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South Florida's gilded path to economic prosperity is paved with advantages, but an equal number of obstacles lie ahead.

That's the conclusion [Florida International University](#) and the Creative Class Group, a consulting firm, arrived at following a multi-year economic study.



Urban studies theorist Richard Florida, founder of Creative Class Group, presents a multi-year economic study of South Florida at the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce's Annual Goals Conference.

Unveiled at the [Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce's](#) annual Goals Conference, the study examined Miami's economic landscape and identified both its strong points and disadvantages.

At the conference, urban studies theorist and Creative Class Group founder Richard Florida broke down the 34-page report into 10 key areas of opportunity for building a greater South Florida economy:

- Synchronicity between South Florida counties and its northern neighbors, Orlando and Tampa

“We’ve been a fragmented community,” Florida said. “But if we’re gonna compete on the global field, we need a new approach to regionalism.”

Greater Miami’s economy is comparable to Singapore and Hong Kong’s, the report states. Combined with Orlando and Tampa, “the So-Flo mega-region” comprises more than a \$1 trillion in annual economic output.

- South Florida airports and the region’s connection to foreign economies

The study points to Miami’s geographic location and airport infrastructure as valuable tools to be leveraged in elevating the region as a globalization hub.

Miami, the study states, is the economic and financial hub of Latin America, and “a gateway” to foreign markets. Major corporations, such as [Visa](#) and [GE](#), have debuted offices in South Florida in recent weeks to pivot toward emerging Latin American markets.

“Whether this happened by accident or not, we’re one of the most important global cities in the world,” Florida said.

[Miami International Airport](#) ranks among the 30 largest air hubs in the world, with more than 21 million international travelers passing through in 2015.

- South Florida’s growing startup ecosystem

The South Florida economy is primarily anchored by tourism and real estate, but its burgeoning startup landscape is an opportunity to diversify. About \$300 million in venture capital were invested in startups in 2015, ranking Miami’s entrepreneurial ecosystem 16th among U.S. metros. The issue, however, is scaling startups. According to the Kauffman Foundation, South Florida currently ranks 39th for growth entrepreneurship – one notch above Detroit.

“We need to go from quantity to quality,” Florida said.

- Labor pool talents

It isn’t just about technology-based jobs, but a “creative economy” – individuals with ideas. South Florida’s abundance of low-skill and low-wage work – more than 1.3 million in Miami alone – impede growth, if not supported by knowledge-based professions.

- Service sector

Upgrading service-sector jobs with higher salaries would bring up Miami’s middle class, “while increasing the productivity and competitiveness of its hospitality, tourism and service sector across the board,” the study states.

- Brain circulation

There is talk of brain drain, but Florida sheds a positive light on human capital flight with “brain circulation.” While some college students relocate to New York City, San Francisco or other metro areas, “Miami benefits from its ability to attract a significant inflow of talent.”

More than 2.2 million South Florida residents are from another country – nearly 40 percent of its total population and the highest share in the country.

- Cultural diversity

South Florida’s ethnic, religious and sexual diversity is a boon. Cultural tolerance, the study states, is an economic driver.

“Tolerance is the third T of economic development, alongside technology and talent. ... Talent cuts across all ethnicities, races and sexual orientations.”

Promoting diversity and tolerance would, therefore, generate a virtuous cycle.

- Local climate and culture

South Florida has warm weather, beaches and cultural offerings that include world-class cuisine and theater.

“Quality of place can – and should – be a competitive aspect,” Florida said.

- The wealth gap

According to the study, the gap between the wealthiest and the poorest in greater Miami is comparable to those of Nicaragua and Zimbabwe.

“Targeted investment in Miami’s distressed neighborhoods would have far-reaching benefits, including maximizing talent, easing transportation congestion, lowering other public costs and ensuring greater prosperity for a broader majority of the region’s residents,” the study states.

- Traffic gridlock

South Florida residents waste one week of work annually because of traffic congestion, the study points out. And, as the saying goes, time is money. [Focusing on cutting down gridlock](#) by concentrating development on the urban core, improving infrastructure between key neighborhoods such as Brickell and Miami Beach, and investing in public transportation would contribute enormous growth to economic productivity.

*Debora Lima covers startups, entrepreneurship, energy and technology. Get the latest retail news with our free daily newsletter. [Click here to subscribe.](#)*