

How 'think-and-do tank' Better Louisiana plans to achieve bold reforms

By Dillon Lowe



With an eye toward bold, systemic reform, two of Louisiana’s most influential advocacy groups—the Committee of 100 for Economic Development and the Council for a Better Louisiana—have merged to form a new entity: [Leaders for a Better Louisiana](#).

The new nonprofit, branded simply as Better Louisiana, arrives with an ambition befitting its name. Armed with the combined resources of C100 and CABL, the organization promises to be both a “think tank” and a “do tank” for the state—generating ideas, then executing on them.

But what drove two long-standing institutions with established identities to merge in the first place, and how exactly will the new entity function? Those involved say the move was more than just a rebrand. It was a strategic recalibration years in the making.

HOW IT HAPPENED

First, a primer.

Formed in 1992, C100 is a nonprofit that describes itself as Louisiana's "business roundtable." Its membership includes executives of companies both public and private as well as university presidents. It works to promote economic development and advocate for public policy that boosts Louisiana's competitiveness.

CABL, meanwhile, is a nonprofit formed in 1962 with a long-standing mission of "improving the quality of life for all citizens of Louisiana." It has built as much of a lasting legacy through its policy advocacy as it has through its signature Leadership Louisiana program, through which current and emerging leaders across a wide variety of sectors gain in-depth insight into the challenges facing the state and the ways those challenges might be overcome.

Though formalized in early 2025, the idea of a merger had been percolating for years. That's according to Adam Knapp, who served as C100's CEO and now holds the same title at Better Louisiana.

C100 and CABL had a history of collaborating on major policy initiatives—including the 2023 RESET Louisiana's Future campaign, which produced 55 influential policy recommendations across a range of issues—and stakeholders from both groups found themselves wondering from time to time whether they could accomplish more by joining forces.

"There were many conversations over many years about whether it would make sense to have these two organizations merge," Knapp says. "Those conversations were always what I would describe as 'high-level,' and they were never deeply pursued for a variety of reasons."

It wasn't until Knapp took the helm of C100 in November 2023 that the organizations' boards of directors formally started the merger conversation. Knapp and Barry Erwin, then CABL's president and CEO, had built a strong working relationship over the years and shared a similar vision for Louisiana's future.

Shortly after the formal conversation started, a third party was brought in to evaluate the potential alignment. Then, in the spring of 2024, a memorandum of understanding was

drafted to lay out how the two entities would become one. It took about six months for both boards to evaluate the process outlined in that MOU, but in the end, the green light was given.

“Our board decided we wanted to have a bigger impact, and when Adam took over C100, that was part of their goal, too,” Erwin, who now serves as Better Louisiana’s chief policy officer, says. “It was really just good timing. We had worked together a lot, and we were both thinking about the same thing.”

Chris Meyer, president and CEO of the [Baton Rouge Area Foundation](#) and a member of C100, sees the merger as a sign that Louisiana’s civic sector is evolving to meet the moment.

“I think it shows a lot of wisdom and humility for nonprofits to examine their missions and their effectiveness and realize that they would be stronger together,” Meyer says, “and I think it shows a lot of maturity as a state that we’re not working in silos, that we’re putting pride, ego and labels aside to get the mission accomplished.”

WHAT’S THE MISSION?

Better Louisiana may be a new organization on paper, but its operational blueprint draws heavily from the DNA of its predecessors.

At its core, the organization is out to drive change across the interconnected fronts of economic development, education, civic leadership, infrastructure and fiscal policy—all areas that C100 and CABL have long worked to influence in some capacity—in hopes of boosting Louisiana’s competitiveness and overall quality of life.

“We’re kind of in that camp of those who have looked at our outmigration numbers and our population loss,” Erwin says. “Though we’ve had a little uptick this past year, those are things that groups like ours need to prioritize. If we’re not growing, if we’re not creating jobs, if we’re not modernizing our economy, then we’re definitely going to fall behind. And we’ve already been falling behind over the past several years anyway.”

On the legislative side, Better Louisiana’s strategy is a focused one: Each year, the organization will identify one or two key priority issues to elevate in the eyes of lawmakers and the public. Those priorities will be informed by data, stakeholder input and the organization’s board.

In 2025, Better Louisiana is actively engaged on the issue of workforce development. Notably, the organization played a leading role in the passage of a bill—House Bill 533, sponsored by state Rep. Kim Carver, R-Mandeville—that creates a more accessible tax credit program for employers that provide work-based learning opportunities to students and youth workers. A [March report](#) by Better Louisiana shows Louisiana lagging other Southern states when it comes to the number of students participating in internship and apprenticeship programs. Gov. Jeff Landry signed HB 533 into law in late June.

“The idea is to have a way of thinking about the legislative session that’s aligned with the things we outlined in RESET and the strategic goals we set,” Knapp says. “We want to have one or two things that are our top priorities that we go and partner with a member of the Legislature on.”

While its public-facing policy work is more visible, much of Better Louisiana’s influence is exerted behind the scenes, through its people and its programs. Two legacy components of its predecessors live on under the new organization: the C100 executive group and Leadership Louisiana.

The C100 executive group—currently about 150 members strong, despite its name—will operate as a “distinct membership group” within Better Louisiana. The committee will continue to weigh in on key economic development issues, as it has for over three decades.

“C100 is a way to give leaders who want to be personally engaged in the work of improving Louisiana an opportunity to do so, regardless of background or party,” Knapp says. “Under the bylaws of Better Louisiana, the process for becoming a part of the committee is exactly the same as it has been for the past 30 years.”

Leadership Louisiana, CABL’s flagship leadership development initiative, will remain a core offering. Introduced in 1989, the program has more than 1,600 alumni, some of whom have now become C100 members. Under Better Louisiana, the initiative will continue to serve as a talent pipeline producing the state’s next generation of decision-makers.

“Coming into the merger last year, our chairs said [Leadership Louisiana] was a crown jewel of CABL,” Knapp says. “Demand to be a part of these classes far outstrips seats in these classes. That popularity is by virtue of how valuable it’s been for folks who have gone through it, who have gone on to become elected officials, judges, parish

presidents, school board officials and CEOs. It's really a proving ground to learn about the civic fabric of Louisiana. There's just nothing like it."

Looking forward, Knapp and Erwin say the ultimate goal is to help "unlock Louisiana's potential." In their view, that necessitates a smarter, more coordinated approach to reform—one that's informed by data, and one that delivers tangible progress.

Better Louisiana is currently working on a new data project that will combine metrics on how Louisiana stacks up against other states on key performance indicators with actionable policy recommendations. That report is expected to be delivered in early 2026.

URL: <https://www.businessreport.com/business/when-two-become-one-how-better-louisiana-plans-to-achieve-bold-reforms>