

GRANTMAKERS **FOR SOUTHERN** PROGRESS

Georgia Justice Funders Table Phase 1 - Report & Recommendations



Georgia community partners at Justice Day at the Capitol, sponsored by the Justice Reform Partnership

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for Grantmakers for Southern Progress

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Executive Summary

After years of successful advocacy and reforms, Georgia's justice ecosystem is poised for investment.

In 2021, after years of successful grassroots advocacy and policy reforms across the state of Georgia, a small group of national and local funders convened to discuss increasing the number of committed funders resourcing justice reform / justice transformation work in Georgia. These funders understood that it was essential to provide learning and engagement opportunities for both local and national funders to remove barriers from their grantmaking to support Black, Brown, and Indigenous led organizations moving this work in Georgia.

The goal was to create a Georgia Justice Funders Table ("Table"), inspired by similar Tables in Michigan, Mississippi, and Louisiana, offering participants:

- Safe and brave space to talk about the real issues
- Space to deal with justice narrative challenges
- Place to help funders see the power of their influence
- Space to provide funder education that's not extractive
- Opportunity to build a fund or organize funders to significantly increase investments to Black, Brown, and Indigenous organizations leading this work in the state.

In 2022, a coordinating team was formed including representation from United Way of Greater Atlanta, Public Welfare Foundation, The Kendeda Fund, and Grantmakers for Southern Progress. The Team determined the time was ripe to hire a consultant to coordinate Phase 1 of the new Table's work, including:

1. Landscape analysis, part 1: ecosystem mapping and identification of:
 - a. Organizations and individuals focusing on Georgia's criminal and youth justice systems across Georgia
 - b. Funders who are already committed to supporting this work, including levels of investment and types of projects
 - c. Potential funders to bring to table
2. Research and analysis of the history and current posture of Georgia's criminal justice system, including opportunities and obstacles for reform.
3. Funder Education and Engagement
 - a. Community building and educational opportunities for funders engaged or interested in justice reform to become more deeply invested
 - b. Center perspectives of justice impacted individuals and community partner organizations doing the work on the ground

In April 2023, Grantmakers for Southern Progress hired Sara Totonchi, Principal and Co-Founder of Lunoor Consulting, to lead this effort. Sara led the work with support from Aarti Sharma, Principal and Co-Founder of Lunoor Consulting. Sara collaborated closely with

Grantmakers for Southern Progress, Public Welfare Foundation, and United Way of Greater Atlanta as she and Aarti carried out Phase 1 between May and November 2023.

This report documents Phase 1 of the Georgia Justice Funders Table, the work, landscape mapping, a summary of invested funders and community partner organizations, an overview of justice reform in Georgia, and recommendations for Phase 2 of the Table in 2024.

Fundamentally, Phase 1 found that there is strong support for a Georgia Justice Funders Table from both funders and community partners, and that there is much to gain from both constituencies from a new Table structure focused on justice reform and transformation in Georgia.

Landscape Mapping

Over the span of Phase 1 of the Table, outreach was made to a wide range of funder and community partner stakeholders who are already engaged in justice reform/transformation in Georgia, or who are engaged in networks like Grantmakers for Southern Progress and the Justice Reform Partnership. Funders and partners were interviewed to determine:

- Who is funding and who is receiving funding for justice reform/transformation work in Georgia?
- How is the work on the ground evolving? What are the needs, opportunities, and challenges?
- What is the future of justice reform work in Georgia? How is it evolving?
- Would the Georgia justice ecosystem benefit from a Funders Table? What are the needs of funders and how do they complement the needs of community partners?

For purposes of this report, “funder” is defined broadly as any entity that disseminates funds to community-based organizations, and “community partner” is defined as any entity engaging in direct client or advocacy-based work within the adult or youth justice field.

Funders Engaged in Justice Reform/Transformation in Georgia

During Phase 1, over forty funders were contacted and invited to participate in individual conversations in support of the development of the Table. Twenty-eight funders, listed in full and mapped in [Appendix A](#), elected to participate in these conversations that covered the following:

1. What do you do and why?
2. What are your funding priorities?
 - a. How were these selected and why?
 - b. Do you see your foundation’s goals connecting to justice reform/transformation?
 - c. What has the foundation’s relationship to social justice and justice work been?
How do you see it evolving over time?
 - d. What orgs do you fund in the justice space and for what kind of work?

3. What would you consider some of the most important or impactful investments [funder] has made in the last 3-5 years and why?
4. How does [funder] view its role in relation to promoting racial justice?
5. Would a Georgia Justice Funders Table be beneficial to your work?
 - a. If so, how so?
 - b. Would you be willing to join virtual calls and/or in-person gatherings?
 - c. Are there any concerns or questions you have about the Table at this time?

Themes of Funder Conversations

In interviews with funders and partners, some broad trends emerged:

- *Great interest in the Table concept.* Funders were curious and appreciative of the concept of a Tabled focused on justice advocacy in Georgia. Funders acknowledged their own learning gaps with regard to the ecosystem, opportunities, challenges, and players in Georgia's justice space. Funders expressed a desire to connect with other funders who are similarly investing in Georgia.
- *Need for understanding, connections, and real-time information.* Funders agree that they would benefit from increased exposure to community partner organizations, especially those led by justice-impacted people, located in areas outside of Atlanta, and/or focused on reforms at both state and local levels. Funders have a desire to deepen their understanding of more challenging issues like violent crime, and receive reliable and nuanced information about emerging justice-related issues. Funders would like to connect with other funders who are invested in the justice ecosystem of Georgia, and are open to targeted funding strategies.
- *Significant investment from national funders in Georgia.* Investing in Georgia allows national foundations to contribute to transformative changes in the South and serve as a catalyst for broader regional and national progress. Georgia has seen a significant rise of social justice movements and activism, particularly around issues like justice reform, voting rights, and racial justice. National foundations see supporting these movements as a way to contribute to and amplify the momentum for change.
- *Georgia-based funders seek local community partners.* Funders based in Georgia have a vested interest in improving the well-being of communities statewide, and are familiar with the unique challenges and needs at play. By investing locally, they can support informed and targeted interventions that address complex needs in Georgia's communities.
- *Justice work is inextricably linked to racial justice, but momentum is waning.* Following George Floyd's murder by police in 2020, funders doubled down their financial investments into justice work. In response, organizations were able to increase their size and breadth of work. However, this same funding has steadily decreased since then. A number of corporate philanthropic entities have elected to spend funds internally to

address DEI initiatives rather than externally toward community groups. This leaves community organizations with less funding to support their expanded infrastructure.

- *Interest in funding collaborations and coalitions.* Several funders shared that they currently seek or would like to invest in campaigns or coalitions that include multiple community partners. There is a willingness to invest more resources in efforts that are strategic and timely collaborations.
- *Democracy is a funding priority for many funders.* Funders are interested in supporting grassroots work that protects democracy. This can look like protecting the rights of people to protest, as well as work that pursues fair and open elections.
- *Strong desire to invest in Georgia's justice-impacted and Black, Brown, and Indigenous grassroots leaders.* Justice-impacted and formerly incarcerated leaders bring a unique and authentic perspective to justice reform efforts. Funders recognize the value of individuals who have firsthand experience with the criminal legal system, as their insights can lead to more effective and empathetic solutions.
- *Intersectionality with immigrant justice.* Immigrant-serving funders shared that the intersection between immigrant justice and justice work is not acknowledged appropriately by both funders and community partners. There is a desire to connect the dots and ensure understanding of the overlap of these systems and the harsh impact on immigrant communities.
- *Engagement with the Stop Cop City campaign.* Funders are highly aware of the Stop Cop City movement. Funders' position on the prospective police training center spans the gamut, and all positions are paying attention to see what will happen. Funders also say there may be a current need to engage with this campaign, it should not be to the detriment of the longstanding movement for justice reform. National funders surveyed seem to be main investors in the Stop Cop City campaign, more so than local funders.

Community Partners Leading Justice Reform/Transformation in Georgia

During Phase 1, over fifty community partners were contacted and invited to participate in individual conversations in support of the development of the Table. Twenty-five partners, listed in full in [Appendix B](#), elected to participate in these conversations that covered the following:

1. Organization landscape
 - a. What are your 2023-24 priorities for justice reform?
 - b. What are you most proud of today?
2. Funding Landscape
 - a. What is hot- what are the issue areas that are being funded right now?

- b. What are you experiencing re interest from national and local donors?
 - c. What donors fund your justice work?
- 3. Political landscape
 - a. What are you experiencing as far as the appetite for justice reform in GA?
 - b. What do you see as key opportunities? Key obstacles?

Themes of Community Partner Conversations

- *Demand for advocacy outpaces resources available.* Partners name the neverending need for intervention at the state and local levels both to proactively seek change and to wage defense to stop anti-reform measures. Partners need more people, time, funds, training, and administrative support to realize their visions of a better Georgia.
- *2020 effect has waned.* Many justice organizations experienced a surge of new or increased funding in the summer of 2020. However, the funding has not been sustained, causing organizations that grew as a result of new funding to contract to stay afloat. Partners note that even though funding has decreased, expectations for deliverables stayed the same, causing their teams to be overstretched and overworked.
- *Rural areas are under-resourced.* There are a number of smaller grassroots organizations located in small towns across Georgia having a hard, if not impossible, time securing funding. Several of these organizations are led by justice-impacted individuals working to serve other justice-impacted individuals who are in the process of returning home.
- *Reform fatigue.* Partners name that there is a “justice reform fatigue” phenomenon following the eight years of reform under Governor Nathan Deal. They have heard from key grassroots leaders that there is a sense of weariness, frustration, or diminished enthusiasm to continue to embrace justice reform, despite the significant need for sustained investment.
- *Strength of opposition and resurgence of tough-on-crime rhetoric.* Partners observe a sharp shift from the halcyon years of the Deal administration, where smart-on-crime reforms were prioritized. [Opponents to reform are vast.](#) There is a movement to double down on police funding. There is a narrative that crime is increasing, and the response should be increased policing. There is an unmet need for funding communications work to combat the narrative that there is increased crime and the need for increased police presence.
- *Justice reform in Georgia is expansive and inclusive.* In this sample set, community partners share that the work they are carrying out addresses all stages of criminal legal involvement, including: working to prevent involvement in the system, including focus on high vulnerability children; pre-arrest diversion; bail reform and wealth-based detention; public defense; sentencing (from city ordinance violations to the death penalty);

engaged in a funder survey facilitated by Sara Totonchi about [values, interests, and goals](#) for the table. Katrina Mitchell led a discussion on the topics that funders are most interested in learning about. Funders ranked the following topics the highest: youth justice, leadership of justice-impacted people, reentry, criminalization of poverty, and police/policing.

In October, the Table gathered virtually again for its monthly one-hour call. This call featured a conversation on youth justice, including a presentation from the Executive Director of Georgia Appleseed, [Michael Waller](#), followed by a conversation by Table members about their investments in youth justice reform in Georgia.

In November, the Table gathered in person for an end of year lunch and learn, featuring a panel of justice-impacted leaders. Panelists included [Bridgette Simpson](#) of Barred Business, [Lucilla Harrell](#) of Atlanta Community Support Project, [Kareemah Hanifah](#) of IMAN Atlanta, and [Sando Zou-Capzzi](#) of What About Us. Sara Totonchi and Aarti Sharma presented the findings of Phase 1 and recommendations for Phase 2, followed by a funder conversation on next steps facilitated by Thena Robinson Mock.

Recommendations for 2024

Phase 1 of the Table proved that there is strong support from both community partners and funders to continue to grow the Table in 2024 and beyond. Both constituencies see mutual benefit in coordinated learning, relationship building, strategy, and resource investment.

The Table's Phase 2 needs are similar to those of a new organization getting on its feet: building expertise on key issues; ongoing identification and engagement of key stakeholders; developing structure, key values, mission, vision, strategic plan, and decision-making process; awareness of opportunities and challenges; shoring up resources; developing goals and a system for evaluation. The following is a recommended scope of work the Table should consider carrying out in 2024.

Continue to build connections to funders and community partners

The list of potential partners for the Table continues to grow with every conversation that is had on both the funder and community partner side. Specifically, the Table could expand its membership and understanding in the following ways:

- Connect with funders who are engaged in supporting work that intersects with justice reform/transformation, including those who fund equity in education or healthcare, children's rights, and climate justice.
- Dig deeper into the ecosystem of grassroots activists and organizations, especially those from Black, Brown, and Indigenous communities, across Georgia.

Build community while investing in funder education and engagement

One of the key needs identified by funders and community partners in Phase 1 is to build relationships between each other. In Phase 2, a primary focus of the Table should be to act as a bridge between funders and community partners so that they may:

- Share respective priorities and goals
- Identify shared values guiding future reforms
- Determine what progress towards change looks like
- Highlight how donor investment could significantly move the needle
- Explore opportunities to invest targeted funds in Georgia

The approach for this work could be carried out by engaging in the following:

- Build investment and nurture engagement through monthly meetings of current and potential funders
- Convene an inaugural one-day Summit that would bring together donors and community partners to learn from each other and to highlight critical issues and opportunities for engagement.
- Create space for courageous conversations about crime, individual and systemic harm, safety, intersectionality, and racial, gender, and economic justice

Build strategic tools for the Table

The Table will benefit from developing key structures to support funders in identifying key values, mission, vision, strategic plan, issue prioritization, and decision-making process as it grows into a more formal structure, including:

- Identify a process for community partners to have meaningful access and input to Table
- Assess possible Table structure including evaluating options of tiered membership vs steering committee vs collective, etc.
- Seek to understand funder appetite for contributing to a pooled fund administered by Table, or an alternative mechanism for providing funding to community partners.

Conclusion

Phase 1 of the Georgia justice Funders Table proved that there is significant need and desire for coordinated and strategic collaboration in service of justice reform and transformation in Georgia. The collaborations amongst funders and between funders and community partners should be nurtured, grown, and diversified. The results of these collaborations would only further the cause of justice in Georgia and build upon the courageous and effective advocacy of community partners and justice impacted people.

Now is a moment at which funders and donors can make a huge difference. Private funding can provide essential resources to bolster effective organizations and allow partners to step up

where the state has simultaneously failed in protecting Georgians from crime and unjust incarceration practices. Through strategic collaboration and intentional coordination, funders can use their resources and power to drive significant change in Georgia. Thanks to the longstanding and deep dedication of advocates and practitioners, the ground in Georgia is fertile and ready for cultivation.

Appendix A. List and Map of Funders Engaged in Phase 1

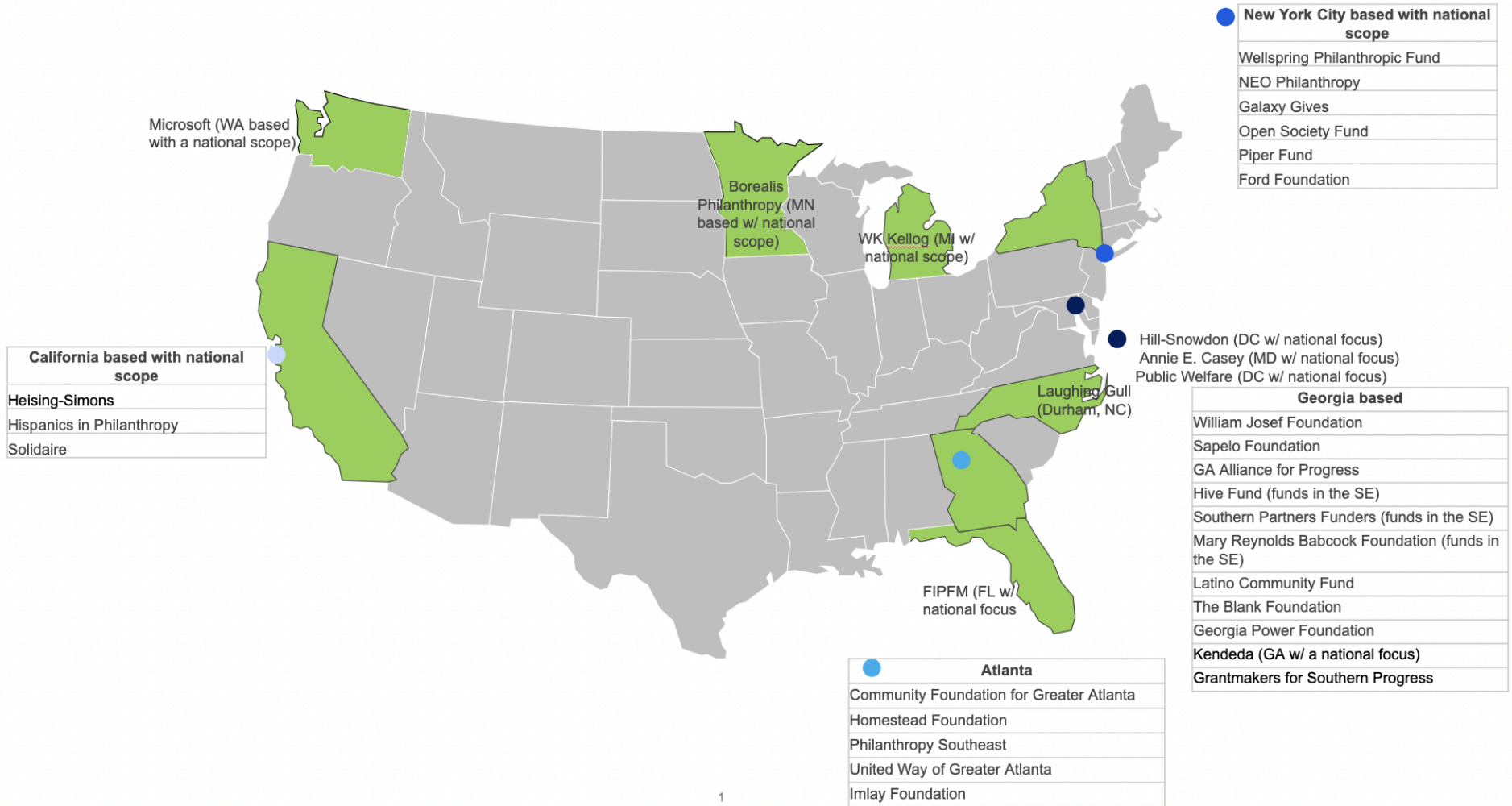
The following foundations were engaged in Phase 1 of the Georgia Justice Funders Table through participation in the steering committee, attendance of one or more in-person or virtual events, and individual interviews and follow-up conversations.

Foundation	Contact(s)	Justice-Related Focus/Intersection	Currently funding justice work in GA?
Annie E. Casey Foundation	Kweku Forstall, Ade Oguntoye, Amanda Jaquez	Children and families, stronger communities	Yes
Borealis Philanthropy	Jeree Thomas	Social justice issues including Black-led movement work, disability inclusion and justice, LGBTQ+, Communities Transforming Policing Fund	Yes
Community Foundation of Greater Atlanta-Community Impact	Ayana Gabriel, Katrina Julien, Amy Clarke	Broad focus on Metro-Atlanta	Yes
Democratizing Justice Initiative	Ken Chapman	Funder support and education on divestment from police unions	No
FICPFM	David Ayala	Formerly Incarcerated, Convicted People & Families Movement (FICPFM) provides funding to justice-impacted leaders for movement work	Yes
Four Freedoms Fund, NEO Philanthropy	Rina Chakraborty	Immigrant justice, intersection of immigrant justice and criminal legal system	Yes
Funders for Justice	Lorraine Ramirez	Network for funders focused on education, alignment, and action towards abolition	No
Georgia Alliance for Progress	Christine White	Georgia-focused, racial justice and democracy, POC leadership	Yes
Galaxy Gives	Noah Maier	Focus on movement leaders building power, dismantling systems of injustice, and building new solutions that heal	Yes
Georgia Power Foundation	Amy Hall	Broad focus with an emphasis on workforce, teachers, and water.	Yes
Grantmakers for Southern Progress	Tamiaka Mosley, Amber Brown	Network of funders who leverage resources for structural change in the South	No

Heising-Simons Foundation	Angie Junck and Gina Peralta	Human rights lens for challenging mass criminalization of BIPOC through power shifts	Yes
Hill Snowdon Foundation	Shona Shakravartty	Focused on community organizing and social justice.	Yes
Hispanics in Philanthropy	Bayoán Rosselló-Cornier	Their programming in power building and justice funds justice related causes.	No
Hive Fund	Jill Cartwright	Focused on climate justice	No
Homestead Foundation	Shannon Gaggero	Broad- based on family interests	Yes
Imlay Foundation	Robert Smulien	General Atlanta focus on a wide range of issues determined by the family	Yes
Latino Community Fund	Gigi Pedraza	Movement building within the Latino immigrant community, intersection of immigrant justice and criminal legal reform	Yes
Laughing Gull Foundation	Hillary Rao	Higher education in prisons and re-entry	Yes
Liberation Ventures	Jennie Goldfarb	Funder coalition with racial justice lens with a focus on reparations	No
Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation	Dwayne Patterson	Power building work to advance racial equity and social and economic justice	Yes
Microsoft, Justice Reform Initiative	Shiqueen Brown	Focus on technology to accelerate impact of justice reform organizations	Yes
Piper Fund	Dan Furmansky, Monica Kim, Ebony Simpson	Democracy focused with a special interest in protest rights and fighting criminalization of dissent	Yes
Public Welfare Foundation	Thena Robinson Mock, Candice Jones, Zimar Batista	Transformative approach to justice that is community-led, restorative, racially just	Yes
Sapelo Foundation	Joe Thomas	Building a just Georgia through investment in climate justice, social prosperity, and civic power	Yes
Solidaire Network	Ada Smith and Shannon Gaggero	Broad giving based on family interests.	Yes
Southern Partners Funders	Teumbay Barnes	Rural focus across SE, racial, economic, and environmental justice	Yes
United Way of Greater Atlanta, Racial Equity and Healing Fund	Katrina Mitchell	Invests in justice work through a child well-being and location-based approach	Yes
Wellspring Philanthropic Fund	Altaf Rahamatulla	Human rights lens with a focus on racial, gender, and economic justice for all	Yes

William Josef Foundation	Roswell Satterwhite	GA and SE focus addressing poverty and economic insecurity	Yes
W.K. Kellogg Foundation	Sakinah Harrison	Focused on thriving children, healthy families, and equitable communities	No

In addition to the foundations listed above, several other foundations were identified for engagement and should be prioritized in 2024. These include: 8th Amendment Project, Arnold Ventures, Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation, N Atlanta Women’s Foundation, Bank of America, Betty and Davis Fitzgerald Foundation. Ford Foundation, Herb Block Foundation, Just Trust Fund, Mellon Foundation, Open Society Foundation, and Walmart Foundation.



Appendix B. List of Community Partner Organizations Engaged in Phase 1

The following organizations were engaged in Phase 1 of the Georgia Justice Funders Table through participation in the research phase, sharing wisdom, experience, skills, and history, through attendance at an in-person or virtual event, and through one-on-one interviews.

Organization	Contact(s)	Geographic Focus	Mission Statements
Augusta Justice Cooperative	Donna Marain	Local (Augusta)	“The Augusta Justice Cooperative is Augusta’s criminal justice reform advocacy group. The Augusta Justice Cooperative is for anyone with questions about how local criminal-legal systems operate. We are not lawyers. We are interested individuals and impacted individuals coming together to try to make local criminal-legal systems less harmful. “
Barred Business	Bridgette Simpson	National	“Barred Business’ mission is to heal, empower, educate, activate, resource, and build the power of all marginalized justice-impacted people, LGBTQIA+ people and Trans people of color, their children, families, and communities.”
Barton Child Law & Policy Center	Melissa Carter	Statewide	Based at Emory Law School, “the Barton Child Law and Policy Center promotes and protects the legal rights and interests of children who are involved with the juvenile court, child welfare, and youth justice systems.”
Center for Employment Opportunities	Simone Price	Local (Atlanta), National (affiliates)	“Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO) provides immediate, effective, and comprehensive employment services exclusively to people recently released from incarceration.”
Center for Victims of Torture	Darlene Lynch	International	“The mission of the Center for Victims of Torture is to heal the wounds of torture on individuals, their families and their communities and to end torture worldwide.”
Color Of Change	Michael Collins	National	“Color Of Change is the nation’s largest online racial justice organization. We help people respond effectively to injustice in the world around us. As a national online force driven by 7 million members, we move decision-makers in corporations and government to create a more human and less hostile world for Black people in America.”

Deep Center	Coco Guthrie-Papy	Local (Savannah), Statewide	“Deep Center uses writing, art, and culture to fuel the creative fires of Savannah’s young people, helping them connect their learning to their lives, their lives to their communities, and their actions to transformational change.”
End Mass Incarceration Georgia Network	Pamela Perkins Carn	Statewide	“The End Mass Incarceration Georgia Network is an intentional association of faith communities, organizations and individuals formed to effect positive change in the areas of youth and criminal justice.”
Georgia Appleseed	Michael Waller	Statewide	“We keep kids in school, in stable, healthy housing, and out of the criminal justice system.”
Georgia Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers	Mazie Lynn Guertin	Statewide	“GACDL is comprised of criminal defense lawyers, law students, and full time criminal investigators who stand together in their commitment to safeguard the constitutional guarantees of fairness in the criminal justice process. GACDL makes its voice for fair and effective criminal justice heard in the courts, the legislature, and the community.”
Georgia Coalition for Higher Education in Prison	Patrick Rodriguez, Thomas Fabisiak	Statewide	“GACHEP is a coalition committed to expanding high-quality higher education in prison in the state and supporting people in their pursuit of higher education after they leave prison.”
Georgia Interfaith Public Policy Center	Carole Maddux	Statewide	“Uniting Georgia’s people of faith to educate, empower and advocate for the common good.”
Georgia Justice Project	Ermis Zayas	Statewide	“Georgia Justice Project strengthens our community by demonstrating a better way to represent and support individuals in the criminal justice system and reduce barriers to reentry into the community. GJP promotes innovative change through direct legal representation, policy advocacy, education, and coalition building.”
Georgians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty (GFADP)	Cathy Harmon-Christan	Statewide	“GFADP is working to end capital punishment in Georgia and around the world.”
IMAN Atlanta	Kareemah Hanifa	Local (Atlanta) Statewide	“IMAN Atlanta was founded in 2016 and emerged out of years of organizing and base-building in Atlanta’s West End neighborhood. The organization models an integrative approach that employs holistic interventions to address a spectrum of structural and systemic injustices impeding a dignified quality of life for people in marginalized communities.”

Living On Purpose ATL	Tami Boyd	Local (Atlanta)	“Living On Purpose ATL, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) organization that provides formerly incarcerated women with employment opportunities, life skills training, counseling, education and housing to help them overcome some of the challenges they face upon re-entering society and give them a greater chance to succeed.”
Motherhood Beyond Bars	Amy Ard	Statewide	“Motherhood Beyond Bars ensures a healthy start for infants born to incarcerated women by providing a network of comprehensive support for mothers and caregivers. We support and strengthen families with the goal of long-term, healthy reunification and a permanent end to cycles of incarceration in families.”
National Incarceration Association	Kate Boccia	Statewide	“To help families navigate the journey of incarceration with positive outcomes, and to push innovations throughout justice systems to correct, rehabilitate, cure and restore, for greater public safety for all.”
Reform Georgia	Maxwell Ruppensburg	Statewide	“Research. Inform. Advocate. Justice policy research, data, and advocacy for all Georgians.”
The Responsible Business Initiative for Justice (RBIJ)	Caz Walcott	National	“The Responsible Business Initiative for Justice (RBIJ) works with companies to champion fairness, equality and effectiveness across systems of punishment and incarceration.”
RestoreHER	Pamela Winn	National	“RestoreHER is dedicated to the safety and dignity of system-impacted women.”
Southern Center for Human Rights	Terrica Ganzy	Local (Atlanta), Statewide	“The Southern Center for Human Rights is working for equality, dignity, and justice for people impacted by the criminal legal system in the Deep South. SCHR fights for a world free from mass incarceration, the death penalty, the criminalization of poverty, and racial injustice.”
Southern Women In Motion Foundation Inc.	Shakiethia Wheeler	Statewide	“We provide Supportive Housing and Reentry for homeless women who are directly impacted by the justice system, may have experienced domestic violence, or non chronic mental health issues.
Women on the Rise	Robyn Hasan Simpson-Bey, Dominique Grant	Local (Atlanta), Statewide	“Women on the Rise is a membership-based organization led by and for a diverse sisterhood of Black women who are impacted by the legal system. Through community organizing and supportive services, we are building a powerful

			base of women with the skills and experience necessary to wage and win campaigns to end mass incarceration and achieve collective liberation, while transforming ourselves and our communities.”
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Appendix C. Justice Reform in Georgia

Research and analysis of the history and current posture of Georgia's criminal justice system, including opportunities and obstacles for reform.

After years of successful advocacy and reforms, Georgia's criminal justice reform ecosystem is poised for investment. There are significant opportunities for funders to strategically invest in unprecedented ways to build a new and better Georgia.

The roots of Georgia's criminal justice system are deep set in chattel slavery and plantation labor. Following Reconstruction, Georgia's white leaders employed a range of tactics and discriminatory laws to maintain control over Black Georgians and ensure the continuation of a cheap or free labor force. From the Black Codes, to convict leasing, to Jim Crow, to the Southern Strategy, to the War on Drugs, the architecture of mass incarceration in Georgia was built with intention and fervor to bar Black Georgians from full participation. While the structures of social control, violence, and oppression have evolved over time, the system itself has retained its strength and decimating impact on Black, Brown, and Indigenous communities statewide.

Justice reform is one of the most critical civil rights and social justice struggles of this generation. For decades, courageous activists, faith-based leaders, attorneys, and directly impacted people have struggled together to seek true justice in Georgia. Over the years there have been countless one-off victories locally and a handful of successful statewide campaigns. One of the most fertile eras for reform in Georgia was between 2011 and 2018, when former Governor Nathan Deal made criminal justice reform a cornerstone of his administration and central to his gubernatorial legacy.

During this time, a multiracial coalition of advocates leveraged this opportunity to make significant, historic reforms. Their expertise and backgrounds were diverse, spanning the gamut of justice issues and lived experiences. The reforms were propelled by the acknowledgement from state leaders that Georgians were paying an enormous price tag – both financially and in wasted human lives – for a system that was not giving anyone the results we needed, and that we can and must do better. The reforms included sentencing changes and modifications to mandatory minimums, youth justice reform, reforms to the criminalization of poverty, bail reform, and more. These reforms resulted in not only an overall decline in our prison population, but also a 30% decrease in the number of Black Georgians incarcerated over the 8 year period. Additionally, the number of youth in secure confinement and secure detention fell 36% and 11%, respectively.

However, the work was far from complete when Governor Deal left office in 2019. And regrettably, since then, Georgia's criminal legal system has been neglected resulting in serious consequences. Georgia's incarceration rate– [968 per 100,000 people](#) (including prisons, jails, immigration detention, and juvenile justice facilities) – gives it the distinction of locking up a

higher percentage of our people than any democracy on earth. Georgia [leads the nation with its probation rate](#), more than triple the national average and nearly double the number of the second-ranked state.

It would be one thing if these numbers corresponded to increased safety for Georgians, but they don't. Gun violence and homicides [have increased dramatically between 2019-2020](#), and cities like Atlanta and Albany have been particularly hard hit. Georgia's prisons have deteriorated to the point that a comprehensive investigation into the violence inside them has been launched by the [US Department of Justice](#). The dangerous conditions inside Georgia's prisons are resulting in our state's corrections officers leaving the system in droves and extraordinary trauma and injury being inflicted upon incarcerated people.

The criminal legal system was a hot topic during the 2023 session of the Georgia General Assembly, though the attention was not favorable to advocates for reform. For example, [SB 44](#) was passed over the objections of the community and justice reform advocates. Sponsored by Sen. Bo Hatchett on behalf of Governor Brian Kemp, SB 44 imposes mandatory minimums for gang offenses, punishing children who are charged under an overbroad gang statute, and enhances penalties for recruitment of minors or people with disabilities into gangs. The bill also mandates cash bail for anyone who has had a bench warrant issued for their arrest for failure to appear for any offense, not including traffic violations, in the last five years. This bill will only increase jail and prison populations and undermine public safety.

In 2023, the leadership of the City of Atlanta found themselves in the national spotlight as they sought to build a massive new police training center, dubbed by activists and abolitionists as "Cop City." Protests against the project escalated after the fatal shooting on January 18 of a 26-year-old protester known as Tortuguita.

The *Stop Cop City* movement opposes the allocation of funds towards this facility that spans 381 acres of forested land, costs \$30 million plus in tax-payer dollars, and has over \$60 million in corporate funding. The plans for the facility include military-grade training facilities, a mock city to practice urban warfare, explosives testing areas, and dozens of shooting ranges.

Stop Cop City activists advocate for redirecting funds from the facility towards community-based programs and initiatives that promote social and economic development and argue that such investments can have a more positive and lasting impact on crime prevention and community well-being. Stop Cop City activists also cite concerns that building larger police facilities will contribute to over-policing, exacerbating issues related to racial profiling, discriminatory practices, and the criminalization of Atlanta's most vulnerable communities.

In the summer of 2023, advocates launched a referendum initiative to seek a city-wide vote on the issue, and reported that they collected over 116,000 signatures from Atlantans in support of the measure. The issue of the referendum is currently unresolved due to court challenges. In September, Georgia Attorney General Chris Carr charged 61 activists with violating the state's Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) law, claiming that the coalition of

activists, mutual aid groups, and bail funds are engaged in a criminal conspiracy. These charges are still pending.

In addition to the Stop Cop City campaign, in 2023, advocates across the state of Georgia have been pushing back against the criminalization of communities, unconscionable conditions of confinement, the failure of the state to provide public defenders to those who are entitled to counsel, and the construction of new or improved jails and prisons.

These dynamics are not new to Georgians who are on the frontlines of justice reform and transformation. These leaders are committed to building a better state and are relying upon those with access to resources to support their essential and courageous work.

Appendix D. Opponents of Justice Reform in Georgia

In Georgia, opposition to justice reform/transformation comes from many directions, often with differing perspectives and reasons for their stance. Some potential opponents of justice reform/transformation include:

Law Enforcement Agencies: Some law enforcement agencies are cautious or resistant to reforms due to concerns about changes affecting their ability to enforce the law effectively or fearing potential impacts on public safety. The Georgia Sheriffs Association is a particularly powerful entity that has single-handedly blocked good-sense reforms on several occasions over the last decade. Individual law enforcement leaders can and have blocked reforms or promoted counter-productive measures in their local jurisdictions.

Prosecutors and District Attorneys: Certain prosecutors and district attorneys may resist reforms as they may believe changes could limit their prosecutorial ability, particularly in serious crime cases. The Prosecuting Attorneys Council of Georgia represents elected district attorneys and county solicitors, and maintains a daily presence at the Georgia State Capitol.

Tough-on-Crime Advocates: Some individuals or groups advocate for a strict "tough-on-crime" approach, believing harsh penalties and stringent law enforcement are necessary to maintain public safety, and they may oppose reforms that could be perceived as lenient or reducing the punitive aspects of the justice system.

Private Probation, Private Prison and the Bail Bonds Industry: Entities that profit from incarceration, such as private probation, private prisons, or companies that provide services to correctional facilities (phones, commissary, healthcare), often oppose reforms that could potentially reduce the incarcerated population, impacting their business and revenue. The Georgia Association of Professional Bondsmen is a strong lobby opposing bail reform and has succeeded in passing bills preventing the release of people who are detained only due to their inability to afford their bail.

Politicians or Public Figures with Conservative Views: Individuals or groups with conservative viewpoints may express opposition to certain criminal justice reforms if they believe these reforms could jeopardize traditional law enforcement practices, preferring a more punitive approach to addressing crime. Senator Randy Robertson from outside of Columbus, GA, is a retired law enforcement officer who sponsors many draconian bills seeking to enhance sentences and criminalization of communities.