

# ***Gulf South Rising***

**Gulf South Rising's Community Controlled Fund:**

*A Recipe for Grassroots Community Financing*



**The Seas Are Rising and So Are We**

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## *A Recipe for Grassroots Community Financing*

### **Acknowledgements**

The Gulf South Rising Community Controlled Fund (GSR CCF) exists because of the resolute work of people of the Gulf South. Thank you to all of the community leaders who met regularly to do the work of creating this fund. Thank you to the [Gulf Coast Center for Law & Policy](#) for anchoring the facilitation process of both Gulf South Rising in 2015 and the creation of the Gulf South Rising Community Controlled Fund in 2016. Thank you to [Project South](#) for the administrative support and continued leadership in our region. Thank you to the [Sierra Club](#) and the [United Houma Nation](#) for their investment into our community meetings. Thank you to the [Foundation for Louisiana](#) for investing in community-led processes that take longer than one grant cycle to achieve.

### **About This Document: Sharing Lessons of Community Controlled Finance**

The goal of this document is to support communities in the Gulf South, Global South, and beyond in cultivating their own community controlled funds, in order to advance balance within local economies, balance with one another, and balance with our shared global ecology. These pages are seeds. Take only what you need.

Over the past four years, a group of Gulf South residents evolved and connected through shared principles, values, and vision with the intention to develop an alternative financial mechanism to control its own resources and build community power. This guide comes from a sometimes tedious but always beautiful process of collective decision making. It is offered to groups and organizations working within their own communities on the frontlines of the climate crisis and social injustices- frontlines that often require a rapid response or long-term investment of resources to rebuild lives, communities and society.

Offered here is an exploration of key steps to developing a Community Controlled Fund at the grassroots or community-level. Each step listed in this document offers details on the GSR CCF process, key elements found in each step and practical tips and questions for your consideration. This document is one “recipe” to guide and inspire work on the frontlines of climate change. As with any recipe, you should substitute your own local ingredients and practices according to the realities of your community. This guide is structured around processes used specifically by the Gulf South Rising Community Controlled Fund- Katrina 10 (GSR CCF- K10).

## Background

The Gulf South Rising Community Controlled Fund (GSR CCF) was born from the [2015 Gulf South Rising Initiative \(Gulf South Rising\)](#). Gulf South Rising 2015 (GSR) was a regional movement of coordinated actions and events to highlight the impact of the global climate crisis on the Gulf South region (Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Florida). The vision of Gulf South Rising was to connect with communities across 5 states around strategic dates in 2015 to demand a just transition away from extractive industries, discriminatory policies and unjust practices that hinder equitable recovery from disaster and impede the development of sustainable communities. The specific goals of this year-long regional initiative were to 1) build regional movement infrastructure; 2) connect and convene frontline communities around collective healing and ecological equity; 3) advance regional efforts of indigenous tribal and land sovereignty; and, 4) shift the regional narrative from resilience to resistance.

The vision and goals of Gulf South Rising were crafted through a four-year community engagement process, anchored by the [Gulf Coast Center for Law & Policy](#) and rooted in the [People's Movement Assembly](#) (PMA) process. From 2010 to 2014, participants in local PMAs identified and affirmed solutions for their own communities across the Gulf South. Top among the solutions identified was the need for communities in crisis to control their own financial resources. Rooted in collective structures of self-governance, the GSR CCF is a manifestation of this community-generated solution.

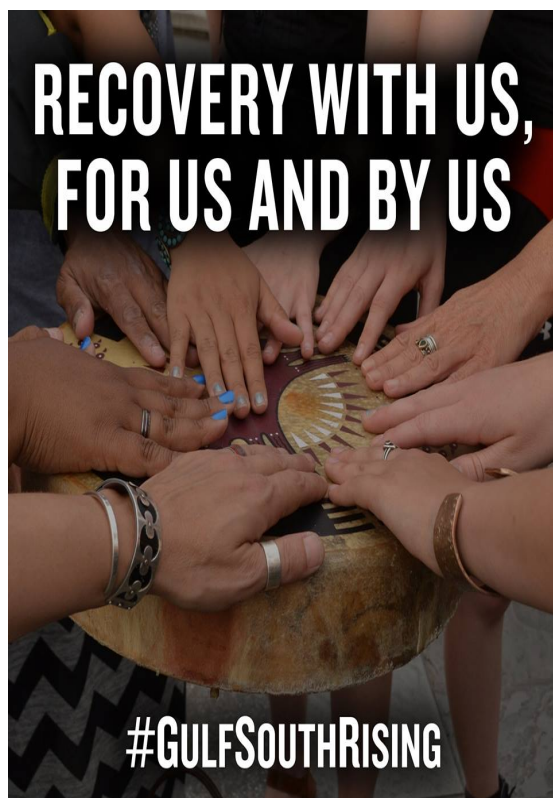
The collective work of Gulf South Rising raised the initial money for the GSR CCF and cultivated a team of community facilitators. This community facilitation team created and held space together with frontline leaders to vision what a community controlled funding mechanism could look like in our region. In its first round of grants, the GSR CCF honored four local, Black and Indigenous led initiatives that advance our goals of Just Transition and Collective Community Healing. Learn more at [www.gulfsouthrising.org](http://www.gulfsouthrising.org)

Below is a walk-through of the Gulf South Rising process of building community through collecting and collectivizing resources. The process was grounded in shared values and a grassroots process of self-governance. With those values, frontline community members and allies created the conditions to envision shared liberation and a commitment to truly democratic decision-making. This community fund invested money into community-identified priorities of collective healing and the just transition, both necessary to prepare for and recover from a changing climate.

## STEP 1: Engage in Shared Work: Building Community

What we did: It was the shared work of the 2015 Gulf South Rising initiative that cultivated the GSR CCF community facilitation team. A year of coordinating actions and events across five states to highlight the impact of the global climate crisis on the Gulf South identified and trained a robust, multi-racial facilitation team and advanced our ability to work collectively. Through 12 months of shared organizing, participants in Gulf South Rising formed regional relationships, developed local leadership, and built the trust needed for successful long-term work.

What we learned: Regular gatherings build relationships. Community projects facilitate these gatherings, and don't have to be formal- just coordinated. Shared work is about more than achieving a goal, and should offer the ability for *all* participants to contribute value in some way. Providing food, song, or laughter is as important as providing money, labor, or access. Shared work also allows the group to know one another without forced declarations. Coordinated gatherings create structured use of the time it takes to build trust. Allow shared work and relationships to support the creation of shared governance and resource development. Move at the speed of trust and relationship.



### Tips for Building Community Through Shared Work:

- Gather 3-5 people to identify a small community project to work on together. Be sure that this is not a "sale", but rather a project that requires participants to offer time (not just money), effort (not just skill) and interest (not just expertise).
- Invite others to join you in shared work. Create stress-free spaces for collective community assessments from participants. Ask: what is happening in the community and what can we do together?
- Invite participants to regular meetings. Establish a leadership team. Coordinate and provide what people need to participate (childcare, food, free parking, etc.).
- In those follow-up meetings, collectively generate ideas for shared work.

## **STEP 2: Build & Collectivize Community Resources: Creating a Community Pot**

What we did: As part of the community-generated vision of Gulf South Rising, funds raised throughout the 2015 initiative that were not designated for specific events on the ground were placed in escrow while the community developed a process for fund distribution and management. For example, the regional commemoration of the 10th Anniversary of Hurricane Katrina on August 29, 2015 was an opportunity for the Gulf South to receive donations from around the country. GSR offered a process to ensure financial and in-kind donations reached frontline communities across 5 states. Guidelines for how to hold financial donations were developed before any money came in. Financial resources were held in trust by a fiscal sponsor with an agreement to halt administrative fees until after the fund was fully operational. The group agreed to create a collective and inclusive process to decide how to spend the donations received. Using funds raised through GSR 2015, local leaders continued to meet to develop the vision, goals and processes for the GSR CCF in 2016.

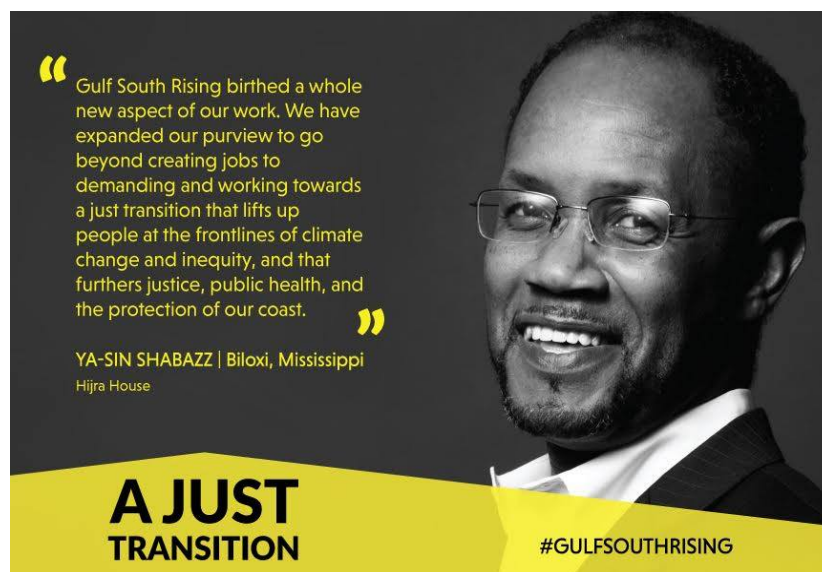
What we learned: Building infrastructure for a Community Controlled Fund creates a model for community controlled financing that can be replicated and adapted across the Gulf South. People want to make a difference and will donate what they can if they can connect to the vision. And after a disaster, funding local leadership and decision-making is as important as funding cleaning out flooded houses. Similarly, with the community controlled fund, the work of forming agreement around how to collect, hold and account for money can be as important as the actual decisions made on how to distribute it. Allow time and space to build collective process. Collectively creating a timeline of distribution can help quell the sense of urgency that often accompanies conversations around money.

### *Tips for Building a Community Pot of Resources:*

- *Make decisions on how/ how long to hold the money before the money arrives.*
- *Identify a day, event, or moment to which people can connect and donate. Offer an invitation for individuals, charitable foundations, local businesses and national allies to contribute to a grassroots vision. Ensure your donors that 100% of their contribution will go to the frontlines.*
- *Find a trusted ally with a 501(c)(3) designation to receive charitable donations. Get that ally to agree to low or no administrative fees until your fund becomes operational.*

### STEP 3: Identify Shared Principles: Values as Community Accountability

What we did: The group began crafting the GSR CCF by agreeing on shared principles and values. These principles guided the work of the group, and informed how participants move together. For a year, every GSR CCF community meeting began with a grounding in the [Jemez Principles of Democratic Organizing](#), the guiding principles of the Gulf South Rising Initiative. Added to these agreements were local community values of how to best engage in deep work with one another. We used different approaches to digest the meaning and need for specific principles: some meeting allowed for a complete read through of the Jemez Document, while other meetings focused on one principle for an extended period of time. When community identified a violation of a principle, we collectively amended group processes. The community continuously held itself accountable to the shared agreements. While distributing thousands of dollars was a major accomplishment of the fund, it was these moments of deep accountability to collective principles that were our true demonstrations of power.



What we learned: Before asking what will the fund be or do, establish ground rules and community agreements to govern the space. Start by establishing values of how you will work together. With participants from various communities, a central line of agreement both helps to address differences in perspectives and becomes a tool of accountability within

your self-governing body. There are many widely held principles for working at the grassroots level. The Jemez Principles should be seen as a starting point. Consider adding more principles that your work will need and ensure a process for the whole group to affirm them. Whatever your final list of agreements, allow time for the group to regularly digest the meaning of the agreed principles. Repetition changes and deepens understanding.



Tips for developing Shared Values as Shared Community Accountability:

- Allow your first few meetings to focus on how people agree to be and work in the space together. Don't skip this as solid shared agreements will prove essential later in the process.
- Begin with the Jemez Principles of Democratic Organizing. After the group reviews these principles, ask if there are others to add. Whatever is added is acceptable. The whole group should affirm all principles; simply ask folks if they agree.
- Consider having a group member write the principles in an artful way on a large piece of paper that can be put up at each meeting.
- Review your principles at the beginning of each meeting. Remind your returning group about the agreements. Invite new folks to affirm as a requirement to participate in the space.



#### **STEP 4: Establish a Shared Vision: Declaring Goals and Parameters for Your Fund**

What we did: Through 12 months of regular community meetings and a consensus-based process in 2016, local residents crafted the purpose, governance structure, goals and logistical mechanisms to manage and disperse money within their own community. Drafting a vision/purpose statement was an opportunity to envision collective liberation- a process that community residents and allies rarely have much time to engage in. We invited all stakeholders to consider how the CCF could achieve concrete improvements in people's lives, give people a sense of their own power, and alter the relations of power in our community through a circular or consensus process. GSR CCF meetings became a space of liberation that allowed all participants to practice conscious dreaming toward a better world. Notetakers captured conversations around imagined futures, what people did not want to see, and specific ideas -- and used that list to create a vision of a community that we did want to see. After a general vision was created, a working group was established to go through notes and draft the language for a vision, purpose and goals of the fund for group affirmation at subsequent meetings.

What we learned: So many frontline people are struggling to survive. Before people could dream, we had to create a space for people to release pain, trauma, neglect, anger and mistrust. Once people are able to dream, it is possible to start capturing the group's vision of a better world and the concrete role and goals of the CCF in achieving that vision. Strong facilitation is needed to bring the group through a process of brainstorming, synthesis, voting, and collective wordsmithing towards a clear mission and goals. There is real work in generating a collective vision and finding the right words to describe it. But the work is necessary, and your vision/purpose statement will serve as a touchstone for group accountability as you go forward with decisions for grants to community.





Tips for Thinking through Vision and Goals of your Fund:

- *What is your community controlled fund absolutely going to accomplish?*
- *Why does this fund exist?*
- *Who is your community (geographically, demographically, by sector)?*
- *Who should these dollars most directly impact?*
- *What do you want to build? When it's all said and done, what have you left behind?*

***Vision of the K10 Gulf South Rising Community Controlled Fund***

*Established by consensus vote on 5/24/2016*

*The Gulf South Rising Community Controlled Fund (GSR CCF) sets precedents for new funding mechanisms promoting just transitions away from extractive practices while dismantling oppressive structures which harm our communities and, ultimately, our ecology. The GSR CCF exists to restore communities and to honor the legacy of strength and resistance in the Gulf South.*

*We believe people on and of the land should control what happens to the land; the people of the South must control what happens in the South. This regenerating, community-controlled fund provides resources to foster power and promote togetherness in the region (Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Florida). The fund exists to return power to historically marginalized communities through collective control of dollars, assets, skills and information. We work against racism, homophobia, transphobia, sexism, ableism, classism, ageism and other forms of discrimination which have been used to divide our communities internally and exclude valuable members of our communities from the larger world. We prioritize Black and Indigenous communities of the Gulf South, and we aim to impact and connect the often overlooked, common interests of Gulf South and Global South communities.*

*We invest in furthering ecological equity. We fund innovative approaches to ensure that the basic needs (air, water, food, housing, healthcare) of Gulf South residents on the frontlines of climate change are met in balance with our ecology. Our dollars are our love in action and we use them to create and grow regenerative spaces of power and collective healing.*

## **STEP 5: Practice True Democracy: Establishing Decision-Making Processes**

What we did: The toughest conversations that the GSR CCF community grappled with were around decision making. This question came up in at least three distinct occasions, namely establishing a decision-making process for 1) Structure and operations of meetings; 2) Process and management of fund; and 3) Distribution of the dollars. For the GSR CCF community, it was important to see the value of and difference between decision-making at each phase. In accordance with our shared principles and vision, our most important objective was to put the decision-making power of distributing money in the hands of communities of color on the frontline of climate change. We did not want to create another space that further exacerbates existing dynamics of marginalization and privilege. Moreover, ten years after Katrina, the issues of gentrification and displacement were paramount, and we wanted to honor those long-standing communities of our region.

Our central question was how to we create a decision-making process that honors the authentic frontlines of climate impacts. We decided to center Native American, African American and pre-storm local voices in decision making. These GSR CCF decision-makers created a consensus and ranked prioritization voting processes for the CCF.

To identify where the CCF wanted to invest its financial resources, the group decided to follow a grant model used most notably by the MacArthur Foundation's Genius Grants and the Nobel Prize- where recipients are nominated and awarded without ever having to apply. Others witnessing good work have a responsibility to honor that work through a recommendation for funding. A ranked voting process was created to decide which projects were to be considered. And while all participants contributed to the general ranking of nominations, the group established that the final decision-making power fell exclusively to the frontline participants of the collective.

What we learned: There are many types of decisions to be made in the formation of a community controlled fund, namely decision-making around structure and operations of meetings; process and management of fund; and distribution of dollars. It is essential to take the time to build out a system and process for decision-making (who makes decisions and how) before discussing where to allocate funds. Developing a clear process and flow for making decisions together allows for the leadership of the CCF to be transferred and grown. Decision-making processes are created by and for the group. Majority voting is often not truly democratic and leaves the most marginalized feeling marginalized yet again. Consensus voting takes more time, but is often more effective in building long-term relationships and power.

Consider identifying your final-decision makers based on addressing equity in local frontline communities.

*Tips for Developing Decision-Making Processes:*

- *Identify phases of decisions and a calendar for developing the necessary processes. Remember making a decision and making the process for decision-making are two different pieces of work.*
- *Take your group through a few critical questions:*
  - *Who are the decision makers of your community controlled fund?*
  - *What is the step-by-step process of making a decision?*
  - *Does the whole group need to be in agreement (consensus) or just a certain percentage/ majority?*
  - *Do you need a certain number of people/ decision makers present in order to make a decision (i.e. a quorum)?*
  - *How do you resolve disagreements and conflict?*

***K10 GSR Community Controlled Fund Decision-making Process for Fund Allocation***

*Established by consensus vote on 10/11/2016*

How Decisions on Fund Allocation are Made:

1. Nominations: All community members attending the meeting may make a nomination for funding.
2. Discussion: Reviewing the vision and goals of the fund, the facilitators engage all participants in an open discussion with equitable facilitation- where everyone has the opportunity to speak once before anyone can speak twice.
3. Voting: Once the conversation is completed, the group can make a decision through our established voting process.

Note: As part of a deep conversation about gentrification, social privilege and equity, the group decided that not everyone in the room during the voting stage would be eligible to cast a vote. Final decision-making power rests in the hands of specific stake-holders, specifically people raised in the Gulf South with a prioritization of Black and Indigenous participants.

## STEP 6: Invest in People and Relationships: Distribution Toward Collective Vision

What we did: The GSR CCF conversation around how we actually distribute our money surfaced rich conversation. In the aftermath of both Hurricane Katrina and the BP/Transocean Oil Drilling Disaster, we saw how money was distributed- not reaching those with the most need, but rather benefiting those with the most access to power and privilege. The entire idea for this type of community-controlled fund came from frontline communities who had to stand aside and watch needed resources pass them by. In the midst of disaster recovery - as in the daily workings of our current economic systems - money is often used to marginalize and penalize the same communities that will suffer the most harm in a changing climate. More than a decade after Hurricane Katrina, GSR CCF community discussion maintained the historical and continued weaponization of loans against most vulnerable communities. In response, we collectively decided against emulating loan-based models of community finance.



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The Gulf South Rising Community Controlled Fund exists to restore communities and to honor the legacy of strength and resistance in the Gulf South.

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GULF SOUTH RISING COMMUNITY CONTROLLED FUND  
STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

We decided that for the GSR CCF, money would be granted. Grants served as a long-term investment in collective community healing and a just transition away from extractive economies. All of the GSR CCF grant recipients were honored and celebrated and invited to join the collective process of nominating and choosing future grant recipients. In this way, the GSR CCF continued to grow in influence, reach, and collective local power.

What we learned: The process of managing community held resources offers experiential learning to inform and strengthen the building of other community-controlled systems. This work can strengthen the practice of self-governance broadly needed to survive a changing climate. Creating a community control fund can also be a way to de-weaponize money. By maintaining and directing our own resources, we can to decolonize our own relationship to money. The distribution of this money is a long-term investment toward the collective vision/purpose of the fund. Inviting grant recipients into the process of the CCF provides an easy mechanism to grow and strengthen the fund.

*Tips for Distributing Dollars Through Your Fund:*

- *Establish who is eligible to receive funds and how to identify potential recipients of funds.*
- *How can your group make being nominated to receive money from your fund easy, accessible, and equitable? Take your group through a few critical questions for distributing dollars:*
  - *How does your CCF give out money? As a no-interest loan that is eventually repaid, a gift/ grant, or otherwise?*
  - *How much money will you disperse to any party at once? Do you want to give many smaller grants or fewer larger grants?*
  - *How will you physically exchange money? Are the people you want to fund able to accept electronic payment/ checks, or would a different payment form (like cash) be more accessible?*
  - *How can you ensure your process centers equity and prioritizes voices from the frontlines?*





### **Gulf South Rising Community Controlled Fund has funded:**

With all of the structures of the fund collectively crafted, the LA Gulf South Rising Community Controlled Fund Decision Makers identified projects and people from across the state to support. The projects funded reflect a locally rooted understanding of our goals of collective community healing and just transition. The LA GSR CCF celebrated the effort of local leaders already working in our communities who are often denied access to external investment or support. The LA GSR CCF has so far funded the following initiatives:

- **Houma Tribal Youth Camp:** This summer camp is a locally Indigenous woman-run initiative to support Indigenous youth in learning and celebrating their own language, culture, and community. The camp also provides Indigenous youth with an understanding of local ecology and native plants.
- **Amaru Come-Unity Homeschool:** This local, Black woman-run homeschool provides a safe, healing, transformative environment for learning. Their official mission is to “to nurture the Black child; mind, body, and spirit... [and] provide strong learning environments for Black children in New Orleans, especially those who have struggled through the failing school systems that perpetuate anti-Blackness and contribute to the school to prison pipeline.”
- **Froot Orleans:** A local, Black-led business that expands by hiring partners instead of workers, Froot Orleans provides fresh fruit to communities that have systematically been denied access to healthy food. Froot Orleans facilitates local wealth-building, provides sustainable nourishment, and coordinates community events.
- **VeggieNOLA:** VeggieNOLA focuses on building community through food and knowledge. This Black, locally owned business builds relationships with businesses and community members across Louisiana and Mississippi as it provides plant-based foods at events. VeggieNOLA hires people presently excluded from the mainstream economy, especially formerly incarcerated people.

### ***Contact us!***

*The Gulf South Rising family created this document to support communities across the Gulf South, Global South, and beyond in creating their own community controlled funds. Pending funding for its creation, a more in-depth community tool-kit is coming soon. Please contact [info@gcclp.org](mailto:info@gcclp.org) with questions or comments about creating your own Community Controlled Fund. You can [donate to the GSR CCF here](#).*