



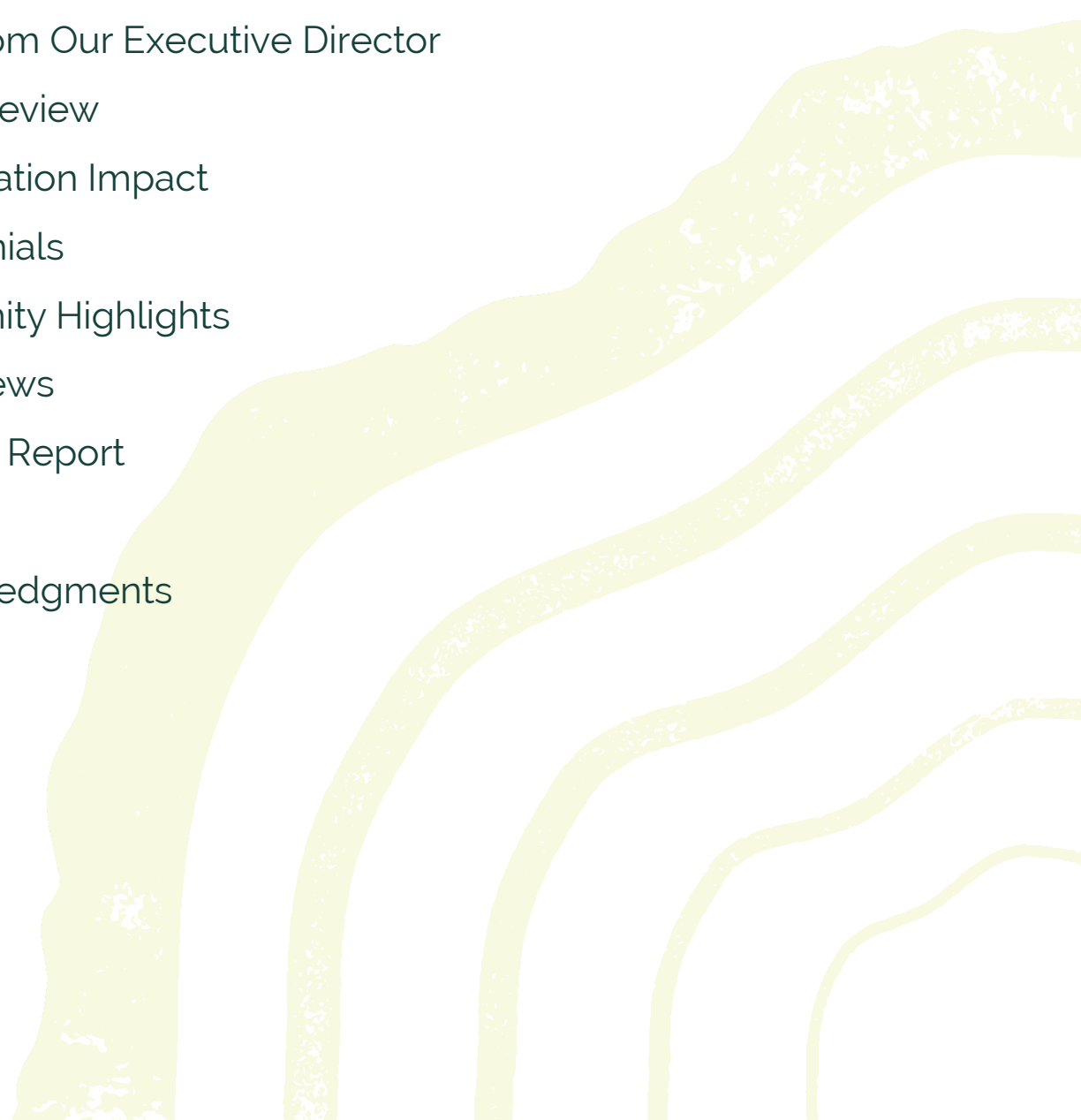
SOUL ANNUAL REPORT

Fiscal year April 1, 2025 - March 31, 2026



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Letter from Director

DEAR FRIENDS AND SUPPORTERS,

The story of SOUL's last fiscal year was one of redemption.

After a year marked by the near-disastrous freezing and termination of federal funding, we entered this planting season with something to prove: that SOUL's work is too rooted, too urgent, and too community-driven to be undone by political uncertainty. And because of you, we proved it.

Together, we planted 2,217 trees — our largest planting season to date.

That number represents far more than trees in the ground. It represents neighbors saying yes to shade, volunteers giving their Saturday mornings, sponsors investing in a healthier New Orleans, and communities continuing to believe that their streets deserve beauty, protection, and care. You showed up to plant, to mulch, to advocate, to give, and to ensure that SOUL could not only survive a difficult chapter, but emerge from it stronger.

This year, we expanded into Little Woods in New Orleans East, where tree canopy covers just 6.4% of the area. By comparison, East Carrollton has 18.5% canopy coverage, Lakeshore-Lake Vista has 29.4%, and Old Aurora has 17.9%. In a community facing extreme heat, street flooding, and serious environmental health burdens, the need for trees is urgent. We kicked off this multi-year effort by planting 660 trees toward our goal of planting 2,400 trees in Little Woods by 2028.

We also moved closer to completing the reforestation of several neighborhoods where SOUL has worked for years. In Pontchartrain Park, Hollygrove, and St. Bernard/Pilotland, unfinished roadwork kept us from planting the final remaining streets. While that setback is frustrating, our commitment has not changed. We intend to return and finish what we started.

Along the Lafitte Greenway, our partnership with the Lafitte Greenway Partnership continues to blossom. To date, SOUL has planted 983 trees along and around the Greenway, helping transform one of New Orleans' most important public corridors into a cooler, greener, more welcoming space. This year, we also worked alongside Louisiana Green Corps and its workforce development cohort, training participants in proper tree-planting techniques and installing 200 trees together. Through a trial with Dr. Abdi at the LSU Hammond Research Station, we also began studying root-pruning techniques that will strengthen our planting practices for years to come.

This year reminded us that resilience cannot depend on any single funding source. Government grants can expand what is possible, but they can also ebb and flow with political whims. SOUL's next chapter must be about building a model that is more durable, more self-sustaining, and more capable of carrying this work forward no matter what happens around us.

We are proud of what we accomplished this year. We are grateful for everyone who made it possible.

Together, we are restoring New Orleans' urban forest — neighborhood by neighborhood, block by block.

With gratitude and determination,

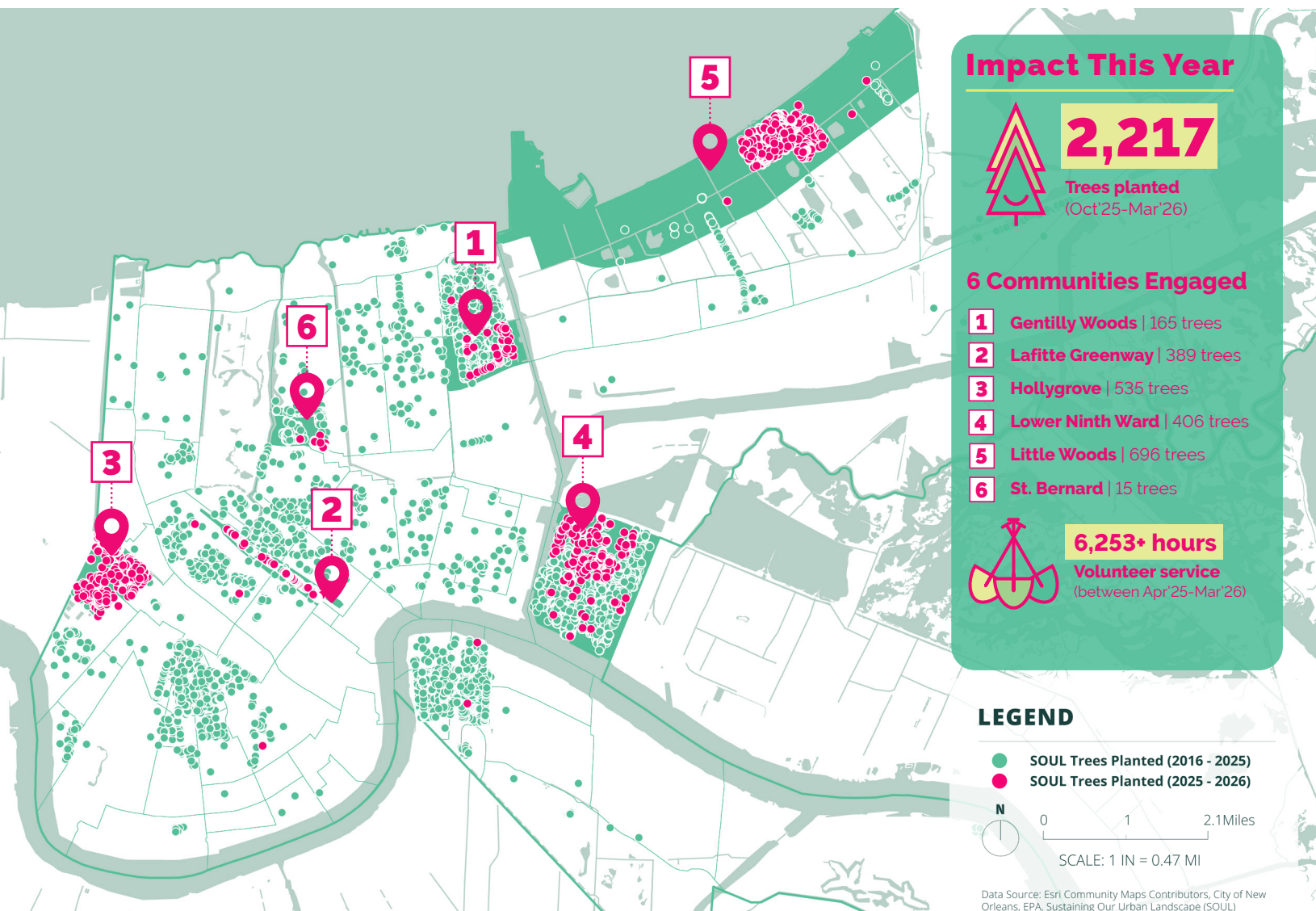


Susannah Burley
Executive Director, SOUL

Year in Review

Our Accomplishments

- Since 2016, we have planted **13,035** native, water-loving trees throughout Orleans Parish at **5,433** properties.
- Our survival rate is **91%** compared to the national **81%** survival rate.¹
- An estimated **37** acres of tree canopy have been restored to date.



¹ Nowak, David J.; McBride, Joe R.; Beatty, Russell A. Newly planted street tree growth and mortality. (Journal of Arboriculture. 16(5), 1990), 124-130.

Reforestation Impact

AS TREES GROW OLDER, THEIR
IMPACT GROWS LARGER

Immediate Impact



Impact in 10 Years



294,942

POUNDS OF CO2 AVOIDED



4,152,675

POUNDS OF CO2 AVOIDED



807,657

POUNDS OF CO2 SEQUESTERED



15,191,095

POUNDS OF CO2 SEQUESTERED



303,547

KWH OF ELECTRICITY SAVED



4,243,906

KWH OF ELECTRICITY SAVED



3,203,166

GALLONS OF RAINFALL INTERCEPTION



59,839,171

GALLONS OF RAINFALL INTERCEPTION



395,561

GALLONS OF AVOIDED RUNOFF



7,389,563

GALLONS OF AVOIDED RUNOFF

*Please see the glossary on page 11 for an explanation of these terms.

**Values are derived from iTree-Planting software. | Visit www.itreetools.org to learn more.

Sustaining Our Urban Landscape (SOUL) is advancing a resilient and environmentally equitable New Orleans by reforesting our urban landscape.

Testimonials

"I've been in Hollygrove forever and ever, and I'm so excited about my magnolia trees and all of the trees that SOUL has planted in Hollygrove. We're so excited, we appreciate it. It looks great!"

- Ruth, 2026 tree recipient, Hollygrove



"During Katrina, we lost a lot of trees. So when SOUL came around and wanted to plant trees, I was all in...It's been a blessing to me. I really love the trees. It gives a lot of shade. And eventually, when I do leave this Earth and pass this house down to my kids, they will have trees for shade."

- Virdis, 2018 tree recipient, Algiers

"Volunteering with SOUL over the last ten years and serving as Board Treasurer for six has been both life-changing and life-affirming for me. I have learned not only about trees - how they function and the value they bring to communities - but also about myself and what is important to me. The community that this organization has built is incredible and being a part of it has made me more optimistic about the future of New Orleans."

- Hayley, SOUL Board Treasurer



Community Highlights



AmeriCorps NCCC team Maple 3 planting in L9
Oct 2025



Volunteers gather for L9 Planting
Feb 2026



Volunteers at L9 Planting
Feb 2026

Lower Ninth Ward



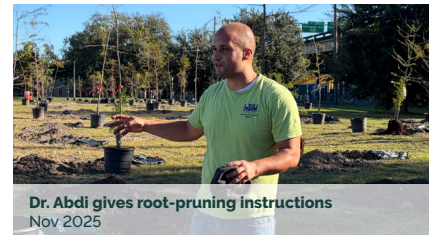
- Planted 406 trees across the Lower Ninth Ward.
- Offered trees to every inhabited property, effectively completing SOUL's work in this neighborhood.
- Partnered with AmeriCorps NCCC, whose members installed 292 trees.
- Community partners included the Lower 9th Ward Neighborhood Association, the Lower 9th Ward Center for Sustainable Engagement and Development (CSED), and Councilmember Jason Hughes.



Volunteers at Lafitte Greenway Planting
Jan 2026



LA Green Corps celebrates planting 100 trees on the Greenway
March 2026



Dr. Abdi gives root-pruning instructions
Nov 2025

Lafitte Greenway



- Planted 389 trees along the Lafitte Greenway.
- Installed 200 trees in partnership with LA Green Corps, Mastadonte, the Lafitte Greenway Partnership, and American Forests.
- Launched a new research-based planting with LSU AgCenter's Dr. Abdi between the football field and Claiborne.
 - Planted 90 trees at 15-foot spacing, with sample sets receiving different root-pruning treatments to determine which techniques yield the strongest results over the next two years.



Councilmember Jason Hughes at Little Woods Planting

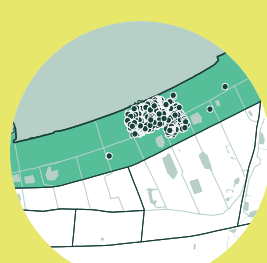


Team Leader Ellie at Little Woods Planting
Jan 2026



Volunteers at Little Woods Planting
Jan 2026

Little Woods



- Planted 660 trees in Little Woods, expanding canopy in New Orleans East.
- Worked alongside community partners including East New Orleans Neighborhood Advisory Commission, ReNEW Schools, and The Third Line NOLA.
- Hosted our biggest group of volunteers (over 175) at our Martin Luther King Jr. Day planting.

SOUL News

Board Leadership Transition

This year, SOUL celebrated the extraordinary service of our founding board chair, Andreas Merkl, who rolled off the board after ten years of leadership, vision, and steadfast belief in what SOUL could become. Andreas helped shape one of the most defining aspects of our work: the idea that reforestation should happen not tree by tree, but neighborhood by neighborhood. His strategic guidance helped SOUL grow from a bold idea into a citywide force for environmental equity.

We are equally grateful to welcome Gary Sernovitz as our new board chair. Gary brings deep financial expertise, clear-eyed leadership, and a profound commitment to SOUL's future. During last year's federal funding freeze, Gary connected SOUL to Bloomberg Philanthropies — a relationship that proved pivotal in helping us weather one of the most difficult moments in our history. At a time when SOUL's future was uncertain, Gary helped open a door that allowed us to keep going.

We are deeply grateful to Andreas for helping build SOUL's foundation, and to Gary for helping lead us into our next chapter.



Andreas Merkl
SOUL Board Chair, 2016-2025



Gary Sernovitz
SOUL Board Chair, 2026

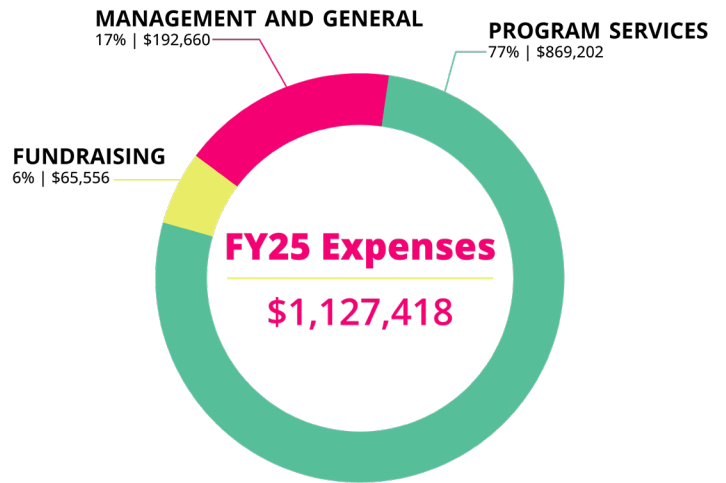
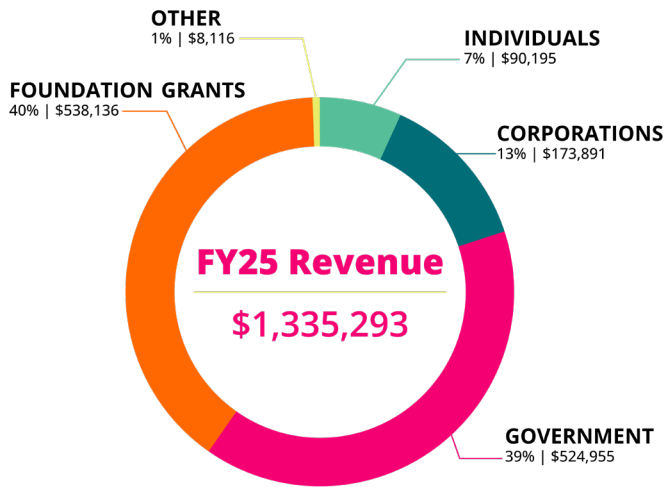


New Orleans Pelicans players Micah Peavy, Jeremiah Fears, and Derik Queen
March 2026

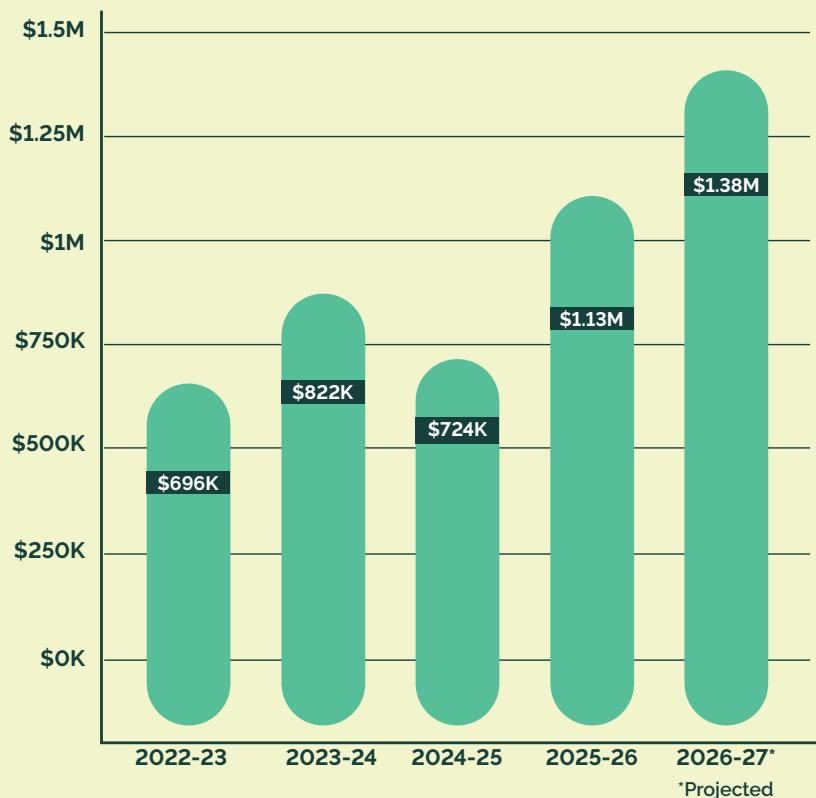
Pelicans Rookies in Gentilly Woods

The New Orleans Pelicans brought serious energy to Gentilly Woods this season when players Micah Peavy, Jeremiah Fears, and Derik Queen joined SOUL and Ochsner Health volunteers for a morning of tree planting. Even Pierre the Pelican grabbed a shovel, helping make the day joyful, memorable, and full of hometown pride. Together, the group planted trees that will grow into lasting shade, beauty, and resilience for the neighborhood.

Financial Report



Operating budget by fiscal year



Glossary

Avoided Runoff - The volume of rainwater runoff that is prevented or reduced by the presence of trees.

CO2 Avoided - CO2 emission reductions in heating/cooling a building.

CO2 Sequestered - The annual net rate that a tree removes CO2 from the atmosphere through the processes of photosynthesis and respiration.

Kwh of Electricity Saved - The amount of energy consumption that has been avoided or reduced by planting trees.

Rainfall Intercepted - The amount of precipitation that is captured or caught by trees before it hits the ground.

What does tree canopy coverage mean? - The tree leaves and branches covering the ground is our tree canopy. American Forests, the nation's oldest nonprofit citizens' conservation organization, recommends a 40 percent tree canopy for healthy cities.

Acknowledgements

2025-2026 Planting Season Sponsors

SEA CHANGE

J.M. Kaplan Fund

MAKE IT RAIN

Lockheed Martin

New Orleans & Company

ROCK THE BOAT

Arena Offshore

Annabelle & Gene Beckstein

Virginia Boulet & Alvin R. Albe Jr.

Crosby Land & Resources

Gibbs Construction

Cathy & Hunter Pierson

Delta Utilities

The Pulda/Sernovitz Family

MAKE WAVES

Boh Brothers

Doorman Designs

The Domain Companies

First Horizon Foundation

New Orleans Archdiocesan Cemeteries

JUMP IN

Matt Arnold & Elizabeth Littlefield

Audubon Tree Care

E-Bikes & Cycles

Ella & Joey

Janet & Scott Howard

Leslie & Scott Jacobs

Parkway Bakery & Tavern

Donna Perot & Andreas Merkl

Sprinkles Art Co.

Regions Bank

Leslie & Russ Tilton

2025-2026 Appeals Matching Sponsors

Earth Odyssey

La Sprout

Donna & Andrew Wardenaar

2025-2026 Grantors & Major Donors

Anonymous

Beatriz Ball

Bloomberg Philanthropies

Peris Brodsky

Carol Lavin Bernick Family Foundation

Melissa Chow

The City of New Orleans Department of Parks & Parkways

Cala & John Colbert

Eos de Feminis

Deep South CPCU Society Chapter

Rebecca Dudley

Ella West Freeman Foundation

Entergy New Orleans

Dana & Paul Fisher

Jonathan Rangel Garcia

The Garden Study Club of New Orleans

Jessica Gaudio

Taylor Galyean

Mary Gifford

Grounds Krewe NOLA

Beth & Rusty Gutierrez

Kathryn Hume

Jewish Endowment Foundation - Nathan Family Supporting Foundation

Carrie & Stuart Johnson

Lafitte Greenway Partnership

Charlie Limmer
Calvin Lopes
Louisiana Green Corps / American Forests
Lynn Marsh
New Orleans City Council: Councilmembers
Lesli Harris, Eugene Green, & Joe Giarrusso
The New Orleans Town Gardeners
Pearl Family Foundation
Cathy & Hunter Pierson
The Roberts Winterkorn Family
RosaMary Foundation
Emily Schoenbaum
Shell Company Foundation
Lois Simpson
Z Smith
Hayley & David Solsky
Andrew Stewart
Urban Forestry Foundation
Susan Whiting
Zemurray Foundation

In-Kind Donors

Audubon Tree Care
HEY Coffee Co.
Trader Joe's Mid-City
Flour Moon Bagels

Community Partners

The 3rd Line NOLA
Center for Sustainable Engagement and
Development (CSED)
The City of New Orleans Department of Parks
& Parkways

Crown Community Garden
Eastern New Orleans Neighborhood Advisory
Committee (ENONAC)
Evans + Lighter Landscape Architecture
Gentilly Woods Subdivision Association
Greater New Orleans Foundation
Groundwork New Orleans
Hollygrove Neighbors Association
Holy Cross Neighborhood Association
Lafitte Greenway Partnership
Lower Ninth Ward Homeownership Association
LSU AgCenter Hammond Research Station
New Orleans Pelicans
New Orleans ToolBank
Ninth Ward Nursery
Parks For All
Peace by Piece New Orleans
ReNew Schools
Touro Synagogue
Utē Petit
The Urban Conservancy



www.soulnola.org

STAFF & BOARD

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