

Baton Rouge Area Foundation



The Baton Rouge Lakes

The Baton Rouge Area Foundation partnered with local stakeholders to develop a master plan for the restoration of the Baton Rouge Lakes. This master plan balances the need for improved water quality, lake restoration, healthy ecosystems for wildlife, and the ability of Baton Rouge citizens to access this community asset. The LSU Foundation is overseeing implementation after funding commitments were made by state and local partners. A team of project contractors are now conducting work related to master planning, bathymetric and stump surveying, and geotech and soil sedimentation. Sasaki, the selected master plan, is currently conducting public feedback sessions to ensure final plans reflect community needs. Dredging of the lakes should start before the end of the year.

Bridge Center

People with mental illness or addiction challenges may find themselves in crisis necessitating intervention by police or emergency medical services. Because of a lack of options, these individuals then often end up in jails or hospital emergency rooms where they do not receive the right level of care. The Bridge Center for Hope aims to be the alternative: a stabilization center that can provide short-term services to those with mental health and substance abuse challenges. The Bridge Center received funds from the City-Parish generated from a 1.5 mills property tax that was approved by voters in December 2018. They selected RI International through a competitive Solicitation of Proposals to serve as the clinical service provider. The Center opened in early 2021 and has since served nearly 400 unique individuals in need of mental health and substance abuse treatment.

MacArthur Safety and Justice Challenge

[David O'Quin Pretrial Diversion & Recovery Program](#)

As an outgrowth of our work with the Bridge Center for Hope, the Foundation applied for and received a \$50,000 innovation grant from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation to launch a pre-trial diversion and release program for individuals with a mental illness or substance abuse challenges. This work has been completed in partnership with the East Baton Rouge Sheriff's office, Baton Rouge Police Department, District Attorney, Public Defender, 19th Judicial District, City Court, City Prosecutor's office, and mayor-president's office. To date, more than 100 individuals have been released through the program and more than 30 have graduated or been released from the program due to positive outcomes. The City-Parish began fully funding this program in 2018.

[Criminal Justice Coordinating Council](#)

In late 2018, The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation awarded the Baton Rouge Area Foundation a two-year, \$350,000 grant to enact criminal justice reform in East Baton Rouge Parish. The MacArthur Foundation's underlying goal is to reduce the prison population in

East Baton Rouge parish by both decreasing the number of individuals arrested and booked into jail and decreasing the average length of stay someone remains in jail before their trial. Chris Csonka was hired in March of 2019 to serve as the program director for this grant. With one year of this work complete, the MacArthur Foundation increased the award to the Foundation by an additional \$150,000 to expand our work in the field. In 2020, we were awarded an additional two-year, \$800,000 grant to continue this work.

A new program, known as the Rapid Case Assessment Team (RCAT) has been established to rethink callout –the first time an accused individual sees a judge after being arrested– into a meaningful step by bringing together an assistant city prosecutor and assistant public defender to review cases and work out a deal or seek case dismissal if they can. Through this work, they have been able to resolve an average of 80% of all City Court cases at callout. Prior to initiating RCAT and other reform efforts, East Baton Rouge Parish established baseline statistics to measure our progress in reducing the local prison population. Since the genesis of this initiative, the overall prison population has decreased by 47%.

[Jail Study](#)

Jim Austin and Wendy Ware of the JFA Institute have been engaged to project the appropriate size for new juvenile and adult jail facilities, taking into account the impact of recent reform efforts and the continued decline in inmates being held at the parish prison. This study is underwritten through support from the EBR Law Enforcement Support Fund, and the findings will be presented to the public when they are available this summer.

[Transportation](#)

[Bikeshare](#)

Bikeshare is an alternate transportation method that allows users to pick up a bicycle at a designated point, use it to commute to their desired location, and return that bike to a nearby station or drop-point. Baton Rouge launched a bikeshare system in 2019, supported heavily by the Foundation. The initial rollout features stations on Southern’s campus, LSU’s campus, and in downtown Baton Rouge. An expansion along Government Street, further north into neighborhoods in north Baton Rouge, and within the Health District is currently being planned.

[Bike Plan](#)

The Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development, East Baton Rouge City-Parish, and BREC partnered to support the development of a parish-wide bike and pedestrian master plan. This plan was conducted by Toole Design Group and Arcadis and outlines proposed routes for both bike and pedestrian pathways; recommends design guidelines for trails, multi-use paths, and bike lanes; and highlights strategies to implement their recommendations. The plan was adopted by BREC, the Planning Commission, and the Metro Council in 2020. We continue to engage with project stakeholders to ensure the recommendations of this plan are implemented. The Foundation secured the funding for this plan and has participated as a strategic partner throughout the process.

[Electric Vehicle Charging](#)

The Foundation partnered with Commercial Properties Realty Trust, Entergy, Louisiana Clean Fuels, and the City-Parish to install 10 electric vehicle charging stations in downtown Baton

Rouge. The Foundation and Commercial Properties Realty Trust continue to look for new opportunities for the expansion of these stations and work closely with the City-Parish on their upkeep and accessibility.

[Intercity Rail](#)

The Foundation continues to push for passenger rail service between Baton Rouge and New Orleans. In 2018 the East Baton Rouge Parish Redevelopment Authority commissioned HNTB to complete a master plan for two passenger rail stations in East Baton Rouge Parish. One proposed location is near the old Entergy building in Mid-City, while the other is in the Health district. These locations will serve transportation needs for residents throughout the parish and will provide high speed service with limited stops in key cities between Baton Rouge and New Orleans.

The Southern Rail Commission, BRAC, and GNO Inc. funded a poll of residents in all parishes along the proposed route between New Orleans and Baton Rouge. The results indicated that there is strong support for the implementation of passenger rail service between New Orleans and Baton Rouge; 65% of individuals indicated they would ride an intercity train, 85% feel the train is important even if they did not plan on using it themselves, and 70% of those surveyed felt that the state should fund this project.

Earlier this year, Amtrak released a proposed route expansion map that explicitly included a route between Baton Rouge and New Orleans. This, paired with President Biden's proposed infrastructure bill and the proposed acquisition of Kansas City Southern by Canadian National Railway cause us to be optimistic this project is gaining enough steam to be seen to completion in the coming years.

[Autism](#)

[Autism Study:](#)

In 2015, BRAF partnered with the Huey and Angelina Wilson Foundation to complete an analysis on autism spectrum disorder services and gaps in the capital area. SSA Consultants led the initiative and identified 25 recommendations for increasing the quality of care in and around Baton Rouge. Local service leaders collaborated to create the Capital Area Autism Network (CAAN), a group dedicated to carrying out the recommendations of the Autism Study. CAAN includes professionals in the medical, therapy, and family advocacy fields and was formalized as a nonprofit organization in early 2021. Cassie Dinecola, PhD, LCSW began as Project Director for CAAN in May of 2021 and will continue to expand access to resources for families of children with developmental disabilities, identify continued funding streams for the organization, and strengthen the existing network of community stakeholders, among other tasks. The Baton Rouge Area Foundation has also funded the development of Exceptional Lives, a website to help families find and access resources and navigate the complex system of services.

[Exceptional Lives](#)

In an effort to help remedy the information gap among providers and families, BRAF partnered with Exceptional Lives. Exceptional Lives created an interactive platform that includes a resource directory to connect individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities to more than 750 resources across the state. In addition to this directory, families have access to FAQ-style

questions to navigate key decisions across the lifespan. These topics include how to apply for Medicaid waivers, how to access special education services, how to transition into adulthood, and more. Since its launch in August 2017, more than 900,000 site visits have been logged by people seeking the resources Exceptional Lives has curated. Exceptional Lives now has 2.5 FTEs in Louisiana to support their work in the state.

Public Art

MLK Restoration

The Foundation, in partnership with the Arts Council of Greater Baton Rouge, the City-Parish of East Baton Rouge and the Downtown Development District, restored the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Monument in City Hall Plaza in early 2021. The monument, which had been damaged for nearly two decades by the harsh Louisiana climate and lack of regular upkeep, was restored by local restorationist Susie Anders. Start to finish, the restoration of this artwork took nearly seven weeks. All existing paint was removed, the structure of the sculpture was repaired, and new paint and a protective coating was applied in keeping with the artist's original color selections. Ms. Anders completed a comprehensive restoration report to document this process and outline proposed maintenance work to elongate the life of this restoration. A multitude of relevant documents have been provided to their parish library for their archives. This work was underwritten by generous private donors.

Public Art Needs Assessment

In an effort to continue the conversation around the restoration efforts, the Foundation has engaged Ms. Anders to conduct an assessment of public art in our community and outline needs for restoration and/or ongoing maintenance. Upon its completion, this list will be provided to the Arts Council, the Art In Public Places Advisory Committee, the State, the City-Parish, and relevant stakeholders to highlight future art restoration needs. This will allow community stakeholders to continue discussions and actions around restoration of public art they own.

Ardendale

Following Hurricane Katrina, the Foundation worked to secure approximately 200 acres of land near Florida Boulevard, Lobdell Avenue, and Ardenwood Drive. This land was intended to be quickly developed into housing for displaced south Louisiana residents. However, for a variety of reasons this vision was unattainable. Instead, the Redevelopment Authority has taken control of the site and developed a master plan to create an educational hub and mixed-use development bringing new residential and retail opportunities to the distressed area. BRCC has built a state-of-the-art automotive training center and collision center nearby. The East Baton Rouge Parish School System built a career academy, where students are trained for jobs available in our area. The Housing Authority has been awarded a \$30 million grant from the Department of Housing and Urban Development to jumpstart development at Ardendale; they continue to collaborate with stakeholders and planning entities at the state and local level to plan for and execute on the buildout of this site.

New Schools for Baton Rouge

The Baton Rouge Area Foundation started New Schools for Baton Rouge (NSBR) at the behest of

State Superintendent of Education John White. This organization is charged with recruiting the best charter schools in the country to Baton Rouge to provide great educational experiences for our youth. John Spain serves on the Executive Committee and heavily supports this work.

Baton Rouge Health District

The Baton Rouge Area Foundation led a master planning effort around the creation of a Health District in the approximately 1,000-acre, medical corridor where healthcare providers, medical teaching facilities, and a nationally recognized research institution exist. Each organization has developed its own campus and services based on its unique goals and objectives for providing care to the community and maintaining financial viability. The area is central to providing and funding care, medical education, and clinical research for the population of Baton Rouge. The Baton Rouge Health District created a governance structure to organize these entities and to leverage the strengths of each organization to better care for the population, educate clinicians, enroll patients in clinical trials, and create a healthy environment for The District's staff and patients.

Under the leadership of Executive Director Steven Ceulemans, the District has been awarded a \$599,000 grant from the Economic Development Administration to support innovation in healthcare. The Health District and its partners are matching the grant with \$600,000 in additional resources. This grant aims to foster entrepreneurship among employees, researchers, and doctors while promoting collaboration to improve the lives of patients in Baton Rouge. If successful, the Health District could be eligible for up to \$3 million in a second round of funding. John Spain serves as the chair of the Health District and his team heavily supports the executive director.

Exploratory Conversations

Litter

In March of 2020, the Foundation was engaged by local photographer Marie Constantin to evaluate opportunities to address litter challenges in the parish. As an offshoot of these initiatives, Marie Constantin established the Louisiana Stormwater Coalition Fund to support efforts to address litter and watershed-wide litter and water management solutions. The Foundation has facilitated several conversations with key stakeholders around solutions to these challenges.

Perkins Road Overpass

From Reymond Avenue to Christian Street, bicyclists and pedestrians have created an unofficial trail under the Perkins Road Overpass to connect small, local businesses to historic and diverse neighborhoods. The path faces several challenges for bicyclists and pedestrians including: grade changes, lack of lighting, a railroad crossing, and no wayfinding. The civic leadership team has held multiple meetings with merchants from the overpass area on Perkins Road to identify solutions to safely formalize this highly-trafficked path.