



The first 20 years



GEORGIA
RESEARCH
ALLIANCE



The first board meeting: Leaders from business, academia and government at the first meeting of the Georgia Research Alliance board in the summer of 1990. The organization was founded on collaboration and has promoted the practice ever since.

The Georgia Research Alliance was created in 1990 through a rare but powerful alignment of business, academic and government interests — a shared vision for making the state a powerhouse for leading-edge university research and development.

Twenty years later, this three-pronged support has given the public-private partnership a strong foundation with enhanced ability to break new scientific ground. It has also allowed GRA to adapt to economic and political changes.

In its two decades, GRA has helped Georgia's six research universities generate \$2.6 billion in federal and private investment — increasing sponsored research dollars by 250 percent. The Alliance has recruited 62 world-renowned Eminent Scholars whose research focuses on areas strategic to the state's economic future. GRA has fueled the launch of more than 175 companies. In all, the Alliance's work has led to the creation of some 5,500 high-wage jobs.

1983

Georgia fails in a bid to win the headquarters of Microelectronics and Computer Technology Corp., which goes to Austin, Texas.

1985

The Georgia Research Consortium Advisory Committee, comprised of CEOs, academic leaders and the head of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, recommends the state create a permanent organization dedicated to leading technology and economic development efforts.

1990

GRA is launched as a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) organization. Its board of trustees is comprised of corporate CEOs and presidents from Georgia's six research universities. Larry Gellerstedt, Jr. is named board chairman.

Zell Miller is elected governor on a platform that includes using lottery funds for higher education and fostering technology-centered economic development.

1992

GRA receives its first state funding, a \$15 million allocation for the fiscal year.



John Copeland

1993

GRA announces its first two Eminent Scholars: Bruce Beck (UGA), recruited to lead UGA's water quality research, and John Copeland (Georgia Tech) to focus on technology transfer.

GRA helps to recruit Silicon Valley venture capitalist Michael Henos to start Alliance Technology Ventures, focused on investing in companies from Georgia and the Southeast.

1994

GRA is instrumental in Georgia Tech's win of a \$10 million National Science Foundation center for microchip development.

1996

Atlanta hosts the Olympic Games, showcasing the state's telecommunications capabilities.

But what is arguably the Alliance's most significant impact on Georgia can't be tallied: Today, Georgia's leading research universities collaborate on science and strategy, sharing dollars and ideas. Cultivating this *esprit de corps* was one of GRA leaders' loftiest goals when the Alliance began. Without GRA, this collaboration might never have happened.

Defeat breeds change and opportunity

One of the earliest proponents of using academic research to drive economic development was Tom Cousins, founder of commercial real estate company Cousins Properties. As an active supporter of his alma mater, the University of Georgia, he saw how a football rivalry between UGA and the Georgia Institute of Technology had devolved into real acrimony. Cousins said the president of UGA, decades ago, "could not be, not only in the same room, but in the same building with the president of Georgia Tech. Silly. And the same thing from Tech's standpoint."

The lack of cooperation among leading universities proved costly. In the early 1980s, Georgia lost out to Texas in a bid for what became the Microelectronics and Computer Technology Corp., a research and development consortia credited with helping Austin grow into a high-tech business hub.

The head of MCC's search gave Georgia leaders some straight talk after their bid failed. "He said, 'I saw your universities sitting together in the governor's mansion at the meeting, but I don't believe they had ever talked to each other before,'" recalled Bill Todd, who was GRA's first president and CEO. "They were trying to give an image of a collaboration that didn't exist, and he saw right through it."

Georgia leaders resolved to transform the state's academic culture and economic development focus. They spent much of the 1980s looking for a tech-industry foothold. They sowed seeds for what would become the GRA model by luring a research team from the University of Colorado to establish UGA's Complex Carbohydrate Research Center.

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Tom Cousins, founder of real estate firm Cousins Properties, was an early proponent of an economic development strategy based on university research.



Cousins had an instrumental role in UGA's presidential search. Beers Construction Co. CEO and Tech grad Larry Gellerstedt Jr. was on Tech's search committee. And Dan Sweat, head of the downtown business group Central Atlanta Progress and a

Georgia State University grad, was involved at GSU. The men told candidates that cooperation with other universities would be a job requirement, setting an expectation that paved the way for GRA.

By 1990, the business, academic and civic leaders supporting research as an economic driver had settled on a plan. They would create an organization governed by business leaders in concert with top elected officials. The organization would use private money to fund operations and public dollars to fund research infrastructure and commercialization. It would focus its efforts on attracting human capital to research universities, rather than on buying real estate to lure companies. On June 15, 1990, the Georgia Research Alliance was incorporated.

Political support endures as Alliance evolves

The first priority was to secure political support for GRA. Lt. Gov. Zell Miller, the leading Democratic candidate in the 1990 gubernatorial race, already had his own plan for a government-controlled technology economic development initiative. Cousins, Gellerstedt and Todd visited Miller to persuade him to support their business-driven plan. Todd recalled what was at first a tense meeting: "Larry said, 'Yeah, Zell, we've already done it. We set it up in the private sector, and we want to reach out and bring you into the fold and have you join in this big effort. We've done the hard work, and we've got the [university] presidents all sitting at the table. It's all teed up waiting for the governor to come in.'"

Miller saw the value of the groundwork laid by GRA's organizers and the value of establishing GRA as an independent organization. By the time he moved into the governor's mansion, he had become one of the Alliance's strongest advocates.

1997

GRA's eminent scholar tally reaches 26 researchers.

1998

Roy Barnes is elected governor.



Michael Cassidy

2000

Michael Cassidy becomes president and CEO of GRA.

Georgia companies get a record \$717.3 million in venture capital in the first quarter.

2002

Gov. Barnes taps GRA to organize the state's cancer initiative, later spun off as the Georgia Cancer Coalition.

Sonny Perdue becomes the first Republican governor since Reconstruction.

2003

Gov. Perdue paves the way for launch of GRA's VentureLab Program to commercialize university research.

GRA-linked universities surpass \$1 billion in annual R&D expenditures.

2007

Gov. Perdue announces an additional \$10 million investment in GRA to help expand the state's bioscience strategy.

GRA wins national awards for best practices for its Eminent Scholars and VentureLab programs.

2008

Gov. Perdue recommends \$7.5 million in funding, and the Georgia General Assembly creates investment tax credits to launch GRA Venture Fund LLC.

2009

GRA's 60th Eminent Scholar is recruited, more than doubling number of Eminent Scholars since 1999.

GRA universities achieve \$1.3 billion in annual R&D expenditures.

2010

GRA Venture Fund LLC makes its first investment.

GRA celebrates its 20th anniversary.

Mike Cassidy, GRA president and CEO since 2000, said Miller also set another precedent. Each governor has recognized he "could get some new and different things done by letting that public-private partnership take it on," Cassidy said. For Miller, GRA furthered goals of boosting higher education and technology-based economic development. For his successor, Gov. Roy Barnes, the Alliance was a vehicle for organizing diverse state technology efforts and launching his cancer research initiative. For Gov. Sonny Perdue, GRA helped create companies and jobs and bring the benefits of technology to rural Georgia residents, businesses and farmers.

Research and commercialization drive GRA

While politics and business fuel GRA, its mission is to promote research and commercialization at Emory University, Georgia Tech, the University of Georgia, Georgia State University, the Medical College of Georgia and Clark Atlanta University.

An example of the success of GRA's Eminent Scholar program is Rafi Ahmed, an innovative vaccine researcher recruited from the University of California at Los Angeles, who was also being wooed by Stanford University. Ahmed established the Emory Vaccine Center, which since 1996 has garnered more than \$260 million



The Emory Vaccine Center has garnered more than a quarter-billion dollars in research grants. The center's inception came with the 1996 recruitment of Rafi Ahmed as a GRA Eminent Scholar.

in research grants, become one of the world's largest academic vaccine centers, and commercialized discoveries through biotech startups. Ahmed said coming to Georgia "was the best decision I made for my academic career and by far the best business decision. I think that certainly I would not be here if it weren't for the GRA."

Alliance draws strength from business backers

The business side of the Alliance's public-private structure is essential to its success. The CEOs around the GRA board table understand the economic development value of GRA's mission. They have the connections that not only help GRA raise private dollars, but also link affiliated startups to key customers or industry partners. And these powerbrokers can open doors at the highest levels.

Pete McTier, a member of GRA's board and a trustee of the Robert W. Woodruff Foundation, said GRA's business-based leadership has helped it survive multiple recessions and three gubernatorial administrations. "When the leaders of this board go before the governor, they are respected because they are some of our state's top people," McTier said.

Gaining an audience with top officials is just the beginning, said David Ratcliffe, chairman of utility giant Southern Co. and past chairman of GRA's board. Alliance leaders — board members, GRA staff and top researchers — must “always be in a position

anytime we are challenged by any leader, anywhere, to explain the value proposition and demonstrate in very tangible terms that it's a no-lose kind of opportunity.” That is essential, Ratcliffe said, as Georgia suffers through crippling state budget

cuts, as voters prepare to elect a new governor and as GRA sets priorities for the future.

In the past 20 years, GRA's focus has evolved to include telecommunications, biosciences and energy. Its ability to keep evolving will determine future success, said Bill Linginfelter, current GRA board chairman and head of regional operations for Regions Financial Corp. To move forward, he said, the Alliance must realize its full potential.

“You either sit there and bump along, or you really spread your wings and fly,” Linginfelter said. “With renewed commitment from business, government and academic leaders, we are well positioned to soar.”

Maria Saporta and Kathy Brister authored this GRA retrospective, which is based on their interviews of prominent Georgia leaders.

Bill Linginfelter, GRA Board Chair: “With renewed commitment from business, government and academic leaders, we are well positioned to soar.”



Photo: Gary Meek

In its 20-year history, the state's investment in GRA has generated a return of more than \$2.6 billion in public and private investment and led to the launch of more than 175 companies.



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