



LEADERSHIP PROFILE

Baton Rouge Area Foundation

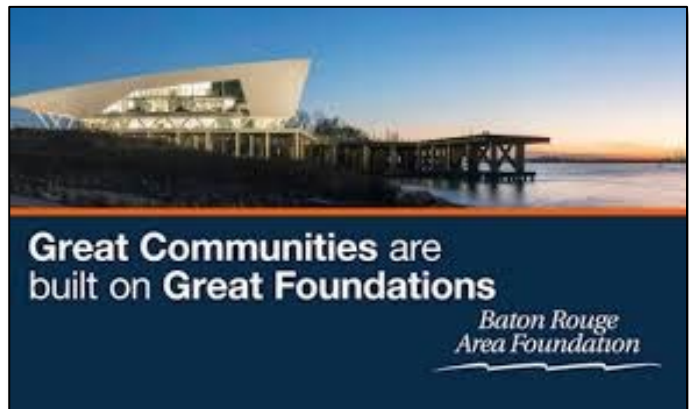
President & Chief Executive Officer
Baton Rouge Area Foundation
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

*Uniting human and financial resources
to enhance the quality of life in South Louisiana*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

By any assessment, [Baton Rouge Area Foundation](#) is an extraordinary institution. Led since 1988 by CEO John Davies, Baton Rouge Area Foundation has long been a force for progress in South Louisiana.

The Foundation is known throughout the region and beyond as a truly consequential resource. It enjoys a long-standing reputation for unparalleled vision and relentless execution, leveraging philanthropic resources in creative collaboration with others to achieve extraordinary results on behalf of the communities it serves.



Finding leaders that matter for missions that matter®

2870 Peachtree Road NW, #920, Atlanta, GA 30305-2918
Tel 404-BoardWalk (404-262-7392) • BoardWalkConsulting.com

During the incumbent CEO's 33-year tenure, the Foundation's assets have grown from \$5 million to over \$700 million. During the same period, the Foundation distributed over \$550 million in grants. While financial numbers are just one measure of a community foundation's relevance, these numbers are indicative of the singular difference Baton Rouge Area Foundation, its donors and its partners have made in pursuit of civic good.

Baton Rouge Area Foundation, commonly known as BRAF, is about to undergo its first change in Chief Executive Officers in over three decades. John Davies has [announced](#) plans to retire upon the appointment of his successor, expected early in 2022. His successor will inherit an organization primed for continued impact, supported by a dedicated staff, embraced by aspirational donors, and respected by a region accustomed to a community foundation known for getting things done on an ambitious scale.

The leader invited to become BRAF's next CEO will have the mandate to build on its exceptional reputation and significant resources, leveraging its full range of assets—human, reputational and financial—in resolute pursuit of a better region for all.

THE ORGANIZATION

Baton Rouge Area Foundation was an entity with no full-time staff when the current CEO joined in 1988. Initial funding came from a small group of civic-minded leaders, each contributing \$1000 to launch the fledgling organization. Tellingly, a number of those original donors, their families and other early partners remain deeply invested in the Foundation as an essential champion for South Louisiana.

Today, BRAF and its two affiliates, [Community Foundation of Southwest Louisiana](#) (based in Lake Charles) and [Northshore Community Foundation](#) (based in Covington), embrace a region of some two million people in 17 parishes across the breadth of South Louisiana.¹ BRAF has long been a proponent of asset-based philanthropy, and it has earned a reputation for visionary leadership backing creative strategies with focused investments and tenacious execution.

BRAF has fostered numerous transformative initiatives that few communities might have even attempted. Some examples:

¹ For readers less familiar with the state, "parish" is Louisiana's equivalent to "county" elsewhere. Louisiana's total population is about 4.7 million.



- The [Bridge Center for Hope](#). Following the deaths in a Baton Rouge parish prison of five detainees with mental health challenges, the father of one of the victims approached BRAF for help in decriminalizing mental illness. Five years later, nearly 7 in 10 voters approved a mental health tax, and in 2021 the Bridge Center for Hope became an operational reality. The state's first short-term crisis stabilization center, the Center will serve up to 5000 people per year who are experiencing a mental health crisis or substance abuse issues.



- The [Capital Area Family Justice Center](#) empowers victims of family violence with the resources to create safety and stability for themselves and their families. By providing comprehensive access to services under one roof, the Family Justice Center provides a safe place “where all the needs of survivors are met, where children are protected, where violence stops, where families heal and thrive, where hope is realized and where professionals all work together.”
- [New Schools for Baton Rouge](#), started by BRAF and now a free-standing nonprofit, has recruited the best nonprofit schools in the US to open and grow schools in the parish. By the 2019-20 school year, NSBR supported 19 schools enrolling 7000 students. Plans to expand capacity to 20,000 students by 2021 were affected by the pandemic, but New Schools is well on the way to ensuring that no child in Baton Rouge should attend a failing school.
- The [Shaw Center for the Arts](#) was a signature project in the revitalization of downtown Baton Rouge. Supported by private donors and public funds, The Shaw Center occupies an entire city block, and its vibrant programming of performing arts, fine arts and education proved a catalyst for further redevelopment throughout the city center.
- The [University/City Park Lakes](#) project currently underway followed a BRAF-sponsored 2016 master plan to reverse the decline of a depleting asset in danger of turning into mudflats. A partnership of local and state governments, Louisiana State University and the LSU Athletics Department have joined forces to make that master plan a reality.
- The [Water Institute of the Gulf](#) is one of the Foundation's most ambitious endeavors. Both a collaboration hub and a center of excellence, The Water Institute and the Water Campus it anchors resulted from a years-long effort to

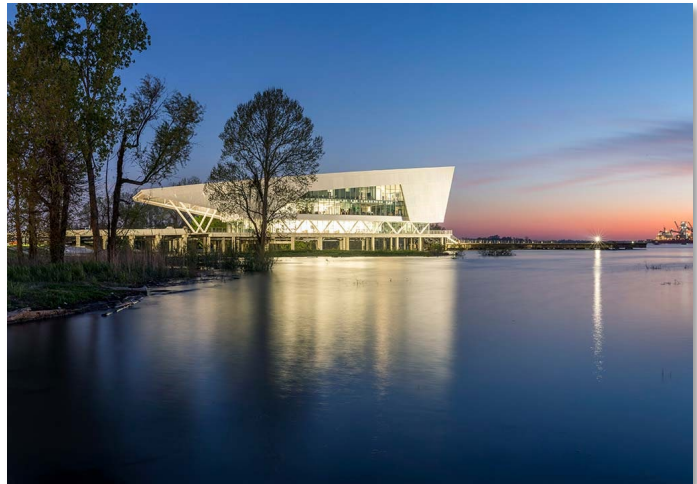
adapt learnings around the globe to address the special environmental challenges facing Louisiana and the Gulf Coast.

BRAF was both initiator and catalyst for all these endeavors—and always a collaborator in helping assemble the public and private support necessary to move from vision to reality.

Not all of BRAF's efforts require large capital infusions, but they all require vision, creativity, tenacity and resilience. For example,

- An experiment in [pre-trial diversion](#) moved non-violent pre-trial detainees with behavioral health challenges to treatment rather than jail. The combination of work and therapies has resulted in a 47% drop in Baton Rouge's incarceration rate in less than three years.
- In 2017, BRAF launched an interactive website, now at [Exceptional Lives](#), where parents and caregivers throughout Louisiana can easily find services they need to support children of all ages on the autism spectrum of with other developmental disabilities. The website was one result of a two-year project funded with the Huey and Angelina Wilson Foundation to improve autism services in the capital region.

BRAF's ambitious work continues. The [Baton Rouge Health District](#), [The Water Campus](#) (pictured nearby), the elusive but increasingly probable [inter-city rail service](#) linking Baton Rouge and New Orleans—each of these began as a dream, and each is of great consequence to the region. In addition are BRAF's numerous other initiatives and programs supporting nonprofits and the communities, families and individuals they serve.



The Water Institute

All of these efforts and more are made possible by the generosity of the Foundation's donors and partners. Although their individual interests may vary, they share a commitment to improving the quality of life in South Louisiana. Leveraging these and other resources, BRAF

- Connects philanthropists with nonprofits;
- Invests in and manages pivotal projects to improve the region; and
- Provides consulting services to nonprofits, generally at no cost to their organizations.

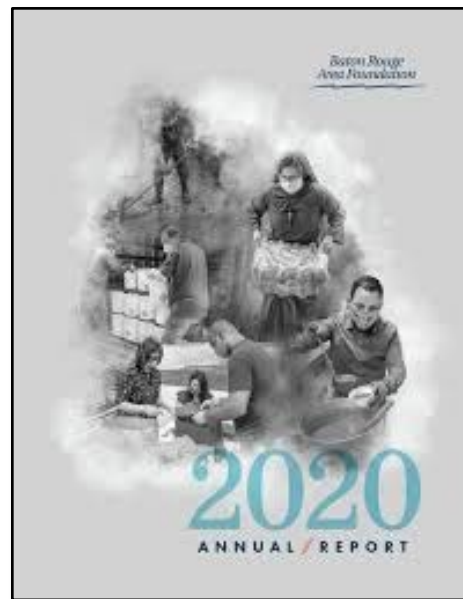
The Baton Rouge Area Foundation has never sought growth for growth's sake, but it serves as a compelling example of the philanthropic adage, "Money follows impact." Not everyone embraces its pioneering approach to community engagement, but no one denies that BRAF has had enormous impact.

BRAF is the largest community foundation in Louisiana and one of the largest in the country. It hosts some 600 donor funds and a diversified portfolio of investments in real estate, stocks and bonds, and Louisiana-based venture capital funds. Most of BRAF's real estate is held in the Wilbur Marvin Foundation, a supporting nonprofit, and managed by [Commercial Properties Realty Trust](#). Altogether, nine supporting organizations are included in BRAF's consolidated financial reports.²

At year-end 2020, BRAF estimated its assets at \$722 million³, up from \$678 million at year-end 2019. The operating budget of about \$4 million is funded by fees for services on charitable accounts and by the Foundation's recurring [memberships](#), which underwrite its civic leadership program.

BRAF's [staff](#) of two dozen reflect a mix of long-term colleagues with deep functional or programmatic expertise and newer members with a proven commitment to community engagement and impact. In addition to the typical roles in a community foundation, BRAF has three units indicative of its particular approach to philanthropy:

- [Civic Leadership Initiatives](#). While all BRAF employees contribute to projects improving the quality of life in South Louisiana, the CLI team is directly engaged every day.
- [Strategic Consulting Services](#). SCS is the vehicle through which BRAF consults with nonprofits on strategic planning, board development and fundraising design, all offered at modest cost to the nonprofit client.
- [Employees 1st](#). Building on the unique expertise in disaster relief and hardship grants BRAF honed post-Katrina, the Foundation created a scalable online program to enable companies to make large numbers of individual emergency assistance grants to employees affected by disasters or personal hardship. What began as a



[BRAF's latest Annual Report](#)
(click the picture to open)

² The 2019 audited financials, available [here](#), contain a full list of BRAF's subsidiaries and eight supporting organizations. Employees 1st, created and housed at BRAF, has recently been restructured as a program of Employee Assistance Foundation, BRAF's ninth supporting organization

³ Published estimate, based on unaudited data

service to three South Louisiana employers now encompasses some 350,000 employees nationwide and beyond.

A volunteer board of directors governs Baton Rouge Area Foundation. The [current trustees](#), all leaders in their own right, have backgrounds in business, law, education, professional services, healthcare, financial services, philanthropy and community engagement—a diverse set of experiences and perspectives. To lead the current CEO search, the board has appointed a search committee of 15 community leaders, eight of whom are current members of BRAF's board.

THE MANDATE

Baton Rouge Area Foundation has a well-earned reputation for leadership and impact in South Louisiana. Much of that reputation is embodied in the incumbent CEO, John Davies, widely regarded as a singular leader and a true visionary. Davies himself would be the first to note that none of BRAF's successes of the past decades have been accomplished by one person or one organization alone, as collaboration is at the center of everything BRAF does. Even so, the reality is that no one in the service area has worked with anyone else as CEO of BRAF, an anchor institution, and a successful CEO transition is widely seen as critical to the region's future.

The first order of business for the next CEO, therefore, is to model a smooth succession, embracing BRAF's rich history and considerable momentum while discerning the path from past successes to an equally ambitious future.

Among the next CEO's key priorities will be a nuanced version of the following:

- *Embrace* the unmet challenges of South Louisiana and, in consultation with staff, board, donors, partners and community stakeholders, develop a cogent strategy that leverages and enhances BRAF's reputation for bold vision, tenacious execution and sustainable impact;
- *Deepen* BRAF's relationships with emerging philanthropists, emerging leaders, and emerging constituencies while embracing the long-term stakeholders who have made BRAF's prior successes possible;
- *Marshal* the energy of a diverse and inclusive organization to deliver a rich and operationally excellent experience for donors, grantees and community partners;
- *Challenge* BRAF's staff and donors, both current and potential, to ensure a stable, sustainable and aspirational future for all South Louisiana; and

**Message for the next CEO:
Accelerate the good!**

*--A senior community leader
and BRAF grantee*

**Most people don't know how to
make the roux, let alone the
gumbo. We need both.**

*--A passionate supporter
of long-standing*

- *Ensure* that BRAF’s own house is in order, that staff have the resources, infrastructure and opportunities for professional development consistent with the strategy for impact in the larger community.

BRAF is a thriving organization primed to be even better, and the appetite for continued impact at scale is both genuine and pervasive. The new CEO is not being asked to replicate the past or simply to maintain it. Rather, the board is eager to discover and embrace BRAF’s next chapter of philanthropic leadership and impact.

The Baton Rouge Area Foundation is complex, with many stakeholders, moving parts and, inevitably, competing priorities. As an activist community foundation, BRAF emboldens the dreams of its region, but it can also be a magnet for frustrations and an outlet for criticism. What most view as creative collaboration, others see as competition.⁴ And like many community foundations, BRAF can appear elitist, despite efforts to reach across traditional divides.

THE RELATIONSHIPS

| The CEO reports to | Board of Directors, Baton Rouge Area Foundation |
|---|--|
| And manages a staff of about two dozen, including such roles and departments as | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Executive Vice President (overseeing long-term programs) • Chief Financial Officer • Civic Leadership Initiatives • Communications • Donor Services • Employees 1st • General Counsel • Strategic Consulting Services |
| While stewarding such other vital relationships as | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Donors and fundholders • Program partners • Peer foundations, locally and nationally • The region’s leadership, including corporate, academic, governmental, philanthropic, professional, and faith-based organizations, operating nonprofits and the media |

THE CANDIDATE

BRAF’s search committee is open to a variety of career paths. A record of genuinely impactful leadership across communities, organizations and sectors will be of particular interest, as will a contender’s creativity in addressing intractable issues.

⁴ BRAF’s real estate dealings seem to spark the most vocal concerns.

The committee will be interested in a prospect's philanthropic experience, but foundation leadership experience is not itself a primary priority for consideration.

Competence: The Baton Rouge Area Foundation expects to appoint a CEO who is...

- An accomplished executive with a rare blend of confidence and humility, a servant leader who knows when to take charge and when to take counsel.
- Ambitious for the community
- A highly creative problem-solver and connector, with the record to match
- A leader equipped by professional involvement or lived experience to engage fully in issues of race and equity
- Accustomed to leading in an environment of high expectations
- Multitalented and politically astute
- An organizationally savvy entrepreneur adept at building relationships and teams; a natural collaborator
- Intellectually alert and financially savvy, a passionate, persistent champion with superior listening skills
- A leader who respects the power of proximity
- A nurturing, accessible and empowering leader who supports staff development and donor engagement with equal fervor
- Able to meet people where they are, even while challenging them to embrace transformation
- A board-savvy leader, quick to engage, learn from, lead and challenge a board drawn from many quarters
- Technologically current, ensuring staff have the tools and the infrastructure needed to achieve ambitious goals
- An inviting champion for the mission, someone with a knack for attracting the financial and human resources to support bold goals; a leader adroit at expanding relationships with current and potential donors and attentive to staff development.

The country's divides—racial, generational, economic—are at play here too, and in my lifetime they've never been worse.

--A Baton Rouge native who remains optimistic, despite the deep divisions



Culture—the Foundation’s CEO should be...

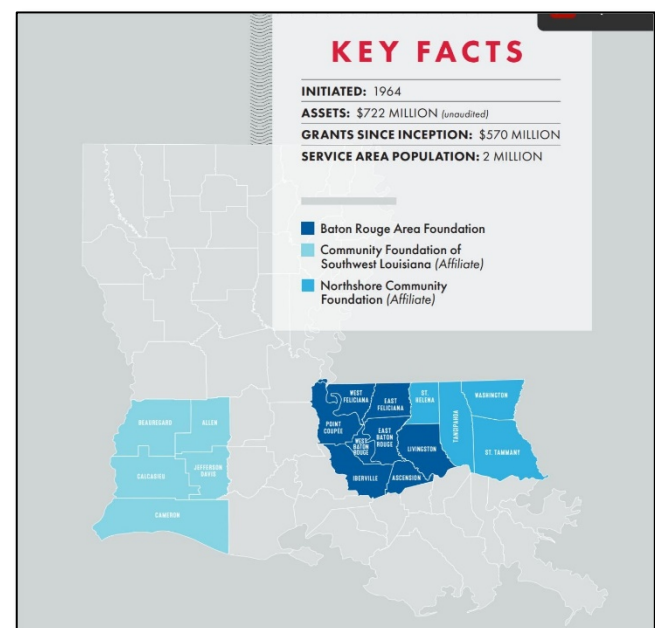
- An authentic and selfless leader of unquestioned integrity
- A catalyst, not a credit-taker; a visionary with deep respect for execution
- An avid learner who capitalizes on the best talent, best thinking and best practices, whatever the source
- A diplomat, able to navigate competing priorities and perspectives with aplomb
- An engaged citizen with an affinity for the region’s rich heritage and comfortable with the special demands of leadership in a complex and multifaceted region with persistent challenges
- Unafraid of challenging discussions, sensitive to the divisions in society but not stymied by them
- Possessed of both insight and foresight, armed with more questions than answers
- Mobilized to seize opportunities to advance opportunity for all, not as an add-on, but as a central component of organizational and community vitality
- An accessible manager who emphasizes team over self and collaboration over hierarchy while ensuring the disciplines and accountability to reinforce operational excellence
- Willing to take—and to encourage—smart risks
- An executive alert to the challenges of succeeding an iconic leader but not daunted by them.

THE LOCATION

Baton Rouge Area Foundation is headquartered in the City of Baton Rouge in the Parish of East Baton Rouge, the most populous parish in the state, located about 80 miles northwest of New Orleans.

Historically, the Foundation’s service area was East Baton Rouge Parish and its seven contiguous parishes. BRAF’s two affiliates, Community Foundation of Southwest Louisiana and Northshore Community Foundation, encompass five parishes to the west and four parishes to the east, respectively.

Baton Rouge and the surrounding areas enjoy a rich cultural heritage. French and Spanish influences are quite evident, and the area’s culinary reputation is well deserved. Baton Rouge is home to the Louisiana state government, Louisiana



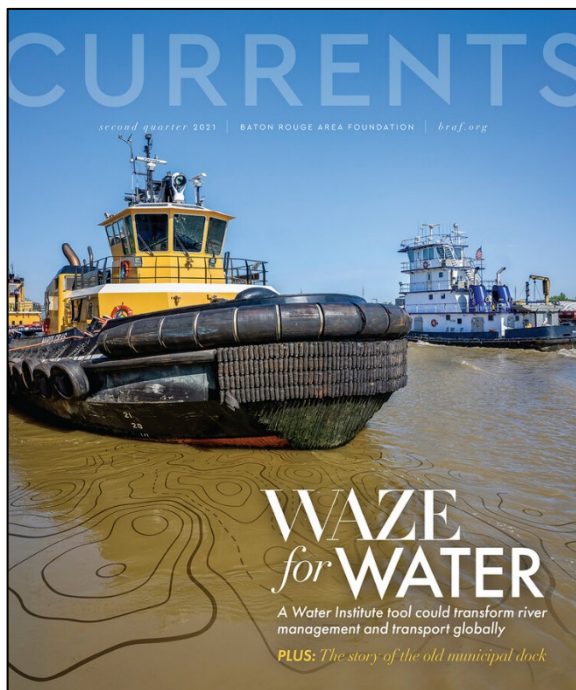
State University (LSU) and Southern University, the flagship institution of the Southern University System, the only historically black land-grant university system in the United States.

[Baton Rouge 2020](#), the annual update from [CityStats](#), a BRAF resource launched in 2008, provides a comprehensive view of the area's quality of life. Other sources of a more general nature include [Wikipedia](#), [Louisiana Travel](#), [Baton Rouge Area Chamber](#) (BRAC), [Baton Rouge Recreation and Park Commission](#) (BREC), [Visit Baton Rouge](#) and [Eight Reasons to Move to Baton Rouge](#).

For potential consideration or to suggest a prospect,
please email

[**BRAF@BoardWalkConsulting.com**](mailto:BRAF@BoardWalkConsulting.com)

or call Sam Pettway, Crystal Stephens,
Patti Kish or Lysondra Somerville at
404-BoardWalk (404-262-7392).



BRAF's latest quarterly reports
(click the images to open)