



## COVID-19 Grantee Spotlight: Westside Sponsoring Committee



On May 26th, **Westside Sponsoring Committee**, working with our statewide organization, Together Louisiana, hosted a virtual meeting of 1,100 leaders from across the state, including Governor John Bel Edwards, for the launch of our “Re-Imagine Louisiana” campaign. As part of this campaign, we have committed to hosting 10,000 virtual conversations to develop policy initiatives that we can present to policymakers and candidates in the Fall.

This meeting provided a forum for community leaders from across the state to share their constituents' ongoing concerns and questions regarding COVID-19. Rev. Theron Jackson, Co-Chair of the event, said **“We are not going back to the Louisiana we had before the pandemic. Now is the time to “Re-Imagine” our state and create a more perfect union.”**

**“Our organization is made up of institutions—churches, synagogues, mosques, and labor unions—that have been devastated by the ongoing COVID-19 crisis. The work of WSC is and continues to be the strengthening of these institutions so that they can continue their work as mediating institutions (buffers) for families. In spite of the pandemic, we are continuing to organize and give voice to those who are too often left out of the decision-making process.”**

Lady Carlson  
Lead Organizer, Westside Sponsoring  
Committee

Governor John Bel Edwards agreed to meet with Westside Sponsoring Committee leaders and Together Louisiana in the Fall. He has also committed to working on policy changes that leaders from the Re-Imagine Louisiana campaign said were crucial in revitalizing rural communities.

**Since quarantine began in mid-April, we have managed to:**

- Give away over 200,000 masks across the state free-of-charge.
- **Work with the Governor, the New Orleans City Council and others across the**

**state to successfully lobby the federal government to make it faster and easier for state food banks to access the federal emergency food supply.**

- Provide Spanish-speaking families with information on the pandemic in their first language. During our May "Re-Imagine Louisiana" launch, Marilou Corona, a WSC volunteer, can be quoted saying "Hispanic families are afraid because there is little-to-no information provided to us in Spanish that clearly outlines what the virus is and what it does."
- **Defeat an effort by two large companies in St. John the Baptist Parish to obtain tax exemptions totaling \$1.7 million a year for five years.** Initially created as an incentive to manufacturers, the Industrial Tax Exemption (ITE) program is now regularly abused. We are so pleased to share our success that **starting in 2021, our Parish will get an additional \$55 million in new tax revenue.**

**Going forward, Westside Sponsoring Committee plans to:**

- Engage civic and community leaders, while providing one-on-one training in online communication platforms for those who are not tech savvy—in particular, our elders.
- Demonstrate to participating congregations and organizations how to organize small group conversations, ie "house meetings," in St. John the Baptist Parish with a target of 10 congregations and 100 leaders. Many of these leaders have expressed a desire for the house meetings to discuss race, geography and language.
- Conduct a survey asking questions about people's current state of affairs around five key areas: job security, health (mental and physical), access to food, children and education, and engagement with faith and community life.
- Develop an agenda to work with policymakers on addressing the most pressing takeaways from these conversations.

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The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare societal inequities that Southern Partners Fund has fought since it's incorporation. SPF's capacity for enabling its grantee partners to build coordinated rapid response teams in their communities is well documented. SPF's grantee organizations rely on Justice Fund for Disaster Relief and Renewal grants to identify their most vulnerable populations and connect them to agencies and services that can help. In turn, vulnerable populations in these communities trust SPF grantee organizations to provide them with the best support available. In many communities, our grantee partners are their first responders.

COVID-19 is currently the primary focus for the Justice Fund for Disaster Relief and Renewal while SPF aggressively seeks new funding partners. To date, SPF has raised over **\$4M out of a \$10M funding goal** and is already issuing its first round of grants to partner organizations throughout the rural Southeast.

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**For more information on Westside Sponsoring Committee, or on contributing to SPF's Justice Fund for Disaster Relief and Renewal,** please click below to visit our dedicated COVID-19 page or contact us by phone with the contact details provided below.

[More Info](#)

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