

Philanthropy Southeast's

Inspiration

Summer 2023

Where Philanthropy Begins



Climate Coalition

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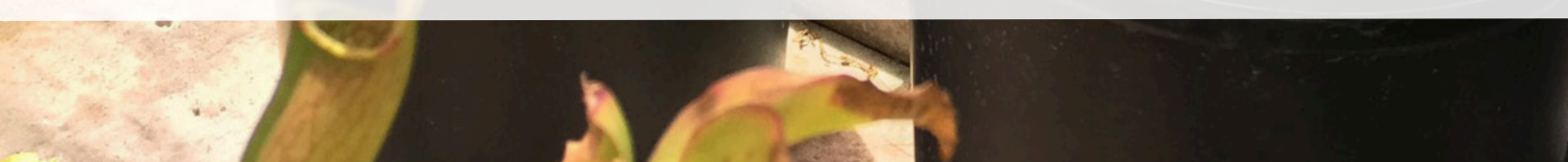


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On the cover: Through the Athens Land Trust's Rooting for Community Camp, children to learn how to conserve, empower, and sustain communities through food, gardening, and a love for nature. *(Photo courtesy of Athens Land Trust)*





About Philanthropy Southeast

Mission: Philanthropy Southeast strengthens Southern philanthropy, welcoming our members to listen, learn and collaborate on ideas and actions to help build an equitable, prosperous South.

Statement of Purpose: Philanthropy Southeast strives to connect the region's philanthropic leaders with a diverse and inclusive range of information, resources, experts, innovations and best practices while promoting peer-to-peer learning and leadership development. While we may not necessarily endorse the opinions and views of those we work with, we engage with them to promote vibrant and open discussion. We believe it is necessary to have these conversations for the sake of increasing philanthropy's impact throughout the region.

About Inspiration: *Inspiration* is published four times a year by Philanthropy Southeast, for the benefit of its Members. The views expressed in *Inspiration* are not necessarily the views of all Philanthropy Southeast Members. We welcome articles, comments and suggestions – please address all communications to Philanthropy Southeast's Vice President of Strategic Communications, David Miller, at david@philanthropysoutheast.org.

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The Athens Land Trust's Young Urban Builders program, an initiative supported by Drawdown Georgia, works to address youth unemployment and perform owner-occupied rehabilitation in the West Broad neighborhood of Athens, Georgia. (Photo courtesy of Athens Land Trust)



Accelerating Climate Justice in Georgia

By Jamie McCrary

A cohort of family foundations is working to address climate change and its inequitable impact

Hot and humid summers, menacing hurricanes and devastating tornadoes have always been part of life in the South.

But as the effects of climate change continue to emerge, Southern communities are increasingly in the crosshairs of intensifying weather events. Coastal communities are being threatened by rising tides and communities across the region can expect summer heat to reach stifling levels.

Southern philanthropy, in turn, is starting to take action by shifting funding priorities to focus on climate change solutions – and to address climate change’s disproportionate impact on people of color and those living in less-affluent communities.

For example, a recent Environmental Protection Agency report found that Black people are 40 percent more likely than other groups to live in places where extreme temperatures cause deaths. Black families are also 34 percent more likely to live in areas with high numbers of childhood asthma diagnoses – a condition that is often directly connected to environmental factors.

With these trends in mind, a cohort of Georgia family foundations is working to address these injustices and develop a coordinated approach to addressing climate change through Drawdown Georgia, a statewide climate initiative.

The inaugural foundations – which include Ray C. Anderson Foundation’s NextGen Committee, the R. Howard Dobbs, Jr. Foundation and its NextGen Dobbs Fund, The Wilbur & Hilda Glenn Family Foundation, The Kendeda Fund and The Sapelo Foundation – see Drawdown Georgia as an important step in creating an ecosystem of funders and leaders that are working to advance equity-focused climate change solutions in their state.

“Georgia as a state, and the Southeast as a region, has a lot of reckoning to do around racial equity,” said John Lanier, executive director of the Ray C. Anderson Foundation, a founding partner of the initiative. “If we can create a community that helps solve racial equity challenges while addressing the climate crisis, we believe we can truly create change across the state.”

A Research-Based Approach

The Trust’s revised approach to Drawdown Georgia draws its roots from a nonprofit called Project Drawdown, which is working to address climate change globally by advancing effective, science-based climate solutions and strate-

gies – as quickly, safely, and equitably as possible.

Lanier was inspired by Project Drawdown’s science-based approach. As the leader of a local funder working in Georgia, he set out to understand and implement state-specific solutions. To do that, Lanier initially focused on answering one critical question: What are the best – and most equitable – climate solutions for Georgia?

“We hope this can be an effective model that brings even more philanthropic organizations into the climate justice space.”

John Lanier,
Ray C. Anderson Foundation

“Research on climate change solutions shows that strategies tailored to local needs are most effective,” Lanier said. “We believe state-level climate action is drastically underutilized. What works for Georgia might also work for other Southern states, but solutions will be different in places like Massachusetts or California.”

The Ray C. Anderson Foundation made its first major Drawdown Georgia investment in January 2019, issuing a research grant to four universities – Georgia Tech, Emory, Georgia State and the University of Georgia – to investigate the state’s most significant climate solutions.

A year and a half later, the university coalition concluded its research, issuing a list of 20 equity-centered climate solutions across five sectors: transportation, electricity, buildings and materials, food and agriculture, and electricity and land sinks.

“This research gives Drawdown Georgia a trustworthy voice,” said Dennis Creech, fund advisor for sustainability for The Kendeda Fund. “It’s more than just science. It’s also community, business and

policy priorities. And it’s pragmatic because it’s targeted to Georgia’s needs. I think that’s critical.”

Building a Cross-Sector Movement

Research from the universities provided Lanier’s foundation with the knowledge it needed to shift from theory to action.

Lanier began reaching out to like-minded funders, businesses and nonprofits with the goal of expanding Drawdown Georgia into a statewide, cross-sector movement around climate solutions. Drawdown Georgia provides partners with its research to help inform their decision-making on which solutions to pursue.

Current partners include nonprofits like Georgia Interfaith Power and Light, which works with faith communities to improve their environmental sustainability, and the Drawdown Georgia Business Compact, a statewide coalition of large and small companies that collaborate on climate solutions.

“We wanted to create this decentralized, joinable, leader-full movement in favor of climate change,” said Lanier. “Our theory of change is empowering different stakeholder groups to use our research in ways most relevant to them.”

One common thread connects partners across sectors and organizations: the pursuit of equity.

“I think the South is – and needs to be – leading the climate conversation across the country,” said Suzanna Stribling, executive director for the Wilbur & Hilda Glenn Family Foundation. “We face a lot of climate justice-related challenges, particularly in our rural communities. Drawdown Georgia is a way for us to collaboratively address these issues and extend our impact beyond Metro Atlanta.”

Advancing Equity Through Grant-making

In December 2022, Drawdown Georgia completed its inaugural Climate Solutions and Equity Grants program. The program, jointly funded by the inaugural foundations, awarded a total of \$1 million in grants to five organizations working to advance climate change and prioritize equity in Georgia.

“We were immediately attracted to Drawdown Georgia for its combination of practical climate change solutions and equity,” said David D. Weitnauer, president of the R. Howard Dobbs, Jr. Foundation. “This

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was a chance for us to learn with a group of colleagues on both fronts and create a vehicle for putting our resources to work.”

The grant recipients – each of which received \$100,000 annual awards over two years – included Truly Living Well Center for Natural Urban Agriculture, Georgia Organics, Georgia Conservation Voters Education Fund, Gwinnett Housing Corporation and Athens Land Trust.

“In the larger world of philanthropy, climate justice doesn’t get enough attention,” Stribling said. “This grant program is helping change that by uplifting the voices of those most affected. I think that’s the proper role of philanthropy: highlighting the hard work of frontline organizations.”

Drawdown Georgia prioritized funding efforts directly tied to its research. Each of the five grant recipients are leading efforts that advance the initiative’s highest impact solutions, including food waste reduction, conservation agriculture and rooftop solar.

And because climate intersects with issues such as economic development and public health, the grants program aims to have an impact that extends far beyond climate.

For example, the Gwinnett Housing Corporation (GHC) – a nonprofit focused on creating quality affordable housing – will use its grant to develop a workforce development plan that creates clean energy job pipelines for BIPOC workers while also providing them with training and resources.

“This is what makes this grant program so unique,” said Weitnauer. “It places equity in a specific frame of reference that cuts across many different societal issues. This has tangible, real-life implications.”

Ensuring an Equitable Process

Drawdown Georgia has also prioritized creating an equitable grantmaking process. The initiative’s partners, who are predominantly White, wanted to ensure their approach for selecting grantees was just and fair.

“We were mindful we couldn’t just talk about funding initiatives that yielded equitable outcomes,” said Lanier. “We needed to thoughtfully create an equitable process.”



Drawdown Georgia’s work includes support for the Georgia Conservation Voters Education Fund, which recently launched an initiative to help people served by electric membership cooperative utilities advocate for affordability and sustainable practices. (Photo courtesy of Georgia Conservation Voters Education Fund)

To do so, Drawdown Georgia hired an equity consultant to design its RFP and grants decision-making processes. The consultant also worked with the grantmaking team to define what equity ultimately means and considered ways to incorporate greater diversity into its grants review process.

This work led Drawdown Georgia to recruit an all-Black, women-led grants review panel. The panel, which reviewed the initiative’s initial round of proposals, also prioritized including Black women who specialize in climate justice.

“This gave us insight from people who understood systemic issues around equity and how they intersect with climate much more intimately than we do,” Lanier said.

This approach helped broaden and diversify the initiative’s decision-making power, a process Lanier likens to trust-based philanthropy.

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, foundations across the South have adopted trust-based philanthropy as a method for building equity through grantmaking. This approach helps redistribute power from funder to grantee by entrusting decision-making to the community itself.

“It was important to us that these grants helped build power in communities that are disproportionately impacted by climate change,” said MaryBeth Deiters, administration and grants manager for The Sapelo Foundation. “We wanted to empower them to advocate for their needs.”

Scaling its Impact

Drawdown Georgia plans to continue its grantmaking in 2024 when the inaugural recipients’ grant periods end. Funding for this new round of grants will be provided by the R. Howard Dobbs, Jr. Foundation, The Wilbur & Hilda Glenn Family Foundation, The Ray C. Anderson Foundation, and by two new funding partners: The Ghanta Family Foundation and The Reilly Family Fund.

Ultimately, Lanier hopes to scale the Drawdown Georgia model so foundations across the country can replicate it. He envisions expanding the initiative to communities in different states to help expand the climate justice movement.

“We hope this can be an effective model that brings even more philanthropic organizations into the climate justice space,” he said. “There’s nothing about what we’re doing that can’t be replicated in other places.”

As a Drawdown Georgia funder, he emphasizes that the Ray C. Anderson Foundation and its peers are only conduits for climate justice.

“The most important part of the story is the organizations we’ve funded,” Lanier said. “They’re committed to doing the hard work of solving both our climate crisis and continued systemic racism in Georgia. They are the true heroes of this story.” ■