

Metropolitan Atlanta Civic Health Index 2012



What does philanthropy and civic engagement in metro Atlanta look like? Why does it matter?

At The Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta, we define philanthropy as the giving of time, talent and treasure. We know it takes philanthropy to build thriving communities. We know that thriving communities are engaged communities. They are communities that actively participate in philanthropy and civic engagement. At The Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta, our mission is to strengthen our 23-county region by providing quality services to donors and innovative leadership on community issues. To accomplish this we have to know how involved metro Atlantans are in philanthropy and civic engagement.

In 2012, we joined 20 other states and four other cities in producing an annual Civic Health Index. The Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta has prepared this metro Atlanta focused summary on five data points from the 2012 Georgia Civic Health Index specific to metro Atlanta: participation in formal and informal volunteering; participation in groups; social connectedness; electoral participation; and political action. It is our hope that by knowing where we are as a region that we can understand where we need to go in mobilizing our nearly 5.5 million metro area residents to actively get involved in philanthropy and civic engagement to build a greater metro Atlanta.



CIVIC LIFE IN METROPOLITAN ATLANTA



The great educator and sociologist, W.E.B. Du Bois, once described Atlanta as the “South of the North and the North of the South.” Indeed, the city and its surrounding region can still be described as a new edition of a classic tale. This tale is one of constant change revolving around the themes of transportation, water, race, civic pride and the tug between urban and rural.

The Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta is rooted in the civic life of the metropolitan region and for this reason we invested in the 2012 Georgia Civic Health Index.

The Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta connects people to the issues and organizations making a difference in the Atlanta region. We do this by providing highly personalized philanthropic services to individuals and institutional donors and by providing community leadership on critical issues in our region. As defined by our Philanthropic Framework, we focus on four key goals to accomplish this work:

- We engage philanthropists by providing knowledge about the issues affecting our community and the institutions addressing those issues.
- We strengthen our region’s nonprofits by providing grants and guidance to effective organizations.
- We advance public will by addressing critical issues with community members and multiple and diverse organizational partners.
- We practice organizational excellence by stewarding resources in perpetuity and supporting a diverse and transparent work environment.



The 2012 Georgia Civic Health Index and the Foundation’s extraction of metropolitan Atlanta-specific data from that report constitute the basis for this examination of community leadership and investment strategies to further accomplish our goal of advancing public will.

Our third goal, which focuses on advancing public will, means we pay close attention to current and emerging community issues. We seek where the energy is within the region to move a cause along or bring people together. We believe in the inevitable collective impact that partnering with other funders, nonprofits and diverse community leaders can produce.

The Community Foundation has a set of 11 performance measures focused on our organization’s direct responsibility for achieving our Goals as well as three community indicators that measure the impact we want to see in the region as a result of our work in partnership with other organizations. Our community indicators are:

- Change in number of investments (financial, human and/or intellectual) in nonprofit organizations within the 23-county region
- Change in nonprofits with a written strategic plan that measures progress
- Change in number of nonprofits and organized communities engaged in addressing public policies

We took a first step towards gathering baseline data for these indicators through our 2010 study, “Tracking Investment and Engagement: A Regional Portrait” conducted by The Schapiro Group. This philanthropic investment and civic engagement study is based on two of our community indicators. From this study, we were able to determine patterns of investment and engagement in the metro Atlanta region and the degree to which individuals are participating in organized communities and engaged in addressing public policies/issues. In addition, we used the data to form baselines from which

to track changes over time as well as to inform the development of strategies The Community Foundation may use to build a stronger civic life within the metropolitan area.

The 2012 Georgia Civic Health Index and the Foundation’s extraction of metropolitan Atlanta-specific data from that report constitute the basis for this examination of community leadership and investment strategies to further accomplish our goal of advancing public will. The Index, itself, is the result of a partnership between three nonprofits: Georgia Forward, Georgia Family Connection Partnership and the Vinson Institute of the University of Georgia; and three Georgia community foundations: Community Foundation of Central Georgia, Community Foundation of the Chattahoochee Valley and The Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta. These partners collaborated with the National Conference on Citizenship (NCoC) for data selection and analysis from the 2011 Current Population Survey. We joined 20 other states and four other cities in producing an annual Civic Health Index. We urge you to read the entire Georgia report at www.cfgreateratlanta.org.

The data points we examined for the metropolitan Atlanta region and which align with our community indicators noted above were:

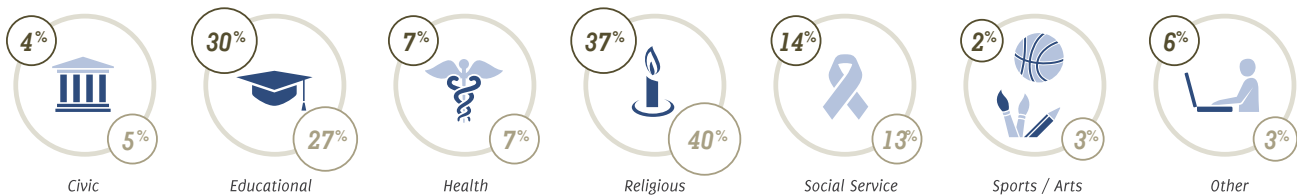
- Participation in Formal/Informal Volunteering
- Participation in Groups
- Social Connectedness
- Electoral Participation
- Political Action

Participation in Formal/Informal Volunteering¹



By Type of Organization:

○ Atlanta ○ Georgia



FINDINGS

The 2012 Civic Health Index reveals that among the country's 51 largest Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs), Atlanta ranks sixth for formal volunteerism and 12th for working with neighbors to fix a community problem. During 2011, 28% of Atlantans served as volunteers in some capacity. The region's strong culture of volunteerism is driven by faith-based and school-related volunteerism.

PLAYERS

Our region has stable infrastructure for facilitating volunteer opportunities led by organizations such as Hands On Atlanta, Points of Light, Habitat for Humanity, United Way of Greater Atlanta and others that connect people with causes. Civic associations at the neighborhood level also leverage volunteers to network and collaborate on common interests. Each year the Foundation gathers these associations at our annual Neighborhood Summit to help them to extend their capacity and influence.

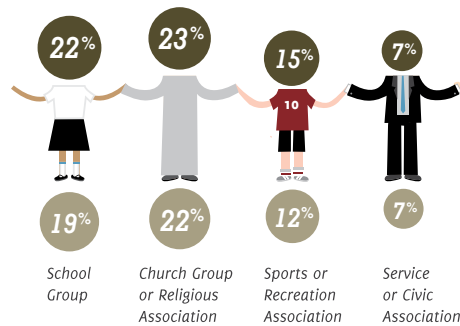
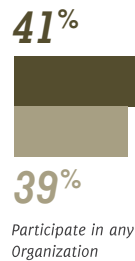
OUR TAKE-AWAY

In today's era of high economic stress for the nonprofit sector, volunteers are essential to stable, efficient service delivery. This requires effective communication by nonprofit organizations about the value of volunteer activities; recognition of employers for incentivizing employee volunteerism; and creativity in providing compelling, flexible volunteer experiences. Volunteerism by children and youth facilitated by families, schools, faith-based organizations and civic groups helps to develop the habit and mindset of paying one's "civic dues" and contributing to social well-being.

¹ 2011 Current Population Survey (CPS) Volunteering Supplement, according to analysis provided by Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) at Tufts University

Participation in Groups²

● Atlanta ● Georgia



Atlanta is ranked 5th among the 51 largest metropolitan areas for school group participation



Atlanta is ranked 11th among the 51 largest metropolitan areas for sports or recreation group participation



Atlanta is ranked 35th among the 51 largest metropolitan areas for being a group officer or committee member

FINDINGS

Involvement in a group and giving to a charitable cause are personal investments in promoting the well-being of a community. Our 2010 survey found that 39% of residents participated in groups. Today, slightly more than 40% of metro Atlantans are members of a group of some type. The number who make financial gifts to nonprofit organizations stands at 50%, equal to the statewide average. This rate of charitable giving held steady between 2010 and 2012.

Interestingly, among the nation's 51 largest MSAs, Atlanta ranks high for participation in school groups (5th) and sports/recreation organizations (11th). However, there is less willingness among individuals to assume leadership responsibilities by holding an office or serving on a committee, with the region ranking 35th in the nation.

PLAYERS

Our region is rich with a variety of nonprofits, businesses, faith-based organizations and civic associations that promote volunteerism and charitable giving. Several of the region's major employers provide time for employees to volunteer as teams, individuals or with their families. Many of the region's residents have grown up with the tradition of "mission work" through their places of worship. Several of the city's direct social services are supported by the financial and human resources donated by local churches, synagogues and mosques. For example, the congregation at Central Presbyterian Church has staffed a winter night shelter for the homeless for more than 20 years.

Regional leadership organizations such as Leadership Atlanta and Leadership Gwinnett have provided leadership development opportunities for individuals whose knowledge of the metro

region and its needs produces ripple-effects among professional and personal networks. The city of Atlanta's mechanism to include resident voices in decision making, the Neighborhood Planning Units (NPU's) and DeKalb County's Office of Neighborhood Empowerment, have developed local leaders and sponsored hundreds of neighborhood improvement projects.

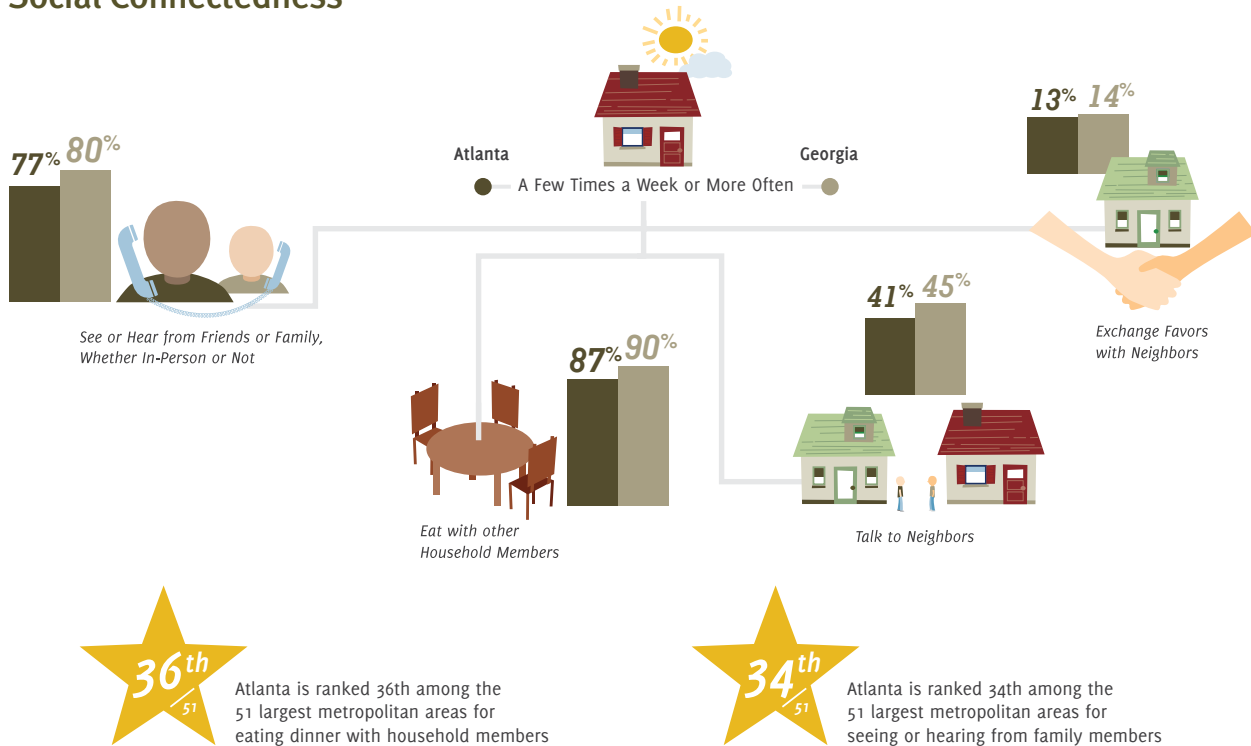
OUR TAKE-AWAY

The disparity between the willingness to participate and the willingness to lead is an interesting finding. As with volunteerism, a key to increased participation and leadership, particularly within informal groups, is consistent communication of the benefits. This may include effective messaging about what the individual gains, e.g. new relationships, skills and experiences, as well as the positive impact volunteers have on the goals of the group.

² 2011 CPS Civic Engagement Supplement, according to analysis provided by CIRCLE

³ 2011 CPS Volunteering Supplement, according to analysis provided by CIRCLE

Social Connectedness⁴



FINDINGS

In spending time and interacting regularly with family, friends and neighbors, the Atlanta region ranks slightly below the rest of Georgia. We are somewhat less likely to communicate regularly with family and friends, eat meals with other household members, talk regularly and exchange favors with neighbors. Atlanta ranks a dismal 34th out of 51 cities for the rates of seeing/hearing regularly from family and 36th for eating regularly with others in the household. This may reflect the region’s long-standing status as an in-migration hub for job-seekers, especially young adults.

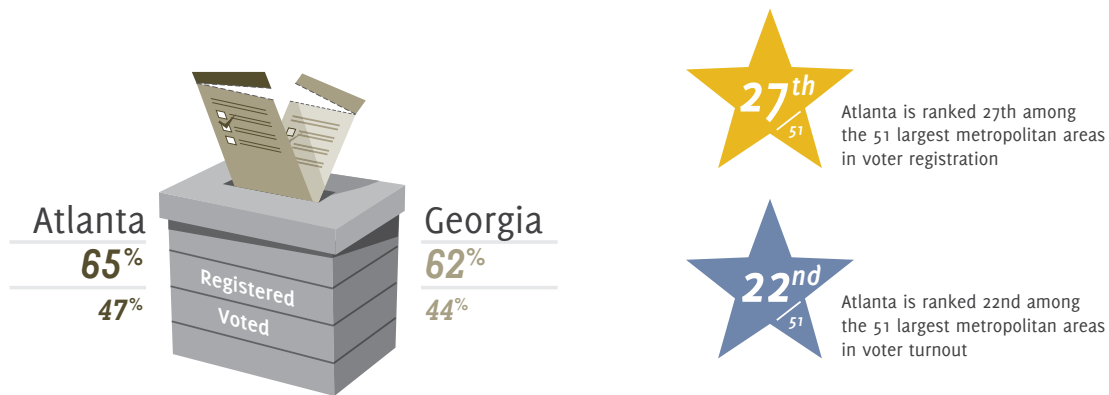
PLAYERS

Since 1991, the Foundation’s Neighborhood Fund has provided outreach, funding and coaching to groups of neighbors working on projects of common interest. This “micro” grantmaking encourages local leadership, sharing of resources and expertise and participation of local families. There is also the Partnership for Healthy Living in which a group of DeKalb County residents combined their talents to create walking school buses, community gardens, nutrition classes and more. This effort attracted the support of Foundation donors and other funders and has produced an organization devoted to healthy eating and active living in a neighborhood that is, today, well-connected.

OUR TAKE-AWAY

Given the increasing demographic variety and flux of our communities, it is important to advance both formal and informal mechanisms for developing residents’ sense of community. Recent years have seen the successful establishment of formal structures in the region that advance connections within specific international communities, such as the Latin American Association and the Center for Pan Asian Community Services. However, there are few formal efforts that focus on social connections between and among ethnically diverse groups of newcomers and longtime residents across faith, culture, geography, political affiliation and other characteristics focused on neighborhood or regional issues.

Electoral Participation, 2010⁵



FINDINGS

The Atlanta area ranks roughly in the middle of America's 51 largest MSAs in voter registration and voter turnout as measured by the 2010 election. National mid-term elections tend to be good indicators of baseline citizen interest and commitment to influence the direction of government. Sixty-five percent of the region's citizens are registered to vote; yet only 47% actually voted in the last midterm elections. These figures place us in the middle of the pack relative to other metropolitan areas (27th and 22nd respectively).

PLAYERS

Opportunities in Georgia to register and vote continue to expand. The ability of community groups and nonprofits, such as the League of Women Voters, Asian American Legal Advocacy Center and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), to provide voter registration services has bolstered the number of registered voters in the state. Early voting and an easier absentee ballot process have brought more opportunities for voters to cast their ballots.

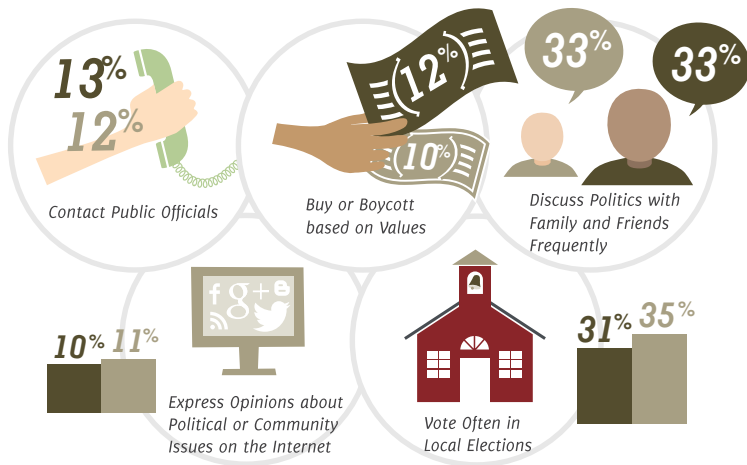
OUR TAKE-AWAY

The disparity between the number of registered voters and the number of persons who actually vote in local elections is a challenging one. The ability to vote and effect change in one's local community is a profound honor – and has significant impact on schools, property taxes and environmental stewardship. We should be observant about additional ways to increase access within the framework of electoral integrity, as the case is often made that electoral participation reflects the general state of civic engagement. When volunteerism, group participation and social connections are encouraged broadly, one positive by-product is likely to be increased commitment to practice citizenship at the ballot box.

⁵ 2010 CPS Voting/Registration Supplement, according to analysis provided by CIRCLE
The 2012 CPS voting supplement data was not yet available at time of production and is expected to be released in the summer of 2013
 Volunteering: Age 16+ | Voting and Civic Engagement: Age 18+

Political Action®

Atlanta Georgia



Atlanta is ranked 9th among the 51 largest metropolitan areas for frequently expressing opinions via the Internet



Atlanta is ranked 34th among the 51 largest metropolitan areas for often voting in local elections

FINDINGS

People have more ways than ever to express political viewpoints – from Internet posts, to participation in movements such as product boycotts to traditional table talk with family and friends. For frequency of online political expression, Atlanta ranked ninth among the 51 largest MSAs. Some form of contact with public officials was made by 13% of the region and 12% decided to buy or boycott certain products based on their personal values.

The Atlanta MSA is 34th among other MSAs in frequency of local election voting—where a few votes can have a great impact.

PLAYERS

The metro Atlanta region has civic organizations such as the Rotary Club of Atlanta and the Civic League for Regional Atlanta that help to harness public will for action. These organizations support residents in finding common voices and provide platforms for reasoned debate. Organizations such as Georgia Forward and the Georgia Family Connection Partnership offer residents vehicles for informative conversations about both local and stateside issues.

OUR TAKE-AWAY

Politically active communities bring higher alertness to social needs and the processes of governance. The beneficial effects can range from faster action on an emerging problem to a sustained “good government” climate with strong expectations of integrity. Over time, activities that raise awareness and educate people about issues can increase the frequency and potency of political expression in its varied forms. A challenge for community leaders is how to capture and sustain broad mindfulness about an issue in an age of fragmented media and scattered attention. This must be a layered process, involving collaborations at multiple levels that grab and hold onto public focus. An alternative approach may be to foster political/civic-minded activities in neighborhoods at the grassroots level. Narrowing the focus of complicated civic discussions and debates may motivate broader and deeper participation.

Conclusion

Civic engagement is a broad continuum of attitudes and actions, all of which are intended to make a difference in the civic life of our communities through use of our individual knowledge, skills, values and motivations. While we cannot judge whether any single or combination of acts or attitudes are “more” or “less” important, we know that we are at our best when the region understands and engages in our collective life. We are committed to both strengthening opportunities for this engagement and doing all that is possible to reduce obstacles for civic participation.

Recommendations for increasing civic engagement

WHAT INDIVIDUALS CAN DO

- Visit Neighborhood Nexus and develop a data-based understanding of your community’s assets and challenges.
www.neighborhoodnexus.org
- Invite your neighbors to dinner; introduce your neighbors to one another.
- Begin a neighborhood project like a community garden or neighborhood watch. The Community Foundation’s Neighborhood Fund may be a resource for financial support and expertise.
www.cfgreateratlanta.org/Community-Initiatives/Current-Initiatives/Neighborhood-Fund.aspx
- Begin a neighborhood listserv.
- Call, visit or email your local elected and appointed officials. Express your opinions. Offer your expertise.
- Vote – at all elections! See Turbo Vote’s website. They will send you texts and email alerts to remind you!
www.turbovote.org
- Encourage your children to develop the habit of volunteering. Find opportunities for the entire family to participate. Check Hands On Atlanta’s website for suggestions.
www.handsonatlanta.org

WHAT NONPROFITS CAN DO

- Be a good neighbor. Your building and/or services are likely to be located in or near a residential neighborhood or commercial district. Your participation in the civic life of the area is key.
- Provide meeting space to local groups. Use these occasions to extend hospitality and information to your community.
- Get to know the elected officials that represent your geographic area. Invite them to your events and introduce them to some of their constituents.
- Become familiar with civic engagement organizations such as Common Focus.
www.commonfocus.org
- Organize voter registration drives. Offer to take people to the polls on election days.
- Make sure your efforts and programs address the issues of equity, environmental stewardship and volunteerism.

WHAT FUNDERS CAN DO

- Find ways to offer financial support to local efforts that promote volunteerism, intergenerational events, neighborhood revitalization and nonpartisan electioneering activities.
- Understand a community’s history, assets and desires prior to making grants that will impact it.
- Participate in local volunteering opportunities.
- Ask nonprofits you meet with and grantees how they act as good neighbors in the communities in which they reside.



Voting is our right and responsibility and is one of the best ways for a person to be civically engaged.



Great things can happen when people come together and work with community civic organizations as seen at the annual Neighborhood Summit.



Corporations can encourage civic engagement like The Home Depot's partnership with Habitat for Humanity where volunteers from the company's vendors build a home.

WHAT PUBLIC OFFICIALS CAN DO

- Use social media to engage a broad span of community members, especially those who are younger.
- Support underrepresented groups and their organizations (Latinos, Asian Americans and African Americans), young residents and those with lower income and educational attainment to gain the experience they need to fully participate on boards and commissions.
- Establish annual prizes for competitions at local public schools for poster or essay contests on good government.
- Observe open meeting laws. Refuse to participate in meetings that do not comply.
- Challenge your peers to join you in efforts to meet and understand the breadth of opinions and concerns among constituents.

WHAT THE MEDIA CAN DO

- Identify and highlight individuals and organizations that are strengthening communities and improving civic health.
- Identify and highlight organizations and/or policies that appear to be damaging a community's civic health.
- Cover civic activities such as those sponsored by Parent-Teacher-Student Associations (PTSA), neighborhood associations and The Community Foundation's annual Neighborhood Summit (www.neighborhoodsummit.org).
- Identify and highlight young people who are making a difference in their community.

WHAT THE PRIVATE SECTOR CAN DO

- Create in-house incentives and programs to promote employee civic engagement – think of Home Depot's long standing affiliation with Habitat for Humanity as an example.
- Fund programs that boost nonpartisan civic engagement.
- Partner with local organizations, media and foundations to increase voter participation.



The Community Foundation
FOR GREATER ATLANTA

The Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta has prepared this summary from data collected for and presented in the 2012 Georgia Civic Health Index.



For more than 60 years, The Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta has served as a trusted steward of philanthropic resources for our 23-county metro Atlanta region. The Community Foundation's service area reaches as far north as Pickens County, as far West as Carroll County, as far South as Butts County and as far East as Morgan County.