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Richard Florida to Speak in Columbus about our Creative Economy

By: [Walker](#)



Richard Florida has become a household name in urbanist circles following his coining of the term “creative class” in 2002. His ideas about the creative economies of urban places has changed the way many leaders think about economic development and human capital.

In addition to being an author and thought leader on these topics, Florida is also a professor at the University of Toronto and New York University, the senior editor of “The Atlantic,” and a sought after speaker for public forums and conferences that revolve around the future of cities.

Tomorrow, Florida will speak at COSI at the 2012 Innovate Columbus event presented by TechColumbus and the Fisher College of Business at The Ohio State University. The event is one of many taking place during the inaugural idUS series.

We had the opportunity to chat with Richard recently to learn a bit more about how his ideas apply specifically to Columbus, and to preview what we can expect during tomorrow's presentation. Our full Q&A can be found below:

Walker Evans: Your 2002 book, “[The Rise of the Creative Class](#),” has certainly had an impact, directly or indirectly, on the way that city leaders in Columbus make strategic plans. The past decade in Columbus has seen a strong emphasis on creating a welcoming environment to young professionals, artists, creatives, designers and entrepreneurs through affordable housing, walkable districts, and urban amenities such as park systems and bike paths. As “Creative Class” gets [revisited](#) in 2012, what do you think Columbus as a city should be reflecting upon and planning for over the next 10 years?

Richard Florida: The economic downturn has underscored the importance and need to continue to focus on creativity and innovation to ensure sustainable future economic development in the future. Just as I wrote in “The Rise of the Creative Class” ten years ago and reinforced in the update, I still believe every single human being is creative.

Economic growth is driven by creativity, so if we want to increase it, we have to tap into the creativity of everyone; this should be the single point of focus for all economic development policies, both local and federal, moving forward. With more than 301,000 creative workers, this holds true for Columbus and its efforts to attract and retain the brightest creative talent. Columbus has made terrific strides in improving its creative ecosystem, support structures and quality of place; the region needs to continue on this path forward.

WE: From 2006 to 2009, there was much ado about “brain drain” in Columbus, though that conversation largely seems to have fallen out of public discourse. As a large university city, often cited as having the second largest ratio of college students per capita behind Boston, Columbus is naturally going to be a “brain factory,” producing more college graduates than it can retain with jobs. The Ohio State University alone graduated 10,642 students during Spring Quarter 2012.

A [blog post from Aaron Renn](#) at The Urbanophile in 2010 likens college cities to steel mills and claims that there is value in dispersing college graduates as if they were a domestic export. Do you think that “brain drain” is not as big of an issue as it was several years ago, or should we still strive toward a 100% retention rate of our young and talented citizens?

RF: Talent development, attraction and retention are still the defining factors of the creative age. We know that driving force behind any effective economic strategy is talented people. And people these days, especially talented people, move around a lot.

The Columbus region ranks 61st in the country on talent, in the top 20 percent. Obviously as a university town you'll lose some talent –it's your export, so to speak– but the ultimate goal

should always be to retain as much creative talent as possible. This goes back to a place people really want to be, and providing them with the career and market opportunities to grow.

WE: Columbus has gone through three false starts on rail-based transportation efforts in the past 11 years: light rail in 2001, streetcar in 2008, intercity rail in 2011. While our bus system and bike infrastructure systems are steadily growing in functionality and usage, there are currently no plans to build any type of rail-based transit systems in Central Ohio for our nearly 2 million residents located in our MSA. Just how important is the role of rail-based mass transit on the future of a city like Columbus?

RF: Connectivity is important; its critical to the future. We need to invest in an infrastructure for the new economic geography— the rise of mega regions and the digital age. This includes better and high-speed rail connections. We need to catch up to Asia and Europe, where we trail significantly.

Worldwide there are 40 mega regions that account for one fifth of the world's population, but drive two thirds of the world's economic output and 90 percent of the world's innovation. Columbus sits in the middle of the Chi-Pitts mega region, which is the third most powerful in the world. Having the key connectivity within that mega region is critical to economic success, and high speed rail provides that critical connection.

WE: What can you tell us in advance about your keynote speech at Innovate Columbus taking place tomorrow, October 4th? Are there any specific trends or topics that we can be prepared to hear about from you?

RF: I will provide an update on my thoughts regarding the creative economy, and the direction the economy is going and why its important to a city like Columbus. I'll address Columbus advantages as a university town and how those should be utilized to help propel the economic growth for the city. Finally, I'll address what's needed to foster creativity in Columbus: quality of place, support structures, a technology and innovation-focus and an open and inclusive people climate.

*For more information about the Innovate Columbus event, visit www.innovate-columbus.org.
For more information on Richard Florida, visit www.creativeclass.com.*

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