21st Century Leaders

3-Year Strategic Plan
2022-2024

OUR MISSION

21st Century Leaders is a non-profit organization that connects, transforms, and inspires high school students across Georgia to leverage diversity, explore career opportunities and lead in their schools, communities, and ultimately the workforce.
Executive Summary

Organizational Mission

21st Century Leaders is dedicated to the collaboration of business and professional leaders with the goal of inspiring high school students from diverse backgrounds in Georgia to take on leadership positions, explore career opportunities and give back to their communities. We accomplish this mission by connecting students with a diverse group of peers, and by providing them with significant exposure to business professionals and community leaders from across a diverse platform of career specialties. These experiences are further strengthened by leadership training programs and hands-on experiences that build on their leadership skills and abilities.

Since our founding in 1989 as the Georgia Business Forum – and subsequent rebranding as 21st Century Leaders in 1996 – we have dedicated our resources toward the goal of providing high school students with the training, guidance and encouragement necessary to develop these much-needed skills in preparation for future leadership roles in business and civic activities.

21st Century Leaders has always been committed to empowering students to create an inclusive environment that embraces diversity, belonging and equality through developing their leadership skills. Students who participate in our programs truly reflect the diversity of the state and the local communities we serve. They are from both urban and rural areas and represent a range of religious, social, economic and ethnic backgrounds. Typically, 85% of the participants are minority students, 60% of the students identify as female, and 50% face barriers to success (i.e., free/reduced lunch, first generation American, first generation college bound, etc.). By providing students the opportunity to interact and relate with peers and professionals from different backgrounds, 21st Century Leaders fosters a strong appreciation for diversity that is critical in our society.

Our program alumni have gone on to work for Fortune 500 companies, start their own businesses or non-profit organizations, teach at various levels of educational institutions and become community and/or political leaders. They often credit much of their success in these endeavors to the valuable life skills and leadership tools they gained through their affiliation with 21st Century Leaders.

Strategic Plan Rationale

2019 marked the 30-year anniversary for the 21st Century Leaders organization. We have grown significantly over the past 30 years – from the early days of serving a few dozen high school students to now serving more than 1,000 students each year. Since 1989, 21st Century Leaders has provided leadership opportunities to more than 16,000 high school students in Georgia, representing 250 high schools. Our programs have attracted annual funding from nearly 50 corporate sponsorships and numerous individual donations. Nearly 100 percent of the participants in our youth leadership programs go on to participate in leadership activities and roles in their schools and communities,
while 75 percent of the participants report discovering a new career field they’re now interested in pursuing that they weren’t aware of before as a result of participating in our program.

As the organization has evolved to serve the growing need for leadership training among high school students in Georgia, 21st Century Leaders also has evolved in terms of its maturity as a non-profit organization. The long-term tenure of the previous Executive Director provided significant stability and continuity of leadership over the last three decades. The appointment of Kate Hewitt as the new Executive Director in 2018, was part of a well-developed succession plan which has maintained the stability of the organization’s leadership. As we have grown, we have been able to recruit and build a high-quality team of staff members that are passionate about the organization’s success. In fact, 60% of our staff are alumni of 21st Century Leaders, showcasing our long-term impact and commitment to building a diverse pipeline of talent.

To supplement this leadership profile, the organization has been successful in growing its Board of Directors through the recruitment of high-quality, passionate and engaged business and community leaders who bring a diversity of talents, skills and thought leadership to help guide 21st Century Leaders on strategic and mission-critical issues. In 2019, the Executive Board confirmed Matt Johnson as Chairman.

As we seek to continue expanding the reach and scope of 21st Century Leaders, it is imperative that we focus our limited financial and personnel resources on the areas that will have the greatest impact for our students. This plan is intended to be a robust and dynamic guide for those efforts over the next three years.

The plan will enable our organization to:

- Continue to move towards the desired “future state” of 21st Century Leaders and execute our focused plan of action to achieve it;
- Focus the efforts of our Board and our staff on the activities and opportunities that are high-priority and high-value in terms of most effectively supporting our mission and differentiating 21st Century Leaders from other student leadership programs/opportunities in Georgia;
- Measure and evaluate the outcomes of our efforts – against well-defined annual and long-term targets – in helping our students achieve success in each of our foundational leadership competencies; and
- Leverage the learnings from 2020-21 as we adapted our programs and models to reach more students and support our community virtually due to COVID-19.
Guiding Principles

Our planning process reflects, and has been guided by, the following set of principles and leadership qualities:

**Passionate** – exhibits the confidence and enthusiasm to take on new challenges and responsibilities, and to evaluate and respond to new opportunities;

**Forward-Thinking** – continuously learning, future-focused, open to new ideas and focused on innovative ways to improve the student experience;

**Leverages Diversity** – includes and incorporates the diversity of others’ ideas, experiences and backgrounds;

**Resourceful** – utilizes relationships, networks and personal accountability to accomplish tasks and goals more effectively; and

**Service-Oriented** – dedicated to serving others.

Strategic Priorities

The strategic priorities of 21st Century Leaders are to **Connect, Inspire and Transform**:

- **Connect** students with a diverse group of peers, professionals, ideas and organizations
- **Inspire** students to demonstrate leadership by planning for their future, taking on new leadership positions, seeking out new opportunities and giving back to their communities
- **Transform** their skill-sets, ideas and attitudes

Leadership Competencies:

**Expected Outcomes for Students**

All aspects of 21st Century Leaders’ programs focus on empowering students to create an inclusive environment that embraces diversity, belonging and equality through developing their leadership skills. Those skills center around the development and mastery of one or more of the following seven (7) leadership competencies:

1. Communicating Effectively
2. Problem Solving
3. Action-Oriented
4. Self-Development
5. Building Effective Teams
6. Integrity/Trust
7. Career Ambition

Commented [kH1]: We really write it out as Leverages Diversity instead of Diversity-Centered so for purposes of continuity we should keep it as Leverages Diversity.
Our Goals: 2022-2024

Goal #1: Expand program funding sources through proactive engagement with potential donors and program alumni

21st Century Leaders has had long-time success in using annual fundraising events (golf tournament, annual gala, etc.) to meet stable financial needs. However in the last three years, it has doubled its individual giving while also building a strong financial reserve to help advance the long-term strategic goals of the organization. Operating funds are managed in a disciplined and conservative manner to maximize the organization’s effectiveness at current levels. We will become more proactive and strategic in diversifying our fundraising and grant management efforts, while maintain strong relationships with donor engagement and alumni involvement to ensure the long-term success and sustainability of the organization.

Strategies:

1. Establish a comprehensive partnership strategy plan, including a formal sponsorship packet.

2. More board of directors engagement and strategic meetings with potential corporate and/or foundational/grant funders.

3. Strategic marketing efforts to convey impact to constituents, including but not limited to program alumni data.

4. Continue to build comprehensive alumni database.

Key Success Metrics:

- Board of Directors submit a minimum of three (3) qualified corporate/foundational warm leads to Executive Director per fiscal year.
- Obtain 20% of board leads as a new significant donor annually at $25,000 each.
- Reinstate donor stewardship events twice a year.
- Increase individual donations through monthly 21CL Giving Circle to 100 members by FY2024.
- Identify and select top 10 priority companies per Fiscal Year.
- Establish formal sponsorship packet by Spring FY2022.
Our Goals: 2022-2024

Goal #2: Focus on programmatic excellence by improving the content and method of delivery for our leadership programs

21st Century Leaders has long been recognized for the quality of the leadership programs and opportunities it offers its students. We have proven learning models, content and approaches that serve as the foundation for our programs while also embedding diversity, inclusion and equity throughout our programs and organizational history. We also have leveraged our partnerships with corporations, individuals/volunteers and supporting youth organizations to broaden awareness of the 21st Century Leaders brand and offerings. We will continue to focus on engaging strategic partners, alumni, volunteers and technology resources to deliver higher-quality programs to a larger and more targeted student audience.

Strategies:

1. Maintain the high quality of our in-person/on-site programs and offer these experiences to an expanded number of students each year.

2. Double the students we serve annually through strategic partnerships and collaborations.

3. Effectively use technology to differentiate us from similar programs, and reach an expanded student audience with Leadership Connect as an online learning platform for youth leadership across Georgia.

4. Create a higher profile and notoriety of us being an industry leader in leadership development and diversity, equity, and inclusion work for youth.

Key Success Metrics:

- Achieve a target of 5,000 students enrolled in Leadership Connect by the end of 2024 calendar year.
- Serve students in at least 50% of counties in Georgia by 2023.
- Partner with a Georgia based university for formal accreditation or certification for Leadership Connect and build out the final level of curriculum in Leadership Connect by end of FY2023.
- Formalize Leadership Connect subscription model by end of 2021 and achieve 20% of annual enrollment be subscription based by FY2024.
- Collaborate and/or formalize partnerships with a minimum of 2 youth serving organizations that support underrepresented groups.
- Restructure and execute summer internships by FY2023 with 100% of funding for 30 students by FY2024.
Our Goals: 2022-2024

Goal #3: Develop a world-class team of actively engaged leaders and partners dedicated

Achieving the goals of this plan requires a sustainable level of leadership commitment and support through an active, engaged and diverse board, staff development programs and support, and active commitment from our program alumni, partners, and volunteers. It also requires community outreach across Georgia that’s building awareness to 21st Century Leaders and its work. Building on these current relationships and strategies, as well as developing new ones, will be critical to our future success.

Strategies:

1. Identify additional ways to recruit sponsors, donors, and volunteers to support 21st Century Leaders.
2. Recruit new board members in healthcare, IT, film, marketing industries and educational organizations.
3. Hire additional program staff to support program expansion efforts.
4. Maintain established additional leadership groups as reflected in our advisory council and junior board.
5. Activate community, social, and media engagement from staff and leadership teams that is bringing awareness to 21st Century Leaders.

Key Success Metrics:
- Host two (2) board training session per fiscal year aligned with board meetings/retreat
- Create and establish piloted mentorship program in Leadership Connect Level 2 or Level 3 by FY 2022/FY2023.
- Formalize and maintain a partnership with a Georgia based HBCU annually.
- Recruit and maintain at least 1 board of director who represents program/corporate industry priorities annually
- Hire another Program Manager by FY2023
- Create revenue driven leadership event for and led by alumni (Junior Board) by FY2024