we have the resources and political will to galvanize our peers and others to invest sustainably? Can New Orleans build a civic-engagement system that demands that the people affected by policies are shaping them?

2. In a city that has been awarded accolades such as the nation's #2 Aspirational City based on economy, demographics and quality of life (Daily Beast); the Fastest-Growing City for Employment, Income, and Population (NerdWallet); and the #1 Brain Magnet in the US (Forbes), our community is also home to cataclysmic rates of child poverty (39%) and black male unemployment or underemployment (52%), as well as an incarceration rate that is more than twice that of the nation as a whole (The Data Center). How can we build systems that balance the need for economic growth and development with the needs of those citizens who cannot capitalize on its growth without deeper investments in structures and supports? What can funders and partners do to not only safeguard equity and justice, but prioritize equity and justice as a core strategy of our grantmaking across sectors? How do we ensure that access to services and supports is not confused with quality? Furthermore, can we demand that completion is not mistaken as competence, and perhaps more importantly, that readiness is supported as a *right* for all?

3. The poverty and inequality of opportunity that has devastated lives across vast swaths of low-income neighborhoods in New Orleans did not begin with Katrina, though the aftermath of the storms and levee failures shined a terrible light on challenges that recovery dollars failed to adequately address. Looking to new investments, how do we ensure that historic patterns of injustice do not persist? Upon the eve of the city's tricentennial, how do we acknowledge and address the legacy of racial inequity embedded in the fabric of our systems? How do we break the cycle, so that all New Orleanians can reap the bounty of the recovery and not just live but thrive?

By tackling these issues tied to the immediate investment opportunities with an intentionality about applying the lessons we have learned, we can be even more deliberate about creating the drumbeat to address the long-term, intertwined challenges threatening not only the Greater New Orleans region but our nation. We invite you to join us to explore the role we can and should play, tangle over these important questions, identify possibilities for collaboration and inform what we hope can be a guiding vision and strategy for our field. We have questions and we believe you have answers. Please join us for the next steps in this journey.