

Better Maximizing Tallahassee's Unique Potential

While Tallahassee has several unique resources, they are not well integrated for economic development; in fact, they are often organized in way that is counter to this goal. While Tallahassee is home to three major postsecondary education institutions, they are not integrated into the economic life of the area (except as a source of jobs and students). FSU, as a research university, does not encourage its professional staff to be entrepreneurial, as academic rewards are focused on professional publications rather than business activities. As a result, FSU is not a major source of creative entrepreneurship in Tallahassee. This will be difficult to change given the academic environment, and would require leadership commitment within the university. There also is very little interaction between the universities and Tallahassee/Leon County and state government. As a result, the universities play little part in the business or governmental life of the greater community but are focused inward on themselves.

Tallahassee has a very educated population, in part due to the universities. These persons can be a major source of creative entrepreneurship, and there are a good number of single proprietors and very small businesses engaged in creative enterprises. However, these enterprises get very little assistance from the government to support their growth. Neither the state nor Tallahassee/Leon County have programs geared to very small businesses such as single owners or those with a few employees, such as microloan programs or business development programs that work with individuals. Instead, both focus on recruiting much larger 'prestige' businesses or assisting those businesses that can lobby for incentives. While FSU and FAMU have some business development center programs, these also are generally focused on larger businesses. However, many creative entrepreneurs have no or only a few employees and cannot benefit from existing programs, despite the fact that they are a major force in overall economic growth and vitality.

Leading Change with Heart & Wisdom

Addressing this problem will require both a 'heart' and a 'head' commitment. A 'heart' commitment is needed from Tallahassee/Leon County to realize that very small businesses matter and can be a key component to economic growth in the area. Tallahassee and Leon County should reach out to and embrace very small creative businesses. A 'head' commitment is required as well to incorporate these creative entrepreneurs into their advisory councils and economic development plans, rather than just continuing to focus on much larger businesses. These creative enterprises can bring much vitality to this planning and become a vital partner to government efforts to diversify the regional economy. Another key 'wisdom' component should be to bridge the intellectual resources of the two universities and TCC into the entrepreneurial life of the region, encouraging faculty and students alike to become entrepreneurs and invest in the economic growth of the area (rather than just the growth of academic journals).

Cynthia VanLandingham

[TallyPiano & Keyboard Studios](#)