

# GEO Member Story



***How Baptist Community Ministries works towards its goals of creating a more healthy community for the people of New Orleans by fostering “the leadership of the many.”***

From its creation in 1995 to today, Baptist Community Ministries has worked to guarantee the greater health of all New Orleans citizens, and especially its most at-risk youth. Through the devastation and aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the health conversion foundation has consistently approached its work with a focus on engaging and collaborating with the leaders and nonprofits in its community.

In 2014, the foundation awarded more than \$8 million in grants, focused on their goal, described by Jennifer Roberts, vice president of education grants, as creating “a city where young people come first.” This focus on the communities it serves is more than just a part of BCM’s mission and vision — it is lived deeply and fully by the foundation staff, many of whom first cut their teeth in direct service. “We all hold the value that all kids are entitled to have a shot at healthy, productive lives — it’s not just doing all we can, but doing the best we can,” said Luceia LeDoux, senior vice president of grants at the foundation.

The foundation is deeply committed to amplifying its work far beyond its grantmaking dollars. To accomplish this, the foundation has developed a deep, longstanding commitment to working as a partner with grantees and other grantmaking organizations in New Orleans. This hasn’t been a simple task, but the foundation has been intentional in how it builds open and trusting relationships that can help ensure the success of collaborative efforts. As Roberts noted, the foundation’s approach to creating relationships comes just as much from the foundation staffs’ experience as it does from the organization’s culture and values:

“All staff have expertise in the content areas they work on — when partners talk to us, they know they’re talking to someone who will understand what they’re going through. But we never assume we have all the answers; it’s very much a two-way street. We don’t just bring expertise; we bring humility. And people come to the table because they trust Baptist Community Ministries. They’re not afraid to fail in front of each other, and we’re not afraid to fail in front of them.”

Due to the collaborative reputation Baptist Community Ministries has cultivated, it plays a large and influential role in how government entities, grantmakers, nonprofits or community leaders work together to improve children’s health and welfare in New Orleans. BCM has taken it upon itself to invest deeply and for the long-term in the infrastructure to support these efforts. According to LeDoux, “Codifying these networks and practices means the work is more efficient, and information is now being shared. We’re allowing organizations to say for the first time that they don’t need to duplicate work.”

One such effort led by Baptist Community Ministries is YouthShift, a collective impact initiative designed to help lead community change and improve the well-being of New Orleanians ages birth

to 25. In addition to offering the support and space for leaders from 80 child- and youth-focused organizations to work together, BCM has used this as an opportunity to build out the infrastructure of the social sector in New Orleans. Ten organizations are also part of the foundation's Opportunity Youth Data Sharing Council, to develop a platform of shared measurements of outcomes. This council is piloting processes and an online data system that will allow nonprofits in the community to better share data and information across their organizations and work towards shared goals. As LeDoux noted, this is incredibly important to making an impact, especially in New Orleans: "Our population, especially children and youth, is very transient. This data collaborative will allow service organizations to see how someone they're serving has interacted with other partner organizations in the past."

Baptist Community Ministries isn't just concerned with the evaluation and learning capacity of its grantees, it is also key to how the foundation operates. Continuous learning is a core value for Baptist Community Ministries, and this means that staff are constantly looking for new ways to apply what they've learned into other areas of the foundation's work. As Roberts explained, "We apply knowledge across the board in everything we do. If we want to have a healthy community, what we learn in one endeavor, we apply to all." This means that as BCM's collective impact efforts have seen success against their goals, the foundation has looked for ways it can engage even more organizations and apply the lessons it has learned in interactions with other grantees. For instance, as the Opportunity Youth Data Sharing Council work continues, BCM is looking intently on ways it can find ways to bring more organizations and leaders into the conversation.

At its core, the foundation and its staff deeply believe and truly live that Baptist Community Ministries cannot go it alone in this work. The stakes — ensuring the health and well-being of the citizens of New Orleans — are just too high for BCM to work in isolation. Roberts explained, "We — the foundation and staff — believe deeply that change can only come from the leadership of the many."

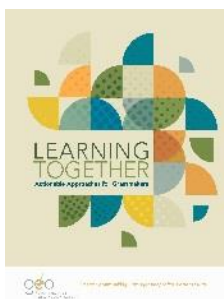
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To find out more information about Baptist Community Ministries, please visit <http://www.bcm.org/>.

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### **GEO resources that relate to the topics covered in this member spotlight**

*Learning Together: Actionable Approaches for Grantmakers*



*The Smarter Grantmaking Playbook: Strengthening Relationships with Grantees*



*Do Nothing About Me Without Me: An Action Guide for Engaging Stakeholders*

