

Georgia ACT Strategic Plan – 2021 to 2023

INTRODUCTION

Georgia Advancing Communities Together, Inc. (Georgia ACT) is a statewide membership organization of nonprofit housing and community development organizations, professionals and individuals advancing equitable housing and community development. Specifically, Georgia ACT advocates, represents, provides information to nonprofit organizations, provides networking opportunities, communication and tools and information, and seeks resources to support the nonprofit housing and community development sectors across Georgia.

As Georgia ACT continues to evolve and given the dramatic changes that are taking place in the communities it serves, greater opportunities will avail to Georgia ACT. Thus, Georgia ACT must look more strategically at strengthening its ability to be more vital, resilient and sustainable in providing meaningful outcomes and impacts to the individuals, families and communities across Georgia.

WHY STRATEGIC PLANNING?

It was time to update the Georgia Act strategic plan in order to remain relevant, the partner of choice, the strong platform for Georgia families in all their diversity, and to explore growth opportunities for the organization moving forward.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONTEXT

Through stakeholder interviews, Georgia ACT has found that the following internal strengths and weaknesses, and external opportunities and threats (SWOT) inform the key focus areas and goals upon which this strategic plan is built.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<p>Themes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Board <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. A strong and engaged board b. Diverse board and representative across the state c. Strong board leadership d. Experienced in the housing affordability space e. Virtual board meetings are a norm, even before COVID 2. Staff <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Small staff but very knowledgeable, resourceful, experienced, solid, strong, committed, effective and hard working b. Excellent job done by staff c. Staff goes above and beyond d. Flexible and capable to engage all types of stakeholders from corporate to grassroots communities. Makes everyone feel welcomed and important 	<p>Themes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Board <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Some board members are more helpful and some need to be more engaged b. Need additional expertise on board (e.g., fundraising / development, real estate attorney, policy, etc.) c. Need northern Georgia representation on the board d. Board should market Georgia ACT within their networks more e. Expand board to include community resident participation (by-law change needed) 2. Staff <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Staff is small and taking on too much; must match capacity with direction and activities of organization

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> e. Able to work well remotely f. Brought networks to the organization beyond Atlanta g. ED brought more visibility to the organization – across the state and nationally h. Georgia ACT won the lottery when they hired the ED. She brings relevant lived and professional experience <p>3. Brand</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Gaining increased statewide and national recognition b. Value of Georgia ACT tremendously increased given leadership’s statewide and national activities c. Very strong brand d. Membership has a positive relationship with Georgia ACT e. Executive Director is a strong brand ambassador for Georgia ACT f. Georgia ACT is viewed by many in the housing industry and media as the go to place and expert g. An information clearing house h. Recognized as lead statewide trade association for housing affordability i. Membership values the organization and brand <p>4. Programs / Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Georgia ACT is a champion on legislation and public awareness on the lack of affordable, safe and decent housing b. Great at informing members across the state on policy issues and topics of interest c. Georgia ACT is present at more statewide and national tables d. Georgia ACT sees the interrelatedness of affordable housing, voter engagement and health for seniors, vets, and low-income families with children, etc. e. Georgia ACT is bringing resources to rural parts of Georgia f. Annual Fall Affordable Housing Conference <p>5. Technology</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Staff and board strong in using technology b. Technology is helping staff reach out to more people and reduce time and travel costs <p>6. Finance / Fundraising</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. ED has been able to bring in new sources of revenue b. Funds are properly managed <p>7. Membership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Increased membership participation beyond Atlanta region b. Members outside of Atlanta that come from rural areas have new opportunities through their networking and accessing resources through Georgia ACT 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> b. Need staffing to assist with development, technology, administration, and social media/marketing c. Need succession planning d. Staff working long over time hours often and don’t want to burn them out e. Staff lacks health benefits f. Staff needs to learn to say, “no”; Staff needs to be more strategic and focused g. If increase workloads, then may have to get board involved h. Grants now require an organization to have a minimum of 3 staff members i. For staffing capacity may need to look at consultant or part-time staff <p>3. Brand</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Need to craft an elevator pitch for board and staff b. It needs to be more cohesive – we now provide direct services c. Need to update website and collateral / marketing materials d. Fall conference needs to be branded better e. Need to expose the brand deeper into Georgia <p>4. Programs / Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Could do more to reach more stakeholders beyond Atlanta b. Georgia ACT needs to be careful to not expand beyond staffing capacities / capabilities c. Will need funding to expand our footprint and direction d. Need to do more to make current members aware of good work; increase frequency of communication e. Need to do a deeper dive in programs / member benefits to attract more members f. Need to expand membership beyond housing network g. Need to communicate more frequently with members beyond quarterly newsletters and annual meeting h. Need to work with other organizations to expand opportunities for a housing state tax credit/state housing trust fund i. Need to network and other national and statewide housing networks to learn and inform our work <p>5. Technology</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Need a tech person to assist with virtual new normal b. Need serious hardware and software upgrades c. Staff should not be involved in the tech of the annual conference. Need to contract this out
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<p>c. Improved membership engagement</p> <p>8. Collaboration</p> <p>a. Staff has built strong collaborative partnerships nationally, regionally, statewide and locally</p> <p>b. Georgia ACT's participation in the National Forum brings more opportunities, networks and resources to the members</p>	<p>d. Need software platform for board (beyond Zoom, etc.)</p> <p>6. Finance / Fundraising</p> <p>a. Reliant on grants is not advisable</p> <p>b. We need to have diverse revenue streams beyond non-renewable / one-time application grants</p> <p>c. Hard to raise funds for policy related activities in the affordable housing sector</p> <p>d. Need to create fundraising plan to expand revenue</p> <p>e. Need more individual and unrestricted dollars</p> <p>7. Membership</p> <p>a. More effort to attract organizations beyond Atlanta for membership – especially in North GA</p> <p>b. Need to review / improve messaging for North GA nonprofits and municipalities</p> <p>c. Membership could include other organizations beyond housing</p> <p>d. Need an IT assessment of current membership for communication purposes</p> <p>e. Need to engage and get more input from members beyond Atlanta</p> <p>8. Collaboration</p> <p>a. More collaborative partnerships are needed and also beyond housing issues</p>
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<p style="text-align: center;">Opportunities</p> <p>Themes:</p> <p>1. Political Will</p> <p>a. Given the increasing affordable housing crisis across the country more Federal programs should become available</p> <p>2. Economic Trends</p> <p>a. Funders will continue to be there for nonprofits like Georgia ACT</p> <p>b. Existing commercial buildings could be converted to affordable rental housing</p> <p>3. Demographics</p> <p>a. Need for affordable housing in marginalized communities is increasing</p> <p>b. Look more at multi-generation housing for families today</p> <p>c. Seeing more Latinx and undocumented population in need of affordable housing services / support</p> <p>d. Workforce inclusionary housing policies / laws</p> <p>4. Technology</p> <p>a. Technology enables small staff to do more and reduces cost of travel – reach out to members beyond Atlanta more frequently</p> <p>5. Partnerships</p> <p>a. New partnerships could lead to more funding</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Threats</p> <p>Themes:</p> <p>1. Political Will</p> <p>a. Federal elected leadership more empowered to be vocal in an unequal way</p> <p>b. By a lack of national affordable housing policy, and COVID 19 more families are losing their homes and joining homeless ranks</p> <p>c. If Community Development Corporations fall by the wayside, more families will lose affordable, safe and decent housing</p> <p>2. Economic Trends</p> <p>a. Developers solely focus on profits and not affordable housing</p> <p>b. Increased unemployment, evictions and homelessness in a weakened economy</p> <p>c. A weak economy will cause a loss of small nonprofits with a focus on affordable housing</p> <p>d. Increase in people losing their homes</p> <p>e. Rental stock may increase but families may not be able to afford rents</p> <p>3. Demographics</p> <p>a. More people are moving into poverty and can't afford housing costs</p> <p>4. Technology</p> <p>a. Lack of / limited access to smart technology in rural communities limits their voice</p>
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	<p>5. Partnerships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Need to expand partnerships with like and complimentary organizations (e.g., regional commissions and GICH communities and in other states to learn from them)
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THE PROCESS

In developing this strategic plan, Georgia ACT completed an environmental analysis of internal strengths and weaknesses against external opportunities and threats. The processes of the analysis included input from critical stakeholders, including board, staff members and network members. This analysis enabled Georgia ACT to review the environmental findings against the mission and operating philosophy, and to develop strategic and core focus areas for the next three years. Specifically, the processes yielded data and insights on its existing internal capacity and resources as well as external macro forces and trends that could impact Georgia ACT. Next, the team identified what Georgia ACT must look like to continue being an effective operating nonprofit; reviewed our strategic intent – our vision and mission to guide us over the next three years. The team also developed five strategic goals to help keep focus on the amended mission and vision for the future in our most successful state. With these strategic goals articulated, we next identified objectives – the gaps that exist between where we are today and what we must accomplish in the future. The effort enabled us to understand the measurable outcomes and objectives that we must complete if we are to successfully achieve the full intent and scope of the goals. Finally, we were also able to identify key steps or initiatives to be taken that will help us to achieve our objectives, goals and ultimately our mission.

OUR STRATEGIC INTENT

Every idea and action taken by Georgia ACT must be aligned to the mission statement and vision crafted below:

Our Mission:

We build, support, and inform a statewide network of thriving organizations, professionals, and individuals advancing equitable housing and community development.

Our Vision:

All Georgia families have safe & decent housing in vibrant neighborhoods.

OUR VALUES & BEHAVIORS CHARTER

Georgia ACT applies the following values and visible behaviors to implement this strategic plan as well as to support and move the nonprofit and its strategic partnerships forward. Through its board, staff, and partnerships, Georgia ACT commits to exhibiting the following values and behaviors:

Values	Behaviors
Passion	Demonstrate empathy, hard work and putting in the time, engaging advocates and exhibit enthusiasm
Creativity	Flexible and open to change, actively seek alternatives, be inclusive and engaged (people and ideas), look to the future, recognize and take advantage of opportunities and brainstorm
Pragmatism	“Keep it real”, understand the realities of the GA context, seek to understand all agendas/motivations and connect the dots accordingly, set realistic expectations of staff and board
Integrity	Transparent financial documents, consistency in messaging, by-laws and articles of incorporation, membership standards and requirements, appropriate use of grant funds, on-time reporting
Respect	Resolving conflict, confirming community’s values, aligning motives and outcomes with values, listening, advocating, collaborating for the greater good, and fostering collaboration between and among member organizations
Collaboration	Work cooperatively with member and external organizations to achieve common goals, develop joint resources, share and provide information and technical assistance, support events and activities, address obstacles, short- and long-term, across geographic, racial, economic and political barriers.
Diversity, Equity & Inclusion	Understanding DEI is a journey not a destination, realizing our unconscious biases, applying equal value and access for ALL people, understanding our differences add value to the organization, and representing people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized.

OUR STRATEGY AND STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

In developing our strategic plan, Georgia ACT utilized the results based strategic planning framework. This framework answers the following questions:

- Where is Georgia ACT today?
- What do we have to work with today?
- Where do we want to be in the next three years?
- How do we plan to get there?
- How will we know when we have arrived?

Considering these questions revealed the strategic priorities / goals that will result in a desired future for Georgia ACT. The process also produced specific outcomes, measurable objectives and key initiatives. The key initiatives are further developed with specific activities, timeframes, budgets and deliverables / results.

The five core and strategic focus areas for the next three years are:

1. Elevate the visibility and value of the Georgia ACT brand;
2. Strengthen membership engagement and collaborations;
3. Enhance board, staff and technology capabilities;
4. Expand programs and services; and
5. Boost financial vitality

Goal 1: When people hear Georgia ACT, there is name recognition, an understanding of what we do and a positive view and experience of the organization.

	Outcomes	Objectives	Key Initiatives
Branding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are a top national and state industry expert. • We are known for our accomplishments as a service provider, in advocacy, and equitable housing and community development activities. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.1. Increase partnership activities (such trainings, speaking engagements, conference participation). 1.2. Strengthen the Georgia ACT 'pitch' and increase media coverage of organizational activities. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Establish a Georgia ACT Speakers Bureau. b. Develop & Implement a marketing/communications campaign (e.g., what Georgia ACT offers - conference, training and partnerships). a. Create a sample pitch, fact sheet, and press kit for board members and staff to tailor for the specific events / audiences / issues.

Goal 2: We have an active, engaged and diverse membership from the twelve regions of the state and nationwide collaborations.

	Outcomes	Objectives	Key Initiatives
<p>Membership & Collaborations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have maintained current membership and increase it by 10% per year. 	<p>2.1. Increase membership and participation outside of the metro Atlanta area.</p>	<p>a. Develop regional membership campaigns that include: highlighting membership benefits, commercials, podcast, and information sessions.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participated in at least one national event annually to bring opportunities, networks and resources to the membership. 	<p>2.2. Engage in a new national event annually and highlight outcomes.</p>	<p>a. Annually assess national event and make recommendations for upcoming year's event.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Built and created new statewide and regional collaborations. 	<p>2.3. Highlight a new collaboration.</p>	<p>a. Capture testimonies (written & video) from new collaborations and use in website, social media, and membership campaigns.</p>

Goal 3: Georgia Act has diverse, skilled and experienced people and tools to meet its mission

	Outcomes	Objectives	Key Initiatives
<p>People & Technology</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Network has grown by X# and by X# of new capacity by members. • We have engaged all 12 regions through our programs and activities. • We are recognized as the subject matter expert and partner throughout the state. 	<p>3.1. To increase and diversify board participation and giving.</p> <p>3.2. To increase staffing capacity and provide benefits.</p> <p>3.3. To establish cross-training, staff succession planning and review internal operations.</p> <p>3.4. To improve and strengthen technology to support the virtual environment.</p>	<p>a. Expand board member representation that is statewide, diverse and engaged.</p> <p>b. Develop a policy and strategy to secure annual board giving.</p> <p>a. Explore work place benefits for Georgia ACT staff.</p> <p>a. Develop an internal operation manual (SOPs).</p> <p>b. Develop a staff and board succession policy and plan.</p> <p>a. Develop & implement an IT policy and plan.</p>

Goal 4: We impact communities served by the network and provide increased benefits to member organizations.

	Outcomes	Objectives	Key Initiatives
<p>Programs & Services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • X% increase of satisfaction from members . • X number of training .opportunities (i.e. Fall Conference). • X number of resources and information made available. • X number of technical assistance engagement. • One new initiative. 	<p>4.1. Diversify the training offerings/initiatives/technical assistance areas to members.</p> <p>4.2. Strategically establish direct services to meet emergency needs.</p> <p>4.3. Establish and strengthen partnerships to share the work to maximize impact.</p>	<p>a. Develop and implement a member capacity building program (e.g., Survey members to ascertain training and/or technical assistance needs).</p> <p>a. Deploy services upon determination that Georgia ACT (and/or network) has the capacity to provide services during an emergency.</p> <p>a. Develop & cultivate “win-win” collaborations that allow Georgia ACT to meet its expanded community outreach objectives.</p>

Goal 5: We have Diverse funding sources and increased resources			
	Outcomes	Objectives	Key Initiatives
Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased sponsorships by X% • Obtained \$100,000+ multi-year, unrestricted dollars. • Received In-kind resources (not including financial) by \$X%. • Strengthened partnerships/network with national partners who have access to resources (i.e. technical assistance/funding). • 100% Board Giving. 	5.1. Strengthen funding sources to realize our mission.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Re-establish resource development / fundraising committee. b. Contract with a Resource Development person. c. Develop a fundraising strategy to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultivate relationships with new funders; • Identify and explore new funding opportunities/sources of funding; and • Collaborative funding activities (i.e. Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Sapelo Foundation).

Summary

Georgia ACT looks forward to the future that has now been clearly and strategically crafted. The focus on each goal aligns the nonprofit with the main areas that will provide for a successful organization of the future. Creating goals, objectives and initiatives ensures that Georgia ACT monitors key performance indicators in every sphere of the organization.

Participants

Georgia ACT offers sincere thanks to its board, staff, members, partners and other stakeholders who participated in the development of this three-year strategic plan.