

Gulf Coast Fund Report Fall 2010 through December 2011

A. Grant Purpose

The purpose of the grant received is to support the re-granting and program activities of the Gulf Coast Fund, especially those in response to the BP Oil Drilling Disaster. The Fund is providing emergency grants to groups most impacted by the disaster, and establishing a fund to meet the long-term needs of the region. In addition, this grant will allow the Fund to provide crucial programs and opportunities for grassroots leaders; media and communications support; and a link between Gulf Coast communities and key decision-makers from government and philanthropy. All work will be approached through the lens of environmental and social justice.

B. Steps Taken So Far to Achieve Purpose

Grantmaking:

- Completed the Fall 2011 Grant Cycle, the Fund's largest to date, in which we distributed \$500,000 to 36 organizations, including \$250,000 to organizations focused on environmental justice and health; as well as response to the BP oil drilling disaster. A complete list of grantees for this cycle is attached.
- Completed two regularly-scheduled grant cycles in Winter and Summer of 2010, in addition to six rounds of emergency grants in response to the BP oil drilling disaster, ultimately distributing over \$800,000 in grants for 2010.
- Winter 2010 Grant Cycle: distributed \$80,000 to 13 organizations.
- Summer 2010 Grant Cycle: distributed \$350,000 to 33 organizations.
- Conducted six rounds of emergency grants in response to the BP disaster, distributing \$675,000 to 68 organizations.
- Distributed discretionary and special project grants related to program goals, including \$30,000 in grants to organizations identified by three new Advisory Group members (Danny Patterson, AL; Teresa Bettis, AL; Bryan Parras, TX.)

Strategic Planning:

- In December 2011 the Gulf Coast Fund Advisors voted unanimously to approve a new leadership structure, streamlining decision-making processes and opening up new avenues for our extensive network of grantees and partners to participate in substantive decision-making for the organization. The new structure includes a six-person group of Managing Advisors, all of whom have served as GCF Advisors in the past, representing a broad spectrum of expertise as well as the diversity of the Gulf Coast region. This six-person group includes representatives from Alabama, coastal Louisiana, New Orleans, Mississippi and Texas; as well as from the African American, Native American, Vietnamese American and Latino communities of the Gulf Coast. In addition, the Fund has created Grants Advisors and Program Advisors, positions that will allow our Grantees and partners to participate in grantmaking and program activities, thereby opening even more opportunities for community involvement.
- Convened the Advisory Group in March 2010 in Atlanta to discuss the future of the Gulf Coast Fund and Gulf Coast philanthropy in the face of (at the time) shrinking resources available for the work. Advisors concluded that Gulf Coast

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Fund grants and grantee programs are both of great value and the Fund should continue to provide both, even if necessary to do so at a reduced level.

- Convened the Advisory Group in June 2010 at the Stennis Space Center in Mississippi (at the invitation of the EPA's Gulf of Mexico Program.) With guidance from a professional consultant, discussed organizational development needs in light of the increased attention and resources brought to the Fund as a result of the BP oil drilling disaster. Hired first full-time director; brought part-time staff to full-time; created and subsequently hired consultant positions for communications, social media and grantee programs. Drafted organizational chart and decision-making protocols for new structure.

Grantee Programs:

- Organized regional gathering in July in Houma, LA, "Restoring Our Coast, Our Communities, and Ourselves"; this two day meeting was attended by over 100 people and focused on vision, strategy, information-sharing, and the need for community leaders to focus on wellness and personal sustainability in the wake of the BP disaster.
- Arranged community meetings for grantees with the **Presidential Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Explosion and Deepwater Drilling; the Gulf of Mexico Alliance; the EPA Air Administrator; the Clinton Global Initiative;** as well as several national environmental and human rights organizations.
- Partnered with the Gulf Restoration Network on two meetings, Gulf Gatherings I and II, held roughly 4 months apart and open to all Gulf Coast Fund grantees. Included several days of information-sharing and strategizing around the future of the Gulf's coastal environment and the development of a joint statement and set of principles.
- The Fund provided several special opportunities for community leaders and grassroots organizations to meet and engage in meaningful dialogue with the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Task Force, formed as result of recommendations from the Presidential Commission charged with investigating the BP oil disaster.
- Throughout the year, the Fund worked with EPA Regions 4 and 6, as well as the Gulf of Mexico Program, to provide multiple community forums for grassroots and community leaders to meet directly with EPA representatives to ask questions and share concerns. Gulf Coast Fund grantees were always a strong presence at these meetings.
- Working in partnership with several grantees, the Fund played an integral role in organizing region-wide meetings and communications focused on the establishment of a Regional Citizens Advisory Council to oversee the restoration of the Gulf in the wake of the BP disaster.
- Partnered with the Bridge the Gulf project and several other key communications and media vehicles to ensure an outlet for community-based media.
- Provided travel stipends and organizational support for Gulf Coast organizations to attend and speak about the BP oil drilling disaster at multiple events, including the US Social Forum held in Detroit in June, the PowerShift conference held in Washington, DC in April, and River Network's National River Rally, held in June in South Carolina.

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- Continued to provide key communications and opportunities through the Fund's network, including Daily Updates sent to the electronic mailing list of nearly 500 people and organizations, webinars, trainings, and workshops.

Outreach and Communications:

- Through our communications consultant and key partnerships with entities such as the Bridge the Gulf Project, Counterspill, and NRDC, the Fund was able to place dozens of stories and quotes from Gulf Coast residents in major media outlets, and to create press releases and stories that were published by hundreds of media sources throughout the year. (For a list of recent media hits, please visit our website: <http://gulfcoastfund.org/media/gcf-in-the-news.html>)
- The Fund served as a key resource for many foundations and funders interested in the community impacts of the BP oil drilling disaster. Including, hosting a tour in May 2010 for funders to meet with communities throughout the entire impacted area across three states; serving on many panels and conference calls; arranging tours and meetings; and providing updates and information to key philanthropic publications.
- Engaged in ongoing dialogue with other funders interested in social justice funding in the Gulf South, including active participation in the Southern Organizers Working Group, a coalition of progressive foundations engaged in the region.
- Active participation in several funder gatherings on the part of Gulf Coast Fund staff and Advisors, including the Neighborhood Funders Group and the Environmental Gantmakers Association.
- Co-produced a report with the Institute for Southern Studies, "Learning From Katrina: Lessons from Five Years of Recovery and Renewal in the Gulf Coast" intended to outline for both philanthropic and general audiences the progress that has been made and the renewed energy around civic engagement and community action that grew in the wake of Katrina.
- Served as key source for publications such as *The Chronicle of Philanthropy* and *The Nonprofit Times* interested in covering the BP oil disaster.

3. Unforeseen Challenges or Surprises

During this grant period the work of the Gulf Coast Fund has been able to proceed in accordance with the activities and goals set out in our original proposal. No major unforeseen challenges or surprises have arisen to keep us from being able to do so (aside from the BP disaster itself.) However, in this past year we have found ourselves responding to more emergency situations on the ground through the emergency grant procedures that we established and honed during the emergency grantmaking in response to the BP disaster. For example, in April many communities in **Alabama were hit by devastating tornadoes**, the worst in the state's history. **The Fund was able to move resources and volunteers quickly to the area, ultimately distributing over \$23,000 in small grants to first responders in remote, isolated rural areas that were not receiving any of the aid mobilized in the wake of the tornadoes.** Then, just a few weeks later, the Fund responded again to allow community organizations to monitor the

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flooding of the Mississippi in Louisiana. In both situations, as in many others, the almost immediate, real-time strategic communications and information-sharing provided by our network and communication mechanisms were as valuable as the grant support. Going forward, the Fund will continue to respond in a similar manner to emergency situations that may unfold in the area—providing emergency grant support, volunteers, and critical strategic communications and updates through our extensive network.

4. Outcomes and Impacts Achieved So Far:

- *Completed three grant cycles and distributed over \$1,300,000 in grants to support work in the priority areas of the Fund, including over \$400,000 in emergency response to the BP Oil Drilling Disaster.*

Impact: Enabled important grassroots and community-based work—much of which is not supported by other more traditional sources—on a broad spectrum of critical issues related to the progress toward social justice in the under-served Gulf Coast region. Ensured strong support for frontline organization engaged in community-level responses to the BP oil drilling disaster.

- *Served as key liaison between communities and responding agencies in the wake of the BP disaster.*

Impact: Ensured community voices heard at all levels of the response, leading to the inclusion major recommendations in the Presidential Commission report, including the formation of a citizens advisory council and the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Task Force.

- *Played a leadership role in guiding funders in the wake of the BP drilling disaster.*

Impact: The Fund's outreach among the philanthropic community **resulted in at least \$1,000,000 in additional support** for its grantees and other community-based groups in the region in response to the BP spill.

- *Engaged resources and partnerships to focused on communications and media.*

Impact: Ensuring community voices are still being heard and allowed to share their birds-eye view of the ongoing effects of the spill.

- *Increased connectivity among Gulf Coast Fund grantees, as evidenced through joint projects, support of each others campaigns and efforts, increasing work across issue areas and constituencies, mutual support, etc.*

Impact: Joint action on policy on federal and local levels, co-convened press events, statements of support, and communications.

- *Increased attention to and support of social justice and environmental justice in the grantmaking strategies of other funders in the region.*

Impact: Succeeded in ensuring social justice lens was included in most responses from traditional environmental funders and organizations in the wake of the BP spill.