

Louisiana is First State in the Nation to Launch an Institute to Incubate Innovative Social Programs

Sara Brenner and Brooke Smith 25 September 2009

In the face of tremendous challenges in post-Katrina Louisiana, social innovators began solving the most critical problems facing Louisianans; and the State's Lt. Governor Mitch Landrieu took notice. In 2006, he created the first in the nation Office of Social Entrepreneurship to advance social innovation by supporting the creation and growth of the most innovative, measurable, and sustainable solutions to the social problems affecting Louisiana's citizens. As Lt. Governor Landrieu has worked to spearhead innovation in the public and private sectors, the Office of Social Entrepreneurship itself has become an example of innovative government practices.

In 2006, the Office of Social Entrepreneurship partnered with the Louisiana Serve Commission to launch the Changing Louisiana Initiative - a statewide initiative that drew 1,500 participants to city-specific conferences aimed at promoting citizen involvement in social entrepreneurship and volunteerism. As a result of this initiative, the Office of Social Entrepreneurship recognized

the need to make a greater investment in social innovators to realize the transformative change desired. In 2007, the Office of Social Entrepreneurship initiated a partnership with Root Cause, a Boston-based consulting firm, to develop a strategic plan focused on incentivizing innovative and measurable solutions developed by social service providers – public and private, and to support its implementation. These efforts lay the groundwork for the Social Innovators Institute, which in these unprecedented economic times is more necessary and relevant than ever before.

According to Landrieu, "In these difficult economic times, when budgets are strained and social challenges are mounting, there is growing recognition that social innovation and entrepreneurship must be a significant part of the solution. We have to spend smarter and invest in what works to solve society's problems."

Social Innovators Institute: established to support the most promising innovators

In September 2009, Lt. Governor Landrieu was the first in the nation to establish the Social Innovators Institute, a program to recognize and support the most promising statewide social innovators so they can be more successful at achieving social impact and long-term financial viability. The Institute blends rigorous business and social impact training with individualized consultative support to help social entrepreneurs develop business

plans for innovative and successful social programs. According to Landrieu, the six month intensive business planning process will provide an opportunity to study “new ways of doing business” and to build better communities using business principals to deliver social programs. (“Twelve Finalists for Grants Named.” The Advocate. September 2, 2009). The Social Innovators Institute has named twelve nonprofit organizations statewide as participants, including a new substance abuse rehab facility, a new cord blood bank, a paint recycling program, and expansions of work activity centers for disabled individuals.

The Office of Social Entrepreneurship is partnering with Community Wealth Ventures, a DC-based consulting firm, to facilitate the Social Innovators Institute. The Institute will culminate with a business plan competition in February 2010 which will award three of the twelve participating organizations with grants to jumpstart their new business plans. The Institute provides the necessary supports to ensure the innovators’ success, including:

- A focus on problem solving and measurement of social impact
- Creation of a network of innovators
- Decision making support

A focus on social problem solving and measurement

The Institute is designed to help social innovators incubate social programs that will solve Louisiana's most pressing social problems. Participants define and study the social problem that their program will address and then develop meaningful measurement systems to track their progress in solving the social problem. Systems involve gathering feedback from external stakeholders and using the information to refine the program's operating model as needed to achieve the social impact desired. Participants conduct extensive market research to build an operating model that will have a high likelihood of success in the market, while also planning for financial sustainability of the social program.

The creation of a network of innovators

Institute participants meet at monthly peer learning sessions during which they have the opportunity to learn from each other, to challenge each others' ideas, and to apply critical strategic, financial, managerial, and operational business principles to social problems. This shared learning environment fosters deep relationships and is a catalyst for partnerships that are necessary for achieving the social impact desired. The roughly fifty participating finalists are leaders and managers at the following twelve organizations:

1. Acadiana Outreach Center (www.acadianaoutreach.org)
2. ADVANCE Innovative Education (www.advanceie.org)

3. Boys Hope Girls Hope of New Orleans and Baton Rouge (www.boyshopegirlshope.org)
4. Cultural Crossroads of Minden, Inc. (www.artsinmiden.com)
5. Family Service of Greater Baton Rouge (www.fsgbr.org)
6. Holy Angels Residential Facility (www.laholyangels.org)
7. LifeShare Blood Centers (www.lifeshare.org)
8. NextSTEP of Central Louisiana, Inc. (318) 664-0277
9. NO/AIDS Task Force (www.noaidstaskforce.org)
10. Reconcile New Orleans, Inc. (www.cafereconcile.org)
11. St. Bernard Project (www.stbernardproject.org)
12. The Green Project (www.thegreenproject.org)

Business coaching helps organizations make critical, informed decisions

Beyond the network, the Institute provides each participating organization with a dedicated business coach who supports the social entrepreneurs' critical decision-making. Business coaches work side by side with the organization's executive and management team to determine critical aspects of the social program – program design, financial strategy and need, marketing strategy, measurement system, and staffing requirements. The coaches also prepare the innovator to successfully implement his or her program and to seek funding for the program. Business coaches will help organizations

prepare to compete for the three grants awards at the final business competition in February 2010.

To read more about the Social Innovators Institute, please visit www.ltgov.la.gov and www.communitywealth.com.

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