



# Greater New Orleans Inc.

## Overview

Greater New Orleans Inc. is a new regional economic alliance in southeast Louisiana. It is the result of a year of work by regional business leaders to reshape the region's business-civic landscape.

Greater New Orleans Inc. (GNO Inc.) officially merged the functions of the New Orleans Regional Chamber of Commerce and Metro Vision Economic Development Partnership on January 1, 2004. The selection of the new group's President and Chief Executive, Mark Drennen, was announced just over a month later.

The birth of GNO Inc. had been in the works since the departure of the Regional Chamber's Chief Executive in early 2003. Business leaders of the Chamber and Metro Vision — partner organizations that had grown apart — identified the need to jumpstart regional business-civic leadership. Their solution was to create one synchronized group of business leaders organized around job creation. More specifically, they launched a campaign to add 30,000 net jobs in the region with \$1 billion in payroll.

As the new organization gets underway, its top regional priority is job creation. Its other priorities are workforce development and public policy.

## Regional Priorities

GNO Inc.'s major regional priority is a campaign to create 30,000 jobs with a payroll of \$1 billion over five years. Three of GNO Inc.'s business leaders chair the 10-parish initiative, which is officially called the "Campaign for 30,000 Jobs: A Five Year Initiative of Greater New Orleans Inc." GNO Inc.'s co-chairs launched a \$15 million fundraising campaign to support the project in January 2004. The group has already received commitments of nearly 85 percent of the total. In addition to raising the money, GNO Inc. is contributing half of the staff to implement the initiative.

The Campaign for 30,000 Jobs is a cluster-based approach to job creation. GNO Inc. identified eight clusters as the best bets for job creation: ship building, information technology, biotechnology, food manufacturing, maritime services, energy, creative services and healthcare.

## ORGANIZATIONAL SNAPSHOT

### Type of Organization

Primarily led by companies or employers

### Unit of Membership

Company/organization

### Number of Members

2003: 1,500

1998: 1,800

### Membership by Company Size

Small Companies: 80%

Mid-sized Companies: 15%

Large Companies: 5%

### Dues Determined by

Company revenue

### Annual Dues Paid by

Largest Member Companies: \$200,000

Smallest Member Companies: \$330

### Annual Operating Budget

2003: \$500,000 to less than \$1 million

1998: Less than \$500,000

### Staff Members (FTE)

2003: 26

1998: 50

### Board Members

2003: 50

### Regional Priorities

Job Creation, Workforce Development, Public Policy

## FROM IVORY TOWER TO WALL STREET POWER

**A new fund opened up by GNO Inc. provides researchers with seed money to move toward early stage research for commercialization. This “proof of concept” fund is a partnership with the Louisiana Technology Council. Researchers coming out of the university system with a specific deliverable in mind can access up to \$10,000 to get their ideas from concept to reality. The goal is to commercialize ideas and provide potential job growth and economic development for the area. GNO Inc. provided \$100,000 of initial funding for this fund.**

GNO Inc. has organized business-led groups to create jobs in each cluster. Twenty-six full-time staff persons from GNO Inc. provide technical assistance and guidance on data, workforce issues, and public policy issues for each cluster.

GNO Inc. is also running a national image campaign in conjunction with some of the cluster initiatives. The goal of the image campaign is to sell the Greater New Orleans brand as an emerging center of business innovation and entrepreneurship and to dispel misperceptions about doing business in Greater New Orleans. GNO Inc.’s marketing efforts with biotechnology are an example. Staff members are working with half a dozen journalists and a site selection consultant, Developers Councilors Inc., to re-brand the biotech image of the region. They are highlighting the region’s existing biotech companies and Tulane University’s role as a national storehouse for adult stem cell research.

Closely linked with the job creation priority is workforce development. Over 18,000 vacancies exist in healthcare, manufacturing, and film and video due to a skills mismatch between what employers need and existing labor force skills. GNO Inc. is working with key industry sectors to implement regional strategies which align the needs of industry and workforce systems and resources. In healthcare, GNO, Inc. played a leadership role in addressing a shortage of nursing and allied health professionals. This was achieved through the implementation of a plan that resulted in first year funding of \$2 million for expansion of healthcare training and feasibility development and the targeting of \$70 million in state incumbent worker training funds.

Other priority initiatives of GNO, Inc. include a unified regional advocacy of \$100 million in funding for Northrop Grumman to retain and expand the state’s largest employer with 7,000 jobs; retention of SCP Pool, the country’s largest distributor of pool equipment, which prompted the development of a proposed state business tax reform agenda; and the expansion of 90 jobs at Trinity Yachts by securing state funding for facility expansion.

### Structure and Operations

The New Orleans Regional Chamber and Metro Vision merged to refocus the activities of the two organizations, solidify the voice of the business community, and bring in the parish chambers and business councils under one tent. It was also an opportunity

for the Chamber and Metro Vision to share staff and connect more effectively with the other chambers and economic development organizations around the region.

The merger will change the membership base. GNO Inc. will place less emphasis on member services such as group healthcare and business-to-business networking, services which are often the lifeblood of small business-based chambers. GNO Inc., in turn, will emphasize issues critical to the well-being and growth of the region as a whole, such as the Campaign for 30,000 Jobs.

Membership at the Regional Chamber was in decline before the birth of the new organization — it had dropped from 1,800 to 1,500 over a five-year period. Leaders of GNO Inc. express optimism that a focused agenda and re-engaged business leadership will boost membership.

Besides changes in membership, GNO Inc. also changed leaders. The organization announced on February 11, 2004 that Mark Drennen would take over for acting CEO and President Barbara Johnson, ending over a year in which it had been without a permanent leader. Each parish has representation on the Board of Directors.

GNO Inc. will continue to examine how it structures its parish-based business councils, a system that was adopted under the Regional Chamber. The business councils were a way to organize businesses by parish, and they often included a strong contingent of small business.

GNO Inc. has raised 80 percent of its current \$15 million fundraising campaign goal. The Regional Chamber's 2003 operating budget was between \$2 million and \$5 million.