Western Gulf Phase 0
## Contents

**Introduction**  
- ioby's Mission and Theory of Change  
- What is Phase 0?  
- Research Objectives  

**Methodology & Limitations**  
- Local Research Fellow  
- GIS fellow  
- Workshops  
- Interviews  
- Interviewees and Workshop Attendees  
- Limitations

**The Wester Gulf'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.
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.

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.

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.

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.

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 Western Gulf 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 seven 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 Western Gulf, ioby hired Melissa Lee for this role. Melissa Lee is the Senior Manager for Planning and Community Engagement at Concordia, a New Orleans based architect and planning firm, and is an experienced urban redevelopment professional and solutions-focused administrator with a comprehensive background in neighborhood economic development, community organizing, and urban planning. Her previous work experience includes serving as Senior Advisor for Commercial Revitalization at the New Orleans Redevelopment Authority (NORA), Managing Director of the Coalition for the Improvement of Bedford-Stuyvesant (CIBS), and she earned an M.P.A with a concentration in Urban Community and Economic Development from the Wagner School of Public Service at New York University.

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, and 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 one workshop in New Orleans on November 14, 2019. Attendees contributed insight that has helped ioby to tailor our training content and approach to best serve residents in the Western Gulf.

INTERVIEWS

From a total of 19 one-on-one conversations with civic leaders and 9 attendees of ioby’s grassroots fundraising workshops in the Western Gulf, 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, she also relied on existing contacts who introduced her to additional leaders in the region.

INTERVIEWEES AND WORKSHOP ATTENDEES

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<tr>
<th>Name of Interviewee or Workshop Attendee</th>
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<td>Darrin McCall</td>
<td>Youth Empowerment Project</td>
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<td>Hermione Malone</td>
<td>Good Work Network</td>
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<td>Heidi Schmalbach</td>
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<td>Jackie Sumell</td>
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<td>Haley Burns</td>
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<td>Marguerite Green</td>
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<td>Christina Andrini</td>
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<td>Philip Lee</td>
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<td>Carlesia Wright</td>
<td>City of Houston – Office of Business Opportunity</td>
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<td>Angela Tucker</td>
<td>TuckerGurl LLC</td>
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**LIMITATIONS**

We have identified limitations in our market research in the Western Gulf:

- First, we had a goal of collecting 100 survey responses from residents in the Western Gulf, but our survey response rate was not high enough to be included in this report. In many regions, not just in the Western Gulf, we have found it challenging to get sufficient responses. As a result, we expect we will discontinue this practice given its ineffectiveness, and we expect to return to our former approach of relying heavily on more interviews.
- We were only able to schedule interviews with 19 of the 35 civic leaders in the region that we had originally planned to reach.
- A second workshop, planned for Biloxi, MS in spring 2020, was canceled due to the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic.

To ensure that our analysis was thorough, we conducted extensive supplemental research, using macro-level data from the Census, historical records, academic articles, and previous research by other organizations in the region.

Although this report is meant to examine ioby’s fitness in communities across the Western Gulf, the majority of our analysis concerns New Orleans. We believe that there may be an opportunity for ioby to consider hiring an Action Strategist in Houston in the future.
The Western Gulf’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. Based on our interviews with residents and leaders in the Western Gulf, the region’s assets include:

- Well-connected residents and grassroots leaders who are adept at organizing their neighbors in response to natural disasters.
- Many organizations working at the intersection of the arts and civic engagement.
- The region has harnessed its entrepreneurial spirit to inform policy and planning, and organizations and civic leaders have created innovative solutions that contribute to recovery processes following natural disasters.

These assets have aided the region as residents and community-based organizations have grappled with profound challenges in their towns, cities, and neighborhoods. According to interviewees, these include:

- The cumulative effect of natural disasters has forced the region to confront deep-seated, entrenched barriers - historic patterns of poverty, the legacy of racial inequity, exclusion, growing income inequality, lack of affordable housing, vulnerability to rising seas, antiquated infrastructure, and failing school systems.
- Meager philanthropic investments made available to those that produce and preserve culture.

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

For ioby to be successful in a place, residents must step forward with ideas for creating positive change, and neighbors must feel comfortable turning to each other to fund their projects. To develop our strategy for growing our impact in the Western Gulf, we must first understand where and how patterns of disinvestment and social, economic, and public health trends have impacted residents’ perceptions of their towns, neighborhoods, cities, and region.

LEGACY OF SLAVERY AND RACISM

It is important to open with the acknowledgement of how the historical structuring of the Western Gulf Coast based on race and class propelled the region into a well-functioning network of antebellum plantations participating in the economy of slavery. A century later, the well-functioning network of antebellum plantations evolved into a series of contemporary, yet inequitable 21st century urban cores grappling with the legacy of white supremacy. This heritage was never more evident than during the immediate years of recovery following Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Harvey.

In the late 1700s and early 1800s, white enslavers intentionally built the Gulf Coast into a profitable network of plantations using the free labor of enslaved Africans. During the antebellum period, sugar plantations, agricultural production, commercial shipping and the ingenuity of enslaved African labor distinguished the Western Gulf Coast economy. The City of New Orleans became the principal slave market for North America, yielding tens of millions of dollars (in 1860 dollars) nationwide.\(^1\) Enslaved African labor made it possible for civic infrastructural improvements such as the construction and maintenance of levees, the clearing of swamp land, the erecting of public municipal buildings to usher the Western Gulf Coast into a new era of prominence and modernization.

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By the mid-1800s populations of enslaved Africans were in the tens of thousands. In New Orleans, Black populations were represented by enslaved Africans and free people of color, many of whom gained freedom through service, fighting in colonial militias, self-purchase or those who emigrated from Haiti after its 1791 revolution. Freedom and enslavement thrived in proximity to each other. That dichotomy, coupled with a generally relaxed attitude toward racial mixing in New Orleans, led to a caste system based on skin color (similar to India or Latin America) that perpetuated color-class lines drawn between communities of color.

During Reconstruction, from the mid-1860s to the late 1870s, Black populations saw some improvement in their attainment of economic, civil, educational, and political rights. That said, most still faced violence and racial discrimination led by white supremacist terrorist groups often with the full backing of the white elite. By 1890, formal "separate but equal" statutes written into state law known as "Jim Crow laws" dominated the South.

In the century following, government and financial leaders in the region used redlining, a racist policy that excluded neighborhoods from home loans because of the race of the residents, as white populations fled to the cities' suburbs. By the end of the 20th century, relatively few African Americans lived in suburban areas and white populations made up considerably smaller proportions of the region's cities. Between 1950 and 1990, New Orleans lost 55% of its white residents, and Houston's white population dropped from 79% of the population in 1950 to 53% in 1990.

In contemporary pre-Katrina communities of the Western Gulf Coast, economic and political power was still held primarily by the white elite, despite that whites accounted for only 28% of the New Orleans population and Black residents comprised two-thirds. Orleans Parish was the seventh poorest large U.S. county, with more than one in four residents living below the official poverty line.

When Hurricane Katrina made landfall on August 29, 2005, several economic and social factors—rooted in the region's racist histories and institutions—exposed poor and Black New Orleanians to disproportionate risk. Approximately 150,000 to 200,000 residents did not heed the State of Louisiana's call to evacuate. The reasons to stay in place were numerous, including the lack of financial resources, lack of access to transportation, or a personal obligation to protect their property. Race and class conditions linked to past racial oppression were major determining factors in whether people were able to evacuate and to rebuild. One year after Hurricane Katrina, 44% of displaced Black residents had returned to New Orleans, compared to 67% of displaced white residents. According to a Gallup poll, 53% of black residents reported they lost everything, compared with only 19% of whites. Today, many former residents of the city who wish to return cannot, simply because of financial constraints. Even more sobering, Hurricane Katrina left more than 1,800 deaths in its wake, caused $100 billion damages, and ultimately destroyed or compromised over 800,000 housing units.

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7 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
The ideological barriers to rebuilding are rooted in the inability or unwillingness to empathize with the poor, especially the poor Black populations. Following a visit to a relocation site in Houston, former First Lady Barbara Bush famously remarked, "[...] So many of the people in the arena here, you know, were underprivileged anyway, so this is working very well for them."\textsuperscript{16} To many in the region, this kind of flippant reaction to human suffering reveals the deeper dynamic of racist notions that have for centuries impeded empathy, understanding, and solidarity across the color line. Hurricane Katrina provides an unprecedented opportunity to frame racism as both a practice of racial exclusion within our political and economic structures and a matter of psychological hatred.

This same storyline was observed in Houston. A year after Katrina, many Black and Latinx Houstonians were still unable to safely live in their homes, citing the denial of FEMA aid as well as the lack of resources and government intervention to address the air and water quality. Similar results were scene studying racial discrimination in FEMA aid after Harvey.\textsuperscript{17} The level of environmental injustice is a huge concern for communities of the Gulf Coast. Racial discrimination, the unsustainable of land, the unequal distribution of environmental benefits and pollution burdens based on race before the hurricanes contributed to the damages and heavy effects it had communities of the Gulf Coast where people of color resided after the hurricanes.

This long legacy of racism has led to gentrification, for which there are many indicators, such as:

- Demolition of housing development projects, which led to the proliferation of scattered-site, mixed-income housing.\textsuperscript{18}
- Failure to address water, air, and land quality.\textsuperscript{19}
- Unequal distribution of environmental benefits and pollution burdens based on race.\textsuperscript{20}
- FEMA's Road Home program's flawed and discriminatory property valuation policies exacerbated inequities in the agency's grantmaking to homeowners.\textsuperscript{21}
- The auctioning of private property in the name of blight elimination, which led to increased property values and an increase in short-term rentals.\textsuperscript{22}
- Decentralized charter school system with no centralized autonomy.\textsuperscript{23}

**HIGHWAYS**

**New Orleans**

In 1969, a thriving African American business corridor and more than two miles of the city's historically Black neighborhoods (including Tremé) was razed to construct the expansion of the I-10 expressway.\textsuperscript{24} In its wake, 326 black-owned businesses, 300 massive live-oak trees and a wide grassy median that served as a picnic and play area along Claiborne Avenue were eliminated.\textsuperscript{25} Before the I-10 overpass went up, Claiborne Avenue was a commercial and cultural destination for Black families.\textsuperscript{26} Since the building of the I-10 overpass, the Claiborne Avenue business district has fallen into economic decline.\textsuperscript{27} Today, only a

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\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{25} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid.

few dozen establishments still stand. The only remaining sign of the oak trees are of those painted on the pillars beneath the highway to commemorate what was lost to urban renewal.

Tremé residents and historians say that the government’s assault on the neighborhood did not begin with the construction of I-10. The first physical manifestation of urban renewal planning, which began in the 1920s, was the construction of the Municipal Auditorium in 1930. The plans for the Auditorium called for the demolition of the original Tremé Market. As construction continued with completion of the Theater for Performing Arts (now known as the Mahalia Jackson Theater) and Louis Armstrong Park, dozens of city blocks in Tremé were leveled and more than 400 Black families were displaced throughout the city. In 1969, the Tremé Community Improvement Association formed to fight back against further destruction or displacement that was witnessed under the guise of “urban renewal.”

Houston

In Houston, in at least two instances, the City seems to have responded differently to communities’ resistance to mid-twentieth century urban renewal projects based on neighborhoods’ racial and socioeconomic makeup. In the early 1970s, officials proposed to widen the stretch of Interstate 45 in the Third Ward, a historically Black neighborhood that had been known as the “Park Avenue of black Houston” in the early 20th century. The initial construction of Interstate 45 had already damaged large portions of the community, and this new plan for the widening project called for the demolition of about 200 homes. Residents protested and campaigned for historical designation to preserve the integrity of their neighborhood. Despite residents’ efforts, the City proceeded with its plan to widen the highway. The Interstate effectively split the community in two and catalyzed a long period of private disinvestment and economic decline.

At about the same time, residents of Courtlandt Place, a white and wealthy community, protested the City’s plans to build a highway spur and introduce multi-family housing and commercial activity to the mostly single-family neighborhood. The spur was already in construction when protests began. Protestors used similar organizing tactics to those used by Third Ward residents, and the project was ultimately scaled down to have very little impact on the neighborhood’s built environment. According to Kyle Shelton, researcher at the Kinder Institute for Urban Research, the different outcomes of urban renewal projects in Third Ward and Courtlandt Place are emblematic of larger trends: “It is undeniable that imbalances in the racial and economic power of the two sets of actors involved definitively shaped the outcomes of the fights. Houston in the 1970s still struggled with racism and rarely provided equitable treatment to all of its citizens.”

RECENT INSTANCES OF FORCED DISPLACEMENT

Lower Mid-City

In August 2015, a new $1.1 billion public hospital opened near downtown New Orleans, replacing the city’s shuttered Charity Hospital. In 2016, a new New Orleans Veterans Affairs Medical Center opened nearby. To build the new hospitals, public officials forced hundreds of homeowners and businesses from
the Lower Mid-City neighborhood. In 2019, the Arts Council of New Orleans commissioned artists Rose Kelly and Nik Richard to install metal panels along the neutral ground that connects the two hospitals, to commemorate the neighborhood that was demolished and the residents who had been displaced.

**The Housing Authority of New Orleans:**
New Orleans was the first American city to receive federal funding under the Wagner Act, a piece of New Deal legislation that authorized and financed "slum clearance" programs and the construction of new low-income housing. By the end of 1938, the federal government had authorized $30,000,000 for two housing projects for white residents and four housing projects for Black residents. The City continued to develop several more public housing projects until the 1970s when, according to HANO, "public housing in New Orleans had deteriorated to the point where units were no longer habitable under basic living standards." Beginning in the 1990s, HANO pursued federal HOPE VI grants to redevelop, retrofit, and redesign its public housing stock.

Before Hurricane Katrina, the City developed plans to demolish old housing sites and replace them with mixed-income developments. When large portions of HANO’s public housing stock were damaged by the storm, the City accelerated these plans with the goals of deconcentrating poverty and improving lower-income residents’ quality of life. Some residents of public housing supported the plan, but many resisted: a large protest erupted at the December 2007 city council meeting where members voted unanimously to demolish the housing complexes. In 2005, more than 5,000 families lived in public housing. Today, there are fewer than 2,000. Displaced families have relocated to places like Houston and Atlanta or moved elsewhere on the outskirts of New Orleans.

**HISTORY OF GOVERNMENT FAILURE**
“America failed the people of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast long before that failure showed up on our television sets. America failed them again during Katrina. We cannot — we must not — fail for a third time,” – President Barack Obama in August of 2007.

The aftermath of the storms and levee failures shined a light on challenges that recovery dollars have yet to adequately address. These disasters have forced cities and towns in the region to confront deep-seated, entrenched barriers to recovery, including: historic patterns of poverty, the legacy of racial inequity, exclusion, growing income inequality, lack of affordable housing, vulnerability to rising seas, antiquated infrastructure, and a failing school system.

According to the Greater New Orleans Funders Network, New Orleans has become the testing ground for new ideas to address these barriers: "New Orleans has become a living example for testing principles, policies and projects for rebuilding a more just, resilient and equitable city; the lessons learned from the past decade can inform other cities and regions facing similar issues.”

While the social and economic values of the cultural sector are profound, investments in those that produce and preserve the culture are meager. Many community institutions, particularly those led by people of color, neighborhood-based groups like the Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs and Mardi Gras Indian tribes, and musicians and independent artists, struggle to sustain themselves economically. One

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47 Burdeau.
48 Maccash.
50 Ibid.
52 Ibid.
53 Fessler.
54 Ibid.
56 Fessler.
57 Ibid.
58 Ibid.
interviewee told ioby that, while some philanthropic dollars and modest investments from the public sector benefit these communities, there remains an imbalance between the large, historically white-led institutions and those groups led by people of color. This disparity is not only an economic justice issue but one of social and cultural equity.

President Obama pledged to strengthen New Orleans’s broken levees by 2011 so that they would be able to withstand a Category 5 storm. In 2018, the Army Corps of Engineers completed construction of the $14.5 billion project. Only 11 months later, the Army Corps announced that rising sea levels and shrinking levees will render the system inadequate to prevent flooding by 2023.

**DIGITAL DIVIDE**
Interviewees said that there is a significant digital divide that affects individuals who are low-income, elderly, school age, from communities of color, or live with a disability. Members of these segments of the population are less likely to 1) have a computer; 2) have high-speed Internet at home or 3) live or work near free Wi-Fi hotspots. We heard that libraries are not open as long as they should be in order to accommodate people without consistent access to the internet and who do not work within typical business hours.

In 2017, New Orleans was ranked the 14th worst connected city in the country, with 22.6% of households reporting that they do not have access to the internet.

Interviewees in the region said that affordability is the primary barrier to internet access. However, some residents are also unfamiliar with how to use digital devices or feel that they are intended for other people: “I think many people fail to recognize the conditions in which poor and African-American New Orleanians struggle to survive every day,” Anglea Tucker told ioby, “the internet just isn’t relevant to their lives.”

In rural areas, access to high-speed internet is either too expensive or unavailable to many residents.

**ECONOMY**

**Oil and natural gas**
The oil and natural gas industry continues to be the economic foundation of the Western Gulf Coast. About 17% of total domestic oil production and 5% of natural gas production originates in the Gulf of Mexico. In 2017, the industry accounted for 1.3% of all employment in cities and towns on the Gulf Coast (including the Western Gulf and Eastern Gulf regions), and refining and chemical manufacturing contributed another 0.7% percent of employment. These figures translate to over 308,000 jobs in oil and gas and over 253,000 jobs in refineries and chemical manufacturing.

The federal Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act (GOMESA) of 2006 required that Gulf Coast states receive a share of leasing revenues produced by the oil and gas industry in each state. Since then, Gulf states have relied heavily on these funds to invest in coastal conservation and restoration projects, hurricane protection programs, and environmental management.

**Advanced Manufacturing**
Advanced manufacturing is an important economic driver in the region. This includes aerospace manufacturing, ship and boat building, chemical manufacturing, mineral production, and plastics manufacturing. In 2014, there were approximately 7,790 jobs in advanced manufacturing in the New Orleans region.

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62 Ibid.
63 Ibid.
68 Ibid.
70 Ibid.
Orleans metropolitan area.\textsuperscript{72}

**Tech Boom in New Orleans**

New Orleans's economy appears to be shaking its historical reliance on tourism and the oil and gas industry. In 2017, New Orleans beat out more than 30 cities in a competition to host DXC Technology's new Digital Transformation Center.\textsuperscript{73} The project promised to add 2,000 new high-paying jobs to the city's tech sector.\textsuperscript{74} DXC joined more than 45 other high-tech startups and subsidiaries that had moved to the city since 2007.\textsuperscript{75} In total, the tech sector now accounts for 20,000 jobs in the city.\textsuperscript{76}

**OPIOIDS**

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Louisiana ranked 19th in drug overdose death rates in 2017.\textsuperscript{77} Until recently, deaths related to overdoses in rural areas outpaced overdose deaths in major urban areas.\textsuperscript{78} Today, death rates in cities have surpassed those in rural areas. Even so, treatment options in rural communities continue to lag.\textsuperscript{79} Addiction treatment programs are unable to account for feelings of isolation and loneliness that are common in rural areas and are among the root causes of opioid addiction.\textsuperscript{80} The five parishes in Louisiana that have been hit hardest by the opioid epidemic are Orleans (covering the entire city of New Orleans), Jefferson, St. Tammany, East Baton Rouge and Washington.\textsuperscript{81}

According to the City of Houston Health Department, deaths from opioid overdoses in Harris County increased 36% from 2013 to 2019.\textsuperscript{82} Approximately 77% of these deaths were Houston residents.\textsuperscript{83} In 2019, the Health Department received two grants, totaling $2.2 million, to reduce overdose deaths, refer people to treatment, provide education, and improve data collection.\textsuperscript{84}

**CRIMINAL JUSTICE**

The incarceration rates for Louisiana (1,052 per 100,000 residents) are more than double the U.S. average (698 per 100,000 residents).\textsuperscript{85} Until 2018, Louisiana's incarceration rate was the highest in the nation.\textsuperscript{86} Today, the state is second to Oklahoma.\textsuperscript{87}

The disproportionate impacts of the country's criminal justice system on Black communities are felt profoundly in the state. Although Black residents make up only 32% of Louisiana's population, they account for 66% of the population incarcerated in the state's prisons and jails.\textsuperscript{88}

The Louisiana State Penitentiary is nicknamed "Angola," after the former plantation that occupied the same land.\textsuperscript{89} The plantation had been named for the African country that was the origin of many enslaved Africans brought to Louisiana.\textsuperscript{90}
Mississippi’s incarceration rate (1,039 per 100,000 residents) is similar to Louisiana’s, and the Black population is similarly overrepresented in prisons and jails. Although Black residents make up 37% of the population in Mississippi, they account for 57% of all prisoners in the state.

Although the incarceration rate in Texas (891 per 100,000 residents) is lower than in Louisiana and Mississippi, criminal justice advocates point to the disproportionate impact of prosecutions on communities of color. According to data analyzed by Grassroots Leadership and Texas Advocates for Justice, Black residents account for less than 20% of the population in Harris County but made up more than 45% of bookings over a three-year span from 2015 to 2018.

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

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.

We assessed data from New Orleans, Houston, and Biloxi, and found that more than 39,670 residents have used crowdfunding platforms like GoFundMe (3,974 fundraisers currently listed) and Kickstarter (5,239 projects currently listed) to meet their personal and creative funding needs. 30,457 teachers in schools located in and near these places have successfully fundraised with DonorsChoose for classroom supplies.

In New Orleans, a private developer used Small Change, a real estate crowdfunding platform to raise $112,000 for a project in the Lower Garden District that will include an artist-owned bed and breakfast, artist residences, and a community space.

ioby’s intention is to supplement, rather than compete with, these crowdfunding platforms in the Western Gulf. 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.

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92 Ibid.
94 GoFundMe. https://www.gofundme.com/
EXISTING SOURCES OF FUNDING FOR NONPROFITS AND GRASSROOTS ORGANIZATIONS

There are no direct funders or organizations that are likely to perceive ioby as direct competition. Interviewees told ioby that the local funding pool is small and concentrated. The Greater New Orleans Foundation (GNOF) and the City of New Orleans provide small and micro-grants to local nonprofits, including neighborhood associations, for hyper-local improvement projects and organizational capacity-building.

GNOF operates more than 800 donor-advised and donor-designated funds and, according to their website, GNOF donors “make more than $23 million in grants to diverse nonprofits of all sizes throughout the region, according to their specific areas of interest.” Through IMPACT, its discretionary grants program, GNOF funds nonprofits (and unincorporated groups working with a fiscal sponsor) working in the fields of arts and culture, youth development, education, health, and social services. The average size of an IMPACT grant is $20,000.

In addition, the City of New Orleans administers the CleanUpNOLA Community Impact Grant, which is meant “to encourage residents to develop a beautification or ‘Green Infrastructure’ project as a community.” Despite the program’s goal of inspiring and supporting resident-led projects, applicants are told that they must be affiliated with a 501c3 nonprofit organization in order to be awarded the grant.

Other funders in the region include:

Greater New Orleans

- **Platforms Fund:** Each year, Antenna and Ashe Cultural Arts Center award grants through their Platforms Fund, with the support of the Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts. For their 2019-2020 grants cycle, the Platforms Fund awarded a total of $60,000 in grants for projects led by artists and collectives. Most awards are between $1,500 and $5,000, and very few applicants receive $10,000 for ambitious or long-term projects. Projects funded through the Platforms Fund align neatly with the city’s historic characteristics of creativity, collaboration, and resilience.

- **The New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Foundation:** The Jazz & Heritage Foundation grants the proceeds from the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival to artists and nonprofit organizations in Louisiana. For their 2020-2021 grant cycle, the Foundation plans to grant over $1 million to arts education programs, performing arts presenting organizations, and individual artists. The Foundation’s average grant award is $3,500.

- **Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities (LEH):** The LEH awards small “Rebirth” grants of up to $7,000 to nonprofits and unincorporated groups to plan and create public humanities programming and discussions.

- **#CreateLouisiana:** Since 2015, #CreateLouisiana has periodically awarded grants to artists in the region. The organization prioritizes grantmaking to indigenous talent and supports the region’s entertainment industries. The #CreateLouisiana fund has awarded more than $150,000 in cash and in-kind resources to artists in Louisiana.

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101 Ibid.
103 Ibid.
105 Ibid.
106 Ibid.
108 Ibid.
112 Ibid.
113 Ibid.
- **RosaMary Foundation**: The RosaMary Foundation awards grants to organizations in the fields of education, human services, arts, community development, and government oversight.\(^{114}\) During its spring 2020 cycle, the Foundation awarded a total of 40 grants to 39 organizations, totaling $933,500 with an average award of $23,300.\(^{115}\)

- **The Greater New Orleans Funders Network (GNOFN)**: GNOFN was founded by the following 10 foundations, with the goal of leveraging their collective investments in the region to advance social and racial equity:
  - Baptist Community Ministries (BCM)
  - blue moon fund
  - Ford Foundation
  - Foundation for Louisiana (FFL)
  - Greater New Orleans Foundation (GNOF)
  - JP Morgan Chase & Co. (JPMC)
  - Kresge Foundation
  - Surdna Foundation
  - Walton Family Foundation
  - W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

While GNOFN does not directly award any grants, the organization hosts important discussions, called Action Tables, that convene the region’s funders and public officials that help to shape their priorities and set agendas.\(^{116}\)

### Houston

- **United Way of Greater Houston**: The United Way of Greater Houston awards “Community Building Grants,” one-time, short-term grants of up to $10,000 for projects that benefit the community.\(^{117}\) Applicants must be local 501c3 nonprofit organizations that have been incorporated for at least two years.

- **City of Houston**: The City of Houston awards one-to-one Neighborhood Matching Grants for beautification and improvement projects through a partnership between the Department of Neighborhoods and the City of Houston Council Members’ Offices.\(^{118}\) Applicants must be affiliated with 501c3 nonprofit organizations or have a fiscal sponsor in order to be considered. Awards are granted in the form of reimbursements, up to $5,000.\(^{119}\)

- **The Houston Endowment** awards grants to nonprofit organizations across four focus areas: (1) “Strong Civic Assets,” (2) “Thriving Residents,” (3) “Post-Secondary Success,” and (4) “Stronger Region.”\(^{120}\) More specifically, the Endowment aims to strengthen and ensure public access to cultural and civic amenities, improve access to healthcare, improve local and regional education outcomes, and make the region’s communities more sustainable and resilient.\(^{121}\) According to its website, the Endowment awards grants for “general operating support, project support, capacity building, capital improvement, public policy and engagement, and research.”\(^{122}\)

### 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.


\(^{119}\) Ibid.

\(^{120}\) “Houston Endowment.” Houston Endowment. https://www.houstonendowment.org/.

\(^{121}\) Ibid.

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 Western Gulf: STRONG

Individual donations are among the top common sources of funding to nonprofits and causes due to limited local funding resources. Interviewees said that acts of individual giving and kindness occur most often at dedicated fish fries, rent parties, passing of the hat events, and happy hours. This has been a commonplace practice for many decades.

On GiveNOLA Day, an annual online giving event hosted by the Greater New Orleans Foundation, individuals are asked to support one or more participating nonprofit organizations. In 2020, individuals gave 68,679 donations to 835 organizations, for a total of more than $7.2 million. The average donation was $105.

One interviewee told ioby, "The people of the New Orleans region know what it is like to face tough times and how to step up in a crisis. Our people are unmatched in their generosity and caring for one another." Other interviewees shared stories infused with a collective understanding that the quality of their community is the result of their collective efforts.

Another interviewee shared a story of when a tornado pummeled New Orleans East in 2017. Signs were toppled, trees were battered, and businesses and homes were destroyed. A state of emergency was declared. "There are a lot of families that lost everything," Mayor Mitch Landrieu said at the time. In total, about 300 properties were damaged or destroyed and 33 people were injured.

As soon as the weather cleared, residents across the city immediately mobilized to help victims. "These sorts of acts of kindness are not surprising," an interviewee shared with ioby. "That does not make the losses any less painful. We, however, are experts in cleaning up and starting over."

Within a couple of hours of the tornado, local restaurants and food trucks parked at the nearby Joe Brown Park to serve hot meals. The Ace Hotel collected toiletries, clothes, blankets, and pillows to distribute to those who had been displaced. Son of a Saint, a nonprofit mentoring program for young men distributed clothes and shoes. Other residents donated money, and essential supplies, and some offered to house strangers who had lost their homes.

Using the Chronicle of Philanthropy’s "giving ratio" (calculated as itemized charitable deductions as a percentage of gross income) as our metric, charitable giving appears most heavily concentrated in the region’s metropolitan areas.

126 Ibid.
127 Ibid.
128 Ibid.
129 Ibid.
Importantly, in areas where income is very low, it is unlikely worthwhile to itemize deductions. For this reason, the "giving ratio" is often criticized for being a great measure of who itemizes donations and little else. 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, and giving cash at local organizations’ fundraising events.

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 Western Gulf: MIXED

Interviewees told ioby that community-based organizations in the region are very connected to each other, especially the smaller nonprofits.

Because nonprofits’ geographic service areas and missions tend to overlap, interviewees said that most nonprofit executives understand that collaboration is a successful pathway to funding. Nonprofit leaders said that funders are more comfortable making investments in a constellation of service providers, rather than in a single organization or effort.

Interviewees told ioby that nonprofits often refer their clients or users to other organizations that might be able to offer additional services or assistance. We also heard that nonprofits often share resources, such as space, equipment, and supplies. A few interviewees said that they have written grant proposals with another organization.
It is also important to note that, despite their good will toward each other, there can be a high level of competition among community-based organizations as they struggle for positioning or power in the communities that they serve. The question that the nonprofit community has yet to answer is, "How do nonprofit organizations find ways to collaborate while staying in their respective programmatic and geographic lanes?"

**Distribution of Nonprofits**
The map below reveals large clusters of incorporated nonprofits in the region's metropolitan areas, with the greatest concentration in and around Houston.

![Map of Nonprofit Distribution](image)

**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 Western Gulf: STRONG**

The culture of grassroots fundraising for charitable projects in New Orleans runs deep. Interviewees said that people in their communities are generally comfortable asking neighbors, churches, and friends for donations for home repairs, funerals, weddings, graduations, or whatever immediate obstacles they may face. While ioby’s platform is not built to support these kinds of projects, the city’s culture of fundraising for urgent needs suggests that local leaders are likely accustomed to grassroots fundraising.
Although residents with ideas to improve their communities generally do not expect to receive support from the region’s institutional funders, large foundations and financial institutions in New Orleans have a history of supporting local artists and facilitating the production of public art in various forms and interventions.

In Houston, large foundations have a history of supporting neighborhood beautification projects. Residents and organizations have lower expectations that funders will support civic projects beyond traditional artistic or beautification projects.

Nonprofit leaders feel the gaps in funding profoundly, and interviewees said that the sector’s funding needs were consistently greater than the amount of funding available through traditional philanthropy. For these reasons, nonprofit leaders said that they are always looking to diversify their funding streams, including by using grassroots fundraising. It was noted that the current pool of funding has been around for a long time, sustained by local philanthropic family endowments as opposed to state-wide funding streams.

Community members told ioby that it can be difficult to become a grantee, particularly in the region’s cities. We heard that New Orleans is a "relationship town," and that one must build a relationship with local funders in order to garner support for their project or organization. Interviewees said that funders tend to fund organizations and projects led by people whom they already know, and people who live in neighborhoods with histories of disinvestment often have less access to people in positions of power. As a result, interviewees feel that organizations and projects led by people of color and in low-income communities are more difficult to fund. If successfully awarded, grants to these organizations and projects tend to be on the smaller funding scale, so that individuals and groups must look to donors to fill the gap.

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 Western Gulf: STRONG

The cities of New Orleans and Houston have created "one-stop shops" for residents seeking information and approvals for their projects and businesses. Their websites contain detailed information on how to secure permits and licenses. In order to simplify what have historically been complicated and difficult processes, the "one-stop shops" have broken down barriers between departments and improved the customer experience.

The City of New Orleans has also streamlined the process of getting permits and licenses by locating four key agencies—the City Planning Commission, Historic District Landmarks Commission, Safety and Permits Department and Vieux Carre Commission—on the same floor of City Hall. Similarly, the City of Houston’s Permitting Center is located in a single building that houses the Departments of Police, Administration and Regulatory Affairs, Fire, Planning and Development, Health, Airports, and Public Works.

The value of a one-stop shop—with a virtual front-end and an in-person guide—is that a single entity controls the permitting process and is accountable for the results. Staff have continued to develop the skills and culture necessary for driving a positive user experience, interacting with other public agencies, and engaging with community stakeholders. For permit applicants, the one-stop shop means equitable access to government as well as clarity and consistency during the process.

130 "Welcome to the Houston Permitting Center." Houston Permitting Center, City of Houston. https://www.houstonpermittingcenter.org/.
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 borough. 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 Western Gulf: VERY STRONG

Interviewees explained that New Orleans is not just a city, but a singular spirit and culture. The following are nearly a dozen reasons that interviewees said that they are proud of their city:

- We are the Who Dat Nation: “Otherwise known as New Orleans, this is where you will find the biggest and best football fans who go crazy for our beloved team the Saints. Fans show unwavering devotion to the Saints no matter what and cheer out, ‘Who dat say they gonna beat dem saints?’”

- We take the time needed to celebrate our lives. “Some may say that we party too much, and for some it’s true...but mostly, I would say the rest of the country celebrates too little.”

- We nurture the artist in our children. “From NOCCA [New Orleans Center for Creative Arts] to the music and dance and visual art programs that enliven so many of our public schools, we know how to help our children honor their inner artist from the very start.”

- We survived. “It can be easy to forget how uncertain it really was that anyone would ever inhabit New Orleans again in the years after Katrina. As we continue to face enormous environmental challenges, we should remember how much strength, courage, and determination it required for us to exist here at all following that storm. We are survivors, and we are adaptors. We should be proud of it.”

- We aren’t afraid of the truth. “In New Orleans, more often than not, someone is going to tell you like it really is. And we embrace that!”

- We know how to live and let live. “To each their own, laissez les bon temps roulez, and on and on...in New Orleans, we’ve figured out how to give each other the space to express ourselves without too much controversy.”

- We put family and community before work and ambition. “While some people who move here could say that we are lazy or unproductive, in my opinion, we just have different priorities. And I’m proud of that.”

- We say hello to one another on the streets and look each other in the eye. “It’s just the way of doing things here.”

- We appreciate great music. “While we still have a long way to go in making sure our musicians have a comfortable lifestyle, at least we have an innate acknowledgment and appreciation for the amazing gifts great, heartfelt music brings us.”

- We put in the effort to preserve our historic architecture and streetscapes. “And we’ve got the amazing beauty all around us to prove it.”

- We know the meaning of hospitality. “Even though we often groan at tourists and all of the challenges they can bring, at the core of it, we in New Orleans know how to welcome the
stranger with open arms and we take pleasure in doing it the right way."

- We know how to honor those that pass with dignity and joy. “In New Orleans, we understand that death is a part of life and we celebrate the lives of those who have passed.”

In Houston, interviewees explained that their city is a place where you can find inspiration anywhere, “From the random art murals and graffiti, lingo like the ‘feeder,’ ‘59,’ and ‘the loop’; football; the rodeo and the food culture, Houston makes you become your own person.”

**COMPARING THE WESTERN GULF 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 Western Gulf Region appears to be a 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 region’s—especially New Orleans’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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<th>Western Gulf</th>
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<th>Detroit</th>
<th>Memphis</th>
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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 residents and community-based organizations in the Western Gulf have led and donated to the types of community-led, “DIY,” and tactical urbanism projects that ioby tends to support.

Residents in New Orleans have always created their own projects in public spaces. Today, “DIY” and tactical urbanism projects are still relevant, and they represent some of a few ways for residents to carve out an artistic livelihood and exercise their freedom of expression.

Congo Square

“In going up St. Peters Street & approaching the Common I heard a most extraordinary noise, which I supposed to proceed from some horse mill, the horses tramping on a wooden floor. I found, however, on emerging from the houses to the Common, that it proceeded from a crowd of 5 or 600 persons assembled in an open space or public square. I went to the spot and crowded near enough to see the performance. All those who were engaged in the business seemed to be blacks.” - Benjamin Latrobe, 1819

Latrobe’s description of a public space from 1819 is one of the earliest accounts of jazz in New Orleans.132 When New Orleans was under the Catholic Spanish and French rule, slaves were permitted to take Sundays off, and would gather to play drums and string instruments, dance, and socialize in public space.133 In 2011, the City of New Orleans renamed the space described by Latrobe “Congo Square.”134

Neutral Ground

In New Orleans, the “neutral ground,” often called a “median” in other cities, refers to the green space that divides two sides of a street. According to the City of New Orleans, “Neutral grounds play a prominent role in the history, culture, and life of New Orleans.”135 Interviewees said that this is the space where common purpose, energy and passion among people are nurtured. The term “neutral ground” originated in New Orleans in the late 1700s, when English speaking inhabitants took up residence near the French Quarter, which was heavily populated by French speakers. Divided by a vacant strip of land that eventually became known as Canal Street, the two groups frequently gathered at the site considered as neutral ground to settle disputes.136

Today, the term is applied to any similar median and the neutral ground is a prominent player in the civic life of New Orleans. Neutral grounds are where people socialize, walk, catch beads during Mardi Gras, start a second line, and rest. Many people also park their cars on neutral grounds to prepare for flooding.

Under the Bridge

Various social, arts, and civic events in New Orleans appear spontaneously in places that were not originally designed for these purposes. These include jam sessions on the streets and young people

134 Ibid.
135 Ibid.
skateboarding below interstate highway overpasses. In neighborhoods where resources are limited, there may not ever be a perfect concept design, a completed project or a refined sense of materiality. Instead, there is a genuine and resilient “DIY” spirit that emerges from people who desperately want a common ground where they can freely express themselves.

The creation of “Parasite Skatepark” is a prime example of how a DIY project in public space has transformed into a permanent community asset. In 2010, a group of skateboarders built “The Peach Orchard,” a makeshift skatepark under an overpass, including concrete walls and ramps that they built themselves. When the City of New Orleans ordered the demolition of the park in 2012, the group set out to build a new skatepark, which they named “Parasite Skatepark.” They formed a nonprofit and successfully negotiated with the City for it to be formally recognized. Tulane School of Architecture students stepped in and designed the next phase through various collaborative workshops. In 2015, the group raised about $52,000 from 722 donors on Kickstarter to expand the park.

Through its “Youth Solutions” program, the Arts Council of New Orleans works with young people to implement neighborhood improvement projects. The organization trains youth in the tenets of creative placemaking and community engagement and coaches them through the creation of their own projects. The program has supported the creation of a pop-up park and seating for public spaces. In 2016, the Arts Council worked with ioby to raise more than $14,400 for the creation of a bus shelter on Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard that was designed by local youth.

Antenna, a nonprofit arts organization in New Orleans, hosts its “Signals” event four times each year. The event uses a variety show format to feature between six and eight local artists, writers, musicians, scientists, activists and scholars.

These projects are emblematic of the kinds of community-driven action that have shaped the city since Hurricanes Katrina and Rita made landfall in 2005. According to the Greater New Orleans Funders Network, the years since 2005 are defined by “[...] an important shift in civic leadership and community engagement, as residents of the region harnessed their entrepreneurial spirit to inform policy and planning, develop innovative solutions and lead the recovery. This thread runs from the neighborhood leaders and volunteers who worked to bring their neighbors back to the region, through the development of the Unified New Orleans Plan (UNOP) in 2006, to the public process to develop ProsperityNOLA, the official economic development plan of the City of New Orleans, released in 2013.”

Despite significant philanthropic investment in the community engagement processes that fueled the creation of these plans, interviewees said that there is a critical need for more assurances that decision-makers and policymakers will work with community members to design solutions that work for and in conjunction with the community.

We heard the same critical need for robust and meaningful engagement in communities across the Western Gulf region. We believe that ioby can be a flexible facilitator between municipalities and residents in the region. In each of ioby’s cities of focus, we maintain strong relationships with public officials that help to ensure that grassroots leaders are connected to decision-makers, and that government agencies are learning from the successes and lived experiences of neighborhood leaders.

Based on strong precedent of community-led and neighbor-funded work in the region, we predict that there will be significant demand for ioby’s services among nonprofit and grassroots leaders.

139 Ibid.
141 Suh.
144 “Fulfilling the Promise.”
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.

According to interviewees and our supplemental research, civic leaders’ current priorities include (1) restoring wetlands, (2) improving transportation, (3) rebuilding schools, (4) racial justice, (5) housing relief, and (6) stemming displacement.

Restoring Wetlands
For years, the Gulf Region has been losing wetlands, barrier islands, and marshes that provide a buffer for populated areas from storms. In 2017, the State of Louisiana put forth an ambitious $50 billion "Coastal Master Plan" to build and preserve new land on the coast over 50 years. Implementation of the plan is currently underway.

Improving transportation
New Orleans and Houston are taking concrete steps to build a post-hurricanes transportation network that is safer, more equitable, and more fully connected than before. City leaders in both cities recognized this opportunity as they rebuilt, and the Complete Streets ordinance formalized in New Orleans in 2011 and Houston in 2013 honored this commitment.

Rebuilding Schools
Secretary of Education Arne Duncan infamously called Hurricane Katrina “the best thing that happened to the education system in New Orleans.” While many continue to debate city leaders’ effectiveness at rebuilding school infrastructure after the storms, few have questioned the imperative of providing better educational opportunities for the city’s children than those that existed prior to Katrina.

Racial Justice
According to interviewees, communities in New Orleans would like to see meaningful partnerships and collaborations across sectors, across industries, and with leadership, broad input, and participation from residents in order to dismantle racist institutions. The National African American Reparations Commission (NAARC) has an active chapter in New Orleans. In 2017, NAARC hosted “Communique: The New Orleans Reparations Gathering at Southern University.” The primary goal of the gathering was to increase greater public awareness about NAARC’s 10-point program platform, as well as to capture insight and recommendations from the region. Interviewees did not know of any clear next steps for the New Orleans Chapter.

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151 Ibid.
“Take ‘Em Down NOLA,” or “#TakeEmDownNOLA,” is a local coalition of organizers committed to the removal of all symbols of white supremacy in New Orleans, as a part of a broader push for racial and economic justice.152 Take ‘Em Down NOLA’s grassroots movement catalyzed the removal of four white supremacist monuments in 2017, and three in 2020.153

Housing Relief
Under the multi-billion-dollar Road Home Homeowner Assistance Program, eligible homeowners can receive a federal grant to rebuild. But for many Western Gulf Region homeowners with storm-damaged properties, the federally funded Road Home Program has been long and rocky. Although most requests were ultimately met, reimbursements for many homeowners took several years, as bureaucratic tangles and questions about eligibility delayed processing.154

Stemming Displacement
After Hurricane Katrina damaged 200,000 homes and displaced more than 800,000 people, affluent newcomers began to replace long-time residents, including many people of color.155 Many lower-income Black residents relocated to the suburbs, as well as to cities such as Houston and Atlanta.156 In 2005, Black New Orleanians accounted for 67% of the city’s population and, by 2019, they accounted for 59%.157

Developers acquired and rebuilt on blocks that had been destroyed and permanently evacuated and rebuilt to higher standards.158 New units were sold and rented to newcomers.159 Today, several historically Black working-class neighborhoods—including Bywater, Marigny, the 7th Ward, and the Holly Cross neighborhood in the 9th Ward—are substantially whiter and more affluent than they were before Katrina.160

These demographic changes have put upward pressure on the price of real estate citywide. From 2000 to 2017, the proportion of households in the metropolitan area experiencing housing cost burdens (defined by HUD as families who pay more than 30% of their income for housing) increased from 22% to 32%. In that same time period, the average rent rose 30%, from $808 (adjusted for inflation) to $965.161

The affordable housing crisis has been exacerbated by the rise of short-term rentals. In many neighborhoods, developers have bought up houses and use them for short term rentals rather than allowing families and residents to move in.164 In 2019, the New Orleans City Council unanimously passed a series of resolutions curtailing short-term rentals across the city.165 Effective December 31, 2019, short-term, “whole house” rentals are no longer available in New Orleans.166

Houston-area neighborhoods such as Third Ward, Denver Harbor, Fifth Ward and Gulfton have experienced an acceleration of gentrification since 2000.167 According to a recent analysis by the Federal Reserve Bank

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152 “Home.” #TakeEmDownNOLA. http://takeemdownnola.org/.
158 Ibid.
159 Ibid.
160 Bentley.
161 “Rental Burdens: Rethinking Affordability Measures.” HUD USER. https://www.huduser.gov/portal/pdf/edge_pdr_edgefeatd_article_092214.html#:~:text=HUD%20defines%20cost%2Dburdened%20families,of%20one%20in
162 Florida.
163 Bentley.
165 Ibid.
of Dallas, Houston is gentrifying faster than in any other major Texas metropolitan area.\textsuperscript{168} The report noted that, between 2000 and 2015, the median income of neighborhoods within three miles of downtown Houston increased by 67%.\textsuperscript{169}

Residents in large portions of the region, and particularly in and around New Orleans and Houston, are already severely rent burdened, paying an average of more than 50% of their adjusted gross income on rent. These residents are most vulnerable to displacement when rents rise due to new investment.

\textbf{Map 3. Residents in urban, suburban, and rural areas across the region are severely rent-burdened.}

\begin{figure}
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\caption{Residents in urban, suburban, and rural areas across the region are severely rent-burdened.}
\end{figure}

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, particularly in communities of color and low-income areas. 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.\textsuperscript{170} These Opportunity Zones, nominated by the governor of each state, are typically in rural areas and low-income neighborhoods with histories of disinvestment.

\textbf{Objective #6: Characterize civic participation across the region}

Challenges faced by communities across the Gulf Coast impacted by hurricanes Katrina and Rita are surmountable, in theory. People and organizations have shown enormous resilience and continue to provide entry points to create effective community building. However, many residents are straddling the line between generations-long family traditions and the insistent, daily experience of living in a community that is struggling for equity and inclusion. ioby heard from interviewees that the prospect of reconciling strong civic pride with the extreme challenges of living in the region is truly daunting.

\bibliography{
\begin{enumerate}
\item Ibid.
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Residents of color who returned to the city after the hurricanes appear to be less likely to feel attached to their communities, in part because social networks were permanently frayed in the aftermath of the storms.\textsuperscript{171} As stated earlier, our research revealed that recovery funding has been uneven, and nonprofit and grassroots leaders in neighborhoods with histories of disinvestment find it difficult to build relationships with funders that would assist them with projects to improve their communities' social, civic, and physical infrastructure.

According to the Center for Social Inclusion, the region has historically lacked “three types of critical support:
- Core support grants to stabilize and build existing organizations.
- Money for relationship and alliance-building.
- Financial and technical assistance support for the creation of capacities (whether new or existing groups) to address gaps in the work.”\textsuperscript{172}

\textbf{New Orleans}

"Among the fundamental qualities of highly engaged people are capacities to imagine a world that is different and better, communicate that vision to others, take on roles and responsibilities that involve personal risk, think critically and systemically, and empathize with those who are excluded or marginalized from society." – Interviewee

After the storms in 2005, residents of New Orleans rushed to organize; within a year, they had revived and created a total of 200 neighborhood associations.\textsuperscript{173} In fact, neighborhoods’ self-organizing efforts are widely regarded as the key to New Orleans’s recovery. In 2009, researchers described how residents organized independently of government-led recovery efforts:

“Using the social ties, communications capacity, and knowledge of city services developed as a result of Katrina, neighborhood residents quickly assessed damage, directed traffic, corralled local media, found alternative housing for those whose homes had been damaged, and assisted schoolchildren in navigating the dangerous landscape. They did this in spite of, rather than in collaboration with, the city’s disaster response.”\textsuperscript{174}

\textbf{Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs}

New Orleans’s Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs, known today for their second line parades, have their roots in social activism. The Clubs grew out of organizations from the benevolent societies of the 19th century, which provided aid to the Black community in the time of Jim Crow.\textsuperscript{175} They performed charitable works, hosted social events, and helped members pay health care costs and funeral expenses.\textsuperscript{176}

After the storms, a survey of 7,000 New Orleanians revealed that residents regard members of the Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs as “model citizens,” scoring highest of any group. They are community leaders, supporting one another in times of need and providing concrete services.\textsuperscript{177} A researcher with the Brookings Institution claimed in 2010 that, “While SAPC members are mostly lower-income, and thus lack strong individual resources, they are nevertheless more civically active, service-oriented, and trusting than even the rich or well-educated. This is a powerful testament to the importance of social capital or collective resources, which can compensate for the lack of individual resources.”\textsuperscript{178}

These Clubs exemplify the informal, largely arts-oriented, and highly effective forms of collective action that we came across throughout our study of New Orleans.

\textsuperscript{171} Stein. 
\textsuperscript{173} Evans, Pat and Lewis, Sarah. “A Reciprocity of Tears: Community Engagement after a Disaster.” Civic Engagement in the Wake of Katrina, University of Michigan Press, 2 Sep. 2009. https://quod.lib.umich.edu/nps/6869078.0001.001/1:5.3/--civic-engagement-in-the-wake-of-katrina?g=dculture;rgn=div2;view=fulltext;xc=1.
\textsuperscript{174} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{175} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{177} Ibid.
Houston
In Houston, interviewees told ioby that residents are most strongly motivated to become civically engaged when they have a special interest or passion for an issue or activity. As in most places, interviewees said that their neighbors are most likely to participate in a formal community engagement process if they feel that the topic being discussed directly affects their families. Interviewees also said that affiliations to social institutions such as religious organizations, schools, and businesses may also play a role in an individual’s decision to participate in civic life.

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, particularly in the towns, cities, and neighborhoods discussed earlier in this report. 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?

We seek to hire a City Action Strategist in New Orleans with deep personal connections to their city and region and who is well connected to the local civic sector. This person will need to be comfortable and experienced with working in neighborhoods with histories of disinvestment, including in low-income communities and communities of color.

There may be an opportunity to consider hiring an Action Strategist in Houston in the future. As stated previously, although our research centered on the Western Gulf region, we have focused our attention primarily on the civic landscape of New Orleans.

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

ioby will form strategic partnerships with organizations and agencies led by people who have already earned the trust of civic leaders and potential users of ioby’s platform. By positioning crowdfunding as an effective supplement to organizations’ fundraising and community-building activities, ioby hopes that community leaders will perceive ioby to be an important addition to the local civic infrastructure.

How can we reach well-connected leaders in the region?

As we begin to grow our presence in New Orleans, ioby will likely need to depend on referrals from highly regarded organizations in the region. These include introductions to community leaders from our partners, as well as the leaders whom we interviewed for this Phase 0 report.

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

ioby commonly encounters the following barriers to civic participation:

1. People don’t know where to start.

To address this barrier, ioby should create resources that help residents understand how to create and fund projects for their neighborhoods. We may position civic crowdfunding as a first step for residents hoping to become more civically engaged by: helping leaders create their campaign pages, sharpening leaders’ grassroots fundraising skills, and connecting them to technical experts in the city and across the region and country who can assist with implementation.

2. Civic participation just takes too much time for some people.

From our work in neighborhoods with histories of disinvestment across the country, we have found that “quick wins” are the best way to counter deeply rooted perceptions that civic participation is time consuming, or that low-income people are unable to donate to campaigns. We should be able to dispel these notions, and trust should be easier to gain, when we are able to point to a series of strong examples of how ioby’s model works in and around New Orleans. When ioby has successfully supported grassroots campaigns across the metropolitan area, including in neighborhoods with histories of disinvestment, we may begin to see momentum build as well-regarded community leaders and leaders of organizations refer people in their networks to ioby.
3. People don’t have enough spare cash to donate to causes or campaigns.

ioby’s local staff would be trained 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\(^{180}\). 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.

4. 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 New Orleans so that residents understand that they are able to make meaningful changes without much difficulty.

**Strategy #1: Hire a New Orleans Strategist**

When funding is secured, ioby will hire a New Orleans Action Strategist to identify leaders from across each city, prepare them to crowdfund, and connect them to experts in their fields. Using the blended on-the-ground and digital model successfully implemented in New York, Memphis, Detroit, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, and Cincinnati, the New Orleans Action Strategists will use the findings of this Phase 0 Report as a guide and begin to identify local leaders who have ideas and funding needs.

**Strategy #2: Training Partners**

To build ioby’s presence in cities and towns across the Western Gulf, ioby will 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 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 staff who spends at least 50% of their time working directly with community residents, and frequently organizes meetings, convenings, workshops, or trainings with residents who are focused on local project-based work. Each participating organization would be compensated for their staff time. Through this approach to building ioby’s presence across the Western Gulf 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 #3: Pursue match fund partnerships in the Western Gulf**

ioby has found that an effective way to prove our worth to civic leaders in a place is by accruing several examples of projects that are successfully funded and created very quickly.

To accelerate grassroots fundraising efforts in the 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 Strategies #1 and #2. 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.

**Outputs**

In the medium term, ioby expects that an on-the-ground organizer in New Orleans, a training program for leaders across the region, and a match program will have the following results:

1. More people in the Western Gulf 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.

**Outcomes**

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.
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