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## One Community, Act II: Rebuilding a devastated Miami-Dade economy

By Hannah Sampson

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On Friday afternoon, a group of nearly 150 business leaders gathered in a hotel ballroom and graded Miami-Dade's economic outlook for the next five years. The report card would make few parents proud: nearly half the room handed out a C.

With more than \$600,000, a crew of consultants and support from a slew of businesses and organizations, the Beacon Council is spearheading an effort to raise that grade through a study called One Community One Goal.

Over the course of nearly a year, the project will seek to identify the most promising business sectors for a region struggling with 13 percent unemployment and one of the worst housing markets in the country — and then provide a plan for how to lure those jobs.

Part of the goal is to ensure that the region's educational infrastructure is capable of filling the needs of current and target industries.

Avalanche Consulting of Austin, Texas, is conducting the study along with site selection firm McCallum Sweeney and the nonprofit Council for Adult and Experiential Learning.

Adolfo Henriques, chairman of Gibraltar Private Bank and co-chair of One Community One Goal, named the key questions: "How do we retain the jobs we have here? What are the assets we have in this community? What are the obstacles that we have to overcome, whether real or perceived, and what are the industries today and in the future that are going to continue to provide us with attractive employment opportunities?"

Chris Engle, senior consultant with Avalanche, said during a presentation Friday that the study will look beyond the industries that dominate in Miami-Dade now, naming tourism, finance and trade.

"It's time that we go a step further and look at how the sectors are evolving and what new sectors are around to help avoid the see-saw economy," he said.

The hospitality sector so far leads the hiring rebound that began last year, contributing nearly 8,000 new positions, or about 40 percent of the 19,500 jobs added countywide since January 2010, according to an analysis by Miami-Dade economist Robert Cruz.

With tourism hiring at a peak — the hospitality industry's 112,000-person payroll is larger than before the recession — industry leaders see this as a time for support of the vacation sector.

“I think we should continue to rely on the visitor industry as a top jobs producer, especially as we continue to grow,” said Wendy Kallergis, president of the Greater Miami and the Beaches Hotel Association.

William Talbert III, president of the Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau, said his office supports the initiative and has a key role in the discussion.

“There’s no better industry than tourism as a place to start and move up rapidly,” he said.

Consultants hope to get more than 1,000 responses on a survey that is posted online at [www.onecommunityonegoal.com](http://www.onecommunityonegoal.com) and being distributed by email to thousands of people around the county.

The process will end with the rollout of a strategic plan next March based on the findings.

“It has to be doable deeds and not just a study,” said Frank Nero, president of the Beacon Council, which is funded by a mix of Miami-Dade tax money and dues from member businesses.

The One Community One Goal effort reprises a similar study completed by the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce in the late 1990s.

That led to a list of eight “targeted industries” that stand as the county’s official top priorities for economic development: aviation, fashion and lifestyle, film and entertainment, financial services, international commerce, IT/telecom, life sciences, and tourism.

Education loomed large in the last effort, with a related foundation spending about \$2.5 million between 2002 and 2005 supporting career training academies in Miami-Dade public schools for hospitality, finance and technology, according to tax records and school system spokesman John Schuster.

Nero said that while the initial study was effective, a new one was overdue.

“We created the jobs that we wanted,” he said. “Then 2007 and 2008 came and the bottom fell out.”

Complicating the second effort: the most severe economic downturn since the Great Depression, which has cost 92,000 jobs since its start in December 2007 and scrambled past blueprints for growth.

The process got an official kick-off Friday during the Chamber’s annual Goals Conference, held this year at the Hilton Miami Downtown.

The one-year phase is expected to cost \$600,000 to \$650,000. About \$627,500 has been lined up, with the biggest chunk — \$150,000 — coming from Wells Fargo.

Henriques, who is co-chairing the study with Alex Villoch, senior vice president of advertising and marketing at The Miami Herald Media Company, said once the study is done stakeholders will prioritize what needs to happen first, what is affordable and where the money will come from for everything else.

Bruce Hoch, a New Jersey consultant who conducted a similar study for Broward County, said Miami-Dade would be wise to keep its goals realistic and focus on what can bring jobs back.

“It really can’t be pie in the sky,” said Hoch, managing director of DCG Corplan and a finalist to run the Beacon Council study. “A wish list grounded in reality is fine.”

Miami Herald staff writer Douglas Hanks contributed to this report.

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