

CENTER FOR A BETTER SOUTH

# Ideas for a Better Gulf

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CENTER FOR A  
**betersouth**

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## Executive summary

In an early June meeting with U.S. Secretary of Navy Ray Mabus, the Center for a Better South was invited to generate ideas that could lead to long-term impacts for people who live along the Gulf coast, particularly those impacted by the Deepwater Horizon catastrophe.

With the caveat to “think big,” the Center issued a call to advisers, academics and leaders across the South to participate in a series of conference calls to explore big ideas that could help the Gulf states to recover and to move forward in dynamic new ways that would allow it to get past historic economic, educational, health, environmental and other challenges.

Over the course of the summer, this volunteer coterie of participants generated a dozen ideas, which were forwarded to the Secretary as they gelled. This report is the collection of those ideas. Among policies and practices called for by participants were ideas to:

- Establish a long-term development and recovery trust fund, initially administered by a presidential commission and supplanted after two years by a successor.
- Create a higher education economic cluster in the Gulf to serve as a platform for knowledge-based jobs for the future.
- Provide free wireless Internet access along the Gulf coast and tie it in with free educational laptops to elementary students along the coast.
- Fund a new alternative energy project called Green Freedom
- Set up a way to mobilize America’s volunteers to respond to local needs.

While countless other ideas exist that can make a difference in the lives of Gulf residents impacted along the coast, the Center for a Better South offers a dozen ideas that it believes can make a significant difference. The Center appreciates the opportunity to provide these suggestions for ways to speed the recovery and positively affect long-term consequences of the disaster.

## Background information

In November 2009, the Center for a Better South held a conference at Davidson College to develop an “Agenda for a Better South.” (*View: <http://www.bettersouth.org/agenda.htm>*) As part of the conference, the Center drafted a briefing paper filled with 55 indicators about each of the Southern states. Although this document was developed before the Gulf disaster, it offers a good statistical benchmark of economic, education, health and other demographic characteristics of the Gulf states that may be helpful now.

View conference briefing book here:

[http://www.bettersouth.org/pdfs/09.1013.briefing\\_final.pdf](http://www.bettersouth.org/pdfs/09.1013.briefing_final.pdf)

In particular, this document helps show how the region faced many challenges before the disaster occurred. To be clear, it may not be possible to deal with the long-term impact of the disaster without acknowledging the endemic problems that existed in the region, as outlined below.

**Because of the oil disaster, what’s happening across the Gulf poses more policy challenges than ever.**

So now because of the oil disaster, things are even more challenging than many may initially consider. This suggests there may be opportunities to recast various areas, such as education, to encourage wholesale improvements as people who live along the Gulf coast struggle economically to keep up.

Among notable data:

- **Business climate:** Out of the 50 states, Louisiana’s business climate ranked 49<sup>th</sup> from the top. Other Gulf states’ ranks: Mississippi (42), Alabama (28) and Florida (8). Florida’s rank, however, includes the whole state. It is likely that the Panhandle area’s economic climate is more reflective of Alabama and Mississippi.
- **Income.** Residents in the area have among the lowest per capita incomes in the nation: Mississippi (50), Alabama (46), Louisiana (45), and Florida (28)
- **Poverty.** Mississippi has the highest poverty rate in the nation, followed immediately by Louisiana. Alabama is 10<sup>th</sup>; Florida is 23<sup>rd</sup>.
- **Children.** According to KidsCount, the worst, second worst and third worst places for children to grow up in the U.S. are Mississippi, Louisiana and Alabama, respectively. Florida ranks 16<sup>th</sup> worst.

- **Obesity.** Mississippi residents are the most obese in the country followed by Alabama in second place. Louisiana ranks 13<sup>th</sup>; Florida ranks 36<sup>th</sup>.

Finally, there's one other thing to consider and it's about **population**. In 2000, Census figures show there were just under 500,000 people living in New Orleans. After Katrina, the number dropped to below half. By 2008 (latest figures available), the number was around 336,000 people in New Orleans.

Planners for the recovery effort should be aware of the likelihood of the Gulf coast counties losing population in the months ahead if there are not viable work opportunities for people in tourism, fisheries and support industries.

### **New Orleans overview**

At the start of the group's second call in June, Allison Plyer, deputy director of the Greater New Orleans Community Data Center, gave an overview of the economic drivers of the New Orleans area.

In general, she said most leaders think the Gulf disaster is going to be much worse than Hurricane Katrina because the region's economy – fishing, tourism, oil and gas – was able to weather the storm and snap back relatively quickly. Fishermen could return to fishing; tourism returned eventually and oil sector workers went back to their jobs. The Gulf disaster, however, is much different, she said, because of how jobs may just disappear.

“With tourism, perception is king,” she noted. If offshore oil fields remain shut down for much longer, workers may face the ends of their jobs, which means they'll have to move elsewhere or do something else completely. The port may lose business to other ports if, for example, ships have to be cleaned of clinging oil every time they go into port.

Some numbers:

- Tourism jobs in the 10-parish New Orleans region: 72,000
- Oil/gas jobs: 19,000
- Port/logistics: 25,000
- Fishing: There are about 5,000 commercial fishing licenses, which may translate into about 20,000 jobs.

**The Gulf disaster may have a bigger long-term impact on jobs than did Hurricane Katrina and other recent storms.**

Furthermore, New Orleans is more diversified than Detroit, but with the area's three main economic drivers facing a huge impact from the oil disaster, what happens to Louisiana could be more devastating than what happened to Detroit when the auto industry changed.

The one sector that potentially could gain is the higher education sector – if it could become a research hub akin to Silicon Valley or Research Triangle Park. Higher education, Plyer said, has been generally undernourished in terms of business potential.

### **Budget considerations**

On the same call, the group also heard from South Carolina budget analyst Mike Shealy who provided some insights about what happened to the state budget process more than 20 years ago after Hurricane Hugo:

- **Collections.** State tax collections went up 3-6 months after the storm because many major assets were insured and work was done to fix them to good condition.
- **Insurers.** But in this blowout disaster, the private insurance market might not be as involved because of the liability shouldered by BP.
- **Foreign buyouts?** Shealy said because impacted property likely will be worth less down the road, assessments for property taxes will be lower, which will lower the value of the tax base. While that will have major impacts on local governmental abilities to fix things and provide services, a spinoff impact is that some investors, including foreign investors, may sweep into the area to try to buy properties at a low price – a kind of property fire sale. And having absentee landlords could change the character of the area in large ways.

With these matters in mind, the participants in the Better South calls offer the following 12 ideas:

## Idea 1: Establish a long-term development and recovery trust fund



An ongoing challenge in discussing the Gulf oil disaster is the rhetoric and, oftentimes, grandstanding about returning the Gulf coast to the way it was before the crisis that started in April.

Taking into account the South's rich culture and generous people, we observe that the region's "way of life" for many across the Gulf Coast and Deep South has been difficult for decades. Socio-economic and education indicators have consistently placed the region below national averages. As one participant observed in our discussions, "I'm worried that getting us back to the way things used to be is for us to still be poor."

**We can do better. The region now has an opportunity to leapfrog forward economically and educationally while preserving cultural heritage.**

We can do better. The region now has an opportunity to leapfrog forward economically and educationally while preserving cultural heritage.

With this dynamic in mind, participants discussed various ways to structure an organization that would manage recovery investments for the future of the Gulf. BP's current \$20 billion fund is dealing with the environmental problems that currently exist. But that fund generally doesn't address long-term needs. In the end, our group agreed to suggest a big idea that has several implications:

- Develop a long-term recovery and development trust fund to make strategic investments in projects that will have major systemic educational, health and economic impacts in the Gulf states, and
- Use the fund to help pay for unexpected future health, environmental and other impacts caused by the spill.

A Gulf Development and Recovery Trust Fund, we believe, should be no less than \$10 billion and should have a funding mechanism that is set up similar to the federal tobacco settlement: An initial large inflow of money to seed the fund and a continuing funding mechanism that will continue to add to it over 20 years.

The initial seed money for the Fund could be \$5 billion from BP. But because there is a potential for other disasters in Gulf waters in the future, other companies that drill in the Gulf should pay into the fund to take responsibility for future threats and to meet their social responsibility to improve the Gulf region as they draw resources away. The sustaining stream of revenue could come from a

percentage of royalties already paid by companies for leases and similar agreements.<sup>1</sup>

**RECOMMENDATION: The president should set up a long-term Gulf Development and Recovery Trust Fund that is funded in part now by BP and over time by the oil industry. The funds should be used for visionary, long-term projects that will boost economic and educational opportunities and improve public and environmental health throughout the Gulf states.**

## Idea 2: Create a two-year presidential commission to oversee the Trust

# 2

There are multiple ways a Gulf Development and Recovery Trust Found could be set up and managed, as discussed below. We believe, however, it is important to keep two things in mind that may appear to conflict, but could work together to create a pragmatic solution on how to organize the recovery administratively:

1. **Speed.** Some of the funding in such a Trust Fund needs to be spent sooner instead of later. Therefore, the Fund requires a flexible organizational structure that allows for speedy decisions based on experienced input from local, state and federal leaders.
2. **Long-term plan.** Spending for development and recovery should be done in a strategic manner that looks to the long term. Therefore, it would be wise for managers of the Trust Fund to appoint a blue-ribbon commission with significant input from local communities and impacted states to develop a pragmatic, long-term and comprehensive plan for spending Trust Fund monies to build a better Gulf over time.

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<sup>1</sup> The federal Oil Spill Liability Trust Fund may offer an existing funding mechanism that could be tweaked and enlarged to provide long-term revenue for a Gulf Development and Recovery Trust Fund. More: [http://www.uscg.mil/ccs/npfc/About\\_NPFC/osltf.asp](http://www.uscg.mil/ccs/npfc/About_NPFC/osltf.asp)



With these two variables in mind, here are some of the organizational models we discussed for a group to run a Trust or some other funding stream for long-term recovery and development aid:

- **A federal commission.** The Appalachian Regional Commission (<http://www.arc.gov>), a federal-state partnership that has provided housing, highways and other assistance for years to mountain people since 1965, has a federal co-chair appointed by the president and a state co-chair who is a governor. The Commission’s members are the presidential appointee and governors from 13 states. The commission often serves as a catalyst for advancing economic transformation strategies.
- **An enterprise corporation.** The Enterprise Corporation of the Delta (<http://www.ecd.org>), a regional economic and community development organization, started in 1994 to create opportunities in the Delta region of Mississippi, Louisiana and Arkansas. The regional partnership, led by a blue-ribbon group of 16 leaders, leverages grants and other funding streams to help people build wealth in the 58-county and parish region. It serves as a catalyst of interstate cooperation.
- **Short-term administrative organization.** The Louisiana Recovery Authority (<http://www.lra.louisiana.gov/index.cfm>) started in October 2005 by executive order in Louisiana to administer and coordinate what turned into more than \$10 billion in federal aid following Hurricane Katrina and three other hurricanes. The agency, which ended by sunset in July 2010, had a 17-member board, 13 of whom were appointed by the governor and confirmed by the state Senate. The organization oversaw funding a programs dealing with housing recovery, infrastructure rebuilding, long-term planning and economic revitalization.
- **A nonprofit foundation.** The Louisiana Disaster Recovery Foundation (<http://www.louisianahelp.org/index.html>) started soon after Hurricane Katrina to coordinate philanthropic needs through an “equity-driven approach.” It has provided \$29 million in funding to 144 organizations and particularly has been helpful in building capacity of Louisiana nonprofits that focus on helping people. The foundation is led by a dozen professionals with leadership and philanthropic ties to Louisiana.

### Setting up a new Presidential Commission

Other models certainly exist – creating a new federal agency, developing a state-federal task force to distribute money, a commission, an array of public-private partnerships.

But to deal with challenges and opportunities over the short and long terms, it might be best to consider a two-year Presidential Commission that would oversee a federal Trust, be able to approve needed development and recovery projects quickly, and set up a blue-ribbon panel of federal, state and local officials to develop recommendations for administering the Trust after the commission has sunset.

**Key for success of a commission: Speed, a long-term vision and local buy-in.**

This proposed two-year commission should consist of five to seven leaders with federal and state experience. These members, largely are drawn from the Gulf area, might include former congressmen and U.S. senators, governors, mayors and county council members. Members also could include leading-edge, action-oriented professionals in the business, nonprofit and think tank communities. Members appointed to the commission should be creative visionaries who are pragmatic and have records of working well with others.

Responsibilities of the commission should include:

- **Half now.** Oversight of a federal development and recovery trust fund by targeting and allocating half of the Trust's funds within the two-year life cycle of the commission.
- **Half later.** Development of a smart, future-oriented organization to take control of the trust at the expiration of the commission. This organization, which eventually may be set up by the president or Congress, would stem from the recommendations of a broad local-state-federal panel that plans for the future of the trust. The succeeding organization would be chartered to spend remaining trust funds in years ahead to deal with promising economic development projects and unanticipated problems from the Gulf disaster.

**RECOMMENDATION: The president should appoint a commission to last a limited time to make decisions on how to spend development and recovery aid in the short term to boost economic, educational, health and other opportunities for people along areas impacted by the Gulf oil disaster. Part of the commission's charter should be to do have a blue-ribbon group do a meaningful study that will make recommendations and outline a vision for an appropriate successor organization to manage and implement a long-term vision for the region.**

## Idea 3: Jumpstart a higher education cluster in the Gulf

# 3

In the 1960s, North Carolina Gov. Terry Sanford embarked on an effort to create Research Triangle Park as a research hub that connected academic output from the University of North Carolina, Duke University and N.C. State University with corporations that could commercialize research.

The result? RTP is a huge driver of the North Carolina economy worth billions of dollars every year. Here's how a Duke Web site described the impact of RTP three years ago:

“Of the 157 different organizations in the 7,000-acre park, more than 80% are multinational companies, and 84% of them are research and development-related organizations. Of the more than 39,000 employees, 97.3% work for R&D-related organizations. These statistics alone make RTP one of the most dynamic parts of the increasingly globalized North Carolina economy. These organizations span the gamut of industries from information technology, biotechnology, and pharmaceuticals, to telecommunications, environmental sciences, and public health. The largest employers in RTP are IBM (10,800 employees), GlaxoSmithKline (6,400 employees), Cisco Systems (3,400), Nortel (2,800), and RTI International (2,600).”

*Source: [http://www.soc.duke.edu/NC\\_GlobalEconomy/information/public.shtml](http://www.soc.duke.edu/NC_GlobalEconomy/information/public.shtml);*

*Also see the Research Triangle Park Foundation:*

*<http://www.rtp.org/main/index.php?pid=178>*

Currently, the Gulf economy is generated by sectors impacted seriously by the Deepwater Horizon disaster – tourism, fishing, oil/gas exploration and shipping. With each of these drivers partially or significantly impacted for months or years, the region needs to pump up a new economic driver (or drivers) to generate jobs and infuse money into the economy.

Therefore, it is wise to ask, “What are the major drivers of the future for America, and by extension, the Gulf?”

Timothy Taylor, managing editor of *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*, said at a July conference that colleges and universities – and the smart people that fill their halls of learning – have proven to be good drivers for the future, as shown by RTP, Silicon Valley and other research centers across the country.

That's why we believe the best existing sector for the Gulf to concentrate new investment in is higher education – for the region to secure major investments on

a massive scale to make New Orleans become the nation's home for major multi-disciplinary research dealing with environmental health, energy and related fields.

**Investing in a major higher education cluster would have huge impacts for the Gulf – a long-term, growing and stable base of much-needed knowledge-based jobs. Such an investment would create a reason for young Gulf residents to remain in the area, instead of migrating to other larger cities for opportunities.**

Among the kinds of basic and applied collaborative research that could be done to attract private industry (and jobs) to commercialize technology are in the fields of:

- Public health, including the effects of the oil spill and other natural disasters;
- Medicine, to develop products to counteract impacts of disasters on humans and wildlife;
- Ecosystem health and restoration focusing on the impact of the spill and disasters to the environment;
- Alternative energy research, including integrating old technology workers (oil/gas) with new energy systems, development and production;
- Ocean sustainability and health, including protocols for new ways to clean up and mitigate damage for a variety of manmade disasters.

Many more pertinent areas can be added to this list. The point is, however, that the federal government, in coordination with the Gulf states, could set up a major higher education cluster in the New Orleans area, perhaps with offshoots in other affected states, to develop collaborative projects and grow jobs based on research. As Better South director Leo Fishman observes, “This is a 20-year project. A lot of the problems of the Gulf aren’t rooted as much in the oil spill but in the culture that has existed.” Creating a higher education cluster as a major driver of the Gulf economy is a way to combat generational problems.

**RECOMMENDATION: The federal government, in coordination with the Gulf states, should make it a national priority to invest significantly over time to create a Gulf higher education cluster. It should focus on basic and applied collaborative research in environmental health and other areas to create commercial opportunities that will lead to significant job creation in the region.**

## 4

## Idea 4: Provide free wireless Internet access throughout Gulf counties

Technology is at the root of future success and progress for America, many experts agree. Access to affordable technology is important if people are going to be part of the so-called Knowledge Economy.

At its simplest, the National Broadband Initiative ([www.broadband.gov](http://www.broadband.gov)) currently being undertaken by the Federal Communications Commission takes into account that affordability and accessibility are the key drivers in the complicated but necessary process of making the Internet universally available in America.

Like electricity a century ago, broadband is a foundation for economic growth, job creation, global competitiveness and a better way of life. It is enabling entire new industries and unlocking vast new possibilities for existing ones. It is changing how we educate children, deliver health care, manage energy, ensure public safety, engage government, and access, organize and disseminate knowledge. (*National Broadband Plan, executive summary, at <http://www.broadband.gov/plan/executive-summary/>*)

**Offering free wireless access along the Gulf coast is a leapfrog idea that could infuse a new economic dynamism in the region.**

So here's an idea. While the NBI is working out ways for everyone to have affordable access to broadband – high-speed Internet– why not have the federal government and technology companies rapidly develop free medium-speed wireless Internet access for everyone who lives in areas impacted by the Gulf spill? Over the last 10 years, there have been a couple of models, each with its pros and cons, that have been used to deploy high-speed access over a large area (Muni-Wi-Fi, WiMAX, others). With the ubiquity of cell towers along the Gulf coast, there should be a technologically-advanced solution that could create a regional medium-speed wireless network for Gulf residents. (We suggest medium-speed to allow existing and future providers to sell access to high-speed access, which is a “carrot” that may encourage them to build out medium-speed for free.)

By offering medium-speed wireless access, questions become moot about access and affordability. In turn, it allows people in the Gulf states to have the chance to leapfrog into the New Economy. Providing free medium-speed wireless access has a number of advantages for people in urban, rural and suburban environments:

- **Jobs.** The medium-speed wi-fi system will allow them to telecommute to jobs in the Knowledge economy – an opportunity that they may not have now.

- **New businesses.** People will be able to use the Internet as a backbone to create new businesses and use e-commerce.
- **Education.** It will allow students access to the Internet and its educational benefits (see Idea 10 for more).
- **Monitoring.** It will allow installation of remote sensing monitors to allow scientists to collect a lot of environmental data in the Gulf and in forests along the coast. (*This ties into Idea 10, below.*) Other kinds of sensors and data collection equipment could be set up to monitor the health of people along the coast.

We understand that a lot of issues may develop with this idea, but it is technologically achievable and it is an investment in the region's future with major implications for the economy and education.

**RECOMMENDATION: The federal government and technology companies should develop a practical and free medium-speed wireless system for Gulf states to allow everyone access to the Internet and its economic and educational benefits.**

## Idea 5: Provide free educational laptops to Gulf students



Throughout the Deep South, only 30 percent of children going into kindergarten through fifth grade have proficiency in the learning skills necessary for success for the grades they are entering, according to The Palmetto Project in South Carolina. The number drops for low-income and minority students.

Idea: As a leapfrog approach to allow Gulf state students to make big strides in educational success, the federal government, in coordination with Gulf states, could replicate a successful South Carolina pilot project to provide free educational laptops to young students in impacted Gulf counties. In doing so, students – and their families at home – would be able to access educational technologies to develop essential skills for academic success.

One Laptop Per Child SC ([www.laptopsc.org](http://www.laptopsc.org)) is the pilot project that has provided innovative XO computers ([www.laptop.org](http://www.laptop.org)) for free to about 3,000

students in 14 poor South Carolina schools. Originally envisioned to be a \$100 laptop, a more reasonable expectation for each laptop has proven to be \$230.

Feedback from schools about the program in South Carolina is positive, with the state superintendent reportedly saying that providing an educational laptop per child was the best single investment the state could make for students in South Carolina schools.

Results show students were enthusiastic about the computers throughout the year. None were stolen, lost or needed repair other than routine maintenance. Technology proficiency shot through the roof for students. Teachers reported “some” to “substantial” gains in academic achievement because of the laptops. Six in 10 teachers reported more peer collaboration among students.

The experience since 2007 of OLPCSC also suggests key components to the success of the program have been a high degree of parental involvement and good technology training for educators. OLPCSC also suggests use of a Virtual Learning Center to help students fully utilize computers.

Cost context: There are about 2.6 million students (grades 1-12) in Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama, and in the Panhandle counties of Florida. Each grade has an average of 221,000 students. The cost of buying a \$230 laptop for each grade level of students in three entire states and the Panhandle region is about \$51 million. To buy laptops for all students in the three states and Panhandle for grades 1-5 would cost about \$250 million. It was difficult to estimate the number of students just in impacted coastal counties, but it is more than likely that an investment of \$100 million would purchase a laptop for each student on the Gulf coast in grades 1 to 5. Teacher training, hardware, wiring, chargers and other costs could add another \$30 million to \$50 million.

Bottom line: An investment in an educational laptop per child along the Gulf coast is a smart, real, quick and tangible way of priming the economic pump of the future to create a smarter workforce and provide new opportunities to hundreds of thousands of Southerners.

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**RECOMMENDATION: The federal government, in coordination with the states, should spend no less than \$150 million to rapidly implement a One Laptop Per Child project along the Gulf coast to get an educational laptop into the hands of every student in grades 1 to 5.**

Contact: Phil Noble, One Laptop Per Child SC  
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## Idea 6: Fund the Green Freedom project

# 6

The Green Freedom project is a research effort being undertaken by Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico and its partners to synthesize carbon-based fuel (gas, diesel, jet fuel) domestically by using a chemical process to remove carbon from the air.

Dr. Jeff Martin explained to Better South call participants how technology currently exists to recycle carbon dioxide from the air via a technique involving cooling towers to turn it into usable fuel. All that essentially remains for this process to be available for commercialization is a series of tests to determine the efficiency of the process and then to optimize it. Martin said that would take about four years and cost \$6 million.

**An investment of \$6 million seems like a “drop in the bucket” for technology that could help the nation wean itself from oil.**

Among the highlights of Martin’s presentation:

- Already-available technology exists that can be combined to make usable fuel at a price that is almost competitive to current prices at the pump (about \$5 per gallon).
- By converting carbon dioxide into fuel, the U.S. would be able to synthesize green fuel domestically and help wean the country from foreign oil.
- The typical footprint for a carbon dioxide fuel plant is about 450 acres and will produce about 17,000 barrels a day – enough to supply a mid-sized city of 500,000.
- A demonstration plant will cost about \$200 million to build. A full production plant will cost up to \$5 billion and will last at least 40 years.
- No private investment has been sought for the project yet, but already there is venture and other interest when the final research hurdle is jumped.
- The project’s solid waste stream is minimal – about 2 percent of a coal or other plants. The major byproduct of the process is oxygen.

Better South participants agreed that \$6 million to finish the project seemed like a “drop in the bucket” based on the promising results for the research. With all of the money floating round now to “fix” the Gulf, this is an investment that could



be well worth it. *(Additionally, the project would be perfect for being part of a higher education cluster in the Gulf as described in Idea 3.)*

**RECOMMENDATION: The U.S. government should invest \$6 million in the Green Freedom project as a way to green America's fuel supply.**

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## Idea 7: Mobilizing America's volunteers to respond to local needs



It doesn't matter where anyone lives in America, but they want to help fellow countrymen dig out from the Gulf disaster. It's part of the American spirit – this need to help. Unfortunately many Americans are frustrated because of their distance from the Gulf and because they don't feel there is much they can actually do. Witness a recent Sunday column by Charleston, S.C., writer Ken Burger:

“Globally, the overriding feeling for those living this nightmare is helplessness. How can we help? We are a nation that springs into action when disaster strikes. We offer food to the hungry, build shelter for the homeless, send medical aid to the injured, raise prayers for the lost. But in this case we are paralyzed. We cannot stop the leak. We cannot make the hurt go away.”

We need to tap into America's volunteer spirit of giving to help people in the Gulf. By focusing on helpful tasks, we can mitigate negative feelings of helplessness and start attacking the problems collaboratively in a more positive way.

We propose that the federal government quickly develop a national center to tap into this American spirit of trying to help neighbors in need of help. Such a center may be fueled by a national Web site and hotline that would coordinate what local Gulf communities and states need and match that to what communities, companies, churches, volunteer groups and individuals from across the country want to give.

Bottom line: The government could help speed what people in Gulf communities need by matching that with what people want to give, and then coordinating the effort. In turn, there would be an emerging sense that we're doing something to make a difference.

**We need to tap into America's volunteer spirit of giving to help people in the Gulf. By focusing on helpful tasks, we can mitigate negative feelings of helplessness and start attacking the problems collaboratively in a more positive way.**

There's no point, for example, for a truckload of bottled water from a church group in Minneapolis to head to Biloxi if people in Biloxi don't need the water, while people in New Orleans do. The same kind of system could direct volunteer manpower from Iowa, for example, to a Mobile senior center where people need help filling out relief forms.

A National Volunteer Coordination project could help get rid of snafus and allow people to help now – in person or through donated items that are needed in communities.

Some corollary ideas that need to be considered with this big idea:

- **Needs assessments.** Local communities affected by the Gulf disaster will have to conduct baseline and ongoing needs assessments to send to the National Volunteer Coordination project to ensure that posted needs are current.
- **Federal coordinators.** It may be necessary for the federal government to have on-the-ground coordinators to help local communities – service organizations, county governments, municipal governments and more – with developing and updating needs assessments. These individuals may already exist with the Federal Emergency Management Agency and could be tasked to the Coordination project.
- **Local focus.** For the Coordination project to work, it must be a collaborative effort that allows communities to outline what they want. It should not become a top-down command from the federal government about what it thinks communities need. The project will be successful with local buy-in that links what it needs to what people across the country want to give in terms of time, goods or money.
- **Web site and hotline.** The engine to drive the Coordination project is a rich online database – a sophisticated kind of free Craigslist – that would be augmented with a national telephone hotline like those offered by 2-1-1 operations in some metro areas. To set up the Internet component, we suggest that the federal recovery efforts task a large company, such as Google or Oracle to set it up and run the Web effort and phone hotline.
- **Other potential help.** The initiative also might benefit from efforts by AmeriCorps workers.

**See an op-ed that was written on this idea in the Appendix below.**

- **Publicity.** The effort might want to develop national media partners – media outlets and big organizations, such as Major League Baseball or the NFL – to help spread the word.

**RECOMMENDATION: The federal government help to develop a national center of volunteerism that connects people in need with people and communities who have goods and services to offer.**

**Contact:** Dean James L. “Skip” Rutherford  
 University of Arkansas Clinton School of Public Service  
[srutherford@clintonschool.uasys.edu](mailto:srutherford@clintonschool.uasys.edu)

## Idea 8: Measure, measure, measure



During a discussion that took into account observations outlined above in the Background discussion, it became pretty clear that it is important for any recovery effort to “measure, measure, measure” economic and demographic impacts to the Gulf region.

Such measurements will help policy-makers make better decisions in the future in a number of areas; Tax policy, energy policy, job/employment policy, education and retraining. Good economic measures also may help in establishment of better liability impacts. Bottom line: More measuring gives decision-makers better tools.

Therefore, we recommend that the federal government, perhaps through BP, fund a consortium of academics and practitioners with experience to embark on comprehensive economic and demographic measuring. Ideally, the funder will pick an experienced leader to involve several experienced entities. For example, Plyer’s Greater New Orleans Community Data Center could involve other groups it has worked with or that has good experience – Brookings, the Research Institute at Loyola in New Orleans, Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama, the Askew School of Public Administration and Policy at Florida State University and similar institutions at Mississippi State University, Duke University and the University of North Carolina. Annual cost to have researchers doing proper measurements could be \$500,000 a year.

**RECOMMENDATION: Fund and develop a consortium of economic researchers to measure economic, poverty and other social/demographic indicators along the Gulf states to use to help provide good information for policymakers.**

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 Greater New Orleans Community Data Center  
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Ferrel Guillory  
 UNC Program on Public Life, Chapel Hill, NC  
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## Idea 9: Activate community development corporations



**B**etter South Director Leo Fishman discussed an idea to reinvigorate local community development corporations to help fuel local leadership and energy to deal with local needs. If there were an investment to help existing local community development corporations along the Gulf coast and to start ones in areas where they don't exist, then communities would be able to better chart their own courses.

Here is an excerpt of an email from Fishman that explores the idea:

A Community Development Corporation (CDC) represents a locally-based, organizational strategy whose purpose is to create jobs, income and ownership opportunities. Originating from efforts of the Ford Foundation in New Haven, Conn., during the late 50s, the concept was subsequently deployed as a demonstration program in low-income communities by the U.S. Office of Economic Opportunity, part of President Lyndon Johnson's "Great Society." At best, they experienced limited success, but in later years, the concept was applied more flexibly, and they began to appear in many communities. CDCs often were builders of affordable housing, but they participated in business and commercial development as well. (For detailed information, go to Wikipedia or to other Google listings.)

What is a CDC? Basically, it is a nonprofit, tax-exempt corporation (501(c)(3) with a board of directors representing diverse economic sectors of its community. (A "community" can be a neighborhood, city, state, or a region, as the organizers may determine.) The tax status, dependent upon a commitment to serving an area of "need," makes it eligible for government grants and foundation gifts, and it also enables private contributors (such as businesses) to deduct their donations, cash or in-kind, from income. Originally, these organizations were community-based, but in the last twenty-five years, they have been sponsored by banks, faith-based groups, local government, and others committed to local economic improvement.

What does a CDC do? Initially, it is a planning organization measuring needs and developing strategies to meet those needs. A CDC may perform any one or a number of functions to support economic activity such as:

1. **Lender.** A CDC may establish a revolving loan pool for businesses experiencing difficulty in obtaining credit. It may also serve as co-lender or guarantor of all or part of the loans of other institutions such as commercial banks.
2. **Investor.** A CDC may invest capital in a business or commercial venture as a developer/owner or joint venture participant, provided that the purpose of the investment furthers the tax-exempt purpose.
3. **Consultant.** CDC staff may advise various economic entities and coordinate economic activity; it may write grant proposals, solicit financing, or encourage location within its community.
4. **Owner/manager.** A CDC may develop, manage and own a business (in an area of need) and it may develop infrastructure and support services to nourish the establishment and success of such activities.

In other words, a CDC develops and implements a strategy that meets the needs of its community, and tailors a strategy in line with local resources and capabilities.

Would this strategy be useful in some of the communities along the Gulf? It could lead to an assessment at the local level of current economic conditions and the creation of a broad based organization to develop a long term development strategy. This is not a foolproof endeavor, but with leadership, it works.

**RECOMMENDATION: Explore possibilities of funding to reinvigorate or start community development corporations to help with long-term development strategies for local Gulf communities.**

**Contact:** Leo Fishman, Kiawah Island, S.C.  
lfishman@betersouth.org

## Idea 10: Adopt clear environmental monitoring standards

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In June, there appeared to be approximately 28 research vessels in the Gulf monitoring water, methane, animals, oil and a host of factors related to oil cleanup and the health of the maritime ecosystem.

**There reportedly is a great need for scientists to have calibration standards for data so they can make “apples to apples” comparisons.**

There also reportedly was a real need for solid, objective, scientific criteria or standards for data to ensure that data collectors have baselines and can approach data sets with confidence in discussions. In other words, there’s a need for calibration standards for data so scientists reviewing and analyzing what’s going on in the Gulf can have “apples-to-apples” conversations, not “apples-to-oranges” discussions.

Therefore, there appears to be a need, if it is not already underway, for a prompt national initiative for definitions of monitoring standards and establishments of data baselines. Our group thought the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration might already have appropriate criteria – or could develop them – to ensure that data collectors and analysts were speaking the same scientific language in relation to the Gulf crisis.

**RECOMMENDATION: Establish comprehensive, objective, scientific criteria or standards for data collection to ensure scientists can compare research better.**

**Contact:** Prof. Pete Conroy  
Jacksonville State University  
<http://www.jsu.edu/epic/>

## Idea 11: Have informal meetings in Gulf communities

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Throughout the summer, team members discussed the need for policymakers to talk with people on-the-ground in affected Gulf communities to get an idea of the challenges they faced and to understand their perceptions of medium- and long-term needs that should be filled.

While official federal government meetings will yield results, we believe the Center can set up and have small, pragmatic focus-group-like meetings with a few academics, pertinent non-profits, public officials and advisers. These meetings may offer more depth and a different “feel” for what communities and states want over the medium- and long-term to grapple with the oil crisis. The meetings that we propose, pending adequate funding, to have would be private. We believe funding from private sources is available.

More than anything, these private meetings might be able to provide you and others with information and ideas that would be helpful that might not come up,

**This idea has been accomplished.**

for one reason or another, in public session. There's a huge value, we think, for the nonpartisan Center to have these meetings with a cross-section of smart Southerners.

*NOTE: This idea, outlined early on, appears to have been successfully carried out by Secretary Mabus in town meetings and private gatherings from Tampa to New Orleans over the summer.*

## Idea 12: Centralized news resource



Team members discussed how it would be helpful for there to be a daily roundup of news that could be accessed for free in a central Web location. Currently, there are dozens of news resources, but it's hard to keep up with what's happening without having to Web surf all over the place.

The notion of a central news source – a Gulf clipping service that's online – is a private sector function.

**See this idea in  
action at:  
[GulfSpillClips.com](http://www.GulfSpillClips.com)**

*NOTE: This idea was successfully launched by a private company in July 2010. For a comprehensive roundup of news about developments involving the Gulf disaster, you can go to this free news clipping service:*

**GulfSpillClips.com (<http://www.GulfSpillClips.com>)**

## Participants

About five dozen friends and advisers of the Center were invited to participate in our Ideas conference calls.

**DISCLAIMER:** People listed below participated in some or all of the discussions involving the ideas in this report, but being on the list below is not an indication of endorsement of any or all of the ideas listed above.

Among those who helped craft the ideas in this report were:

- Vice Admiral (ret) **Al Baciocco**, USN, former director of research, development and acquisition for the Navy; senior fellow of the Potomac Institute for Policy Studies and a trustee of the S.C. Research Authority.
- **Andy Brack**, president of the Center for a Better South, Charleston, S.C.
- **Elliott Brack**, publisher, GwinnettForum, Norcross, Ga.
- The Hon. **Glen Browder**, a former Alabama congressman and political scientist at Jacksonville State University, Jacksonville, Ala.
- Prof. **Pete Conroy**, director of the Environmental Policy and Information Center, Jacksonville State University, Jacksonville, Ala.
- **Bob Davis**, editor, The Anniston Star, Anniston, Ala.
- **Leo Fishman**, director of the Center for a Better South, Charleston, S.C.
- **Ferrel Guillory**, director, Program on Public Life, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, N.C.
- The Hon. **Phil Leventis**, state senator, Sumter, S.C.
- Dr. **Jeff Martin**, Los Alamos National Laboratory, Los Alamos, N.M.
- **Phil Noble**, founder, PoliticsOnline, Charleston, S.C.
- **Allison Plyer**, deputy director, Greater New Orleans Community Data Center, New Orleans, La.
- **James L. "Skip" Rutherford**, dean of the University of Arkansas Clinton School for Public Service, Little Rock, Ark.



- **Mike Shealy**, chief budget analyst, S.C. Senate Finance Committee, Columbia, S.C
- **Aly Spencer**, graduate student, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.
- The Hon. **William Winter**, former governor, Jackson, Miss.

### **Credits**

The Center also would like to thank photographers across the country for providing photographs that have been displayed on our daily photo blog, [www.BetterGulf.org](http://www.BetterGulf.org) to tell the story of the Gulf oil catastrophe in moving images.

Among those whose images are displayed on this report's front cover are Drew Wheelan of the American Birding Association, Pinar Ozger of the TedxOilSpill Expedition, the U.S. Coast Guard and the Center's Andy Brack..

## Appendix 1: About the Center for a Better South

The Center for a Better South is a pragmatic, nonpartisan think tank dedicated to developing progressive ideas, policies and information for thinking leaders who want to make a difference in the American South.

The Center, a non-profit, tax-exempt organization, has been crafted in the spirit of the L.Q.C. Lamar Society, which was started in 1969 by “men and women who believed the South could achieve practical solutions to its problems, regardless of whether these men were liberal or conservative, white or black, Democrat or Republican, establishment or student.”

Among the Center’s accomplishments:

- **Tax reform.** In 2006, the Center published “Doing Better: Progressive Tax Reform for the American South,” an innovative book of ideas on ways to reform tax codes in Southern states.
- **Environmental ideas.** The following year, it published “Doing Better: Progressive Environmental Ideas for the American South,” which looked at environmental and energy impacts and suggestions for Southern legislators.
- **Agenda:** In 2009, the Center held a major conference at Davidson College where more than 30 leading Southern thinkers and leaders crafted an “Agenda for a Better South” – eight big ideas for the region to adopt to move forward.
- **BetterGulf.org:** In 2010, the Center launched BetterGulf.org, a blog that offers a new photograph every day to tell the story of the Gulf oil catastrophe in pictures.
- **ThinkSouth 2010:** In November, the Center will hold its second annual conference in Little Rock, Ark., to discuss tax reform, environmental issues related to the Gulf crisis and ways to improve safety in Southern communities. More: [www.ThinkSouth.org](http://www.ThinkSouth.org).

You can learn more about the Center for a Better South at: [www.BetterSouth.org](http://www.BetterSouth.org).

## Appendix 2: Op-ed on volunteerism

### Tapping into America's volunteer spirit

*By Andy Brack and Skip Rutherford*

*Published in The Hill, Washington, D.C.*

JULY 1, 2010 -- With oil still spewing into the Gulf after 10 weeks, Americans are becoming increasingly frustrated. How in the world can people in the richest and most technologically inventive country in the world still not get the doggone gusher under control?

Yes, we feel helpless. We're in an oil nightmare that seems a sequel to the movie Groundhog Day. Most of us live too far from the Gulf to be able to do something directly, other than give money. And even that doesn't feel like much as barrel after barrel twists and slinks to impact beaches, marshes and wildlife.

We need to stir Americans from their oil paralysis. We need to tap into our volunteer spirit of giving to help people in the Gulf. By focusing on helpful tasks, perhaps we can mitigate feelings of helplessness and start attacking people's problems in a more positive way.

We propose the development of a national volunteer center to coordinate our innate American spirit of wanting to help neighbors in need of help. Such a center can be fueled by a national Web site and telephone hotline that will coordinate what local Gulf communities and states need and match needs to what communities, colleges and universities, companies, churches, volunteer groups and individuals across the country want to give.

Think of it as a free Craigslist for the Gulf that the Obama Administration could set up to bring together the needy with those who want to meet needs. Such an online hub for community action could match and coordinate needs identified by Gulf communities collaboratively and interactively.

There's no point, for example, for a church group in Little Rock to send a truckload of bottled water to Mobile if folks there really need volunteers to help shrimpers fill out claims forms. And there's no point in volunteers from Charleston heading to New Orleans if what it needs is bottled water. With the help of a coordination center, the water could go to New Orleans and the volunteers could head to Mobile.

In essence, this national volunteer coordination project can use the coordination power of the Internet to get rid of snafus and send help where it is really needed — both short-term and long-term.

For such an idea to become a reality, local communities affected by the Gulf disaster will have to serve as the drivers of what they want by conducting realistic baseline and ongoing needs assessments to fill and update the national project database. A top-down command from the federal government about what it thinks communities need won't work. Local buy-in is essential for linking what people need to what people want to give in terms of time, money and goods.

For its part, the federal government can do three things. First, it can drive the coordination project by tasking the volunteer spirit of our big Internet companies, such as Google, Microsoft, Apple or Yahoo, to develop the rich online database that can augment a national Gulf help hotline like those offered by 2-1-1 operations in many metro areas.

Second, it can provide people power — “clipboards on the streets” — to work with Gulf communities, agencies, service organizations and governments to develop needs assessments. Finally, these coordinators can help to integrate local needs into the online database project.

From soiled Louisiana bayous to oiled Florida beaches, Gulf communities are hurting. It would be easier for all Americans to help if there were some coordinated way to share the hurt and fill the needs. It's time to bring on the power of the Internet to help people help people.

*Andy Brack is president of the Center for a Better South in Charleston, S.C. James L. “Skip” Rutherford III is dean of the University of Arkansas Clinton School of Public Service in Little Rock, Ark.*

Online at: <http://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/energy-a-environment/106645-tapping-into-americas-volunteer-spirit>

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