



Georgia Downtown Association Annual Board Retreat
Teri Smiley, Facilitator – Starfish Partnerships, LLC
January 13-14, 2025
Gainesville, GA

Day 1: January 13, 2025 | 1 pm – 5 pm

Welcome

2025 GDA Board President
Aundi Lesley

Overview of the Retreat

Teri Smiley, Owner
Starfish Partnerships, LLC

Introductions – Board Members, Partners & Staff

Social Styles Team Building Activity

This is an that relates to interaction with others – Triangle, Square, Circle, Squiggly.

A Roadmap for Board Excellence

Teri reviewed training for non-profit board members and a full copy of the power point presentation is included as part of the retreat final report. As part of this, each board member signed his/her annual commitment form.

Partnerships

Teri reviewed the partnerships between GDA and GMA and GDA and DCA. GDA doesn't have staff; however, the board has access to and dedicated GMA Staff through a contract.

Team Building Activity

Part of the desire for the retreat was for board members to get to know one another better so we did several activities through-out the retreat. This activity was building lego towers in groups by their social styles. We discussed the importance of having all types on a team versus only ones who think and interact in the same way.

S.O.A.R. Analysis

We worked to establish a list of GDA Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations and Results.

Strengths

Passionate Board
Advocacy Work
Experience
Leadership
Subject Matter Experts
Career Growth
Good Financial Position
Diversity & Balanced
Clearly Defined Roles
Can have hard conversations
Dynamic Programming – CDP
Business-Minded
Learn from each other
GMA Staff
Growth

Aspirations

Be the Premier Economic Development Organization in the State-Nation-Internationally

Increase Membership
Price-Value – Knowledge is Clear
Purposeful Regional Meet-Ups
#1 SEO Rankings for Downtown Searches
CDP Graduates
CDP Classes –for continuing Ed credits
Stronger Relationships
Double Number of Scholarships
Clear Legislative Structure – a seat at the table

Go to Resource

Opportunities

Relationships – Build, Grow, Educate
The GDA Brand
More Advocacy Work
In state/out of state fee differences
Member/non-member fee differences
Value-Add for Members – large & small
Grow Membership
Revamp of Regional meet-ups
Possible application process
More Volunteers
Explain “What’s in it for me” for cities
Specific Funding allocated for scholarships
Investment Accounts

Results

We are the Premier Economic Development Organization in the State-Nation-Internationally

Influence at state legislature

Investments

250 total communities as members

20+ attendees for Regional Meet-Ups

7 CDP Graduates – from Capstone

Promote CDP from attendees – testimonials

Welcoming & Inclusive

New Awards format

Every board member actively engaged in initiatives

Celebrate Wins: Emily Hopkins, 2024 Chair, reviewed the committee wins for 2024 and the group celebrated those chairs and committee members who worked to gain the accomplishments.

Cross The River: Board members were divided into 2 groups and had to “cross the river on lily pads” (with rules) – groups were told it was not a race nor a competition of any kind. After both teams crossed the river, and discussion was had, they were asked why they didn’t combine lily pads and all cross together. Sometimes, we don’t think about opportunities to collaborate with other groups/teams and try to do it ourselves, yet it would be easier and better if we partnered. Board members were encouraged to think about potential partnerships as well as leveraging current ones.

Adjourn Day 1

Day 2: January 14, 2025 | 9 am – 4 pm

Team Building Activity

Get-to-know Each other BINGO Cards

Mission, Vision, Goals, Strategic Initiatives Review

Teri reviewed the current mission, vision, goals and strategic initiatives and all are still relevant for the organization.

Picture Cards

Board members were asked to find a card that represented the area he/she wanted to work in for 2025 – identifying which committee for involvement.

Small Groups-Planning

The board members met in small groups to plan for 2025 in these areas/committees? Education, Legislative, Governance (former Policy & Procedures Committee), Membership & Marketing and Conference Committee. The Executive Committee will meet separately and send goals set.

Lunch Break (30 minutes)

Team Building Activity

The Knot activity – Two groups were given instructions to make a knot – then group swapped to untangle the knot from the other group – discuss was had on what happens when someone commits then doesn’t follow through – it could be like the tangled knot and someone has to come in and “fix” it and make it happen. A great reminder that board members serve - not just sit on the board.

Updates from Small Groups and Continue in Small Group Planning

One Word Activity

Each committee was asked to come up with one word for 2025 to describe what they would do. Each group was asked to build something with the Lego blocks to represent the one word.

One Word:

Membership & Marketing – Elevate (Lego arrow up)

Education – Yep (just one Lego)

Legislative – BE Present (Lego of presents)

Governance – Implement (Lego of to-do list being checked off)

Conference - Shine (Lego of a Star)

Small Group Reports

To be found in 2025 Business Plan

Team Activity

You are about to take the stage...what is your walk-up song?

The Starfish Story

Teri shared the Starfish Story and reminded them of the difference they make in their communities each and every day and thanked them for allowing her to facilitate the retreat for them and for being so involved and attentive!

Final Comments A few of the board members commented on the progress made at the retreat and we adjourned the retreat.

Adjourn Day 2

Legislative Committee – 2025 Word/Theme: Be Present

Legislative Chair: Taylor Smith **Committee Members:** Jason, Lequrica, Kendrick

	Extra Information	Responsibility	Due Date	Notes	Status
Legislative Calendar	Work with Noah at GMA to get 2025 Legislative Dates.	Taylor	January 2025		Completed
GMA – LPC Committee	GDA Representative to serve on the committee	Cindy to ask GMA	2025 Session		Completed
Membership updates	Monthly Updates January- April and Quarterly after Session Legislative Recap at Conference	Committee Members	Monthly	GDA Leg. Committee will meet 3 rd Friday of Every Month to finalize membership updates	In Progress
GDA Legislative Letter	To send in November to include GDA Award winners & Rack Card	Committee Members	November 2025		2025 Letters Sent 2026 Letters in Fall
Legislative Training at Downtown Conference	Work with Noah at GMA to create Legislative Training relevant to Downtown Professionals	Committee Members	August 2025	Work w/ Noah Post Session to create appropriate training.	In Progress
GDA Rack Card	Update GDA Rack Card Annually w/ Advocacy Topics & Economic Impact Data from GA Main Street	Committee Members	Fall 2025		
GDA Advocacy Agenda	Update Advocacy Agenda Annually	Committee Members	Fall 2025		

GDA Mission: Connect communities and equip professionals through training and networking to strengthen and advocate for Georgia’s downtowns.

GDA Vision: A statewide network of thriving downtowns and equipped professionals that are recognized as Georgia’s most valuable economic engine.

GDA Lobbying Efforts	Discuss Internally and Externally best pathways to expand GDA lobbying efforts	Committee Members/GMA	2025		
GDA Breakfast at Convention	Work w/ GMA to host GDA Breakfast at Convention	Kendrick	June 2025		

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Executive Committee (Internal Operations)

Executive Chair: Aundi Lesley Committee Members: Aundi Lesley, Jason Ford, Abigail Strickland, Emily Hopkins, Renee Coakley					
	Extra Information	Responsibility	Due Date	Notes	Status
Board Meeting Locations	To be located in different citizens around Georgia.	Policy & Procedure Committee	March Meeting	Will have 3 location meetings at board member cities	
Annual review of contracts	Review the GDA/GMA Contract at least once per year.	Board of Directors	April Meeting	Will meet 1 st week in April	
D&O Insurance	Review the insurance policy once per year.	Board of Directors	April Meeting		
Budget Review	Review the budget for approval for the new year.	Board of Directors	November Meeting		
Scholarship Review	Scholarships are to be reviewed on a monthly basis.	Board of Directors	Monthly	Will review as received	
Welcome letter from President to New Managers or Downtown Professionals & phone call by board member	Sent on a monthly basis.	President	Monthly	Welcome email goes out to new managers/DT professionals inviting to membership	
Review Monthly Calendar	To ensure all items are being met.	Board of Directors	Monthly	Renée ensures tasks are met	
In-person Workplan Review	This document should be reviewed at every in-person meeting.	Board of Directors	Bi-Monthly		
Create financial policy for staff for discretionary spending		Board of Directors			

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Coffee with Larry Hanson at Annual Conference					

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Marketing & Membership Committee – 2025 Word/Theme: Elevate

M&M Chair: Velinda Hardy		Committee Members: Tonya Parker, Bethany Strickland, and Jessica Payne			
	Extra Information	Responsibility	Due Date	Notes	Status
Identify nonmember cities & determine how to reach all		Renee & team	January 31	Divide list between committee to reach out	In progress
Create “What’s in it for me?”		Bethany	March 1 -committee review by April 1	Proof of what GDA can do for their members	
Update GDA meet up presentation		Tonya committee	March 1 Review by April 1	Upload in Dropbox -use city box photos in presentation	
GDA Newsletter “Year in Review”	Content from all committees	-Tonya create -Renee email to all	Go out Feb. 1, April 1, July 1, and Oct. 1 End of December	Possibly use ambassadors	
Revamp Regional Meet-ups		Committee and GA Main Street			
	Zoom meeting w/ committee 1 st Thursday of every month @ 10AM				

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Education Committee – 2025 Word/Theme: YEP (we will do that)

Education Chair: Jeffrey Fowler Committee Members: Emily, Aundi, Quijaun					
	Extra Information	Responsibility	Due Date	Notes	Status
CDP Program Review	1-2 Classes per month 1 st one on 1/31/2025	Committee Members		Jennifer to send one-drive information to Jeffrey	
CDP Capstone	Review other programs with capstone projects and set up process	Committee Members	3/31/2025		
Speaker Bench	Set up potential speakers to teach program topics	Committee Members	6/30/2025	Wrap up by year 2	
CDP Outreach	-Send letters -Continuing Ed hours? -Create Program -What is CDP Flyer -Co-Brand with UGA -CDP Postcard	Committee Members	9/31/2025		
Applications Review		Committee Members		Depends on conference committee schedule to set	
Round Table Topic Help				Depends on conference committee schedule	

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Governance Committee - – 2025 Word/Theme: Implement

Governance Chair: Abbey McLaren		Committee Members: Cassidi, Abigail			
	Extra Information	Responsibility	Due Date	Notes	Status
Ambassador Program 2025	1. Re-assess Ambassador needs for each committee 2. Reach back out to interested applicants from 2024 conference 3. Host 2025 Ambassador kick off meeting	All committee members	1. Jan. 31, 2025 2. Jan. 31, 2025 3. Feb. 14, 2025		
Ambassador Program 2026	1. Revamp application 2. Open applications at 2025 conference 3. New Ambassador Orientation November	All committee members	1. April 2025 2. August 2025 3. November 2025		
Hold committees accountable for having consistent monthly meetings	- Establish consistent meeting dates and times - Meetings on GDA calendar - After action reports	All committee members	Ongoing all year		
Mentor/Mentee Program	- Update sign up form and make digital format (Google Form or Submittable) - Update POC for program	Cassidi POC Governance Committee back up			
Conference	- Work with conference committee on Happy Hour and Award Ceremony Recognition	Governance Committee & Conference Committee	August 2025		

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Annual review of bylaws and Polices/Procedures		Governance Committee			

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Conference Committee – 2025 Word/Theme: Shine

Conference Committee Chair: April Norton Committee Members: Renee Coakley, Sharon Collins, Carla Albright, April Norton, Nicole Parham, Regina I., Robyn Lynch					
	Extra Information	Responsibility	Due Date	Notes	Status
Target additional sponsors	Track revenue and numbers	Board	July 15		
Create promotional video		Coordinate with Marketing Committee and Host City	March		
Recruit volunteers	Identify volunteer duties	Host City, Staff, Board	July		
Monthly planning meetings	Develop timeline	Staff & Host	Monthly, Second Tuesday, at 2:00pm		
Post conference evaluation		Staff	August		
Activate downtown experience	Communicating conference dates and details with local business owners and partners. Assist with local promotion and outreach with local partners	Host City/Community	July		
Create a comprehensive timeline	Reference 2024 committee agendas	Staff/Committee	February		
Growing attendance	-Local/rural/small GA cities -Discounted rates -Scholarships (market to	Marketing	Ongoing	Provide data to the Marketing committee	

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	non-city members) -Granted buyer				
Conference schedule	-Review feedback from 2024 and develop schedule -Review roundtable topics -Mobile workshops -Sendoff brunch -Sponsor showcase mixer	Committee	May		
Awards	-Revamp application (Exec., Conf. Chairperson, Staff & Partners) -Review categories (Partners & Conference) -Award winners are promoted through GA Train (Staff & Marketing)	See extra information	April/May		
Silent auction	-Create contract with Hand Bid -Have digital or on-site bidding	???	February		
Application submissions	Finalize contract with Submittable for application submissions	Staff & Committee	February		
Conference App	Evaluate analytics (any modifications that we may need to make)	Staff & Committee	March		
MOU Agreement	Required for next host city	Governance	April		
Review conference RFP	2027 and beyond	Exec Committee & Governance	May		

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Transportation		Host City & Staff			
Budget	Work with Host City for expectations	Host City, Conference & Staff			

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