



UNIVERSITY of  
**SOUTH FLORIDA**  
ST. PETERSBURG



# 2025 USF St. Petersburg Community Impact Report







# Introduction

Christian Hardigree  
Regional Chancellor

Dear Community Partners and Colleagues,

I am proud to share with you the first USF St. Petersburg Community Impact Report, which reflects a year of growth, connection and shared purpose. This report is intended to reflect the great work happening across all campus units and departments engaged in community service, learning, research and outreach.

This year, we introduced several exciting new initiatives that expand our reach and deepen our impact. We successfully launched the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) on campus and in the downtown community, providing free, high-quality educational offerings for older adults. We partnered with the City of St. Petersburg to introduce Camp Bullseye, a new summer camp that blends marine science, entrepreneurship, and digital storytelling to inspire the next generation of innovators.

Also, in collaboration with the city, we secured a \$350,000 USDA grant that will launch a large-scale composting initiative that begins on campus and is expected to grow into a sustainable community resource. This initiative is supported by a generous \$50,000 gift from Duke Energy and \$100,000 from our campus' Student Green Energy Fund.

Overall, our partnerships with local government and community agencies continue to thrive, from co-hosting City Hall on Tour to advancing faculty-led research projects focused on disengaged youth, transportation, and youth aging out of foster care.



Another meaningful undertaking this year was the launch of our first Community Perceptions Survey, sent to 200 local leaders to assess awareness and sentiment around USF St. Petersburg. The feedback we received is already helping guide our outreach strategies and strengthen our ability to serve the region effectively, including the production of this report and new strategies to increase visibility of students in the community.

None of these accomplishments would have been possible without Caryn Nesmith. Caryn spearheaded our Community Relations Office at USF St. Petersburg for the past four years, serving as a vital conduit between USF resources and the vibrant community we are privileged to serve. She helped to get many of these initiatives you will read about in this report off the ground with her collaboration and commitment to our campus and this community. I want to thank her for all she has done for USF St. Petersburg.

We continue to seek out opportunities to build relationships and co-create meaningful opportunities for engagement in our community. I invite you to explore this report and see how, through collaboration and creativity, we are cultivating a more connected and impactful future - together.

# Community Research and Innovation



## TIP Lab Releases First Statewide Report on Human Trafficking

The Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Risk to Resilience Lab released the 2024 State Report on Human Trafficking, the first comprehensive statewide analysis of trafficking in Florida. Commissioned by the state and based on data from 30 agencies and nonprofits, the report estimates over 700,000 individuals were trafficked in the state in the past year, with minors making up a significant portion. The report highlights Florida's high risk of the criminal activity due to its population size, ports, and major industries, while also detailing efforts to combat trafficking through policy, prosecution, and partnerships. The TIP Lab, led by Professor Joan Reid, developed the TIPSTR database and BRIGHT Network to coordinate services and analyze trends. The report evaluates county-level risk and resilience and reflects Florida's growing commitment to data-driven responses to human trafficking. It will be submitted annually to state leadership as required by state law.

## Professor Launches Hurricane Histories Project

An oral history initiative led by Judy Genshaft Honors College Professor Catherine Wilkins aims to document personal experiences from the 2024 hurricane season. Inspired by the flooding of her childhood landmarks, Wilkins began recording stories that reflect the emotional and personal toll of recent storms. The Hurricane Histories project began with an event at the Sacred Lands Jungle Prada archaeological site and expanded in partnership with the Gulf Beaches Historical Museum and other local institutions. Wilkins plans to involve USF students in collecting and digitizing oral histories and storm-damaged artifacts, culminating in a public digital archive through USF Libraries. The project aims to preserve community memory and deepen understanding of the human impact of natural disasters in Tampa Bay.

## Partnership Aims to Reconnect Disengaged Youth

USF St. Petersburg began a new collaboration with Keys Consulting Firm, Mitchem Services, and A Griot's Corner to support disengaged youth in Pinellas County. Backed by a \$200,000 grant from the City of St. Petersburg, the initiative aims to understand why more than 12 percent of local youth ages 15–24 are neither in school nor working. Sociology Professors Frank Biafora and Byron Miller, and Education Professor LaSonya Moore, will survey over 350 high-risk students and convene an advisory board that includes youth who have reengaged, while community partners conduct interviews and storytelling to amplify lived experiences. Insights from this work will inform strategies to reconnect young people with education, job training, and long-term employment opportunities.

## Data Literacy Workshops Build Foundational Skills

Over the past year, the Nelson Poynter Memorial Library, Foundation for a Healthy St. Petersburg and the St. Petersburg Library System offered free data literacy workshops for the community. The Data Literacy for Community Action (DLCA) initiative included four in-person sessions to help community members and nonprofit leaders build foundational data skills, such as understanding basic terminology, using local data sources, and evaluating online information. Led by NPML staff and guest experts, the sessions focused on applying data to drive positive community change. Following the workshops, USF's Innovative Education team developed publicly accessible online modules to expand the program's reach.





# Arts, Culture & Storytelling



## James Museum, Honors College Show Healing Benefits of Art

A healing arts class led by Professor Catherine Wilkins of the Judy Genshaft Honors College is allowing students to see firsthand how art can benefit individuals diagnosed with dementia. As part of the class, the James Museum invited people in assisted living facilities to take art tours hosted by students. Students learned methods of engaging with art to help participants access and express memories, improve communication skills, externalize emotions, relieve stress, and promote positive feelings. The James Museum secured funding this year to continue offering the Art in Mind program.

## Poynter Collaboration Expands Journalism Training, Community Reporting

The Department of Journalism and Digital Communication announced a new partnership with the Poynter Institute in September to expand hands-on learning and community engagement opportunities for journalism students. The collaboration includes the production of a podcast series, The Poynter Report, and strengthening the Neighborhood News Bureau, a student-run newsroom covering St. Petersburg's historic African American Midtown community.

## Library, Studio@620 Create Digital Archive

The Nelson Poynter Memorial Library launched a new digital archive and gallery exhibit showcasing 20 years of work from The Studio@620 and its co-founder Bob Devin Jones. The Bob Devin Jones/Studio@620 Digital Collection preserves the history of the St. Petersburg arts venue through materials such as event programs, media coverage, scripts, and collaborations with local cultural organizations.

## Creekshed Project Explores Local Waterways, Environmental Impact

Creekshed 2.0 is an interactive map that combines environmental storytelling, archival research, and art to explore Tampa Bay's interconnected waterways. Inspired by flooding from Hurricane Helene, English professor Thomas Hallock collaborated with USF Libraries and Eckerd College to expand the original project with 10 new creative reflections linking historical objects to present-day environmental change. Funded by a \$10,000 campus partnership grant, the project highlights stories from across the region—from swamps and springs to bridges and coastlines—while addressing themes of memory, loss and resilience.

# Student Engagement



## **Six Years Pairing Community Mentors with First Year Students**

The Innovation Scholars Career Exploration Program, which pairs first-year students with local professionals for job-shadowing experiences, entered its sixth year. Mentors from more than 100 businesses and organizations in St. Petersburg offer insights into a wide range of fields, including health care, finance, marine science, and the arts. Students meet with their mentors throughout the semester to observe day-to-day operations, attend meetings, and explore career paths early in their college journey. To date, over 300 students have participated in the program.

## **Funded Work Study Positions Support Nonprofits**

Through a program called Community-Based Federal Work Study (FWS), local non-profit and public service organizations can host student workers whose wages are funded by federal financial aid. This is more than just a job opportunity; it is a partnership that develops future professionals while supporting an organization's mission. The FWS program enables eligible students to use their FWS award to support community partners while enhancing their own career readiness.

## **SAIL Immerses Undergraduates in Hands-On Summer Research**

The Summer Academy for Investigative Learning (SAIL) at USF is a six-week paid program that introduces USF undergraduates to hands-on research. Funded by a \$15,000 grant from the Florida High Tech Corridor, the 2025 program enrolled 10 students in St. Petersburg who engaged in workshops, field trips and project development. Students explored local research hubs, including Johns Hopkins All Children's Hospital, the U.S. Geological Survey and the Florida Institute of Oceanography, where they toured the Western Flyer research vessel. SAIL is modeled after the national Research Experience for Undergraduates (REU) program but tailored for USF students. The program aims to spark student interest in research while showcasing opportunities available in the Tampa Bay region.

## **Mellon Grant Enables Humanities Projects, Internships**

Thanks to a Mellon Foundation grant, USF's College of Arts and Sciences has funds for community organization internships and projects in the humanities. Within the program, nonprofit employers submit a 50-hour project for a humanities student to complete. Learn more about the program at [www.usf.edu/arts-sciences/mellon-internship](http://www.usf.edu/arts-sciences/mellon-internship).



# Public Health & Well-Being

## Mo-Bull Nurse Clinic Expands Healthcare Across Tampa Bay

Since launching in 2023, the Mo-Bull Nurse Medical Clinic, a 38-foot mobile healthcare unit operated by the USF Health College of Nursing, has provided medical services to over 1,800 patients across 13 locations in Hillsborough and Pinellas counties. Equipped with exam rooms, a lab, and diagnostic tools, the nurse-managed clinic improves healthcare access for underserved communities while offering hands-on clinical experience for nursing students. It operates at two locations in Pinellas county.

## Five Years On: Health Buddies, TelePals Reduce Social Isolation for Seniors

USF celebrated five years of Health Buddies and TelePals, two intergenerational programs that connect students with older adults across Tampa Bay to reduce social isolation and improve health outcomes. Launched during the COVID-19 pandemic, the programs are operated by Seniors in Service of Tampa Bay in partnership with USF St. Petersburg and other USF colleges. TelePals provides companionship through regular phone or video chats, while Health Buddies adds structured guidance on managing chronic conditions such as nutrition and fall prevention. Enrollment in Health Buddies has grown significantly, from 104 participants in 2023 to a projected 400 by the end of 2025. Faculty from across USF help train and advise students, reinforcing the university's commitment to community-engaged public health.





# Business & Economic Development

## Accelerator Builds Tampa Bay Fintech Future

USF St. Petersburg shared new milestones in 2025 from the FinTechIX Accelerator, a partnership between the Muma College of Business and Tampa Bay Wave that supports high-growth fintech startups. Since launching in 2022, the program has helped 40 companies generate nearly \$60 million in revenue, raise over \$100 million in investment, and create close to 500 jobs. Startups like Notice Ninja have relocated to the region, drawn by its talent pool and growing tech ecosystem. The 90-day accelerator offers training, mentorship, and investor exposure, while connecting participants to USF's research, student talent, and industry partnerships. Supported by a \$14 million gift from Kate Tiedemann and Ellen Cotton, USF has expanded fintech programming, launching a certificate, undergraduate concentration, and a new master's degree starting in fall 2025.

## Students Compete in Governor's Cup Statewide Pitch Competition

Florida's brightest student entrepreneurs gathered at USF St. Petersburg during the 2025 spring semester for the prestigious Governor's Cup Statewide Pitch Competition, hosted by the Muma College of Business' Nault Center for Entrepreneurship. The event brought together students from 10 Florida universities to pitch their startup ventures for a chance at top honors and significant cash prizes. The center holds a number of public pitch events, including the Techstars Startup Weekend.

# Sustainability & Environment



## Accelerator to Grow Marine Economy

USF and six partners launched The Continuum, an innovative accelerator program funded by a \$13.9 million grant from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Designed to strengthen the blue economy, the program will support the commercialization of ocean-based technologies, promote environmental resilience, and stimulate economic growth.

## Restoring Florida's Reef

USF's Keys Marine Laboratory (KML) received 1,050 baby elkhorn corals from The Florida Aquarium to support ongoing restoration efforts following the severe 2023 coral bleaching event. Operated by the Florida Institute of Oceanography, KML offers one of the largest temperature-controlled seawater systems in the Keys, serving as a refuge and research site for marine species. Once arriving at KML, the baby corals were transferred into temporary tanks to become acclimated to seawater before being planted on the reef or nurtured in ocean-based nurseries.

## Composting Initiative to Tackle Food Waste

USF St. Petersburg and the City of St. Petersburg announced a new composting initiative funded by a \$350,000 U.S. Department of Agriculture grant, along with contributions from Duke Energy and the USF Student Green Energy Fund. The project will install an industrial composter on campus to process up to 1,000 pounds of food waste daily, beginning with waste from the campus dining facility. The compost will be used initially for campus landscaping and later sold to local markets and farms as the initiative expands. Students will gain hands-on experience in sustainability, entrepreneurship, and research. Future collaborations include the Saturday Morning Market and 15th Street Farm. The initiative aims to reduce landfill waste and greenhouse gas emissions while creating a sustainable green business that supports food security, economic opportunity, and environmental resilience in the St. Petersburg community.





# Lifelong Learning

## Launch of OLLI Classes

Thanks to the Office of Community Relations, USF's Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) launched on the St. Petersburg campus, bringing low-cost, non-credit courses to adults aged 50 and older. During the 2025 spring semester, the program offered classes in history, art, marketing, biology, and craft

brewing, taught by USF faculty and staff. OLLI has been successful on the Tampa campus for over 30 years and serves nearly 1,400 members. The program aims to support intellectual engagement, social connection, and lifelong learning in the community. Membership is \$50 annually. USF St. Petersburg will offer 13 classes during the 2025 fall semester.

# Youth Engagement & Empowerment



## From Camps to Competitions, Youth Opportunities Grow

USF had its most expansive summer camp season yet in 2025, with the St. Petersburg campus hosting a variety of educational and empowerment-focused programs. Camp Bullseye, created in partnership with the City of St. Petersburg and USF's Office of Youth Experiences, offered 50 middle schoolers a week of immersive experiences in marine science, entrepreneurship, and digital marketing, including overnight stays and city field trips. Camp Rocky, led by Campus Recreation, engaged local youth in leadership, arts, swimming, games, and outdoor adventures. The She Draws camp, hosted by the

College of Education's STEM Lab in partnership with Turner Construction and the James B. Sanderlin Family Center, introduced 25 middle school girls to architecture and design through projects connected to the city's Accessory Dwelling Unit initiative. The summer also marked the 10th anniversary of the St. Pete Strong Youth Conference, which brought 400 Pinellas County students to campus for a day of empowerment, hands-on learning, and college and career exploration. These programs reflect USF St. Petersburg's deepening role as a community partner and educational resource for local youth.



## **Middle & High Schoolers Compete on Campus in Statewide ROV Competition**

More than 100 middle and high school students traveled from across the state in May to compete in the Marine Advanced Technology Education (MATE) Remotely Operated Vehicle (ROV) Regional Competition at USF St. Petersburg. Hosted by USF's Florida Institute of Oceanography (FIO), the event challenged teams to design and operate underwater robots for real-world missions. FIO also brought middle and high school teachers from across Florida to build and test ROVs and learn more about the world of underwater robotics and engineering.

## **PATHe Programs Educate Youth on Options After High School**

For the past three years, thousands of elementary, middle and high school students have come to USF St. Petersburg to sharpen their leadership, communication and team-building skills. Participating in Pinellas County

Schools' Student Leadership Summit, local youth take part in engaging sessions that challenge them to become leaders while learning more about higher education and career pathways. The summits are a collaboration between Pinellas County Schools and USF's Pinellas Access to Higher Education (PATHe) program, which aims to increase the number of Pinellas County residents receiving education beyond high school.

## **USF, YMCA Youth in Government Program Strengthens Civic Education**

For the seventh year, USF St. Petersburg and the Florida YMCA have collaborated to offer the Civics Fellows Program, an initiative designed to enhance civic education in the state by giving high school students hands-on experiences in government and public service. It is the first and only such civic education partnership between a university and the YMCA in the nation.



# Signature Community Events

## Halloween Fest is a Family Affair

Halloween Fest is an annual family focused event in partnership with the City of St. Petersburg and Orlando Health Bayfront Hospital. Hundreds of families come to campus for educationally-themed spooky activities, a Not-So-Haunted Library, costume contests, trunk or treating and ghoulish revelry. Come to campus for our next Halloween Fest on October 30, 2025.

## Bulls and Brews Raises Scholarship Funds

In March, USF St. Petersburg hosted its second annual Bulls and Brews by the Bay, a waterfront fundraiser supporting student scholarships. The St. Patrick's Day-themed event brought together alumni, students, faculty, and friends for an evening of live music, Irish dancing, local craft beer, and games. Proceeds benefited the USFSP General Scholarship Fund, which awarded \$34,000 in scholarships in 2024. All six brewers at the event were graduates of the USF Brewing Arts Program and the title sponsor was the USF Credit Union.

## St. Petersburg SciFest, MarineQuest Inspire STEAM Exploration

Every February, more than 10,000 people attend the St. Petersburg Science Festival and MarineQuest, two side-by-side events held along the USF St. Petersburg waterfront and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Research Institute. With over 150 interactive exhibits, including ocean research vessel tours, crime scene demonstrations and coding tutorials, the festivals connected the public with experts from USF, NASA, the Dali Museum and more. The festival aims to spark curiosity in science, technology, engineering, art, and math (STEAM), offering



immersive experiences for families and students. Around 800 schoolchildren participated in a preview day, while the Junior Scientists program paired students with science professionals. The festival highlights the region's commitment to STEAM education and community engagement through partnerships with local institutions, government and industry.

## MLK Jr. Annual Celebrations

Every year, dozens of USF St. Petersburg students and employees march in the MLK parade. USF's pontoon boat donned "Bulls By the Bay" decorations to join the community in commemorating the civil rights icon during this annual tradition. The campus also organizes every year the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Awards Banquet. This past year, nearly 20 incredible middle, high school and college students were recognized for their resilience, dedication to justice and commitment to uplifting their communities. Dr. Alex Harris, CEO and Founder of the Arts Conservatory for Teens, provided an inspiring keynote, while ACT performers danced and sang.



# Go Bulls







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