



The Atlanta Brain Trust

April 12, 2011

## Introduction

On April 12, 2011, CEOs for Cities, the City of Atlanta, McKenna Long and Aldridge, and Parkmobile convened the Atlanta Brain Trust, a cross-sector group of 75 urban leaders who engaged in a robust discussion of the trends shaping the future of cities, how Atlanta is likely to fare in light of these trends and if the local civic agenda needs to shift in response to these trends.

Atlanta is home to a host of industries. How can Atlanta build on the existing business infrastructure to further existing opportunities? What can leaders do to increase the economic footprint of Atlanta? How can Atlanta prepare its citizens to meet the challenges of the diverse business interests present in Atlanta? What would it take to make Atlanta the engine of the new American dream? And given the strength of Atlanta's business community, how can it engage its leaders and talent to promote Atlanta's future?

After opening remarks by Mayor Kasim Reed and Julia Klaiber, Director of External Affairs for CEOs for Cities, a panel of local leaders responded to questions about Atlanta's strengths, weaknesses and opportunities. A question and answer session followed in which all Brain Trust participants were able to suggest important actions Atlanta leaders ought to take to shape the city for the future. Results are presented in this report.

The Atlanta Brain Trust is a program of the US Initiative, a civic movement to imagine a new kind of future for urban life in America. The US Initiative was launched in 2010 by CEOs for Cities with support from The Rockefeller Foundation and advances the work of the CEOs for Cities network of corporations, universities, foundations and cultural institutions with a comprehensive public engagement campaign.

Outcomes of the AtlantaBrain Trust will be compiled and put to use in national publications related to the project, including a book to be published by The Rockefeller Foundation.



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There are three factors that make cities work:

**Quality of Talent**

**Quality of Place**

**Quality of Opportunity**

And without leadership, none of these can be realized.



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## **Atlanta is a place of opportunity, but we can be more.**

Atlanta is a hub of businesses. Connected by air and by sea, Atlanta provides a gateway for international commerce. Given the existing talent pool and its reputation for openness, Atlanta is a city of opportunity. This is a great attribute as opportunity, is the second most important factor in making talent “stick” to a city. There are three strong indicators of quality of opportunity in Atlanta: as it ranks 11<sup>th</sup> in entrepreneurship, 15<sup>th</sup> in the amount of venture capital raised, and 23<sup>rd</sup> in small businesses of the top 51 metros. These assets create the basis of a strong business environment in Atlanta.

Is openness enough? While Atlanta ranks 12<sup>th</sup> among the top 51 metros for college attainment, it needs to develop more of the talent of its population. When it comes to success factors for cities, talent is the first among equals. Conservative estimates attribute 58% of a city’s success, if defined by per capita income, to the percentage of its population with a four-year degree. The latest figures available show that only 34.6 percent of Atlanta’s population has a 4-year college degree or better. If Atlanta could increase that just one percentage point – just one – it would produce an additional \$3.9 billion in personal income. That’s the Talent Dividend. Atlanta’s thriving business community needs educated employees to ensure future success and increase college attainment is the number one way to do that.

Beyond quality of talent and quality of opportunity, Atlanta needs quality of place to make talented workers stick. By developing Atlanta into a livable and vibrant neighborhood, Atlanta will attract young, college educated people, the most mobile people in America. Overwhelmingly, educated 24-35 year olds want compact, mixed-use, walkable neighborhoods with local businesses, arts & culture, and recreation. This much sought-after vibrancy is the key to attracting prosperous people and creating a strong economic center with high-wage job growth.

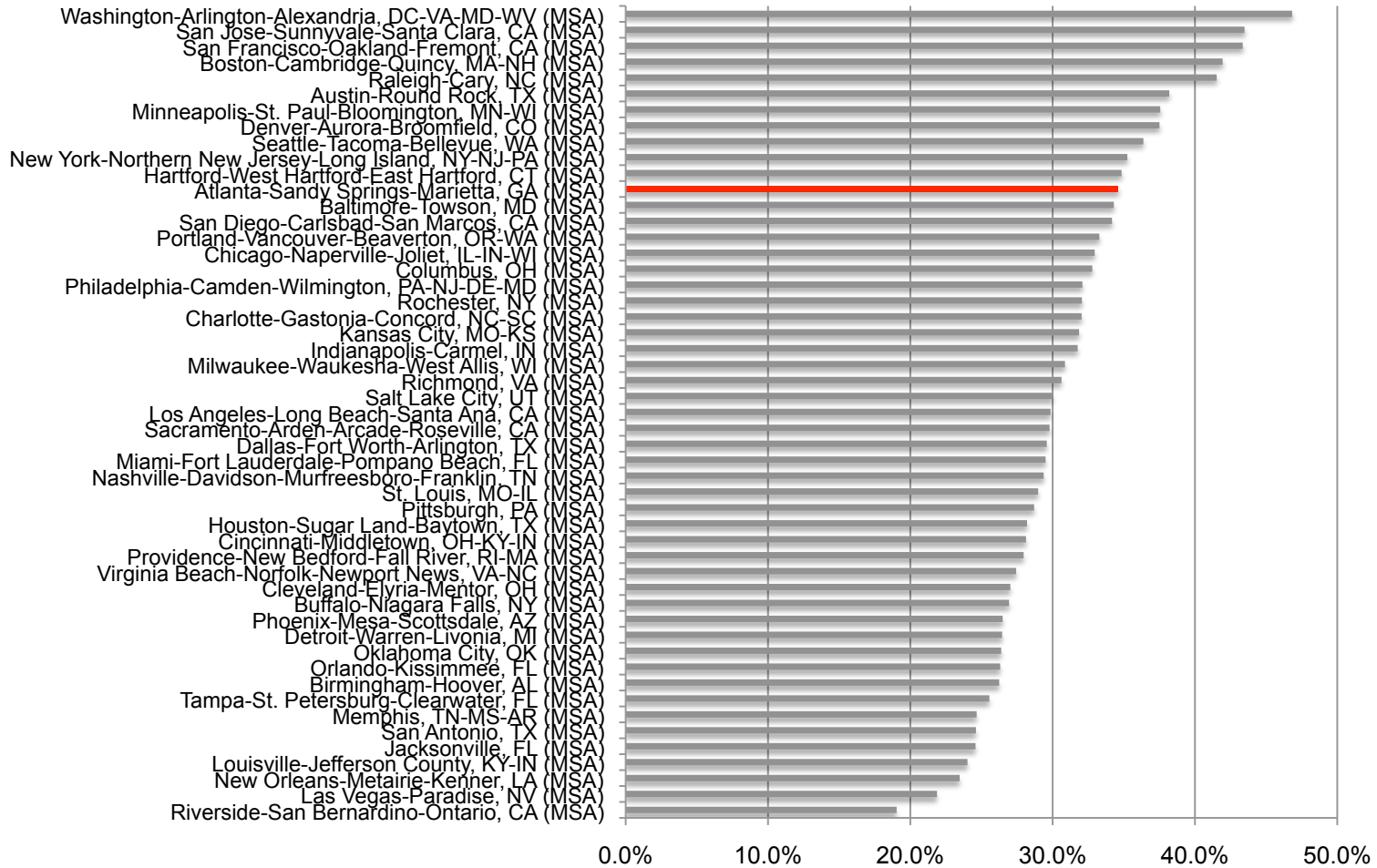


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# Metro Variation in College Attainment

Source: 2008 ACS



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## Where do the biggest opportunities lie for gaining competitive advantage?

Atlanta is globally positioned, through both air and water connectivity, to be an economic leader. With a history of entrepreneurship and business, Atlanta has the potential to be the regional economic driver. What can strengths can Atlanta build on to build the city into a strong innovation economy?

During the Brain Trust, civic leaders suggested looking at Atlanta job growth from cradle to career. By enhancing education from early childhood onward, Atlanta leaders hope to reinvigorate Atlanta's talent base. Atlanta can no longer rely on importing talent, thus leaders emphasized the importance of improving K-12 education in order to develop an economy of high-wage jobs.

Guy Millner, Chairman and CEO of AssuranceAmerica Corporation, sees a future for Atlanta's talent in two new industries: technology and healthcare. Leaders believe that these industries have the potential to power Atlanta into an innovation economy powered by talented workers. By utilizing Atlanta's connectivity and talent pool, Atlanta can become a global economic leader.



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**Atlanta should build on the existing strength of leadership.**

Atlanta is rich in strong leadership. Mayor Kasim Reed is a young and innovative civic leader working to improve public safety, increase youth opportunities and decrease unemployment. His initiatives, such as Hire One Atlanta, have strong corporate backing throughout the city. While collaborative leadership is part of Atlanta's DNA, more should be done to foster quality of leadership in Atlanta.

Quality of talent, quality of opportunity, and quality of place are critical components of a successful city, but quality of leadership drives it all. What can Atlanta do to further develop corporate leadership and civic responsibility? Atlanta Brain Trust participants suggested a larger role for the Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce and businesses. Beyond the existing corporate leadership, Brain Trust participants recommended instituting 50 Under 50, a development program for young business leaders.

By diversifying generational leadership and encouraging corporate civic involvement, Atlanta can further develop the quality of leadership it needs to be a world leader.



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**What are the three most important actions we need to take as a community?**



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**1. Invest in education.**

If Atlanta is to become an engine in the innovation economy, it must have a strong educational system to develop talent. Emphasizing job growth from cradle to career, the civic leaders present at the Brain Trust discussed the importance of early childhood education from the age of three. Beyond starting earlier, Atlanta should stop cutting K-12 educational spending in order to maximize educational outcomes. By properly funding education and by expecting students to succeed, Atlanta's educational investments will reap benefits in talent development.

**2. Develop new industries.**

Building on existing connectivity, Brain Trust participants suggested that Atlanta can become global leaders in the innovation economy. By developing both technology and healthcare, Atlanta can further its hold on major industries. Atlanta should soar on its existing strengths in air transportation and talent and create a stronger knowledge economy to put its talent to work.

**3. Build Atlanta's infrastructure.**

Quality of place makes talent stick and one of the main drivers of placemaking is connectivity. Brain Trust leaders suggested that Atlanta should look at the logistics of mobility and work to develop a more comprehensive transit plan. Outside Atlanta city limits, Atlanta should be nationally connected. Cities drive regions and regions are the new economic footprint in the global economy. Thus, Atlanta should be a regional leader. Brain Trust participants discussed connectivity to Charlotte via high speed rail to facilitate regional trading.



**Responses from Facilitated Group Dialogue**

**Talent**

- Build in strengths of healthcare and technology
- Concentrate on K-12 education
- Engage talent by diversifying the economy
- Absorb talent
- Explore future opportunities in South America/  
Latin America
- Early childhood education

**Place**

- High speed rail
- Connectivity/Transit
- Housing affordability
- Mixed income housing

**Leadership**

- Further engage corporate sector leadership
- Strength of Mayor Reed
- Develop mentor program for young leaders
- Create a new attitude for leaders



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## Atlanta Brain Trust Participants:

Yolanda Adrean, Atlanta City Council  
John Ahmann, Ahmann  
Yum Arnold, Leapfrog Services  
Ed Baker, Atlanta Business Chronicle  
Mark Becker, Georgia State University  
Ken Bernhardt, Georgia State University  
Renay Blumenthal, Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce  
Michael Julian Bond, Atlanta City Council  
Albert Bogaard, Parkmobile USA, Inc.  
Paul Bowers, Georgia Power  
Esther Campi, Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce  
Calvin Cochran, City of Atlanta  
Sonji Dade, City of Atlanta  
Beverly Daniel-Tatum, Spelman College  
Michael Dogan, City of Atlanta  
Thomas Dortch, TWD, Inc.  
Eugene Duffy, Paradigm Asset Management Company  
Rukiya Eaddy, Atlanta Beltline  
Hans Gant, Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce  
Ernestine Garey, Atlanta Beltline  
Raina Giddings, JCI Controls  
Alina Gorokhovskiy, McKenna Long & Aldridge LLP  
Jeff Haidet, McKenna Long & Aldridge LLP  
Kwanza Hall, Atlanta City Council  
Hakim Hilliard, McKenna Long & Aldridge LLP  
Diane Jones, City of Atlanta  
Kylie Jordan, McKenna Long & Aldridge LLP  
Felicia Joy, Ms. CEO Inc.  
Patrick Labat, City of Atlanta  
Howard Lalli, Atlanta Beltline  
Brian Leary, Atlanta Beltline  
Tad Leithead, Atlanta Regional Commission

Cheryl Lomax, Bank of America  
Debra Lum, City of Atlanta  
Clarence Martin, Atlanta City Council  
Bill McCargo, Atlanta Education Fund  
Reese McCranie, City of Atlanta  
Penny McPhee, The Arthur Blank Foundation  
Guy Millner, AssuranceAmerica Corporation  
Caesar Mitchell, City of Atlanta  
Jennifer Ogunsola, City of Atlanta  
William Pate, ACVB  
Egbert Perry, Integral Group  
Amy Phuong, City of Atlanta  
Shannon Powell, Midtown Alliance  
Mayor Kasim Reed, City of Atlanta  
AJ Robinson, Central Atlanta Progress  
Catherine Ross, Georgia Tech Center for Quality Growth & Regional  
Development  
H. Jerome Russell, H.J. Russell & Company  
Maria Saporta, Journalist  
Beth Schapiro, The Schapiro Group  
Suzanne Sitherwood, Atlanta Gas Light  
John Somerhalder, AGL Resources  
Eric Tanenblatt, McKenna Long & Aldridge LLP  
Lee Thomas, GA Film Office  
George Turner, Atlanta Police Department  
Dexter Warrior, Leadership Atlanta  
Aaron Watson, Atlanta City Council  
Sam Williams, Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce  
Tony Williams, Corporate Executive Board  
Joseph Williams, City of Atlanta  
Cleta Winslow, Atlanta City Council



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**Are you with  ?**

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