

SOF 8/09 Out of Docket

<u>Name of Organization:</u>	Sweet Home New Orleans and Renew Our Music, Inc.
<u>Tax Status:</u>	501(c)(3)
<u>Purpose of Grant:</u>	To assess the needs of New Orleans' cultural tradition bearers, and to compile and disseminate resulting data to key stakeholders and decision-makers.
<u>Previous OSI Support:</u>	None
<u>Organization Budget:</u>	\$946,322 (FY09)
<u>Project Budget:</u>	\$25,000
<u>Source of Support:</u>	Louisiana Disaster Recovery Foundation Baton Rouge Area Foundation (matching funds)
<u>Amount Requested:</u>	\$25,000
<u>Amount Recommended:</u>	\$25,000
<u>Term:</u>	September 1, 2009 – August 31, 2010 (1 year)

Description of Organization:

Founded in 2005 as the New Orleans Musicians Heritage Relief Fund, Sweet Home New Orleans (SHNO) began disbursing emergency aid to New Orleans' musicians immediately following Hurricane Katrina. SHNO's mission is to support the individuals and organizations that perpetuate New Orleans' unique musical and cultural traditions. The organization helps New Orleans' musicians, Mardi Gras Indians, and Social Aid & Pleasure Club members establish sustainable lives in their New Orleans neighborhoods and become an artistic force behind the city's revitalization. Initially, SHNO's work focused on streamlining resource allocation. Today their programs have evolved to include in-depth services such as job creation and legal assistance, and SHNO has emerged from the aftermath of the flood as the leading local service provider to the city's cultural community.

New Orleans' music, the root of the city's identity and a driving force behind its economy, is an expression of a unique American culture whose tradition bearers practice a functional art that unites and strengthens communities. Over successive generations, local artists were marginalized by the mainstream music industry. Often earning less for their intellectual property than those cutting the record deals. They learned to cope with limited opportunities for earning a living and restricted access to basic services while transmitting their art forms to family and friends within their neighborhoods – so that communities became conduits for sharing knowledge, documenting history, schooling next generation artists, and sustaining culture even within an unfriendly economic system.

In the wake of the hurricane and flood devastation of 2005, many of these neighborhood communities no longer exist or have been fragmented almost beyond recognition. Thousands of artists/practitioners in New Orleans lack the personal resources to rebuild their houses and re-establish their lives in the post-Katrina local economy, and struggle to access public assistance. SHNO approaches its work with two central intentions: to aid individuals and their families in rebuilding their lives; and to engage these same individuals as leaders and agents of change in the metro area's overall and ongoing recovery.

SHNO practices a multi-pronged program strategy that includes:

- An intentionally designed **Case Management System**, through which culturally sensitive social workers and counselors assess the needs of the city's tradition bearers. SHNO case workers document this information in a customized database and use the data to advocate on behalf of clients for resources ranging from health care to housing.
- **Distribution of funds** for client's immediate and urgent needs as appropriate, responding to time-sensitive needs such as car repairs or funeral expenses in a matter of days. (All payments are issued to third-party vendors, and not to clients themselves.) To support clients in gaining long-term stability, SHNO case managers also provide numerous in-kind services such as housing identification and conduct one-to-one financial management sessions with their clients.
- An **Economic Development** program that creates jobs for artists in local venues, partnering with presenters of live music to pay artists a fair wage. SHNO also provides pro bono legal services related to intellectual property and covers repair and replacement costs for flood-damaged instruments. In August 2008, SHNO published the first *State of the New Orleans Music Community Report*, establishing itself as the authoritative source for demographic and economic data on local tradition bearers.
- The **Community Revitalization** program, which promotes the role of indigenous culture in bringing people together and advocates for the restoration of critical neighborhood-based lines of cultural transmission.

Description of Program for Which Funding Is Sought:

SHNO's goal is to open and expand access to resources for the city's indigenous tradition bearers and to disseminate data that will enhance a quantitative understanding of this community's needs among decision-makers. To this end, the organization intends to document improvements to clients' overall stability as a result of working with its case managers, and to publish a *2010 State of New Orleans Music Community Report* on a timeline corresponding with the fifth anniversary of Hurricane Katrina. Through documentation and dissemination, the project seeks to promote more effective allocation of resources by public, non-profit, and private sector entities to maximize their benefit to the men and women responsible for perpetuating New Orleans' unique culture.

SHNO seeks funding to pay for the salary and benefits for one case manager who works directly with clients collecting vital information as a key component of the documentation process. Through a donor-advised fund at the Baton Rouge Area Foundation, this contribution would be matched dollar-for-dollar, providing SHNO with the necessary general operating support to carry out this work.

SHNO's clients are predominantly African-American (76%) and predominantly male (75%). The average income of its constituents is less than \$20,000 per year. Most members of the SHNO client community were born in the city, rent their homes and live throughout the New Orleans metro area, though most have been unable to return to their pre-Katrina neighborhoods. A typical SHNO client is over 50 years old and is struggling to make ends meet.

The short-term objective of this project is to continue to assist the New Orleans music community in disaster recovery through case management mediation. The longer-term objectives are to analyze the data about these tradition bearers, to make it accessible to colleague advocates, and to disseminate it to gatekeepers and stakeholders who determine the flow of resources into client communities.

SHNO employs a two-pronged strategic approach for meeting project objectives that includes:

- Supporting clients through a thorough, culturally sensitive, customized, and interview-based intake process that facilitates the capture of in-depth data related to individuals' finances, housing situation, health conditions, professional activity, family life, and general stability.
- Analyzing data and making it accessible. This activity is coordinated in partnership with Dr. Frederick Weil, a sociologist based at Louisiana State University who has been at the forefront of post-Katrina data collection and analysis in the New Orleans area, with a particular emphasis on the retention and new formation of community in flood-damaged areas.

Rationale for Recommendation:

The Strategic Opportunities Fund continues to invest in exploratory grants to innovative programs that use arts and culture to empower individuals and communities to advance social change. We hope to raise awareness of the power and potential for art as an activism tool to advance a broad spectrum of social justice concerns and issues of specific interest and intersectional relevance to the priorities of U.S. Programs. In addition, SOF has identified New Orleans and the broader Gulf Region for a targeted, cross-program, and coordinated regional place-based initiative that builds on our past grantmaking in New Orleans.

SHNO operates as an accessible clearinghouse of resources for New Orleans' rich, historic, and neighborhood-based music community, as well as a repository of critical data documenting the conditions of livelihood for thousands of individual artists. Since the flood of 2005, SHNO has disbursed more than \$2.4 million in direct financial assistance to more than 2,300 artists/practitioners. At the same time, the organization promotes cultural continuity by empowering artists to serve as agents of change in the ongoing post-Katrina recovery efforts. SHNO is uniquely positioned to do its multi-leveled work because of its established and culturally sensitive case management system – as well as years of direct aid to the music community which have promoted a high level of trust on the part of local tradition bearers.

Furthermore, SHNO's work around documentation and dissemination has been highly successful. The *2008 State of New Orleans Music Community Report* (referenced above) detailed the dire economic conditions faced by New Orleans artists even prior to the current recession: performance opportunities had decreased by 40% and wages had dropped by nearly 20% from pre-Katrina levels, even as the cost of living in New Orleans had increased since the hurricanes and flood by 110%. Government entities such as Louisiana Economic Development (LED) have already begun referencing SHNO's research in their discussions of government investments in the music industry. Other public offices – from the Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation, and Tourism at the state level to the New Orleans Convention and Visitors Bureau at the local level – have expressed interest in the organization's ongoing research. The 2010 report, which will be compiled from data gathered through this project, is positioned to expand upon this already considerable body of work as another invaluable resource for recovery.

SHNO is a critical and unique partner for SOF's work as we seek to support arts and culture organizations that advocate for change in the Gulf Coast region. SHNO is an organization of particular interest given its unique position as an intermediary with an artist population that comprises the true fabric of the city of New Orleans. We therefore recommend a one year \$25,000 grant to Sweet Home New Orleans.