



## Cleveland and the World: Forum Summary of the Multi-Sector Benefits of International Engagement and Inclusion

To celebrate its centennial, the Cleveland Council on World Affairs (CCWA) convened a free civic forum on June 8, 2023, to invite conversation on how being globally connected benefits greater Cleveland.

Framed by inspiring opening remarks from Mayor Justin Bibb and closing remarks from County Executive Chris Ronayne, the forum addressed the benefits of global engagement and inclusion in four sectors: Arts and Culture; Business and Infrastructure Assets; Human Capital; and Wellbeing and Environment. In conversations led by sector leaders in each of these areas (see Appendix), over 250 forum participants shared their experiences of global engagement, as well as their insightful recommendations for ways to further strengthen our connections to the rest of the world.

### Engaging Globally Matters

As one speaker stated: global connectivity not only matters but is inevitable. This view was supported by participant polling that found that global connectivity – the international exchange of people, ideas, and capital – was seen as “very important” (4.8 out of 5) to position greater Cleveland for future competitiveness.

Yet forum participants rated our current level of global connection as average (3 out of 5), raising the question: how exactly should greater Cleveland further develop its global connectivity, particularly

given the strong participant consensus that global engagement should never be at the expense of local investment? To address this, forum participants collectively discussed:

1. What existing assets and efforts are already underway that strengthen Cleveland's international engagement and inclusion?
2. What does greater Cleveland's global success look like? What indicators should be used to gauge our global-related progress?
3. What are opportunities and challenges to further develop global connectivity?

## Assets and Opportunities

*"The 2024 Pan-American Masters Games is an international sporting event that will draw over 10,000 athletes from around the world to Cleveland. How can we use this event to promote greater internationalism in our city?" Rachael Stentz-Baugher, Greater Cleveland Sports Commission*

Forum participants agreed that better leveraging global engagement and inclusion should begin with further developing the local assets that provide greatest international opportunities, namely:

### **Cleveland, an international hub in Ohio**

- *Cleveland's history.* Greater Cleveland's previous prosperity was directly linked to internationalization and the free movement of non-Clevelanders to Cleveland, whether immigrants from Eastern Europe or the South during the Great Migration. Learning from our diverse cultures and actively celebrating this heritage is one of our greatest assets to currently embrace globalization.
- *International concentration.* Cleveland has the greatest proportion of international investment in Ohio, the largest presence of honorary consuls, and an extensive list of sister cities.

### **Natural environment**

- Lake Erie provides a sustainable source of fresh water, a major asset in a climate-challenged world, and the potential for a "water economy."
- A growing number of entities are proactively working to protect our natural resources, including our tree canopy, and to increase awareness of environmental health as a significant social determinant of health, with the goal of making greater Cleveland a place that people choose to live, work, and play.
- Greater Cleveland is at a key crossroad of ground transportation routes, and its active international port is a growing hub for maritime trade and transportation.

### **Cleveland, a powerhouse**

- *Cultural gems.* Whether celebrating our diverse heritage at the Cultural Gardens, visiting the largest public access art museum in the world, watching films from over 67 countries at the Cleveland International Film Festival, or enjoying a concert of the world-renowned Cleveland Orchestra, Cleveland offers ongoing opportunities for experiencing international cultures.
- *Healthcare.* Cleveland is uniquely positioned by the presence of world-class healthcare institutions that attract top international medical talent and patients from around the globe.

- **Education.** Cleveland has a strong blend of public and private research universities that boast a growing international student body, though the majority leave after graduation. Retaining this talent pool is a key opportunity for area employers.

#### **Collaborative and “low risk”**

- Cleveland has collaborative systems, particularly in education and arts and culture, that it can leverage to compete globally.
- Greater Cleveland offers a relatively low risk business environment, supported by the presence of international banks, accounting and law firms.

### **Measures of Global Success**

*“The number of Clevelanders who have passports. The higher that number, the more global partnerships we can build that will help create jobs locally. That would be global success.”  
Joy D. Johnson, Burten, Bell, Carr Development, Inc.*

*“The number of residents in the greater Cleveland area that have better health outcomes and safe access to parks, bike infrastructure, and walkable amenities.” Jacob Van Sickle, Bike Cleveland*

*“When we reach out to colleagues overseas and discover that they are already familiar with Cleveland and have a positive impression of our global city.” Jennifer Souers Chevraux, Illumine Creative Solutions, LLC*

In each of the four breakout sessions, forum participants shared slightly different visions for global success, noting that global engagement in and of itself has heretofore not been included as a community success indicator. **Three metrics** that could be used to measure the benefits of global connectivity for greater Cleveland rose to the top of conversations.

1. **International revenue generation:** Measure the volume of exports from Cleveland and level of foreign direct investment – and the international portion of economic revenue that is derived from Cleveland’s arts, culture, sports, and entertainment activities.
2. **International population/workforce data:** Measure the growth in foreign-born employees, the retention rates of international students and other newcomers, and the number and type of employer H-1B visa sponsors.
3. **Quality of life:** Measurements of affordable living, levels of poverty, health outcomes, crime rates and perceptions of safety, availability of arts and culture, and access to green spaces are all considerations for Cleveland’s local and global attractiveness.

Many participants emphasized that greater Cleveland’s success would not simply be reflected in “better metrics” but in more positive storytelling about our city. This suggested additional measures:

- **Media coverage:** By regularly reporting on the impact of international events, visitors, and investments, media outlets are key to informing us about our level of global engagement.
- **Collaborations:** The level of collaborations between the public and private sectors, and across sectors will indicate how wisely Cleveland is leveraging its resources to compete globally.

## Beyond Words – Taking Action

A recurring question from forum participants was: how do we take action on these ideas to engage more globally? This call to move from “a city of hope” to “a city of action” underpinned many of the recommendations offered throughout the forum, as summarized by graphic artist Matt Orley.



Consensus emerged around the following recommendations:

1. **Leverage location:** Cleveland’s location on the Great Lakes defines us globally. Our waterfront, river revitalization, and Lake Erie location are focal points in our global competitiveness, making greater Cleveland attractive to future residents and employers whether from the U.S. or abroad. Location-related advantages, such as the development of a “water economy,” should be emphasized.
2. **Welcome all jobseekers:** While visa and international employment regulations are set by the federal government, greater Cleveland can still advertise itself as an opportunity for all immigrants, refugees and newcomers and develop a more coherent strategy to better integrate them. There are key industries in the area that are in immediate need of international talent such as advanced manufacturing, healthcare (e.g., nurses), freight transportation (e.g., trucking), and tourism (e.g., airport passenger engagement).

3. **Strategize business investments:** Partnerships with technologically advanced battery and semiconductor-related companies in Asia and Europe would help move our regional economy forward, as well as investments in sustainability, which is key for European companies.
4. **Focus on community wellbeing and connection:** A green city, with easily accessible and safe public spaces, will provide wellness in daily living. This will benefit our local neighborhoods, as well as help attract international talent. Clevelanders and visitors alike need public transportation, safe cycling options and efficient roads to connect work, leisure, public spaces, and tourist spots. Cleveland communities also need to be better connected to grow social trust.
5. **Engage local communities:** Greater Cleveland benefits most from international competitions, conferences, and business exchanges when local neighborhoods are included and creators, performers, investors, and entrepreneurs collaborate with local schools, organizations, and businesses. Smaller businesses and institutions, specifically, need more support to connect to such opportunities. Cleveland's Sister Cities offer a key avenue for mutual exchanges that can bring growth and deepen understanding among communities.
6. **Provide better information:** Several public and private entities offer resources that facilitate global engagement for groups and individuals. What is needed is a clearinghouse to connect those global opportunities to their seekers. All residents should have access to this information.
7. **Reduce disparities:** While many ideas were discussed for how to better leverage international opportunities, at the end of the day, competing globally requires greater Cleveland to continue to address its challenging economic, educational, health, and racial disparities.

A key message was that we need to simultaneously invest in all our neighborhoods, and welcome and include newcomers. Local action may be constrained by political decisions at state and federal levels that affect the flow of human talent, goods, services, and investment capital. Yet, one speaker reminded us, as Americans, we have the freedom to vote and express our opinions on the policies that affect the future of our city.

### How Does Cleveland Want to Engage Globally?

*“Cleveland must – and can – jump into global connectivity at this unique moment when two leaders – at the city and county level – want to embrace it. This has to be a priority. We need to change our mindset to embrace global opportunities.” Cameron Taylor, Global Cleveland*

In conclusion, three themes are noteworthy. The first was that global engagement and inclusion are also about lifting up the existing diversity of Cleveland. Global engagement should be seen as a two-way street; this will help position greater Cleveland as not only a market that optimizes international capital and visitors but is identified as a talent hub that contributes expertise worldwide. For Cleveland, engaging globally also means engaging across our own communities in ways that benefit us all.

The second was that we already possess many assets, good collaborative behaviors, and strong tactics to build success. What's needed is more systematic asset mapping, a coherent vision around becoming a global city, and a positive narrative about our city and our ability to succeed.

A final thought that was shared throughout the forum speaks to why the Cleveland Council on World Affairs organized it: it helped expand awareness of the benefits of international engagement. The hope is that forum participants will be inspired to continue to think about how they can leverage the international dimensions existent in their work.

The forum invited citizens of greater Cleveland to think of themselves as global citizens. For CCWA, that shift in mindset is likely the most powerful action that we can take to move us closer to the vision of a globally engaged and inclusive greater Cleveland, as reflected by some of the desired characteristics identified in this participant "word cloud."



## APPENDIX

**Opening Remarks:** Mayor Justin Bibb

### **Arts & Culture**

- Marcie Goodman, Executive Director, Cleveland International Film Festival
- William Griswold, Director and President, Cleveland Museum of Art
- Jeremy Johnson, President and CEO, Assembly for the Arts
- Sarah Spinner Liska, Managing Director, FRONT International
- Tony F. Sias, President + CEO, Karamu House
- **Moderator:** *Jill Paulsen, Executive Director, Cuyahoga Arts & Culture*

### **Business and Infrastructure Assets**

- Joe Cimperman, President, Global Cleveland
- William Friedman, President and CEO, Port of Cleveland
- Dennis Kramer, Airport Director, Hopkins International Airport
- Mindy McLaughlin, Managing Director, Global Business Development, Team NEO
- Baiju Shah, President and CEO, Greater Cleveland Partnership
- **Moderator:** *Bethia Burke, President, Fund for Our Economic Future*

### **Human Capital**

- Ashley Basile Oeken, President, Engage! Cleveland
- Dr. Michael Baston, President, Cuyahoga Community College
- Eric Gordon, CEO, Cleveland Metropolitan School District
- Anelize Nader, Deputy Director, Refugee Response
- **Moderator:** *Victor Ruiz, Executive Director, Esperanza*

### **Wellbeing and Environment**

- Rich Cochran, President and CEO, Western Reserve Land Conservancy
- James Misak, Medical Director, MetroHealth Institute for H.O.P.E.
- Joyce Pan Huang, Director of City Planning, City of Cleveland
- Brian Zimmerman, CEO, Cleveland Metroparks
- **Moderator:** *Grant Goodrich, Executive Director, Great Lakes Energy Institute, CWRU*

**Closing Remarks:** Cuyahoga County Executive Chris Ronayne