

## **Background Information on Together Baton Rouge**

In November 2010, Rev. Lee T. Wesley joined together with about 12 other local pastors to create a space for religious institutions, civic organizations, unions and non-profits to come together and address the pressures facing families in Baton Rouge and across Louisiana, particularly the underserved and disadvantaged. Their idea was that in serving the least of us we ensure a safe, productive community for all of us – rising waters lift all boats. TBR started as a faith-based initiative and soon expanded to include a broad base of churches – black, white and mixed congregations, synagogues and mosques across the city’s neighborhoods. This gave special meaning to the name Together Baton Rouge. While it later incorporated other civic organizations, it holds fast to its roots, opens and closes meetings with prayer, and focuses on God’s message of the importance of being a good neighbor. Back in the early days, Rev. Wesley reached out to the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), the nation’s best known organization for training leaders of local faith based and community-organizations (see more below). Louisiana’s relationship with IAF actually goes back to around 1992 when a regional organization was established in the Shreveport-Bossier area, then in Monroe, Alexandria and in New Orleans in 1998. Together Baton Rouge has joined up with the other regional organizations and formed a state-wide organization called Together Louisiana, which is comprised of 250 religious congregations and civic organizations across the state, one of the largest grassroots organizations in the history of Louisiana.

**Goals:** Together Baton Rouge’s 3 basic goals, as stated on the website, are as follows:

- to build relationships across our community based on trust and a willingness to listen to each other,
- to equip our members and leadership with skills and practices to get results, and
- to achieve change on concrete issues, as part of our common call to justice

**Major areas of focus and outreach:**

- Access to Healthy Food
- Access to Health Care
- Criminal Justice & Police Reform
- Tax Fairness
- Flood Prevention/Flood Relief
- Education – civic academies and training on community needs

**Funding:**

The funding for TBA comes from member organization in the form of dues (pledges), individual donations and grants. It adheres to all the requirements of a 501©3 non-profit institutional

membership organization (including not endorsing political candidates). Membership in TBA is limited to member organizations; there are no individual memberships.

### **Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF):**

The IAF was founded in 1940 in Chicago by Saul Alinsky and a board of directors including Chicago Sun-Times publisher Marshall Field, Roman Catholic Bishop Sheil and Catherine Lewis, daughter of John L. Lewis, President of United Mine Workers. They focused on developing organizing tools and training, taking on issues related to Community Building, Neighborhood Development, Jobs, Criminal Justice, Voter Engagement, Anti-Corruption, Financial Reform, Healthcare, Education, Housing, Environment, Public Safety, Senior Issues and Immigration. The IAF has grown to include organizations / affiliates in 22 states.

Saul Alinsky is considered the founder of modern community organizing and his organizational skills were focused on improving the living conditions of poor communities. William F. Buckley called him an organizational genius. Adlai Stevenson said Alinsky's aims "most faithfully reflect our ideals of brotherhood, tolerance, charity and dignity of the individual." Alinsky died in 1972 and the IAF still claims to be "the nation's largest and longest-standing network of local faith and community-based organizations." They report "victories" on, among other issues, housing and neighborhood revitalization, public transport and infrastructure, living- wage jobs and workforce development, support for local labor unions, criminal justice reform, and tackling the opioid crisis. [ Wikipedia]

An important point to remember is that IAF did not come into Baton Rouge to organize people around their political agenda. Local leaders asked IAF to help train, lead, and organize their members to address issues considered important by the local organizations. The Baton Rouge member organizations set the priorities and select the issues to be addressed.