Delta Region
Phase 0
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**The Delta Region’s Assets and Challenges**  

**Objective #1:** Improve ioby’s understanding of each sub-region’s civic landscape.  

**Objective #2:** Assess competition and new opportunities for ioby to add value to the region’s civic sector.  

**Objective #3:** Measure the region against ioby’s predictors of success.  

**Objective #4:** Evaluate potential demand for ioby’s services in the region.  

**Objective #5:** Identify the trends that drive communities’ interest in taking on projects like those that ioby typically supports.  

**Objective #6:** Characterize civic participation across the region  

**Objective #7:** Recommend strategies to source and serve ioby project leaders across the region.  

**Appendix A — Survey Questions**
Introduction

**ioby’s MISSION AND THEORY OF CHANGE**

ioby directly supports residents rebuilding and strengthening healthy and sustainable neighborhoods, towns, and cities. We blend resource organizing and crowdfunding to help leaders of local projects find the resources they need within their own communities. Our vision is to create a future in which our communities are shaped by the powerful good ideas of our own neighbors. Our mission is to mobilize neighbors who have good ideas to become powerful civic leaders who plan, fund, and make positive change in their own neighborhoods.

While ioby is available to residents across the United States, we currently have Action Strategists—community organizers who work intentionally to support residents, increase civic engagement, and strengthen community power in neighborhoods with histories of disinvestment—working with residents in Memphis, Cincinnati, Detroit, Cleveland, and Pittsburgh to support them in making positive change happen where they live.

ioby removes friction from neighborhood action, helping people to make positive change. ioby supports resident leaders in every step, from idea through implementation. We focus on local residents because we know that they have great ideas to improve the neighborhoods where they live, work, and play. But there are many barriers to leading positive change, such as: lack of funding, lack of confidence, lack of knowledge about permitting processes, lack of 501(c)3 status, lack of teammates, and fear that no one will help.

ioby’s model—including a crowdfunding platform, coaching, fiscal sponsorship, resources, and project implementation support—removes these barriers, so that great ideas from residents can be implemented locally, quickly, and with neighbor support. Making it easier for residents to take neighborhood action is important because neighborhoods are the most tangible, relatable, accessible places for us to practice civic participation and flex the civic muscle we need for a healthy democracy.

**WHAT IS PHASE 0?**

Before we begin a deliberate phase of work in a new place, ioby strives to learn as much as possible about the civic landscape from the very people who we will eventually be supporting. We do not make any assumptions at the outset about the skills, needs, and resources of the community leaders whom we hope will eventually be using our platform and services. We aim to support and contribute to, rather than supplant or duplicate, the services of existing local technical assistance providers. The Phase 0 research reveals residents’ goals for their communities and helps us develop a strategy to best position our services toward those goals. Through Phase 0 research, we sought to understand how ioby can best serve residents in eight regions of the Southern United States, including the Delta Region.

**RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

ioby aims to identify opportunities and craft a strategy for our team to increase civic engagement and enable residents to complete projects that improve public spaces and make their neighborhoods, towns, and cities stronger. To be successful in the Delta Region region, ioby must first:

1. Improve ioby’s understanding of the region’s civic landscape.
2. Assess competition and new opportunities for ioby to add value to the region’s civic sector.
3. Measure the region against ioby’s predictors of success.
4. Evaluate potential demand for ioby’s services in the region.
5. Identify the trends that drive communities’ interest in taking on projects like those that ioby typically supports.
6. Characterize civic participation across the region.
7. Recommend strategies to source and serve ioby project leaders across the region.
Methodology & Limitations

LOCAL RESEARCH FELLOW

To conduct Phase 0 research in eight regions in the South, ioby felt that it was essential to engage with local research fellows who had deep roots and connections in their region. In the Delta Region, ioby hired Jackson Alexander for this role. Jackson Alexander is a PhD candidate at Mississippi State University (MSU) studying public policy and administration with a focus on rural community development. He also serves as a graduate assistant for MSU’s Department of Political Science and Public Administration and a part-time Community Sustainability Facilitator with the Arkansas-based rural development non-profit, Communities Unlimited. In that role, Jackson brings his years of experience in higher education and community-oriented programming to focus on local-level community and economic development in the Arkansas Delta.

GIS FELLOW

ioby hired a GIS Fellow, Sarah Kontos, to help us understand and visually represent the diverse social, economic, and physical landscapes in each of the southern regions. Using data from the U.S. Census Bureau, the IRS, and other sources, Sarah Kontos created maps that informed many of the findings and strategies presented in this report. Sarah Kontos is a spatial analyst and urban designer based in Brooklyn, New York. She has worked for a wide and varied range of nonprofits and city-adjacent agencies to translate lived experiences into novel spatial and analytical frameworks. She also has previous experience as a GIS analyst-for-hire, a data visualization specialist, as a teacher, and has served on volunteer boards related to pedestrian and bicycle advocacy. She holds a B.A. in Urban Studies and History from the University of Pittsburgh and an M.S. in Design and Urban Ecologies from Parsons, The New School.

WORKSHOPS

ioby’s Local Research Fellow led two grassroots fundraising workshops, on November 12, 2019 in Little Rock, Arkansas, on November 18, 2019 in Dewitt, Arkansas. Attendees provided valuable feedback on ioby’s mission, training content, and approach to grassroots fundraising.

INTERVIEWS

From conversations with a total of 34 civic leaders in the Delta Region of Arkansas, ioby began to identify the context, opportunities, and challenges involved in working in the region. While the fellow was already connected to some of the interviewees, he also relied on existing contacts who introduced him to additional leaders in the region.

INTERVIEWEES AND WORKSHOP ATTENDEES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Interviewee or Workshop Attendee</th>
<th>Title and Affiliation(s)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tanya Broadnax</td>
<td>City of Dermott</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anthony Scott</td>
<td>City of Dermott</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India Donald</td>
<td>City of Dermott Parks and Recreation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tyler Brown</td>
<td>University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shea Wilson</td>
<td>University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debbie Luther</td>
<td>Communities Unlimited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitzi Hargan</td>
<td>White River Planning and Development District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name of Interviewee or Workshop Attendee</td>
<td>Title and Affiliation(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justin Burch</td>
<td>Rural LISC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hope Bragg</td>
<td>University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle Viney</td>
<td>Communities Unlimited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carolyn Turner</td>
<td>University of Arkansas Phillips Community College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kristina Bordelon</td>
<td>Compassion Louisiana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will Jacks</td>
<td>Delta State University - Delta Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee Aylward</td>
<td>Delta State University - Delta Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cade Holder</td>
<td>Delta State University - Delta Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben Kaufman</td>
<td>Poplar Foundation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patricia Ashanti</td>
<td>Delta Circles</td>
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<tr>
<td>Amie Alexander</td>
<td>Attorney and Resident Leader</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ross Owyoung</td>
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<td>Natalie Ramm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Toni Carter</td>
<td>University of Arkansas Phillips Community College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phyllis Fullerton</td>
<td>University of Arkansas Phillips Community College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tammy DeBerry</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whitney Neal</td>
<td>Farmers and Merchants Bank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ja Chambless</td>
<td>Pattillo Center School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kim Rawls</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shawana Wamsley</td>
<td>University of Arkansas Phillips Community College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April Herring</td>
<td>DeWitt School District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheree Graham</td>
<td>IMAGE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster Graham</td>
<td>IMAGE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chantel Poor</td>
<td>Communities Unlimited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhonda Golden</td>
<td>University of Arkansas Phillips Community College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gracie Jemerson</td>
<td>University of Arkansas Phillips Community College</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SURVEY

ioby designed a survey to uncover new perspectives on the civic landscape and asked community-based organizations to share it with constituents. The survey, full questions available in Appendix A, included questions about civic pride, attachment, trust in institutions, and the region’s existing culture of giving to grassroots projects. As an incentive for residents to complete the survey, respondents were entered to win one of thirty $200 gift cards.

We received 23 survey responses from the Delta Region:

<table>
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<th>Race/Ethnicity (Self-reported)</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Share of Total</th>
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<td>Black</td>
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<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Latinx</td>
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<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed Race</td>
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<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native/Indigenous</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>23</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

LIMITATIONS

We have identified limitations in our market research in the Delta Region. First, we had a goal of collecting 100 survey responses from residents in the Delta Region, but only received 23. So, perspectives are based on those responses, along with the 34 people we spoke with. Second, because the region is large and varied, compared to the way ioby has typically focused Phase 0 research on a single city, the perspectives of interviewees and survey respondents are not representative of the entire region. Rather, perspectives are only representative of the town or city of the participant. For the purposes of this report, we’re defining the Delta Region as inclusive of portions of eastern Arkansas and western Mississippi. This report is primarily focused on the rural areas of the region, and touches on activity in some cities in this region.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City or County</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Share of Total</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helena, AR</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poplar Grove</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indianola, MS</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marvell, AR</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brinkley, AR</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Town</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little Rock, AR</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Star City, AR</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maumelle, AR</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McGehee, AR</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hickory Plains, AR</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watson, MS</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleveland, MS</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>23</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Using an online survey is a fairly recent tool in ioby’s Phase 0 research methodology. Over the last seven years, we noticed a pattern in our research that commonly after about 20 interviews, most of the answers were similar and reinforced perspectives we had already captured. Originally, our rationale was that an online survey, distributed to residents through intermediary partners, would be a more efficient and more statistically significant way of providing evidence to reinforce answers. However, in many regions, not just the Delta Region, it has been challenging to get sufficient responses, and we expect we will discontinue this practice given its ineffectiveness. We expect to go back to our former approach of relying heavily on more interviews.

The Delta Region’s Assets and Challenges

Guided by the tenets of asset-based community development, ioby always aims to understand the existing conditions of a place before we make plans to grow our local presence. The Delta Region’s civic assets are numerous. Based on our research and feedback from interviewees and survey respondents, the top assets include:

- The Mississippi Delta has one of the most distinct cultural histories of our country, including incredibly important contributions to our civil rights history, music and arts history and culinary traditions. For heritage and tourism purposes, these are critical assets.
- The Delta is famous for its deep alluvial river and fertile soils. These important natural resources are enormous assets for expanding an agrarian culture, building new forms of agriculture, and have great value for recreation and beauty.
- Small-scale investments in creative placemaking, community development, tactical urbanism, and small-scale agriculture in the region are some of the leading examples nationally.

These assets have aided the region as residents and community-based organizations have grappled with profound challenges in their towns, cities, and neighborhoods. Based on our research and feedback from interviewees and survey respondents, the top assets include:

- The Mississippi Delta is one of the poorest regions in the United States. Poverty does not affect all people in the region equally. The impact of racist policies and practices persist today; rates of poverty are twice as high for African Americans in Arkansas than for whites.
- There are high rates of homelessness¹, joblessness, hunger², and disease.
- The region has the highest digital divide in the United States.
- While interpersonal violence has dropped nearly 50% nationwide, it has spiked highest in the Delta.

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¹ [https://www.myarkansaspbs.org/programs/povertydivideinarkansas](https://www.myarkansaspbs.org/programs/povertydivideinarkansas)
Synthesizing interview content, survey results and research on the region, several themes emerged. They are (a) entrenched intergenerational poverty, (b) Delta civil rights history, (c) the legacy of white supremacy, (d) understanding of racism uneven by race, (e) limits of the agrarian economy, (f) trust, but lack of understanding of economic drivers, (g) digital divide, and (h) crime and violence.

**ENTRENCHED INTERGENERATIONAL POVERTY**

The Mississippi Delta has been for the last 60 years the poorest region in the United States, and it seems that the attempts to pull the Delta out of poverty are as cyclical as the region’s alluvial waters.

Following the post-bellum century that essentially made permanent a societal wealth gap between extremely wealthy plantation owners and extremely poor workers and sharecroppers, mechanized cotton ginning led to massive job loss and deepened inequities. By 1965, 95% of cotton was harvested by machine.  

Plantation owners controlled the land, economics and politics and considered nearly anything a threat to their control; as such, they resisted new industries such as textile mills to process cotton, as much as they resisted public education.  

In 1967, Senator Robert Kennedy famously toured the Mississippi Delta and reported on severe levels of hunger and malnutrition in the region sparking the public outcry that ultimately led to the expansion of the food stamp program and creation of the Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC).  

In 1989, Arkansas Gov. Bill Clinton, Louisiana Gov. Buddy Roemer, and Mississippi Gov. Ray Mabus, began pushing educational and economic reforms, famously signing a pact on a Mississippi barge. About the same time, Arkansas Senator Bumpers and Mississippi Congressman Espy introduced legislation to create a seven-state Lower Mississippi Delta Commission to formulate a 10-year economic development plan for the region.

> “You see a lot of it in the eyes, the dull, lusterless, beaten-down look. The poverty has become so widespread, there’s no hope. There is only despair.” L.C. Dorsey Director of the Delta Health Center in Mound Bayou, Mississippi said in 1989.

The ioby team created two GIS maps of data to show where greater than 40% of the population lives in poverty (Map 1), and the distribution of rent burden in the region (Map 2). Understanding regional poverty helps us understand more about the daily lives of residents and the variable ability to give.

> “It’s a regional ghettoization,” said Larry Farmer in 1989, director of Mississippi Action for Community Education, a coalition of community organizations based in Greenville, the state’s largest delta city. "We’re trapped in a time warp of poverty perpetuating poverty." Poverty persists despite a number of initiatives over the years led by various regional leaders.

The Center for Disease Control developed a Social Vulnerability Index (SVI) to measure the cumulative effect of several factors that limit a community’s ability to withstand a disaster of any kind, such as poverty, lack of access to transportation, and crowded housing. They are designed to help emergency response planners and public health officials identify and map communities that will most likely need support before, during, and after a hazardous event.
Map 1. Poverty rate in the Delta Region by Census tract.

Map 2. Census tracts where a majority of households are rent burdened along the Delta region.
Every single county in Arkansas (Table 1) and Mississippi (Table 2) that borders the river is in the top 90th percentile SVI score based on 2016 census data. The lowest SVI score is 0; highest SVI score is 1.9

ioby anticipates that the introduction of new funding for real estate projects catalyzed by the federal Opportunity Zones program may deepen residents’ concerns about the threat of displacement. Through this program, investors are offered a set of attractive tax benefits for their investments in real estate, housing, infrastructure, and existing or start-up businesses in designated Opportunity Zones. These Opportunity Zones, nominated by the governor of each state, are typically in low-income towns and neighborhoods with histories of disinvestment. Injections of new real estate investment in these concentrated areas threaten to intensify and accelerate the displacement of rent-burdened residents.

**DELTA CIVIL RIGHTS HISTORY**

The Delta is home to rich and important components of U.S. civil rights history, a huge portion of which is formally untold, unmarked, or unrecognized.

Across the South, there was a brief period black landownership and formal leadership positions held by African Americans during Reconstruction after the end of the Civil War. The Colored Farmers’ Alliance was founded in Texas in 1886, because the Southern Farmers’ Alliance banned African Americans. It grew rapidly, and in December 1890, the Mississippi Colored Farmers’ Alliance included ninety thousand members.10 Oliver Cromwell was a primary organizer and leader of the Colored Farmers’ Alliance in Leflore County, MS.

Forty miles to the north and west, Isaiah Montgomery established Mound Bayou as one of the first all-black communities in 1887 in the bottomlands of the Delta. By 1900, two-thirds of its land was owned by blacks. However, during the Jim Crow era, most lost their land. After a fire in the downtown in 1942, a fraternal organization called the International Order of Twelve Knights and Daughters of Tabor founded the Taborian Hospital which served thousands of blacks in the region. It is also where civil rights leader Medger Evers lived, and where reporters and witnesses stayed during the trial of Roy Bryant and J.W. Milam for the murder of

<table>
<thead>
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<th>County (Mississippi)</th>
<th>SVI Score</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tunica</td>
<td>0.9784</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coahoma</td>
<td>0.9640</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bolivar</td>
<td>0.9895</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>0.9542</td>
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<tr>
<td>Issaquena</td>
<td>0.9392</td>
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<tr>
<td>Warren</td>
<td>0.8077</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clairborne</td>
<td>0.9873</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jefferson</td>
<td>0.9745</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adams</td>
<td>0.9828</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wilkinson</td>
<td>0.9564</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County (Arkansas)</th>
<th>SVI Score</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>0.9204</td>
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<tr>
<td>Crittenden</td>
<td>0.9217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Francis</td>
<td>0.9771</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lee</td>
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<td>Phillips</td>
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<td>Desha</td>
<td>0.9411</td>
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<td>Chicot</td>
<td>0.9975</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Table 1. The CDC’s Social Vulnerability Index show high values of vulnerability in all counties that border the Mississippi river in Arkansas and Mississippi.

Table 2.
Sunflower, and Washington counties where poverty was widespread.\textsuperscript{11}

In 1900, halfway between Memphis and Clarksdale, black landowners in Tunica County outnumbered white landowners three to one. By 1910, Black farmland in Mississippi totaled 2.2 million acres, the most of any state.\textsuperscript{12}

The Regional Council of Negro Leadership was founded by T. R. M. Howard in 1951 to promote civil rights, self-help and business ownership. Its annual meetings were held in Mound Bayou, and attracted many famous civil rights heroes from Clarksdale, Cleveland, Lexington and Itta Bena.

Despite its role as the seat of the Confederacy, Jackson, Mississippi, is also home to a significant part of the country's civil rights legacy. Writer Richard Wright was born in Jackson, Mississippi, in 1908, and his childhood experience was the focus of his memoir Black Boy. In 1960, Jackson became the center of nonviolent civil rights protests, such as a read-in led by the Tougaloo Nine on March 27, 1961, and the destination for more than 300 Freedom Riders on May 24, 1961. Jackson is home to two critical black colleges: Tougaloo College, home of the Tougaloo Nine, and Jackson State University, where famed African-American poet Margaret Walker began teaching in 1949.

Fannie Lou Hamer, Medgar Evers and Bob Moses founded the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) in 1964 to challenge the Mississippi Democratic party which was only open to whites. At the time, 40% of the state's population were African American. The MFDP developed its strongest political entity in Holmes County.\textsuperscript{13} The previous year, SNCC sent organizer John Ball The SNCC was first invited into Holmes County in 1963. They immediately sent organizer John Ball to Mileston, Mississippi, to train farmers to pass the voter registration tests including reading, writing and the ability to interpret 285 sections of the state constitution.

Understanding the region's civil rights history gives us a critical understanding of civic participation that may not have been well recorded.

\textbf{LEGACY OF WHITE SUPREMACY}

Nowhere in the United States is the legacy of violent murders of innocent African Americans more present than in the Deep South, with perhaps the most famous event of them all in 1955, when Emmett Till was murdered at the age of 14 in Money, Mississippi, halfway between Memphis, Tennessee, and Jackson, Mississippi.

In addition to overt criminal violence, it is well documented across the United States that as blacks began to build power in the 1950s and 1960s, that white elected officials and government employees began to create new policies and practices to exclude black communities from any of the benefits. Some notorious examples include the Federal Highway Act, which bisected many cities and used the power of eminent domain to displace stable black neighborhoods, and the Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC) practice of redlining maps, excluding black neighborhoods from loans.

In the Delta, characterized by rural, agrarian communities, white supremacists used other tools—from theft, exploitation, violence to intimidation, threats and policy making—to prevent blacks from enjoying their rights, such as voting and land ownership, as well as basic needs such as food. Black studies scholar Clyde Woods calls this the "Delta plantation bloc."\textsuperscript{14}

Perhaps most notable in the Deep South were the White Citizens Councils founded following Brown \textit{v} Board of Education in 1954 to oppose racial integration in schools. Members used intimidation tactics including economic boycotts, firing people from jobs, propaganda, and threatening and committing violence against civil-rights activists. Their members were primarily businessmen. A supposedly nonviolent organization, they considered themselves to be a more sophisticated version of the Ku Klux Klan, sometimes known as “uptown Klan” or “pursuing the agenda of the Klan with the demeanor of the Rotary Club.”\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{11} https://deltahealthcenter.org/our-history/
\textsuperscript{12} https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2019/09/this-land-was-our-land/594742/
\textsuperscript{13} https://mscivilrightsproject.org/holmes/organization-holmes/mississippi-freedom-democratic-party-of-holmes/
\textsuperscript{14} https://southernstudies.olemiss.edu/study-the-south/ms-war-against-war-on-poverty/
Some sources claim that the group was founded in Greenwood, Mississippi, in Leflore County, and others claim Indianola in Sunflower County, Mississippi, where the founder Robert Patterson was from. The White Citizens Council produced a newsletter until 1973, and racist children’s books, such as one that describes a segregated heaven. Local chapters sprung up across the Deep South. In Mississippi, local councils were partially funded by government funds, through the State Sovereignty Commission, which was directed by governors of Mississippi for twenty years to keep the federal government from encroaching on state issues such as racial integration. Until the practice was outlawed, members purged blacks from voting, and used forms of intimidation, boycotts, loan denials, and economic injustices to take revenge on activists in the NAACP or supporters of racial integration.

Another widespread tactic was to dispossess black farmers of their property. Civil-rights leader Bayard Rustin reported in 1956 that documents taken from Patterson’s office proposed a “master plan” to force hundreds of thousands of black people from Mississippi so that the state would have fewer black voters.17 18

Another tactic was to weaponize food, as political scientist Peter Wallensteen wrote in 1978, in “Scarce Goods as Political Weapons: The Case of Food.” Building on this research, legal scholars Aeyal Gross and Tamar Feldman argue that “food is core because it is part of our cultural experiences, our family and communal lives, our pleasures, and our bodies” and coined the phase “food power” to describe “situations in which one State seeks a coercive advantage over a target country by manipulating the volume and timing of its own food exports, such as placing a selective embargo on food exports, with the aim of punishing the target country or forcing it to change its policy.”

They have no shortage of backup for this claim. Under President Kennedy, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Orville Freeman wrote the Guide to Civil Defense Management in the Food Industry, in which he frames food as a weapon, writing “the history of mankind and the records of his wars clearly demonstrate that food . . . is a prime weapon, a prime target, and a prime element of survival.” Congressman Jaime Whitten, who represented Mississippi in the House from 1941 to 1995, and Senator James “Big Jim” Eastland, were part of this Delta plantation bloc. Among notable uses of food power, they blocked the USDA from researching social impacts on blacks in the region, directed substantial farm subsidies to plantation owners, rather than the poor, crafted a commodity program to keep prices of crops high, then changed it to a Food Stamp

16 https://libraries.olemiss.edu/cedar-archives/finding_aids/MUM00072.html
17 https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2019/09/this-land-was-our-land/594742/
18 https://doi.org/10.31274/rtd-180813-9171

Map 3. The Delta is low density with small clusters of predominantly black communities.
program which benefited white grocers. Not a single federal food program was designed with nutrition or fighting poverty as a primary goal.\footnote{https://southernstudies.olemiss.edu/study-the-south/ms-war-against-war-on-poverty/}

Finally, the legacy of white supremacy poisoned education in the region. For example, as recently as the 1960s the school board of Bolivar County censored what black children were allowed to learn, and mandated that "neither foreign languages nor civics shall be taught in Negro schools. Nor shall American history from 1860 to 1875 be taught."\footnote{Carmichael, Stokely; Michael Thelwell (2003). Ready for Revolution. Scribner.}

Understanding the legacy of racism and where it persists allows us to understand best the way that low income communities and communities of color have been intentionally and systemically cut out of decision making processes and any barriers to civic participation today.

\section*{Understanding of Racism is Uneven by Race}

So while systems of racism, classism, and disinvestment continue to pervade the Delta Region, ranging from remnants of systems born from the United States' origins of slavery, to current patterns of development and gentrification, a shared understanding of racism, classism and disinvestment is nonexistent. In fact, the ability to connect the impacts of legacies of racism to present day issues seems to be largely dependent on the race and class of the person interviewed. That said, there was, from all interviewees, a basic acknowledgement that the aforementioned issues exist.

In rural areas, residents mentioned that certain parts of town had long been segregated but in some cases had slowly begun to desegregate. Residents, both black and white, discussed the history of segregation, but they weren't able to say exactly how history affected the region today.

In some instances, white individuals could acknowledge the history of racism, but they weren't sure how the histories played a role in the present. While they understood the disenfranchisement of certain groups during certain periods of time, several of the white people expressed a belief that everyone is on a more level playing field today. Many had not previously considered the long-term impacts of redlining, segregation, or disenfranchisement. Many had an understanding that the black communities in their area might be poorer or have less opportunity, but most attributed that difference to issues related to personal agency.

Conversely, when speaking with people of color in the region, each interviewee spoke about the long history of redlining and segregation in the region. It's clear from interviews that these practices not only had an impact on the people interviewed, but had an impact in the lives of their parents, their children, and even their grandchildren, depending on the age of the person who was interviewed. People of color could speak directly to the long-term effects felt by segregation and redlining. One resident, requesting anonymity, said "Sure, we feel these effects every day down here. Now, the practices might not be legal anymore, but the white people don't think there's anything going on today that would hurt us black folks." The participant elaborated that although segregation and redlining are not a legal practice today, individuals in her community still feel the impact.

Despite perception, the impacts are still evident. Cities across the Delta Region, large and small, are often divided into different zones that segregate communities by race and socio-economic status.

One female African-America resident in Dermott, Arkansas, who serves on City Council said, "Just take a look around at our town and towns like ours. Sure, most people are poor, but the poorest are the people who look like me. We live on that side of the tracks, and we come to this side when we need things. Our families have been dealing with a system that works against us forever, and the minute we get a leg up, the bottom gets pulled out from under us."

A recent article in The Atlantic found that nearly 98% of blacks in the region have been dispossessed of their property through racist policies that provided aid, such as loans and subsidies to small businesses and farmers, but ignored the needs of black farmers. Between 1950 and 1975, a half million black owned farms failed across the country. In Mississippi, black farmers lost an estimated 800,000 acres of land between 1960 and 1964.
In 1965, the United States Commission on Civil Rights uncovered blatant and dramatic racial differences in the level of federal investment in farmers that "served to accelerate the displacement and impoverishment of the Negro farmer."

Ted Keenan, a black farmer in Sunflower County, Mississippi, told investigators that he was denied loans by banks and by the Farmers Home Administration because of his position with the NAACP. A 2001 report by the Associated Press uncovered more than 100 cases like this where exploitation, extortion, and theft was targeted on black farmers.21

The result is some of the worst poverty in the United States. Opportunity Insights, a research group from Harvard University, noted that Leflore, Sunflower, and Washington Counties in Mississippi are "among the worst in the country in terms of a child's prospects for upward mobility."22 In the Delta there are some of the highest rates of poverty, lowest life expectancy, highest infant mortality rates (twice the national), and people in the Delta are audited more heavily than in any other region in the U.S.23

Researchers Dania Francis, at the University of Massachusetts, and Darrick Hamilton, at Ohio State, in a report for The Atlantic estimate that the dispossession of farm land, including property and income, is equivalent to an estimated $3.7 billion to $6.6 billion in today's dollars,24 perhaps a beginning of a calculation of reparations to black families in the region.

In our surveys and interviews ioby found that individuals are aware of the concept of reparations. However, white interviewees were uncomfortable addressing this topic. And while African-Americans recognized the importance of reparations, they have very little confidence in reparations coming to fruition. For example, a resident of Helena, Arkansas said, "As a black woman, I know that many people in my community have thought about reparations during their lifetimes, but we know the likelihood of this is slim. Reparations make white people uncomfortable, and we, as black people, have enough reasons for white people to be upset about our advancement than making white people talk about something they clearly don't want to face."

Understanding perception of equity is as important as understanding inequities themselves.

21 https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2019/09/this-land-was-our-land/594742/
22 Ibid.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
LIMITS OF THE AGRARIAN ECONOMY
The Delta Region is largely rural and driven by an agrarian economy that offers a wealth of produce but few jobs. With its flat topography, fertile soil, and abundant water supply, crop production is the largest industry in the region. From northeast Arkansas southward to the Baton Rouge area, and from Vicksburg, Mississippi northward to western Tennessee, the terrain is covered in crop fields, including rice, cotton, soybeans, and corn.

Many interviewees noted that throughout the past 30 years, a number of industries have left the region, including a variety of factories and processing facilities. What remains are the facilities which might process the harvested crops or prepare the crops for transport to other areas. Although these facilities provide some economic stability for the region, they only provide a few jobs for a larger population.

While crop production is stable, it demands very few workers. Agriculture is increasingly mechanised, to the point that one farmer can work on thousands of acres at a time and without many workers to assist. This limits the career opportunities for individuals in the region.

Based on interview responses, it seems that a final challenge with this long-term agrarian economy is that many find it difficult to imagine any other way of life; and therefore don't want to invest the time and resources into growing a more diversified economic base.

As a result, the region has nearly twice the poverty rate of the rest of the United States, around 30% of Arkansans in the Delta live in poverty, as defined by the Census Bureau. Compared to the Ozarks, the Delta hasn't changed as much since the 1960s when both regions had around a 60% poverty rate. Today the Ozarks and Northwest Arkansas have a poverty rate lower than 20% largely as a result of regional investments by large Fortune 500 companies.25

Understanding the local economy gives us insights into whether the regional economy is shrinking, stable or growing.

TRUST, BUT LACK OF UNDERSTANDING OF ECONOMIC DRIVERS
Overall, and especially in rural areas, interviewed residents expressed uncertainty and lack of knowledge about where funding opportunities come from. However, residents knew that funding comes to the region from outside sources. While some were able to identify programs or projects that were implemented by outside entities, most made statements like, “There was a group that moved in a few years ago to help with economic development, but I don’t know what they really did.”

Throughout the Delta area, the Delta Regional Authority has implemented community programs. In Arkansas, Mississippi, and Louisiana, Communities Unlimited and the U.S. Department of Agriculture have promoted community development through the Rural Community Development Initiatives Grant. And, in each state, that state’s Economic Development Commission (or equivalent) promotes growth practices. In Arkansas, there are local organizations that represent each geographic region to aid this type of work.

Residents expressed apprehension about outside organizations or funders moving into the area with big promises for change. However, despite a cycle of government initiatives that have not resulted in any perceived substantial change for the region, residents reported being open minded and had a desire to meet with new entities to learn about their intentions and goals. In-person meetings often are the key to building trust locally.

Overall, new initiatives tend to work with the community in advance of new projects to build buy-in. There are only a few “planned” initiatives happening in the Delta region coming from outside entities. Most often, new economic initiatives and cultural showcase programs like the Mississippi Blues Trail come from within the region to bolster local tourism. Entities like Winrock International and Communities Unlimited have partnered with a number of communities throughout the Delta region to work on efforts related to sustainability, community, and economic development. Often, these entities have come into the community beforehand and conducted in-depth consultation with the town’s people and leadership before establishing a partnership. For the most part, residents feel that they had a fair amount of say in the community planning process, as well as the carrying out of the established goals.

We always want to know how residents perceive how change happens, and these insights into how residents feel engaged in change helps us understand levels of trust or apprehension about change.

DIGITAL DIVIDE
Interviewees were given context to establish that a divide in digital access to technology could mean a number of issues: age, connectivity, or knowledge. Many residents indicated that while knowledge and age were often factors in being disconnected from the digital world, the majority of the disconnect was related to lack of actual connectivity to high-speed internet. This is unsurprising, since Arkansas and Mississippi are the least connected states in the U.S.26

Expanding broadband access has been a priority for the state since 2007, when the Arkansas High Cost Fund was established. Funded by revenue from a percentage of all telecommunications bills, the High Cost Fund provides funding to 22 telecommunications companies to expand access in the state. The fund is overseen by the Arkansas Public Service Commission, but its impact is unclear so in 2019, Rep. Michelle Gray, R-Melbourne called for an interim study on the impact of the fund.27, 28 Even the most recent $20 billion Rural Digital Opportunity Fund is expected to only reduce, not eliminate, the digital divide in rural Arkansas.29

As a result, many residents rely on their smartphones to stay connected. But, poorer residents often pay for service by the minute, cost prohibitive for the amount of access needed for basic functions in education, health care and other government benefits delivered online. For example, in 2018, it was reported that more than 4,000 Arkansans lost Medicare benefits because they failed to log their work hours through Medicare’s online platform.30 Today, during safe-at-home policies online learning is impossible for many rural families in Arkansas, a crisis that resulted in a program with PBS for televised learning.31

As a tech-based platform with many digital inclusion practices, it’s important for us to know what barriers residents have to digital access.

CRIME AND VIOLENCE
A 2018 study by the RAND Corporation was funded by the Walton Family Foundation to understand how to leverage research and philanthropy to reduce crime and violence in the Mississippi Delta. The report identified that the “two most populous cities in the region, Helena-West Helena (Phillips County) and Clarksdale (Coahoma County),” have significantly higher rates of crime and violence than surrounding areas. Four major themes were reported as the primary causes. The first was “inadequate family and community support,” which included family instability, lack of community cohesion, negative social norms, racial tension, and gangs. Interviewees described how communities have disintegrated over time, with families and communities no longer providing support; many reported that the idea of community no longer existed and had been replaced with a collection of individuals co-existing. Discussed almost as frequently as the lack of community was the lack of economic opportunities, which included financial hardship, lack of job opportunities and training, and the perception that the only way to make money was through the illicit economy.32 In addition, interviewees mentioned government failures, and the failure of schools, outmigration, and urban decay as contributing factors.

The report outlined several evidence-based strategies for reducing violent crime, and while family and community programs focused on disorder policing, intergenerational communities, intentional neighboring, education, social cohesion, youth development, mentoring, trauma informed community building, and community development—all project types that Ioby has supported in the past—few of these strategies have evidence to reduce crime as significantly as geographic prevention and recidivism programs.33

Normally crime and violence is not a priority for Ioby to study, but we felt that it was important to recognize the high crime in this region as a barrier to participation.

30 https://www.benton.org/headlines/more-4300-arkansas-residents-lose-medicaid-under-work-requirements-digital-di vide-played
32 Leveraging Research and Philanthropy to Reduce Crime and Violence in the Mississippi Delta
33 Ibid.
Objective #2: Assess competition and new opportunities for ioby to add value to the region’s civic sector.

The purpose of ioby’s Phase 0 research is to ensure that if ioby were to operate more deeply in the region that we would add value and not duplicate efforts already underway.

Interviewed residents, overall, believed that ioby’s work would not be redundant for a very simple reason: they have never heard of work like ioby’s work taking place before.

Carolyn from DeWitt, Arkansas said “I think there’s real value in the work ioby has the capacity to do. As the executive for the local community college, I see small projects throughout the town and county that go untouched because they need little money and people don’t deem them worthy of taking on. By using small donations through a platform like ioby, I think there’s a real opportunity to not only raise monies that may be needed but also to recruit energetic new individuals to be involved in the process.”

Because of the extreme poverty in the region, very small grants can make a big impact. In a PBS interview with a farmer from the Arkansas-based Grassroots Farmers Coop shared a story of a mini grant from Heifer International resulted in a nearly 20% income increase the very next year.34

CROWDFUNDING IN THE REGION

As we begin to raise ioby’s profile in new places, we find that our platform is often compared to other crowdfunding platforms with which residents are already familiar. Most residents interviewed in this study had never heard of crowdfunding before. If they had, it was typically GoFundMe being used to raise money for a funeral or school trip. So while on the one hand, this seems like an opportunity to provide a real service, residents in rural areas express skepticism about outside entities raising money from local individuals without building trust first.

We assessed data from cities in the Arkansas Delta and the Mississippi Delta with populations of at least 10,000 and found that more than 3,385 residents have used crowdfunding platforms like GoFundMe (3,274 fundraisers currently listed) and Kickstarter (111 projects currently listed) to meet their personal and creative funding needs. 2,793 teachers in schools located in and near these cities have successfully fundraised with DonorsChoose for classroom supplies. ioby’s intention is to supplement, rather than compete with, these crowdfunding platforms in the Delta Region. ioby differs from these platforms in key ways:

- We support projects from an through implementation, and focus our support and our evaluation of our success on the development of the leader of the project, rather than on the project or on the financial transactions. Informed by organizing models such as asset-based community development (ABCD) and resource organizing, ioby’s training and coaching are designed to build the confidence and fundraising capacities of grassroots leaders.
- As a nonprofit, ioby is able to guarantee that all donations made on our platform are tax-deductible. For groups without 501(c)(3) status, we offer project-specific (Type C) fiscal sponsorship.
- ioby believes that residents know what is best for their neighborhoods. We only require that projects be based in the United States or its territory and have a public benefit.
- ioby is mission-driven to focus on communities with the most need, and so we deliberately build networks of leaders in areas with histories of disinvestment.
- ioby stewards a national network of civically engaged neighbors that project leaders join when they run a campaign with us. We encourage our nationwide network to learn from each other, and provide opportunities for them to do so.

34 https://www.myarkansaspbs.org/programs/povertydivideinarkansas
35 https://www.gofundme.com/
36 https://www.kickstarter.com/
37 https://www.donorschoose.org/
**Objective #3: Measure the region against ioby’s predictors of success.**

Ioby measures success by the number of leaders trained in online grassroots fundraising and supported on our platform, as well as the amount of “citizen philanthropy” funneled to projects led by neighbors and community-based organizations. Based on our experience working in Pittsburgh, Detroit, Cleveland, Memphis, and New York, ioby has identified five predictors of success.

### 1. Culture of Giving

**Background:** A strong culture of giving is characterized by general participation in charitable giving across income brackets and a general comfort with grassroots fundraising among would-be users of ioby’s platform. This is measured using a combination of interviews, survey responses, and IRS charitable giving data.

**Why this matters:** In a place with a robust culture of giving, ioby leaders are more likely to succeed because they are more comfortable asking for donations and their neighbors are already accustomed to donating to charitable projects. For example, the average household in Memphis donates about 5.6% of adjusted gross income to charitable organizations, a figure considerably higher than the national average of about three percent. Coming from Memphis’ culture of giving, most ioby leaders in the city have felt comfortable making asks of donors and have had great successes in their grassroots fundraising campaigns.

**Finding in the Delta Region:** STRONG

In the region, the household giving ratio is lower than the national average, but there is some nuance in interpretation here.

First, on the Arkansas side of the river, looking at zip codes beginning in 724, 723, 720 and 716, the average giving ratio is 1.85%, dividing itemized charitable deductions by adjusted gross income. But in Arkansas 27 zip codes had no record of itemized deductions. In areas where income is very low, it is unlikely worthwhile to itemize deductions. One such zip code is 72428 where the AGI is only $3,766. In Mississippi, for zip codes beginning in 386, 387, 396, 3909, and 3906, the average giving ratio is 2.67%. This is the method of calculating giving ratio used by the Chronicle of Philanthropy, and it is criticized for being a great measure of who itemizes donations and little else.

Moreover, we do not find giving ratios to be a complete look at generosity, which would include giving to faith institutions, helping family members in need, giving cash at fundraisers like spaghetti dinners, or giving through for profit crowdfunding platforms (like GoFundMe) which many people assume are charitable, but are not.

When asked, “If you had an idea for a project that would improve your town (or neighborhood, if you live in a city) in some way, who do you think would be very likely to fund it?,” the most popular answer was foundations (60%) followed by a close second to friends, family, neighbors and colleagues (52%). When survey respondents were asked, “Are people in your community likely to donate to projects that they think are positively impacting the community?” 92% responded yes.

Household giving tends to skew local where the impact can be seen. Shea from Hazen, Arkansas, said “People in our part of the world don’t give to things we don’t know about or understand. We trust our churches. We trust our school leaders. We trust the people who run the local civic organizations. It’s sometimes hard for us to place our money into something we can’t see or don’t know.”
2. COOPERATIVE CIVIC SECTOR

**Background:** A cooperative civic sector is characterized by a culture of collaboration among organizations and government, where collaboration is born out of a mutually enforced creative or strategic ethos rather than from a funder.

**Why this matters:** ioby finds it easier to build meaningful connections to organizations and grassroots leaders in cities where nonprofit leaders are deeply committed to each other’s success. For example, Memphis nonprofits have deeply interwoven staff, board and members, that are reinforced by social connections. Because Memphis boasts this supremely collaborative environment for nonprofits, our local partners and champions have had great success encouraging other organizations in the city to work with ioby.

**Finding in the Delta Region:** MIXED

Typically, what ioby is trying to uncover in this section is if existing nonprofits collaborate with each other and with the local municipalities and businesses. But here in these rural areas of the Delta, the results are more difficult to summarize.

On the Mississippi side of the river, there seem to be clusters of nonprofits acting as anchors in places like Clarksdale and Mound Bayou.

On the Arkansas side, most nonprofits serving the Delta are headquartered in Little Rock. It's unclear to us if they have offices in the Delta or if their staff simply commute to the region.

Most interviewees and survey respondents mentioned working with a nonprofit in the area, and mentioned the key to success is meeting with residents, so we can draw a conclusion that nonprofits collaborate well with residents. In addition, given the small populations of cities like Helena-West Helena, we assume that many people know one another, and that staff at the community college or at a health center might be providing informal services to create connectivity for residents in need.

Institutions like Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation, The Walton Family Foundation, Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation, and Communities Unlimited have all taken great notice of needs within the Delta. In doing so, they have partnered with a variety of local municipalities and state governments to create movements for agricultural sustainability, K-12 education, sustainability, and civic engagement.
Compared to larger metropolitan areas, we did not find evidence that local nonprofits are competing with one another. Unfortunately, the low density of nonprofit organizations also means that there is less structure in place to build upon. ioby found it difficult to build traction in Miami-Dade County where similarly there was little civic infrastructure. One major advantage the Delta Region has in this area is its strong history of civil rights organizing. So, despite the lack of official 501c3 organizations, enormous amounts of political will have been built in the region over many generations. Instead of focusing on nonprofit service providers based in communities, we could focus on other local institutions, like churches and schools.

3. OPENNESS TO GRASSROOTS FUNDRAISING

**Background:** To successfully motivate and prepare residents to crowdfund for their ideas, ioby depends on a general openness to the tenets of grassroots fundraising and asset-based community development. This includes willingness on the part of residents and community-based organizations to ask neighbors, relatives, friends, colleagues, and strangers for donations to their projects.

**Why this matters:** ioby may predict the extent to which residents and leaders of community-based organizations will embrace ioby’s model of online grassroots fundraising by looking at local examples of successful fundraising campaigns and by surveying residents about their proclivities for fundraising. Example: When ioby first set down roots in Cleveland, leaders of some community development organizations were already looking at how they might use crowdfunding to extend their reach to grassroots donors. This openness to grassroots fundraising enabled ioby to quickly grow our presence in Cleveland.

**Finding in the Delta Region: STRONG**

When asked “How comfortable are people in your community with fundraising from their neighbors, friends, family, and colleagues?”, 74% said very or somewhat likely. Only white respondents weren’t sure or marked unlikely. To the question “Are people in your community likely to donate to projects that they think are positively impacting the community?”, 92% responded yes. Because there is often a perception in places where high speed broadband is not universal and online payments in general are considered risky, we asked across the South the following question to get a sense of risk aversion, “Would people in your community feel comfortable donating to a project that has a risk of failing?” Surprisingly, nearly a quarter of respondents said yes, they felt their community would be willing to donate even if there were a risk of failure.
In ioby’s survey of residents in the region, when asked “If you had an idea for a project that would benefit your community in some way, how likely would you be to crowdfund for that project?” 43% said that they were very or somewhat likely. But 30% said that they simply don't know enough about crowdfunding to answer the question. Of those remaining (~30%) who said that they wouldn’t pursue crowdfunding, their reasons were that it might be too much work or that others would be worried about the possibility of fraud when giving online.

Nearly half of our survey respondents have crowdfunded in the past, and 100% of them were successful in their crowdfunding campaign. The majority (60%) of black survey respondents are included in this category.

4. TRANSPARENT, ACCESSIBLE GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Background: ioby determines the transparency and accessibility of local government by examining the extent to which residents find it easy to obtain permission for projects in public spaces.

Why this matters: Because many ioby projects take place in public spaces, project leaders often seek permits for their work. In municipalities and counties where residents are easily able to obtain official permission to execute a project, ioby leaders are able to complete their projects more quickly and, often, with greater efficacy. Example: In Pittsburgh, the Office of Community Affairs and the Mayor’s Bureau of Neighborhood Empowerment proactively educate residents at public forums in neighborhoods across the city about the kinds of permits that are required for projects in public spaces and assist them in navigating bureaucratic processes. The City of Pittsburgh’s willingness to assist residents as they seek support for their projects has been an asset for ioby in the city.

Finding in the Delta Region: MIXED

When asked, “If you had an idea for a project that would benefit your community in some way, do you know of anyone in local or county government who would be willing to help you get the necessary approvals, permits, or resources to make it happen?,” 78% of our survey respondents said yes. Typically, when we see survey responses to this question, there is a significant racial divide, wherein white respondents typically know someone inside government, but respondents of color do not. In this case, every black respondent said yes to this question.

However, when it comes to trusting the government to carry out its promises, only 52% of survey respondents agreed. And, unsurprisingly given the explicitly racist recent history of local governments, only 40% of African American respondents trust the government, compared to nearly 80% of white respondents.

These responses are very similar to trust in institutional philanthropy; 52% believe that institutional philanthropy can be trusted.

However, in an open response question to comment on trust in general, most took time to write about a personal experience of philanthropy proving that they could be trusted and / or to describe the ways the government has not earned their trust. For example, one respondent who is a black woman who leads a local nonprofit said that foundations can be trusted because of their track record of follow through, whereas “Government appears to have forgot [sic] Phillips County.”

Phillips County, and specifically Helena City Council, are frequently noted as exceptions to this overall good will toward government.

5. CIVIC PRIDE

Background: Civic pride refers to residents’ demonstrable sense of pride to be from their town, neighborhood, city, and region. Ioby measures pride through interviews and survey.

Why this matters: When residents are proud to be from a neighborhood, town, city, and/or region, ioby is more likely to be able to motivate them to create and fund civic projects. Example: ioby has found that many New Yorkers have a strong pride in their city, and connect their personal identities to their
bourough. Project leaders in New York City are willing to spend time working with neighbors to fundraise for and implement an ioby project because they have personal and long-term interests in making their neighborhoods stronger and more sustainable.

Finding in the Delta Region: STRONG

“People tend to be very proud to be a product of the Delta. Our history is rich and runs deep. Sure, we’ve had our problems, and they still exist, but there are so many good people that come from these places,” said a resident of DeWitt, Arkansas. As mentioned previously, Delta heritage runs deep. Folks tend to be generationally from the Delta, and their roots are firmly intact with the land, the people, and the history.

A large majority (82%) of survey respondents reported that most people are proud to be from their town or city, and 82% reported that most are proud to be from the region.

Although residents understand that the Delta certainly has problems with racism and systemic disenfranchisement, there is also a deep understanding among residents, both white and black, that the Delta wouldn’t be what it is today without those histories. The struggles the Delta region faces today are long. One of the program coordinators at the Delta Cultural Center said, “People tend to be familiar with the Faulkner quote ‘To understand the world, you must first understand a place like Mississippi.’

COMPARING THE DELTA REGION TO IOBY’S FOCUS PLACES (AT THE TIME OF IOBY’S ARRIVAL)

When measured only against other places where ioby has hired local staff, the Delta Region appears to be a moderate to strong fit for ioby’s services. We expect that our efforts to source and cultivate local leaders with ideas for their communities will benefit from the Delta Region’s strong culture of giving, openness to grassroots fundraising, and civic pride.

Some scores from ioby’s previous Phase 0 reports have been changed to more accurately reflect the nuance in our findings.

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Objective #4: Evaluate potential demand for ioby’s services in the region.

Before determining ioby’s approach to working in a place, we must predict the degree to which residents will be interested in using ioby’s crowdfunding platform, grassroots fundraising coaching, and fiscal sponsorship service. This prediction hinges on the extent to which Delta Region residents and community-based organizations have led and donated to the types of community-led, “DIY,” and tactical urbanism projects that ioby tends to support.

ioby has been curious about investing more deeply in the Delta for years, after becoming aware of the creative placemaking efforts in Clarksdale, Mississippi. Timothy Lampkin is a national leader in creative placemaking and in community development. He helped to establish the Crossroads Cultural Arts Center and now works in building community wealth with black residents in Mississippi.38 39

In an interview for the Huffington Post in 2017, Timothy Lampkin describes his plan for breaking the poverty cycle: “[W]e need to redirect the resources we have to break the traditional mindset. It’s generational poverty; a generational issue that has been passed down from family to family; we have to take it as motivation and shift the mindset first. We then need to establish best practices that can be used in the county to make sure our development is consistent and sustainable. I want to see an attitude that you can still do good work without the title and power. You can really do more, actively collaborate, and make an impact no matter what position you’re in. I simply want to see us all coming together with a genuine passion to improve the community.”

On the Arkansas side of the river, resident-led, small-scale, local projects are less common, so we prompted interviewees to consider the arts as a possibly more common example. Throughout the majority of the Delta region, residents responded by describing the need for economic drivers rather than drivers in other areas such as the arts. Most of the time, residents indicated they believe their time, resources, and efforts should be centered around growing small businesses and improving public spaces like parks and community recreation areas.

An exception to this comes from Cleveland and Greenwood, Mississippi. The Delta Blues Trail and Blues Museum are high priority areas for growing the culture surrounding the Delta Region. Moreover, in Cleveland, Mississippi, Delta State University is home to the Delta Cultural Center, which celebrates the history, culture, and heritage of the Delta Region. Speaking with the Center’s Director, he said, “The Delta is home to some of the nation’s richest history and deep cultural roots, but sometimes the people who are here don’t care. Their concerns are economic. They struggle financially, so their first concern isn’t coming to a cultural center.”

Organizations like Together for Hope Arkansas, a program of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship are framing their programming impacts as about changing mindsets for youth to imagine new possibilities. Small programs like Little Free Libraries and a focus on literacy could be funded through the ioby platform.40

Nonprofit Heifer International is headquartered in Little Rock, and has a new initiative to provide small grants to farmers to invest in their ability to scale their operations. Similarly, Our House is a wrap-around service temporary home for families in Little Rock that acts as a safety net for individuals at the edge of homelessness.41

An astonishing 100% of our survey respondents said that they have been part of a local project to make their neighborhood better, as a donor, volunteer or leader, and nearly half said that they led the project. 43% said that the project was led by a local nonprofit.

38 https://www.huffpost.com/entry/meet-the-young-man-on-a-m_b_8093998
39 https://higherpurposeco.org/#missionandmodel
40 https://baptistnews.com/article/imagination-is-the-greatest-threat-to-delta-poverty-together-for-hope-arkansas-says/#.XrVluBNKjOQ
41 https://www.myarkansaspbs.org/programs/povertydivideinarkansas
Objective #5: Identify the trends that drive communities’ interest in taking on projects like those that ioby typically supports.

Learning from our work in New York, Memphis, Detroit, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, and places around the country, we know that ioby’s services are most helpful to grassroots leaders working in areas with histories of disinvestment. To be most impactful, we aim to understand how conditions of institutional disinvestment and resource scarcity have shaped residents’ approaches to creating projects in their towns and neighborhoods. We also must understand how new investment, particularly in towns and neighborhoods with history of disinvestment, has impacted residents and how community leaders are responding to these changes.

Programs like the USDA Rural Community Development Initiative and Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI) have driven funding into these areas. One example of these dollars is in Dumas and McGhee, Arkansas, where REDI dollars are being used to invest in a localized college or learning institute that is focused on the arts. This institute allows individuals who are interested in performing arts to be mentored by individuals within the industry to practice their craft or learn career skills related to their interests.

In ioby’s Phase 0 research, we typically focus conversations on gentrification and revitalization. However, given the Delta’s high poverty rural landscape, gentrification is a thing discussed as affecting urban centers like Little Rock and Baton Rouge. And most residents respond favorably to the concept of revitalization, viewing it as a term to return their community to what was likely a more prosperous past. Residents long for the days of their town having a bustling, energetic downtown area, and many expressed excitement about outside organizations that come in or local economic development organizations that were formed in hopes of making the town a bit more exciting and inviting. In fact, one resident from Cleveland, Mississippi said, “We want this place to be revitalized. Want to see our areas return to their former glory. Revitalization, to us, means something is powerful and beautiful again.”
Objective #6: Characterize civic participation across the region

By most accounts, residents in the Delta Region cited a lack of time and knowledge about where to begin as a barrier to being civically engaged. In rural areas, there are limits to the job opportunities residents can pursue, and there are also limited resources as far as places to care for children when adults want to participate civically.

People in the Delta often struggle with political ideological differences. Largely, the Mississippi side of the Delta, and part of the Arkansas Delta that are predominantly African-American, tend to vote Democratic, while the rest of the Delta is heavily Republican. The African-American population expressed feeling overshadowed and unheard in their own political interests and willingness to engage in the political process.

- People don’t know where to start
- Civic participation just takes too much time for some people
- People feel that participating in civic life won’t change anything, so it’s not worth it
- People think that they wouldn’t enjoy being civically engaged
- People don’t have enough spare cash to donate to causes or campaigns
- Apathy: People in my community just don’t care enough
Interviewees and survey respondents across the region ranked their top three primary barriers to civic engagement as:

1. **Financial Constraints**

Multiple interviewees and survey respondents signaled a common contradiction. They report that they believe others in the region might be unable to give financially to local improvements, yet they also list the many ways that people give financially. This is an extremely common contradiction ioby observes anytime we ask about people's ability to give. With few exceptions, most people talk about the poor being unable to give despite evidence to the contrary.

Typically, both research and our experience has found that residents in low income communities are the most generous, but we have not worked in many places where poverty is as widespread and as intergenerational as the Delta. For instance, we see substantial giving in the Uptown and Klondike Smokey City neighborhoods of Memphis where median household income is around $7,000-$9,000, but those neighborhoods are surrounded by wealthier neighborhoods.

2. **Unsure of where to start**

Survey respondents also indicated that not having knowledge of how to start something was the second most common barrier to civic participation. We interpret this as both a technical lack of knowledge and a psychological barrier that is common for folks where problems are so big, it’s impossible to see a solution.

3. **Apathy, feelings of discouragement**

The third most common barrier to civic participation cited by interviewees and survey respondents is apathy and feelings of discouragement.

**Objective #7: Recommend strategies to source and serve ioby project leaders across the region.**

Our research suggests that there is considerable opportunity for ioby to positively impact the region’s civic landscape. When developing a strategy to grow ioby's presence in a place, we ask the following questions:

**How do we reach people who might be interested in leading fundraising campaigns with ioby?**

**Strategy #1: Leverage staff in Memphis to support a train the trainer model in the Delta Region**

Based on our conversations with leaders of organizations across the region, it is clear that residents and civic leaders in rural areas are generally distrustful of organizations led by people from outside of their areas. This distrust seems to stem from a common feeling that solutions are only reasonable or palatable when they come from people in the area. Philosophically, this aligns nicely with ioby’s founding principle—that people closest to a problem are best suited to solve it—and signals a strong fit for our services. Practically, however, this distrust presents a significant barrier to our work. An organization like ioby, from outside of the region, may find it difficult to build trust with civic leaders.

In addition, our research suggests that people in rural areas have been relegated to the position of "passive recipient of change" rather than the position of change agent. Civic leaders who aim to bolster engagement in their communities contend with a sentiment that there is simply no point in trying to change anything because no one is listening anyway.

So, rather than following the typical ioby model to hire an Action Strategist to act as a hub for the region, we propose a new strategy. To increase ioby's presence in cities and towns across the Delta Region, ioby will leverage our 8-year history in Memphis, and our Memphis Action Strategist, to train a cohort of civic leaders, including community-facing members of staff from highly-regarded community-based organizations from cities and rural areas across the region (including Little Rock) to:
• Learn about community development models and frameworks that can help them more creatively address challenges in their towns and cities, including:
  • Asset-based community development (ABCD)
  • Tactical urbanism
  • Creative placemaking
• Preparing to lead a grassroots fundraising campaigns by:
  • Deciding whether crowdfunding with ioby is right for them
  • Building a strong and diverse fundraising team
  • Crafting and telling a compelling story about their work and its significance
  • Assessing their team’s fundraising capacity using a prospect chart
  • Creating an online communications strategy to support their fundraising campaign

The ideal participant in this cohort is a member of a nonprofit or local government staff who spends at least 50% of their time working directly with community residents, and frequently organizes meetings, workshops, or trainings with residents who are focused on local project-based work. This could include nonprofit employees, teachers, health care workers, and college students. Each participating organization would be compensated for their staff time. Through this approach to building ioby’s presence across the Delta Region region, we hope to:
  • Equip residents and community-based organizations with the tools and skills that they need in order to access citizen philanthropy for projects that make their towns stronger, more connected, more vibrant, and more sustainable;
  • Build strong and authentic relationships with leaders of nonprofit organizations that are highly regarded by leaders who might benefit from ioby’s services and platform;
  • Cultivate a robust culture of leading and giving to grassroots projects in cities, towns, and neighborhoods with histories of disinvestment.

**Strategy #2: Pursue match fund partnerships in the Delta Region**

ioby has found that an effective way to prove our worth to civic leaders in a place is by accruing several quick wins. To accelerate grassroots fundraising efforts in the Delta Region, ioby will pursue match fund partnerships. A time-limited, match opportunity with broad eligibility criteria would serve as a strong incentive for organizations to begin connecting residents and community-based organizations in their networks to ioby’s crowdfunding platform and services.

ioby expects that this strategy would be most impactful when paired with Strategy #1. Place-based matching funds are most successful when the local leaders and organizations who are promoting the opportunity are equipped to explain the advantages of crowdfunding and prepare people in their networks to run their fundraising campaigns.

Trust should be easier to gain, and strategic partnerships should be easier to forge, when we are able to point to a series of strong examples of how ioby’s model works in the Delta Region. When ioby has successfully supported grassroots campaigns across the region, we may begin to see momentum build as well-regarded community leaders and leaders of organizations refer people in their networks to ioby.

**How do we build on and work with forms of civic participation that are already working? (e.g. Public meetings, charrettes, etc.)**

We know that there are important initiatives led by anchor nonprofits in the region such as the Delta Health Center in Mound Bayou, MS, Heifer International in Little Rock, AR, and Higher Purpose in Clarksdale, MS. And so we would begin this work by having our Memphis Action Strategist meet with leaders of these and other critical safety net nonprofits in the region to develop a strategy together.

**How do we circumvent barriers to civic participation in order to reach the deep roots?**

To address barriers to civic participation, we suggest the following strategies.

1. **People don’t have enough spare cash to donate to causes or campaigns.**
   ioby’s local staff would train partners to address this myth in trainings and conversations with leaders who are
considering running a campaign on ioby's platform. Research indicates that there is no correlation between a community's median household income and the success of a crowdfunding campaign in their neighborhood. In fact, compared to people who live in high-income neighborhoods, people in low-income communities tend to give larger shares of their incomes to organizations and causes that are important to them.

2. **People don't know where to start.**

ioby's local staff would train partners to address this myth in trainings and conversations with leaders who are considering running a campaign on ioby's platform. Research indicates that there is no correlation between a community's median household income and the success of a crowdfunding campaign in their neighborhood. In fact, compared to people who live in high-income neighborhoods, people in low-income communities tend to give larger shares of their incomes to organizations and causes that are important to them.

3. **People feel that participating in civic life won't change anything, so it's not worth doing.**

By sharing stories of leaders who have successfully funded and built projects in their own neighborhoods, ioby can inspire residents to take action. At the same time, we would encourage leaders to fund and deliver projects quickly in the Delta Region, so that residents understand that they are able to make meaningful changes without much difficulty.

**Outputs**

In the medium term, ioby expects that leveraging our on-the-ground organizer in Memphis to build a training program for leaders in rural areas of the Delta Region will have the following results:

1. More people in the Delta Region will lead projects at the town and neighborhood scale that are concerned with making their communities stronger, safer and more sustainable. These projects will be designed by residents, funded by neighbors, and implemented by the community. Public spaces will have more stewards invested in positive change.
2. Civic leaders across the region will become better equipped to fundraise, use digital communications, and organize their communities.
3. Leaders will have a network of like-minded people doing similar work around the region and country, to whom they can turn for peer support.
4. New, previously untapped sources of citizen philanthropy will become available to civic groups working to make their communities stronger.

**Outputs**

In the long term, we expect that:

1. Previously disengaged residents will contribute to existing community development and city and regional planning initiatives. As a result, engagement with local community-based organizations will expand and diversify, and the regional civic sector will grow to be more connected.
2. Municipal and county agencies will be better positioned to make smart decisions and policies for residents based on authentic input from community leaders, the ingenuity of residents who live closest to the problems in the community and small-scale demonstrations that build community buy-in.
3. Residents will feel more ownership over initiatives that affect their towns and blocks, and understand the larger scale impact of their own projects in their communities.
Appendix A – Survey Questions

1. In which of the following regions do you live?
2. Are people generally proud to be from your town or city?
3. Are people generally proud to be from your region?
4. Have you ever worked on (e.g. volunteered for, donated to, or led) a project to make your community better in some way?
5. Who initiated the project?
6. If you had an idea for a project that would improve your town (or neighborhood, if you live in a city) in some way, who do you think would be very likely to fund it? (Check all that apply)
7. If you had an idea for a project that would benefit your community in some way, do you know of anyone in local or county government who would be willing to help you get the necessary approvals, permits, or resources to make it happen?
8. If you had an idea for a project that would benefit your community in some way, how likely would you be to crowdfunding for that project?
9. If you answered that you are unlikely to crowdfunding for a project, what are some reasons that you might not pursue this option?
10. How comfortable are people in your community with fundraising from their neighbors, friends, family, and colleagues?
11. Are people in your community likely to donate to projects that they think are positively impacting the community?
12. Would people in your community feel comfortable donating to a project that has a risk of failing?
13. Have you ever crowdfunding for a project before?
14. Was your crowdfunding campaign successful?
15. If you answered “no,” what do you think could have made your campaign more successful?
16. Which of the following barriers prevent people in your community from becoming civically engaged (i.e. volunteering, donating to a civic project, voting, meeting with a decision-maker)?
17. Do people in your town (or neighborhood, if you live in a city) trust each other?
18. Do long-term residents in your town or neighborhood tend to trust new transplants to the community?
19. Do new transplants to your town or neighborhood tend to trust long-term residents?
20. To what extent do you know what nonprofit organizations are doing to support your community?
21. Do you trust government to keep its promises to your community?
22. Do you trust philanthropists to keep their promises to your community? Why or why not? What is your full name?
23. Email address
24. Occupation (if applicable)
25. What is your zip code?
26. In what town or city do you live?
27. What is the name of the neighborhood where you live? (If applicable)
28. How would you describe your race and/or ethnicity?
29. For how long have you lived in your town or city?
30. Who sent you this survey, or how did you discover it?
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