



**Unitarian Universalist Service Committee**

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To whom it may concern:

The Unitarian Universalist Association and the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee formed the Gulf Coast Relief Fund to respond to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. In November 2005, we participated in a meeting of several organizations doing community work in New Orleans. They all emphasized the difficulty of working in New Orleans, the complexities of working with evacuees and returnees, the losses their own organizations had suffered, and the overall lack of funding for community organization in the wake of the hurricanes.

In December 2005, The Gulf Coast Relief Fund supported a team that spent several weeks in New Orleans mapping community organizations' work there. The team spoke with organizations about the work they were doing, the challenges they faced, and their needs for capacity building.

The organizational mapping done by the team shows there is very little funding going into these organizations. We found the team's work very useful for our own programmatic funding framework in New Orleans. By mid-January, we decided to continue to support a two-person team, Jainey Bavishi and Rachel Wilch, for several months.

The product of our team's research has been compiled in a series of three reports. The first two summarize the status of New Orleans and the current needs of community organizers. This third and final report in the series, entitled, "Building Relationships to Rebuild New Orleans" is based on follow-up interviews with representatives from organizations with which UUA-UUSC has already formed funding partnerships. These interviews delve into the specific ways in which foundations and national organizations are already contributing to New Orleans, and ways in which this support might be more effectively directed.

PDF files of all three reports are available for download on the UUSC website, [www.uusc.org](http://www.uusc.org), under *Katrina Relief* and on the Unitarian Universalist Association website, [www.uua.org](http://www.uua.org), under Gulf Coast Relief Fund. We hope you will find this information useful in your work; please feel free to pass these resources along to others.

Sincerely,

Martha Thompson  
Program Manager for Rights in Humanitarian Crises

*New Orleans' Post-Katrina Community Organizing  
Landscape:*

## **Building Relationships to Rebuild New Orleans**

Part Three in a Three Part Series\*

*Prepared for the UUA-UUSC and  
the Funding Community*

By Jainey Bavishi and Rachel Wilch

June, 2006

\*This report is the final of a three part series entitled, "New Orleans' Post-Katrina Organizing Landscape." Research for this series has been funded by the Unitarian Universalist Association-Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUA-UUSC). The first two reports of this series, "Current Efforts, Unmet Needs," serving as a general overview of the types of groups involved in organizing and community initiatives in New Orleans and presenting the basic categories of needs of those organizations, and "From Action to Policy," exploring the relationship between community-based action and policy, can be found on the websites of the UUA ([www.uua.org](http://www.uua.org)) and UUSC ([www.uusc.org](http://www.uusc.org)). The UUA-UUSC encourages the wide distribution of these reports to all those interested.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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## INTRODUCTION

“So, how is it going down there?”

More than nine months have passed since New Orleans’ levee system failed, inundating 80% of the city with Hurricane Katrina’s flood waters. Nine months is a long time to wait for phone service to be restored to your undamaged home, a long time to live in an out-of-town motel, waiting to return to a home that did see flood water. Nine months is *not* such a long time if you’re a bankrupt city administration, trying to rebuild a municipal infrastructure from the bottom up, or if you’re a construction firm contracted to design and build the kind of levee that will save lives, rather than wash them away.

Depending on who you ask, and where you go, “So, how is it going down there?” has as many answers as there are people in New Orleans (and Houston, Baton Rouge, Atlanta...) To understand New Orleans and its current needs, one cannot dismiss the diversity of perspectives as mere confusion, but rather one must embrace it as representative of the piecemeal, often lopsided process that is taking place, a process where a step forward in one area, can mean one or even three steps backwards someplace else.

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Walking the streets of the French Quarter, it is easy to forget that a hurricane washed through New Orleans at all. The sidewalks are still choked with sunburned tourists, the carriage drivers still water their mules in front of Jackson Square, and the ubiquitous daiquiri stands still vend daiquiris, margaritas, and the blood-red drinks known as hurricanes. Walking behind a crowd of visitors on Esplanade Avenue one afternoon, we overheard a wife remark to her husband, “I don’t know what everybody’s complaining about. New Orleans looks better than ever to me.”

Citywide, some visible progress *has* been made in the form of towed cars, restored traffic lights, and regular mail delivery, but if one spends much time anywhere but the French Quarter, it is easy to see what everybody’s complaining about. Insects breed in standing water leftover from the flood. Soggy houses continue moldering in the sun. Potholes the size of VW bugs checker

thoroughfares, while blocks that were high and dry during the flood are now threatened by broken water mains and debris clogged sewers. With paradoxes in plain sight all over the city, it is hard to make a single statement that summarizes the *state* of New Orleans.

As the city haphazardly dedicates its eviscerated municipal agencies to the tasks of rebuilding, there are simply not enough resources to go around. When recovery progresses, everyday maintenance falls by the wayside and vice versa. The race, class and geographic boundaries along which services were unevenly distributed prior to the storm become ever more apparent. The sight of city cleanup crews trimming grass and picking up litter along the abandoned St. Charles streetcar tracks contrasts absurdly with the heaps of uncollected household trash in the repopulated Seventh Ward and with the un-passable graveyard of cars now occupying the Claiborne Avenue neutral ground.

Into this social and physical geography of paradoxes, community organizers seek to create parity. Despite personal and professional losses, displacement and trauma, people doing community work continue to wake up everyday to champion their neighbors, most who are still struggling to come back home. It is through often tenuous, often new relationships with funders that this work is possible. And it is through funders' and organizers' willingness to understand each other's situations and to meet each other half way that this support will be most effectively marshaled.

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This report, a compilation of interviews with representatives of seven grassroots and community-based organizations funded by the Unitarian Universalist Association- Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUA-UUSC), is intended to contribute to an ongoing conversation between organizers and funders about how to effectively work together in partnership. Each interviewee was asked the same set of six questions relating to foundations and the various national organizations working to provide resources and support to local players in the rebuilding process, and then given time to provide additional comments; the questions were:

- What resources could national foundations provide, in addition to grant money, to make the money easier and more efficient to spend?
- What role have you seen national organizations and foundations taking so far? What roles could or should they be playing?
- How could national foundations most effectively encourage collaboration?
- What is your ideal funder – grantee relationship?
- What is your organization’s timeline? What will you be focusing on in the next three months? Six months? One year? Five years?
- What would success look like? How would you measure it?

The small group of organizers interviewed for this report certainly does not represent the full spectrum of work that is being done at the grassroots level in New Orleans; however, the diversity of their responses is a testament to the larger range of perspectives on these issues. Short biographies of those interviewed and profiles of the organizations they represent can be found in the appendix of this report.

## **INTERVIEWS**

### **Additional Resources**

In each of our seven interviews with UUA-UUSC partner organizations, we started by asking, “What other resources could foundations offer, in addition to funding, to make a grant easier or more efficient to spend?” Shana Sassoon, of New Orleans Network and Neighborhood Housing Services of New Orleans, Inc. (NHS) detected, in the heart of this question, the impatience on the part of funders about why organizers have failed to spend quickly the money that they had delivered quickly. “People aren’t using it, but it doesn’t mean that they won’t use it. It just means that it’s slower,” Shana explained. “...I feel like there’s a certain amount of angst over that from the funding community, which I can understand. But at the same time, you know, we’re nine months out from the storm.” From the funding community, Shana asked foremost for patience, trust and a set of expectations adjusted for this unprecedented situation. This request was echoed by other organizers who almost across the board asked for an individuated approach that took into account the unique state and capacity of each organization and the very real constraints to speeding progress.

Beyond this, organizers' ideas for non-financial forms of support varied. Jay Arena of C3/Hands Off Iberville said that his group had had no trouble spending the money granted them, whereas Cyndi Nguyen of the Vietnamese Initiative in Economic Training (VIET) noted that funding for supplies was difficult to spend in part because local stores lacked the products her organization needs. She asked foundations to donate the physical supplies (computers, generators, construction equipment), rather than the money to purchase them. Similarly, Jackie Jones of the Jeremiah Group discussed the difficulties of managing money once it has been granted. She requested that the occasional services of a bookkeeper/funds manager be donated along with funding. Shana added that networking help was always useful, and went on to acknowledge the fleeting nature of funding in New Orleans and the need for relationship building and for strategic planning sessions to ensure fiscal sustainability, even after philanthropic attention shifts elsewhere.

With an eye to New Orleanians' right to return, Khalil Shahyd of the People's Hurricane Relief Fund (PHRF) asked for technical training for organizers and residents both back home and in the diaspora, to enable them to participate in the planning and zoning discussions taking place. Lauren Anderson, also of NHS, and Shana Sassoon suggested centralized clearinghouses located both in New Orleans to manage the flood of donated goods and labor, and located in evacuee hubs to help connect displaced New Orleanians to jobs, training, and housing back home. Steve Bradberry of ACORN stated his organization's need—despite the constant flow of university students and church groups—for interns and organizers *of color*, and also for donations of skilled workers and crew leaders to expand the organization's existing house-gutting program.

Finally, a number of organizers discussed the challenges of self-care in this post-Katrina landscape. Lauren Anderson noted the lack of mental health care available in the city, and Shana agreed with her about the near inevitability of mental collapse for so many of the critical folks in New Orleans. In addition to bringing counseling services to the city, Lauren and Shana echoed an idea we first heard from Steve Bradberry, suggesting that foundations might organize retreats for people doing community work in New Orleans. These retreats would be both an opportunity for rest and relaxation, and a chance for more focused interaction between organizers who typically only encounter one another in harried professional contexts.

We found as many different ideas for non-funding support, as there were organizations. While organizers did not speak with a unified voice as to any specifics that might guide funding decisions, the diversity of responses does speak to the need for an individualized approach. Relationship building, and the cultivation of what Shana Sassoon referred to as “fewer, but deeper relationships” would seem to be key to providing funding and the ancillary support needed to spend it.

### **Roles Taken By Foundations and National Organizations**

Like the question about additional resources, when asked, “What role do you see national organizations taking so far? What could/should they be doing?” organizers responded with a variety of answers. Some organizers discussed the process by which foundations and national organizations were involving themselves with local players and local issues in New Orleans, while others discussed particular programming or initiatives that could be undertaken at a national level.

From the beginning of relationships between foundations and local organizations, organizers are often asked not only to guide funders through their own projects or programs, but to function as event planners, taxi drivers, tour guides to the city's attractions and destruction, entertainment directors and educators about community histories and relationships, “...in another city that would be called consulting,” Shana Sassoon of NHS and New Orleans Network pointed out. “And in another context it would be understood that that shouldn’t be for free.” Her challenge to foundations: “Pay for people’s time! You can figure out a way to write that into your budget, and you can figure out a way to justify it...You don’t even have to pay people personally. You could just make donations [to their organizations].” Lauren Anderson of NHS added “but these are very different circumstances right now. It's hard. I don't say no to it [requests for destruction tours, etc.]. ...it's really important for people from the outside to bear witness to what's happening here. But it's a tremendous amount of our time.”

Shana went on to note that foundations and national organizations have also tended to take over work that could be done by local players who are more familiar with the social and political

landscape in New Orleans. Jackie Jones of the Jeremiah Group elaborated on this point, describing the awkwardness generated by national players foisting collaborations upon New Orleans organizations, without any real knowledge of the personal and professional politics, and the established organizational processes unique to every group working on the ground. On the other hand, however, both Shana Sassoon and Jay Arena of C3/Hands Off Iberville saw connecting organizations to potential partners, collaborators and allies as a central role for national organizations and foundations, through clear and transparent expectations are a prerequisite to cultivating such cooperation. Finally, Steve Bradberry of ACORN worried about the current *lack* of involvement on the part of national political movements.

“The progressive community has been *lackluster*,” Steve said. “Where has been the outcry about voting rights nationally? You know everybody knows about it, right? But how many people are picking up the telephone and letting their congressmen and senators know that they want money to send to New Orleans to get it back on track instead of, you know, shooting out to Iraq?...In terms of this whole national community, people say, ‘Oh, people in New Orleans aren’t mad enough.’ That’s a load of crap! They just aren’t getting support from other places.”

In terms of steps national organizations and foundations could take to make themselves more useful, organizers again offered a variety of opinions. Cyndi Nguyen of VIET echoed Shana Sassoon, offering that organizers are ordinary people who are just trying to do their jobs, but who generally don’t have the time to put on dog and pony shows for funders. Most organizations are still in recovery mode and so are limited in staff and capacity. As such, Cyndi noted what a breath of fresh air it was to have funders seek out grantees, instead of the other way around. She emphasized the importance of foundations looking in unexpected places, and isolated communities for areas of need, rather than the most familiar or high profile non-profits. Cyndi also challenged foundations to ‘lose the suit’ and meet organizers on their own turf, in their own communities and offices, at Sunday church services and nighttime meetings, in plain old jeans and t-shirts rather than their usual corporate attire.

Lauren Anderson and Shana Sassoon, speaking for NHS, took a different spin on foundations’ corporate approach. They said that foundations and national organizations seeking to provide

New Orleans oriented support or events should work to model their convenings after corporate style events (if not their dress code). Rather than packing countless workshops and panel discussions into cramped schedules, the folks who call these convenings should focus on their potential as networking events, holding them in interesting locations and leaving plenty of unstructured time for making connections. Khalil Shahyd of PHRF elaborated on the content piece of trainings, saying that organizers would benefit most from capacity building events.

### **Collaboration**

Collaboration is a buzzword in philanthropic circles, but bringing about a genuine collaborative process is always easier said than done. We posed the question, “How could national organizations most effectively encourage collaboration?” One of the main frustrations organizers express when discussing the funding process is the sense that organizations are willy-nilly pushed into collaborations that do not make sense. Although funders certainly have the best of intentions, these forced partnerships can do more harm than good in New Orleans’ tenuous and politically charged organizing landscape.

Jackie Jones of the Jeremiah Group speaks to the challenges of collaboration mandated by funding, rather than organically grown out of mutual interest. “Some of us come to the table with different missions, different principles, different ways of approaching strategies, and you know, I don’t think that organizations are going to fold their work into somebody else’s work, be it the right thing to do or [not],” she observes. “What we were being asked to do...just wasn’t that practical from the perspective of what we *have* to do and how we operate.” In addition to style, organizations differ in terms of scope – for example, groups like IAF organize institutions, whereas ACORN works with individuals, some groups work in one or a few neighborhoods while others operate city-wide, etc.

Lauren Anderson of NHS observed that much of the collaboration orchestrated by funders centers around pieces of work, and Shana Sassoon of NHS and New Orleans Network gave a window into what is actually necessary to make such a collaboration successful. “You’re talking about serious relationship building that would have to happen, and clarification of roles. And some of that has been successful, but for the most part not.” Many of these relationships are

possible in the long term, but are particularly challenging in the short term given the urgency of the current situation.

Khalil Shahyd felt that past struggles with collaboration within the organizing community, and especially within PHRF recently, pointed to the ultimate impossibility of collaboration. Jackie, Lauren and Shana however, all agreed that policy and advocacy might be fruitful areas in which to foster collaboration. Steve Bradberry of ACORN saw potential in identifying pre-existing organizational relationships that might be supported, and Jay Arena of C3/Hands Off Iberville framed his discussion of collaboration not within a local context, but within a larger context of national movement building.

In any case, Cyndi Nguyen of VIET provides a useful caveat to any work on collaboration. She draws a distinction between authentic and inauthentic partnerships, remarking, “Having bodies (around the table) is one thing, but having bodies that has an interest in doing and carrying out into action is another thing. So, you know, I know that when they do a collaboration, they just send out a mass of emails to anyone that has an interest, but before we actually do a collaboration, we need to investigate in who we’re inviting [sic]”.

Jackie Jones expands on Cyndi’s point, noting that funders’ demands for collaboration “[put] organizers in awkward positions, because you don’t want to just outright say, ‘I’m not going to do it, I can’t do it, I don’t want to do it,’ because, I mean, you’re looking for the funding, so you try to have an intelligent informed conversation when it’s put on the table, but you’re still walking a very, very tight rope...it’s like you dangle this carrot in front of organizations, (though) I don’t think it’s your intention.”

### **Ideal Funder-Grantee Relationship**

We asked organizers to describe their ideal funder-grantee relationship. What organizers envisioned ranged from a relationship that Jay Arena of C3/Hands Off Iberville described in which *ideally* the funder provides the money with no strings attached, providing the organization with the most flexibility and the least intervention possible, to VIET co-founder, Cyndi Nguyen’s idea of a partnership characterized by ongoing monitoring, face to face interactions,

and professional evaluations. The level of institutionalization of the organization and history of applying for grants are factors that may determine where organizations lie on this spectrum; for a few of the organizers we talked to, the opportunities to interact with funders in the past few months are the first times they've worked with national grantmakers.

In general, local organizers expressed a desire to have a relationship with a funder that allowed space for setting realistic expectation and honest dialogue about progress. Jackie Jones of the Jeremiah Group noted, "A lot of what we're doing is so out of the norm of what you would normally do." For this reason, she hopes for opportunities to address challenges with funders honestly to the extent that she can change course midway through a project if she sees that something is not working, without worrying about the funder questioning her preparedness to carry out the project or risk losing opportunities for future grants. This kind of relationship contrasts a situation in which a foundation sets blanket funding criteria for all grantees, not taking into account the differences in capacity and scale between organizations. Steve Bradberry of ACORN stated that his ideal relationships are with funders who "work with organizations where they are and the expectations are based upon where they are."

Shana Sassoon of NHS and New Orleans Network added that an ideal funder-grantee relationship is "a true partnership that accomplishes something." "If there's a partnership that doesn't accomplish any work," she explained, "it's not a good relationship to us because it just uses our time." Cyndi Nguyen echoed the notion of partnership; for her, partnership entails funders looking through her books to make sure there are no mistakes, participating in her programs to provide professional evaluations, and sitting down to discuss reports face to face. This type of relationship provides Cyndi with reassurance that funding will continue.

The continuation of funding is especially important with the scope of work still left to be done and the constantly changing needs. Shana Sassoon remarked, "Because this is a marathon, this place isn't changing any time soon." Lauren Anderson of NHS stated, "The support we've gotten for community work has been incredible," but she worries if that money will still be available a year from now. Both Jackie Jones and Jay Arena discussed the possibility of self-generating funds for the longer term so that their organizations are not solely dependent on grant

money. In terms of keeping grantmakers informed about changing needs, Cyndi Nguyen said that having representatives of national foundations on the ground is useful. She also suggested the idea of a list serve through which local organizations could keep the funding community updated.

### **Organizational Timeline**

When asked what their organizations' timeline looked like in the next three months, six months, one year and five years, some organizers mentioned programmatic goals for the next three to six months, but it was difficult for them to look beyond that time. "It's hard to think that far ahead," Lauren Anderson told us when we asked about her organization's goals a year from now. "I just pray that I'm still alive." One reason that organizers have trouble thinking ahead is that they worry if funding will still be available a year from now.

Jay Arena of C3/Hands Off Iberville talked about housing being a major concern in the next three to six months as people come home. He expects that his group's activities will intensify as evacuees "are being pushed out of the diaspora but at the same time, they don't have a welcome mat in New Orleans." He made the point, "In some ways the government is setting the timeline." Cyndi Nguyen of VIET shared the sentiment. Her organization will be working on summer programs for children as more families start coming home and preparing families for hurricane season by educating children, the only fluent English speakers in many of the families in her community, about what to do if another hurricane were to hit the area. But, as her community is adjacent to a recently opened landfill in New Orleans East, Cyndi is not sure if people will be coming home to stay this summer or picking up and leaving again. She said, "I don't know what's going to happen, but I know that the community is doing everything we could [sic] to stop the landfill but I don't know that that's enough. I guess that six months is really hard to tell because we have so many challenges within our next three months...The only thing now is that we need the government to do their part."

Lauren Anderson of NHS, who plans to have two community centers open, community festivals to celebrate their launches and work started in a third neighborhood in the next three to six months also made the point, "Nobody can exhale until after this storm season's over." Steve

Bradberry of ACORN also said that his organization will continue to work to bring people home “unless the city just washed away and we couldn’t come back.” He also mentioned the continued need for support for organizing around policy to enable residents to speak on issues as well as bricks and mortar.

Some interviewees expressed the need for strategic planning and evaluation. Jackie Jones stated that the Jeremiah Group (a local IAF chapter) is planning on bringing in a regional director of the national IAF network to help put a timeline together. Shana Sassoon who will be focusing on fundraising, outreach, a full-scale launch and working on an anniversary report with the Gulf Coast Reconstruction Watch in the next three months, said in looking ahead to the next six months, the New Orleans Network will be in an evaluative stage to determine whether or not there is a continued need for their work. Khalil Shahyd also discussed a need for PHRF to engage in a process to determine their purpose and plans.

### **Success**

We asked organizers, “What would success look like? How would you measure it?” Our interviewees’ definitions of success ranged from achieving goals related to organizational development to programmatic accomplishments to bringing evacuees back home. Indicators of progress are dependent on the goals themselves.

For Jackie Jones, “internal” success for the Jeremiah Group would include having twenty-five primary leaders, people who would help the organization build relationships, fundraise and also address issues identified by members of the organization, and building a broad, diverse membership base. Shana Sassoon, explained that capacity building the staff of Neighborhood Housing Services is also important so that it can in turn serve as capacity builders for the neighborhoods it serves. Speaking for New Orleans Network, Shana hopes that by the end of the year, the organization increases its staff so that the existing staff members are not so overstretched. Similarly, Cyndi Nguyen’s definition of success for VIET, also related to organizational development, has to do with increasing space rather than capacity. Frustrated by her lack of flexibility to expand programs due to space constraints, she would like to build a community center that could serve as office space, programming space and an evacuation site for

the residents of her community. Many of the interviewees' organizational development goals are necessary for the success of their programs.

More directly related to programming, Shana Sassoon, in talking about the Neighborhood Housing Services' community centers, stated, "I think the centers themselves also being utilized in a dynamic way would look like success to me...used by different people for different purposes." For New Orleans Network, programmatic success would be measured by end of the year indicators like increased usership of the online calendar, doubling the email announcements list, and expanding their online database of community organizations. Jackie Jones's "external" measure of success involves "political recognition" of her organization based on its accomplishments and victories.

As Jackie alluded, success in this situation means more than the organizational development and programmatic goals that are normally used as indicators of progress and achievement. As Lauren Anderson of NHS explained, "For this moment in history, there is more that brings this city together than divides it because we all have the same common enemy. It seems like such an opportunity to capitalize on that, to build bridges across groups and neighborhoods...We've got so much potential to thrive." Khalil Shahyd of PHRF echoed her comment, saying that success, first and foremost, would involve "recouping as much of our population as absolutely possible, as quickly as possible" and then secondly building "a different type of formalized, strong neighborhood structures." Steve Bradberry of ACORN was also on the same page, stating, "Success looks like 200,000 people back in the city." Other things such as living wage, education and healthcare "would occur along with the organizing to get those people home." ACORN, like other organizations in the city, is working in an unfamiliar situation of rebuilding and recovery, but from a familiar angle. The scope and urgency of the work is of course magnified.

Jay Arena of C3/Hands Off Iberville believes that the potential of this situation goes beyond an opportunity for change in New Orleans; he sees an opportunity for a national movement. Although his coalition's immediate goal is the reopening of public housing in New Orleans, he

stated, “What we want is a movement, a social movement, emerging out of this - a renewed struggle for racial struggle, for racial and economic justice in the U.S.”

## CONCLUSION

Over our months in New Orleans, the organizers we encountered were exceedingly generous with their time and connections. They first opened their meetings to us, and eventually, often their homes and personal lives. We shared meals and celebrated birthdays with organizers, we made sojourns to super markets and toured their half-finished homes. Through these interactions, we built trust, care and genuine admiration for these folks. Because of these relationships, organizers revealed to us more honest, candid perspectives about funder/grantee relations than ever before. More than a few of our friends shook their heads as we concluded their interviews for this report, saying that after their candor they imagined they’d never get funding again. We encourage funders and national organizations to understand this report not as an invective, but rather a testament to the value of deep relationships, to organizers’ genuine desire to succeed in New Orleans, and to their recognition of the centrality of funding relationships to achieve this success.

Like the state of the city itself, apparent paradoxes abound in organizers’ descriptions of where they’re at and what they need. The bustling French Quarter’s proximity to depopulated sections of the Treme neighborhood parallels Cyndi Nguyen’s desire for more aggressive funds management, contrasted with Jay Arena’s wish for more lax administration of funds. These stories of rebuilding are confusing, but all true in some way. There is no single vision of New Orleans, no single answer to *how* we should rebuild, and *what* we are rebuilding. As such, this report does not provide a single set of directives for how and what to support in New Orleans, but rather draws a loose set of guidelines from the diverse observations and suggestions from the organizing community. More in-depth descriptions of these guidelines follow, but in short they can be organized into three basic principles: foundations and national organizations should work to 1) build fewer but deeper relationships, 2) meet community organizers in their own communities, and 3) listen to the needs and objectives of organizers, rather than telling them how and where to prioritize and allocate resources.

**Building fewer but deeper relationships, meeting community organizers in their own communities, and listening instead of telling:**

The diversity of perspectives present in even this small sampling, presents a challenge to funders' established protocols around giving. This apparent confusion, however, should not deter resourcing of the Gulf Coast but should rather direct funders and national organizations towards a more individualized approach to supporting local organizations. National players should seek to cultivate what Shana Sassoon described as "fewer, but deeper relationships" with grantees. They should feel free to surrender some of the formality, 'losing the suit' as Cyndi Nguyen put it, and meeting organizers on their own turf rather than confining interactions to conference calls and business lunches. Building sincere relationships with organizers and their communities is how, despite shifting media and public attention, national players will remain aware of the needs, and continue to support New Orleans through this marathon.

On most days, in most communities in New Orleans, truly successful organizing doesn't take place in formal meetings, but on peoples' front porches, at coffee shops, corner stores, and church pews. Rather than taking organizers away from their work to meet in hotel conference rooms, funders and national organizations should make time to see what they do and how they do it. For much more than touristic appeal, visitors should try not to miss the chance to see the local brass band play, or to attend a neighborhood block party.

Ultimately, it is always true that organizers know more about their communities and their needs than funders and national organizations do. National partners must practice listening and asking, rather than telling and demanding. Although the process of working *with* organizers to develop reasonable evaluative standards and spending guidelines takes longer than simply applying rote instructions, the likelihood of success and mutual satisfaction on the part of funder and grantee is much greater.

Finally, Cyndi Nguyen aptly asserted that organizers are ordinary people. "We don't bite, we really don't," she laughed. When in doubt, *ask* the people organizing in their communities how to support them and how to structure a relationship such that the ultimate goals of both the funder and the organizer can be reached most effectively and efficiently.

## APPENDIX

### I. INTERVIEWEES' BIOS

**Lauren Anderson** has served as the Executive Director of Neighborhood Housing Services of New Orleans, Inc. since 1993. Having earned her law degree from Rutgers University, Lauren has extensive experience in public interest law and community and economic development. She has also served as an Adjunct Professor at the College of Urban and Public Affairs at the University of New Orleans, where she taught classes on Housing and Community Development and Collaborations, Partnerships and Coalition Building.

**Jay Arena** is an active member of the anti-war, pro-public housing group C3/Hands Off Iberville and also a long time community and labor activist in New Orleans. He is now completing his dissertation in sociology from Tulane University on the privatization of the St. Thomas public housing development.

**Steve Bradberry** currently serves as the Head Organizer of the New Orleans chapter of the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN). His work has centered on organizing public interest campaigns to actively involve low-income families in addressing the social problems they face everyday. He has led campaigns promoting a living wage, preventing predatory lending and lead poisoning in children, and increasing voter participation. In the aftermath of Katrina, Steve has become a voice for the displaced poor of New Orleans, collaborating with Community Labor United and Urbanheart, organizing the ACORN Katrina Survivors Association, uniting survivors to have a real say in how their communities are rebuilt. He has been working to assure New Orleans poor have a right to return to their city, the means to take care of themselves, access to housing and credit, and that their concerns are treated with fairness and dignity in the rebuilding process. His social change objective is to have full participation of the poor in government decisions impacting their lives and their communities.

**Jacqueline Jones** is the lead organizer of the Jeremiah Group, the local affiliate of the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF). She is a native of Louisiana, having spent her entire life in Jefferson Parish. She has studied at both Xavier and Southern Universities. By profession, Jackie is an educator. She spent much of her career working in the Jefferson Parish school system. Jackie has worked with the IAF since 1994, first as a volunteer leader, then as organizer and now as lead organizer for the Jeremiah Group. She is a member of the Shiloh Missionary Baptist Church, one of the founding churches of the Jeremiah Group. Jackie has spent her career addressing social justice issues from the education field and from the religious community, as an insider of the community to which she has ties.

**Cyndi Nguyen**, co-founder and director of the Vietnamese Initiative in Economic Training, the first Vietnamese nonprofit organization in Louisiana, received her Bachelor in Social Work in 1993 from Loras College in Dubuque, Iowa. In 2002, she received her Masters in Management from the University of Phoenix in New Orleans. She has been honored by the Louisiana Women in Philanthropy from the Louisiana Association in Nonprofit Management (LANO) and has received the Making Things Brighter Award from Entergy. Cyndi also serves as the President for the Einstein Charter School's Board of Directors and Vice President for the Vietnamese American Community. She is married to Sean Truong Nguyen and they have three children, Serina, Alexis and Shawna.

**Shana Sassoon** is a community organizer and New Orleans Network founder. Originally from India, she grew up in Houston. She moved to New Orleans in 2001 and founded the League of Pissed Off Voters, producing community endorsed voter guides and working to empower historically non-voting young people. Her work locally with the League and the anti-war movement got her involved with the funding and development of the League of Young Voters Education Fund nationally. She served as the National Board Chairperson for almost a year, stepping down in September to focus her work on post-flood New Orleans. Previously a school teacher in the Latino community in Houston, Shana's passion is for gathering and disseminating tools that educate and empower people to advocate for their communities. She is co-director of New Orleans Network, which helps residents rebuild their lives and communities by gathering and disseminating reliable information about New Orleans-led projects, organizations, community groups, and coalitions working for our common aid and advocacy. NON works to amplify and strengthen these efforts by building relationships between communities and organizations. Currently, through New Orleans Network's partnership with Neighborhood Housing Services, Shana has been working with residents in the 7<sup>th</sup> Ward and Freret St. Neighborhoods in New Orleans to create neighborhood centers and build capacity for neighborhood level organizing.

**Khalil Tian Shahyd**, an organizer with the People's Hurricane Relief Fund, is a recent graduate from Brandeis University's Heller School for Social Policy and Management with a MA degree in Sustainable International Development. He has been a community organizer and activist for over 10 years working on a diverse section of issues from education reform, juvenile justice and anti-domestic violence. He has served as a mentor to a number of high school youth and as a peer counselor for males on issues of masculinity and violence. In the fall, Khalil will start a doctoral program in Political Ecology at the University of Delaware. His plans are to return to New Orleans to work on issues of sustainable human development.

## **II. DESCRIPTION OF ORGANIZATIONS' ACTIVITIES**

**ACORN** is a nationwide grassroots membership organization working for social justice and equality. Since Katrina, ACORN's semi-autonomous New Orleans chapter has been involved in lobbying Washington for federal funding for rebuilding, anti-bulldozing and voting rights class action lawsuits on behalf of city residents, organizing residents to prepare for the neighborhood planning process, and wide scale pro-bono gutting of flooded houses.

**C3/Hands off Iberville and New Orleans Housing Emergency Action Team (NOHEAT)** form the nucleus of a public housing and tenant advocacy coalition that brings together public housing and rental tenants, activists and attorneys. Since Katrina, the coalition has been fighting for the reopening of New Orleans' public housing projects and for eviction protection for renters and FEMA hotel voucher recipients.

**IAF-Jeremiah Group** is a consortium of local churches organized before the storm. Post-Katrina the Jeremiah Group has worked to help pastors locate evacuated parishioners and identify and meet their needs. The Jeremiah Group is currently exploring homebuilding and homeownership programs for its members.

**Neighborhood Housing Services of New Orleans, Inc. (NHS)** was founded to help move low and moderate income residents from renting to homeownership. Post-Katrina NHS' focus has expanded to include partnering on nonprofit homebuilding and the development of a network of interconnected community centers offering a variety of social services including housing and homeownership counseling.

**New Orleans Network** emerged post-Katrina as an information sharing tool for organizers and community members. Housed on the internet, the New Orleans Network's function is to provide a community calendar and database with information on organizations, services, events and fundraising.

**Peoples' Hurricane Relief Fund and Oversight Committee (PHRF)** is a broad-based coalition whose activities are spread across fourteen working groups and whose stated focus is the needs and perspectives of marginalized, poor, African-American survivors of Hurricane Katrina. Currently PHRF is engaged in developing affordable housing, opening a workers' center, and developing a People's Plan as a response to the city's call for a neighborhood planning process.

The **Vietnamese Initiative for Economic Training (VIET)** is based out of the large Vietnamese community concentrated in New Orleans East. Prior to the storm, VIET was involved in a variety of advocacy and job training programs as well as offering an annual summer day camp for kids. In the wake of Katrina, VIET has broadened its focus to include advocacy and support in navigating the bureaucracies of insurance, taxes, FEMA aid packages and absentee voting. VIET has been extremely successful in mobilizing residents in this hard hit neighborhood; now the organization is trying to expand its tax and legal support programs, reopen its summer day camp, establish a recreation center for neighborhood youth, and prepare its community for hurricane season.

### **III. AUTHORS' BIOS**

**Jainey Bavishi** is a first year Master's candidate at the Department of Urban Studies and Planning at MIT from Charlotte, NC, focusing on international development and regional planning. After graduating from Duke University in 2003 with an AB in Public Policy Studies and Cultural Anthropology, Jainey spent a year in the town of Cuttack in Orrissa, India, an area still recovering from a deadly super cyclone in 1999 that killed more than 10,000 people and left over 1.5 million homeless. Her work focused on creating advocacy materials for a movement to start daycare centers in communities below the poverty line through documenting the voices of poor working mothers. Jainey spent the last year working as a research assistant at the Fannie Mae Foundation. She researched lessons and best practices from domestic community revitalization work.

**Rachel Wilch** was born and raised in Seattle, Washington. She received a BA from Reed College in Portland, Oregon where she studied labor movement narratives through the lens of cultural anthropology. Her interests focus on economic justice and alternative approaches to affordable housing. She grew up in and later worked on establishing low-income mutual housing cooperatives. She is currently pursuing her MCP (Master's of City Planning) in the department of urban studies and planning at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. She is

excited for the adventures and opportunities she is finding across the country, though she is eager to eventually set up shop back in the great Northwest.