

Civic Progress

Overview

Civic Progress is an exclusive business leadership organization composed of the chief executives of St. Louis' largest companies. It provides leadership and financial support for improvements in the areas of regionalism, racial economic progress, education, community life, business climate and infrastructure.

Regional Priorities

Regional collaboration is an important priority for Civic Progress. According to Executive Director John Roberts, "The region is pretty fragmented politically. It includes the city of St. Louis, 93 municipalities and 13 counties covering two states and there is a 50-50 split between Democrats and Republicans." A key goal for Civic Progress is to get different constituents on the same political page in order to focus on "what's good for the region." In recent years, Civic Progress has worked with the larger business community to take the necessary steps in order to make this happen. Their efforts were integral to the creation of *Forward Metro St. Louis*, which aims to get the business community to speak with a unified voice to influence regional, state, and national legislators. *Forward Metro St. Louis* works to establish a unified foundation for positive, constructive legislation that supports the growth of the St. Louis region along with a healthy business climate.

Another top priority for the organization is equitable economic progress. The Greater St. Louis metropolitan area has a long history of racial disparity. Socio-economic disparities are particularly stark between whites and African Americans in the region. In 2000, for example, the median income of African American households in the St. Louis region was less than 60 percent of whites' median income and the unemployment rate of African Americans was three times that of whites'. Leaders at Civic Progress say that the organization has developed a "racial economic progress" strategy that aims to improve ethnic diversity in the business community, increase job advancement of minority workers and utilize minority suppliers on a more widespread basis.

ORGANIZATIONAL SNAPSHOT

Type of Organization

Exclusively led by companies or employers

Unit of Membership

Individual

Number of Members

2003: 30
1998: 30

Membership by Company Size

Small Companies: 0%
Mid-sized Companies: 0%
Large Companies: 100%

Dues Determined by

Combination of number of company employees, company revenue and history of company in community

Annual Dues Paid by

Largest Member Companies: \$150,000
Smallest Member Companies: \$40,000

Annual Operating Budget

2003: \$1 million to less than \$2 million
1998: \$1 million to less than \$2 million

Staff Members (FTE)

2003: 1.5
1998: 1.5

Board Members

2003: 30

Regional Priorities

Race Relations; Regional Collaboration; Public Education; City Governance

Other priorities for Civic Progress include improving public education and the city governance structure of St. Louis. In public education, Civic Progress has focused on closing the student achievement gap. The organization is actively supporting candidates that advocate school reform. Lastly, the organization has financially supported an initiative called “Bridging the Achievement Gap” that is aimed exclusively at improving the quality of education in the public school system and enhancing student achievement.

Finally, Civic Progress has placed enormous resources behind an effort to reform city governance. Civic Progress supported a citizen’s engagement and education process along with a ballot initiative to change the city’s form of government from a weak to a strong mayor system. The organization spent \$1.5 million over 18 months on the initiative. In 2002, the ballot initiative was passed in the Missouri State Legislature to amend the state constitution and allow the city to change its charter.

Structure and Operations

Civic Progress has been active in the St. Louis metropolitan region for approximately 50 years. Membership is restricted to the CEOs of the region’s 30 largest companies, as measured by annual revenue. Membership has remained consistent over the past five years.

With just 1.5 full-time staff members, Civic Progress must work closely with other business-civic organizations to carry out its regional priorities. In particular, Civic Progress works very closely with the St. Louis Regional Chamber and Growth Association (RCGA).

One of the biggest challenges facing Civic Progress is the changing nature of membership. Over time, fewer and fewer of the region’s largest companies are headquartered in St. Louis. As a result, it becomes harder to persuade members that investing in the St. Louis region is in their long-term interest. To address this challenge, Civic Progress has worked closely with the RCGA to identify more companies to help fund initiatives and projects that support a regional agenda.