

Greater ATL RCE Executive Summary

May 31, 2017

Since its founding, Atlanta has aspired to greater heights. Rising from the ashes after the American Civil War, Atlanta became a beacon of the “New South,” a region that would grow into a cosmopolitan city of the American South driven by a modern economy, a vibrant and diverse citizenry, and a spirit of what Congressman John Lewis refers to as “good trouble” to create positive change. In the decades since the civil rights movement was born here, the region’s rapid growth has created great wealth and prosperity for many. Yet for those living south and west of the growth line bisecting the region, this 50 years of growth has come at great cost: jobs, opportunity and high quality of life are largely inaccessible to them.

As the region prepares for an additional 2.5 million residents in the next 25 years, it sits at a pivotal moment: will deepening disparities begin limiting opportunity for even the most prosperous in the region? Will its ecosystems and institutions survive the shocks and stressors anticipated as global warming accelerates, climate refugees arrive, and the fossil fuel-driven economy wanes?

The stakeholders engaged in formation of the Greater Atlanta Regional Centre of Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development (ATL RCE) see a different future for the region, where the dozens of organizations and institutions working tirelessly to address these sustainability issues are able to connect their efforts and leverage them for needed collective impact. Establishing the ATL RCE will provide a much-needed structure to facilitate cross-sector collaboration towards commonly identified Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

While metro-Atlanta boasts one of the highest concentrations of higher educational institutions in the United States, those anchor institutions have not always been a part of past networks to achieve sustainability goals, like an effective movement to resist the privatization of water in Georgia. The genesis of the RCE is a realization by these anchor institutions that, after implementing award-winning sustainability programs on their own campuses, the time is right to bring their knowledge and expertise outside their campus gates and partner at a broader regional scale for a multi-sector approach to education for sustainable development. It will also engender a culture of learning and continuous improvement, providing opportunities for students of all ages to contribute to these efforts and shape new ones.

Leveraging the SDGs to Address our Paradoxes

As this application details, the Atlanta region represents many paradoxes of strength and weakness, interwoven in a complex web of interdependency. Stakeholder-identified preliminary SDG priorities for Greater Atlanta RCE collaboration will seek to address these paradoxes.

Our Greater Atlanta RCE application was submitted to the UN at the end of May.

Download the full application: serve-learn-sustain.gatech.edu/atlanta-un-rce

Primary SDGs	Strengths of the Region	Weaknesses
Good Health & Well-being	Home to internationally known health centers, including the Centers for Disease Control, The Carter Center and world-class research hospitals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Top-ranked in US for new HIV/AIDs cases, diabetes, stroke, asthma ● Extreme health inequities such as infant mortality and premature deaths ● Graded “F” by American Lung Association in 2017 for ozone
Zero Hunger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Year-round growing season - GA is #1 producer in US of eight food commodities ● Growing local food system, with one of first US cities with Director of Urban Agriculture ● In 2015, Georgia ranked third in the nation in net electricity generation from biomass 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● >80,000 Atlantans need assistance to buy food each week ● Dozens of food deserts and food swamps exist in metro Atlanta ● No systems exist to scale diversion of food waste ● Local production of perishable crops is limited by lack of access to land
Sustainable Cities & Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● World-class parks and greenspaces ● Sprawl growth model has shifted to core densification ● Atlanta is one of 100 Rockefeller Foundation resilient cities ● Trees cover 36 percent of the city, far above the national average of 27 percent ● Strong sustainability plan under Power to Change and use of Neighborhood Planning Units 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Top-ranked energy burden on low income households in US ● Disparate impact of urban heat island effect on low wealth communities ● Poor access to greenspace ● Legacy of sprawl development ● Rapid gentrification and loss of affordable housing ● Lack of political commitment or investment in meaningful sustainable practices across the region, such as transit, walkability, and zoning
Climate Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● US leader in electric vehicle ownership and growing charging infrastructure ● Ranked by Carbon Disclosure Project as a top-10 worldwide city for quality reporting of Greenhouse Gas Emissions ● City of Atlanta resolution mandates that the City transition to 100% renewable energy sources by 2035 ● US leader in LEED-certified buildings and voluntary commercial energy/water conservation ● Strong leadership from Georgia Climate Action Coalition (grassroots) and the Georgia Climate Project (UGA, Georgia Tech, Emory) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Top polluting coal-fired power plants in US ● Rapid loss of tree canopy ● High transport carbon emissions (tonnes of CO₂ per person)

Quality Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highest concentration of Historically Black Colleges and Universities in US • Home to more than 50 other higher education institutions with nearly 1,800 programs of study 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National notoriety for Atlanta Public Schools cheating scandal • Dramatically segregated and disparate K-12 school performance correlated with race and income • Lack of institutional commitment to sustainability and ethics in higher education
Industry, Innovation & Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Global logistics hub - busiest airport in the world, HQ for UPS, extensive rail infrastructure • Burgeoning technology start-up ecosystem and testbed for smart cities technologies • New catalytic infrastructure investments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notorious traffic and crumbling road infrastructure • Skeletal transit infrastructure inaccessible to more than 60% of population in region • Sharp digital divide
No Poverty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home to 25 Fortune 1000 corporate HQs • Film and video industry hub of the south • Abundance of natural resources • Diverse and growing economy • Birthplace to the modern civil rights movement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistently ranked as top US city for income inequality and lack of social mobility • Slavery legacy is reflected today in structural and systemic racism and a city/region divided

Many of these paradoxes are not unique to the Atlanta region. It could in fact be said that this is the story of many 21st century cities around the globe, certainly of those in the exponentially-growing US Southern Sunbelt. Atlanta has contributed health advances, civil rights inspiration, cultural music and product icons, and logistics and technology innovations to the world. Now is the time for Greater Atlanta to contribute in a new way: to forge new global and local collaborations through the RCE network to advance sustainable development and address these paradoxes.

Vision of ATL RCE

We envision a robust and engaged network of all sectors of Greater Atlanta society, collaboratively working towards a region where the principles of sustainability - equity and justice, resilient ecosystems, health and well-being, and economic opportunity - are ingrained in its continued development; where opportunities for greater progress are realized through connected local partners and knowledge centers; and where the students in the region have expanded opportunities to learn about sustainability locally and globally, and participate first-hand in shaping a sustainable future.

Mission

The Greater Atlanta RCE accelerates student and community sustainable development leadership and progress towards a more sustainable future by leveraging a network structure to connect, support and catalyze diverse collaborations.

Goal and Objectives

The stated goal of the UNU-IAS Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) Programme is to bridge the gap between learning and development through the following objectives:

Objective 1: Accelerating local and regional solutions to sustainability issues

Objective 2: Re-orienting higher education for societal transformation into SD

Objective 3: Developing SD and ESD competencies and capabilities as well as a science-policy interface.

The following chart reflects preliminary thinking on strategies and activities that will allow the Greater Atlanta RCE to focus on our priority SDGs while addressing all three of the UNU ESD objectives. These strategies and activities surfaced through conversations with more than 200 stakeholders from higher education, civil society, business, and local, regional, state and federal government during Winter/Spring 2017. Activities prefaced with “Potential” reflect ideas inspired by and extrapolated from these conversations.

Planning and execution of all activities will be done using a distributed network structure, reliant on network members’ in-kind contributions of time and talents, with anchor educational institutions at the hub of the network. Initially proposed activities will largely be driven by voluntary efforts to achieve early wins with little to no hard expense. Relationships with the local philanthropic community have also been deepened through the application engagement process, and the RCE anticipates seeking funding to support network formation, coordination, facilitation; collaborative tool development; participation in the RCE global network; and scholarships for our most resource-constrained members, to ensure diverse participation.

ATL RCE STRATEGIES, KEY ACTIVITIES, & OUTCOMES

Strategy	2018 Activities	2019 Activities	Long-term Outcomes
<p>A. Approach governance with explicit inclusion of diversity of stakeholders, focus on equity in power dynamics and balance of sector participation</p>	<p>Establish RCE Steering Committee (SC), including community organization representation as well as other sectors, ensuring diversity of stakeholders in network governance.</p> <p>Establish network coordination structure, including engagement of part-time Network Coordinator, graduate research assistants and student interns.</p> <p>Develop collaborative leadership structure including regular rotation of RCE Chair(s)/Institutional home(s)</p> <p>Establish Working Groups (WGs) ensuring diverse representation across sectors, and network facilitation training is provided for SC and WG Chairs</p> <p>Establish RCE Youth Corps, represented on the SC and active in WGs.</p>	<p>Explore potential membership structure with fees/in-kind contributions to deepen commitments, ensure equitable participation and generate revenue.</p> <p>Potentially create member mentoring program.</p> <p>Potentially create small grants program to help seed new collaborations and build capacity of civil society to participate.</p>	<p>RCE reflects the true diversity of experience and perspectives of Greater Atlantans, giving it reach and relevance across cultures locally and globally.</p> <p>RCE governance embodies SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities.</p> <p>RCE reflects focus on civil and human rights that is an integral part of history and future, incorporating the many international thought leaders and institutions on these issues located in the Atlanta area.</p> <p>RCE expands existing momentum of sustainability-focused student advocates/groups and increases collaboration among them.</p>

Strategy	2018 Activities	2019 Activities	Long-term Outcomes
<p>B. Use digital tools to elevate existing ESD collaborations for greater visibility and broader relevance</p>	<p>Conduct inventory of ESD collaborations, partners and results, identifying clusters, alignments and gaps.</p> <p>Engage communications assets of RCE members to develop branding for Greater Atlanta RCE that is approachable and inclusive, including templates for collaboration stories that connect SDGs to life in region.</p> <p>Develop Virtual Resource Center for RCE communications, directory of RCE members, projects, resources and opportunities (particularly around internships/fellowships and other employment), and educational resources/tools.</p> <p>Create SDG Data Hub to ensure quantitative and qualitative data is accessible and useful for regional sustainable development. Potential RCE roles include data collection, curation and translation.</p>	<p>Potentially develop shared online dashboard of SDG metrics with means for RCE participant contribution.</p>	<p>Ease of access and use catalyzes connections and accelerates local progress towards the SDGs while providing value to network participants.</p>

Strategy	2018 Activities	2019 Activities	Long-term Outcomes
<p>C. Leverage momentum around existing collaborations to catalyze broader participation, greater impact and connection to ESD.</p>	<p>Highlight and facilitate engagement with key regional projects (such as 100 Cities, SPARCC).</p> <p>Expand existing cross-institutional collaborations (e.g. Environmental Justice series, Georgia Climate Project, Piedmont Project, Integrated Network for Social Sustainability, Leadership and Multi-faith Program, Student Sustainability Ambassadors)</p>	<p>Potentially develop RCE conference to continue expanding the network and engaging collaborators.</p>	<p>Greater Atlanta RCE amplifies and accelerates existing collaborations, contributing to their success.</p> <p>RCE engagement provides a conduit for broader participation in collaborations and catalyzes deeper integration of ESD.</p>
<p>D. Identify and share wisdom of the network to heighten ESD in the region.</p>	<p>Create crowd-sourced online directory of expertise, assets, needs and case studies, including network member training capabilities.</p> <p>Elevate Project Drawdown as a tangible example of education on the intersection of SDGs, and facilitate exploration of Greater Atlanta implications through convenings and fellowships.</p>	<p>Join other RCEs in SDG Challenges to accelerate inter- and intra-sector innovation, ESD and adoption of sustainable practices.</p> <p>Potentially create multi-media awareness campaign to share successes of collaborations.</p> <p>Potentially create Member Speakers' Bureau to take collaboration lessons learned to diverse array of conferences and RCE gatherings around the world.</p>	<p>Greater cross-disciplinary, cross-sector knowledge of ESD.</p> <p>Growth of the network.</p> <p>Acceleration of most locally-impactful global warming solutions.</p>

Strategy	2018 Activities	2019 Activities	Long-term Outcomes
<p>E. Infuse K-12, higher education and informal and non-formal education curricula with the SDGs in local context</p>	<p>Convene an RCE-focused meeting of all higher ed campuses in the region at the Georgia Campus Network annual meeting (particularly focusing on engaging technical and vocational colleges).</p> <p>Deepen outreach to K-12 educators from the 5 core Greater Atlanta school systems to assess SDG knowledge and identify ESD leadership.</p> <p>Inventory curricula resources among the network and identify gaps in content for diversity of ages/settings.</p> <p>Establish a baseline of sustainability awareness in relevant categories of civil society.</p>	<p>Potentially develop new curricula to fill identified gaps and ground SDGs in local context.</p> <p>Potentially translate curricula to reach the region’s rapidly growing immigrant and refugee community.</p> <p>Potentially partner to host Hindi-, Spanish- and Korean-speaking (largest non-English languages spoken in region) ESD events.</p>	<p>Introduction of ESD to greatly expanded audience across the region.</p>
<p>F. Empower local youth to create and execute ESD strategy through an RCE Youth Corps</p>	<p>Support youth leaders in creating structure for recruitment, governance and accountability for RCE Youth Corps</p> <p>Support youth leaders in connecting with peer RCE Youth Corps around the world.</p> <p>Engage Youth Corps representatives to serve on SC and engage in each WG.</p> <p>Facilitate Youth Corps connections with business leaders and entrepreneurs for both curricular (e.g. class projects) and extra-curricular (e.g. internships) learning and mutual benefits of students and businesses.</p>	<p>Potentially facilitate mentorship between RCE Youth Corps and secondary students around ESD.</p>	<p>Youth leadership infuses RCE with energy and innovation, creates a cohort of young leaders who are highly competitive in the field, and accelerates momentum of the RCE.</p>

Proposed Governance & Management Structure

In order to keep the demands of network coordination from detracting from the ESD work of the network, we are exploring a governance structure for the Greater Atlanta RCE anchored during the first year by Georgia Tech, Emory and Spelman as co-leaders with broader multi-sectoral leadership provided by a Steering Committee, including representatives from each of the higher education partners as well as from other sectors. The early work will include the structuring rotation of leadership among higher education anchor institutions, as well as planning for launch of Working Groups and training in racial equity and network facilitation.

Establishment of an RCE Youth Corps will be an essential governance activity early in RCE formation. With a solid cohort of roughly 20 student leaders representing at least six institutions already engaged in an Atlanta Student Sustainability Council (ATL-SSC), the Youth Corps will establish its own roles and responsibilities in executing RCE strategies; to participate in the Steering Committee and to serve as an important conduit to youth leadership around the region.

The bulk of the activity of the network will take place within work groups organized around themes and clusters identified in the initial inventories and surveys described in the 2018 activities. These thematic work groups will comprise practitioners engaged in the work to support the SDGs and ESD, who will communicate about their work and collaborate as appropriate. A member of each working group will serve on the Steering Committee to ensure their activities are communicated.

Letters of Support (see full application)

- Agnes Scott College – Elizabeth Kiss, President
- Atlanta Regional Commission – Douglas Hooker, Executive Director
- Captain Planet Foundation – Courtney Kimmel, Director of Strategic Partnerships
- City of Atlanta – Kasim Reed, Mayor
- Clark Atlanta University – Felicia Davis, Sustainability Coordinator
- Corporate Volunteer Council – Cheryl Kortmeier, Executive Director
- Emory University – President Claire Sterk
- Institute for Urban Studies, Andrew Young School of Public Policy, Georgia State University – Johannes Nijman, Director
- College of Arts and Sciences, Georgia State University – Sara Rosen, Dean
- Georgia Institute of Technology – Rafael Bras, Provost
- Ray C. Anderson Center for Sustainable Business, Scheller College of Business, Georgia Institute of Technology – Michael Oxman, Managing Director
- Atlanta Student Sustainability Council (RCE Youth Network) – Nicole Kennard & other students
- Greenhouse Accelerator, Inc. – Bernie Burgener, Executive Director
- President’s Commission on Sustainability, Kennesaw State University – Vanessa Slinger-Friedman, Chair and Professor of Geography
- Morehouse College – William Taggart, Interim President
- Ray C. Anderson Foundation – John Lanier, Executive Director and Vice President
- Saving Our Sons & Sisters International – Chuck Barlow, Jr., Co-Founder/Executive Director
- Southface – Andrea Pinabell, President
- Spelman College – Mary Schmidt Campbell, President
- United Nations Foundation - J. Rutherford Seydel, II

Get Involved

This effort is currently being led by the Georgia Institute of Technology and Emory University, in collaboration with Agnes Scott College, Clark Atlanta University, Georgia State University, Kennesaw State University, Morehouse College, Spelman College, and University of Georgia. We are just at the beginning stages and are eager to engage more institutions, organizations, and groups. Contact us at:

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