

# Atlanta Regional Economic Competitiveness Strategy



**ARC**

ATLANTA REGIONAL COMMISSION  
regional impact + local relevance



# Letter from the Chairman

There is no doubt that the Atlanta region is a major economic engine and driver of Georgia's economy. With roughly half of the state's population and more than 60 percent of the state's economic activity, metro Atlanta is critical to Georgia's financial well-being. And, as home to the world's busiest airport, numerous Fortune 500 companies and the East Coast's fastest growing port, Georgia and the Atlanta region help advance the global economy, as well.

While the Atlanta region and Georgia have achieved much during the last half century, the future promises great opportunities. We must be prepared to take advantage of them.

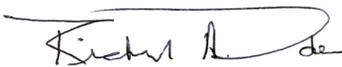
The process of developing a Regional Competitiveness Strategy for metro Atlanta began with an assessment of the region's economic strengths and weaknesses through the examination of pertinent data and qualitative measurements, such as surveys and focus groups. One common theme that emerged from the research is that metro Atlanta and Georgia are no longer competing against other southeastern cities for the best jobs and workers. Instead, we are competing with cities from across the United States and around the world. In order to be globally competitive, we must collaborate and realize that we are stronger together.

We have heard this theme of collaboration many times over the last few years from leaders within the region and from experts who see metro Atlanta through a global lens. And, conceptually, we all know that working as a team is a key to the region's sustained success. However, we also understand that the region's success hinges on our ability to create and sustain vibrant communities that can attract critical workers and keep them here.

The development of this regional strategy included a thorough review of existing strategic initiatives underway by local, regional and statewide partners in economic development, community improvement and workforce preparedness. This strategy is intended to complement, not supplant, the successful efforts of these partners and to advance the pursuit of more collaborative and cooperative approaches to regional competitiveness for the betterment of the Atlanta region and its communities.

Assisted by Market Street Services, the Atlanta Regional Commission convened a team of regional leaders representing elected officials, businesses, education, economic development and other communities, who worked diligently to create this strategy and will continue to work together throughout its implementation in the coming years. It has been my pleasure and my honor to serve as the chairman of the Regional Economic Competitiveness Strategy Steering Committee and to present this strategy to the Atlanta region and its 4.5 million residents.

Sincerely,



Richard Oden  
Chairman, Rockdale County Commission  
Chairman, Economic Competitiveness Steering Committee



# The Volunteers

The process of developing this Regional Economic Competitiveness Strategy involved many different organizations, governments and, most importantly, people. The process was initiated by the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) but was guided by volunteers from the public, private and nonprofit sectors on behalf of the entire region. The strategy was developed by Market Street Services Inc., based on the input they received from the Work Group and the Steering Committee throughout the process. Below are lists of the dedicated volunteers who gave their time to the Work Group and the Steering Committee.

## Steering Committee

Hon. Richard Oden (*Steering Committee chair*), *Rockdale County Board of Commissioners*

Mr. Eddie Ausband, *The Ausband Agency, Inc.*

Mr. Richard Autry, *Rockdale County Schools*

Ms. Marsha Bomar, *Stantec*

Mr. Tony Britton, *Community and Southern Bank*

Mr. Danny Brown, *SERVPRO of Henry & Spalding Counties*

Mr. Patrick Burke, *Fulton County Schools*

Ms. Tedra Cheatham, *The Clean Air Campaign*

Mr. Pedro Cherry, *Georgia Power Company*

Mr. Justin Clay, *NCR Corporation*

Mr. Tracey Coker, *Piedmont Fayette Hospital*

Ms. Shan Cooper, *Lockheed Martin Aeronautics Company*

Mr. Charles Craig, *Georgia Bio*

Ms. Ann Cramer, *IBM Corporation*

Dr. Stephen Dolinger, *Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education*

Mr. Rod Drake, *Georgia Power Company*

Mr. Todd Evans, *Jackson EMC*

Mr. Zaheer Faruqi, *Aventure Aviation*

Mr. Hans Gant, *Metro Atlanta Chamber*

Mr. Don Geiger, *Marriott International*

Mr. Stephen Green, *Morris Manning Martin Green Consulting*

Mr. Scott Gregory, *Brock, Clay, Calhoun & Rogers, LLC*

Dr. Ken Harmon, *Kennesaw State University*

Mr. Penn Hodge, *Penn Hodge Properties*

Dr. Tim Hynes, *Clayton State University*

Mr. Vaughn Irons, *APD Solutions*

Mr. Reynold Jennings, *WellStar*

Ms. Dana Lemon, *Georgia Department of Transportation*

Mr. Craig Lesser, *Pendleton Group*

Mr. Orlando Lynch, *Atlanta Peach Movers*

Mr. Lindsay Martin, *Georgia Department of Economic Development*

Hon. BJ Mathis, *Henry County Board of Commissioners*

Mr. Paul Michael, *TPA Realty Services*

Mr. Al Nash, *Progress Partners of North Fulton Atlanta*

Mr. Jason Nelms, *Everlast Synthetic Products, LLC*

Dr. Dan Papp, *Kennesaw State University*

Ms. Alicia Phillipp, *The Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta*

Hon. Tom Reed, *City of Chattahoochee Hills*

Mr. Martin Small, *State Bank & Trust Company*

Mr. Michael Sullivan, *Andersen, Tate & Carr*

Dr. Alvin Wilbanks, *Gwinnett County Schools*

Ms. Betty Willis, *Emory University*

## Work Group

Mr. Craig Lesser (*Steering Committee Liaison*), Pendleton Group

Ms. Tedra Cheatham (*Steering Committee Liaison*), The Clean Air Campaign

Mr. Joe Allen, Gwinnett Place Community  
Improvement District

Mr. Demming Bass, Cobb County Chamber of Commerce

Ms. Kali Boatright, Douglas County Chamber  
of Commerce

Mr. Fred Boscarino, Conyers-Rockdale Chamber  
of Commerce

Ms. Melanie Brandt, Technology Association of Georgia

Ms. Denise Brinson, City of Suwanee

Mr. Roger Brown, Georgia QuickStart Program

Ms. Kellie Brownlow, Partnership Gwinnett; Gwinnett  
Chamber of Commerce

Ms. Pamela Carnes, Cherokee County Chamber  
of Commerce

Dr. Mark Cunningham, Atlanta Metropolitan College

Mr. John Cushnie, Georgia Chamber of Commerce

Ms. Yulonda Darden Beauford, Clayton County  
Chamber of Commerce

Ms. Terry Durden, University System of Georgia

Mr. Alan Durham, Gwinnett County

Dr. Lisa Eichelberger, Clayton State University

Mr. Amir Farokhi, Georgia Forward

Mr. Matt Forshee, Fayette County  
Development Authority

Mr. Steve Foster, Georgia Power Company

Ms. Virginia Gibbs, Fayette County Chamber  
of Commerce

Dr. Ken Harmon, Kennesaw State University

Ms. Cinda Herndon-King, Atlanta CareerRise

Dr. Russ Hunt, Southern Polytechnic State University

Dr. Eloisa Klementich, Invest Atlanta

Mr. Terry Lawler, Regional Business Coalition

Dr. Earl Lewis, Emory University

Ms. Misti Martin, Cherokee Office of  
Economic Development

Ms. Y. Dyan Matthews, South Fulton Chamber  
of Commerce

Mr. Leonardo McClarty, DeKalb County Chamber  
of Commerce

Mr. David McCullough, Gwinnett Technical College

Mr. Chuck Meadows, Metro Atlanta Chamber  
of Commerce

Mr. Alfie Meek, Enterprise Innovation Institute; Georgia  
Institute of Technology

Ms. Lynn Menne, City of Decatur

Mr. Glenn Pfeifer, Georgia Perimeter College

Ms. Kay Pippin, Henry County Chamber of Commerce

Mr. Chris Pumphrey, Douglas County  
Development Authority

Mr. David Purcell, Perimeter Community  
Improvement Districts

Mr. Trevor Quander, AGL Resources

Mr. Emil Runge, Fulton County

Mr. Glenn Sears, Conyers-Rockdale Economic  
Development Council

Dr. Dave Sjoquist, Georgia State University

Mr. Richard Smith, DeKalb Technical College

Mr. Michael Starling, City of Dunwoody

Mr. Marshall Walker, Rockdale County

Mr. Bob White, Henry County Development Authority

# Introduction

Metro Atlanta is a diverse region anchored by the state capital, multiple colleges and universities, numerous Fortune 500 headquarters and the world's busiest airport. The 10-county region, which includes Cherokee, Clayton, Cobb, DeKalb, Douglas, Fayette, Fulton, Gwinnett, Henry and Rockdale counties, has enjoyed tremendous growth in recent decades and has positioned itself among the most competitive economic regions in the world.

But the region is not without its challenges.

The Great Recession challenged the Atlanta region on many levels, as it has many metro areas across much of the nation. The region's school systems have faced a variety of challenges, from reduced funding to cheating scandals to an ongoing debate around charter schools. And, traffic congestion threatens to slow the region's future growth.

Some residents and leaders are concerned that these challenges will adversely impact the region's ability to attract and retain young professionals. As metro Atlanta emerges from the recession, it must have a clear roadmap to address its challenges and build on its strengths to continually solidify its position within an increasingly competitive global environment for jobs and workers.

The goal of the Atlanta Regional Economic Competitiveness Strategy is to collaboratively determine and address the most critical of the region's challenges using strategies and initiatives that work within local frameworks. These successful programs can either be expanded to meet regional needs, or can be duplicated in other local communities as appropriate.

The key to the continued success and economic growth of the Atlanta region is collaboration. Local governments, businesses, economic development professionals, school systems and nonprofits must work together if metro Atlanta is to remain globally competitive and nationally respected. And all of these efforts must mesh with the focus areas of the state's Georgia Competitiveness Initiative, which was considered at length during the development of the regional strategy.

## The Assessment

### The Population

When talking with residents, businesses and community leaders around the region, it is apparent that there is an appreciation for the increasingly diverse and well-educated population of metro Atlanta, along with the many other assets that led to decades of tremendous population and economic growth. The region added more than two million residents over the last two decades, a growth rate of 70 percent, nearly three times the national average.

*In 2010, 36.7 percent of metro Atlanta's population was ages 20-44, leading all comparison regions.*

As the Baby Boomers age, much of the region's population growth has been in the older age groups, a trend seen across the nation. But unlike other regions, metro Atlanta seems to have a workforce capable of sustaining itself during and after the retirement of the Boomers.

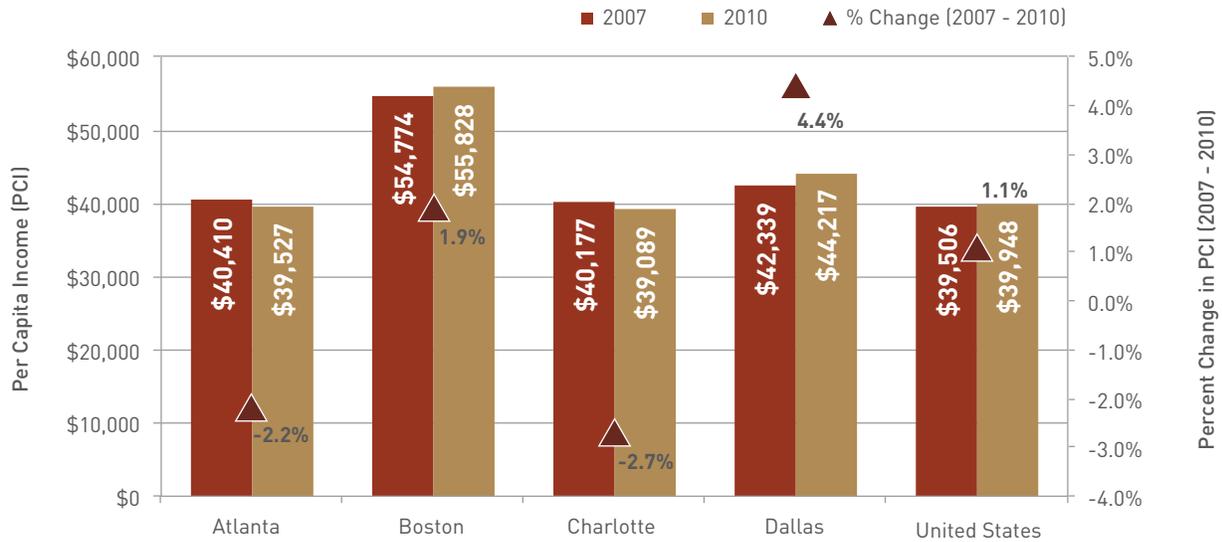
*In 2010, 33.4 percent of metro Atlantans 25 and older held at least a Bachelor's degree. This is second only to Boston.*

Along with growing larger, older and more educated, the region's population is also becoming more diverse. In 2012, six of the region's 10 core counties had majority minority populations of different ethnic backgrounds.

## The Economy

While the growth of the last few decades was exciting and led to a booming economy, it came with consequences. The region's infrastructure, has been challenged to keep pace with the demands of its residents and businesses. And, having been hit hard by the recession, the metro Atlanta's economy has been sluggish to recover. While that is true of most of the U.S., the chart below shows that change in per capita income in metro Atlanta lagged the nation and other regions between 2007 and 2010. As the region emerges from the recession and prepares to welcome new growth, it is critical that many of the jobs offered here be the high-paying careers of the future that young professionals desire. Metro Atlanta is well positioned to attract those jobs.

**Per Capita Income (2007-2010)**



Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis; Moody's Economy.com

Metro Atlanta is home to the largest concentration of colleges and universities in the Southern United States, with more than 40 institutions of higher learning. Nine of these institutions are research universities, recognized by the National Science Foundation and are among national leaders in life sciences and engineering research. To make the most of the region's diverse collegiate offerings, the business and academic communities must coordinate with each other to ensure there is no gap between academic offerings and available jobs. This will encourage college graduates to stay in metro Atlanta for their job search and will attract young professionals from around the world.

**How Metro Atlanta Compares (2011)**

Region	Number of Startups	Millions in Licensing Income	Active Licenses	Number New of Patents
Metro Atlanta (Georgia Tech and Emory)	12	\$16.7	715	66
Metro Boston (MIT, Harvard, Boston University, Tufts, Boston College)	28	\$88.3	1,707	256
Research Triangle (Duke University and University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill)	10	\$28.3	1,288	70

# Targeting Business for Metro Atlanta

Metro Atlanta and the state of Georgia have long been considered attractive places to do business due to low corporate income taxes, strong infrastructure, right-to-work status, the HOPE scholarship, Quick Start and other talent development incentives and a diverse labor pool for a wide array of job types. In 2011, *Area Development* conducted a survey of site location consultants. These professionals ranked Georgia second only to Texas as the most desirable location to do business. Not coincidentally, the three metros that gained the most population from 2000-2010 were Houston, Dallas and Atlanta, in that order.

Before developing a strategy, it was important to incorporate the solid foundation of economic development laid over the last several decades by chambers of commerce, local governments and economic development professionals from around the Atlanta region. So, ARC developed an inventory of all pre-existing economic development strategic plans of the 20 different communities or organizations doing this type of work within the 10-county region.

This inventory found that there are many successful and transferable ideas around the region. However, there is no cohesive, consistent language to describe key strengths of the region and its individual communities. The lack of consistency leads to confusion among internal and external audiences as they talk with state, regional and local economic development professionals. Through this inventory and an economic cluster review, ARC hopes to strengthen the region's various clusters of economic activity and the individual business sectors targeted at the state, regional and local levels.

## Conceptual Framework: Metro Atlanta's Hubs and Nodes





The cluster inventory shows that metro Atlanta is a true global economic hub. Long known as a center for commercial air travel, the region is increasingly a hub for freight movement and logistics as well. Manufacturing has increased as companies look for ways to maximize their supply chains. World-class institutions of higher learning, Fortune 500 headquarters and a highly-educated workforce have led to the region's emergence as a knowledge hub. And, unique to metro Atlanta when compared to other regions, is a burgeoning TV and film production industry, an established music industry, and emerging digital animation and gaming sector as well as other entertainment exports.

All of these business sectors have metro Atlanta poised to take advantage of the global economic recovery. What the region must leverage in the coming years is innovation within these industries. This innovation might come in the form of new technologies, business processes and entirely new business sectors that leverage the expertise, capacity and competitive advantages of the region's existing hubs and nodes.

In summary, metro Atlanta is a hub for global commerce. At the intersection of metro Atlanta's knowledge, production, logistics and entertainment hubs is that which will innovatively drive metro Atlanta's economic future.

Our region must take a more collaborative and synergistic approach to attracting new investments that support growth and innovation in new technologies, business processes and emerging sectors to leverage and fuel our future potential.

# The Strategy

The first step in developing the strategy was to conduct focus groups, interviews and an online survey of residents and businesses. The survey received more than 3,500 responses across the region. A key question was “What is the region’s greatest strength in terms of economic competitiveness.” The answers are shown in the graphic below. The more times an answer was given by respondents, the larger it appears.



Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport was overwhelmingly the most frequent answer given. It’s true, that no other region in the world can claim the world’s busiest airport. And, the new international terminal has already opened new doorways to other parts of the world.

As the graphic shows, the region’s low cost of living, diverse population, quality of life, available workforce and temperate climate are also major factors when people and businesses choose to locate in metro Atlanta. This strategy is designed to provide guidance to local economic development professionals and to create one voice for attracting and retaining business in metro Atlanta by leveraging the region’s existing assets, while improving upon some of its perceived weaknesses, like K-12 education and infrastructure.

The overarching structure of the strategy consists of four goals, each defined by four assets and the desired attributes of those assets. Each goal includes multiple objectives and potential action steps, supported by best practices from around the country when relevant and appropriate. Cutting across all four goals is the unifying theme of cooperative leadership across economic sectors.





## Goal Area 1 – Educated Workforce

The first goal of the economic competitiveness strategy is to create a more educated workforce that is prepared for the region’s 21st century jobs. Metro Atlanta has an extensive network of colleges and universities, and 68.2 percent of Georgia’s high school graduates attend college, a number that is in line with the rest of the U.S. However, fewer than 70 percent of students graduate from high school, and the state’s K-12 public school system ranks near the bottom of the nation on standardized test scores.

Those numbers matter to large corporations and manufacturers as they search for the best location for their facilities and to existing companies looking to expand.

### Objective 1

“Elevate public education to the top of local, regional and state funding and public policy priorities.” Tasks assigned to accomplish this objective include funding alternatives for the HOPE Scholarship and other education investments, as well as a regional advocacy campaign.

### Objective 2

“Integrate best practices and innovative new programs into Pre-K-12 classrooms throughout the region.” Tasks assigned to this objective include implementing best practices from around the country where appropriate, creating a privately funded grant program to fund them and expanding the use of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) magnet schools.

### Objective 3

“Adequately prepare the region’s students and workers for 21st century skills and careers.” Tasks assigned to this objective include developing training, mentoring and apprenticeship programs for 21st century jobs, maintaining an analysis of workforce needs and encouraging more advanced classes in grades 6-12.

### Objective 4

“Retain the best and brightest graduates from our region’s institutions of higher education.” Tasks assigned to this objective include better promotion of internship opportunities and encouraging college and graduate students to network through public service.



## Goal Area 2 – Prosperous Businesses

The second goal of the strategy is to make existing businesses more productive and profitable while also attracting new business to metro Atlanta.

### Objective 5

“Support the growth of existing businesses in metro Atlanta.” Tasks assigned to this objective include supporting business expansion by expediting permitting and other government processes and developing international trade relationships that could lead to expansion in the region.

### Objective 6

“Effectively promote metro Atlanta as a place to live, work, visit and do business in a coordinated and cohesive manner.” Tasks assigned to this objective include establishing a regional marketing alliance to create and promote a regional identity and defining points of contact for site selectors at the state, regional and local levels.

### Objective 7

“Advance public policies that make metro Atlanta and the state of Georgia more attractive and competitive places to do business.” Tasks assigned to this objective include encouraging more joint development authorities across jurisdictions, developing more enterprise and opportunity zones and annually surveying site selectors.

### Objective 8

“Invest in physical and social infrastructure that supports economic competitiveness.” Tasks assigned to this objective include promoting cooperation on high priority transportation projects, identifying sources of alternative transportation funding, promoting alternative commuting options and sustaining metro Atlanta’s water supply and quality.



### Goal Area 3 – Innovative Entrepreneurs

Metro Atlanta is one of the most educated metro regions in the U.S., and has a large number of quality institutions of higher learning. However, the region does not produce as many patents as other regions of the country and does not have some of the business-building incubators needed to thrive in the tech-heavy economy of the 21st Century.

#### Objective 9

“Attract and nurture new startup enterprises.” Tasks assigned to this objective include establishing fellowship programs and wealth generators, increasing the number of business incubators and advancing the development of Georgia Science and Technology Park on the former site of Fort McPherson.

#### Objective 10

“Establish metro Atlanta as a top five market for academic research, innovation and commercialization in the United States.” Tasks assigned to this objective include expanding the Georgia Research Alliance’s Eminent Scholars program, developing teams that cross research jurisdictions and encouraging institutions to incorporate startup activity into tenure considerations.

#### Objective 11

“Improve capital access and incentives for innovation at the regional and state levels.” Tasks assigned to this objective include expanding executive training programs and incentivizing innovative, entrepreneurial activity at the state level.



## Goal Area 4 – Livable Communities

It is critical to metro Atlanta’s economy that the region retain many of the graduates leaving its colleges and universities each year. Because many of these young professionals want to live in settings where they are close to work, recreation, public transit and social activities, it is important that communities create and foster these types of neighborhoods. Another economic reality is the region’s rapidly aging population, many of whom will prefer walkable communities or will require expanded public transportation to move around the region.

### Objective 12

“Develop neighborhoods, downtowns and activity centers that are attractive to existing and potential residents.” Tasks assigned to this objective include encouraging more transit-oriented development where appropriate, linking land use plans to economic development plans, developing programs to increase occupancy of vacant storefronts and creating better connections between residential areas and activity centers.

### Objective 13

“Adequately prepare communities for the demands of an aging population.” Tasks assigned to this objective include evaluating housing supply and demand for impending retirees throughout the region, helping communities integrate concerns of aging residents into land use planning and policy, including incentives for policies that support the needs of an aging population.

# The End Game

The goal of the volunteers who created the Regional Economic Competitiveness Strategy is to implement the strategy, to have some tasks completed, others up and running and still others in the pipeline, by 2018. Some of the metrics they would like to meet include:

- » Dropping the region's unemployment rate below the national average and keeping it there.
- » Increasing the percentage of adults with at least a bachelor's degree to 42 percent.
- » Doubling the number of startups emerging from colleges and universities each year.
- » Raising the average ACT composite score to 22, exceeding the national average.

If a metropolitan region isn't growing, it's shrinking and losing its economic viability. There is no surviving by staying the same. This strategy must be flexible enough to adapt to an ever-changing region and to new technologies, but essentially it will remain intact and will drive the region forward, making metro Atlanta a destination for young professionals and thriving businesses across the nation and around the world.

To learn more about the Regional Economic Competitiveness Strategy, the work of the committees and for updates on implementation, once it begins, visit <http://www.atlantaregional.com/local-government/economic-development>.



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40 Courtland Street, NE | Atlanta, Georgia 30303  
[atlantaregional.com](http://atlantaregional.com)