

Orlando: Creating a sustainable network

A regional approach to the SDGs

Orlando, Florida has long been a leader in sustainable practices. What also sets the city apart is an unwavering commitment to regional collaboration for achieving the SDGs, a mission that became even more pressing when the COVID-19 pandemic erupted.

Orlando uses the SDGs as a framework for its development policies, and underpins this with a strong culture of collaboration, according to Chris Castro, the city's director of sustainability and resilience. Indeed, Orlando is the only North American city in our survey that partners with every level of government—from state to federal—as well as other actors to achieve its goals.

Setting up a regional collaborative

In 2018, Orlando approached the East Central Florida Regional Planning Council to work together on climate and resilience. The city mobilized several committees to bring forward a resolution for city councils in the region to pass to officially join the collaborative, called the East Central Florida Regional Resilience collaborative (or R2C).

To date, almost 40 government partners have joined, making it one of the largest resilience and climate collaboratives in the US.

“It's rooted in the triple bottom line of people, places, and prosperity,” said Castro. “It's very focused on natural and built environment. It's focused on economic prosperity,

health, and equity. The SDGs and the metrics of the SDGs are how we're starting to track and monitor progress towards those goals.”

The collaborative not only comprises government actors, it's also cross-sectoral. Partnerships with universities have enabled the city to tap the expertise of academics, researchers, and students. The University of Central Florida, for instance, created a center of excellence around the SDGs, the Global Economics and Environmental Opportunity (GEEO), that weaves the SDGs across the entire curriculum. It also operates across colleges, and involves faculty, staff, and community scholars.

The collaborative is also pushing for smaller municipalities in the region to appoint an expert in charge of sustainability. A grant from Audubon Florida enabled the collaborative to fund one full-time position for one year in up to 20 local governments.

“We're really a catalyst to get other counties and smaller cities to see the importance of the SDGs, to see the value proposition. We do a lot of education around different types of interventions or investments that we've made that have shown good economic results and address climate and public health.”

—Chris Castro, Director of Sustainability and Resilience,
City of Orlando



Tracking SDG progress

With only ten years left to deliver on the UN's 2030 Agenda, cities like Orlando are eager to implement metrics and systems for tracking progress against their sustainability goals.

Orlando is in the process of publishing its first Voluntary Local Review (VLR), a roadmap that monitors SDG progress in detail, while also establishing guidelines for future planning and budgeting.

For its first VLR, Orlando chose to focus on nine of the SDGs, including affordable clean energy (7), health and well-being (3), and partnerships for the goals (17).

Goal 10, which tackles inequality, also has been a priority for the city, particularly during the

“I think we’re seeing the highest returns on the momentum building in our community around centering the SDGs as a recovery framework. It’s incredible to have a university and a college, to have the city and now the county updating their plans to include the SDGs.”

–Chris Castro, Director of Sustainability and Resilience, City of Orlando.

pandemic. Orlando is investing heavily to address the digital divide by setting up hotspots for high-speed broadband and a tablet checkout program in 19 neighborhood and community centers around the city. The initiative allows residents to connect to multiple services in the community and simultaneously supports the city’s financial literacy efforts.

“It’s needed now more than ever. For people who have multiple kids at home that are still virtual, it’s really a challenging time,” said Castro. “We’re excited to be able to help, and I’m sure the visibility and interest in this program is going to be tremendous.”



[Watch here](#)

How Orlando works with its ecosystem to achieve its goals

Uses open and flexible RFPs to consider innovative solutions.	Engages with other cities to share best practices.	Develops the skills, capabilities, and culture to work with external ecosystems.	Uses PPP schemes to bring in private-sector investment.
Appoints a champion to build key partnerships.	Monitors progress and challenges with partnerships and make ongoing improvements .	Opens pitching sessions for potential partners to provide ideas to the city.	Builds a shared vision, responsibilities, and accountabilities with partners.

Orlando’s biggest lessons from the pandemic

Business and government need to collaborate more closely to address today's issues.	Cities need to pay more attention to the health and well-being of all citizens.	Cities need to ensure that their investments benefit all citizens, especially the most vulnerable.	Private and public-sector organizations need to take a 'triple bottom line' perspective that considers social, environmental, and financial value.
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