

One Region Atlanta: The Power of Partnerships to Strengthen Community

THE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION FOR GREATER ATLANTA

Foreword

The Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta serves as a unique dynamic bridge between philanthropy and community, providing resources and influence to create a common agenda for growth and prosperity. Our 30,000-foot, view-complemented by an on the ground presence - provides us with insight and access to facilitate a level of public engagement essential for a vibrant, sustainable quality of life.

We believe the healthy development of communities is based largely on the balance of power (philanthropy, government, business); access to resources (food, jobs, housing); and equity (fair and just practices) in relationship to the members of the community it represents. As a place-based funder forever committed to this region, the Foundation sees as our unique role to motivate and support local civic and institutional efforts that have a mission to seek this balance.

The Atlanta region is changing rapidly and so must our philanthropic responses. We are increasingly international, recording 716,434 foreign-born residents in 2010. These numbers moved Atlanta up from 14th to 12th in US metro areas with the largest immigrant population by sheer numbers. In acknowledgment of the inextricable link between culture and faith, houses of worship have increased as well. Religion in the region, historically centered on western Christianity, is now represented by a considerable number of ethnic Christian congregations, including Korean and Indian churches. Large non-Christian faiths are present in the form of Islam, Judaism and Hinduism. Overall, there are over 1,000 places of worship within Atlanta.

Through One Region Atlanta, an interfaith and intercultural initiative of The Community Foundation, we have gained greater appreciation of the power of partnerships that are built upon profound roots of faith and culture. When fostered by respect and candid curiosity, these relationships of the heart and mind have the potential to not only alter our region's civic infrastructure from "inside out", but to also increase collective motivation and capacity to solve our toughest community concerns.

Comity as Civic Character

For half a century, Atlanta has thrived in large part because of its reputation as a place where different faiths and races work together to solve problems. When former city of Atlanta Mayor William B. Hartsfield called Atlanta "a city too busy to hate," he forever linked the values of neighborly good will and economic vitality.

Tangible benefits result when an eclectic community embraces its differences as a source of advantage. Public policies improve. Businesses are more successful. Governments run better. Schools educate more effectively. Institutions of all types fulfill their missions with greater impact. Right down to the neighborhood and block level, the quality of life is consistently higher.

Globalization is one of the dominant influences now, fueling metro Atlanta's ambitions for prominence on the international scene. Yet these ambitions depend first and foremost on who

we are “at home.” We are changing, because like America overall, the Atlanta region is a magnet for the world. Among our more than 1000 houses of worship, the masjid has taken its place alongside the church and synagogue as a pillar of community life. The prominence of Sikhs and other faiths is increasing. Correlating with our religious diversity, the region’s ethnic and cultural diversity is burgeoning: according to the Atlanta Regional Commission, within 25 years, there will be no majority ethnic group in Atlanta.¹

If Metro Atlanta is true to its heritage, we will chart our future with everyone having a voice, a chance to contribute leadership, and a role in shaping the region.

One Region Atlanta

An initiative of The Community Foundation, One Region Atlanta grew out of a national movement to counter the post-September 11 atmosphere of suspicion and hostility keenly directed at Muslims, but broadly reflected across a rising tide of cultural and religious intolerance. Efforts similar to One Region Atlanta are underway in San Francisco, Chicago, New York and Minneapolis – each associated with a local community foundation.

One Region Atlanta supports opportunities for inclusion, civility, participation and cooperation across the region. Since its launch in 2013, the Initiative has deliberately worked across faiths and cultures together to help build relationships, encourage leadership, and promote civic engagement.

One Region Atlanta has ambitious goals and its methods are as diverse as its participants--public dialogues; artistic & cultural experiences; training; and grants, including individual scholarships and program sponsorships--to encourage the consideration of faith and culture from fresh perspectives.

Impact Revealed

We have learned through this experience, that faith is a powerful force for good, bringing out the best in individuals and communities. Below are community highlights of interfaith and intercultural efforts throughout the region:

- Atlanta is home to Welcoming America, a nonprofit committed to celebrating diverse communities and building intercultural understanding. In 2014, 27 states hosted National Welcoming Week, during which 13,000 people participated in service projects and other events such as soccer games, business tours, and potluck dinners.
- With over 2000 votes cast from across the metro region and ideas submitted from 13 Metro Atlanta counties, the *One Region Atlanta: Ideas Challenge* has been shown to be a powerful mechanism for stimulating civic engagement broadly and deeply throughout the community.*
- Atlanta Mayor Kasim Reed announced a ten step plan including creating an Office of Multicultural Affairs; partnering with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to

¹ Atlanta Regional Commission *Plan 2040*

establish citizenship corners in Atlanta-Fulton public libraries; and increase immigrant and refugee participation in the Small Business Enterprise Program.*

- The Hunger Walk/Run, an annual 5K walk and “fun run” begun in 1984, is a project of the Atlanta Community Food Bank that showcases the diversity of Atlanta’s cultural and religious landscape by bringing together individuals from the Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and other faith to raise money to fight hunger. In its 30 years, the Hunger Walk/Run has raised over \$7 million for hunger relief – enough to provide 28 million meals!
- Between 2002 and 2014 World Pilgrims, an Atlanta-based nonprofit, has conducted 17 “interfaith immersion” pilgrimages supported by 90+ individuals. Destinations have included Istanbul, Taiwan, Spain and Jerusalem. World Pilgrims have gone on to establish local organizations such as the Faith Alliance of Metro Atlanta and Neshama.
- Formed in 2010, Higher Ground was born of a unique relationship among four long-time Atlanta faith leaders. Higher Ground’s leaders speak with a distinctive, collective voice, helping to raise awareness and to inspire action on key issues affecting the greater Atlanta community to effect positive change. The group has been featured in local and national press and hosted dozens of conversations across the region.*
- The Midtown Assistance Center, Inc. (MAC) is an interfaith ministry founded in 1986 that provides emergency assistance to the working poor of midtown and downtown Atlanta. Eleven interfaith congregations support MAC; since 2007, these congregations have donated a total of \$448,929 and 22,000 volunteer hours.

**Supported by One Region Atlanta, an initiative of The Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta*

Signs of Success

Here’s what to look for when funding interfaith and intercultural community building:

- Greater volunteer participation in civic groups and associations Stronger social connections among people of differing faiths and cultures
- Increased electoral participation in local elections
- Visible public interactions between and among diverse coalitions united in action
- More financial, intellectual and human investment in efforts that bridge cultures and faiths

The Journey

Everywhere in the world, there is clear proof that sectarian conflict puts society in a deadly, downward spiral. Yet our region’s historic ideals and traditions show that here, we can follow a more positive and productive path.

And what an exciting path it is – listening, learning, offering ideas and talents, working side by side to realize shared goals, understanding neighbors in a new light, appreciating the strengths to be gained as each engages the other. There is so much to be done. And while One Region Atlanta as a distinct set of programs and actions will sunset in June 2015, The Community Foundation will continue the legacy in and through the organizations and relationships that have been established.

We invite you to join us on the journey, seeking greater impact across differences. Here's how...

Be Open to Learning about Different Faiths and Cultures

- **Learn a new language to gain insight into a different culture.** Language and expression offer insight into the heritage and history of different cultures, faiths and nations. Language offers a unique window to understand the differences and similarities among us.
- **Seek experiences – worship, festivals, dinners, dances, art shows – sponsored by ethnic communities other than your own.** Visit websites such as: Atlanta Interfaith Broadcasters <http://aibtv.com/comevent.htm>; Atlanta Journal Constitution Access ATL <http://www.accessatlanta.com/>
- **Enroll in a class or course open to the public** at a local college or university, to deepen your knowledge and read literature from a variety of the world's authors. If it changes or shifts your views, offer your copy to a friend, and tell him or her you would like to talk about it.
- **Participate in one of the Interfaith Community Initiative's yearly [World Pilgrimages](#), quarterly weekend [Interfaith Immersion](#) classes, monthly [Interfaith Contemplative Groups](#), and [Leadership workshops](#).** <http://www.interfaithci.org>
- **Challenge yourself** by questioning your own opinions and views, and putting yourself in the position of others

Don't be Afraid to Talk and Ask Questions

- **Consider starting or joining a group that is interested in multi faith and cultural interaction.** This could be a book club, a supper group or a ministry at your house of worship. Small groups allow time and opportunity for deep interaction and trust to develop. Clubs such Rotary and Kiwanis have an international focus and committees.
- **Check with your local library and humanities council for activities and programs that focus on building diverse relationships.**
- **Invite a speaker or hold a film screening on a multicultural theme at your home/house of worship/school/service event.**

Be Inclusive in your surroundings

- **Look at the composition of your associations – nonprofit boards, religious affiliations, neighborhood groups – and seek to include diverse voices and perspectives**
- **Track public policy, especially around issues of immigration, education, housing and employment.** Keep track of those legislative and policy actions that encourage – or discourage – diverse voices. Study the different points of view, make your personal conclusions and let political leaders know what your opinion is.

Be Generous in your Support

- **Give financial support to organizations and efforts that promote interfaith and intercultural work.**
- **Give time and talent.** Get involved and help to mobilize others to the cause.

About The Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta

For more than 60 years the Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta has connected philanthropic resources with community need across 23 counties. We do this by:

- Engaging philanthropists ... providing philanthropic services to individuals and families interested in making a long-term, positive impact in the community through their giving. We help them to connect their passion with purpose.
- Strengthening the region's nonprofits ... supporting them through grants, education and technical assistance, increasing their ability to influence critical issues in the region.
- Advancing public will ... leading and encouraging collaborative efforts to provide solutions to community problems, often partnering with other funders, nonprofits and individual donors.
- As of 2013, the Foundation managed donor assets of more than \$929 million and awards more than \$134 million in grants to nonprofit organizations and community-based programs. We also provide coaching, guidance and knowledge to increase the strategic and managerial capacity of the nonprofit sector.

Through a well-established network of relationships and activities, we are a catalyst for action on the region's most pressing needs. One Region Atlanta is part of a long tradition of innovative initiatives which have included the Atlanta AIDS Partnership, Grants to Green, the Neighborhood Fund, the Metro Atlanta Arts Fund, Healthy Belvedere, Metropolitan Atlanta Young Opportunities Initiative, Champions for Children, Neighborhood Nexus and others.

- Practicing organizational excellence ... being a trusted and transparent steward of long-term charitable resources to serve donors and benefit nonprofits and communities.

Visit www.cfgreateratlanta.org to learn more about The Community Foundation.

In an environment marked by polarization, philanthropists will need to develop and draw on deep reserves of cultural and political capital. In some cases, they can help forge new and previously unimaginable coalitions.

Steven Teles, Heather Hurlburt & Mark Schmitt, *Philanthropy in a Time of Polarization*, Stand for Social Innovation Review

Friendship is born at that moment when one person says to another, “What! You too? I thought I was the only one.”

C. S. Lewis

I don't like that man. I must get to know him better. Abraham Lincoln.

Brian Friedman, Community Foundation Trustee

– “I've been engaged at a personal level and have witnessed how a small amount of dollars, can truly have an amazing impact”

Joanna Adams, Higher Ground Group - “People are dying to be exposed to faith in a way that builds bridges of understanding. They want to experience religion in a hopeful way.”

Although all individuals in the region benefit from this growing diversity, not everyone yet sees this phenomenon as a positive one. Those practitioners in the region who are doing intercultural and inter-faith work are helping ensure metro Atlanta reaches its full economic and social potential by building bridges between new international residents and long-time community members. When all residents in the region come to appreciate the growing diversity, it will mean more successful outcomes for newcomers, and for the region as a whole. David Lubell, *Welcoming America*

America's greatest strength has always been its diversity – every kind of diversity. Embracing that asset, The Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta has identified strategies worthy of emulation. Its interfaith and intercultural initiatives not only impact our community; they set forth an example of wise and inspiring leadership.” Jamil Zainaldin, Georgia Humanities Council