



# Strengthening Democracy, Increasing Opportunities:

## Impacts of **Advocacy,** **Organizing** and **Civic** **Engagement** in the **Gulf/Midsouth Region**

by Frontline Solutions



A Snapshot:

**20 organizations** and their allies

**\$41.9 million** in funding for policy engagement efforts

**\$4.7 billion** worth of benefits from their accomplishments

A return on investment of **\$114 for every dollar** spent

**And impact that improves lives and communities**

# overview

- The study looked closely at **20 nonprofits** based in **Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana and Mississippi**.
- Despite lack of resources, these nonprofits and other groups collectively achieved tremendous impact and **garnered more than \$4.7 billion for underserved communities** in the form of higher wages, affordable housing, access to education and other benefits.
- **Foundations were a critical source of monetary, capacity building and convening support** to the 20 nonprofits, having provided **70 percent** of all policy engagement funding from 2005-2009.
- For every dollar invested in the 20 nonprofit groups collectively, there was **a \$114 return in benefits** to communities in the Gulf/Midsouth region.
- The civic involvement efforts of the nonprofits resulted in:
  - > Nearly **34,000 community leaders** trained
  - > More than **98,000 individuals communicated** with policymakers
  - > More than **46,000 people attended** public actions
  - > More than **4,000 voters registered**, including many people of color, youth and rural residents.
- These impacts **directly benefit** tens of thousands of workers, children and families, victims of sexual violence, immigrants, LGBTQ residents and other historically vulnerable groups.



Read the **FULL REPORT**,  
**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY** or  
**SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

***"This report shows the tremendous benefit that these organizations bring to communities in the Gulf/Midsouth region. These organizations, along with their allies and supporters, have made a real difference in people's lives."***

***- Aaron Dorfman  
Executive Director, NCRP***

# state highlights

*"These nonprofits are doing amazing work with so few resources to make positive change in their communities. This report is a wake-up call to funders that investing in civic engagement leads to substantial community change. Imagine what they can accomplish if we can give them more to work with."*

*- Sherece West  
President and CEO, Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation*

## alabama

- Ranked **46th in per capita foundation giving** in the country.
- The nonprofits included in the study are:
  - > **Equal Justice Initiative (EJI)**
  - > **Federation of Child Care Centers of Alabama (FOCAL)**
  - > **Hispanic Interest Coalition of Alabama (iHICA!)**
  - > **Greene-Sumter Enterprise Community (GSEC)**
  - > **Center for Fair Housing**
- These groups focused on a range of issues, including **affordable housing, child care, criminal justice, domestic violence, education and immigrant rights**.
- Examples of **impact** include:
  - > Prevented City of Mobile from blocking development of affordable housing units next to a middle/upper class neighborhood.
  - > Federal Supreme Court ruling that bans "death in prison" sentencing for children.
  - > Blocked anti-immigrant legislation.

# state highlights

## arkansas

- ranked **20th in per capita foundation giving** in the country
- The nonprofits included in the study are:
  - > **Arkansas Advocates for Children & Families (AACF)**
  - > **Arkansas Public Policy Panel (APPP)**
  - > **Center for Artistic Revolution (CAR)**
  - > **Northwest Arkansas Workers' Justice Center (NWAJWC)**
  - > **Rural Community Alliance (RCA)**
- These groups worked on a range of issues such as **education, equal rights, health care, minimum wage, predatory lending, pre-K services and workers' rights**.
- Examples of **impact** from their efforts include:
  - > Creation of a Children's Mental Health Commission.
  - > Passage of the Early Intervention and Underperforming School Bill.
  - > Fought against state anti-adoption initiative against same-sex couples.

# state highlights

## louisiana

- Ranked **43rd in per capita foundation giving** in the country.
- The nonprofits included in the study are:
  - > **Family and Youth Counseling Agency (FYCA)**
  - > **Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Center (GNOFHAC)**
  - > **Louisiana Bucket Brigade**
  - > **Southern Mutual Help Association (SMHA)**
  - > **Vietnamese American Young Leaders Association of New Orleans (VALYA-NO)**
- These groups focused on a range of issues, including **affordable housing, post-disaster recovery and redevelopment and mental health.**
- Examples of **impact** include:
  - > Establishment of Children and Families Action Network and Human Services Response initiative immediately after Hurricane Rita
  - > Secured \$25 million in state funding for Housing Trust Fund
  - > Secured housing supportive vouchers and building of group homes for people with disabilities

# state highlights

## mississippi

- ranked **48th in per capita foundation giving** in the country
- The nonprofits included in the study are:
  - > **Children’s Defense Fund (CDF)**
  - > **Concerned Citizens for a Better Tunica County (CCBTC)**
  - > **Mississippi Low-Income Child Care Initiative (MLICCI)**
  - > **Mississippi Coalition for Citizens with Disabilities (MCCD)**
  - > **Southern Echo**
- These groups worked on a range of issues such as **affordable housing, Census participation, child care, education, health care** and **public transportation**.
- Examples of **impact** from their efforts include:
  - > Defeated charter school bills that would have further eliminated funding for underfunded public schools.
  - > Prevented major state funding cut to Medicaid.
  - > Compelled City of Jackson to improve transit services and access for people with Disabilities.

***“The nonprofits were resourceful and effective in the face of serious challenges. They demonstrated a striking depth of civic engagement that has helped the region’s citizens fight poverty, inequality and injustice.”***

***- Marcus Littles  
Founder, Frontlines Solutions***

## our experts



**Marcus Littles**, the founder of **Frontline Solutions**, specializes in organizational development, particularly within the nonprofit and philanthropic sectors. His work experience includes TCC Group, the Ford Foundation, where he served as a Program Associate in Community and Resource Development, and the Department of Housing and Urban Development. A native of Mobile, he is a graduate of Auburn University and holds a master's degree in Public Administration, with a concentration in Nonprofit Management, from the University of Delaware.



**Lisa Ranghelli** is the director of the Grantmaking for Community Impact Project. She brings nearly 20 years of experience in the nonprofit and public sectors. Most recently, Lisa was a consultant to foundations and social justice organizations. Previously, Lisa was deputy director of public policy at the Center for Community Change, where she helped grassroots organizations mobilize successfully in response to federal and state policy issues. Lisa holds a master of regional planning degree from Cornell University.



**Aaron Dorfman** is the executive director of NCRP. He previously served for 15 years as a community organizer, including ten years as executive director of People Acting for Community Together in Miami, Fla. Aaron led dozens of successful grassroots campaigns to improve education, transportation, housing and other issues affecting low-income communities. He studied political science and grassroots social movements at Carleton College under the direction of the late Senator Paul Wellstone. Aaron holds a master's degree in philanthropic studies from Indiana University's Center on Philanthropy.

# FAQs

## ***How was the ROI calculated?***

The ROI was calculated with the following formula:

$$\text{ROI} = \frac{\text{aggregate dollar amount of all wins}}{\text{aggregate dollars invested in advocacy and organizing}}$$

It illustrates how the collective financial support from foundations and other sources for a set of advocacy and organizing groups in a location over time has contributed to the collective policy impacts of these groups.

## ***How were the 20 sample nonprofits identified?***

NCRP generated a list of local organizations after consultations with nonprofit, foundation and community leaders. Then researchers looked for those organizations that meet the following criteria:

- Existed for at least five years
- Had at least one full-time staff or equivalent whose work is devoted to advocacy or organizing
- Focused on a core constituency of lower-income people, people of color, or other marginalized groups, broadly defined.
- Worked on a local, regional (in-state) or state-wide level
- Had the capacity to provide data for the research

## ***Why did NCRP focus on those organizations that work primarily with marginalized communities?***

This criteria reflect NCRP's mission to promote a philanthropy that better serves the public good, supports nonprofit effectiveness and responds to the needs of those with the least wealth, opportunity and power.

### ***Is advocacy the same as lobbying?***

No. Advocacy is the act of promoting a cause, idea or policy to influence people's opinions or actions on matters of public policy concern. Lobbying can be part of an advocacy strategy, but advocacy doesn't necessarily have to involve lobbying.

There are other types of advocacy activities, such as public issue education, nonpartisan voter registration/education/mobilization and grassroots mobilization. Nonprofits can lobby legally, although federal laws determine how much lobbying a nonprofit organization can undertake. Each state has different additional guidelines for nonprofits operating within its jurisdiction.

There are no legal limits to the amount of non-lobbying advocacy activities a nonprofit can undertake.

### ***What specific strategies did the 20 nonprofits use to engage their constituents?***

Researchers found that these nonprofits used a number of effective strategies, such as:

- Providing direct services while mobilizing constituents.
- Conducting workshops and trainings for citizens engagement and leadership development.
- Creating diverse networks and collaborating with stakeholders and other institutions within communities, the region and nationwide.
- Developing youth leadership.

## FAQs (cont'd)

***Some of the foundations that have provided funding to one or more of the featured nonprofits are highlighted in the report:***

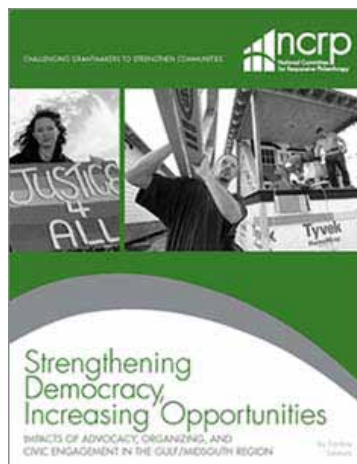
- Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation (North Carolina)
- Marguerite Casey Foundation (Washington)
- Louisiana Disaster Recovery Foundation
- Black Belt Community Foundation (Alabama)

***Has NCRP conducted similar studies at others states or regions?***

Yes, the report on the Gulf/Midsouth is seventh in a series. NCRP has published similar reports on [New Mexico](#), [North Carolina](#), [Minnesota](#), [Los Angeles County](#), the [Northwest Region](#) and [Pennsylvania](#).

A summary of findings from all seven study sites is available at [www.ncrp.org/files/media/gcipfindings-media.pdf](http://www.ncrp.org/files/media/gcipfindings-media.pdf).

For more information, including additional resources, please visit [www.ncrp.org/gcip](http://www.ncrp.org/gcip).



Read the [FULL REPORT](#),  
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## contact us

For more than 30 years, NCRP has served as the only independent watchdog of institutional grantmakers, providing information and analyses on issues regarding philanthropic accountability, effectiveness and responsiveness to the needs of marginalized communities.

To speak with any of our **experts, representatives from the 20 nonprofits** and **featured foundations**, or to receive a media copy of the report, please contact:

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