BGR has always worked with forward momentum. We anticipate problems and innovate solutions. We monitor the constant evolution of local government public policy and respond with reframed and updated research. We stay in front of decisions and guide outcomes. It is our public service to remain on guard for public policy developments, always looking ahead for ways to improve local government.

But there were moments in 2017 when BGR paused for the sake of self-assessment and continuous improvement. We gathered to contemplate our mission, evaluate our effectiveness and assess better ways of doing and delivering our work. When we emerged from this exercise, our daily execution had a slightly different cadence. We were invigorated by a plan for doing what we’ve always done in better, more modern, more engaging ways. The potential for higher return on our programmatic work is exciting to us.

We have already showcased some of our new strategies. We’ve come to life on social media, condensed our reports to a single summary page, packaged our findings in infographics, launched The Daily Dispatch and toasted public policy with evening cocktails at a PubPolicy event. And this is just a sampling of the bigger vision.

We have more in store for 2018. We’ve doubled the size of our research team and will increase our output. We will work to make our recommendations, and the reasons for them, more visible, accessible and easily understood. We plan to use more effective messaging to reach a broader citizen base. We will launch a new website that facilitates a better understanding of us and our library of work. We will educate community groups about our recommendations so they can advocate for them. We will engage our membership more frequently, and the public too, with a variety of opportunities for discussion, questions and answers on key policy issues.

But our research and analysis will not change from the standard of excellence we set decades ago and have maintained ever since. Our reports will remain distinctive for their relevance, accuracy, thoroughness and objectivity, and for their potential to serve as a catalyst for change to improve the function of local government.

As the following pages demonstrate, BGR is solidly here to soldier on in furtherance of efficiency, effectiveness, accountability and transparency. Join us as we continue to look forward, providing with each report an objective basis for optimism in local government’s ability and opportunity to improve.

Amy L. Glovinsky
President & CEO
It is my privilege to serve as Chairman of the BGR Board during this remarkable time of organizational growth. Certainly, BGR has set and raised the mark on excellence in public policy research and analysis. To confirm that standing, BGR has decades of national and local recognition as a leading voice in our regional policy dialogue.

For 85 years, BGR has been a trailblazer. It has charted the course for improved local government many times over. From public education to levee districts to assessors to pensions, and many topics in between, BGR’s reports have pointed policymakers in the direction of reform. And in a role not nearly as visible, BGR vigilantly monitors local government to identify problems, tailor solutions, and educate citizens and policymakers alike as they work toward better functioning local government.

What I have observed over the past year is a contingent of engaged, enthusiastic and dedicated Board members safeguarding BGR’s historic excellence while embracing a vision for enhanced organizational effectiveness. The Board just completed a comprehensive strategic planning exercise, which yielded an action plan that sets in motion a series of enhancements to BGR’s work. For example, BGR intends to deepen its understanding of key policy issues by obtaining broader and more diverse input on potential research topics. BGR intends to communicate its work in a way that makes it more accessible to the fast-paced environment to which it is delivered. BGR intends to become better engaged with community groups to educate them on BGR recommendations and encourage advocacy for results. BGR is dynamic right now, making its way to a very current mode of fulfilling its time-tested mission.

The Board’s work this year positions BGR for decades of continued success in terms of effectiveness as well as financial sustainability. BGR is on sound financial footing owing largely to the foundations, corporations and individuals who constitute its base of support. BGR’s members – both longstanding and new – recognize that BGR is essential in our community for its nonpartisan work on critical policy issues. And BGR is now reciprocating that recognition by honoring our members in multiple ways that reinforce BGR’s appreciation for the support that enables its work.

I extend my gratitude to the BGR Board and to the many BGR members who remain engaged and supportive of BGR’s mission for more effective local government. I thank the BGR staff for its relentless pursuit of solutions to some of our most complex public policy problems. I look forward to another year of service to a remarkable organization.

Hardy B. Fowler
Chairman
ABOUT BGR

OUR MISSION

The Bureau of Governmental Research is a private, nonprofit, independent research organization dedicated to informed public policy making and the effective use of public resources for the improvement of government in the New Orleans metropolitan area.

WHO WE ARE

BGR is an objective resource on local public policy. Since our founding in 1932, we have monitored and analyzed government policies, structures, finances and processes to identify critical issues requiring best-practice problem solving. BGR uncovers facts, frames issues and recommends solutions.

BGR transcends administrations and politics. We are governed by citizens and not part of, or controlled by, any government body. Our financial support comes from a mix of individuals, businesses and foundations. And our work remains independent of all of them. We are nonpartisan and do not endorse any candidates for public office.

WHAT WE DO

We have been a constructive voice in the local policy landscape for 85 years. During that time, we have issued more than 1,500 reports to improve government function. For decades, our work has laid the groundwork for government reform initiatives. We have a legacy of organizational excellence. The timeline below highlights some of the outcomes we have achieved.

BGR THROUGH THE DECADES

- **1930s**
  - Facts uncovered by BGR play prominently in the federal investigation of the Louisiana Hayride scandals.
  - BGR proposes a modern mayor-council form of government for New Orleans.

- **1940s**
  - BGR research and recommendations help bring about the introduction of voting machines in Louisiana.
  - New Orleans implements BGR recommendations to reorganize its administration and police department.
  - BGR research leads to the creation of New Orleans’ civil service system.
  - Entire BGR staff is loaned to the State of Louisiana to prepare its first modern budget.

- **1950s**
  - BGR drafts the constitutional amendment for New Orleans home rule; BGR leads the preparation of the City’s charter.
  - BGR fosters formation of the Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana to address statewide issues.

- **1960s**
  - BGR study lays comprehensive foundation for preserving the Vieux Carré.
  - BGR assists St. Bernard Parish home rule charter efforts.

- **1970s**
  - BGR conducts a study of facilities and operations at Audubon Zoo; Audubon implements the recommendations for more efficient recordkeeping.

- **1980s**
  - Entire BGR staff is loaned to the State of Louisiana.

- **1990s**
  - New Orleans government implements BGR recommendations for more efficient recordkeeping.

- **2000s**
  - BGR research and recommendations help bring about the introduction of voting machines in Louisiana.

- **2010s**
  - New Orleans implements BGR recommendations to reorganize its administration and police department.
  - BGR research leads to the creation of New Orleans’ civil service system.
  - Entire BGR staff is loaned to the State of Louisiana to prepare its first modern budget.
A STRATEGIC VISION FOR A STRONG FUTURE

Throughout 2017, BGR engaged in strategic planning to improve its effectiveness. At the conclusion of the exercise, BGR committed to a 5-year strategic vision and correlating action plan to address organizational behaviors in key areas, including communication and messaging, citizen and community engagement, diversity, implementation and impact, member services and performance measurements.

We have already begun to realize some of our strategic planning goals, and we are poised to quickly accomplish several more. We enter 2018 with a renewed commitment to the dynamism and innovation on which the organization was founded. BGR is committed to excellence and positioned for a strong future.

- Modernizing the City’s planning process.
- BGR adopts BGR ways to improve the process.
- BGR engages in strategic planning to improve its effectiveness.
- BGR documents political influence, sparking reform of professional services contracting by local governments.
- BGR professional services contracting model forms the basis for major reforms to City contracting.
- Civil Service Commission amends department rules to increase managerial flexibility and improve employee evaluations, largely consistent with BGR recommendations.
- BGR shines light on misinterpretation of pension benefit formula for New Orleans firefighters, potentially saving more than $1.2 million a year over the course of the next few decades.
- BGR’s reporting on Orleans Parish school facilities and finances lead to changes to improve transparency and accountability.

70s

80s

1990s

2000s

2010s

- BGR adds $3.5 million to New Orleans revenues by uncovering errors in motor vehicle sales tax distribution.
- Following BGR recommendations, New Orleans institutes a long-term capital improvement planning process.
- Pre-Katrina, BGR analysis informs the debate over the Sewerage & Water Board’s proposed privatization of water and sewer operations.
- Post-Katrina, BGR research fuels movement to consolidate the seven Orleans Parish assessors.
- BGR reports on New Orleans’ land-use decision making, neighborhood participation and proposed charter amendments provide a foundation for reform.
BGR’s program of work consists of two primary components: (1) monitoring local government; and (2) public policy research and reporting. These components inform one another and sustain the cycle of our work.

MONITORING LOCAL GOVERNMENT

During 2017, BGR monitored more than 70 government entities. We regularly review meeting agendas, observe meetings when agenda items warrant closer inspection, and capture significant developments for further discussion and analysis.

Monitoring helps BGR stay abreast of current issues, identify new issues and understand the dynamics that affect decision-making. Monitoring allows BGR to craft a highly relevant annual work plan. It also allows us to sound the bell when a government entity has strayed from the tenets of effective government.

PUBLIC POLICY RESEARCH & REPORTING

Objective, nonpartisan public policy research is BGR’s hallmark. Our reports externalize BGR’s daily work and inform the citizens, decision makers and the media about policy issues that are significant to the New Orleans metropolitan area. Reports released during 2017 include:

Beneath the Surface: A Primer on Stormwater Fees in New Orleans. This report recommends that the Sewerage & Water Board and the City consider a stormwater fee as a potential source for drainage system funding. BGR cautions that any fee proposal must go hand-in-hand with a review of the accuracy of the drainage system’s financial requirements and clear justification for all proposed expenditures. The report’s significance escalated with the August 2017 drainage system failures.

Paying for Streets: Options for Funding Road Maintenance in New Orleans. This report explores ways to fund the preventive maintenance ($30-35 million per year) necessary to safeguard the City’s $2 billion, once-in-a-lifetime capital investment in the street network. Paying for maintenance would not necessarily require new taxes. One of the report’s most striking findings is that the street network itself generates impressive revenue – more $50 million per year at the beginning of 2017 – but none is reinvested in streets.

On the Ballot. In 2017, BGR informed voters on ballot propositions in five separate reports for Jefferson and Orleans parishes: (1) the proposed renewal of a property tax for Jefferson’s public library system; (2) two property tax renewals for Jefferson’s public transit system; (3) three property tax renewals for Orleans Parish public schools; (4) a new property tax proposed by the Jefferson Parish School Board to increase the pay of teachers and other employees; and (5) a proposed amendment to establish the Savings Fund of the City of New Orleans in the City’s home rule charter.
An Open Letter to the Louisiana State Legislature on Nonprofit Property Tax Exemptions. Before the 2017 session, BGR reiterated the need to align the state’s overreaching nonprofit property tax exemptions with national norms. BGR has been committed to this issue for more than two decades.

2017 Candidate Q&A Election Series. Before New Orleans’ fall municipal elections, BGR obtained and published the positions of mayoral and City Council candidates on important policy issues, including public safety, streets, drainage, taxation and contracting. We published seven separate reports and also released podcast interviews with both mayoral runoff candidates.

WORKING FOR RESULTS

BGR’s work to achieve results is an extension of our reports – a necessary post-publication implementation phase. Once a report is complete, BGR disseminates it through multiple channels. We make the report publicly available on our website. We distribute it by e-mail to more than 4,500 individuals. We also use social media, including Facebook and Twitter, to reach a growing number of followers.

We present information from each report in multiple forms. We have launched a new report feature, a one-page summary called InBrief, as a report companion. We are incorporating infographics, charts and tables into our reports and social media strategies. We invite members of the media to information sessions and educate them on our findings. We participate in radio, television and newspaper interviews.

As we work toward outcomes, we measure progress in the opportunities to present our work, media coverage and actual results. In 2017, BGR staff participated in an array of public education activities, all with the goal of increasing awareness of our work and laying the foundation for implementation. We made presentations to government entities and civic groups. We sat for broadcast interviews, participated in public forums, and provided information to journalists, policymakers, citizen groups and researchers. BGR appeared in more than 60 news items.

Sometimes implementation of BGR recommendations spans many years, even decades. But we don’t simply wait. We revisit issues with updated research and analysis. We release follow-up publications. We track the instances where policymakers adopt BGR recommendations.

Based on our most recent assessment, BGR recommendations have been implemented to some degree in 13 out of 16 major research areas during the past decade, with significant or full implementation in most cases. We are proud of the history of results, especially for the broader impacts that may result.
WHAT'S AHEAD IN 2018

WORK PLAN

People often ask: How does BGR choose the topics it researches? The answer is our work plan process.

Each fall, BGR begins preparing a work plan for the upcoming year. The process starts with the BGR research team identifying topics that have emerged from our government monitoring or from other research projects. We reference research ideas collected throughout the year from individual citizens who connect with us through our events, social media, email or simply by phone. We also contact community leaders and policymakers to inquire about potential work plan items.

We view this outreach on the front end of our work plan development as crucial to connecting BGR to current issues. In furtherance of this objective, we will host the inaugural President’s Gathering of Community Leaders in December 2017. This event launches a new BGR tradition to bring leaders of key nonprofit organizations into the ranks of our membership. Going forward, this event will occur twice a year.

At the start of each year, the BGR research team presents its work plan recommendations to BGR’s board of directors for approval. Throughout the year, BGR remains responsive to critical public policy developments and continually adjusts its allocation of time and personnel to areas of highest importance.

A PREVIEW OF RESEARCH PROJECTS IN 2018

At the time of this annual report, BGR remains in the early stages of developing its 2018 work plan. However, it has several research projects underway and targeted for completion in 2018. They include:

- An analysis of the progress made by the single Orleans Parish assessor toward implementing best-practice reforms in assessment administration.
- A primer on hotel taxes, with analysis comparing our local hotel taxes to norms and best practices.
- A report analyzing the relationship between the City of New Orleans and the Orleans Parish Sheriff’s Office in the context of the administration and funding of the parish jail.
OUR PROGRAM OF EVENTS

During 2017, BGR presented a variety of events, each with a unique purpose. But all share the goal of building an informed citizenry and fostering good government.

BREAKFAST BRIEFINGS

BGR’s Breakfast Briefings are public forums where citizens can hear from experts and decision-makers on major public policy issues. This series builds upon BGR’s core work of monitoring and reporting, while engaging about 150 citizens at each event. In 2017, BGR presented four Breakfast Briefings. They featured:

➔ Mitchell J. Landrieu, Mayor of New Orleans
➔ Brandy Christian, President and CEO, Port of New Orleans
➔ Kevin Doliole, Director of Aviation, Louis Armstrong New Orleans International Airport
➔ Johnny Bradberry, Governor’s Executive Assistant for Coastal Activities and Chairman of Louisiana’s Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority, jointly with Mark Davis, Senior Research Fellow and Director of the Institute on Water Resources Law and Policy and Director of the Tulane University ByWater Institute

PUBPOLICY

This year, we introduced our new PubPolicy event series with a focus on Beneath the Surface: A Primer on Stormwater Fees in New Orleans. We created the PubPolicy events to host an enlivened discussion about BGR’s research and recommendations in a casual setting. The PubPolicy on stormwater fees featured a tandem presentation by the report’s principal author and Laurens van der Tak, a water resources expert. The event attracted a number of decision makers, community leaders and concerned citizens, all of whom were able to contribute to the stormwater fee discussion.
On December 7, we held our 2017 Annual Luncheon, which is our sole fundraising event. The luncheon featured a panel discussion with Betsy Fischer Martin and Jonathan Martin. Ms. Martin is an Executive in Residence at American University and Emmy-winning former producer of Meet the Press. Mr. Martin is the national political correspondent for The New York Times and former National Review reporter. The esteemed media duo appeared together with Walter Isaacson, President and CEO of The Aspen Institute and renowned author. Mr. Isaacson moderated their discussion, Meeting the Press in an Era of Fake News, Partisan Politics and High-Stakes Elections.

Betsy Fischer Martin
American University

Jonathan Martin
The New York Times

Walter Isaacson
The Aspen Institute

Since 1994, BGR has given more than 150 awards at its biennial Excellence in Government Awards ceremony. The awards honor creative, dedicated public employees and extraordinary private citizens who have worked significantly to improve local government. BGR will host an awards ceremony in May 2018. We encourage the public to attend.

We also invite participation in our nomination process. The deadline for nominations is January 16, 2018, and anyone can nominate. Nominations are essential. They allow us to learn about and consider worthy award recipients. BGR accepts nominations throughout the Greater New Orleans Region, including Jefferson, Orleans, Plaquemines, St. Bernard, St. Charles and St. Tammany parishes. For more details on eligibility and to submit a nomination, visit bgr.org.

ANNUAL LUNCHEON

2018 EXCELLENCE IN GOVERNMENT AWARDS

Excellence In Government
AWARDS 2018
The Bureau of Governmental Research annually engages an independent certified public accountant to audit its financial statements. LaPorte CPAs & Business Advisors audited BGR’s financial statements for the fiscal year ended December 31, 2016, and issued an unqualified opinion. We provide below highlights of BGR’s audited financial statements.

BGR’s net assets grew by 23% from 2012 to 2016.

In 2016, BGR received $1.1 million of unrestricted revenue to fund its operations. BGR receives revenues primarily in the form of foundation grants and individual and corporate memberships, its Annual Luncheon fundraising event, and other sponsorships and gifts. In addition, it may elect to receive an annual appropriation from the BGR Endowment Fund, which it established in 2007.

In 2016, BGR spent $926,000 on its research staff and other program expenses, general and administrative costs, and fundraising expenses. More than three-quarters of 2016 expenditures – 76% – went toward programmatic expenses.
SUSTAINERS’ CIRCLE CHARTER MEMBERS ($25,000+)
BGR gratefully acknowledges the contributions of the 2017 inaugural class of Sustainers’ Circle members.

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THE 2017 MEMBERSHIP SUPPORT
BGR thanks the following members for their generous support in 2017.
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“We value tremendously BGR’s presence in our community. BGR contributes to a big-picture framework for effective government. They create a playbook that allows policymakers to execute on a higher level and citizens to have confidence that someone is working objectively on solutions to critical problems. BGR’s work is essential, and we are proud to support it.”

– Vanessa Brown Claiborne, President & CEO, Chaffe & Associates, Inc.

“BGR tackles complex issues with thorough research and presents them in a comprehensive yet accessible manner. This is a valuable service to both citizens and policymakers in the greater New Orleans area, particularly due to BGR’s independent, nonpartisan status.”

– Edgar L. Chase, III, BGR Board Chairman 1996-98 and Current Honorary Board Member

“I support BGR because its independent, nonpartisan and unbiased research and reports are an invaluable resource to our community. BGR is a force for good government and an important asset for the citizens of New Orleans and the surrounding region.”

– Melissa A. Gibbs, Business Development & SBE/DBE Outreach, Gibbs Construction

For an explanation of membership benefits at each member level, please visit bgr.org/membership.
There are many ways to stay in touch with BGR. Connect with us.

Visit BGR.org for information on how to join our membership ranks and email list.

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