

Building Statewide Collaboration for Global Engagement

An Example of Subnational Diplomacy Governance in North Carolina

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The State of North Carolina regularly leads rankings of top destinations in the U.S. to do business, invest, study, visit, work, partner, and live. Building a welcoming and attractive environment takes time and organization. Part of our success comes from the ability of North Carolina leaders to join forces across sectors to form the NC Coalition for Global Competitiveness (“Coalition”) and elevate global engagement as a statewide priority.

Too often, disparate efforts drive the international strategy of a city or a state. A lack of coherence may lead to competing initiatives, wasted resources, or the projection of conflicting signals to foreign counterparts and potential partners. Positioning an industry, a community, or a region for global competition and connections requires cross-sector collaboration. North Carolina has a few lessons to share.

1. Connecting leaders across sectors based on common global goals

The Coalition, a private and public sector partnership, consists of a network of over 60 leaders who foster thought leadership and serve as a catalyst for the statewide vision for global engagement. The primary goal is to optimize North Carolina’s global engagement through a comprehensive approach, including foreign direct investment, trade, and workforce development, to generate jobs and opportunities and create an environment for success in the global economy.

In early 2013, a group of likeminded North Carolinians, from a variety of sectors (education, business, government, and community), joined together to form an informal “coalition of the willing,” working to connect often siloed sectors in a unified approach for statewide global engagement. There is no cost for members to join the Coalition. Members value their association with others and share an international focus that stimulates creative and collaborative thinking to further their goals. Coalition members include senior executives of major companies, globally minded community organizers, executives from major academic institutions, local and regional consulate generals and honorary consuls, economic developers (regional, state, and federal), and leaders from state government agencies (including the Department of the Secretary of State, Department of Agriculture, Department of Commerce, Department of Transportation, and the Governor’s Office).

Founded by former North Carolina Secretary of Commerce Jim Fain and Go Global NC, a statewide nonprofit, the Coalition has grown in impact and reach. The structure of the Coalition originated from the collective impact model, bringing together diverse voices to support a common goal. Go Global NC serves as the “backbone organization” and provides meeting facilitation and logistics, speaker identification, cross-sector connections and collaborations, and ongoing maintenance of membership. The full Coalition meets quarterly to share emerging best practices and ongoing programs and initiatives across the state.

Currently, the Coalition is co-chaired by Secretary of State Elaine Marshall, a Democrat, and Commissioner of Agriculture Steve Troxler, a Republican. Their bipartisan leadership demonstrates that a global focus can cut across political differences and bring benefit to all residents. In addition to the co-chairs, the Coalition is guided by a vice-chair and an executive committee, including subject matter experts in the five strategic areas of focus deemed necessary for successful cross-sector statewide global engagement (see Blueprint below for details). The executive committee meets quarterly in advance of the full coalition meetings to set agendas, review membership, and identify additional opportunities for collaboration.

2. Activating the state’s global engagement and demonstrating impact

Targeted messaging is indispensable when working across sectors and political parties. Knowing how to frame an issue is a key to success. To meet this need, the Coalition developed resources to help members show the impact of global engagement, including a shared vision, an online database, and an annual event. Together, these tools foster an ecosystem that celebrates global connections. Strategies used by the Coalition include:

- **Building a state-wide strategy for global engagement:** In 2015, North Carolina was the first state to develop a roadmap for global engagement across sectors, known as the NC Blueprint for Global Engagement. In 2020, the Coalition produced the [NC Blueprint for Global Engagement 2020](#), outlining five strategic areas central to advancing global Engagement: leadership; communication and partnerships; infrastructure and logistics; cross cultural competencies; and global economic development. This document provides a shared vision, defines the statewide global engagement framework and approach, and serves as a concise overview of the Coalition’s approach for global partners in North Carolina, the US, and abroad.
- **Measuring impact:** To track global impact, the Coalition created the [NC Global Engagement Snapshot](#), a data tool that includes over 60,000 data points showcasing how North Carolina is globally engaged. The tool includes indicators aligned with the strategic framework outlined in the Blueprint. This database provides a clearinghouse for vetted, secondary sources to develop data-driven messages for diverse targeted audiences, for example, the number of international students in the state, or jobs supported by trade.

- **Building relationships and dialogue across sectors:** The Coalition hosts an annual [NC Global Advantage Forum](#), which convenes more than 160 thought leaders from a variety of sectors to engage around global opportunities. The Forum provides an annual opportunity to gather with statewide leaders, showcase achievements, host international delegations, strengthen networks, and acknowledge exceptional global engagement champions through the NC Global Ambassadors Award. The Forum provides a platform for hosting international delegations interested in establishing or increasing their partnership with North Carolina.
- **Activating global engagement:** The Coalition supports economic and cultural ties across the globe. In January 2023, the International University Sports Federation (FISU) announced North Carolina as the host for the 2029 World University Games, which will bring together more than 150 countries and athletes from over 600 colleges and universities. In the fall of 2023, under the leadership of the Coalition, a delegation of state legislators and academic and private industry leaders will travel to the Netherlands to further existing partnerships and grow North Carolina's AgTech sector, including the industries that support an increase in greenhouse technology, production, and output.

The Coalition looks forward to growing partnerships around the world, nation, and state - and, crucially, to building a dialogue with federal agencies, including aligning efforts with the U.S. State Department and its new Unit for Subnational Diplomacy. Interest in and opportunity for the type of subnational diplomacy led by the Coalition has never been higher.

This City & State Diplomacy Toolkit compiles a collection of case studies and how-to briefs to support the international engagement and global initiatives of local actors. These short, digestible, and practical briefs are written by local practitioners, city and state leaders, and experts based on their direct experience. If you're interested in learning more about this brief or wish to connect with the Truman team, please fill in this [short survey](#).

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