



BAYOU COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

2013 Community Needs Assessment

Bayou Community Foundation

Serving Lafourche Parish, Terrebonne Parish and Grand Isle

Released: April 2013

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www.BayouCF.org

Executive Summary

This Community Needs Assessment was assembled to direct the grantmaking program of the Bayou Community Foundation (BCF), to provide readers with an overview of identified needs of the Bayou Region, and to enhance communication among non-governmental and governmental agencies as they work to improve the lives of local residents. The assessment is comprised of data, analysis and information collected from key civic, community, and nonprofit leaders. Participants were asked to respond to the following questions:

- What are specific, critical needs of residents in your parish/service area?
- Are there data from reports or surveys that confirm these needs?
- How are these needs being met in terms of funding and nonprofit services?
- What are the gaps?

Responses resulted in key funding recommendations, which align with the Foundation's areas of programmatic focus, namely, 1) educational success for children and adults; 2) preservation of our coasts; and, 3) human services, and are as follows:

Educational Success for Children and Adults, including Workforce Development

Key issues identified were a lack of preparation/readiness for kindergarten, educational opportunities for at-risk youth, and a State educational accountability system focused on a four-year college track that leaves many of our young adults with no workforce skills. Recommendations for funding included:

- Early childhood programming to enrich the lives of children from broken homes and living in poverty, particularly capacity-building among Head Start programs,
- Technical assistance and capacity building support for nonprofit childcare centers to improve their Quality Rating, which, in turn, will increase their funding from the State,
- An alternative school for expelled students,
- Policy reform at the State level to promote a dual-track, high-school diploma system to promote workforce development opportunities, and
- Programs promoting the nobility of all career choices throughout education levels and community, along with vernacular change from "trades" to "occupational professions."

Preservation of Our Coasts

Increasingly dangerous and frequent storms have led to the out-migration of families from more vulnerable, coastal communities. A critical need is to elevate homes and make them more resilient to storms. Furthermore, local and national awareness about the critical issues facing our coastal communities is limited, which impacts advocacy for this issue. Recommendations for funding included:

- Educational programs with schools, including their direct involvement in projects aimed at preventing coastal erosion, such as marsh/tree plantings,

- A national awareness campaign around the importance/impacts of coastal preservation, and
- Support and advocacy for funding to elevate homes and provide access to these elevated home for our elderly/handicapped residents.

Human Services

The most critical need identified in the Bayou Region was treatment and counseling services for the mentally ill and substance abusers. Draconian budget cuts at the State level have left many mentally ill citizens without treatment. Substance abusers have slightly more access to care, but it is nonetheless limited and insufficient to meet the demand. At-risk youth are also impacted by limited resources in terms of education, recreation, and institutional care. Further, our elderly need improved access to food and transportation. The Lafourche Parish jail has a capacity of 244 prisoners but averages more than 400, and spends more than \$1 million per year housing prisoners out of parish. Finally, abandoned animals are creating issues for local law enforcement and shelters are overwhelmed and resorting to euthanasia. Recommendations for funding included:

- Facilities for and funding of mental health and substance abuse treatment and counseling,
- Funding for certified mental health counselors,
- Expanded education around substance abuse and mental health issues and prevention education in middle and high schools,
- Elder care, including food and transportation,
- Expanded services for at-risk youth, including institutional care and social services,
- A study to determine the appropriate size of jail needed for Lafourche Parish, and
- Support for spay/neuter programs and animal shelters

Conclusions

The community issues identified by stakeholders – educational success for children and adults, workforce development, coastal preservation education, and health and human services – confirm the initial areas of focus identified by the Bayou Community Foundation. The assessment also provided the opportunity for members of the BCF Board of Directors to deepen their knowledge of community needs, which, in turn, will result in more effective and impactful grantmaking program. Based on these findings, an implementation strategy is being developed by the BCF Board.

Background

In the summer of 2011, a group of philanthropic leaders from Lafourche and Terrebonne Parishes envisioned the creation of a community foundation to serve the Bayou Region. Spring of 2012 saw the formal creation of the Bayou Community Foundation (BCF), a donor advised fund at the Greater New Orleans Foundation (GNOF), seeded with \$70,000 in donations from Charlotte Bollinger, J.J. Buquet, Benny Cenac, Al Danos, Alexis and Berwick Duval, and Phyllis Taylor. GNOF provided \$10,000 and time of a senior staffer.

Founding board members Charlotte Bollinger, J.J. Buquet, Al Danos, and Alexis and Berwick Duval along with Simone Theriot Maloz, Executive Director of Restore or Retreat, and Rob Gorman, Executive Director of Catholic Charities Houma-Thibodaux, participated in a retreat in July 2011, in which they developed a mission and vision statement and goals for the BCF. A target geography comprised of

Lafourche and Terrebonne Parishes and Grand Isle was identified with programming focused on the following areas:

- Educational success for children and adults,
- Preservation of our coasts, and
- Human services

GNOF on behalf of BCF applied for and received a \$500,000 challenge grant from the Gheens Foundation In July 2012 to

- Support community based leadership to improve the quality of life throughout the Bayou Region,
- Leverage partnerships and investments from outside of the region, and
- Build a permanent fund as a means for philanthropists to invest in their community.

In October 2012, bylaws were adopted, officers elected, and a press release announced the establishment of the BCF with an expanded board:

Alexis Duval, Chair	Charlotte Bollinger
James J. Buquet, III, Vice-Chair	Allen Danos, Jr.
Danna E. Schwab, Secretary	C. Berwick Duval, II
Edward R. Bouterie, Treasurer	Felicia Frederick
	Stephen Peltier
	Koti Sangisetty, M.D.

The full complement of the board along with newly hired part-time coordinator, Jennifer Armand, and assistant coordinator, Jonas Dominique, participated in an annual retreat in December 2012, facilitated by Myron Rogers, an organizational development consultant, and Josephine Everly, Senior Development Officer of GNOF. At an earlier board meeting facilitated by Dr. Albert Ruesga, President & CEO of GNOF, the BCF board had explored various approaches to effective grantmaking and determined that key areas of work among the three broad areas of programming (educational success for children and adults, preservation of our coasts, and human services) would have to be identified for the investments of the BCF to be effective and measurable. The purpose of the 2013 retreat was to revisit the mission, vision, and goals and to adopt a clear grantmaking strategy.

The retreat affirmed the mission, vision, and goals with only minor refinements; however, it became clear to the BCF board that while there were competencies among the members in some of the programmatic areas of interest, particularly workforce development and education, there were some knowledge gaps about community needs especially within the human services category. Based on recommendations by Myron Rogers, the board embarked on a community needs assessment to be comprised of data collection and analysis and information gathering from key civic, community, and nonprofit leaders.

Community Needs Assessment Design

This needs assessment¹ was comprised of a review of existing data, and feedback from focus groups and one-on-one conversations with community stakeholders including parish presidents, mayors, university and college presidents, school superintendents, nonprofit leaders, judicial and law enforcement leaders, and employers from key industries in Lafourche and Terrebonne Parishes and the town of Grand Isle. The goal of the needs assessment was to test the programmatic focus areas identified by the Bayou Community Foundation.

Bayou Talks and Focus Groups

In January 16, 2013, “Bayou Talks” was hosted at the home of Charlotte Bollinger with 37 community leaders in attendance representing the aforementioned sectors. Prior to attending the event, participants were asked to consider the following questions:

- What are specific, critical needs of residents in your parish/service area?
- Are there data from reports or surveys that confirm these needs?
- How are these needs being met in terms of funding and nonprofit services?
- What are the gaps?

Board Chair Alexis Duval shared with the group the mission and planned grantmaking of the BCF. Participants were then divided into four groups: Lafourche Parish, Terrebonne Parish, education, and nonprofits, and were asked to respond to the above questions. Participants were deeply engaged and identified key issues and opportunities for the BCF to consider.

Although the groups were divided geographically and by sector, key target areas emerged which confirmed the proposed areas of work identified by the BCF and offered specific areas for philanthropic investment:

Mental Health and Substance Abuse Treatment and Counseling

The most frequently identified community need was treatment and counseling services for the mentally ill and substance abusers, across both parishes and in Grand Isle. Domestic abuse, commonly linked to mental health and substance abuse issues, was also identified as a key issue. State funding is being steadily cut, yet substance abuse, particularly among middle-aged females, continues to grow. Furthermore, mental health patients are left without affordable access to care which is exacerbated by a lack of affordable mental health treatment facilities. The mentally ill, who are not eligible for the options offered through Drug Court, have nowhere to go except jail or back on the street. In addition, funding is not provided to support certified mental health counselors, which are sorely needed to assess and treat the mentally ill. Mental health services to children and their families are also being cut due to reductions in State funding²³. The citizens in Terrebonne and Lafourche parishes are largely unaware of

¹ Coping with Growth: Community Needs Assessment Techniques. Lorna Michael Butler and Robert E. Howell, <http://extension.usu.edu/wrdc/resources/coping/wrep44.htm> and Needs Assessment Strategies, <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/communities/tools/assess/>

² <http://theadvocate.com/home/4861577-125/la-mental-health-program-to>

the significance of substance abuse and mental health issues in the region; increased awareness could promote advocacy for additional funding. Substance abuse awareness education in the schools is also lacking: Project LEAD serves only 5th graders and DARE serves 6th graders, with no organized program beyond the 6th grade. Specific needs were identified as:

- Facilities for and funding of mental health treatment,
- Funding for certified mental health counselors,
- Facilities for and funding of substance abuse counseling,
- Funding for mental health services for children and their families,
- Expanded youth substance abuse prevention education,
- A plan to address prescription drug abuse, particularly among middle-aged women (underground drug black market within this population), and
- A plan to educate all residents about parish's substance abuse and mental health problems and need for more funding/services.

Vulnerable Populations: Children, the Elderly, and At-Risk Youth

Are our children receiving the development, enrichment, and stimulation they need to be prepared for kindergarten? Lack of early childhood development was identified as a critical problem leading to insurmountable development gaps, impacting individuals into adulthood. It is counterintuitive to believe that a community that enjoys the lowest unemployment rates in the nation also experiences some of the deepest poverty – particularly among its children. However, this is the case: Houma-Thibodaux has an overall poverty rate of 15 percent⁴; however, children living in single-parent or grandparent households experience 85 percent and 72 percent poverty in Lafourche and Terrebonne parishes, respectively⁵.

Capacity issues with Head Start programs were identified (there are no early head start programs within a 25-mile radius of either Houma or Thibodaux⁶). As one participant stated, “They just offer babysitting services.” Furthermore, the quality of programming at other non-profit child care programs that meet the licensing standard for the State of Louisiana’s Quality Start Child Care Rating System must be improved. This rating system – from one to five stars – rates the learning environment; an increase in star rating correlates with an increase in the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) daily reimbursement rate. Therefore, building the capacity of nonprofit child care providers will, in turn, increase their financial sustainability. Finally, we learned that Grand Isle was losing its Head Start program, serving 22 students, due to federal budget cuts. This is the only early education program on the island.

An equally vulnerable population – our elderly – also experiences a lack of services and care. This is primarily due to the State’s movement to privatization, which has led to service reduction and families having to do more on their own. At the same time, operational costs for caring for the elderly are increasing. Specific needs for our elderly include food and transportation to receive healthcare/hospice care.

³ http://www.nola.com/politics/index.ssf/2012/07/louisiana_cuts_medicaid_progra.html

⁴ New Orleans Metro Profile, Metropolitan Opportunity Unit, Ford Foundation, November 2012, page 42.

⁵ GNOCDC interactive map

⁶ <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/HeadStartOffices>

At-risk youth also experience limited programming and support: the Lafourche Parish Juvenile Justice Facility accepts a maximum of 15 children of either sex (infancy – 17); the Group Home Program accepts 12 children of either sex (13 – 18); and the Detention Unit has a capacity for 11 residents from ages 10 – 17. There is also a lack of safe, supervised facilities for juvenile recreation. In Grand Isle, the baseball field, having sustained repeated damage from storms, is in deplorable condition and, while a gym is available to provide activities such as midnight basketball, funding is needed for renovations and programmatic support. Finally, there is no alternative school for children who have been expelled from school, leaving them without access to education and development, and at risk of becoming victims or perpetrators of crime. This also creates an economic impact on our community, due to a lack of a trained and employed workforce (see Workforce Development section below). In terms of community awareness, there is a lack of discrimination between “abused” children and “bad” children.

Specific needs were identified as

- Early childhood programming to enrich the lives of children from broken homes and living in poverty, particularly capacity-building among Head Start programs,
- Elder care including food and transportation,
- Expanded services for at risk youth, including institutional care and social services, and
- An alternative school for expelled students.

Workforce Development

As stated above, the Bayou Region enjoys access to jobs which provide family supportive wages, primarily due to the presence of the oil and gas industry. However, there is a dearth of trained workers to fill these well-paying jobs (the average salary in the oil and gas industry = \$76,000⁷). Instead, workers are being imported from other regions and states, leaving our local citizens unemployed and untrained. Participants blamed the lack of a dual-track diploma system in our secondary education system that would enable career pathways as well as college preparatory paradigms. In addition, there are deficiencies in post-secondary two-year, certificate programs; however, jobs requiring only an associate degree will grow by 17 percent over the next 5 years.⁸ Students coming into colleges and universities are better prepared (e.g., TOPS), but graduation rates remain low (29 percent⁹ in six years compared to 53 percent nationally¹⁰). This creates the lack of a career path for our youth who will not achieve a 4-year degree, and has resulted in more of our youth than ever who are neither in school or working: 23 percent of youth ages 16-19 and 56 percent of youth ages 20-24¹¹.

Participants identified that fact that BESE and LABI are promoting an accountability system that is college-oriented as a roadblock to re-introducing a dual-track secondary education system, known as a “career pathway.” Advocacy is needed to inform State decision makers that this dual path would not diminish the quality of current magnet/college preparatory offerings. As one participant stated, “You

⁷ New Orleans Metro Profile, Metropolitan Opportunity Unit, Ford Foundation, November 2012, page 50.

⁸ Ibid, page 49.

⁹ Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, U.S. Department of Education.

¹⁰ http://collegecompletion.chronicle.com/state/#state=la§or=public_four

¹¹ Annie E. Casey Foundation. Youth and Work: Restoring Teen and Young Adult Connections to Opportunity, Policy Report.

have to have strong math skills to be a pipe fitter, but these students are perceived as being less intelligent, when they are not.”

Specific needs were identified as

- Policy reform needed at the State level to promote a dual-track, high-school diploma system
- Convening of a focus group to further explore workforce development needs

Based on the need for a deeper, more informed discussion on this critical issue, BCF hosted a focus group of educational and industry leaders on February 22, 2012. Feedback from the focus group included the following:

- Only 29 percent of local university students are obtaining a bachelor degree after six years.
- Occupational professions represent the majority of jobs in the Bayou Region, and this number will continue to grow. These jobs offer family supportive wages, with salaries from \$70,000 (pipefitter) to \$120,000 (tugboat captain).
- The nobility and economic value of these professions should be promoted to students, parents, and educators. A vernacular change from “trades” to “occupational professions” is strongly recommended.
- Entry-level skills required by local industries are now much higher and continuing to increase. Training is essential.
- The River Parishes are experiencing similar workforce development needs for the petrochemical/refining industry.
- Promotion of occupational professions should begin as early as 3rd/4th grade and continue through high school. Parents must be informed and engaged as well.
- Aptitude tests could be valuable to help students and parents understand and appreciate student skills and professional preferences.
- A dual-enrollment system is critical to encourage and prepare students who will not pursue four-year degree. Such a system should reflect different course-work requirements than the Taylor Opportunities for Scholars Program (TOPS), namely less focus on LEAP and ACT scores. Furthermore, there is an opportunity to advocate for TOPS scholarships to be offered to students electing a community college/certificate educational pathway.

Coastal Preservation

Since the disasters brought about by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005 and the more recent emergencies caused by Hurricanes Gustav and Ike in 2008 and Isaac in 2012, Bayou Region residents have had to make major adjustments in how they react to these inevitable and increasingly dangerous storms. Disasters of this magnitude have critical repercussions for the most vulnerable people in our communities—low income and working families, children and the elderly, and our growing Latino and Vietnamese populations, for whom language barriers exist. We are already seeing out-migration from more vulnerable, coastal communities. A critical need is to elevate homes: currently, there are 400 families on the waiting list for home elevation in coastal areas, but current federal funding will not serve them all. And, especially for our elderly residents, access to those elevated home through ramps and mechanical lifts will be necessary. Furthermore, local and national awareness about the critical issues facing our coastal communities is limited. Increased awareness and education is needed before effective advocacy for these communities can occur.

Specific needs are

- Educational programs with schools including their direct involvement in projects aimed at preventing coastal erosion, such as marsh/tree plantings,
- An national awareness campaign around the importance/impacts of coastal preservation, and
- Support and advocacy for funding to elevate homes.

Rural Access to Healthcare

Patients in rural communities face greater rates of diabetes, heart problems, and cancer but receive lower quality healthcare.¹² This is particularly true on the island town of Grand Isle. Grand Isle's new multiplex includes examination rooms and medical clinic facility; however, *no medical care is currently provided* due to lack of physicians/nurse practitioner to staff the facility. The town would like to see funding available to provide a physician/nurse practitioner at the clinic once a week. In addition, a professional to provide counseling services is needed. An increasing number of Grand Isle residents involved in the oil spill cleanup are becoming ill or exhibiting symptoms not previously experienced. Federal government estimates indicate that up to \$500,000 may be needed, but town leadership estimates a smaller amount (\$150,000) could help set up an initial program to evaluate workers and determine how much future medical care may be needed. A physician/nurse practitioner based at the multiplex on a weekly basis could also help fill this need. Currently, the Town of Grand Isle funds a bus to transport residents requiring regular medical care to appointments, dialysis and chemotherapy in Thibodaux, Houma, and Jefferson Parish. Funding to continue and/or expand this medical transportation service is critical.

Specific needs are

- A physician/nurse practitioner to provide primary care,
- A mental health/substance abuse counselor, and
- Funding to transport patients requiring secondary (specialized) and tertiary (in patient) care

Lafourche Parish Jail

The current jail, which was built in 1968 and expanded in 1977, has had crowding issues since 1995 and maintenance woes since 1992. The Lafourche Parish Council began planning the construction of a replacement jail March 1, 2005. The Lafourche Parish Detention Center has a capacity of 244 prisoners and typically averages more than 400, according to the Lafourche Parish Sheriff's Office. Excess prisoners are held in other parishes' facilities. Lafourche spent more than \$1 million housing out-of-parish prisoners in 2010, according to the parish finance director. A committee tasked with making recommendations on a new jail in 2009, concluded that the parish would need a 900-bed facility by 2030 to keep up with a rising population. However, the committee has been urged to commission an updated population study which incorporates national declines in jail population and crime and alternative incarceration methods, which the previous study did not consider. One concern is that the inmate population may be "an artificially low number"¹³ attributable to the state of the current jail. For instance, drug offenders and non-violent criminals are being released to leave beds open for more dangerous offenders.

¹² *Modernizing Rural Health Care: Coverage, Quality, and Innovation*, Working paper 6, UnitedHealth Group, 2011.

¹³ http://www.tri-parishtimes.com/news/article_e88f93b2-17c3-11e2-88f0-001a4bcf887a.html

Specific needs are

- Support for a study to determine the size of jail needed

Animal Welfare

A law-enforcement participant indicated that the most frequent call or complaint his department handles is animal- or pet-related. There is a dire need for assistance with population control. These animals are being euthanized at a high rate at local animal shelters.

Specific needs are

- Support for spay/neuter programs and animal shelters

Conclusions

Located in the southern reaches of Louisiana, the area served by the Bayou Community Foundation is a defining feature of this unique part of America. The Bayou Region is home to diverse cultures – French Canadians, Spanish, German, African, and Irish as well as Native Americans – and to an abundance of wildlife and other natural resources. Yet the Bayou Region is disappearing at an alarming rate: a glance at a map of the area reveals land being consumed by the Gulf at the rate of an acre every 33 minutes. And most do not understand the importance of this habitat for species and resources: cities like New Orleans are under an increasing threat from hurricanes as a result of coastal erosion, as storms and hurricanes can reach further inland, creating the devastating flooding experienced during Hurricanes Katrina and Isaac.

As we have learned through this community needs assessment, in the Bayou Region of Louisiana, contradictions abound. Our region enjoys some of the lowest unemployment rates in the nation, yet is home to significant numbers of children living in poverty, high-school drop-outs, and unemployed youth. Jobs offering family supportive wages are abundant, yet jobs are being outsourced, and a proliferation of hotels supplants workforce housing, hindering local economic development which could be realized through a stabilized tax base of local workers. State educational policies and scholarship opportunities drive students to achieve a four-year degree, yet only 29 percent of students attain this goal. However, many of the issues these communities face also mirror those of communities across our State: marginalized, underserved, and vulnerable populations suffering from draconian cuts in State funding providing key services for the young, the elderly, the mentally ill, and the abused.

Despite these contradictions and challenges, key opportunities, such as RESTORE Act funding for Louisiana's Coastal Master Plan, hold great promise for preserving the Bayou Region and its culture. It is within this context that the Bayou Community Foundation realizes its mission: to strengthen our local capacity to create a compassionate and sustainable coastal community for generations to come. The Foundation aims to achieve this mission through strategic investments in educational success for children and adults; protection and preservation of our coasts, and human services. Beyond grantmaking, the Foundation will leverage partnerships and investments and serve as a permanent fund for community investment by local philanthropists. The Bayou Community Foundation's sincere hope is

that the efforts made as a result of this report will continue to improve the quality of life in the Bayou Region for years to come.

Prepared by Josephine Everly, Senior Development Officer, Greater New Orleans Foundation