

## Tell Your Miami Story

Written by Matthew Beatty, Special to the BT  
September 2019 - Last Updated September 2019

---



The Miami Foundation takes community engagement to a new level

### **The Miami Foundation takes community engagement to a new level**



ust before Election Day in November 2018, a senior friend of mine expressed that he was unsure about whom and what issues to support. Most of us remember that miles-long ballot in Florida, full of local referendums, constitutional amendments, and congressional candidates. He couldn't make sense of it all.

The day before he went to the polls, I printed off his custom sample ballot, and we sat together,

## Tell Your Miami Story

Written by Matthew Beatty, Special to the BT  
September 2019 - Last Updated September 2019

---

researching the issues, looking at what local newspapers recommended, and talking through his opinions. We ended up with a solid guide he felt confident about.

The next day he took the guide to his precinct in Buena Vista. When it came his time to vote, he followed our guide to the T. Once done, he announced to the room that if anyone was looking for some help, they were welcome to use his sample ballot guide, explaining he and I had done the research and made informed recommendations. One person spoke up and took the sample ballot. When they were finished using it, another asked to see it. And then, another. Two hours later, his sample ballot had changed hands more than 20 times.

One small act of civic participation can have an exponential impact on our community. That's the entire concept behind the Miami Foundation's My Miami Story conversations. It's an initiative to get all local residents thinking about what they can do to take ownership of issues they care about. In our fourth year, participation continues to grow; in 2018 more than 4000 residents gathered to discuss ideas and solutions to local issues.

Next year, 2020, promises to be a time of transformational change -- affected by elections, the Census count, evolving diversity in neighborhoods, and climate impacts. On Tuesday, October 15, 2019, My Miami Story conversations will invite all Miami-Dade County residents to consider the question: "2020 is here: where are we?" These gatherings will provide a platform for residents of every ZIP code and cultural background to discuss community priorities, civic policies, and other pressing issues that will define the county's future.

Hosts who coordinate My Miami Story conversations invite small groups of neighbors and colleagues for a meal or *cafecito* breaks throughout the day. Anyone can sign up to host at [MyMiamiStory.org](http://MyMiamiStory.org). We've welcomed everyone, from students to government leaders, to encourage their guests to engage in solution-focused discussions. If our hosts need some structure, the Miami Foundation offers toolkits and prompt cards, as a way to get started.

Year after year we discover that residents are eager to share their stories about how they got here, why they stay here, what matters to them, and what they could do to address the challenges.

Hosts and participants are asked to complete a post-conversation survey, generously supported

## Tell Your Miami Story

Written by Matthew Beatty, Special to the BT  
September 2019 - Last Updated September 2019

---

by Knight Foundation. In those surveys, participants can share deep insights into what they think about their community and how they want to change it. The Foundation provides those findings to local decision makers to help inform their community-related work in Greater Miami.

The initiative has powerful outcomes. According to 2018 surveys, nine out of ten residents who participated in conversations in 2017 took a specific action in 2018 to improve their community as a result of what they discussed. Other key findings:

- One-half of respondents attended community meetings and events about important issues.
- Forty percent indicated they built relationships with new people.
- Roughly one-third worked to raise awareness and educate others about important issues, donated money to a cause or organization, or became more politically involved.

Eight-six percent of 2018 participants said it was likely that they would take specific actions to address an issue discussed at their conversation. In addition to increasing participants' understanding of the challenges and issues facing fellow residents across Greater Miami, these conversations had a significant impact on building a sense of community and increasing motivation to take action.

Around 80 percent of participants said their My Miami Story conversation made them feel more connected to others and more motivated to get involved in addressing issues in their own neighborhoods.

The survey underscores that these conversations are about more than talking. In fact, behind nonprofits and community organizations, the most frequently cited entities that participants view as having the greatest impacts on making their community a better place to live are the residents themselves. That is encouraging, as the true power to improve Greater Miami lies within its people.

## Tell Your Miami Story

Written by Matthew Beatty, Special to the BT  
September 2019 - Last Updated September 2019

---

Heading into 2020, as we think about how to mobilize this community to take ownership of it, we must create opportunities for residents to have meaningful dialogue about their experiences and share ideas to improve it. Good conversation leads to inspiration, empowerment, and, ultimately, action.

*Matthew Beatty is senior director of communications and engagement at the Miami Foundation. To sign up to host a conversation, visit [MyMiamiStory.org](http://MyMiamiStory.org).*

*Feedback: [letters@biscaynetimes.com](mailto:letters@biscaynetimes.com)*