



## **GROWFL PROGRAM SUMMARY**

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**NOVEMBER 2009  
THROUGH  
SEPTEMBER 1, 2011**



“The GrowFL team provided me with insight that has helped our company grow. The information I obtained from GrowFL assisted in the procurement of this contract [with Lockheed Martin], which will put between 55 and 65 individuals to work over the next eight months.”

Dale Coxwell  
Coastal Steel, Inc.  
Cocoa, FL  
Brevard County  
July 11, 2011

## Background

Economic Gardening is an entrepreneurial alternative to traditional economic development strategies. This new approach uses high end corporate level tools and cutting edge scientific concepts to help 2<sup>nd</sup> stage entrepreneurial growth companies identify markets, monitor competitors, track industry trends, locate customer clusters on maps, use search engine optimization/social media for marketing and various other customized research.

The State of Florida approved funding for an economic gardening technical assistance pilot program (Section 288.1082, F.S.) in a special legislative session during the summer of 2009 and then again in the 2010 regular legislative session. The program was established to create new jobs and build a stronger economy for current and future generations of Floridians. Total funding for the program was \$3.5M (\$1.5M in 2009 and \$2M in 2010).

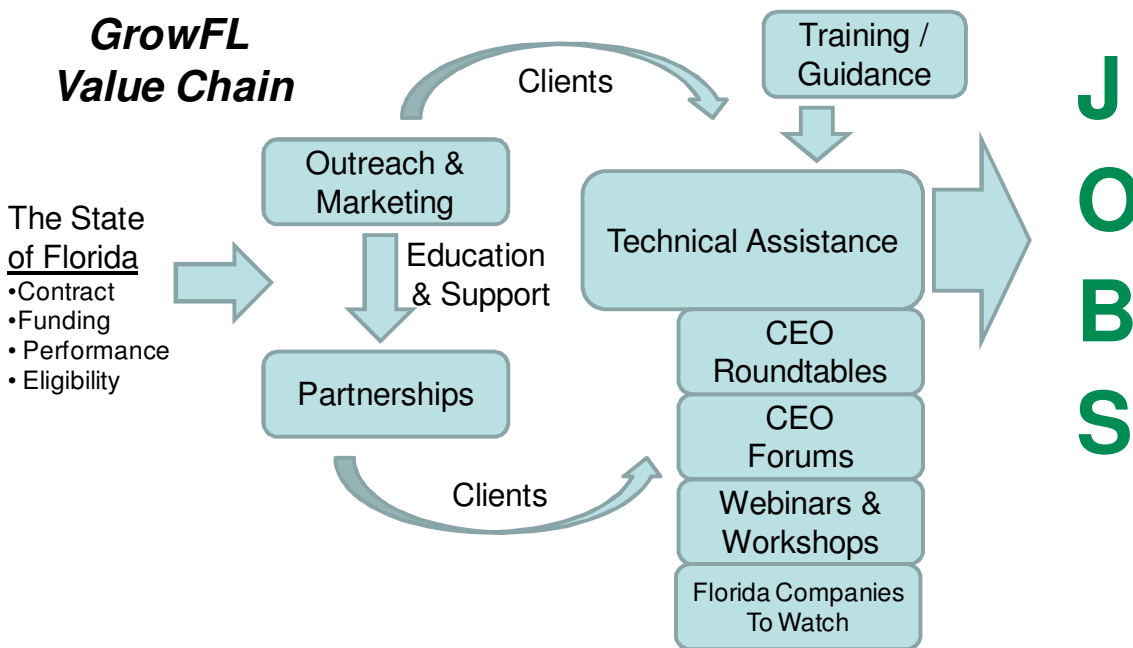
The economic gardening technical assistance pilot program's purpose was to stimulate Florida's economy by providing technical assistance to 2<sup>nd</sup> stage businesses with an objective of growing sales. New job creation would result from increased sales. Technical assistance resources included, but were not limited to: access to informational services, consulting services, information on markets, consumers and competitors, geographic information systems and search engine marketing. In 2009, it was estimated that 5,000 to 7,000 Florida companies met the criteria for the program – privately held, resident firms employing 10-50 workers, generating \$1 million to \$25 million revenue, within an industry identified on the State of Florida's Qualified Target Industry List, and having revenue and employment growth in three of their last five years.



In the fall of 2009, the Office of Tourism, Trade, and Economic Development (OTTED) selected the University of Central Florida (UCF) as the administrator of the Economic Gardening Technical Assistance Pilot Program. UCF initiated activities for the program in November 2009 with the formation of the Florida Economic Gardening Institute (FEGI) and the GrowFL Program. UCF's contract with OTTED concluded on September 1, 2011.

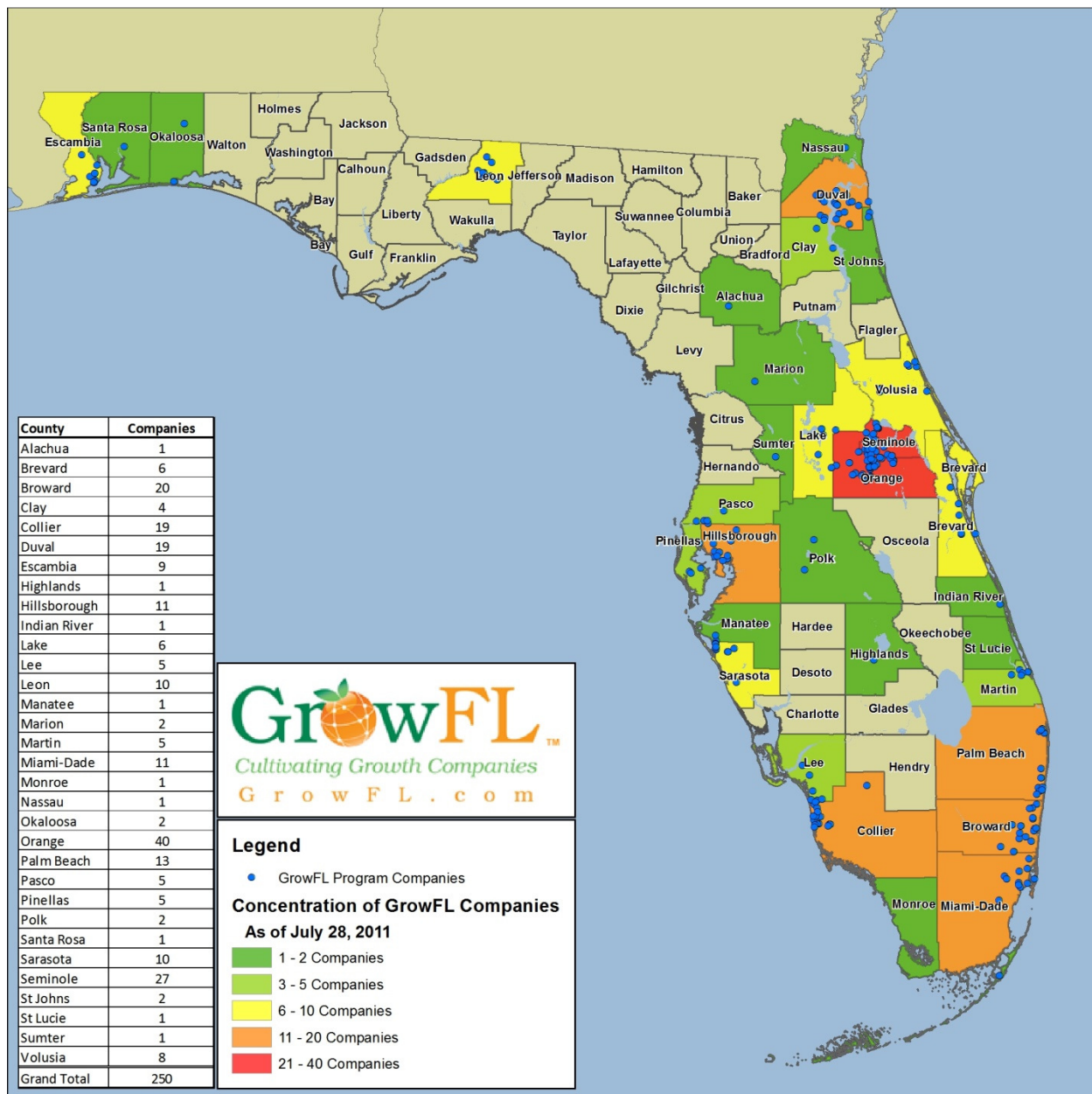
## GrowFL Services

The GrowFL Program has provided many services for 2<sup>nd</sup> stage companies including economic gardening technical assistance, CEO Roundtables, CEO Forums, various webinars and workshops and the “Florida Companies to Watch” recognition event. Each of these activities has been targeted to support the 2<sup>nd</sup> stage CEOs with operational and revenue-increasing strategies to improve business performance. This in turn has driven the creation of new jobs in the State of Florida.



UCF delivered technical assistance via a centrally managed technical assistance team with access to various market research databases and tools to facilitate strategy, market research, web strategy and search engine optimization. A typical technical assistance engagement was 40 hours of consulting time provided at no charge to the client. Work was handled virtually with clients via conference calls and the use of an on-line collaboration system. The on-line collaboration system allowed for document sharing as well as collaborative communications. A cloud based customer relationship management tool (Salesforce.com) was also used to automate the application process, track client data, and report on technical assistance engagement status.

Since November 2009, UCF provided technical assistance to 250 companies located throughout the State of Florida. This assistance has resulted in companies increasing sales which in turn allowed them to hire more people. As an example, the GrowFL technical assistance program has helped companies validate markets, identify sales opportunities, understand competitor’s strategies, determine target contact/lead lists, identify sources of raw materials, investigate funding/capital investment alternatives, make connections to people that could help them improve operations, find new employees, or break into a specific new customer segment.



In addition to economic gardening technical assistance, GrowFL also provided 2<sup>nd</sup> stage CEO's access to CEO Roundtables. CEO Roundtables are professionally facilitated monthly problem-solving meetings of 10 to 15 non-competing 2<sup>nd</sup> stage CEOs. Like Technical Assistance, CEO Roundtables required rigorous involvement from participating CEOs. The process engaged CEO participants in a free flowing dialogue about the challenges of running a business. Working in small, professionally facilitated groups, experienced second-stage CEOs helped each other solve

their toughest business challenges. Roundtable groups met regularly 10 times a year. The GrowFL program provided a 1-year scholarship to companies participating in roundtables. GrowFL funded 17 CEO Roundtables since November 2009. CEO Roundtable groups have been located in Pensacola, Tallahassee, Jacksonville, Sarasota, Pasco County, Orlando, Naples, Ft. Lauderdale, Palm Beach, and Port St. Lucie.

Although economic gardening technical assistance and CEO Roundtables were the most rigorous service provided by GrowFL, GrowFL also offered a number of other services intended to wrap 2nd stage CEOs in an ecosystem of support to accelerate growth. These services have included:

- CEO Forums  
Presentations by executives of 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> stage companies to 2<sup>nd</sup> stage CEOs. 1 to 2 CEO Forums per month have occurred since November 2009 in locations throughout Florida.
- CEO Summits  
Reverse trade shows in which GrowFL clients provide a rapid presentation to invited business prospects followed by networking time for the GrowFL client and business prospects. CEO Summits occurred in Orlando, Ft. Lauderdale, Tallahassee, Naples and Jacksonville.
- SBIR Webinars  
This webinar series focused on how to successfully prepare small business innovative research grant proposals. 2 webinar series (12 sessions) have occurred since November 2009.
- Kauffman FastTrac Workshops  
1 or 2 day workshops focused on growth venture management. Workshops occurred in Orlando, Jacksonville, Tampa, Ft. Lauderdale, and Naples.
- Human Resource Webinars  
A webinar series that covered topics ranging from communication skills to labor relations. 7 webinars have occurred since November 2009.

## Florida Companies to Watch

GrowFL hosted the 2<sup>nd</sup> stage company recognition event called “Florida Companies to Watch”. The event occurred on February 17, 2011. Fifty companies from 18 Florida counties earned a place in Florida’s inaugural class which recognized the state’s privately held businesses that employ up to 99 employees and had between \$750,000 and \$50 million in annual revenue. Companies were selected after evaluating more than 310 nominations. The 50 winning companies represented industries ranging from alternative energy development to food production and industrial gear makers to information technology firms. The combined impact of the fifty chosen companies is \$419 million in total annual revenue; 1,972 full-time equivalent employees and 510 new net jobs created compared to 2009. From 2006 through 2010, these companies generated \$1.4 billion in revenue and added 1,153 employees (both in Florida and out of state), reflecting a 162 percent increase in revenue and 141 percent increase in jobs for the five-year period. That translates into a 32 percent annual revenue growth and 28 percent annual

growth in employees. This first time event attracted over 500 attendees from across the state. Major sponsorship support came from the Governor's Office of Tourism, Trade, and Economic Development, Association for Corporate Growth (Florida), Florida High Tech Corridor Council, the Florida Business Incubation Association, Fowler White Boggs, P.A. , the University of Central Florida, the Edward Lowe Foundation, Gulf Power Company, Nperspective, Osceola County Economic Development Department and the University of South Florida.

## **Outreach, Promotion, and Partnerships**

When developing an outreach program in support of GrowFL, the first thing considered was how to identify and create awareness with 2nd stage companies. In order to achieve this, outreach and promotion of the program was accomplished via multiple methods. Methods included the use of a public relations and marketing firm, the employ of a GrowFL Outreach Manager, and the cultivation of partnerships with economic development organizations (EDO)/ chambers/ industry groups throughout Florida in order to educate both clients and stakeholders about GrowFL and economic gardening.

The public relations and marketing firm was engaged to support the creation of marketing messages about the GrowFL program including the development of the GrowFL brand, the GrowFL website, brochures, press releases, social media management (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube), advertising, and promotional event needs.

Initially, the GrowFL program established formal partnerships with a small number of EDOs strategically located throughout the state in Collier County, Ft. Lauderdale, Orlando, Tallahassee/Leon County, Jacksonville, and Sarasota. GrowFL worked with each of these organizations to identify candidate companies, host networking events to educate companies about GrowFL, and to support CEO Forums and Roundtable activities in each of their respective regions.

To augment the initial EDO partners, as well as to more broadly communicate the program throughout the state, GrowFL worked with many other EDOs, Chambers, and trade organizations to encourage promotion of the program with their members in their local geographies. GrowFL was positioned as a service provider available to all throughout the state, as well as a program that they could consider as part of their tool box of services.

There has also been close coordination with the Florida Economic Development Council (FEDC) both in terms of creating awareness with the GrowFL program and legislative support. The FEDC has made economic gardening a legislative priority since 2009.

Other outreach initiatives were also employed including entering into a co-marketing agreement with Vistage Florida (Vistage hosts roundtables throughout the world including, a substantial network in Florida) and approaching large corporations for access to their suppliers (most notably was the access provided by Lockheed Martin and Progress Energy).



Finally, GrowFL employed an Outreach Manager in order to better support the initial EDO partners as well as create the energy necessary to sustain the recruitment of 2nd stage companies. The Outreach Manager’s role was focused on coordinating, educating, and fostering relationships with EDO/Trade/Chamber organizations throughout the state for the purposes of recruiting companies to participate in the GrowFL program.

**Outcome - Return on Investment of GrowFL**

The GrowFL Program has proven itself as a true “primary job creator”.

To mark the end of the state funded GrowFL program (November 2009 through September 1, 2011), UCF issued a job survey to companies that had participated in GrowFL Technical Assistance and CEO Roundtables (the most rigorous of the GrowFL services).

Using the job survey responses as input, an economic impact study (August 2011) was commissioned by UCF that found, that since November 2009, the GrowFL program helped create a total of 3,285 direct, indirect and induced jobs state wide. According to the results of the study, GrowFL contributed more than \$510.4 million impact (direct and indirect) to the state’s economy. The study also found that GrowFL helped generate \$18.17 million in state and local taxes, above and beyond the cost of the state’s total investment of \$3.5M over 22 months.

GrowFL Economic Impact Study Results – August 2011

Impact	Measurement
Jobs (Direct/Indirect/Induced)	3,285 (1,419 / 823 / 1,043)
Sales/Output	\$510.4M
GDP	\$267.4M
Derived State and Local Tax Revenues	\$18.7M

**The \$3.5M funded  
for the economic gardening technical assistance pilot program  
resulted in an investment per job created of \$1,065.**

**If only direct jobs are considered,  
the investment per direct job created was \$2,467.**

Furthermore, an additional analysis was conducted using employer data provided by the Florida Agency for Workforce Innovation / Bureau of Labor Statistics that compared job growth of GrowFL participant companies against similar companies in Florida that did not participate in the program. From 2009 to 2010, non-participant companies reported an average net job loss of 3.5%. In that same period, GrowFL companies reported an average net job gain of 7.4%. Although there is a large statistical margin of error in the comparison (state’s available historical data allowed consideration of only 20 GrowFL companies), at face value GrowFL companies grew 10.9% faster than their peers from 2009 to 2010.



Finally, it should be noted that the State of Florida and the GrowFL program at UCF has emerged as the national best practice for large-scale implementation of Economic Gardening. As such it offers a clear path for advancing the economic development practice area in Florida. It is also the first program in the nation certified by the National Center for Economic Gardening as a Level 3 Economic Gardening provider. The success and notoriety of the GrowFL program has set in motion a new set of economic development "standards" and "competitors." In Michigan, Governor Snyder has embraced economic gardening with a \$1 Billion+ investment targeting existing industry. Other states are on track to do the same. To date Indiana, Kansas, Georgia, Oregon, Arizona, Louisiana, Minnesota, Colorado and others are actively pursuing an economic gardening path.

## Key Learnings

Much has been learned since the establishment of the GrowFL program in November 2009. In this section key learnings are presented as well as corresponding recommendations on how to improve economic gardening in Florida.

### Technical Assistance and CEO Roundtables Help Create Jobs

The best indicator of how the GrowFL Program makes a difference is in how it helped the client companies grow. The client testimonials below illustrate what the program has done for this sample. Again it was done with an exceptional return in terms of the investment per new job created.

- "The information that they provided us would have taken several months to do ourselves. Because of this program we have added five new full-time employees to the payroll." - Amjad Shamim, AAJ Technologies
- "It's like having a whole consulting firm behind you. As a small business person with limited resources and in today's economy, it's a tremendous support." - Sandra Saft, Window Interiors
- "Great feedback from GrowFL, everything from website changes, SEO and potential sales lists both government and private sector." - Eugenia Sefcik, Employment Technologies Corporation
- "With the help of GrowFL, I know that I'm going to probably double my employees, with the projects that I see in the future." - Nekeya Nunn-Stephens, The Labor Pros
- "Immediately I started getting information that was very helpful--very actionable in the short term but also very good information to make long-term strategic decisions." - Joe Buckheit, MediaBrains
- "The GrowFL program gives you access to qualified experts that can provide invaluable advice for those things that you don't know." - Vince Mayfield, Bit-Wizards
- "Thanks to the GrowFL program, my company added the people that it needed and the talent that it needed to grow both in its overall revenue and its bottom line." - Anthony Gaeto, Web Direct Brands

- "GrowFL is a great program because they take the potential of second-stage companies such as mine and network them to other businesses to provide a system of support and advice to help nurture company development and growth." - Bryan Croft, Holmes Stamp and Sign
- "The GrowFL team urged us to focus more on forming strategic alliances, and we are putting the ideas into action." - Pam Weber, Roar!
- "The most beneficial component of the GrowFL program was the advice we received on our company's core business strategy. The team helped us narrow down the direction Endorphin needed to take as we continue to grow over the next year." - Vince Smith, Endorphin
- "GrowFL forced us to focus on long-term objectives and provided the support to help us reach those goals." - Aaron Duncan, Advanced Composite Solutions
- "Thanks to GrowFL, we have deployed new branding strategies, we're marketing to more potential clients and we have an improved web presence." - Kenneth Moten, Moten Tate
- "We got access to talented people that helped us define aspects of our market. They helped me put together a very large searchable index of companies we sell to or potentially could sell to." - Daniel West, UNITY Mobile
- "Since enrolling in the economic gardening program, we have gained clients in other regions of Florida, Georgia, and even Maryland." - Pam Butler, Aegis Business Technologies
- "We are in the early stages of the relationship, and we have already been given lots of valuable input—information that we, as a small business, could not easily attain or afford." - Eloy Bazaldua, R.M. Myers Company Inc.
- "Over the last year, we've grown tremendously—we've increased our staff about 40% and our sales are up over 50% year-to-date. A lot of that has to do with the comfort that I have from many facets of the GrowFL program." - Doug Brown, Florida Supplement
- "I'm impressed with the effort. They analyzed what we're doing and what we might tweak and were able to search databases I didn't know about for potential new customers." - Joe Scofield, Advanced Manufacturing & Power Systems
- "In these tough economic times GrowFL has helped me focus on what we do well, thus not wasting a lot of time or money chasing new low margin products." - Bob Weidenmiller, Prestige Printing
- "They operate like a natural extension of my company—they know the industry, our challenges, and our competitors, but they are also far enough away to see the things that I can't see." - Pete McAlindon, Blue Orb
- "The information that came back to us is giving us great research and information that we can add to our strategic business plan." - Neal Kimball, The Kimball Companies
- "We're so fortunate to have been given the opportunity to go through the process and leverage all the benefits that are available." - Hugo Perez, DATACORP

- "I don't know where we would be without this outside help. Thanks to the program, I'm getting on the right path to grow my company." - Peter Buczynsky, Micron PharmaWorks
- "These connections are what entrepreneurship is all about. It helps me, as a smaller company, connect with some of the major institutions to grow new relationships." - Rafael Gerena, Instruxo
- "Thanks to the information we received from GrowFL, the company is better equipped to make strategic business decisions as it enters the next stages of growth." - Jason Flanzbaum, Boca Bearings Company
- "The Economic Gardening program has able to provide insightful information and research that second-stage companies like myself would not be able to do due to lack of funding and resources." - Juan Rodriguez, Advanced Processing and Imaging
- "I was most surprised by the level of talent within the GrowFL Economic Gardening Team. Normally I would have spent a lot of money for the opportunity to talk to such experienced professionals, and they impressed us by their wide breadth of knowledge, spanning several disciplines." - Terry Hedden, Infinity Technology Solutions

### **Opportunity to More Tightly Integrate Technical Assistance & CEO Roundtables**

Although the GrowFL program offered both Technical Assistance and CEO Roundtables, there was not a specific requirement for a company to participate in both activities. Also, there was no provision in the GrowFL program for follow-up on the use of technical assistance data.

By more tightly integrating Technical Assistance with CEO Roundtables, the use of technical assistance data could be built into the accountability requirements of roundtable participation resulting in improved overall business growth for participating companies.

Although not tightly integrated, the GrowFL program did have clients that participated concurrently in Technical Assistance and CEO Roundtables. Via a recent job survey, GrowFL clients that participated in both Technical Assistance and CEO Roundtables created 6.0% more jobs than clients who only participated in Technical Assistance.

### **Companies Benefit Most from a Series of Technical Assistance Engagements**

The economic gardening movement, founded in Littleton, Colorado, has operated for 20+ years under the premise of an "open storefront". Businesses have been provided assistance continuously and on-demand over that timeframe. No one is turned away; regardless of how many times assistance had been requested. The practicality of doing this on a state-wide basis was deemed inappropriate for GrowFL, both from the basis of equitable distribution of services with clients across the state and from a management of the volume of engagements with clients.

Initially, GrowFL provided a single technical assistance engagement for clients. Although this was practical to manage, it was found that clients often requested updates to information previously provided or encountered a change in direction requiring additional support. In order

to remedy the requests, GrowFL worked with OTTED to offer a 2<sup>nd</sup> engagement to clients after a reasonable waiting period. Approximately 30% of GrowFL clients from the first year of the program took advantage of a 2<sup>nd</sup> engagement.

GrowFL's 2<sup>nd</sup> engagement experience found that clients returned with a very clear research need. This was because the client better knew the expertise available from the GrowFL team. The GrowFL team also found that the work associated with a 2<sup>nd</sup> engagement clients was enhanced since the team had an established working knowledge of the client.

What has been learned from this experience is that companies, once they understand the specific expertise offered by the technical assistance program, have a propensity to leverage the expertise to support specific business growth objectives. Furthermore, a single technical assistance engagement, although valuable, is not optimal based on customer demand and needs.

Via a recently completed job survey, GrowFL clients that participated in a 2nd Technical Assistance engagement created 5.8 % more jobs than clients who only received a single Technical Assistance engagement.

### **Eligibility Criteria Had Negative Unintended Consequences**

The criteria included in the 2009 statute stipulated that in order for a business to be eligible for the economic gardening technical assistance pilot program, the business must:

- Be for-profit
- Be privately held
- Be an investment-grade business
- Maintain its principal place of business in the state for at least the previous 2 years
- Qualify for the tax refund program for qualified target industry businesses under s. 288.106
- Generate at least \$1 million but not more than \$25 million in annual revenue
- Employ at least 10 persons but not more than 50 persons
- During 3 of the previous 5 years, increased both its number of full-time equivalent employees and its gross revenues

In general, the criteria noted above was adequate in ensuring that growth oriented 2<sup>nd</sup> stage companies were supported. This criteria (established in late 2008/early 2009), however, had unintended consequences as a result of the national recession and use of Florida's Qualified Target Industry list.

These consequences were most notably related to the following 2 criteria:

- Employ At Least 10 Persons But Not More Than 50 Persons

This criterion has 2 significant issues. The first, especially when the industries associated with the "qualified target industry list" (QTI) are considered, causes an issue for

companies that operate in an industry that typically has lower revenue per employee. Most notably affected are manufacturing companies. Although part of the qualified target industry list, a manufacturer will generally have higher employment in comparison to a professional services firm generating the same amount of revenue. Considering the acceptable revenue range of \$1M to \$25M with the employment range capped at 50 employees, some manufacturing companies that would have benefited from the pilot program were excluded.

Secondly, the generally accepted employee headcount range for 2<sup>nd</sup> stage companies, as defined by the Edward Lowe Foundation, is 10 to 99 employees. Companies in this employment range have similar characteristics and would benefit the most from economic gardening services.

Because of this, UCF recommends the employment criteria for any future program be from 10 to 99 employees. During the GrowFL pilot program, approximately 5% of companies denied would have been accepted if this criterion were altered as suggested.

- During 3 Of The Previous 5 Years, Has Increased Both Its Number Of Full-Time Equivalent Employees And Its Gross Revenues

The key issue with this criterion is that when you consider the effects of the national economic downturn there are very few companies that experienced both consistent employment and revenue growth since 2008 or 2009. The original intent behind this criterion was to ensure the GrowFL pilot program worked with companies that were in growth mode. However, during the recession, survival became the primary measure of business stability. Companies that maintained flat or slight revenue growth were still considered strong businesses.

Furthermore, during the pilot program it was not uncommon for a company to apply that had decreasing headcount but flat or increasing revenue during the economic downturn. Unfortunately, these companies were denied acceptance to the GrowFL program even though they were ideally positioned for rapid growth for when an economic recovery occurs.

To adjust for the impact of the recession, UCF recommends this criterion be modified to allow companies into the program that show employee or revenue growth in 2 out of the last 6 years. This change will allow the program to include companies that experienced growth prior to the recession but that have recently suffered losses due to national economic trends. This revised criterion will also eliminate an unintended penalty for companies that have shown revenue growth in conjunction with implementing sound business action to right-size employment levels as a result of the national economic downturn.

During the GrowFL pilot program, approximately 20% of companies denied would have been accepted if this criterion were altered as suggested.

UCF also recommends that eligibility criteria be used as a **guideline** as opposed to statutory requirements. Every company has unique situations that could merit special consideration. If the administrator of the program was given latitude to accept companies into the program, as long as the extenuating circumstances were documented, more companies could benefit from the program. Furthermore, one of the criticisms coming from local communities about the GrowFL pilot program was the inflexibility of the eligibility criteria. This many times resulted in the denial of service to companies recommended by a local EDO.

### **Program Acceptance is Tightly Linked to Process Governance & Common Tools Coupled with Local Support and Partners**

Beyond job creation, it is strongly believed that GrowFL pilot program's success, was tightly linked to centralized process governance & common tools coupled with local support and partners.

UCF maintained centralized management of technical assistance methods and tools, as well as coordination of CEO Roundtables and other services. Technical assistance was delivered via virtual interaction with clients. Conference calls and an Internet-based collaboration tool were used to facilitate delivery of services. This ensured a consistent experience for clients regardless of where they were located in the state. This also provided efficiencies in terms of procurement of tools and market research databases that supported the delivery and management of technical assistance engagements.

Management of the technical assistance engagement is only part of the consideration. In order to gain broad acceptance of economic gardening around the state, as well as to support outreach and marketing efforts for the promotion of the GrowFL pilot program to interested 2<sup>nd</sup> stage business, UCF established both formal and informal partnerships with economic development, chambers of commerce, and industry groups. This was key for getting the word out to clients, but also for educating economic development stakeholders about economic gardening. Without these partnerships, local acceptance and awareness would not have been achieved.

Key partnerships established included:

- Florida Economic Development Council
- EDC of Collier County
- EDC of Tallahassee/Leon County
- EDC of South Florida
- EDC of Sarasota County
- Jacksonville Cornerstone Regional Development Partnership
- Florida High Tech Corridor Council
- Greater Ft. Lauderdale Alliance
- Florida's Research Coast

- Enterprise Florida
- Space Coast EDC
- Tampa Bay Chamber of Commerce
- Tampa Bay Technology Forum
- Heartlands REDI
- Melbourne Chamber of Commerce
- Enterprise Florida
- Workforce Florida and regional workforce boards
- Orlando Inc.
- Florida MEP
- Metro Orlando EDC
- Rollins College
- Pinellas County EDC
- Pasco County EDC
- Pensacola Bay Area Chamber of Commerce

### **Clients Want More Face-To-Face Interaction with the GrowFL Team**

Although GrowFL has high customer satisfaction, clients have said that having face-to-face meetings would enhance customer service. Furthermore, based on the founding economic gardening initiative in Littleton, Colorado, face-to-face interaction at the client's location greatly increases the technical assistance team's ability to understand client businesses and build long-term relationships.

### **There is Significant Value in "Florida Companies To Watch" Event**

There is significant value in "Florida Companies To Watch" event. As demonstrated by the high number of nominated companies, as well as the significant attendance at the inaugural "Florida Companies to Watch" event (over 500 people), the state's investment in a recognition event focused on entrepreneurial / high growth businesses created tremendous goodwill with 2<sup>nd</sup> stage businesses towards creating a climate *of growing from within*.



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