A major purpose of the Florida Civic Advance (FCA) is to encourage and support innovation and improvement in civic life. This will require evidence-based practices based on a strong research foundation since, as Microsoft founder Bill Gates has said, “the way you get innovation is that you fund research and you learn the best facts.” This plan summarizes the research areas the FCA will seek to facilitate to get the best facts.

The research strategy of the Florida Civic Advance stresses collaboration with researchers, reflective practitioners, and others interested in civic improvement. Based on a study by the Florida Consensus Center for the Board of Governors of the Florida State University System, we estimate there are over a hundred scholars interested in expanding research on civic life. This research plan calls for the creation of a research network to review, focus, and increase research about civic life, facilitate information sharing, and create research partnerships. The proposed network will develop useful and user-friendly products that are described below. This will provide an unprecedented opportunity for researchers to work together and with those in communities in ways and to an extent not possible until now. Further, the proposed network can demonstrate how academic resources (from public and private higher education institutions) can make a collective and strong contribution to improving community life.

1. **THE FLORIDA CIVIC ADVANCE RESEARCH AGENDA**: One of the great challenges of civic research is that it is a very multi-disciplinary area of inquiry. For example, those who are concerned about civic life may come from such diverse fields as political science, public administration, community studies, civic education, community health, non-profit studies, criminal-justice, social work, anthropology, sociology, et al. So, one of the first challenges when scholars work together is to agree on common definitions, goals, and limits of inquiry. We propose this as one of the first tasks of the civic research network. Building on this task, we will create a shared civic research agenda that will clarify the following questions as well as others that we expect to be raised by network participants:

   - What are the most important questions about civic life in Florida communities?
   - What do we know about civic life in Florida generally and in particular communities?
   - What are the most important lessons and best examples of civic life in Florida?
   - What do we need to learn about civic life in Florida communities going forward?
   - How do we propose that such research be undertaken?

These questions will help guide the preparation of a Florida Advance Civic Research Agenda report. The report will include a literature review and survey among civic researchers in Florida, a parallel review of national and world-class research, and a survey among Florida public officials and philanthropic leaders. This report will help guide and promote research and learning about civic life in Florida communities. This report will also help community leaders focus on issues critical to their future. It will be useful to foundations, business, universities, and government in supporting civic research and development.
activities. It will also benefit faculty and students in suggesting topics for professional research, term papers, group projects, service learning activities, dissertations, and community partnerships.

2. **TOOLS FOR MEASURING FLORIDA CIVIC ADVANCEMENT**: The second research challenge of the Florida Civic Advance is to assure that there are adequate metric tools to access civic health and to help communities measure their condition and progress.

This is an important challenge since many measurements have been used in the last 40 years and there is sensitivity as to which indicators are most relevant to the unique diversity of Florida’s population, regions and cultures. Fortunately, the Florida Joint Center on Citizenship has done stellar work in assessing Florida’s civic health in studies in 2008, 2009, and 2011. In addition there is an opportunity to build on a recent national report taking stock of the experience in measuring and investing in civic engagement, social cohesion and social capital. The FCA supports progress in the development of Florida civic metrics that promote the development of tools and guidelines that can be used by local communities to assess their civic capacity, measure progress, and plan for future improvements.

3. **FLORIDA CIVIC SHOWCASE AND CASE STUDIES**: An important strategy of the Florida Civic Advance is to encourage others by reporting on some of the best models and successes of civic life in Florida. The FCA will draw upon the leadership of its partners such as Leadership Florida and the Florida League of Cities to identify these success stories. The Askew School of Public Administration at Florida State University, working with others, will study these cases and report them in case studies, special reports, and videos.

Annually, some of the best civic initiatives will be reported at the Florida Civic Advance Conference, on radio, television and online and in local and state media. Also, the FCA will provide webinars and leadership assistance to help Florida communities learn more about successful leaders and practices in other communities. Further, a FCA website will carry this information, but it will also include contact information about local leaders and FCA network partners willing to provide information, guidance, or consultation to other communities.

4. **SPECIAL ISSUE CIVIC RESEARCH PROJECTS**: Because of Florida’s rapid growth and diversity, there are many civic issues that deserve special attention. These include such challenges as engaging people who are older, transient, and immigrant; increasing inter-group cooperation; promoting civility; creating effective forums for citizen deliberation; discovering and reinventing ways for citizens to relate to government; increasing voter participation, volunteering and philanthropy; expanding multi-sector partnerships to address community needs; and discovering economic development models that are inclusive, collaborative, and sustainable. Beyond these research areas, the FCA is concerned about the effectiveness of citizenship education and the long-term impacts of student engagement. The Florida Civic Advance Research agenda will further clarify research findings, needs, and opportunities regarding these issues and ways to address them in the future.

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