

Georgia*Forward*

2018 FORUM



ENGAGING GEORGIA'S NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 10, 2018
GEORGIA FARM BUREAU, MACON, GA.



GeorgiaForward

FORUM OVERVIEW

The GeorgiaForward Forum is an annual gathering of leaders, both emerging and seasoned, in the areas of business, government, and civic life in the State of Georgia, gathered to discuss engaging Georgia's next generation of leaders. The 2018 Forum brought together contributors from across the state. For the purposes of analysis and recommendations, participants spent much of the Forum divided into three groups.

1. Rural Georgia.
2. Hub Cities.
3. Metro Atlanta.

In their small groups, participants considered pressing questions of Georgia's social and civic life and explored new possibilities for citizen engagement and leadership.

The forum opened with statements from the Hon. Robert Reichart, mayor of Macon; Jeffrey Harvey, director of public policy for Georgia Farm Bureau; and A.J. Robinson, president of Central Atlanta Progress and the Atlanta Downtown Improvement District and board chair of GeorgiaForward. The Hon. Cathy Cox, dean of Mercer University's Walter F. George School of Law, delivered the keynote address. Additionally, the Forum featured two panel discussions and two interactive problem-solving sessions. The conference concluded with the presentation of Big Ideas from the participants on how to engage the next generation of leaders.



Cathy Cox
Dean
Mercer Law

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W E L C O M E

The Hon. Robert Reichart, mayor of Macon, delivered a welcome on behalf of the people and City of Macon. He spoke of the many important initiatives undertaken in his city, among them the landmark consolidation of the city and county governments in 2012. He urged the Forum participants to think creatively about the questions at hand. "It is a mistake to do nothing because you can only do little," he said.

Jeffrey Harvey, director of public policy for Georgia Farm Bureau, welcomed the participants on behalf of the Georgia Farm Bureau, which hosted the Forum. As Hurricane Michael threatened the prosperity of many Georgians, Mr. Harvey reminded Forum participants to consider the role of agriculture in Georgia's future, noting that 383,000 state jobs rely on the agricultural sector.


Kris Vaughn, executive director of GeorgiaForward, added her welcome on behalf of her colleagues and the board of directors. She briefly recounted the history of GeorgiaForward, including its Forum. In 2010, she said, a group of committed citizens, noting the long history of disparate conversations about internal divisions within the state, rural-urban disparities, competing regional approaches to planning and problem-solving, and so forth, agreed to bring together notable leaders from across civic, business, government, and academic life. The result was the first GeorgiaForward Forum, hosted in 2010. Today's Forum marks the sixth of these important gatherings and GeorgiaForward's enduring commitment to working on behalf of all Georgians to:

- Find a common vision for Georgia;
- Create an environment in which vision and pragmatism trumps political deadlock;
- Discuss innovative solutions to our state's challenges; and
- Foster communications and goodwill among Georgia's stakeholders.









Opening Keynote Address

C A T H Y C O X

Cathy Cox delivered the keynote address. Mrs. Cox is currently dean of the Walter F. George School of Law at Mercer University. She was Georgia's twenty-fifth Secretary of State and served as president of Young Harris College. Secretary Cox offered some advice to the forum participants—both during their time at the Forum and as they return to their communities. A few highlights:

- Invest in Relationships. Ultimately, we follow those whom we trust. Community leaders can cultivate trust and respect by investing in their relationships with friends, families, colleagues, and neighbors.
- Serve as Role Models. Established leaders should serve as role models for young leaders. They should invest in them, connect them with resources, and help them to build their community and professional networks. As such, our established community leaders should “encourage them to jump in, to take the lead, and to accept the push from those who are investing in them.”
- Young People are Committed. The younger members of our communities want to be involved in civic and social life. They want to volunteer for civic causes, to show activism, and to join organizations that they believe can make a real and meaningful improvement to community life. Secretary Cox explored questions related to identifying young leaders. “Do you know who the young leaders are?” “How they may differ from one another?” In summary, she concluded:
 - Younger leaders will have greater diversity and education. They are more likely to detach from established political structures and networks, including political parties.
 - Digital technology has given younger leaders a broader and more diffuse sense of their communities. Through social media, for example, the notion of one’s “community” is less dependent upon a single locale but perhaps upon a shared sense of identity or commitment.
 - Established community and state leaders must get to know the perspectives and beliefs of younger leaders and to educate themselves on these differences. Established leaders can engage younger generations by asking them to engage and showing that they care.



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Building Bridges

Challenges & Opportunities for Engaging Young Leaders

The morning's first panel, "Building Bridges: Challenges and Opportunities for Engaging Young Leaders," focused on the challenges and opportunities communities face engaging a younger generation of leadership. The participants in the panel were the Hon. Kasey Carpenter, representative for house district 4 in the Georgia House of Representatives and owner of Oakwood Café (Dalton); and the Hon. Amy Carter, Deputy Commissioner of Economic Development for Rural Georgia Initiatives. Tippi Burch, attorney at Chalmers, Burch & Adams, served as panel moderator. Carpenter and Carter discussed a wide variety of topics, including:

- Established community leaders need to do a better job at creating "living and breathing community" through "variety"; opportunities for leadership that offer a variety of ways to engage with people and issues will be most appealing to aspiring community leaders.
- Young leaders, as they establish themselves professionally, are less likely to have flexible schedules in their junior positions. Engaging them as leaders may need to take forms that are less traditional, including fewer regularly scheduled in-person meetings.
- Generational shifts are leading to fewer connection points for older and younger generations because viewpoints and networking approaches differ.
- To get younger people involved, established leaders need to embrace them, convince them of our shared goals, and share personal stories with them—all with an aim to create buy-in.

One way that we can do this is to mentor and invest in them.

Carpenter and Carter offered a consensus perspective: leaders need to create ways of bridging the generation gap and for everyone to approach conversations with a listening mindset. More seasoned leaders need to keep open minds and welcome new viewpoints.



INTERACTIVE DISCUSSIONS

Otis White, president of Civic Strategies, facilitated the two interactive sessions. In the interactive sessions, participants from across the states divided themselves into three groups:

1. Rural Georgia. Participants represented each of Georgia's rural regions, from the least populous counties of the southwest to the small towns of the northern highlands and north Georgia mountains.

2. Hub Cities. Participants representing hub cities came from Augusta, Columbus, Macon, and Savannah.

3. Metro Atlanta. Participants from the Atlanta metropolitan area included representatives from Fulton, Gwinnett, Cobb, DeKalb, and Fayette Counties, among others.

Based upon the group they represented, participants arrived at a series of recommendations. The first topic for discussion and exploration asked participants to assess the status of young leadership involvement in their communities.

What is the current situation of young leadership involvement — defined as leaders under the age of 40 — in your community today?

Please rank on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 reflecting low levels of younger citizen engagement and 5 reflecting high levels of younger citizen engagement.

- Rural Georgia and Metro Atlanta participants both reported rates averaging 1-2, while participants from Hub Cities reported a broad range of activity.

What are the most common obstacles for young people becoming involved in your community?

- The Rural Georgia groups concluded that limited job opportunities and resources available for young people represented the most significant impediment to engagement among young people. They also pointed out that a lot of young people are unaware of how to get involved in leadership in general.
- The Hub Cities participants concluded that institutional inertia represents the foremost obstacle. Those in power or otherwise influential in decision-making are reluctant to give up the “way things are done.” In turn, younger people, perhaps after clashing with those already in the leadership positions, may feel marginalized from community leadership.
- The Metro Atlanta group concluded that the biggest obstacles are the sheer size of the young community and the lack of institutions available to help them get involved or at least introduced to leadership.

What are the most important things community leaders could do to bring more young people into civic work?

- The Rural Georgia group recommended incorporating leadership programs into schools. They further suggested reimagining community leadership roles and structures to be more accommodating and welcoming toward leaders under the age of forty. For instance, Georgia’s population data tells us that this younger demographic is less likely to be stationary across their lives. Many communities, however, tacitly or unofficially value years of residency or service in that community over other characteristics of leadership: experiences, professional accomplishment, or skillset. This group likewise suggested that community leaders extend direct and personal invitations to community events and into leadership roles, such as board meetings, city council and county commission meetings, and so forth.
- Participants representing the Hub Cities suggested that businesses and private enterprise might offer solutions by capitalizing on the varied ages of their employees and offering more developmental and mentoring opportunities across traditional divides in company life.

- Likewise, contributors in the Metro Atlanta group suggested that employers and leaders “should meet the young people where they are.” Such an approach would recognize the competing commitments on young people’s time and energy, such as beginning their professions, starting families, and so forth. The group recommended harnessing the power of the metropolis to appeal to younger community leaders—through community festivals, the craft beer industry, art and film industries, and leadership-development opportunities incorporated into education and workplaces.

Who should be involved in recruiting young people for civic leadership?

- The group consensus—from those representing Rural Georgia, Hub Cities, and Metro Atlanta—held that community leaders, parents, and educators should be involved in recruiting since they are who the young people interact with the most throughout their lives. The groups were encouraged to think outside the box since most of the participants are the people previously named. Some unique suggestions were: owners of coworking spaces, artists, scout troop leaders, Realtors, and after-school program directors.





Strategies for Success:

C R E A T I V E W A Y S T O E N G A G E Y O U N G L E A D E R S

The second panel, “Strategies for Success: Creative Ways to Engage Young Leaders,” focused on innovative strategies participants might use to cultivate leadership among Georgia’s younger and aspiring leaders. The panel featured Dr. Linda Buchanan, president of Andrew College; Cosby Johnson, senior government affairs manager for the Georgia Chamber of Commerce; and Josh Rogers, president of NewTown Macon. Amir Farokhi, district 2 representative on the Atlanta City Council, moderated the panel.

The three panelists offered a variety of perspectives, speaking from their own unique experiences and from the vantage of the organizations and industries they represented. Dr. Buchanan particularly spoke about the need for innovative and adaptive approaches, noting that the challenges that the next generation of Georgians will face will require departures from the status quo. Her fellow panelists echoed those sentiments, noting that younger generations are less wed to the traditional institutions of their parents’ generation; political parties, religious organizations, and civic clubs seem to have less appeal to those under the age of forty than they may have in decades past. As such, each of the three panelists spoke about the need for focused mentoring—that individual community leaders need to seek out younger members of their communities who demonstrate commitment and promise.





Final Thoughts

The 2018 GeorgiaForward Forum brought to light, several ideas to engage the next generation of leaders from many different perspectives to give a well-rounded consensus of ideas.

Editorial Comment

This report has been prepared by Georgia College students enrolled in the Leadership Program. The comments here offer a synthesis of the GeorgiaForward Forum proceedings as well as the perspective of those whom the Forum is focused on engaging.

1. Define Market Segments. The Forum would do well to define further who the group seeks to engage. “Young” carried broad interpretive license—whether one considers college-bound high school students as young or mid-career professionals in their late thirties. Adapting marketing approaches, for instance, to stakeholder segmentation may help Forum participants to generate better results in their communities as they cultivate the next generation of Georgia’s leaders.

2. Study Mentorship Opportunities. A common refrain among Forum participants was the need for robust mentorship opportunities. Communities would do well to consider such initiatives. Practical challenges to address:

- Who administers such programs on a community level?
- How do mentors and mentees become linked?
- How are target audiences defined, and how do such programs reach their targets?

3. Allow Generational Characteristics to Define Leadership Roles and Responsibilities. Young people are looking for ways to make positive change in their communities and to feel that they are empowered to such ends. Generally, they are reluctant to take jobs where the seasoned leaders in the organization do not value their opinions.

A Thank You to Our Sponsors

The successful 2018 GeorgiaForward Forum is the result of the collaborative efforts and insights of many individuals and organizations. The GeorgiaForward Board of Directors, the forum steering committee, and volunteers helped to create an excellent program.

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This summary has been prepared by Morgan Drawdy, Georgia College.

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