



Civic Council of Greater Kansas City

Overview

The Civic Council of Greater Kansas City is a CEO-led, research-based regional actor. It is one of the two major regionally-focused business-led organizations in the metropolitan area. In 1964, 15 CEOs of large employers headquartered in Kansas City formed the Civic Council. The CEOs formed to pool their resources and use their status as business leaders to improve the community and its quality of life.

More than 90 high-ranking business executives belong to the Civic Council today. Each represents a major employer in the region, from the card maker Hallmark to telecommunications giant Sprint. Membership has opened up to include managing partners of smaller firms and regional headquarters. A goal of the Civic Council is to recruit CEOs who represent the geographic, racial and gender diversity of the region.

There is a high expectation for civic engagement from each of the executives. The Civic Council aims for at least 75 percent of members to be actively engaged in committee and task force work. Members participate in one or more of the Civic Council's top regional civic priorities: early, K-12 and higher education; urban core development; mechanisms for regional cooperation; job growth through the life sciences; and the impact of technology on the economy.

Regional Priorities

The Civic Council has a research-based mission — to “study, confer, develop and implement a vision” of the bi-state region that leads to a high quality of life. This mission features five priorities.

The first is education. The Civic Council has launched studies and other efforts to support early learning, K-12 and higher education in Missouri and Kansas. The Civic Council works closely with the Metropolitan Council on Early Learning and the Partnership for Children to promote good early learning policy in Greater Kansas City. The Civic Council lobbies for increased funding for early learning in both states. It also plays a leading

ORGANIZATIONAL SNAPSHOT

Type of Organization

Exclusively led by companies or employers

Unit of Membership

Individual

Number of Members

2003: 90
1998: 75

Membership by Company Size

Small Companies: N/A
Mid-sized Companies: N/A
Large Companies: N/A

Dues Determined by

N/A

Annual Dues Paid by

Largest Member Companies: N/A
Smallest Member Companies: N/A

Annual Operating Budget

2003: N/A
1998: N/A

Staff Members (FTE)

2003: 5.5
1998: 4

Board Members

2003: 25

Regional Priorities

Education, Downtown Core Development, Regional Cooperation, Life Sciences

role in K-12 education reform on the Missouri side of the bi-state region (the Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce leads K-12 education issues on the Kansas side). The Civic Council's efforts focus on adequate funding for K-12 schools and reform issues such as setting new accountability standards for students and schools.

The Civic Council plays an active role on higher education in both states, sponsoring research on the state of higher education and its role in the region. The Council hired a consultant to look at how decreased state funding has affected public higher education in Kansas. The study included an economic impact of higher education and developed a new strategy for statewide public education. The Civic Council contributed \$150,000 to the research and has pledged another \$150,000 over the next three years to continue the strategy. The Council has also supported research aimed at building the University of Missouri at Kansas City as a research university. It has just begun this research, and has chosen peer institutions with which to compare the university's position. The study will recommend ways to measure the progress of the university's research efforts and will make recommendations on public-private partnerships and funding.

The Civic Council also had taken a prominent role in researching, planning and promoting the region's urban core. A 2001 downtown revitalization study sponsored by the Civic Council has been credited with creating unity behind a downtown vision and persuading Mayor Kay Barnes to embrace a Downtown Corridor Redevelopment Strategy. "When the Civic Council decided it wanted to become directly involved with downtown and finance planning and implementation of the plan, that went a long way toward pulling everyone together," said John Laney, a Vice President with the Hall Family Foundation in Kansas City, according to a December 2001 article in the *Kansas City Business Journal*.

The Civic Council paid for and staffed the 18-month, \$180,000 planning process behind the downtown revitalization study, which was conducted by an outside consulting firm. The Council contributed \$300,000 and raised another \$400,000 from other sources for its implementation.

A third regional priority for the Civic Council is its support for the Greater Kansas City Life Sciences Initiative. In 1999 the Council partnered with the Kansas City Area Development Council to found the Kansas City Area Life Sciences Institute. The Life Sciences Institute is raising the region's life sciences research capacity through new investments in researchers, equipment and facilities. The Civic Council is committing its resources to build the Institute's capacity and help it become self-sustaining.

The Civic Council provided staff for much of the Institute's work during its first two years. A task force pulled together to evaluate the Initiative and the future role of the Civic Council has recently completed its work. As a result, the Civic Council Board has adopted a plan that continues the Civic Council's support of the Institute for another five years, at \$200,000 per year. In addition, the Civic Council will take a lead role in developing a communications plan to inform the community about the life sciences and advocate with public officials for positive legislation.

The Civic Council's fourth priority is building regional infrastructure and governance. The Council has identified critical components for the regional community and decided what its own role should be in helping to build a strong regional community. The Council has brought in leaders from the field to help in its research and strategic planning, such as Bruce Katz of the Brookings Institution and leaders from the Mid-America Regional Council.

A new Civic Council priority is to look at technology and its impact on regional issues. The Civic Council has created a task force to oversee the discussion of this topic and answer questions. What will be the impact of technological changes on the regional economy? Which strategies will the Civic Council adopt to harness and guide these changes? How can the Civic Council take technological changes into account as it approaches regional issues?

Structure and Operations

The Civic Council examines best practices and researches strategic options before it undertakes initiatives that impact the region's long-term quality of life. The Council takes a 10- to 20-year view on regional issues. Before the Civic Council becomes involved with an issue, several questions must be answered: Can or will someone else do it? Does it fit within the Council's priorities? Is there someone to provide leadership within the Civic Council? Does the research indicate it's a good time to tackle the issue?

The Civic Council is a highly collaborative group. "By the time we get to implementation, we don't want to be the one who gets the credit," says Jewel Scott, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Civic Council. "We want everyone to feel that it was their idea."

Membership requirements have evolved over the years. The Council has 90 members, up from 15 when it was founded in 1964. In past years, the Civic Council only accepted members of companies that had 1,000 or more employees, but today membership extends to CEOs as well as managing partners of smaller firms and regional headquarters who have demonstrated willingness to invest in improving the region's quality of life. The requirements have loosened to also allow automatic qualification for membership among companies with either 1,000 or more employees or revenues of \$250 million or more. Additionally, the Civic Council has ex-officio members including county and municipal elected officials, the presidents and chairpersons of organizations such as the Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce, and the heads of major universities. A requirement for membership is that the individual be the major decision-maker in the company — that is, someone who has the authority to commit the dollars and resources of his or her company.