

Georgia **Forward**   
2017 FORUM

presented by: 

# Forum Report

## **GeorgiaForward Forum Overview**

The 2017 GeorgiaForward Forum was the first in four years and marks the return of a popular and powerful convening of stakeholders. The Forum places participants at the nexus of business, innovation, and collaboration. The two-day conference brought together a diverse cross section of academics, small business owners, agricultural experts and leaders from every corner and sector of Georgia to the World Congress Center in Atlanta.

The Forum included breakout and interactive sessions that ranged from education to agriculture and a host of other topic areas. Each day the full group gathered for interactive sessions. The first interactive session built a foundation by defining what participants shared in common as Georgians and their conception of common prosperity. The second interactive session challenged them to develop ideas to help create common prosperity through Big Ideas and Goals.

## **Finding Common Ground and Framing Common Prosperity**

Otis White of Civic Strategies led the collective conversations and challenged participants to think deeply about what they had in common and what shapes “common prosperity” in Georgia. The discussion was impactful because it runs counter to the stereotype that there are two Georgias. Aside from the obvious items like paying taxes, adhering to laws, loving peanuts and peaches participants pointed out deeper ideas such as commitment to children, caring about the vulnerable, a desire to feel safe and an interest in financial success.

As a practical matter, most tables pointed out the importance of tourism, agriculture, and logistical industries as pillars to economic success. The wide-ranging discussion lifted several examples of common prosperity. Some of the various ideas were,

- Ensuring every child in Georgia is healthy, safe, employable;
- Making Georgia the best place to do business and the best place to raise a family
- Connecting educational opportunities to match the job opportunities
- Delivering our educational assets and opportunities to places that don't have those assets
- Being deliberate about ensuring gender equity and healthy race relations
- Geographic and demographic prosperity in all places in the state
- Encouraging civic responsibility creating a shared value on what it means to be a good citizen
- Having political districts reflected by neighborhoods, diversity in leadership
- Ensuring citizens have ability to make and have high quality education, transportation, and job choices no matter where they live in the state
- Lifeline quality – having opportunities where people could do well at every stage at their life. The ability to stay and age in place and ensuring dignity for seniors
- Eliminating food deserts in Georgia

- Having a criminal justice system that is fair to everyone

### **Big Idea Goals To Move Georgia Forward**

In the final interactive session participants exchanged, debated, created and voted on solutions about the future of Georgia. Some of the key themes centered on infrastructure, education, and quality of life. Connected to those foundational values was the shared belief that Georgia has to invest in its citizens. No matter the geographic location of each person everyone agreed that the ultimate goal was for the next generation to inherit a better Georgia than the one they were born to.

Over several tabletop discussions participants posited over thirty unique proposals that could revolutionize Georgia. The most popular ideas were,

- Create an “Agriculture Research and Production Triangle” in South Georgia;
- Encourage strong connections between businesses and schools for workforce development
- Find ways of encouraging creative industries/non-profits/individuals to locate in small towns as a form of economic development
- Build a high-speed rail system that connects Georgia’s metro areas
- Recognize Georgia’s “industries of the future” and create a plan for growing them (e.g. film, financial technology and logistics)
- Consolidate cities/counties in rural Georgia (and use local resources more wisely)

### **Final Thoughts**

The 2017 GeorgiaForward Forum continued its tradition of shaping the short and long-term goals for the state. The session produced compelling ideas that could very well become initiatives in the future. As next steps, GeorgiaForward will be looking for organizations, businesses, and engaged individuals who are interested in taking a deeper look into the ideas generated at the Forum for possible implementation of sound ideas. GeorgiaForward does not directly implement ideas but rather serves as a catalyst and connector of ideas, organizations and people.

### **Ideas Generated at the 2017 GeorgiaForward Forum:**

The following ideas were generated from the participants at the 2017 Forum. Each attendee was given colored dots in which to use to show their favor for particular ideas. The colors indicated whether the person was from Metro Atlanta, other metro areas in Georgia and rural/non metro areas. The ideas below are listed in rank order based on which ideas receive the most dots showing favor for the idea. The top ideas received a striking mix of votes from people from all three types of locations in Georgia which was visual proof that the support for these ideas was spread across the state.

Create an “Agriculture Research and Production Triangle” in South Georgia.

- Be a world leader in farm research and ag production research.

Encourage strong connections between businesses and schools for workforce development.

- Break down the stigma of two-year degrees (“middle-level skills”).
- Create mentorships and partnerships (career fairs, internships, work study)
- Use media to expose students to businesses

Find ways of encouraging creative industries/non-profits to locate and grow in small towns as a form of economic development.

Build a high-speed rail system connecting GA’s metro areas

Recognize Georgia’s “industries of the future” and create a plan for growing them (e.g., film, financial technology, and logistics.)

- Use tax credits

Create new and better programs in our schools about life-skills education (health, finances, etc.)

Consolidate cities/counties in rural GA (and use local revenues more wisely)

Invest in apprenticeship programs and build new work-study programs.

Fund counselors in schools to facilitate programs that bring together employers, students, parents and teachers to talk about careers and post-secondary education options.

Create a statewide “Match.com” online service so businesses can find and do business with one another and workers can find employment.

Grow GeorgiaForward/Young Gamechangers and use it as a model for other groups: (“Learning by doing” programs.)

Build infrastructure that would allow telecommuting in small towns.

- Job is in Atlanta but worker is in Fort Valley
- Tech colleges play a role

Enlist local businesses in making sure early education students reach reading proficiency goals .... and the schools have the resources they need.

Use new public-private partnerships to connect existing social services with distressed communities.

Create transportation co-ops for farmers in rural Georgia.

Use virtual reality in schools to teach urban students about rural areas and vice versa, so children know what Georgia is like today.

Legalize and tax marijuana and use all revenues for infrastructure.

Encourage creativity in reading education by starting a competition for early education teachers to develop innovative reading programs.

- Local chambers of commerce give annual awards

Use public money to expand free and reduced lunch programs to all schools.

- No additional funding needed

Define what equity means in communities and offer each GA community a way of measuring equity in health care, education, etc.

Create better education program about public policy and civic engagement

Mandate curriculum statewide that teaches students about how agriculture works and the career opportunities in Ag.

Create a program to help rural businesses plan for succession.

Create virtual reality program so you could see/visit other communities and have discussions among citizens and leaders.

Extend tax credits available currently for manufacturing to agriculture.

Encourage local autonomy and experimentation especially in economic development.

- Publicize the best/most successful ideas.
- Create a competition

“Barn Raising”: Spur volunteering through programs that allow communities to cooperate with each other on common issues.

Create a competition for rural youth to showcase their community.

## **Thank You**

A very special thank you to the 2017 GeorgiaForward Forum sponsors, GeorgiaForward board, Forum steering committee and volunteers.

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For more information about GeorgiaForward visit [www.georgiaforward.org](http://www.georgiaforward.org).