



Bradenton Area EDC names Shirar O'Connor their CEO & President

Following a nationwide search, the Bradenton Area Economic Development Corp. has appointed Shirar O'Connor its next CEO and president. She will assume the role June 1.

O'Connor has more than 30 years of experience in economic development, business attraction and foreign direct investment, according to a statement. She comes to the EDC from the Financial Times, where she served as director of professional development, advising and training economic development organizations and government agencies worldwide on strategies to improve performance and drive capital investment.

Previously, O'Connor was vice president of marketing for the state of Connecticut's public-private economic development agency, AdvanceCT. She has held additional leadership roles at Conway Data, UK Trade & Investment and the Netherlands Foreign Investment Agency, where she managed North American markets and led international investment initiatives, according to a statement. Throughout her career, O'Connor has advised more than 120 economic development organizations globally. She was also a "founding architect" of the SelectUSA Investment Summit and the Site Selectors Guild annual conference, according to a statement.

"Shirar is a world-class economic development leader with the rare combination of strategic vision, global connectivity, diplomatic leadership and the local ties required to guide our organization forward," EDC Board of Directors Chair Chris Cianfaglione says in a statement.

The Bradenton EDC's board unanimously approved O'Connor after a search process led by St. Petersburg-based executive search firm Winner Partners. In January, the EDC hired the firm to help find its next leader after its previous CEO, Sharon Hillstrom, retired Dec. 31, 2025. Since mid-January, Lakewood Ranch-based Fawley Bryant Architecture COO and partner Amanda Parrish has been interim CEO.

O'Connor, who graduated from high school in Clearwater and has a BFA from the University of Florida, will assume the role of president and CEO at the EDC June 1. She will take the helm a couple of months into the EDC's new contract with Manatee County, which took effect April 7 and requires the organization, among other things, to report on performance metrics, provide quarterly reports to commissioners and maintain audit-ready documentation. Last year, county commissioners opted not to renew the agency's annual contract in September, citing concerns over transparency and return on investment.

"Her ability to build trust, navigate intricate stakeholder environments and implement data-driven strategies will be instrumental," Cianfaglione says, "as we strengthen our partnerships and expand economic opportunity across the Bradenton Area."

O'Connor is currently based in New York, according to LinkedIn. She and her family plan to relocate to the community, where she already has "established ties," according to the statement.

"Returning to Florida to serve a place I call home is incredibly meaningful to me," O'Connor says in the statement. "The Bradenton Area has tremendous potential, and I look forward to working alongside our public and private partners to drive sustainable economic growth, support high-quality job creation and build on the region's momentum."

The Bradenton EDC is a public-private partnership dedicated to driving economic growth in Manatee County by attracting new businesses, supporting existing companies and strengthening the region's economy through strategic partnerships and targeted initiatives.

About Winner Partners

Winner Partners is a certified woman-owned executive search and recruitment firm headquartered in St. Petersburg, Florida. The firm specializes in identifying and placing leaders for organizations that create community and economic impact and supported the national search process for this role. www.winnerpartners.net.