



ECONOMY ANALYSIS

Active citizenry:

Greater civic engagement is a mark of Miami-Dade's growing sophistication

Civic engagement transforms communities through participation in social change and economic opportunity, involving a roster of citizens, foundations, businesses and nonprofits. The most prominent civic engagement foundation in Miami-Dade County is the Knight Foundation, which supports transformational ideas by promoting quality journalism, advancing media innovation, engaging communities and fostering the arts. The foundation works in 26 U.S. communities; Miami is one of eight with a resident program director and also is the site of its headquarters. An example of its support of Miami is its Knight Cities Challenge, held for the second time in 2015; last year's winner, floating laboratory Miami Science Barge, was granted \$300,000.

The Miami Foundation is also a major player, connecting civic leadership for community change. Its fundraising event Give Miami Day 2015, which raised \$7.1 million for more than 600 local nonprofits, has increased in fundraising feats by over a million dollars each year since its start in 2012. President and CEO Javier Soto tells Invest: Miami, "Miami is at an inflection point with regard to connection and attachment. Miami used to be a place where people came with the expectation that eventually they were going someplace else—either because this was a transient stop or because they were waiting for a change in government in their home country—or be buried somewhere else. That is changing today. There is a growing attachment to this community by people who were either born here or who have come here from outside, but who have no intention of leaving. That kind of attachment leads to greater civic engagement."

From this civic engagement in Miami-Dade was born social entrepreneurship, the use of business principles to achieve social change. Approaches to social entrepreneurship vary widely as 60 percent of all social enterprises are less than eight years old, according to



Social organizations like Camillus House provide services and job opportunities for struggling populations.

Harvard Business Review. The tech sector, for example, has benefited business and community engagement. Programs like Girls Who Code, sponsored by the Knight Foundation for \$500,000 through 2018, engage the community (in this case, advancing girls in a female-deficient field), provide long-term benefits to people and the economy by creating a stronger and more equitable workforce.

In addition, several private and public social enterprise initiatives have taken hold in Miami-Dade, empowering people and organizations to give back to the community. A county grant of \$450,000 funded EcoTech Visions in 2015, an incubator for 20 green businesses helping early-stage companies obtain capital and manage manufacturing. EcoTech offers co-working space, workshops and mentoring to companies like sustainable cutlery maker Earthware, natural sunburn soother and mosquito repellent producer Culito de Rana and electric motorcycle company Aeolus. Other social companies include Urban.Us, which invests in startups that improve city life, focusing on issues like water and energy efficiency and economic development, and HandUp, a website that connects donors to partner organizations to help the homeless. Meanwhile, the newly formed Community Justice Project is a Miami-based group of lawyers supporting racial and economic justice.

As the field continues to evolve, civic engagement and



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social entrepreneurship in Miami-Dade County will continue to be positively influenced by millennials, who show interest in their communities by volunteering and participating in nonprofit young professional groups and leadership development.

Another organization serving the less fortunate is Camillus House, which offers numerous programs and housing for those struggling with addictions, PTSD, homelessness, mental illnesses and more. At its 48-bed Beckham Hall facility, homeless people receive vocational and life skills education, and its Project Phoenix facility, which opened in January 2016, houses female victims of human trafficking. Camillus also partners with local organizations and the government. Camillus and the Downtown Development Authority jointly operate the DWNTWN Enhancement Team, offering maintenance and landscape jobs to the economically disadvantaged. Camillus started as a Cuban refugee shelter in the 1960s and its commitment to helping vulnerable populations continues in its expansion of its 14 county locations, says CEO Shed Boren. "Though Miami emphasizes its luxury offerings, we must recognize the need to improve the community by helping the less fortunate," he says.