

# GULF COAST COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

## 2020-21 Regional Priorities

At Gulf Coast Community Foundation, we set an ambitious agenda for our philanthropic work by identifying critical trends and establishing priorities to transform our region. We refer to this priority-setting process as our “regional scan,” which we conduct every two years by researching and analyzing data to view long-term and emerging trends, and then enhancing that picture with the perspectives of a variety of community leaders. This process helps Gulf Coast prioritize regional issues and mobilize the resources and community partners to systemically address them.

Gulf Coast makes community investments in five broad funding areas: health and human services; civic and economic development; education; arts and culture; and the environment. Informed by our 2019 regional scan, below are the actions we aim to take and support this year through our strategic initiatives and responsive grantmaking. They are followed by the regional priorities we seek to address.

### OUR ACTIONS

#### Lead

- Encourage long-term visioning and strategic planning
- Foster innovative approaches and creative solutions
- Provide branding, communications, information, and education
- Fund exploration and advocacy to understand and redefine issues

#### Partner

- Engage business and community leaders
- Incentivize collaboration, cooperation, and consolidation
- Connect services across providers, clients, and needs
- Share information, data, and approaches across issues

#### Invest

- Scale successful programs to expand impact
- Bridge programmatic gaps
- Leverage investments and match funds
- Focus on implementation and performance

### REGIONAL PRIORITIES

Gulf Coast Community Foundation is committed to action across the range of issues facing our region. We look to our community, business, public, and civic partners to imagine new solutions, explore bold ideas, innovate novel approaches, and collaborate with new partners to make progress on these regional priorities. Gulf Coast will focus our community investments in programs, providers, and partners in the following critical areas:

- **Workforce housing** – More than 40 percent of households in Sarasota County pay 30 percent or more of their monthly income for housing. Housing is directly connected to transportation costs, challenges retaining essential workers, and limited opportunities for young and diverse residents. ***Addressing the housing imbalance requires regional leadership, innovative market solutions, and education and communications initiatives to reframe the problem and dispel myths surrounding housing.***
- **Mental health** – Among teens age 12-18, the rate of hospitalization for self-inflicted injuries has trended above the state average rate since 2014. Nearly 16 percent of Sarasota County adults report being diagnosed with a depressive disorder. At-risk and underserved populations face barriers to care including cost, access, transportation, and stigma. ***Regional partnership and support are needed to identify and close gaps in mental health support systems and to backfill lagging funding for treatment programs and services.***
- **Quality education** – Sarasota County public schools perform above state and national averages, but closing achievement gaps and improving educational outcomes for all students is critical. Continuing to leverage and coordinate across the region’s higher education institutions supports other regional priorities, including retaining skilled graduates and workforce development. ***While financial resources are generally adequate, regional partnership and leadership are needed to sustain innovative initiatives and foster creative approaches to learning.***
- **Economic diversification and workforce readiness** – Economic diversification is critical to develop a more resilient economic base that can weather downturns and respond to new market opportunities. Our region also must be able to recruit, train, and retain skilled workers to fill talent gaps and meet the needs of businesses. ***Shifting the region’s economic base away from traditional service, consumer, and tourist based sectors and toward creative and innovative industries continues to be a long-term priority. We also must continue to support programs and partnerships that train workers for the future and provide career pathways.***
- **Youth engagement** – The Gulf Coast region offers unique places to live, learn, enjoy, and work, but the places and spaces that make our region attractive to older generations are not necessarily the same for young professionals and working families. ***Leveraging successful partnerships that provide opportunities for internships, create entrepreneurial pathways, and support young professional organizations can help address this familiar issue, but leadership is needed to change fundamental issues such as housing, jobs, and community placemaking.***

- **Climate change and environmental quality** – Extreme weather and high-impact storm events are likely to worsen as the effects of a changing climate are increasingly apparent. Beach erosion and tidal flooding are already visible threats, and much of the region’s housing stock, destinations, and critical infrastructure are at risk. Meanwhile, the conservation lands, state parks, beaches, and wetlands of the region are economic drivers and perform essential natural functions. They also have an economic cost when they are out of balance. ***Leadership on climate change is needed most in order to mitigate risks, harden infrastructure, develop action plans, and implement studies already completed. Support for economic impact studies, mitigation efforts, and preventive programs can help improve environmental quality and enhance and steward unique natural assets.***
- **Criminal justice and rehabilitation** – The criminal justice system and the complex network of associated public, private, and civic programs and services are not always aligned with rehabilitation. Sentencing guidelines, legal costs, program limitations, funding constraints, or disconnects between service providers sometimes create a vicious cycle for individuals and families. ***Our region can better identify local gaps, expand successful programs already being deployed here, and support additional reform and systematic change at the federal and state level.***
- **Public and private leadership and civic engagement** – A common perception among community leaders is a lack of consistent leadership and implementation from elected officials. Participation rates during elections are improving, though just 9 percent of residents reported attending a public meeting. While 26 percent of Sarasota residents report volunteering through community service, this is just half the rate of the top mid-sized cities in the country. ***Partnerships that draw new voices into decision processes and develop the next generation of leaders are critical.***
- **Senior care** – Four of every 10 residents will be over 65 in 2030. Many seniors face issues of social isolation, vulnerability to natural disasters, retirement and financial insecurity, transportation barriers, and basic mental health and healthcare needs. ***Partnerships and support for programs that connect services across networks and that connect volunteers and donors to senior-care initiatives can help the region prepare for the future.***
- **Transportation and mobility** – Finding transportation should be easy, but it is increasingly becoming a barrier to accessing quality jobs, housing, healthcare, and other services and a regional disadvantage to attracting businesses and visitors. ***Supportive programs such as connected vehicle technology, micro mobility, active transportation, and transit-oriented development can address transportation needs, but these solutions require regional leadership.***