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**MAKING AN  
IMPACT**

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**Florida  
Community  
Innovation**



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# HELLO FROM

# CAROLINE

## Caroline Nickerson, PhD

### Executive Director

Wow, hello! So great to see you here! I'm Caroline.

I have a bit of an unconventional background: I got my PhD from the University of Florida; I have received multiple national teaching awards; I have built a career through SciStarter empowering citizen scientists with NASA, the Unique Mappers of Nigeria, the Australian Citizen Science Association, the United Nations Environmental Programme, and hundreds more organizations; and, yes, I'm a retired pageant queen. My goal in life is to leverage science and technology to help others achieve their dreams and live their fullest lives. And anyone who knows me knows I love the state of Florida.



My friends and I started FCI all the way back in 2020. Most of us were based in Washington DC at the time, and we looked at how our home state was dealing with COVID-19 – the skyrocketing unemployment, food insecurity, and health issues – with a lot of heartache. We got to work: we offered our services as technologists and public affairs professionals to organizations working on the ground to serve.

Soon, we realized the problems facing Florida were a lot bigger than just COVID-19, and I moved back to Florida to dedicate my life to making it better. We landed on a unique model for FCI: with the phrase “build with, not for” in our minds, we pay students who might not be able to access internships otherwise to work with communities to build tech, do research, and engage in outreach to serve Florida.

We'll tell you more about how to work with FCI in this booklet, but I'll share this: I still haven't taken a salary from FCI because I want the money to go to the students.

This organization has changed my life: helping first generation college students use their tech skills to serve the communities they came from; co-designing a resource map with community workers who have served the Parramore neighborhood of Orlando for decades; watching with tears in my eyes as my childhood friend, who has survived domestic violence and receives food assistance, does user interviews with the students to optimize tech products to help people like her; all of these experiences make me grateful to be alive and do the work I do.

So what are you waiting for? Join me!





# ABOUT

## Florida Community Innovation

FLORIDA COMMUNITY INNOVATION (FCI) works with paid students and volunteers of all ages to partner with communities on research, outreach, and tech for a better Florida.

Our community partners have included multiple foundations, agencies, municipalities, and more. Our model focuses student-centered work, beginning with research grounded in community listening, to scope and iterate tech projects that make Florida better.

### Who do we work with?

- Students from: University of Florida, University of Michigan, UC Berkeley, American University, University of Central Florida, and Georgetown University (and potentially more...contact us to add your school to this list!).
- Community Partners: Foundations, companies, municipalities, government agencies, nonprofits, and grassroots organizations.

### What projects do we take on?

Our projects include elements of research, outreach, and/or tech. The main requirements are that a project is (1) innovative and (2) helps Florida. We choose to take on projects based on proposals from our students, partners, and/or volunteers.

### We focus on:

- Community Research - Partnering with local leaders to analyze datasets, conduct interviews, and more to understand and address pressing issues (which scopes the development of tech projects!)
- Web & Mobile Apps - Interactive tools that connect people to essential services
- Data & GIS - Mapping and analytics to drive community conversation and informed decision-making
- Civic Engagement - Increasing public participation and accessibility

Through nimble student and volunteer teams, community partnerships, and human-centered design, FCI ensures that our tech is built with, not just for, communities. The next page features some of our work!

# PROJECT

# ROUND-UP



## The Florida Community Resource Map (FRM)

- Flagship project: It is a statewide tool being developed to help social workers, nonprofits, and residents find and manage real-time information on food pantries, shelters, job resources, and more.
- Student-run: The students train each other through a course covering front-end and back-end software development concepts. Over 30 students from different institutions work on the tool at any given time, with the front-end, back-end, research, and data management teams coordinating in nimble stand-ups. The students iterate the tool in partnership with community workers, leaders, and beneficiaries.
- Right now: The team is exploring advanced AI to update profiles on the FRM (to mitigate issues surfaced during our research and community listening process) and building out features requested by partners, including ratings and reviews.
- Legacy Version: [floridaresourcemap.org](http://floridaresourcemap.org) | Pilot Version in Orlando: [dev.floridaresourcemap.org](http://dev.floridaresourcemap.org)

## GoBituary

- Like an obituary (but on-the-go), GoBituary is a digital humanities project funded by Florida Humanities.
- It was built by University of Florida and UC Berkeley students in partnership with the City of Miami Parks Department and local historians. The project, available in English and Spanish, celebrates Miami's diverse history at the level of individual lives, with multimedia profiles of notable figures buried at the cemetery.
- Survey research is ongoing to see if the project changes the way people interact with public spaces like cemeteries and if historical education can make individuals more connected to their communities in the present.
- Explore today: [gobituary.app](http://gobituary.app)

## Stop Human-trafficking through Industry Networking and Education (SHINE)

- Florida Statute § 509.096 mandates hotel staff training on human trafficking, but the quality of these trainings is unknown.
- SHINE will bridge the gap by evaluating training programs through a database and badge system—hotels meeting key criteria will earn a mark of excellence and a spot in our public database.



## Recyclepedia

- FCI has partnered with Miami-Dade County and Dream in Green to build iOS and Android apps to facilitate better recycling and environmental sustainability.
- Key features of the apps under development include a barcode scanner to determine if a product is recyclable, translations into Spanish and Haitian-Creole, and gamification aspects.

# PROJECT

# ROUND-UP

## ...CONTINUED



### **The Gentrification Risk Assessment Tool (GRAT)**

- Interactive GIS tool built by University of Florida students with funding from the Bob Graham Center for Public Service and the Gainesville Community Reinvestment Area.
- It was launched on March 8 in partnership with the Porter's Farm.
- It's educating residents on and acting as a catalyst for dialogue about gentrification's impact in Gainesville, particularly in the historic Porters Community. We're expanding outreach based on our launch.

### **The Pedestrian Avoidance of Traffic Hazards (PATH) App**

- Now a complete project still available for public education on FCI's website, PATH is a web-based navigation app that helps Gainesville pedestrians plan the safest routes by avoiding high-risk traffic areas, using historical crash data from the Gainesville Police Department and GIS technology to highlight pedestrian danger zones.

### **Gainesville, FL Data Walk**

- In 2023, FCI UF interns hosted a Data Walk showcasing visualizations on crime, traffic and public services using Gainesville's open data.
- Residents, city officials, and tech experts explored trends, added context, and discussed data-driven solutions for local challenges.

### **Miami, FL Climate Gentrification Data Walk**

- In 2024, FCI students and volunteers hosted a Data Walk examining climate gentrification, using interactive visualizations to explore sea level rise, property values, and demographic shifts in communities like Little Haiti.
- Findings and community discussions were syndicated statewide via The Invading Sea, sparking conversations on climate justice, green infrastructure, and anti-displacement policies.



### **EveryVote**

- In 2024, EveryVote was funded by Campus Vote Project, enabling FCI student leaders to integrate voter education into a back-to-school event with VoteRiders, the Orange County Supervisor of Elections, and local partners.
- By combining school supply distribution with hands-on voter ID support, the event made civic engagement more accessible, meeting families where they already gathered.

### **Community Volunteering and Events**

- FCI volunteers quarterly at Porter's Farm in Gainesville, supporting sustainable agriculture and food access initiatives. FCI has also served breakfast at GRACE Marketplace, a Gainesville-based homeless services center, and traveled to Cedar Key for hurricane relief efforts, assisting with community recovery and resilience-building.
- FCI regularly provides free trainings on civic tech and convenes community events, for organizations including UCF College of Medicine, Girls Who Code, the Alliance for Civic Technologists, Rally (the City of Orlando and Orange County's Accelerator), the Central Florida Foundation, and more.

# PROJECT

# ROUND-UP

## ...CONTINUED



### **The Influential Messaging & Prosocial Attitude Change Techniques (IMPACTS) Study**

- IMPACTS explores how different types of messages via Facebook ads influence environmentally sustainable behavior change, considering factors like eco-anxiety and environmental agency.
- Developed by former FCI intern Chloe Dill and funded by the Haskell Grant, the study applies psychological models via a randomized control trial to test behavioral nudge techniques in sustainability.



### **Research by University of Michigan, Georgetown, American University, University of Central Florida, UC Berkeley, and University of Florida Students**

- University of Michigan students have investigated resource gaps, the needs of social workers, and how homeless shelters store real-time data.
- Georgetown students have investigated resource directories (winning a capstone prize) and human trafficking recognition training.
- American University students have investigated municipal resource provision, stakeholder outreach, urban farms, preventative healthcare, LGBTQ+ resources, and more – all in the context of the FRM.
- University of Central Florida students have investigated best practices for grant-writing.
- UC Berkeley students have researched cybersecurity best practices and digital humanities in cemeteries.
- University of Florida students have dove into many other topics referenced throughout this booklet, as well as urban farming and social media.

### **Mount Dora Community Trust (MDCT) Needs Assessment**

- Produced by Florida Community Innovation, this report analyzes ten years of MDCT funding data alongside Census and other sources to identify service gaps in North Lake County.
- MDCT is a community foundation that funds local nonprofits, scholarships, and community projects. FCI's student team is finalizing revisions to inform MDCT's grantmaking and integrate their data into the Florida Community Resource Map.

### **Community Navigator Research with the University of Central Florida**

- FCI has partnered with the University of Central Florida to enhance the Community Navigator project, equipping community workers with a customized version of the Florida Resource Map to help seniors access food, shelter, and essential services.
- By shadowing community workers in action, FCI has identified gaps in resource availability and developed recommendations to improve search accuracy, accessibility, and usability, ensuring the platform better supports both workers and the communities they serve. The project is ongoing.

# PROJECT

# ROUND-UP

## ...CONTINUED

### **Ability-Based Learning and Employment (ABLE) Literature Review**

- FCI conducted a year-long literature review of academic, journalistic, and expert sources on employment challenges for individuals with disabilities, with mentorship from Florida Vocational Rehabilitation and the Center for Independent Living of South Florida.
- The research explores barriers, assistive technology, and support services, driving conversations on technology's role in workforce accessibility.



### **Central Florida Foundation THRIVE, Central Florida Closed Referral Work Group, and Nemours Ginsburg Institute**

- FCI has participated in Central Florida Foundation's THRIVE initiative, the Closed Referral Work Group, and the Nemours Ginsburg Institute for Health Equity, attending meetings to learn, contribute insights on civic technology, and explore opportunities for collaboration.
  - THRIVE is a collective impact framework aligning regional efforts with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, focusing on economic stability, health, education, community connections, and livability.
  - The Closed Referral Work Group seeks to improve social service coordination through a closed-loop referral system, ensuring individuals receive efficient and accountable support.
  - The Nemours Ginsburg Institute for Health Equity convenes stakeholders through initiatives like Opportunity Hubs, addressing social drivers of health to improve child well-being. Through these engagements, FCI stays informed on regional efforts to enhance social service coordination and health equity, positioning itself to support future initiatives with its expertise in digital resource accessibility and community research.

### **Catalyst**

- FCI is part of Catalyst Northeast Florida, an initiative led by the Nonprofit Center of Northeast Florida to use data and nonprofit collaboration to advance community priorities in Duval and the surrounding counties.
- As a student-centered civic tech nonprofit, FCI contributes research and analysis, providing feedback in Catalyst meetings to help shape data-driven strategies for regional impact.

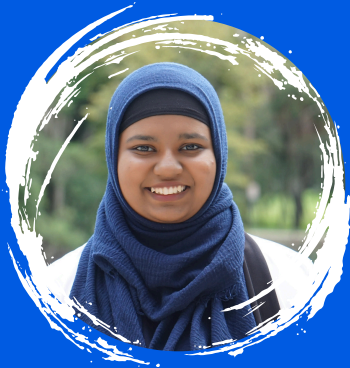
# EXPERIENTIAL

# LEARNING

## FOR SOCIAL GOOD

*Every FCI student experience is different. Our volunteers and mentors work with each student to forge an individual pathway that aligns with their learning goals and the impact they want to have on the state of Florida.*

*Check out some example student pathways, below.*



### **Aniqah Ahmed**

#### **From UF Student to FCI Board Member**

Aniqah came to us as a pre-med student. Soon, she fell in love with civic tech and public affairs — and she hasn't looked back since. After graduating from UF, she joined FCI's board, and now she mentors all of our public affairs students while heading up many of our grant, outreach, and research ventures. By day, she works for the City of South Bend, Indiana, staying connected to Florida by night through volunteering with FCI.



### **Anna Lanzino**

#### **Cybersecurity & Digital Humanities at UC Berkeley**

Anna graduated from UF with a degree in computer science, and after getting into UC Berkeley for her Master's degree, she got involved with FCI as a fellow to stay connected with and give back to her home state. Anna has engaged other UC Berkeley students to level up FCI's cybersecurity, and through FCI, dreamed up and leads the GoBituary digital humanities project based in the Miami City Cemetery.



### **Juliana Lucas**

#### **Project Founder & Computer Science Mentor**

Juliana wanted to use her computer science degree to address human trafficking, an issue she had been concerned about growing up in Pensacola, FL. She embarked on a years-long process to scope SHINE with experts and community members, and now that she's graduated, she mentors FCI students and serves as FCI's delegate to the Alliance of Civic Technologists, the largest national convener of civic tech groups.

# REVENUE MODEL

## **Status Quo**

So far, we've been supported by mini-grants from community foundations (including the Mount Dora Community Trust, the Central Florida Foundation, the Community Foundation of North Central Florida, and Florida Humanities), and small donations.

Almost all of our money has been to pay students stipends (typically \$500 for 5 months of work), with a limited amount going to project upkeep.

At present, it costs about **\$50,000 a year** to support our students and projects.

## ***We are open to exploring different funding models.***

For example, if a community foundation is interested in featuring their nonprofit data on the FRM and receiving a report about potential resource gaps (places where Census and other data indicates need, but no resources are provided), we would be delighted to produce a report on commission.

Or, if a deserving nonprofit wants to level-up a mobile app (just like Dream in Green did with Recyclepedia), we would love to work out a way to pay our students to work on this.

And with our existing free tech products, like the FRM, we would be happy to build premium features for agencies that employ social workers to find and manage information even more efficiently, with insights to improve the workflow of the entire organization.

## ***So what's next?***

We encourage you to get in touch to explore how we can partner and how you can support our work! We think corporate volunteer programs and organizational partnerships make sense as a way forward.

Check out the next page – which is a sample one-pager that we put together for companies – to explore some of our ideas. Please share the one-pager with any organization that you think might be interested!



# CORPORATE-SOCIAL

# RESPONSIBILITY



Turn your organization's expertise into tech solutions for Florida's future.

## Who We Are

At Florida Community Innovation, we leverage tech and research for good to create real change in Florida. We invite you to collaborate with our student innovators!

Our research-driven approach emphasizes community listening, empowering your employees to volunteer alongside emerging technologists. Industry mentors impact students, while meaningfully partnering with community members. With FCI, you're not just meeting top-tier student talent—you're building tech solutions with, not for, communities.

## Benefits of Getting Involved

- ◆ **Drive Community Impact:** Help students build technology that tackles real challenges in Florida communities you care about.
- ◆ **Boost Brand Image:** Showcase commitment to social responsibility and innovation, attracting and retaining top talent and loyal customers.
- ◆ **Engage Your Employees:** Provide a fulfilling volunteer experience where employees mentor students and apply their skills to real-world problems.
- ◆ **Discover Future Stars:** Connect with Florida's rising tech talent through student mentorship and identify potential recruits.

## Program Components

**\$500**

### Sponsor a Student

Support a student innovator as they research, build civic tech, and drive social change.

Your \$500 sponsorship funds a five-month experiential learning fellowship for an undergrad or grad student in:

- Computer Science, Data Science, Geography, Political Science & more
- Hands-on research, outreach, and tech development
- Collaboration with nonprofits, universities & local governments
- Students from UMich, UC Berkeley, UF, UCF, American, & Georgetown

Plus...you have the option to hire most of our students after working with them through the cohort. Recruit top-notch talent while supporting social good? We don't think you'll get a better deal!

**\$5,000**

### Host a Hack-a-thon

Fund a one-day or weekend hackathon where students, experts, and community leaders collaborate on tech solutions for pressing social issues. Your \$5,000 sponsorship covers:

- Event space rental & food for in-person participation
- Honoraria for impacted community members (e.g., longtime social workers, survivors of domestic violence, and more)
- Student stipends to support continued project development post-hackathon
- Hands-on problem-solving in areas like human trafficking prevention, social services, and civic tech
- Teams of students & professionals from top universities and industries
- Real-world impact—projects don't just stay ideas; they get built and iterated on

**\$300**

### Speak at a Class

Meet 20+ young innovators from schools including UMich, UC Berkeley, UF, UCF, American & Georgetown at our weekly Wednesday meeting (in-person and on Zoom) at 6 PM ET. Your voice can change careers and communities.

**?**

### Flexible Volunteering

Don't see an option that fits? We'll build something together:

- Want a one-hour volunteer session with your team on Zoom?
- Prefer to mentor just one student?
- Have another idea? Let's scope it out!

# THE FUTURE IS BRIGHT



If you want to make Florida a better place, we want to work with you.

If you're an individual, you can volunteer, and we'll find a place for you to plug in. It's as simple as emailing [info@floridainnovation.org](mailto:info@floridainnovation.org) and then attending FCI's weekly meeting, either in-person or on Zoom, at 6 PM ET on Wednesdays.

If you represent an organization, let's dream up a way to partner.

And if you just want to donate to support our mission, hey, we won't say no!

Thank you for caring. "If you don't like the news, go out and make some of your own." -Wes Nisker

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