

## **Rebuilding Transparent and Open Government in New Orleans**

### Panelist Biographies

**Lucas Diaz** has over nine years experience working in the non profit arena, primarily as a development professional. He received extensive institutional development and project planning training through a Kresge Foundation capacity development grant during his four years with Dillard University, and in February 2007, he helped co-found Puentes New Orleans, Inc (PNOInc), which builds assets and creates access for the Latino Community of the Greater New Orleans area. One of its goals is to create a highly active, non-partisan public leadership Latino voice that engages on critical issues. Through his work with Puentes, Diaz, who was born in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic and immigrated as a child with his parents to Louisiana in 1977, is leading discussions that cross traditionally closed ethnic lines, particularly between the African American and Latino communities. As a Latino with African heritage, an immigrant from the Caribbean, and New Orleanian, Diaz is interested in exploring how New Orleans can serve as a model for inter-personal, inter-ethnic community building in all aspects of community life.

**Karen Gadbois** is co-founder of the *New Orleans Lens*, a local investigative journalism organization, and continues to work as a researcher and contributing writer for that publication. In 2006, Gadbois began to document the built environment in post-Katrina New Orleans. Her intent was to create a document that would serve as a historical catalog of neighborhoods. The blog *Squandered Heritage* became a repository for news about demolitions and the policies that were resulting in the destruction of historic neighborhoods. The work grew to include and uncover malfeasance and corruption in City government and eventually led to Peabody and IRE awards for work first revealed on *Squandered Heritage*. Previously, Gadbois had begun a career in textile arts after attending the Massachusetts College of Art and her work took her to Mexico where she settled for 16 years. While in Mexico, she opened a gallery in San Miguel de Allende and worked with prisoners and indigenous women creating original narratives. She and her family relocated to New Orleans in 2002.

**Denice Ross** is co-Deputy Director of the Greater New Orleans Community Data Center (GNOCDC), which gathers, analyzes, and disseminates data to help nonprofit and civic leaders work smarter and more strategically. Ross's role is to design information systems that effectively deploy content, designs, and programming across projects, and illustrate relationships between complex data sets that include information on demographics, income, housing, education, public safety, health and more. With over fifteen years of experience in user-centered design, Ross specializes in creating large web sites that convey complex information through an intuitive user experience. When she came to New Orleans in 2001, she designed the GNOCDC.org web site with data for all 73 New Orleans neighborhoods – from the Lower Ninth Ward to Lakeview – and built a loyal following of 5,000 unique monthly visitors. When Katrina hit, the site received 120,000 visits in one month; now, GNOCDC.org has a wide audience that includes neighborhood leaders, national media and the White House as they all track the recovery of New Orleans.

**Timolynn Sams** is Executive Director of the Neighborhoods Partnership Network (NPN). The NPN is a citywide network of neighborhoods that was established after Hurricane Katrina to facilitate neighborhood collaboration, increase access to government and information, and strengthen the voices of individuals and communities across New Orleans. The organization is unique in its focus on the power of communities to be their own governors and spearhead their own development. Sams is a New Orleans native and a graduate of the Southern University of New Orleans. Twelve years of work with non-profits – including five years of advocacy work focused on the minority community – led to Sam’s appointment as Executive Director of the NPN in 2007.

**Linda Usdin** has worked over the last ten years for local and national foundations as a program development and evaluation consultant. She has worked with the Ford Foundation, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Open Society Institute, the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, the Louisiana Disaster Recovery Foundation, and the Greater New Orleans Foundation. She has worked extensively in the neighborhoods of New Orleans, where she was born and raised, and throughout the Gulf Coast. Usdin has taught courses on building community engagement in public health efforts for the South Central Public Health Leadership Institute, the Centers for Disease Control, and Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, and has facilitated strategic planning processes for groups such as the City of New Orleans, National Network of Public Health Institutes, the Louisiana Public Health Institute, and Montefiore Medical Center in the Bronx.