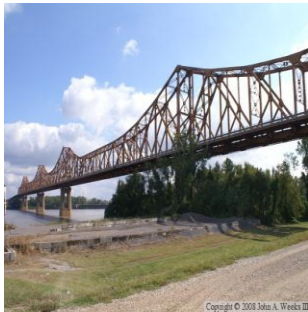




*A Vision for Louisiana*



**A NEW ECONOMIC MODEL**

**RETHINKING THE**

**DELTA**

**LOUISIANA'S REGIONAL  
DEVELOPMENT PLAN**

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# 2009 Delta Regional Authority Regional Development Plan for Louisiana

## Executive Summary

Louisiana is one of eight (8) states with parishes (counties) that comprise the Delta Regional Authority (DRA). This Mississippi River Delta region is predominantly rural with the highest concentration of disadvantaged populations in the United States. As a part of this region, Louisiana faces profound concerns related to persistent poverty, out-migration, health, education, and income levels. These economic factors indicate that Louisiana must utilize non-traditional community and economic development strategies in the future. Community and economic development in Louisiana must be readdressed in order to be successful.

In recognition of these challenges, Louisiana has implemented some of these non-traditional strategies, including comprehensive workforce development plan, improved governmental ethics laws, and an aggressive evaluation and elimination of unorthodox taxes related to business development. Louisiana's update to the *DRA Regional Development Plan* proposes a new direction for community and economic development in Louisiana. Louisiana's plan proposes to enhance state and local economic competitiveness; and to cultivate economic development assets; including business retention, recruitment, and expansion; and, small business development and entrepreneurship. This plan provides a realistic approach as to what Louisiana's community and economic development goals will be in its combined efforts with DRA for future development of the Mississippi River Delta region.

## Louisiana/DRA Overview

Louisiana participates in the activities of the Delta Regional Authority (DRA), as authorized under the Delta Regional Authority Act of 2000. The DRA serves as a unifying voice for community and economic development in the Mississippi River Delta. Led by a Federal co-chairman and the governors of each participating state, including Louisiana's Governor Bobby Jindal, the DRA seeks to leverage resources and focus attention on the region. The DRA and Louisiana accomplish their missions by fostering partnerships with public, private, and non-profit entities.

Encompassing 240 counties and parishes in portions of eight (8) states, including 56 parishes in Louisiana, the DRA region has deep historical and cultural roots and is home to more than 9.5 million people. Louisiana has 3,556,241 people within the region. Compared to that of the United States, the overall economic well being of the DRA region continues to experience pervasive economic distress. Even though many areas of the American South have prospered in the modern economic growth, the DRA region, including Louisiana, remained largely behind in all categories. Of the 240 counties and parishes in the DRA region, only ten (10) are not defined as economically distressed.

Under federal law, at least 75 percent of DRA's funds must be invested in economically distressed counties and parishes. Additionally, DRA earmarks

half of the funds for transportation and basic infrastructure projects. Even though the DRA is a relatively young federal agency, since its first board meeting on February 23, 2002, it has invested over \$47 million in the region through its federal grant program. These DRA funds have leveraged over \$205 million in other public funds and over \$480 million of private funds.



Louisiana is truly supportive of DRA's commitment to serve as a focal point for resources and an as originator of ideas. Louisiana recognizes that for the DRA to be an effective agency, its mission cannot be limited to reducing unemployment and poverty in failing communities. Louisiana and DRA realize they must concentrate on developing the assets needed to sustain long-term growth.

On this basis of understanding, Louisiana, in conjunction with the DRA, will work with its partner states, as well as regional, local, and private-sector partners to build "critical mass" in communities throughout the region. Critical mass is central to this strategic plan and represents the potential for sustainable growth and private sector investment.

## Vision for Louisiana

A snapshot of Louisiana's economy suggests the state is doing relatively well today, especially compared to the United States overall. Louisiana's unemployment rate is well below that of the nation. Per capita income growth in Louisiana has been higher than in much of the country. Louisiana's economy has been growing faster than that of the nation as a whole. Billions of dollars of construction projects are underway in a variety of sectors, including industrial modernization projects, new manufacturing facilities, commercial office space and various transportation investments. Major bond-rating agencies like Fitch, Moody's and Standard & Poor's have recently upgraded our state debt rating. In addition, Louisiana has avoided the worst of the national real estate crunch. Although volumes have slowed, prices are stable or up in most of Louisiana's communities.

However, beneath this attractive veneer is a reality with which Louisiana residents have become far too familiar: our greatest export today is not our agricultural products, not our wood products, not even our oil, gas or chemicals. Louisiana's greatest export too often is our people, particularly our young people, who frequently believe they must leave Louisiana for greater economic opportunities in such places as Houston, Atlanta or Dallas.

Dramatically changing this reality, or more specifically, repositioning Louisiana as the next great American state for business investment, quality of life and economic opportunity, is the new vision of Louisiana. To successfully fulfill this vision, Louisiana will need to advance from "good" to

“great” in community, business, and economic development, as well as to cultivate new capabilities in product development, such as public-policy efforts designed to increase the attractiveness of Louisiana as a place in which to invest. In the process, Louisiana expects to become one of the top states in economic development in the country over the next two to four years.



Louisiana’s plan represents its movement toward non-traditional community and economic development strategies. The implementation of this plan will reposition Louisiana as a great state for business investment, quality of life, and economic opportunity. The strategies offered in this plan provide a new perspective that embraces the vision of Louisiana as a region where people, communities, and businesses flourish. The plan contains prioritized goals, strategies, and actions that focus the DRA’s mission.

*The challenge of this plan is to create a single vision that integrates non-traditional strategies with existing programs while taking into account*

*traditional performance measures. The challenge is met by a focus on the economic competitiveness and business development in Louisiana and its communities.*

Committing to a shared vision, one embraced not only by Louisiana, but also the DRA, its member states and their communities, is essential. However, it is not enough. Louisiana feels it is increasingly obvious to all economic development agencies that a healthy and educated workforce is a precondition of overall economic competitiveness. More important, is how the plan addresses the most critical question: “How can Louisiana’s workforce be retained?” When reviewing the out-migration of young and talented people, one begins to understand competitiveness. It is not enough to improve health, transportation, communications, infrastructure, and broadband access. Without the ability to retain and attract talent, Louisiana will continue to decline. The solution to the continued decline is in the factors of critical mass. These factors add up to quality of place. This plan addresses these factors and embodies a blueprint to attract talent.

Louisiana’s goals and strategies presented here are built on the above foundation. Louisiana will support its communities that commit to quality of place that establish themselves as a magnet for talent.

**Goal 1: Advance the productivity and economic competitiveness of the Louisiana workforce.**

This goal encompasses the vision of the plan with an aggressive State agenda. Governor Jindal and the Louisiana Legislature having successfully

completed a comprehensive workforce development reform plan to improve the effectiveness of Louisiana's community and technical colleges. The plan will further provide turnkey workforce solutions to expanding and relocating businesses, and insure that Louisiana's workforce programs are driven by real business needs. It also supports existing initiatives related to health, workforce training, and regional partnerships.

**Goal 2: Strengthen Louisiana's physical and digital connections to the global economy.**

This goal encompasses the vision of the plan with an aggressive approach exemplified by Governor Jindal's effort to expand telecommunications, including broadband; transportation, including roadways, airports, river ports, and railroads; and energy producing capacity. Expanded physical and digital connections to the global economy will further improve upon the development of Louisiana's workforce.

**Goal 3: Create critical mass within Louisiana communities.**

The concept of "critical mass" reinforces what every economist and every resident already knows: growth requires jobs and investment. Louisiana must prepare for success in the increasingly competitive world of community and economic development. To do this means each parish, community, and region in Louisiana must have a strong community and economic development plan; adequate, stable funding; assertive, professional staff; and coordinated, active engagement from the public and private sectors in order to be successful.

## Conclusion

Louisiana cannot focus its efforts and simultaneously retain a broad programmatic approach. Louisiana feels the only realistic approach is to align its programs towards a common objective. That objective is the economic competitiveness and business development in Louisiana and its communities.

The need for economic competitiveness and business development does not require extensive documentation and is the watchword of every business in Louisiana. To make this the focus of this strategic plan update, however, is to recognize that the myriad of issues facing citizens throughout Louisiana will require cooperative efforts from a



multitude of partners, including DRA. It means that health, information technology, and transportation are part of a common challenge, not goals themselves. Of equal importance to Louisiana, is that economic

competitiveness and business development meet the performance measures set for the state and provide specific direction for all of Louisiana's programs. Louisiana hopes that the approach presented in this plan will serve as a template for the parish and communities' plans and their programs directed toward distressed rural areas in general.

### **The Challenge for Louisiana**

The economic challenges facing Louisiana are serious. Out-migration has continued. This can be attributed to loss of jobs in general. However, the situation has been exacerbated by continued fallout from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, as well as Hurricanes, Ike and Gustav. There was a temporary increase in employment immediately following Hurricane Katrina and Rita due to disaster recovery funds received by Louisiana as a part of the Federal



Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) and the Louisiana Recovery Authority (LRA) Disaster Recovery Program. Shrinking opportunities to earn decent salaries have caused Louisiana residents, with marketable skills, to migrate

elsewhere in search of better paying jobs. Louisiana's continued dependence on a declining industrial and agricultural base is the most compelling of challenges.

Louisiana has previously adhered to failing economic models. Meanwhile, most of the nation has made the leap to information technology (such as broadband) and a growing professional service sector. Louisiana has redirected its vision toward the challenge of keeping its residents with marketable skills as productive citizens in the state.

### **Louisiana's Response to the Challenge**

Louisiana recognizes the DRA's highly successful federal grant program and intends to build upon the base provided by DRA. The State's Investment Strategy will also be organized around the DRA philosophy of building critical mass within its Delta communities.

#### **1. Health as an economic engine.**

Louisiana will support the "Healthy Delta" campaign and other employer based disease prevention, education, and screening initiatives.

#### **2. Information Technology.**

Louisiana will pursue implementation of the iDelta plan and the goals of the Louisiana Delta Initiatives Program created by Act 347 of the 2007 Louisiana Legislature. These initiatives are designed to bring broadband to all of the DRA parishes in Louisiana.

### 3. **Transportation.**

Louisiana will place priority on the “Delta Development Highway System”.

### 4. **Workforce Education and Leadership.**

Governor Jindal and the Louisiana Legislature have worked together to adopt a comprehensive workforce development reform plan to improve the effectiveness of Louisiana’s community and technical colleges; and to provide turnkey workforce solutions for business expansion and recruitment projects.

### 5. **Traditional localized projects.**

Louisiana will follow the priorities of the DRA regarding basic physical infrastructure projects, transportation projects, workforce training, and business development projects. Louisiana will make every effort to provide matching funds, wherever possible, in support of these projects. Louisiana will also utilize DRA and other federal agencies in coordinated projects. The majority of Louisiana’s DRA parishes are considered to be “distressed counties.” Since DRA is mandated to spend 75 percent of its total funds in “distressed counties,” the statistical makeup of Louisiana parishes will maximize the impact of DRA funds.

## **Coordination with Local Development Districts**

Local Development Districts (LDDs) are regional planning councils that are recognized and administratively funded by the Economic Development Administration (EDA) and regional development authorities, such as the DRA. The

purpose of the LDDs is to address economic development and quality of life issues on a multi-jurisdictional basis. Of the 44 established LDDs in the DRA region, eight (8) of them are in Louisiana and have governing boards made up of appointed representatives of local communities and state government.



As part of DRA, Louisiana relies heavily on the LDDs as its regional frontline partner in economic development, particularly in the delivery of its federal grant program. Both DRA and Louisiana have found that the LDD delivery system can provide an effective mechanism for transforming the DRA region’s economic vitality. The LDDs promote DRA programs and provide technical assistance to grant applicants. Accordingly, the LDDs are responsible for ensuring the suitability, completeness, and quality of grant applications, and sign their own federal grant application agreeing to do so for compensation. It is, therefore, critical that the regional economic development strategic plans of the LDDs also reflect Louisiana’s and DRA’s investment priorities. Under

federal law, each DRA member state is required to submit a development plan that corresponds to the 2002 DRA Comprehensive Action Plan. The 2008 DRA Regional Development Plan significantly departed from its previous plan. This new direction allowed for each state, including Louisiana, to conform to goals, objectives, and strategies established in the 2008 DRA plan. DRA requested each state to update this plan on an annual basis and the LDDs in Louisiana played a vital role in this update.

### **Local Partners**

Louisiana must work in concert with its local partners in order to promote sustainable community and economic growth in Louisiana. This strategic plan update has identified the primary factors driving job growth. It is up to local and regional partners to identify and implement the specific programs that address these issues. Key to this process are the eight (8) LDDs; the eight (8) economic alliances; eight (8) small business development centers; state economic development organizations; state and regional municipal associations; state and regional parish associations; regional economic development groups; local chambers of commerce; and local governments. All of these organizations promote the DRA federal grant program in Louisiana to local and regional organizations. Louisiana will work with all of these local partners to incorporate the components of economic competitiveness and business development in Louisiana and its communities.

### **Additional Considerations**

All strategic plans face difficulties and obvious hurdles to implementation. Louisiana's goal is that this plan will be unfettered by these concerns. As a

consequence, it bears addressing what this plan does not propose to do. Each of the points below is held by strong constituencies and must be taken seriously. Plan changes and revisions must be addressed annually.

- The plan does not recommend industrial recruitment as the sole solution to unemployment.

*Industrial recruitment is an old traditional course of action to solve unemployment. Communities must address their economic competitiveness and business development to solve unemployment.*

- The plan does not assume that training workers, or advancing leadership, can ensure that the talented young people of Louisiana will remain in their communities.

*It is a fact, conveniently ignored by workforce training organizations, that workforce development and training must be reformed to motivate individuals to acquire skills and education in order to remain in their communities' workforce.*

- The plan does not recommend actions that compromise the efforts of organizations already operating in Louisiana.

*The DRA is not the only federal or state agency investing in Louisiana. From health to transportation, from technology to education, from housing to economic development, federal and state agencies continue to spend heavily in Louisiana.*

*The success of DRA in Louisiana will continue to lie along two paths: creative approaches and cooperative planning.*

- While the plan narrows the focus of Louisiana, it respects the importance of continuity and support for existing initiatives.

*Louisiana has a constituency whose needs must be recognized.*

Finally, this updated plan further recognizes that while poverty is not unique to Louisiana, the mix of historical economic factors pose enormous burdens. These burdens, however, cannot be resolved by any governmental agency in Louisiana. The resolution requires private investments and individual initiative.

## Summary of Initiatives

### **Goal 1 – Advance the Productivity and Economic Competitiveness of the Louisiana Workforce**

**Objective 1.1: Work with other regional partners to improve the employability and productivity of Louisiana Delta residents.**

#### Strategies

1. Louisiana’s Local Development Districts will work with DRA to address employability and productivity issues on a multi-jurisdictional basis.
2. Louisiana’s investment strategy will be that of the DRA philosophy of building critical mass within its Delta parishes.

**Objective 1.2: Strengthen workforce and professional skills programs.**

#### Strategies

1. Conduct seminars and workshops for training providers.
2. Enhance the scorecard component of Louisiana Occupational Information System by communicating with training providers and/or government entities to encourage participation in the scorecard system.
3. Create a labor market information system that will provide information on training opportunities, available employment opportunities, job growth and demand projections and economic wage data.
4. Provide supportive services to businesses and job seekers through a network of workforce centers throughout the Delta parishes in order to develop a diversity skilled workforce with access to better paying jobs.

**Objective 1.3: Improve the health of the workforce within the Louisiana Delta parishes.**

#### Strategies

1. Louisiana will support the improvement of rural healthcare services utilizing Federally

Qualified Healthcare Clinics, mobile healthcare providers, and development of telemedicine facilities and services. This strategy will help to provide more primary health services throughout the Delta parishes.

**Goal 2 - Strengthen Louisiana's Physical and Digital Connections to the Global Economy**

**Objective 2.1: Advance the iDelta initiative.**

1. Louisiana's Local Development Districts (LDD's) will cooperate with DRA to implement Global Information System (GIS) systems. These systems will be compatible and used in planning and economic development activities in Louisiana.
2. Coordinate with the Louisiana Delta Initiatives and DRA to improve the awareness of all citizens and businesses in the Delta parishes of the value of technology to their economic future.
3. Louisiana will participate in support of enhancing distance education in all schools.
4. Louisiana will utilize local and regional career and business solutions centers to improve workforce development by providing access for all adults and enrolled youth to training in computer literacy, workforce skills, resume' writing and business practices relating to e-commerce.

**Objective 2.2: Support the Delta Development Highway System**

**Strategies**

1. Louisiana will work with DRA, the Federal Highways Administration, and the Federal Transit Administration to prioritize and seek funding for the planning and construction of the major corridors of the DDHS.
2. Louisiana will incorporate transportation improvements into its top regional economic development assets where they are located within the DRA designated parishes. As an example, Louisiana has allocated funds for transportation improvements for the Franklin Farm Mega-Site in Northeast Louisiana.

**Objective 2.3: Expand intermodal and multi-modal transportation needs and networks.**

**Strategies**

1. Louisiana will support the DRA multi-modal transportation plan.
2. Louisiana will promote funding, wherever possible, for creating new multi-modal facilities and expanding existing ones.

**Objective 2.4: Expand the region’s energy infrastructure and production capacity.**

**Strategies**

1. Louisiana will support planning and policies that increase the Delta’s capacity to produce, transport, and refine energy resources.
2. Louisiana will work with funding sources such as USDA, DRA and others to provide funds for alternative fuel development and production.

**Goal 3 – Create Critical Mass within Louisiana Communities**

**Objective 3.1: Enhance the quality of place of Delta Communities.**

**Strategies**

1. Louisiana will support downtown revitalization efforts through the use of the state Mainstreet Program, USDA Rural Business Enterprise Grant (RBEG) Program, and Federal Highways Enhancement Program.
2. Louisiana will conduct an evaluation of the housing stock within the DRA parishes.
3. Louisiana will support the construction of local/regional medical facilities within DRA communities.

4. Louisiana will work to protect the area’s environmental assets.
5. The Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism will support the development and marketing of local entertainment, recreation, cultural and tourism assets in the DRA communities.
6. Louisiana will support the development of “green” technologies throughout the Delta parishes.

**Objective 3.2: Promote innovation and diversification within local and regional economies.**

**Strategies**

1. Louisiana will develop a robust state strategy to capitalize on local and regional efforts to recruit and retain companies which employ advanced processes and technologies.
2. The State will assist existing business in adopting new technologies and processes.

**Objective 3.3: Support growth oriented entrepreneurship.**

**Strategies**

1. Louisiana will work with its partners and the

Small Business Development Centers to support entrepreneur education and training.

2. The State will support joint efforts to bring together entrepreneurs, potential investors, and service providers.
3. Louisiana will promote the use of venture capital to assist entrepreneurs.

**Objective 3.4: Foster local leadership.**

**Strategies**

1. Louisiana will continue to participate in the Delta Leadership Institute (DLI).
2. The State will continue to encourage DLI graduates to participate in DLI alumni networks and events.
3. Louisiana and regional partners will support local training initiatives.

**Objective 3.5: Build and augment basic infrastructure.**

**Strategies**

1. The State and its partners will continue to support the construction and extension of basic infrastructure and services in rural areas which show the potential to augment nearby growth areas.
2. Louisiana will use state, federal, local, and private investment to develop and improve

water and wastewater systems in distressed parishes in the DRA region. Louisiana will continue to support funding of projects where health and safety is in question, and it is believed that DRA represents an essential portion of the funding.

3. The state will continue to support the construction of the last mile infrastructure and transportation linkages to local economic development assets.