

Georgia Initiative for Community Housing  
**Georgia Department of Community Affairs/Georgia Housing and  
Finance Authority**  
Special Achievement

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## Overview

The Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) is the state’s agency responsible for housing and community development. DCA administers more than 70 programs with a mission to help build strong, vibrant communities. Each of DCA’s programs equips local governments and community partners with the tools, systems, and financial resources they need to overcome local barriers, including through improved laws, regulations, and policies. The Georgia Initiative for Community Housing (GICH) is one of Georgia’s greatest tools to empower local governments to address their housing challenges.

## Responding to a Statewide Need

Georgia, like most states, is in a housing crisis. DCA is tasked with helping local governments achieve safe, affordable housing in their communities. With DCA’s diverse programs, GICH provides communities with the knowledge of housing issues facing Georgia and educates them on how to make investments using different state and federal resources. By the time participants graduate from the program, they are armed not only with knowledge but also with special benefits for certain programs that make them more competitive when applying. GICH communities are among the most active applicants for DCA programs across the state.

GICH, which celebrates its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2025, began with the purpose of providing communities the resources necessary to improve local quality of life and economic vitality through focused planning for housing. The program is a collaborative partnership between the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, the University of Georgia’s (UGA) Center for Housing and Community Research, UGA’s College of Family and Consumer Sciences, and the Georgia Municipal Association, who each assist with program planning, resource commitments/allocation, fostering connections to local communities, and providing technical expertise and community facilitation.

This public-private partnership also includes support and engagement from the University of Georgia’s Office of Public Service and Outreach, Georgia Power, and Wells Fargo Foundation. In the fall of 2024, GICH welcomed its 100<sup>th</sup> participating community. In its now 20 years, GICH has provided more than 100 Georgia cities and counties with the tools and resources necessary to modify local policies and unlock resources to address their housing needs.

## GICH Selection Process

GICH is available to all cities and counties in Georgia. Each year, GICH selects five communities for the program through a competitive application process. After a thorough process that includes site visits, participants are selected based on the following criteria:

- Demonstrated support from local communities, including government resolutions and letters of support.
- Composition of the team, ensuring representation from key sectors throughout the community.
- Description of existing efforts to address local housing challenges.

GICH is a three-year program in which participating counties, cities, or towns form a housing team comprised of representatives from local businesses, city and county government, faith-based organizations, housing authorities, non-profit organizations, real estate professionals, lenders, school district leaders, and residents. These housing teams are then paired with a trained facilitator to build community consensus while designing a locally based housing plan. The trained facilitators provide regular, engaged support for three program years (titled “Freshman, Sophomore, and Junior Years”), and the selected housing teams work with a facilitator year-round to address their housing needs. Twice a year, between 250-300 housing team members from the 15 currently participating communities and active alumni communities come together during a three-day retreat to develop new ideas, learn about approaches and available resources from expert guest speakers and resource representatives, and network with program partners, other team leaders, and community development experts.

One of GICH’s key advantages is its use of a collaborative model to support communities in the development of locally driven housing and revitalization strategies that address deteriorating neighborhoods, identify affordable housing options, and provide financial and home buyer education to residents in Georgia communities. Participating communities learn from university experts, state administrative staff and long-time practitioners, and successful peer cities and towns about tools available to improve and develop local housing and neighborhood conditions. As a result of the education and facilitation during GICH participation, most communities adopt local policies and regulations to improve their housing options. Some examples include code enforcement improvements, the value of accessory dwelling units (ADU), zoning updates, creation of land bank authorities, collocating affordable housing development incentives with other community benefits like childcare, and others.

In addition to education and technical assistance, GICH gives a competitive advantage in program access to participating communities. GICH communities receive the following support from DCA:

- The opportunity to provide a letter of support for a Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) development in their community, allowing the project to improve its competitive LIHTC score.
- The opportunity to apply annually to DCA’s Non-Entitlement Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Annual Competition if the application contains a housing component, whereas non-GICH communities can only apply every other year.
- Additional points in the competitive scoring for DCA’s administration of the Community HOME Investment Program (CHIP), which is a HUD HOME single-family housing rehab and development program.

### **Measurable Success**

The GICH program provides a replicable, low-cost example of how other states can improve local housing outcomes through establishing strong partnerships with other state institutions and offering a statewide technical assistance program.

Since its inception in 2005, GICH communities have had 615 successful grants from LIHTC, CHIP, and CDBG, resulting in over \$475 million in funding for affordable housing. In 2024 alone, GICH communities received over \$38 million. To examine how communities benefit before and after joining the

program, DCA conducted a study on the communities who joined GICH from 2014-2018. In the five years before joining GICH, communities averaged \$1.6 million in awards granted. After joining, communities averaged \$3.3 million for the five years after, more than double what they were awarded before. These awards have translated into transformative change in the construction of new homes, the rehabilitation of substandard homes, and the removal of vacant dilapidated homes. Through the collaborative efforts of the communities that have taken part in GICH, families across the state are living in new homes and experiencing better neighborhood conditions. Appendix B demonstrates the success GICH communities have with securing and deploying other affordable housing resources after participating in the GICH Program.

As the program concludes its 20th anniversary, GICH continues to be one of DCA's greatest tools to educate communities about affordable housing and produce concrete results. There is consistent, strong pool of new communities wanting to join every year, and alumni communities continue to thrive and achieve amazing results, showcasing the longevity and success of the program. As the program ages, we are creating new initiatives to assist our communities. One example is the creation of GICH Senior Year. This is a pilot program where two competitively selected alumni are given assistance in developing place-based development plans through targeted technical assistance. We are continuing to innovate and find new ways to serve GICH communities to make the Georgia Initiative for Community Housing the country's premier program for affordable housing education.

## Appendix

Appendix A: Map of GICH Communities

Appendix B: Analysis: Before and After GICH

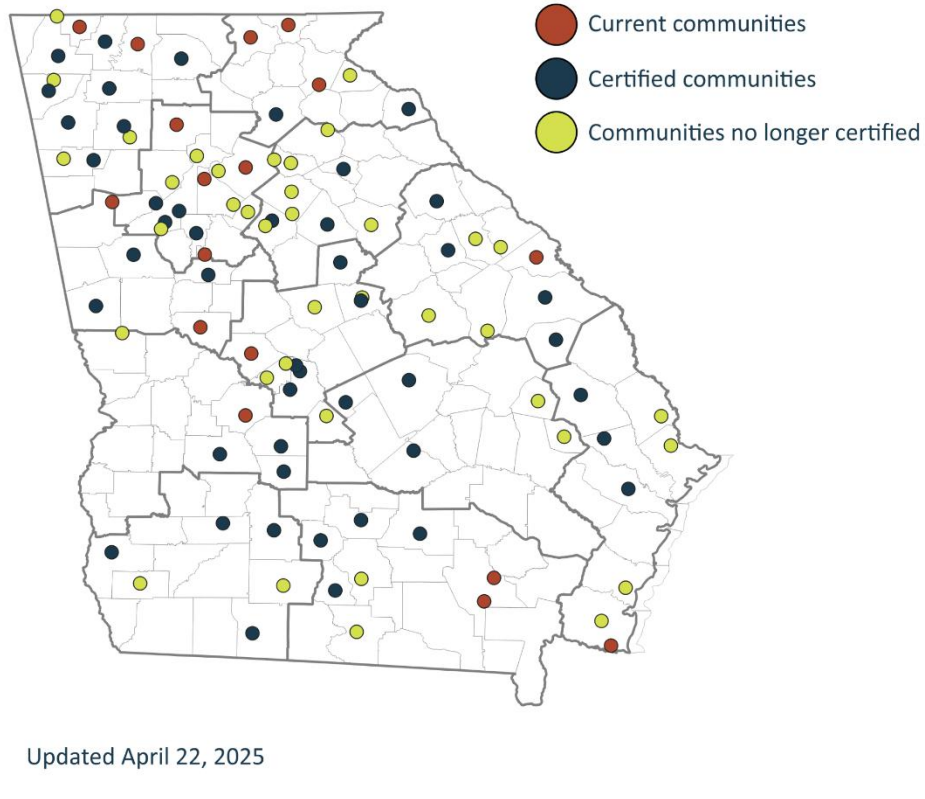
Appendix C: Excerpt: [Housing Finance and Development Division Impact Report 2024](#)

Appendix D: Press Release: [Five Communities Join the 2025 Georgia Initiative for Community Housing](#)

Appendix E: Social Media Push

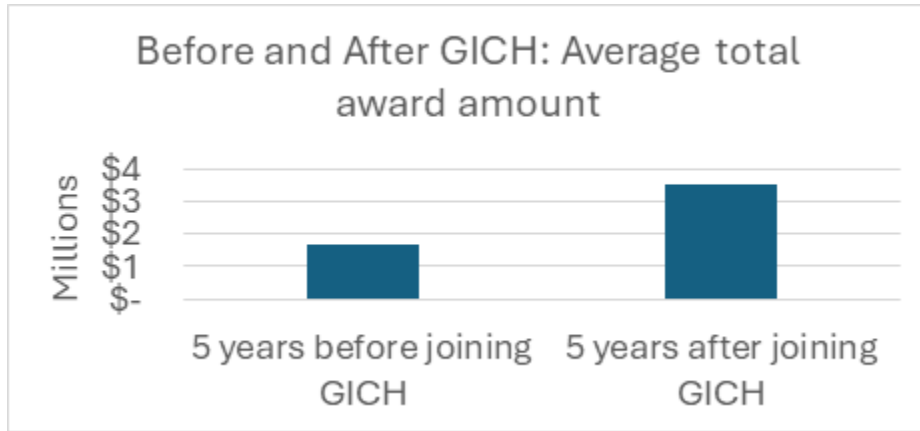
**Appendix A: Map of GICH Communities**

# 2025 GICH Communities



**Map of GICH Communities**

**Appendix B: Before and After GICH**



**Analysis: Before and after GICH**

**Appendix C: Excerpt: Housing Finance and Development Division Impact Report 2024**

**Community Case Study:**

# GAINESVILLE

**Housing by the Numbers:**

<b>6</b>	<b>331</b>	<b>1,072</b>	<b>0-97</b>
new residential communities	residential units	residents	age range of residents



16

## A GICH Senior City

The City of Gainesville proudly serves as a member of the Gainesville/Hall County, Georgia Initiative for Community Housing (GICH) Team. In 2024, the team achieved a significant milestone by being selected as one of only two communities to participate in the DCA's inaugural Senior Year cohort.

GICH Senior Year is a highly competitive program designed exclusively for GICH Certified Alumni Communities. Participating cities share a commitment to strategically and holistically investing in affordable housing resources. Their decisions are guided by a clear, strategic vision aimed at addressing local housing needs and opportunities.

This prestigious designation grants Gainesville/Hall County access to specialized technical assistance and education provided by DCA and other housing and community development experts. These resources will support the effective implementation of the community's housing plans, with a focused effort on revitalizing the Athens Street corridor.

As part of the program, Gainesville/Hall County receives priority consideration for funding through key programs such as the Community HOME Investment Program, HOME Investment Partnerships Program (HOME), and Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) programs. This initiative underscores the city's dedication to fostering sustainable, affordable housing solutions for its residents.

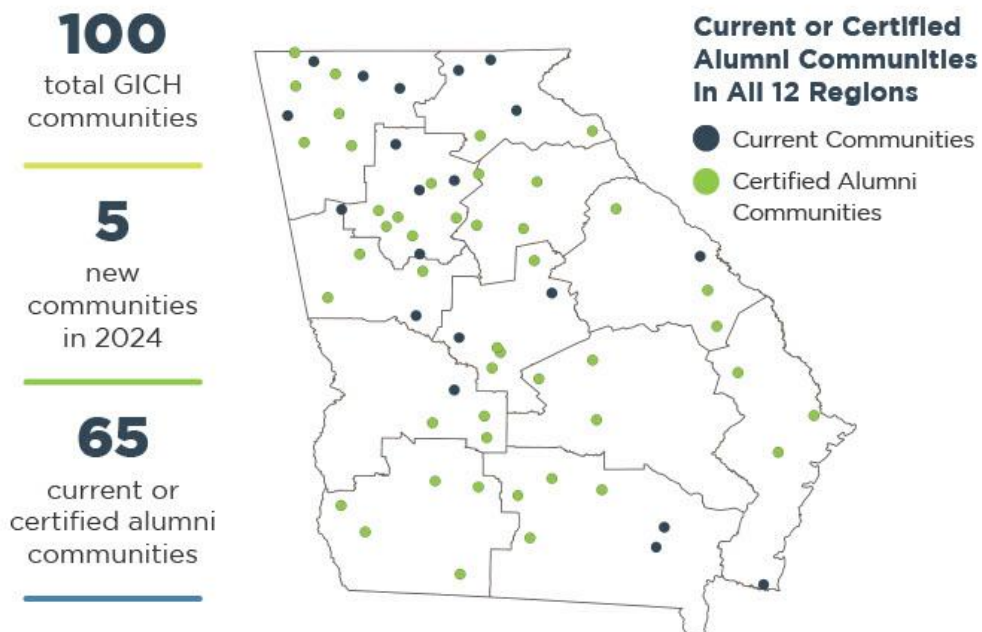
17

Appendix C: Excerpt: [Housing Finance and Development Division Impact Report 2024](#)

## Georgia Initiative for Community Housing

The Georgia Initiative for Community Housing is a collaborative program established in 2004 to help communities enhance their quality of life and economic vitality through locally-driven housing and revitalization strategies. Over a three-year period, participating communities receive technical assistance, training, facilitation, networking, and mentoring to address housing challenges and develop actionable plans. In 2024, GICH celebrated its 20th anniversary, marking two decades of impact across Georgia. Since its inception, GICH has served over 100 communities, with five new additions in 2024, and now includes 65 current or certified alumni communities spanning all 12 regions of the state.

GICH's success is evident in the transformative work of its communities, which have revitalized distressed neighborhoods, developed affordable housing using tax credits, updated ordinances, created land banks to renovate distressed properties, and initiated clean-up programs. Participants identify housing needs, explore solutions, and implement best practices, supported by two annual retreats. This program continues to play a vital role in fostering sustainable development and addressing housing challenges across Georgia through its collaborative and locally-focused approach.



## **Appendix D: Press Release: Five Communities Join the 2025 Georgia Initiative for Community Housing**

**Atlanta, GA** – The Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) announced at the GICH Fall Retreat on October 16, 2024, that the following communities will join the 2025 GICH cohort:

- **Blairsville-Union County**
- **City of Hampton**
- **Crawford County**
- **Murray County**
- **Waycross-Ware County**

This year, these communities join the Georgia Initiative for Community Housing as the program celebrates its 20th anniversary, officially serving more than 100 communities across the state.

“We welcome these five new partners to the Georgia Initiative for Community Housing and applaud the investment they are making in their community,” said Philip Gilman, DCA Deputy Commissioner of Housing Assistance and Development. “As we celebrate the 20-year milestone of this incredible program, we are reminded of the positive impact that intentional coordination and peer-learning can have to drive creative housing solutions and critical local investments.”

GICH launched in 2004, growing out of Georgia’s experience with the National League of Cities’ Affordable Housing Program and the success stories coming from the annual Magnolia Awards for Excellence in Affordable Housing.

The Initiative provides each participating community with a three-year program focused on collaboration and technical support in housing and community development. Throughout the program, GICH communities develop and implement a localized plan tailored to address their housing needs.

To learn more about the Georgia Initiative for Community Housing and its impact, visit: <https://bit.ly/4e6QFQ6>

## Appendix E: Social Media Push



As GICH celebrates its 20th anniversary, the program ushered in five new communities for its 2025 class, marking a new milestone of serving more than 100 Georgia communities. Read more about these communities and what GICH has to offer in the #DCANewsroom #linkinbio