

# Governance Guidelines



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## 1. Introduction, Mission and Founding

### 1.1 Introduction

RCE Greater Atlanta is a network whose activities are driven by members, and whose governance must be in service to creating value for these members. **The purpose of network governance is not to tell people what to do, but to enable them to do what they want to do.** It should be grounded in making and implementing decisions that enable members to build relationships and engage in collaborative education and action, and be more adaptive than rigid.

This document therefore seeks to recommend *just enough* governance to help the network grow, evolve and meet its mission. It will propose answers to the essential governance questions of: WHO DECIDES? WHAT IS DECIDED? HOW IS IT DECIDED?

These Governance Guidelines were created during a strategic planning process held in 2019/20. They are intended to accompany the [RCE Greater Atlanta Roadmap](#) that also resulted from that process. Both documents were greatly influenced by the network model laid out in the book, *Connecting to Change the World: Harnessing the Power of Networks for Social Impact*, by Peter Plastrik, Madeleine Taylor, and John Cleveland. A related but shorter introduction to networks and how they differ from other types of organizational and collaborative structures is the article in *Nonprofit Quarterly*, "[A Network Way of Working: A Compilation of Considerations about Effectiveness in Networks.](#)"

### 1.2 Purpose/Mission

RCE Greater Atlanta is a network committed to leveraging education and training resources for regional implementation of the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with a focus on equity and justice.

Our members, representing all sectors of education, community, business, and government, contribute to the creation of an inclusive and collaborative community that advances SDG knowledge and action and nurtures strong youth leadership for a sustainable, healthy region.

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## 1.3 Founding

In our 2017 RCE application, we proposed a governance structure grounded in higher education members, with an additional Advisory Board. Here is what the application laid out:

### ***Inner Circle: 3 Network Co-Chairs***

- 2-year terms
- For this first cycle, all 3 co-chairs represent higher education
- After first cycle, our goal is for each co-chair to represent a different sector
- Subsequent co-chairs are expected to be chosen from the Steering Committee
- Co-chairs will provide overall network direction and supervise coordination, to be done by a Network Coordinator (need to fundraise to hire) and student workers (already hired)

### ***Middle Circle: Steering Committee***

- 2-year terms
- Representing all RCE sectors
- Members commit to providing input into governance and network strategy through quarterly meetings and in between; being actively engaged by leading an RCE work group focusing on a strategy area, project, or SDG; serving as RCE public ambassadors (representing the RCE, seeking engagement and funding opportunities, etc.)
- Note that we have a commitment to serve from some, but not all, listed organizations; all of these partners have been actively engaged to date

### ***Outer Circle: Advisory Board***

- 2-year terms
- CEOs, Presidents/Provosts, Executive Directors
- Meet 1x/year to provide high-level guidance ensuring that the RCE is in touch with Greater Atlanta regional and stakeholder priorities and that these leaders are aware of RCE activities

Our 2020 Strategic Planning process has allowed us to reflect on the challenges of fully building this structure. As a network in the early stage of development, most members are still very naturally trying to determine the value proposition for participating as members and committing to leadership. Formal governance structures such as our original one are more frequently found in organizations rather than networks. **This document therefore proposes a reboot of network governance in a way that right-sizes the weight of the scaffolding with the needs of the network as it evolves into a network focused on CONNECTING, ALIGNING and PRODUCING.**

## 2. Steering Committee---->Leadership Circle - Transition in 2020

### 2.1 Purpose

Governance to date has been led by a Governance Committee and a Steering Committee. The Governance Committee has been run by one of the founding co-chairs, with members comprising the two other founding co-chairs and one to two other active network members (composition changed as members became busy and had to stop participating). The role of this committee was to oversee the Steering Committee and develop governance practices and policies. From its founding through 2019, it met regularly, approximately once a month. The Steering Committee, comprising approximately 20 members from all sectors, also met regularly, approximately once per quarter before Network quarterly meetings.

However, both committees have struggled to nurture active participation and leadership, and the structure overall has not invited inclusion of active RCE members not representing core institutional

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partners. However, we did have significant participation in a variety of meetings facilitated as part of this Strategic Planning process. To build a more inclusive governance structure, we recommend transitioning to a more open and differently structured Leadership Circle.

This document recommends the evolution of the formal Governance Committee and Steering Committee into a new Leadership Circle, with a less rigid membership structure and a newly defined connection between RCE working groups (now to be called Action Groups) and the Circle. Below are the proposed shifts in structure.

	<b>PREVIOUS: Steering Committee</b>	<b>NEW: Leadership Circle</b>
<b>Summary of Member Responsibilities</b>	<p>Provide input into governance and network strategy</p> <p>Actively engage in leading an RCE work group focusing on a strategy area, project, or SDG</p> <p>Serve as RCE public ambassadors (representing the RCE, seeking engagement and funding opportunities, etc.)</p>	<p>Maintain core Network Functions</p> <p>Support Action Groups and their projects and facilitate sharing among them</p> <p>Facilitate 1-2 Network-wide events per year</p> <p>(See more details below)</p>
<b>Meeting Frequency</b>	Quarterly	Monthly (alternating by phone/in-person)
<b>Leadership</b>	Co-Chairs	<p>No Co-Chairs</p> <p>1-2 members have core Network function goal of “Leadership Circle Coordination” (see below)</p>
<b>Roles</b>	<p>Seats held by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Higher Ed Institutions</li> <li>● Government agencies</li> <li>● Nonprofit organizations</li> <li>● Community-based organizations</li> <li>● Businesses</li> </ul>	<p>Seats held by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Action Group liaisons (elected or appointed by Action Groups)</li> <li>● Core Network Function leads (via application)</li> <li>● See more details below</li> </ul>
<b>Total seats</b>	20+	10-20
<b>Terms</b>	2 years	2 years

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## 2.2 Detailed Responsibilities of Leadership Circle Members

- All members are expected to:
  - Regularly attend monthly Leadership Circle meetings
  - Act as RCE ambassadors - engage their institutions/organizations in the RCE and publicize and share about the RCE with their networks
  - Each member will play a specific role with specific responsibilities, as follows
- Maintain Core Network Functions:
  - Through an open application process, 1-2 Network members will join the LC to oversee and implement each of the following core network functions:
    - Leadership Circle Coordination
      - Develop and implement LC participation criteria
      - Develop engagement and decision-making guidelines for Leadership Circle and Action Teams that operationalizes Network principles (see Appendix)
      - Coordinate and facilitate LC meetings and coordinate follow-up in between meetings
    - Relationship-building
      - Plan quarterly meetings
      - Develop and implement a welcoming and on-boarding process for new members
      - Facilitate other gatherings and collaborative activities to help Network members build relationships
      - Ensure the LC and network are operating according to our Guiding Principles
    - Network Membership (see details below)
      - Develop and oversee Network membership application, guidelines (see below), and directory
      - Oversee review of Membership Applications (including notifying new members of acceptance and create and update the member directory on [rcega.org](http://rcega.org))
      - Conduct an annual Membership Survey
    - Relationship with Global RCE Network
      - Serve as liaison to the Global Network
      - Share opportunities
      - Submit quarterly updates on our Network activities
      - Coordinate Network participation in Americas and Global conferences, publications, etc.

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- Marketing & Communications
  - Ensure annual hosting and domain continuity for [www.rcega.org](http://www.rcega.org)
  - Oversee our primary communication mechanisms: website (incl. calendar), monthly newsletter, Google Group, gmail account, social media accounts
  - Develop and implement branding strategy and marketing materials for potential members; the public; and potential funders
  - Undertake efforts to make the RCE visible regionally, nationally, and globally
  - NOTE: MarComm Leads will be supported by Student Assistants working at different higher education institutions, as a team. They will support RCE MarComm as a whole and lead their own efforts targeted at College Youth participating in the network. This arrangement may allow the institutions to engage some of their MarComm Depts as well, as advisers to the students and the MarComm LC leads.
- Governance and Long-term Planning
  - Oversee implementation of Roadmap and Governance Guidelines
  - Form and oversee Advisory Council
  - Lead efforts to plan for the future
- Revenue Development
  - Execute contractual agreement with fiscal agent and serve as liaison to agent
  - Develop donor alignment policy
  - Provide feedback on Case Statement for Support and sharing it with prospective funders and sponsors
- Support Action Groups:
  - Each Action Group will elect or appoint an Action Group Liaison. Ideally, liaisons will be active members of Action Groups, but not Action Group leads, so as to distribute workload and nurture more leadership.
  - Liaisons will:
    - Liaise between Leadership Circle and their Action Group
    - Develop and execute support structures for Action Groups (materials, trainings, fundraising assistance, etc.)
    - Facilitate sharing and collaboration among Action Groups

## 2.3 Leadership Circle Membership

- Each member will play a specific role with specific responsibilities, as outlined above. Action Group Liaisons will be selected by their Action Groups (see more details about liaisons in Section 2.2 on Responsibilities of Leadership Circle Members, above). All other members will apply for specific roles (see above).
- 2-year terms - staggered to retain institutional memory, beginning in August and ending in July, to align with higher ed calendars. Vacancies filled on a rolling basis.

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- The Steering Committee will review initial applications for the first LC. Consideration will be given to composition, ensuring balance and equity in terms of...
  - Race, Gender, Age, Sexual Orientation, Geography, Position
  - Minimum of two youth (High School through 20s)
  - Minimum of two members representing disenfranchised communities
  - Sector: higher education, nonprofits, community-based organizations, government, and business

## 3. Work Groups--->Action Groups - Transition in 2020

### 3.1 Purpose

From its founding through 2019, Work Groups of RCE Greater Atlanta were established to carry out the collaborative work of members and support the formation of core network infrastructure. Over time, these groups progressed to varying degrees and with varying levels of success. Some groups that focused on particular sectors gelled as strong affinity groups, while others struggled to find focus, attract members, and maintain momentum. Ultimately, reflections during the Strategic Planning process led to the recommendation that the current Work Group structure transition to more explicitly project-focused Action Groups, with core network functions being transferred to the new Leadership Circle structure.

The primary function of Action Groups is to carry out the majority of our network's ongoing projects, in ways that advance network goals and demonstrate network principles in action.

### 3.2 Structure & Approval

Each Action Group has its own general focus and functions independently, but their interests overlap with the interests of other Action Groups, and some of the work overlaps as well. In fact, we encourage Action Groups to constantly look for areas of overlap so as to avoid silos.

Action Groups and projects must be proposed to and approved by the RCE Greater Atlanta Leadership Circle to be considered official and to receive network support and promotion. Proposals serve two purposes: 1) To ensure that Action Groups advance RCE Greater Atlanta network goals and embody network principles, and 2) To provide a foundation for Action Groups to succeed and be supported on an ongoing basis by the RCE Greater Atlanta Leadership Circle. The LC will work with Action Groups on any parts of the proposals that need additional work. The Leadership Circle will also collaborate with Action Groups to conduct an annual review and reflection, to identify ways in which the groups can be strengthened.

As explained above, the Leadership Circle will include a liaison from each Action Group (see more details about liaisons in Section 2.2 on Responsibilities of Leadership Circle Members, above).

### 3.3 Guidelines

Action Groups should be intentionally structured to be intergenerational and multistakeholder, in both leadership and membership.

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They support collaborative projects that meet the following criteria:

- Advance the work of 1-2 project leads
- Benefit significantly by being carried out within the RCE with multiple partners
- Advance at least 1 of our 3 Network Goals
- Embody our Network principles
- Bring together stakeholders from multiple sectors, including both higher ed and community
- Build intergenerational and interracial relationships among RCE members
- Actively recruit and engage youth (K-20s)
- Align with at least 1 SDG - and preferably multiple connected SDGs
- Report on activities quarterly to RCE Greater Atlanta and annually to the [Global RCE Network](#)

If possible, projects should also:

- Engage youth as co-leads (Leadership Circle members can help Action Groups connect with youth, if needed)
- Tie in to the RCE annual priority SDG or other priority (e.g., for AY2020-21, the priority is [COVID-19](#))
- Consider potential collaborations with other RCEs in the Americas or beyond
- Align with other UN initiatives - if any group members are already involved (e.g., UN Decade for People of African Descent, 2015-24)

## 4. Network Membership - Establish in 2020

### 4.1 Purpose

Membership is the core of the RCE Greater Atlanta network, as members ultimately control the direction and execution of the network. Membership is open to all organizations, institutions and individuals in the Greater Atlanta region\* who are interested in the network's vision, mission, and goals and committed to our guiding principles (see Roadmap).

*\*The region is defined as the ten-county area that makes up the inner Metro region as defined by the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC): Cherokee, Clayton, Cobb, DeKalb, Douglas, Fayette, Fulton, Gwinnett, Henry, and Rockdale Counties. University of Georgia in Athens also participates in the network.*

### 4.2 Benefits

The RCE network offers *free* membership. Membership benefits include opportunities to:

- Connect to global and local networks of stakeholders across higher education, business, government, nonprofit sectors and community
- Contribute to an inclusive and collaborative community that advances SDG knowledge and action for the region's most pressing sustainable development challenges, and solutions -- with a focus on *equity and justice*

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- Amplify your individual/organizational impact, visibility and voices to reach new audiences in a network representing multiple sectors of community, business, government and civil society
- Join Action Groups and multi-sector collaborations to deepen understanding and actions on the SDGs
- Exchange ideas, get inspiration, share and access resources, tools and information in collaboration with other members from different sectors, generations, and backgrounds
- Network and volunteer to attain your personal/professional goals and gain hands-on experience and knowledge on UN SDGs

## 4.3 Responsibilities

Membership in RCE Greater Atlanta is an active, rather than a passive, commitment. Members should be seeking to grow long-term relationships and have the capacity to actively participate as dedicated network citizens. Members are expected to contribute their skills, knowledge and talents, towards advancement of the RCE Greater Atlanta goals, and create value for other members, by:

- Regularly attending quarterly network meetings and other network events
- Actively participating in the RCE Google Group, to share and collaborate in between events
- Actively participating in at least one Action Group and one of the group's projects (for further info on the Action Groups, please refer to the Governance Guideline 3. Work Groups-->Action Groups )
- Completing the annual membership survey and providing input into the network's development in other ways as requested
- Accepting and respecting differences of opinion among stakeholders as long as these differences are deemed in the interest of and not disadvantageous to the network. Differences of opinion are not to be suppressed, but rather addressed in a transparent and timely manner. In handling these differences, members are expected to focus on the issues at hand and foster an atmosphere of dignity and mutual respect.

## 4.4 Application Process

Applications will be made available via [rcega.org](http://rcega.org) and will be accepted and reviewed by the Leadership Circle on a rolling basis. See application [here](#).

- *Organizations and institutions* interested in joining are asked to complete the online application form. In addition, they must submit a *Letter of Support* to express their interest in the RCE, what strengths they hope to bring to the network, and what resources they are able to commit. This letter should be signed by the leadership of the organization at the highest level possible (e.g. Director, President or Provost, unit director, CEO, Student Government President).
- *Individuals* who are not applying as representatives of an organization or institution are asked to complete the online application form. If desired, they may upload their resume and/or a Letter of Recommendation from a current RCE member to the application form, but this is not required.

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New members will be on-boarded by veteran members, invited to participate in new member orientations held before each quarterly meeting, and recognized at the next quarterly meeting.

## 4.5 **Implementation**

The Membership Application will be distributed in late Summer 2020. It includes information on who to contact for information on how to apply for the new Leadership Circle and for sponsoring the RCE.

## 5. **Advisory Council (Draft Guidelines) - Establish in 2021**

These draft guidelines provide a basis for the new Leadership Council to develop a final set of guidelines to use in establishing an Advisory Council in 2021. An alternative to an Advisory Council would be to instead just have Network Advisors who advise the Leadership Council individually, rather than trying to bring these high-level individuals together as a group. The Leadership Council will need to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of each model or consider other models.

### 5.1 **Purpose**

- Engage upper-level leadership of member organizations and institutions in Network governance and fundraising and nurture their institutional participation and commitment to growing and amplifying the network
- Engage guidance from other high-level advisers who bring special expertise to the network

### 5.2 **Responsibilities**

- Advise the Leadership Council
- Contribute funding and in-kind resources from multiple areas in the organization/institution
- Serve as a Network ambassador: increase network visibility by sharing outcomes with other leaders
- Assist with additional fundraising

### 5.3 **Benefits**

- Build constituencies for sustainability efforts
- Gain recognition for your institution or organization for advancing the SDGs and regional sustainable development
- Build relationships for personal and professional development

### 5.4 **Governance**

- Council will nominate a Chair and Co-Chair for two-year terms, with Co-Chairs expected to succeed the Chair

### 5.5 **Advisory Council Members**

- Members will be invited to join by the Leadership Circle and the Council will convene them
- 2-year terms, not to exceed three consecutive terms, staggered to retain institutional memory

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- Strive for 8-12 members on Council
- Criteria for Selection:
  - Here is an [initial list of potential members](#)
  - All of the active HEIs should be represented, at the highest level possible
  - Consideration will be given to composition, ensuring balance and equity in terms of...
    - Race, Gender, Age, Sexual Orientation, Geography, Position
    - Sector: higher education, nonprofits, community-based organizations, government, and business.
  - Membership criteria and balance should be reviewed by the Equity, Diversity and Racial Justice Action Group