

# Stanford SOCIAL INNOVATION<sup>Review</sup>

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***Leadership Supplement***  
**FUSE Fellow Siobhan Foley**  
By Tina Barseghian

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## PROFILE:

# FUSE Fellow SIOBHAN FOLEY

BY TINA BARSEGHIAN

**I**n 2015, on the 10th anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans became the first city in the world to complete a comprehensive resilience strategy. Doing so marked the beginning of a new era for New Orleans—one in which the city is as actively engaged in its future as it is in responding to present challenges and celebrating its storied past.

As part of its strategy, New Orleans Mayor Mitchell Landrieu opened the Office of Resilience and Sustainability, and a year later, he brought in FUSE Corps Executive Fellow Siobhan Foley to develop the city's first Climate Action Strategy, working in conjunction with Deputy Mayor and Chief Resilience Officer Jeffrey Hebert and a wide range of stakeholders.

It was a critical moment for the city. By partnering in 2016 with FUSE, a fellowship program that places executive-level, entrepreneurial leaders with cities to increase capacity to work across sectors and develop actionable strategies to take on systemic challenges, New Orleans could start to make major strides toward its ambitious plan. And in July 2017, the Climate Action Strategy was officially launched.

Foley had many years of experience working on programs and educational initiatives to combat climate change in California, Oregon, and New York, and was drawn to the New Orleans fellowship because of the team's expertise in resilience, and because of Mayor Landrieu's leadership and commitment to the issue.

The strategy team's biggest challenge, at the outset, was to lay the groundwork for a holistic approach that connected systems, contextualized climate action, and focused on developing and supporting sustained community leadership. With that challenge front and center, Foley's first task was to reach out to stakeholders within local government agencies and throughout the community to glean a clear sense of the big picture. What did "climate action" mean to them? What did they know?

TINA BARSEGHIAN is the director of impact communications at FUSE Corps and has worked as a journalist, writer, and editor at NPR, IDEO, and O'Reilly Media.



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What did they need? Their answers would help the team identify an action plan and prioritize their activities.

Foley found that one primary message about climate adaptation in the city's overall resilience strategy had resonated: New Orleanians generally understood the importance of "living with water"—embracing the city's changing environment and adapting to effects of climate change, such as sea level rise and increased flooding. She learned, however, that they lacked a clear understanding about the critical connections between climate change and energy, transportation, and waste, and their ability to take action to help slow climate change.

### A HUMAN-CENTERED APPROACH

To communicate those connections, Foley, Hebert, and other team members drafted a strategy that was clear and direct, and focused first on framing the city's challenge and current

systems and resources, and then on shifting the values in the system and the behaviors they encourage, and finally on identifying specific ways that people could engage with these issues to effect change. They were intent on making sure that the strategy would use a voice and tone accessible to anyone, no matter their existing understanding of the issues. To that end, they designed easy-to-grasp, visual representations that clearly depicted risks to the city and city systems—energy, water, transportation, and waste. Their goal was for the strategy itself to be a learning tool as well as a road map for action.

"Cities like New Orleans are critical in leading action against climate change, as we are a city on the frontlines of its effects," Foley says. "And with such a rich culture and history, connecting our action on climate change to our culture is critical to our success."

To encourage behavior change, the team is partnering with local arts and culture organizations, nonprofits, and neighborhood groups to engage residents and visitors. They want to be sure that climate action and community preparedness become part of the city's cultural identity and cultural expression. To ensure that equity remains as much a focus in implementation of the strategy as it was in developing it, they have also partnered with the Greater New Orleans Foundation to engage subject-matter experts, residents, and local businesses to delve into the strategy and develop detailed approaches to achieve its goals through human-centered design workshops.

Foley, Hebert, and the team were strategic in what they prioritized. Waste represented only a small part of the city's greenhouse gas pollution, but the team's early research revealed that it was an important issue in the community. In a city known for its cocktail culture and festivals, residents and visitors alike regularly point out that glass is not recycled, food waste is not composted, and mounds of Mardi Gras beads go to landfill. The city reinstated some curbside recycling after Hurricane Katrina, and the team felt that reducing waste in the coming years would help demonstrate that every person's actions can make a difference. What's more, the mayor's office has greater control over the city's waste-disposal activities than it does, say, in effecting change in energy and transportation systems, where it relies heavily on leadership from other elected officials and agencies. This meant that decisions could be made relatively quickly, and action could soon follow.

To that end, Foley partnered with Cynthia Sylvain-Lear, the city's director of sanitation, to

engage a broad array of businesses, nonprofits, residents, and community groups to assess the barriers to and benefits of increased recycling and composting. The group is working to formulate a plan to build a better recycling ecosystem—seeking to increase participation rates along with business and job opportunities.

## **DIVERSE SKILLS, COLLABORATIVE APPROACH**

Foley's background helped shape how she approached developing and implementing the city's first climate action strategy. A key piece of the puzzle was to connect the right people to each other, to find and tell the right stories, and to build capacity in the community for the work, which is both an urgent need and a long-term endeavor. To do this, Foley first connected with her colleagues in the city's Office of Resilience and Sustainability to shape an approach for climate action that would build upon that work.

Foley used her skills and background in strategic communications, social marketing, and community education to interview a wide range of stakeholders, to convene the key stakeholders, and to make connections among their areas of focus to weave the connections and find the stories. By taking this approach, Foley was able to quickly learn about the city's energy, waste, and transit systems, and identify aspects that were less understood by stakeholders and most connected to climate-change effects. These skills also helped her develop relationships with private sector partners and work with colleagues in the city and throughout the community to build a narrative for the work and secure resources to help spark action.

Importantly, her experience and skills complemented those of her FUSE host champion Jeffrey Hebert. Hebert's knowledge of the city shaped the scope of the work, and his background in urban planning and resilience brought in the necessary expertise to connect the team to best practices in other cities and to give feedback on New Orleans' strategy, with emphasis on equity, social connection, and community activation in implementing the strategy over time.

"We are working with dozens of local companies and organizations to collect and use critical information about our energy, transportation, and waste systems, and engaging hundreds of community leaders on the issues," says Foley. "As a result, we're much better prepared to help all New Orleanians take action on our climate action goals in the coming years. I'm excited to work with FUSE and the city for a second year to get under way with implementation." 

## **PROFILE:**

# **Oakland Mayor LIBBY SCHAAF**

**BY JEANINE BECKER**

 Oakland, Calif., Mayor Libby SchAAF's career wound its way through multiple sectors, starting when she was an attorney at the city's largest law firm, always seeking a way to make an impact. While SchAAF worked as a litigator, she and her mother launched Oakland Cares, a volunteer program providing busy professionals with one-shot volunteer opportunities.

Then, during one of SchAAF's own volunteer experiences with Oakland Cares—tutoring children at a local school—she hit a tipping point. When Nathan, a 9-year-old boy she was tutoring, ran across the gym to greet her with a hug, she recognized that her real joy was in public service. SchAAF decided to leave the law firm to start a centralized volunteer program for the Oakland Unified School District.

When searching for her next position, SchAAF received a dream job offer to be a nonprofit program officer. At the same time, in the course of speaking to her network about her passions and interests, she became aware of another opportunity: to serve as a legislative aide to the president of the Oakland City Council, Ignacio De La Fuente.

SchAAF was torn—the positions would take her down very different paths—but her love of her native Oakland and the idea of working with the City Council was just too intriguing. In addition, the job would utilize what she enjoyed most about her legal background: the ability to analyze and craft policy solutions.

So SchAAF made the pivot into government work. "What I love about the government is that you have both the privilege and the responsibility to look at the bigness, the comprehensiveness, and the interconnectivity of all of the issues that you care about. It's hard sometimes because you have to make the tough choices, you have to analyze the

trade-offs, but it also is very empowering because most problems are complicated, and they involve many levers in order to make meaningful change."

SchAAF committed to the public sector, successfully running for Oakland City Council in 2010, and then in 2014 being elected as Oakland's 50th mayor. With her election, many people approached SchAAF with their personal vision and their particular program for her to champion.

Oakland School Superintendent Antwan Wilson described his vision for more and bigger college scholarships and persistent support based on Future Centers, an in-school program pioneered in Denver, offering students guidance through the college application and financial aid process, and access to scholarship opportunities.

School Board and City Council members approached SchAAF as well, proposing to replicate a kindergarten-to-college initiative with roots in San Francisco that encourages college aspirations, removes barriers to saving for college, and starts family savings earlier by providing every child in kindergarten a savings account with \$50. (While the city sponsors the initial contribution, local businesses, corporate and philanthropic foundations, and individuals provide additional funds and matching incentives for increased savings.)

The Walter & Elise Haas Fund proposed a Brilliant Baby program offering combined financial support and coaching for families with babies born into poverty.

## **LAUNCHING OAKLAND PROMISE**

And then, as SchAAF puts it, "it suddenly came to me: All of these individual good ideas were components of a comprehensive great idea."

With that realization, the bold vision for Oakland Promise was born. Launched in 2016, the comprehensive initiative aims to triple the number of college graduates from Oakland within the next decade by offering an interrelated series of programs that provide students

JEANINE BECKER is the founder and managing director of Co-Lab Leadership Group. She hosts the podcast On Purpose Together, sharing stories and insights by and for leaders who leverage collaboration for impact. You can find an in-depth interview with Mayor SchAAF and other Oakland Promise collaborators on the podcast.