

# National Town Gown Association

A revised proposal from the Joint City-University Advisory Board

May 5, 2008

The City of Clemson and Clemson University are widely considered to be national models for building and maintaining positive and mutually beneficial town-gown relationships. According to the Princeton Review, Clemson ranks 6<sup>th</sup> in the nation in the category "Town-Gown Relations Are Great" (**#1 among public institutions**). City and university collaborations for fire protection, transit service, joint marketing initiatives and other projects have provided service and economic benefits for both partners. The JCUAB's first town-gown symposium drew approximately 185 city and university officials to the Madren Center, and the idea of a permanent town-gown professional organization began to take shape at that conference.

There is growing recognition of the benefits of positive town-gown relations. Recent changes in retirement relocation habits have created more demand on college towns for new "retirement housing" and increased populations. The return of alumni to a college town has a positive influence on direct participation in volunteer efforts and private giving for the colleges. Additionally, retirees offer new opportunities for part-time professors and/or as new adult students for the colleges and universities. The national best selling books of Richard Florida's "The Creative Class", Richard Karlgaard's "Life 2.0" and Thomas Friedman's "The World is Flat" have all contributed to the new movement of people to locating in creative communities where the quality of life is high and the opportunity for creative growth is open. College towns are among the leaders of these types of communities. And in an environment of municipal spending and taxation limits, state budget cuts, and concerns about rising tuition, cities and universities need to find more ways to share costs of services and programs and achieve high levels of economies of scale.

Colleges and communities need a place to turn for contact information, program assistance, examples of successful partnerships and solutions to common problems. The needed assistance must be able to cross jurisdictional lines and professional lines. Stories must be told and examples must be shared to show that successful partnership and shared leadership is possible and advantageous between colleges and community.

Numerous professional and academic organizations exist to foster information sharing and networking among colleagues. Police chiefs meet regularly with police chiefs; city managers with city managers, student housing directors with student housing directors, and campus master planners with campus master planners. But rarely do all of these professionals come together to discuss issues of mutual concern, share best practices, and develop a greater understanding of each other's perspectives.

**The Joint City-University Advisory Board proposes collaboration among the City of Clemson, Clemson University, and the JCUAB to launch a National Town-Gown Association to fill this void. We are uniquely qualified to assume a leadership role in this initiative.**

### **National Town-Gown Association**

The National Town-Gown Association (NTGA) will be a membership-based, non-government organization, managed by a Board of Directors with a full-time professional and support staff consisting of a director and administrative assistant. Its purpose is to become the primary information resource point for common issues between institutions of higher learning and the communities in which they reside. The NTGA will be the nation's common link bringing together practitioners from varying fields to address common issues and be a network of resources -- including print and online publications, information databases, programs, training materials, and consulting services -- to help city and university leaders improve the quality of life in their communities.

A limited number of founding memberships will be offered to 12 cities and 12 universities that will make a three-year commitment of \$3,300 per year, giving them one seat per organization on the original Board of Directors and permanent status and recognition as a Founding Member. General membership fees will be offered to institutions of higher education and local governments. Affiliate memberships will be available to businesses, corporations and nonprofits.

Although the organization is expected to be self-sustaining after three years, start-up costs are needed to hire and equip the staff to develop a formal business and marketing plan, solicit memberships, seek grant funding and develop products to generate revenue. It is envisioned that university and city volunteers, student interns, and research teams could also contribute to the launch.

#### **Proposed Start-Up Funding**

<b>City of Clemson</b>	<b>\$30,000/year for three years</b>
<b>Clemson University</b>	<b>\$30,000/year for three years</b>
<b>JCUAB</b>	<b>\$10,000/year for three years</b>
<b>24 Founding Members</b>	<b>\$3,330/year for three years</b>
<b>50 General Members</b>	<b>\$500/year (annual)</b>
<b>20 Corporate Members</b>	<b>\$1,000/year (annual)</b>

Expenses and numbers needed for sustained funding are detailed on the attached pro forma budget estimate, which does include a relatively small revenue estimate from

conferences and consulting income. However, no revenue is included for grant or foundation income, advertising, and interest income. Preliminary discussions with other institutions and municipalities indicate sufficient demand for products and potential for memberships to exceed these numbers. However, this type of organization has never been attempted and there are no guarantees of success.

### **What's in it for Clemson?**

There is no shortage of good ideas and opportunities for investment at both the city and university level. Why act on this one? What's in it for us? Here are the top 10 reasons why the city and university should say yes.

1. Leaders have a responsibility to lead. We're one of the best, and our advice is already frequently sought on issues and solutions. This organization would formalize our de facto leadership role.
2. The national recognition among academic peers will support Clemson University's Top 20 vision.
3. The organization will distinguish both the university and the city, because no one else is filling this niche.
4. The aggregation of knowledge and interaction with peers will help us create a better sense of community and quality of life for our constituents.
5. The program is directly aligned with the Clemson "brand," which is characterized by a strong sense of community, a climate for collaboration, and inclusiveness.
6. Conferences and other programs can have economic benefit for both the city and the university.
7. The collaboration will strengthen the "One Clemson" theme and preserve existing strong town-gown relations for future generations.
8. It presents a rare opportunity to be a part of launching something unique and important. It is a "big idea."
9. We can control risks and costs if we are willing to subsidize the start-up costs with one-time funds.
10. The organization can support the mission of Clemson University by providing opportunities for faculty and student involvement, internships, research and Creative Inquiry projects.

### **What are the reasons to say no?**

1. Start-up costs will need to be subsidized. Both city and university officials strongly suggest that this is not a project that can be successfully managed by a part-time city or university employee. If it is to carry the Clemson brand, it must be done right.
2. There is risk of damage to reputation if we try and fail to generate the needed numbers. It is likely that we would feel pressure to continue to subsidize rather than have it fail. A long-term subsidy is not likely to occur within the budget pressures at the City and University.
3. We need a champion. We will need to identify and hire a director who is enthusiastic and has the right skills to make the organization succeed.
4. This organization will need some “local” start-up assistance (beyond the financial side) from the City and University. In addition to the local representatives who serve on the Association Board of Directors, the new executive of the Association will need marketing, logistical and organizational support. Busy people will need to find time to assist the new Director in the start-up process.
5. Success takes hard work. If we are not up to the task of investing our time and financial resources, we should not accept the challenge.

### **Where Do We Go From Here?**

At the City/University Best Practices Conference last summer, which was hosted in Tallahassee, Florida, there was favorable discussion about the creation of a National Town Gown Association. Clemson representatives agreed to develop a conceptual plan and pro forma budget for a new association. This year’s City/University Best Practices conference will be held in College Station, Texas/Texas A&M, from June 16 - 19. At this conference, a presentation and discussion will frame the decision-making process of the merits, costs, benefits, and worthiness of proceeding with a National Association. If Clemson desires to become the “host site” of this potential new association, we need to be prepared to commit to the initial three-year subsidy. If the City of Clemson and Clemson University have collective reservations about being the host, we need to be ready to offer our support to another community/university host site.