



## The Getty Foundation Fund for New Orleans 10 Years after Hurricane Katrina

### *Report Summary*



Dehumidification at Longue Vue House and Gardens in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina. Photo: Longue Vue House and Gardens

On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast, bringing high winds and devastating storm surges to the area. In the wake of Katrina there was a catastrophic failure of the levee system protecting New Orleans. Water covered 80% of the city, rendering many of the city's cultural institutions inaccessible for days. As the floodwaters receded and the consequences of Katrina's devastation were revealed, it became clear that the city and its cultural institutions faced a number of serious challenges. To meet these challenges, the Getty Foundation created the Fund for New Orleans, a \$2.9 million grant initiative.

In the immediate aftermath of the disaster, the Foundation reached out to the National Trust for Historic Preservation and provided a grant to support teams on the ground in the historic neighborhoods of New Orleans to assess damage, distribute critical recovery information, and save historic buildings from red-tagging.

Soon after Katrina, a team composed of representatives from all four Getty programs led by the Getty Foundation and also including staff from the Getty Conservation Institute, Getty Research Institute, and the J. Paul Getty Museum traveled to New Orleans to assess how the Getty might help cultural institutions recover from one of the worst disasters ever faced by a U.S. city. The team identified priorities for the Fund for New Orleans, an initiative intended to support arts and cultural heritage in the city as it faced the difficult task of recovery.



Collapsed building in the Central Business District caused by Hurricane Katrina. Photo: J. Paul Getty Trust

The Foundation assisted in two broad areas: grants for conservation planning and treatment for collections and built heritage damaged by Katrina, and grants for transition planning for key museums and cultural institutions. In addition, the Getty Leadership Institute organized a scenario planning workshop for senior leadership of cultural organizations as they faced major changes in the cultural landscape of the city. Overall, the Foundation expended \$2.9 million in grants (including \$2 million in special funds approved by the Getty Board of Trustees). See page nine of this report for a complete list of all Getty grants.

**Conservation:** After Katrina, several of the collections housed in New Orleans institutions were at risk. There was an urgent need for immediate and practical conservation work, such as the collection of African art at Southern University that had been exposed to humidity and water for an extended period of time. Buildings that house collections also suffered water damage, as at Longue Vue House and Gardens and the Tulane University Art Museum. Less urgently, but perhaps equally important, many of the institutions needed to undertake conservation surveys of their collections and historic structures, and review and re-evaluate their conservation and disaster preparedness plans. It also became evident that the New Orleans area and the Gulf Coast lacked adequate technical expertise in conservation and up to date facilities for the treatment of objects. The Fund for New Orleans conservation grants were designed to assist the city's cultural institutions in caring for their art collections and archives, historic buildings, and landscapes, and in exploring the potential for a local conservation facility.



Dan masks from the collection of the Center for African and African American Studies, Southern University of New Orleans (SUNO). Photo: SUNO

**Transition Planning:** Even weeks after the storm, it was clear that post-Katrina New Orleans was going to be a very different place and that the cultural institutions of the city needed time and money to find an appropriate way forward. The Getty transition planning grants aimed to strengthen nonprofits as they responded to the changed environment for the arts following the storm.

Related to the need for transition planning was the need for the senior leadership, primarily the executive directors and board chairs of cultural institutions, to engage in thoughtful planning and dialogue about the future. Prior to Katrina, there had been little communication among institutions in the city, and that had the potential to hamper recovery efforts. The Getty Leadership Institute workshop for these senior leaders included organized scenario planning to help guide them through various "what if" situations. The workshop also emphasized communication and collaboration among cultural institutions in the region.

The time period immediately after Hurricane Katrina was one of great hardship for all of New Orleans, and although the Fund for New Orleans did not represent much money in the face of the enormous cost of the recovery, the Getty grants still had a significant impact. In particular, the early grant to the National Trust for Historic Preservation helped to signal clearly to the arts and cultural heritage communities in the U.S. that there was an enormous challenge in New Orleans and that the institutions there needed immediate assistance from the whole country.

As then-president of the National Trust Richard Moe said in a recent email to the Foundation:

"We decided that the National Trust had to open an office in New Orleans immediately to coordinate the effort and, most importantly, to make the case that most of the historic homes and other structures damaged by the storm did not need to be demolished, as many officials argued, but rather that they could be saved and continue to contribute to the community.

Perhaps most important, the fact that Getty put its pledge and its reputation out there early meant that it was much easier to persuade other foundations and individuals to do the same."

*Key findings:*

- All the institutions to which the Getty Foundation made grants have survived, and most are thriving almost ten years later. This was not an obvious outcome in the fall of 2005, when many organizations had drastically reduced staff levels, had lost audience and donors, and faced compromises to their physical structures and collections at a time when many of their leaders were dealing with the loss of their homes or other personal tragedies. Virtually every one of the organizations supported by the Foundation has undergone a successful leadership change in the last ten years, and arts and heritage professionals in the city are very positive about the future.

- Leadership was crucial to the survival and success of the institutions in New Orleans. Those institutions with strong leadership weathered Katrina and the subsequent economic and oil spill crises. The Foundation supported the strongest leaders in the city post-Katrina, easing the recovery efforts for their institutions.
- In some cases the transition planning grants awarded by the Foundation were also critical in simply allowing institutions to continue to function during a very difficult period.
- At this time, there is still not a conservation facility serving the Gulf Coast. The Louisiana State Museum explored opening a branch of the Williamstown Art Conservation Center in New Orleans, but did not succeed in securing federal funding.



SUNO Graduate Student Erika Witt holds her favorite mask in the university's African Art Collection in preparation for a 2015 exhibition on campus as part of her graduate degree in Museum Studies. Photo: Master of Arts in Museums Studies Program, Center for African and African American Studies, SUNO

*Some key grant outcomes include:*

- As mentioned above, an early grant to the **National Trust for Historic Preservation** (NTHP) allowed the organization to bring professionals and volunteers to the city to quickly assess the damage to historic structures. They inspected nearly 400 red-tagged properties that were slated for

demolition, and as a result nearly 150 historic buildings were removed from the city's demolition list. According to the director of the Southern Office of the NTHP, the grant was also transformative for the organization: virtually all areas of the NTHP were involved in the New Orleans recovery effort, from the legal department and Trust leadership to volunteers. This comprehensive approach has now become the way that the National Trust works, focusing on projects with all its resources, appropriately scaled to each project.

- The **Contemporary Arts Center (CAC)**, which emerged as a leader in post-Katrina New Orleans, is now expanding its gallery space under a new executive director. CAC's financial services program, through which the staff of CAC provides back-of-the-house financial services to other, mostly non-profit, organizations in the city, is well-established (the program was supported through a Getty transition planning grant). It allowed CAC to re-staff after Katrina, and it remains a strong program for the organization as well as a vital service to small non-profits in the city. CAC also plays a key role in Prospect New Orleans, the biennial art show created in the wake of Katrina (see more below on Prospect New Orleans).



Gallery-goers at the Contemporary Arts Center. Image courtesy Contemporary Arts Center, New Orleans. Photo: Frank Aymami

- The African collections of the **Center for African and African-American Studies at Southern University of New Orleans**, which were submerged under water and exposed to humidity for an extended period

of time, were stabilized and preserved with support of a Foundation grant. The project proved to be galvanizing for the small historically black college, and the Center's collection has tripled in size since 2005, with some works loaned for exhibition outside the city. The fact that the collection has grown by over 300% since Katrina is a testament to the faith that others have placed in the Center's stewardship of their collection. Prior to Katrina, there were no plans or protocols for disaster preparedness for the collection. As a result of the grant, there is now a plan in place.

- The work funded by the Foundation in the garden at **St. Louis Cathedral** was the beginning of an extraordinary series of discoveries about the early history of the city, which will be highlighted in an exhibition at the Ursuline Convent in 2018. The garden has been restored and an internship with the National Landscape Institute in Versailles, organized through the French Heritage Society, now brings an intern to the garden every summer.



Mark Bradford's *Mithra* (2008) at Prospect.1 in New Orleans. Photo © Hrag Vartanian via FLICKR, [CC By-ND 2.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/2.0/)

- October 25, 2014 marked the opening of the fourth **Prospect New Orleans** international biennial, which began in November 2008. In the aftermath of Katrina the Getty Foundation joined leading national funders in supporting the new biennial through a \$150,000 grant. The biennial continues to attract leading international artists, has enhanced

the reputation of the city, and has boosted the reputation of key arts institutions in the city.

- Acting on the recommendations of a study funded by a Foundation grant, staff of the **New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Foundation** have catalogued and re-housed the collections there and have moved many of the works to climate-controlled, off-site storage for safekeeping. They are also working on making the collection more accessible to the public online.
- The **New Orleans Botanical Garden** has made steady progress since Hurricane Katrina. A transition planning grant resulted in their rethinking both the physical structure of the garden and its buildings and their organizational structure. High-level collaboration with the New Orleans Board of Commissioners and the Friends of the City Park Board—the result of the planning grant—has helped overcome pre-Katrina disputes over money and priorities.

In the immediate aftermath of Katrina, it was not clear that many of the cultural institutions in the city would survive. Getty support in the earliest transition stages contributed to the ability of arts organizations in the city to rebound and contemplate a future. The outcomes demonstrate that relatively small grants in the face of a disaster of that magnitude, if well designed and executed, can make a difference.

**The Getty Foundation Fund for New Orleans  
Grants Awarded**

Administrators of the Tulane Educational Fund, New Orleans, Louisiana. For a conservation survey at the Newcomb Art Gallery. \$15,000

Cathedral of Saint Louis King of France, New Orleans, Louisiana. For the development of a conservation plan for St. Anthony's Garden. \$130,000

Contemporary Arts Center, New Orleans, Louisiana. For transition planning. \$150,000

Contemporary Arts Center, New Orleans, Louisiana. For a collaborative transition planning project for New Orleans arts organizations. \$250,000

Contemporary Arts Center, New Orleans, Louisiana. For the implementation of the Contemporary Arts Center's transition plan. \$125,000

Contemporary Arts Center, New Orleans, Louisiana. For collaborative audience development and outreach initiatives for seven New Orleans arts organizations. \$170,000

Longue Vue House and Gardens Corporation, New Orleans, Louisiana. For transition planning and the development of a conservation plan for Longue Vue House and Gardens. \$200,000

Longue Vue House and Gardens Corporation, New Orleans, Louisiana. For the implementation of Longue Vue's transition plan. \$175,000

Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities, New Orleans. For "Roadmap to Recovery," a series of programs and services for Louisiana museums following Hurricane Katrina. \$80,000

Louisiana Landmarks Society, Inc., New Orleans. For the preparation of a conservation plan for the Pitot House. \$75,000

Louisiana Museum Foundation, New Orleans. For transition planning for the Louisiana State Museum. \$220,000

Louisiana Museum Foundation, New Orleans. For conservation of the collections of the Louisiana State Museum. \$200,000

National Trust for Historic Preservation in the United States, Washington, D.C. For an assessment of damage to historic structures in the Gulf Coast region affected by Hurricane Katrina. \$100,000

National Trust for Historic Preservation in the United States, Washington, D.C. For a recovery campaign in New Orleans. \$100,000

New Orleans Botanical Garden Foundation, Louisiana. For transition planning for the New Orleans Botanical Garden. \$120,000

New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Foundation, Inc., Louisiana. For a conservation survey of the archives. \$25,000

New Orleans Museum of Art, Louisiana. For the implementation of a conservation plan for the Sydney and Walda Besthoff Sculpture Garden. \$250,000

The Ogden Museum of Southern Art, Inc., New Orleans, Louisiana. For transition planning. \$180,000

Ohr-O'Keefe Museum of Art Inc., Biloxi, Mississippi. For a conservation survey. \$68,000

Southern University at New Orleans, Louisiana. For conservation treatment of the collection in the Center for African and African American Studies. \$100,000

U.S. Biennial Inc., New York. For marketing and outreach activities related to the United States biennial Prospect.1 New Orleans. \$150,000

The Woman's Exchange, New Orleans, Louisiana. For transition planning for the Hermann-Grima and Gallier Historic Houses. \$79,000