



Health & Well-Being @ ISSUE

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FOCUS: COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Building Better Communities Together

Partnering with the Rapides Foundation to make a difference

It is typical that foundations accomplish their goals by funding other organizations to do specific work in their communities. Usually these organizations are not-for-profits with boards, staff, and volunteers working together to carry out their missions.

Similarly, the Rapides Foundation looks for partners that have the commitment, leadership, and capacity to build and improve their communities. The Foundation supports these organizations through grants for organizational development, community problem solving and leadership development, and community development action projects, as well as specific project support in the Foundation's funding areas.

However, too few organizations currently exist in our region to take advantage of this funding. This slows progress in initiating and sustaining significant improvements throughout Central Louisiana. To fulfill its mission, the Foundation needs community-based partners that can deliver programs and provide services that enhance the health and well being of Central Louisiana residents.

The Rapides Foundation has taken the first step in changing the community development landscape of our region by commissioning a study of existing community development and training activity.

"Information gathered through this research is forming the basis of a long-term community development strategy for

the area," explained Greg Nesbitt, the Foundation's chairman of the board of trustees. "It is our hope that our community development initiative will be the springboard for many innovative collaborations and achievements."

More than 165 people from Central Louisiana participated in the study, which began last summer. The research was conducted by Dianne Williams, a community development consultant from Little Rock, Ark., who specializes in rural community leadership and organizational development.

Outlined in this newsletter is a summary of the study. Briefly, the research indicates that our challenge lies in:

- ❖ fostering and supporting community leaders
- ❖ creating and supporting not-for-profit organizations as vehicles for community development, and
- ❖ identifying and sharing strategies and information that will improve the health and well being of Cenla residents.

Complementing the Foundation's commitment to community development are the people who participated in this study. Almost to a person, they are eager to learn about community development and the role of not-for-profit organizations in building better communities.

"Our research indicates that the people of Central Louisiana want to make a difference, and the Rapides Foundation wants to partner with them to help reach that goal," said Joe Rosier, president and CEO of the Rapides Foundation.

Community Development Initiative

Study Looks at Leadership, Structure and Training

"Central Louisiana is a very fertile ground for community development work," concluded Dianne Williams, the community development consultant who conducted a recent study for the Rapides Foundation.

Now that the study is complete, Ms. Williams has organized her summary of findings into three categories: community leadership, the nonprofit infrastructure, and training and technical assistance providers.

What follows is a compilation of information gleaned during the study:

Community Leadership

People in Central Louisiana have a great sense of place and a commitment to their communities. In general, when people need help they look to political office holders or ministers for leadership.

Although office holders or ministers are traditionally looked to for guidance, they are not generally described as community builders. People agree that government leaders do not have access to the resources that were once available and that new avenues for community improvement efforts must be found. In addition to new resources, people believe that new leaders, or at least different leadership styles, are necessary to bring about change.

Cenla residents have a tradition of using their skills and gifts in support of community activities.

Many people believe that improving life in their communities will have to be done in new ways and with more diverse citizen involvement than in the past. In each community, people expressed wonderful visions for their communities and an eagerness to learn about community development strategies and resources.

The Nonprofit Infrastructure

With the exception of Rapides Parish, very few 501(c)(3) organizations exist in the region. Of the 501(c)(3)

nonprofit organizations that exist, few are community development vehicles; most are service-providing organizations.

The perception exists that the training and technical assistance needs of Rapides Parish residents differ in scope and accessibility from those of other Central Louisiana residents.

"Sometimes you have to take risks. You have to lose sometimes in order to gain."

*Rev. Freddie Banks,
Hope Development Center,
Alexandria*

People who belong to community groups typically belong to service organizations. Most of the volunteer groups that were part of this study are not organized nor do they have the capacity to plan and implement community development activities.

Training and Technical Assistance Providers

At this time, a leadership and community development training program that has the capacity to

provide the intensive training and technical assistance needed to create and develop viable community groups does not exist in Central Louisiana.

Most of the existing training programs for nonprofit boards and staff focus on Alexandria. Southern University's community development program provides training and technical assistance in the University's service area, usually through the Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service.

A few individuals in central Louisiana, primarily in Alexandria, provide training and technical assistance to nonprofit organizations on a fee basis.

What Is Already Underway?

The community development study also looked at work now in progress in Central Louisiana, and it found that citizen-led groups are active in many areas. Among the activities that have taken place or that are forthcoming:

✍ Focus group participants in Leesville organized a community not-for-profit fair that was held January 18, 2000. Next on their agenda is an in-depth proposal-writing workshop.

✍ Community development corporations (CDCs) exist in Bunkie and Alexandria. Residents in Winnfield and Ferriday are working to organize CDCs.

✍ The Coalition for Community Economic Development, which includes many of the communities in Rapides Parish surrounding Alexandria and Pineville, is mobilizing residents for community building activities.

How the Study was Conducted

Information about leadership, organizations, training opportunities, health, technology use, and community resources was collected through interviews with individuals and focus groups. Interviews were conducted with 48 individuals, 10 focus groups were held involving a total of 75 people, and 44 people participated in community meetings as part of the study's information collection.

Community Development Initiative

The Rapides Foundation Community Development Initiative Aiming High

Based upon research results, the Rapides Foundation has developed a new Community Development Initiative. It involves a multi-pronged strategy to assist communities with development programs. The goal of the initiative is to create and support a community development infrastructure as the primary vehicle for citizen involvement in improving the health and well being of Central Louisiana residents.

The outcome will be increased citizen activity in and responsibility for social, cultural, and economic development that is citizen driven and community focused. The initial priority is to develop leaders and community-building organizations.

When these activities are underway, the work can begin on the creation of a permanent community development support center.

Leadership Development for a Healthy Central Louisiana

As part of Leadership Development for a Healthy Central Louisiana, one or two people from each parish will meet every other month for a year to learn leadership skills, gain knowledge about issues of health and well being, and develop relationships with other participants. Training topics will include community development strategies, leadership styles, communication, presentation skills, community resource development, team building, and conflict resolution.

Community Builders Training

To meet the training needs of people outside of Rapides Parish, a team of circuit riding trainers will be developed to provide on-site training on a variety of topics. The first course will be grant proposal development and writing.

Management Seminars for Alexandria's Nonprofit Leaders

These seminars will offer advanced training for nonprofit staff and board members in Alexandria. Topics will include financial management, board recruitment and development, advanced resource development, collaboration, strategic planning, and program. Another series of workshops covering basic nonprofit management skills will be provided for new nonprofit leaders.

Healthy Cenla Community Development Corporations

Teams from CDCs will participate in a training program that focuses on team building, asset based community development, community building strategies, community economic development, and building organizational capacity (board development, financial accountability, strategic planning, etc.). The teams will meet every quarter at a different site in order to learn about one another's communities and challenges.

Technical Assistance and Organizational Development Grants

This is an expansion of the Foundation's current mini-grant program. More emphasis will be placed on making grants that focus on organizational development and training.

Communications

A variety of communication strategies will be used to build awareness of community development and the roles of nonprofit organizations in community building. Along with the Foundation's newsletter, additional vehicles will be a web site, community development newsletter, and training for nonprofit leaders in writing news releases and producing brochures, fliers, and annual reports.

The Community Development Advisory Group

Following the guidelines already established by the Foundation board, an advisory group for the community development initiative will be formed.

The Rapides Foundation is a philanthropic organization that provides grants to organizations throughout an 11 parish service area that share the foundation's mission to improve the health and well-being of Central Louisiana.



The Rapides Foundation

www.rapidesfoundation.org



Community Development Success Stories

Success Stories: A tale of two communities

Community development doesn't just happen accidentally. It begins with a willingness to see things differently, with optimism about future possibilities. Communities all over the United States have combined optimism with determination and collaboration, and have turned their development dreams into reality.



"What has kept the Searcy County movement alive? Pride in their way of life and a desire to preserve the quality of life they enjoy has gotten many people involved."

-From the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation Annual Report

Searcy County, Arkansas

If you asked residents of Searcy County, Arkansas, what helped them begin to turn around their county's economy, you will hear about leadership development. That's an essential ingredient which continues to foster new energy for community building activities there.

"Leadership Arkansas/ Searcy County" was started with the help of the University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service and funded for five years by the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation. Fifteen to 20 community leaders were trained each year, and participants have ranged from teen-agers to senior citizens.

With a cadre of trained, committed leaders, Searcy County is entering a new decade of leadership and community development activities. To date, their accomplishments include:

- ❖ 4,000-foot paved airstrip
- ❖ a 90-acre industrial park with a new industry in the works
- ❖ a new post office is being built on the Marshall town square, instead of on the highway away from downtown businesses
- ❖ a new bank is locating on the Marshall town square
- ❖ more tourists stopping in Leslie and Marshall on their way to Branson, Mo.



Community Development Initiative Technical Assistance Grants

Qualified organizations that recognize the need for assistance in project planning and development may request technical assistance at any time. Technical assistance funding is limited to one-time only allocations of up to \$10,000 over a one-year period. The Foundation may also award technical assistance, at the Foundation staff's direction, upon review of letters of request and project proposals.

Success Stories:

A tale of two communities

Tupelo, Mississippi

Tupelo/Lee County, Mississippi, a community of about 72,000 located in the northeast part of the state, is a model for community development. Both the National Civic League and the U.S. Department of Agriculture have recognized the Tupelo/Lee County area for its community development successes. Its achievements have attracted a steady stream of visitors from throughout the United States and foreign countries who are eager to learn about that community's development formula.

In 1940, Lee County was one of the poorest counties in the nation. Its per capita income is now the second highest in the state and its income level is near the national average. Its Industrial development program has been rated as one of the nation's 10 best, and the county has added an average of more than 1,000 new manufacturing jobs a year for 13 years straight. The area has also been cited for the quality of its educational and healthcare systems.

According to Vaughn L. Grisham, Jr. in the book Tupelo, The Evolution of a Community, Tupelo's primary advantage is that the citizens of Tupelo/Lee County know how to work together toward common goals. Grisham writes, "The initial focus of the community development efforts [in Lee County] were jobs and economic development, but . . . the results become cyclical in which the economic prosperity allows the

In 1940, Lee County was one of the poorest counties in the nation. Its per capita income is now the second highest in the state and its income level is near the national average.



A Regional Youth Leadership Program involves participants from 15 counties.

funding of other community projects such as good schools and good healthcare. These achievements feed directly and indirectly into still better jobs and more prosperity."

The residents of Tupelo/Lee County, over time, have built a community that is able to identify its needs, agree on goals and priorities, agree on implementation strategies and collaborate effectively on action plans.

Technical Assistance Objectives

Technical assistance is provided to enable the requesting organization to do one or more of the following:

- ✦ Build organizational capacity in a new or undeveloped area of expertise
- ✦ Develop collaborative relationships with other organizations with complementary interests to jointly undertake a subsequent project
- ✦ Assess organizational capacity to undertake a larger project
- ✦ Acquire best knowledge and/or best practice that can be applied to a need or problem the organization wishes to address

Technical Assistance Activities

Typically, technical assistance funding will be awarded to engage in activities such as:

- ✦ Consultation with experts in the area of interest
- ✦ Site visits to other organizations that have successfully implemented an innovative program
- ✦ Convening working groups from within a single organization or across multiple organizations
- ✦ Organizing and conducting a working conference
- ✦ Acquiring training materials
- ✦ Supporting tuition/registration and other staff development costs



Grant Update:

The Rapides Foundation Grants from January - March 2000

<u>Alexandria Museum of Art</u>	\$10,000	1 yr
Development of a formal plan for rural and underserved audience development		
<u>American Heart Association</u>	\$10,000	1 yr
Implementation plan to lead a major effort to educate, train and equip the community in the use of portable Automatic External Defibrillators		
<u>American Lung Association</u>	\$10,000	1 yr
Implementation plan for a major middle school-based smoking cessation program in Rapides Parish		
<u>Central Louisiana AHEC</u>	\$185,000	1 yr
Primary research on the use of the healthcare system by rural and low-income persons in Rapides, Grant, LaSalle and Winn Parishes.		
<u>Friendship House Adult Daycare Center</u>	\$120,000	3 yrs
Enhancement of healthcare and marketing services and establishment of the agency as a regional resource for adult day services development.		
<u>Kuumba Center</u>	\$1,055	1 yr
Training support for new Board of Directors for this community center located south of downtown Alexandria.		
<u>Kuumba Center</u>	\$6,216	1 yr
Operations support during Year 1 of program development.		
<u>La Commission des Avoyelles</u>	\$80,000	2 yrs
Capital and operations support for the establishment of a museum and wellness center in the Big Bend/Moreauville area		
<u>LaSalle Arts Council</u>	\$40,000	1 yr
Start-up operations support for this community-based arts and cultural education group		
<u>Louisiana College Division of Nursing</u>	\$10,000	1 yr
Survey of region-wide nursing continuing education needs		
<u>Louisiana College Division of Nursing</u>	\$10,000	1 yr
Planning for establishment of Faith and Health support program for congregations interested in health issues.		
<u>North River Counseling</u>	\$2,500	1 yr
Planning funds to establish the effectiveness of a non-residential bootcamp concept for troubled teens.		
<u>Charles F. Smith Community Development Corp.</u>	\$10,000	1 yr
Board and programmatic development for this Sonia Quarters-based organization interested in affordable housing development		
<u>Tulane University School of Public Health</u>	\$363,354	3 yrs
Establishment of an integrated program of dietary and physical activity enhancement in six Avoyelles Parish elementary schools.		
<u>Volunteers of America</u>	\$10,000	1 yr
Development of a focused strategy for implementation of an Assertive Community Training program targeting homeless mentally ill adults.		

Community Development Initiative

Say What?

A Brief Community Development Glossary

It's helpful to define the terms used in community development work. What follows is a short community development glossary:

Community development: citizen-led efforts to define problems, develop solutions, and attract the resources necessary to implement programs or activities that address the identified problems.

Community development corporations: community-based organizations that focus on building livable, sustainable communities for their residents. CDC activities include affordable housing, small business development, and services such as childcare, elder care, and after school programs for children. CDCs are different in each community because they focus on the specific needs of the communities in which they are located.

Community economic development: citizen-led, community-focused job creation and other business-related activities that lead to increased financial viability.

Community building: activities that improve the quality of life in a community while honoring the culture, traditions, values, and relationships in that community.

Organizational development: the tools and skills that enable a board and staff to run a nonprofit organization effectively and efficiently. Included are resource development, financial management, strategic planning, board recruitment and development, and communications. Organizational development is not about what an organization does, but how it does its work.

Service providers: agencies that address basic human needs through activities, i.e. programs for people with developmental disabilities, home healthcare, childcare, and elder care.

Leadership development: attaining the skills and experiences that will enable a person to assume a leadership position in a community and meet the challenges this entails.

Technical assistance: specialized help provided by someone outside the organization that addresses specific areas of organizational or programmatic activity.

Thank You!

The Foundation's Community Development Initiative strategy is based on information collected in communities throughout the Foundation's 11 parish funding area from July through November 1999. The Foundation wishes to thank the following people who were instrumental in organizing this work and making connections with community leaders:

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Evangeline Parish

Gerald Roberts, *Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service*

Avoyelles Parish

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Concordia Parish

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Catahoula Parish

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Gloria Rambo, *LaSalle Parish Library, Jena*

Grant Parish

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Wanda Ozier, *Hope House*

Wayne Denley, *Hibernia Bank*

David Britt, *Cenla United Way*



R E S O U R C E S

Downloadable Resources Now Available On The Web

The Rapides Foundation's website provides comprehensive grant program information as well as workshop dates and application deadlines. You can also download everything from annual reports to newsletters and grant application cover pages.

Just click on the Resources section of the Foundation's home page and you can access information like a summary of the Foundation's Community Assessment of Central Louisiana. Or click on the Grants section and download guidelines for Initiative and Responsive Grant Programs. The internet is a convenient way to share information with organizations throughout the Foundation's 11 parish service area.



www.rapidesfoundation.org

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