CIVIC AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IS GOOD BUSINESS

“Citizens engaged in their communities are vital, not just because engagement fosters trust in public institutions and legitimacy in public processes, but also because it is correlated to a strong educational system, a competitive workforce, and a dynamic economy.” --The Six Pillars of Florida’s Future Economy- Florida Chamber Foundation

Community engagement is good for business. A growing body of evidence, including corporate responsibility studies by the Federal Reserve, academics, and the private sector (including a-year study effort by Deloitte) supports this statement and suggest a clear correlation between robust economies and an engaged citizenry. Studies have shown that:

- Communities with active and robust civic engagement have less unemployment, more resilient local economies, and supportive multi-sector collaborative environments where the private, public and non-profit sectors solve difficult issues together;
- Individual businesses and their employees can profit from more active civic engagement as well, experiencing better business development, higher employee retention, and employee leadership training; and
- Companies reviewing resumes respond more favorably to individuals who volunteer. The unemployed who volunteer are more likely to get a job.

1 This was prepared by Bob Jones and Amy Kimball. The Florida Civic Advance (FCA) in its 2016-18 Strategic Directions plan seeks to expand the network of FCA partners to include faith-based community service institutions, more businesses and business associations, and community-based funding institutions. This concept paper is the first step in the FCA approaching business organizations and associations and inviting them to participate in the network.
In today's world of socially conscious consumers, most companies are aware that giving back to the community on a corporate level can be a big boost for business. But some organizations are going one step further by incorporating civic engagement and social responsibility into their company culture. Paid time off for charity work and company-wide volunteer projects are becoming more and more common as socially responsible firms encourage their staff to practice what they preach. The common thread is participation in and building of one’s community. It means improving the quality of life, making a difference, and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values, trust and motivation among people to give back and take action together. Elements of civic engagement include community service, volunteering and participation in groups, helping neighbors, connection to information and current events, connection to individuals and organizations, and involvement and citizen participation in local and state elections.

Community engagement is good business. More and more companies are contributing to civic life and encouraging civic engagement among its employees. Civic engagement and socially responsible corporate practices are moving to the mainstream for businesses across the country. At its core, civic engagement creates bonds among employees, encourages a value-based company culture, and increases the overall morale of the organization. Team building and leadership experiences give employees an opportunity to make an impact toward something they are passionate about without it coming at a cost at work, and helps employees see their challenges and accomplishments through a different lens.

Many companies in Florida have embraced a more proactive stance on civic engagement. For example, Wells Fargo leadership in South Florida made it a goal to give all employees the opportunity to serve their communities in a manner meaningful to them. Through identifying volunteer event champions throughout all lines of business and closing the Wells Fargo Branches early on Saturday, Wells Fargo engaged over 1800 team members at 58 sites over the 911 Weekend. Team members served at diverse projects from Boca Raton to Key
West. Many of these volunteers become longer term volunteer and board members for the
organizations they served or more episodic volunteers at other Wells Fargo sponsored
volunteer events organized by the South Florida Volunteer Chapter. Burger King, Starbucks
and Florida Power and Light have organized service days to help improve schools and other
community service activities.

Community Engagement in Florida needs Business. Support from the business
community is necessary to improve community civic health since solutions to community
challenges increasingly require cross-sector collaboration and partnerships among business,
government, the nonprofit, academic and philanthropy sectors. Corporate leaders also need
to help the business community throughout Florida think beyond a one-dimensional
approach to economic development and appreciate that quality of life issues, such as civic
health, are essential to retaining and attracting residents, businesses, and talented workers.

Florida stands to benefit more than most states from a better understanding of how to use
civic engagement to enhance economic opportunity, growth and development. It ranks 48th
of 50 states and Washington, D.C., in overall national measurements of civic standing. Out
of 51 surveyed large metropolitan statistical areas, Florida’s four major metropolitan areas
range in civic health rankings, from Jacksonville at 21st, to Tampa Bay at 42nd, to Orlando
at 46th and to Miami at 51st. Miami, which in some ways is a reflection of Florida’s and the
nation’s future with its increasingly diverse and growing population, faces profound
challenges that, if answered through cross sector collaboration, could provide measurable
strategies and demonstrate to the rest of the state and country how to better align civic
engagement and economic development approaches.

Florida communities will continue to need public, private and civic leaders who are able to
work effectively with all elements of their communities in crafting sound policies and finding
successful solutions to economic, safety and civic challenges. There is also increasing
evidence that through multi-sector collective impact initiatives\(^2\) citizens can improve their

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\(^2\) John Kania & Mark Kramer, “Collective Impact”, Stanford Social Innovation Review, Vol 73, Winter 2011. The authors set forth five conditions for collective success including: a common agenda; shared measurement systems; mutually reinforcing activities; continuous communication; and backbone support organizations. “Collective impact is the commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem. Collaboration is nothing new. The social sector is filled with examples of partnerships, networks, and other types of joint efforts. But collective impact initiatives are distinctly different. Unlike most collaborations, collective impact initiatives involve a centralized infrastructure, a dedicated staff, and a structured process that leads to a common
communities and facilitate community investment by taking stock of their civic health and working collaboratively together, across sectors and organizations, to pursue shared civic vision and solutions for specific community issues and challenges. Effective community collaborations that focus on identified shared civic and economic visions and key community challenges will need to expand in scope and effectiveness to produce positive civic impacts and address challenges among the growing and diverse communities throughout Florida. Social entrepreneurs powered by creativity and innovation can be harnessed to improve collaborative approaches to community engagement, social cooperation and civic advance.

**Florida Civic Advance and Business.** The Florida Civic Advance is very much about Florida’s future. It is about moving beyond widespread disengagement and division to build stronger communities and a better quality of life for all. The good news is that there are many Florida organizations in the public, business and non-profit sectors dedicated to strengthening civic life, and there is an abundance of good and innovative civic and community work being done in Florida communities. The bad news is that the connections between groups interested in civic improvement have been weak, and the good civic work being done in Florida is not well recognized, appreciated, or understood. In recent years many state organizations and leaders have been in dialogue about how to collaborate to help strengthen the civic health and capacity of Florida communities. The result has been the formation of new network, the Florida Civic Advance (FCA) in 2015. The Florida Consensus Center, based at Florida State University, has helped to guide the dialogue and formation of the FCA which includes 40 organizations in the network.

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3 See, [http://kresge.org/library/capital-and-collaboration-depth-look-community-investment-system-massachusetts-working](http://kresge.org/library/capital-and-collaboration-depth-look-community-investment-system-massachusetts-working). In 2013, the Boston Fed launched the Working Cities Challenge, a competition designed to incentivize cross sector leadership and collaboration to benefit low and moderate-income residents in these cities. The cross-sector effort was designed to increase through collaboration the scale, efficiency and impact of investments in Massachusetts cities of more than 35,000 people (excluding Boston), characterized by below-median family income and above-average poverty rates, which have been termed “Working Cities” by the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston.