

Louisiana Folklore Society ~~ Visioning Workshop  
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## **Report and Recommendations**

*Prepared by Amy Skillman ~~ Institute for Cultural Partnerships*

### **Executive Summary**

The goal of this consultation was twofold: first, to provide a visioning workshop that would help the Board and interested members of the Louisiana Folklore Society (LFS) envision the future of the organization and create some concrete next steps to help them move toward that vision. The second part of the consultation involved my review of the existing organizational framework (guidelines, articles of incorporation etc.) with an eye toward making recommendations that would help to create more efficiency and continuity in the organization.

Prior to planning and conducting the day-long visioning workshop, we worked together to create an on-line survey asking LFS members and interested friends to share their ideas about the organization. The accompanying final report offers a summary of the activities undertaken during the workshop and a set of recommendations based on workshop notes, survey responses and personal experiences working in non-profit folklore organizations. Detailed responses from the survey are attached in the appendices.

The Louisiana Folklore Society is at a critical place in its development. Like all non-profit organizations across the country, LFS is struggling to maintain its presence and relevance in our changing economic and civic climate. And like all non-profit organizations, LFS must change and adapt or risk becoming obsolete. With a very small working Board and minimal systems in place for ensuring steady income and outreach, LFS has the potential to burnout and become stagnant. However, it is clear from the individuals involved in this visioning process, that there is a real commitment not only to the organization, but to its potential as a strong and viable resource in Louisiana. For many reasons, the time is ripe. Louisianans have experienced so much loss in the last few years. The skills of a cadre of folklorists can be critical in the process of regaining stability, identity, and cultural pride. It is an opportunity for LFS to grow and position itself at the forefront of the effort

To do this, the Board of LFS needs to take some clear action steps over the coming year. The details of these steps are outlined on the last pages of the report. They are summarized and prioritized here for easy reference.

1. Immediately establish a temporary "restructuring committee" with the charge to research similar organizations and adopt a set of by-laws. Sample by-laws are attached. The by-laws should allow for a larger working Board of Directors with Board members chairing and serving on Standing Committees. The Standing Committees should undertake the bulk of the work of the organization. If most of the work happens in the committees,

then Board meetings can be more frequent (four to six times a year) but short (less than two hours). The agenda need only include committee reports and items for which voting action must be taken. By-laws should be prepared this fall and presented to the full membership for voting at the spring meeting.

2. Set up Standing Committees for membership, finances, public relations, organizational development, and programming. These committees should include non-Board members as well as Board members and should use the worksheets from the visioning workshop, along with the recommendations of this report, to develop a plan of work for the coming year. Workplans should be presented to the Board by early fall should include timelines.
3. Membership is the highest priority for the organization. It is important to let your members know you are thriving. The committee's work should be to a) formalize the membership year (including the dues structure and benefits), b) develop a database for tracking members and their dues, and c) establish a communication strategy that includes renewal notices as well as informational messages that keep members engaged. Once that work is done, the organization will be ready to reach more broadly.
4. Create a web presence where opportunities for member involvement (i.e. committees, program development, and fundraising events) can be published. This will require someone to host and maintain the site but one of the workshop participants already said he was willing to take this on. Keeping it simple will help to avoid getting bogged down in a complicated site that never gets launched. A simple site could be launched by the fall or early winter.
5. The Programming Committee should meet right away to build on the momentum from the visioning workshop and also on the need to gather, document and disseminate the traditional knowledge being lost as a result of the economy, Katrina and the oil spill. The first task of the committee should be to understand what work is currently being done in the state and then to find ways to complement and support that work. Be careful not to create a workplan that is too ambitious. Be realistic about the resources and build the programs thoughtfully. Begin with one new idea, like the speakers' bureau or a regional meeting, and grow from there.
6. LFS needs a central office with a consistent point of contact. A website can serve this purpose in many ways, especially when no physical office can be established. As long as the tasks are assigned and well delegated, the work can be done virtually. However, it is critical that there be someone to coordinate everything – to ensure that committees are working, to call Board meetings, etc. The President can serve this role for now, but it is time to start moving toward a part-time contracted staff person. If the grant writing begins this year, that person could be identified and hired by the fall of 2011.

These six steps should keep the momentum going from the visioning workshop and move the organization forward. The Louisiana Folklore Society has an amazing resource of people and organizations to draw upon for its success. It has a track record of producing engaging events and timely publications that foreground the importance and value of folklorists' work in the

state. It also has the ability to do what no other organization in the state can do; mobilize the field of folklore and foster collaborations that affect change and restore dignity to the people of Louisiana.

## **Report on the Visioning Workshop**

Approximately 20 people participated in the day-long workshop on June 2nd and 33 people completed an on-line survey prior to the workshop. Some participated in both. A little over half of the survey participants (17) are actually paying members of the organization but all participants clearly have an interest in both the health of the organization and the health of folklore as a field in Louisiana.

### ***The Current Landscape***

We began our day with introductions that invited everyone to “describe something that is happening in the world today or in your life that makes you value the potential work of the LFS.” The responses varied from personal to professional to political, but much of it reflected on the oil spill crisis and its impact on local culture and traditional knowledge. People noted that the communities being most affected by the economy and the oil spill are the very communities that folklorists believe have value. They lamented that as people feel compelled to move north in search of new jobs and homes, the traditional knowledge and culture that is so important to Louisiana’s identity is being lost. It is important to explore ways that folklorists can help. Who is planning for the impact of this out-migration? There are stories to be gathered and culture to be documented to ensure their continuity for future generations.

Many people commented on the shifting landscape, especially as it relates to the economic climate. Funding programs are being cut and academic programs are being eliminated as agencies and universities struggle with the declining economy. There was a general hope that the Louisiana Folklore Society might be able to pick up the slack. Likewise, the strong network of folklorists in the state is shrinking and being threatened. The Society has been changing as well and folks are encouraged by the ability of LFS to attract non-folklorists such as artists, tradition bearers and colleagues from other disciplines. As people shift into second careers, they see folklore as the heart of what they want to do.

A few spoke of the ideological shift in the country toward the private sector, which threatens public support but might create an opportunity for the LFS. As one person noted, the power of organizing can have significant value as our society (both LFS and the civic community) struggles against its current challenges.

### ***Brainstorming the Future***

Against this backdrop, participants were asked to think at the 30,000 foot level (big and broad) to identify the 2 or 3 greatest **changes** in the world that will affect their work over the next 5 years? After a few minutes of quiet reflection we organized the individual items into broader categories. Perhaps the overarching concern is that the visibility and relevance of the field is being threatened as attitudes toward diversity change, funding diminishes, and institutions (both public