

IN IT TOGETHER

WHAT IS GULF COAST'S REGIONAL SCAN?

Since 2009, Gulf Coast has undertaken regular regional scans to learn what is happening in our region and what challenges face our community members, donors, and public and private partners. We rely on perspectives from these partners, backed with data, to establish regional priorities and generate ideas for action.

This 2023 scan relies on the input and ideas from over 65 community leaders representing public agencies, private businesses, community and philanthropic organizations, and residents. Over 50% of the participants engaged in this process had not previously participated in a regional scan and offered incredible new information and unique perspectives. Gulf Coast's partner networks were surveyed to gain additional feedback.

Regional Scans are a tool to articulate Gulf Coast's priorities and guide our funding decisions, but also provide community partners, government leaders, and philanthropists with intelligence to inform regional work.

How was this scan created?

65

conversation
participants

150

survey
responses

30k

discussion
notes

As Gulf Coast undergoes its own leadership transition, we continue to strive for regional impact by both addressing immediate needs and planning for transformative, longer-horizon initiatives.

This document summarizes our community's priorities. Priorities are identified by both how frequently they were raised as a critical issue by community partners and how likely and significant their impacts might be in the near future. We also recognize that there remain many foundational and crosscutting issues where progress and regional coordination continues to be a pressing need. Each priority has a plan statement as we continue to transform, together.

Your priorities are our priorities. Gulf Coast is committed to action across the range of issues facing our communities, and we are ready to lead, partner, and invest in innovative ideas and solutions. We invite you to join us in transforming our region.

Our Mission:

*Together with
our donors,
we transform
our region
through bold
and proactive
philanthropy.*

Our Vision:

*We envision
thriving
communities
with
opportunities
for all.*

Our Values:

*Integrity.
Leadership.
Collaboration.
Excellence.*



Affordable Housing:

Sustaining Our Workforce & Economy

These facts paint a difficult picture: the Sarasota community may not be able to sustain its essential workforce without a significant increase in the availability of affordable housing throughout the County.

- Between 2000 and 2022, the average home cost in Sarasota County increased more than **320%**.
- What had previously been a challenge for workers in restaurants and retail shops is now **increasingly affecting** social workers, educators, police and firefighters, nurses and caregivers.
- 56% of renters in Sarasota County spend more than **30%** of their income on their rent in 2021, meaning they are housing-burdened according to the US Department of Housing and Urban Development.
- Of these renters, more than half spend greater than **50%** of income on rent leaving very little for childcare, food, education, healthcare and other day to day essentials.

Sarasota County has the second-highest paying entry-level jobs [for first responders] in the State, but we still have job openings we can't fill. Once people see what houses and apartments are going for around here, they turn down the job."

"When you have an affluent city, you have to have some diversity [in housing stock] to be able to have a workforce that can commute. A server at [a luxury hotel] may commute 1 hour and 45 minutes to get to work."

OUR PLAN. Gulf Coast, in partnership with local governments, housing providers, employers, funders, and other community leaders advocates for adopting and implementing the current recommendations of Sarasota County's Affordable Housing Advisory Committee, particularly exploring the creation of a local affordable housing trust fund.



Water Quality & Access to Green Space

The Gulf Coast’s natural environment contributes to our quality of life, supports our public health, creates a vibrant local economy, and fills us with awe at the world around us. During the pandemic, these resources became all the more valuable to us as we looked to our open spaces for ways to maintain our mental and physical health and spend time together safely.

OUR PLAN. Gulf Coast plans to preserve and steward environmentally-significant lands and to focus on water quality by advocating for revisions to stormwater facility maintenance and utility assessment fees (waterqualityplaybook.org).

- Over the past 60 years, red tide blooms along Florida’s west coast have **increased in frequency, duration, and severity**, and data from the Federal Emergency Management Agency has shown similar trends in coastal flooding events. (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, 2022)
- Sarasota County’s population grew from 12,440 in 1930 to **464,223 in 2023**. Natural landscapes have given way to residential, commercial, agricultural, and industrial land uses – increasing the amount of nutrients flowing into waterways, while decreasing the capacity of the natural environment to remove them.
- Population growth requires us to remain united around the 3 goals of nutrient management: **Reduce, Remove, and Sustain** through science, policy, and education.

Protecting and restoring our natural environment is one of the most important things we can do to take care of our region’s greatest asset and maintain and improve the quality of life for future generations.

“There is no tourism [in the Gulf Coast] without water quality.”

“Water quality investments in County have been strong – thanks to the Foundation’s Water Quality Playbook – but regional and state investments need to step up, along with community support [for the next generation of environmental management projects]”

Mental Health



While the COVID-19 pandemic is largely behind us, its ongoing effects on mental health and well-being have persisted, exacerbating issues that were already present.

- A 2019 Community Health Assessment for Sarasota County found that Sarasota residents reported **worse mental health conditions** than the State, with 7 days out of the past 30 impacted by poor mental or physical health compared to 6 days for the state.
- In 2019–2020, over **1,000,000** adults in Florida reported needing, but not receiving, mental health treatment, and 51.9% cited cost as the barrier. (Florida Commission on Mental Health and Substance Abuse Legislative Report, 2023)
- In 2022, the Safe Children Coalition of Sarasota County saw a **dramatic increase** in the number and duration of stays at its Youth Shelter, with demand being driven not only by an increase in mental health needs for children, but also due to parents and caretakers being unable to care for their children due to their own mental health struggles.

Confronting the spectrum of mental health needs and challenges requires a networked approach of nonprofit resources, social services, and community leadership, with different sectors working in alignment to raise awareness, connect those in need to resources, and support care providers.

OUR PLAN. Guided by the Sarasota County Mental Health Needs Assessment Task Force Report, Gulf Coast plans to address system gaps for youth and their families while involving people with lived experience in the solutions.

[We must] create access to [support for] youth, families, communities who are being assaulted emotionally/physically/politically."



The preceding priorities will be the focus of Gulf Coast’s philanthropic efforts in the coming years. But, making progress on these three priorities requires a foundation of civility.

CULTIVATING RESPECTFUL CONNECTIONS

Empathy in every exchange, unity in every connection.

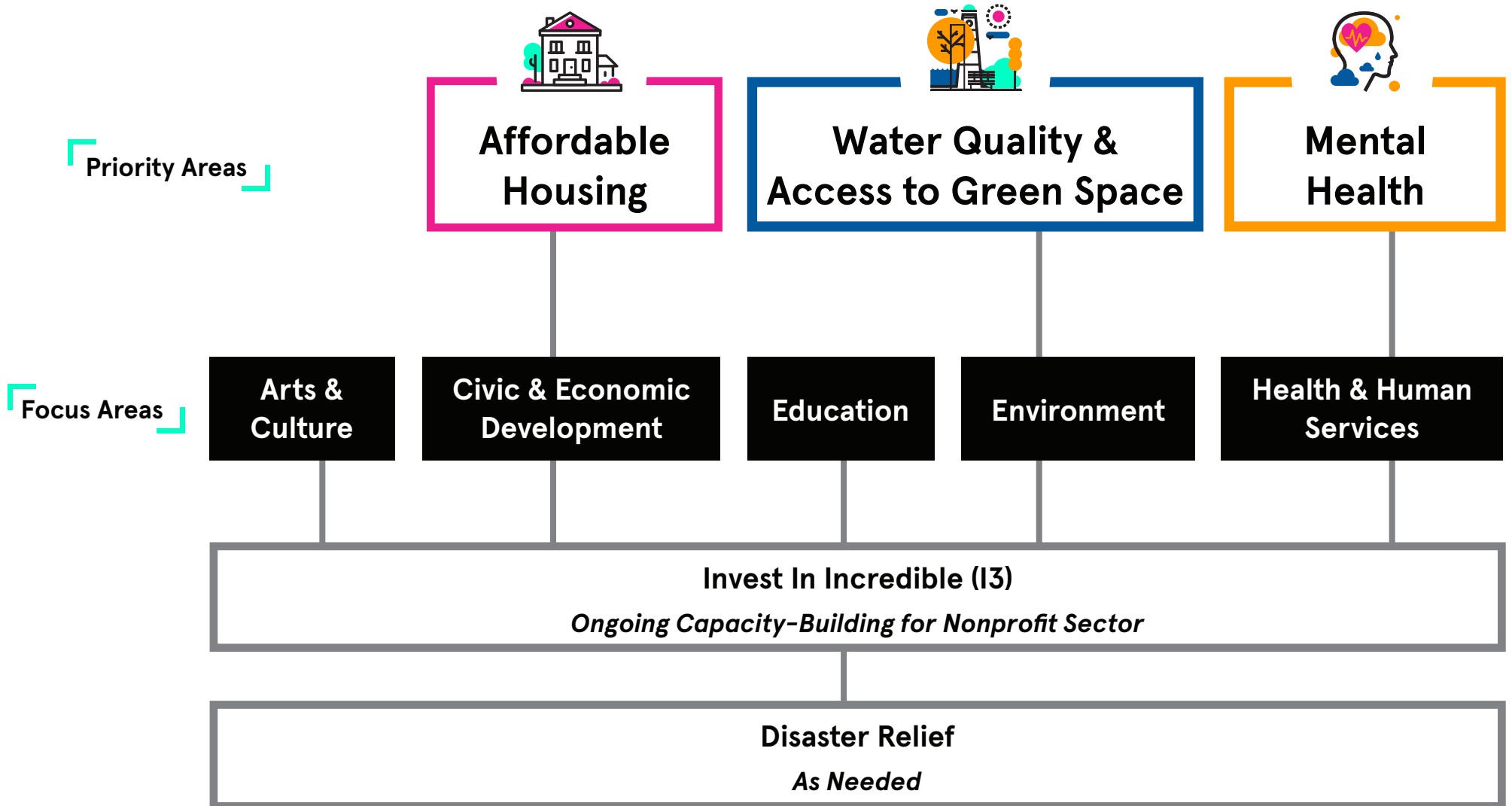
A civil discourse is the foundation on which we can engage with each other productively and effectively in order to make meaningful progress and build a better, stronger, and more welcoming region.

Throughout the Regional Scan interviews, focus groups, and surveys, we heard a constant refrain from the Gulf Coast community: public discourse has grown too polarized and too combative. There is a widely-held belief that this growing polarization has interfered with our community's ability to work together to solve problems and achieve common goals. This seems particularly shocking in the Gulf Coast, where a shared sense of civic pride and a spirit of cooperation have been cornerstones of our approaches to designing public policy and pursuing community service work for decades.

To break through this polarization, the region must commit to a practice of restoring civil relations. We must remember that we are all members of the same community, and while we may disagree with each other, we all want a region that is safe, sustainable, thriving, and respectful. The public sphere is a place to share and debate ideas, to offer different perspectives that help us determine what solutions will most effectively meet the needs and priorities of the many – not the demands of the loudest. In all our work, we must foster civil discourse and recognize the humanity and dignity of all members of our community.

“ We must stop the focus on our differences and find those things that unite us... We must demonstrate how similar we all are in what we value.”

Gulf Coast is uniquely positioned to move the needle on our region's most pressing needs through our data-driven initiatives and projects. We take innovative approaches and invest in scalable solutions to lead regional transformation, but we need community support. Gulf Coast is committed to working with our donors and our partners in the public, civic, and private sectors to enact meaningful change and provide opportunities for all.





We will only be able to overcome these challenges if we face them together as a region. No single entity – public, civic, or private – can solve these problems alone. But if we work together, we can expand mental health services and reduce the stigma around receiving them, make housing more affordable so that it is available to the next generation of workers, and ensure that our natural environment is healthy and sustainable, so that we may keep the uniqueness of our region.