Linda Kirk Fox serves as the 7th Dean of the College of Family and Consumer Science at the University of Georgia. Her job is to provide vision and a collaborative environment for administrators, faculty, staff and students to succeed. “I am a strong advocate for the integration of research, teaching and public service to fulfill the land-grant university obligations to develop strong economics, safe and diverse communities, and healthy children and families,” says Dean Fox. The College has 85 faculty and numerous staff, alumni and volunteers, supporting 1,400 undergraduates and 200 graduate students, four departments and one institute.

“There is an increased number of communities prepared and willing to tackle housing problems and share lessons learned with sister cities. The real value of GICH, to me, is the cohort of current communities and returning and alumni communities getting additional technical support and encouragement.”

Laura J. Meadows was named Interim Vice President for Public Service and Outreach (PSO) on June 1, 2017. In this role she provides institutional leadership for UGA’s outreach and economic development efforts across Georgia, with a $50 million annual operating budget, 450 faculty and staff, and eight diverse PSO units. Meadows is responsible for training, technical assistance, continuing education, and applied research that creates new small businesses, makes government more efficient, provides students with real-world experiences, brings economic development opportunities to Georgia and has a $753 million annual economic impact on the state. Prior to her interim appointment, she served as director of the Carl Vinson Institute of Government, where she coordinated the efforts of more than 150 employees who provide technical assistance, applied research, technology solutions, and training and development services to governments in Georgia and internationally.

“The Georgia Initiative for Community Housing is a valuable program; one that communities can depend on to help meet housing needs. As the state’s land-grant institution we have a responsibility to address community challenges and we are proud to help do that through this program.”

Bill Thornton was appointed Interim Executive Director of the Georgia Municipal Association (GMA), effective August 1, 2017. In this role, he leads the organization, comprised of 521 member cities, in its efforts to build strong, viable cities through advocacy, training, and a wide range of membership services. Previously, Mr. Thornton served as GMA’s Deputy Executive Director, with a focus on the Association’s member service programs. He has held a variety of positions since joining GMA in 1977 and has served as a deputy executive director since 2001. Mr. Thornton received a B.S. degree from Georgia State University in Urban Government Administration. While a student at GSU, he interned with GMA as a research assistant and joined the staff full-time following graduation.

“The Georgia Initiative for Community Housing has been a valuable resource for GMA’s members and communities throughout the State. Through facilitation, training and networking, the program has enabled local officials and community stakeholders to develop effective and sustainable strategies to address their most pressing housing challenges.”

Commissioner Christopher Nunn, a native of Perry, was appointed as Commissioner of the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA), by Governor Nathan Deal in 2017. DCA provides financial resources and technical assistance to help communities across the state prepare for economic development opportunities and create workforce housing. Our team members have a long history of working with local leaders to develop solutions for community issues and to create opportunities for communities to succeed in growing jobs through organic, small-business growth and through the location of economic development prospects. DCA’s strengths lie in our ability to understand a community’s challenges and opportunities and to collaborate with local governments, authorities, state agencies, and non-profits to develop locally-driven solutions.

“Whether it’s community development grants or housing tax credits, state building and construction codes, or the AmeriCorps program, everything we do at DCA shares a common goal: to build strong, vibrant communities in every corner of our state.”

Partners
Executive Summary

The Georgia Initiative for Community Housing (GICH) helps communities improve their quality of life and economic vitality through the development of locally-driven housing and revitalization strategies. With the ongoing support of our Founding Sponsor, the Georgia Power Company, GICH has facilitated progress toward housing stability in 60 communities during its first 12 years.

The support of the GICH partners—the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA), the Georgia Municipal Association (GMA), the University of Georgia (UGA) Housing and Demographics Research Center, and the UGA Office of the Vice President of Public Service and Outreach—includes ongoing technical assistance, as well as the organization and sponsorship of retreats for the participating communities.

GICH provides a platform for teams to think of creative solutions and network with housing professionals, city officials and staff, as well as community volunteers from across the state. In 2016, the freshman, sophomore, and junior classes of GICH continued working to revitalize declining neighborhoods, create new affordable housing options, and provide financial and home buyer education to their residents. As evidenced by their accomplishments in this report, GICH participants are steadily enhancing their knowledge and effectiveness in addressing the issues in their communities.
With the help of the Georgia Initiative for Community Housing, communities that participate in the three-year program and maintain their alumni status afterwards, receive a point for developers on the 9% credit application, as well as a point towards a CHIP application.

From 2005 to 2016, GICH has helped Georgia communities receive awards that have drastically changed the landscape and lives of all constituents living in their region.

$62 million has been distributed through the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), $33 million has been awarded by the Housing Assistance Division (HAD/Section 8), Georgia Dream has helped first-time homebuyers purchase a home by distributing $25 million to GICH communities, $20 million has been used by the Community HOME Investment Program (CHIP) to help rehabilitate homes for GICH communities, and $18 million has been awarded through the Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC).

**In 2016, the following communities received the awards below:**

**CHIP FUNDS**
- City of Millen: $306,000
- City of Monroe: $306,000
- City of Madison: $306,000
- Town of Pine Mountain: $612,000
- City of Perry: $306,000

**CDBG FUNDS**
- Liberty County: $500,000
- City of Madison: $500,000
- City of Millen: $500,000
- City of Monroe: $869,869
- City of Perry: $500,000

**GEORGIA DREAM**
- Athens-Clarke County: $881,015
- City of Monroe: $341,695
- City of Rockmart: $717,966
- City of Cedartown: $89,565
- Liberty County: $777,077
- City of Albany: $433,209
- City of Douglasville: $6,792,827
- City of Perry: $172,672
- City of Rincon: $252,832

GICH helped award a total of $296,167,869 to over 55 Communities in Georgia from 2005 to 2016.
Athens - Clarke County

The Athens-Clarke County GICH team’s 2016 goal was to identify means of creating affordable rental housing for their community. By thoroughly evaluating the feasibility of an inclusionary zoning ordinance in Athens-Clarke County, they are able to establish a housing trust fund, and other mechanisms for creating accessible affordable rental housing for Athens-Clarke County and moving towards their goal.

“Our GICH experience has encouraged us to become more innovative and collaborative in our efforts to better our community. We are also inspired by the great accomplishments of fellow GICH communities.”  
-Deborah Lonon, Director Housing and Community Development Department

Evans County

Leadership changes occurred in Evans County in 2016, but the focus remained the same: Prepare, plan, and complete the housing assessment. By assembling volunteers, completing all parcels in Evans County, and entering the information into the UGA database, they will be able to start 2017 with a wealth of knowledge about their community housing needs.

“Since our induction, the Evans County GICH Team has rallied support from countless volunteers eager to identify and address housing needs in Claxton and Evans County. Our GICH team has focused on a county-wide housing assessment and community beautification efforts. We have also met other GICH members throughout Georgia who share the same obstacles with our community. Because of these connections, we have partnered with Beverly J. Searles Foundation and our local school board to develop plans for a multi-generational housing unit. As we continue to move forward, we are motivated to pursue additional projects and improve our community.”  
-Mayor J. Terry Branch, City of Claxton

City of Millen

The 2016 Millen GICH team has accomplished many goals, from writing a housing assessment during their first retreat, to receiving a grant for a city and county wide clean up and addressing the littered tires around the community, and even completing an Urban Redevelopment Plan to designate an area of focus. Millen is in the process of rehabbing 4 homes after receiving a CHIP grant, and as a group, now feel that they understand the city ordinances and are able to disseminate the information to the public.

“Being part of GICH has opened many opportunities for our community. The information presented at each retreat, coupled with the planning session during the retreat, allowed our group to develop obtainable goals.”  
-Mandy Underwood, Executive Director of the Jenkins County Development Authority and Chamber of Commerce

City of Monroe

The Monroe GICH team engaged the community to help define the housing revitalization goals, specifically, the creation of neighborhood plans that include local housing quality and affordability. During 2016, they accomplished a citywide housing assessment, clean up campaigns, landlord meetings, housing fairs, and addressing blighted housing. Business, civic, government, and community members are already discussing ways to work as a team to address their current and future housing needs, and ways to improve the quality of life in Monroe for their sophomore year in GICH.

“We can already see a visible difference in the community. It's hard work, but the results for Monroe are worth all the effort.”  
-Gloria Reese, Resident

City of Rockmart

The GICH program has equipped the ‘Re-think Rockmart’ team with the knowledge to develop plans and strategies that have been implemented to increase community engagement, enhance Code Enforcement and seek partnerships to allow for increasing affordable and quality housing for their citizens.

“The GICH program has equipped our re-think Rockmart Team to develop plans and strategies which have been implemented to increase community engagement, enhance Code Enforcement and seek partnerships to allow for increasing affordable and quality housing for our citizens.”  
-Councilmember Sherman Ross
City of Cedartown

Since their involvement with the GICH program in 2014, the City of Cedartown has facilitated the demolition of eight blighted structures. These structures include drug houses and unsavory hangouts and homes affected by significant fire damage. They also have made strides in completing a $20 million rehabilitation project. The GICH team is equally excited about this project as well, as it will convert all public housing units to Section 8 Project Based Rental Assistance. The GICH team has also participated in community education events including a poverty simulation event and a graffiti removal project. All members of the housing team are active in other local organizations dedicated to making Cedartown a better place to live.

“The Cedartown GICH Team is a great group that represents many facets of our community. It took some time to build the solid core that we have, but we made it work for what best suits our community. We brought in bankers, realtors, investors, non-profits, business owners, city employees, and citizens. With this knowledge base, along with the GICH program, we have a group that is well versed in housing needs and we look forward to what we can accomplish in the coming years.” - City Commission Chairman Jordan Hubbard

Liberty County

The Liberty County GICH team brought together 7 municipalities and the County to work together as one cohesive entity, with the goal of ensuring safe, affordable housing for all Liberty County citizens, regardless of where they live. Some of their many 2016 accomplishments include the completion of housing surveys for Riceboro, Midway, and Walthourville, a Housing Summit held at the Performing Arts Academy, the facilitation of an Heirs Property Workshop, and the removal of 12 dilapidated mobile homes.

“We started as a weak and scattered bunch that had the heart for service and wanted to do a good job. Now we are a strong, knowledgeable team not afraid to tackle any mission to make sure that the goal of safe, affordable housing is accomplished for all Liberty County Citizens. Without GICH this would not have been possible.” – Bob Sprinkel, Assistant County Administrator

City of Madison

The Madison GICH team accomplished many goals during 2016, including securing an experienced grant administrator; multi-year participation and financial commitment from the First United Methodist Church; and the successful funding of both a CHIP ($300,000) and CDBG ($500,000) to address one-quarter of the deteriorated housing stock. The team’s Neighborhood Engagement Committee organized 5 target area block captains, 4 neighborhood cleanups, 3 town halls, 3 neighborhood assistance days (local mission work), 2 legal aid clinics, 1 neighborhood beautification fundraiser, and assisted the formation of the 1st Neighborhood Action Group, Love Thy Neighbor.

“GICH has been such a great learning experience. If in the future I am not serving as an elected official, I still want to be on our housing team. This is meaningful work and together we are making a measurable difference.” – Councilmember Carrie Peters-Reid

Town of Pine Mountain

The Pine Mountain GICH team accomplished an enormous amount in 2016. By evaluating their housing concerns first and then implementing change second, they were able to have a plan of action and clear six blighted structures with plans to demolish an additional three, organize a town-wide cleanup, submit a CDBG application, and continue to assist homeowners who need renovations done to their homes. Pine Mountain also completed a town-wide digital housing assessment in cooperation with the University of Georgia that will help them accomplish even more for their community moving forward.

“Being a GICH Community will change the way you look at your community and the way your community looks at itself.” – Mayor Jim Trott

Town of Trion

The focus of the Trion housing Team in the past year has been improving the quality of the existing housing stock and property maintenance code enforcement. Six abandoned and/or dilapidated houses were removed with our more with court orders to remove and pending demolition. Code Enforcement issued 31 notices of violation with 19 cases cleared. Two houses were re-constructed through a CDBG grant, and the sales price of the older housing stock has increased due to more private investment.

“Housing, central to their vision, certainly had its challenges and GICH has been the toolbox that has enabled us to layout a vision and plan for solidifying this core element of our community. Without GICH, we would be a decade away from where we are today.” – Mayor Larry Stansell
Participation in the GICH program allowed the City of Albany (population 77,434) to assemble the necessary stakeholder group and create a workable methodology to Fight Albany Blight (FAB!). Nearly 70 dilapidated structures were removed during the three years and a new, intra-departmental position was created between planning and code enforcement to enhance and sustain the blight elimination priority. A land-bank authority is currently being established, which will add another tool for neighborhood revitalization.

Working with City and County elected officials in each City quadrant, the GICH team has partnered with volunteer groups like Keep Albany Beautiful and Game Changers to complete minor rehabilitation projects for local homeowners. Improving the quality of housing in the Northeast quadrant, while also convening a business entrepreneur workshop, has spurred interest in the development of mixed-use housing in this area.
The City of Douglasville (population 30,961) GICH team enhanced training and education of affordable housing issues, resources and programs by hosting local monthly meetings with informative guest speakers, in addition to a field trip to tour a senior housing development. Furthering the promotion of housing to residents, the team convened two housing fairs, each with more than 10 vendors, as well as a weatherization event in conjunction with Georgia Power. These events and activities helped to build strong partnerships with local banks and housing partners, such as Habitat for Humanity (completed 11 homes).

In 2015, the city was awarded $462,200 in the Thomson Street neighborhood. The city has recently added two code enforcement positions and future plans include a housing inventory for Northside and a master plan for downtown that includes housing.
Under the umbrella of the GICH program, the City of Perry (population 16,764) assembled a comprehensive Housing Team with members from Habitat for Humanity, Fuller Center for Housing, City of Perry, Georgia Power, the local business community and others. Focusing on community engagement and outreach, the team convened several neighborhood clean-ups throughout the City, held the first-ever Perry Housing Week, and held the first-ever Perry Housing Fair. A Revitalization Area Strategy (RAS) was created for Sand Hill, and in 2016, these efforts paid off in an $800,000 investment for this neighborhood ($500,000 CDBG; $300,000 CHIP). Following up on that success, the City was awarded an additional $722,000 in CDBG funding in 2017 to rehabilitate 8 homes, completely reconstruct 3 homes, and acquire and clear 5 vacant, blighted properties in the project area. In total, 34 homes will be impacted and a total of over $1.6 million has been committed in providing for a significant improvement in housing quality in Sand Hill. Sustaining this momentum, the team is working with a developer on plans to provide needed senior housing in Sand Hill and is working to establish a land bank.

“Being a part of the GICH program has allowed the City of Perry to bring together a wealth of resources and ideas to make things happen in our neighborhoods. From community outreach and education to beautification efforts and housing improvements, much of what we have been able to accomplish would not have been possible without GICH.” - Robert Smith, Economic Development Director

GEORGIA INITIATIVE FOR COMMUNITY HOUSING

Photo credit: City of Perry

Perry Housing Team engages community in Sand Hill neighborhood clean-up.
The City of Porterdale (population 1,429) is working with numerous partners through the GICH program to increase homeownership while emphasizing the city’s historic nature, river/outdoor recreation opportunities, and arts culture. A marketing partnership between Hometown Realty and Mainstreet Porterdale, as well as a homeowner incentive package of free inspection, exterior paint, and discount garbage, has helped to increase the homeownership rate by 20% in the last three years. The City took several steps to increase housing quality, while maintaining the historic district; adopted a stricter version of the International Property Maintenance Code; enacted a blighted property ordinance; created design standards for historic mill district; and increased employment of the code enforcement officer from part- to full-time. Since 2015, 63 homes have been rehabilitated, brought up to code, and the real property value has increased by 29%. Looking ahead, the group is working to assist homeowners in clearing titles, as well as partnering to create a mixed use development (single family, multi-family residential, commercial).

“The City of Porterdale is a former mill town that fell into significant disrepair and all the problems that come with it after closing. The city began a comeback with the independent renovation of the mill building into upscale loft apartments. This development brought to light the deep rooted problems that slum-lordism had brought to the community. As work began to revitalize, GICH was offered to us as a tool to help in the effort to create honest housing opportunities for all. While we have no areas of open land to build new communities in what is a historic district, the curriculum and interaction with other communities fortified the skills that we needed to move toward success in this area. We have been fortunate to now have people purchase homes to renovate to Better Homes and Gardens standards but along with this we have, through consistent code enforcement and determination, created livable homes for those in lower income levels. Our ability to move this life changing effort forward was made easier by our affiliation with GICH.”- Mayor Arlene Chapman
The City of Rincon's (population size 9,935) participation in the GICH program helped to facilitate several worthwhile milestones in 2016. The City received a $500,000 Employment Incentive Program grant from DCA to match the private investment from Kroger, and complete the expansion on Highway 21 South, as well as install a new traffic signal at Brentwood Drive.

The highway expansion and new traffic signal pair well with their new $20 Million Kroger Market Place. The Rincon Police Department offered a Citizens’ Police Academy to create a greater awareness and understanding between the citizens and the law enforcement. Moving forward there are many exciting new opportunities for Rincon, including efforts to recruit new developers for additional multi-family units in the city.
The program is also partially funded through the Rural Community Development Initiative (RCDI), a USDA Rural Development grant.