

COMMUNITY PROFILE: DECATUR, GA

In Decatur and Beyond - It Starts With Conversation

Addressing diversity issues in your community can be difficult and complex. Many look to Decatur, Georgia as an example of inclusion, diversity & citizen engagement. The city routinely engages many different sectors of the community in addressing challenges, ranging from affordable housing to race equity issues to community police relations – going beyond the traditional public comment or public hearing to true and ongoing dialogue with many different sectors of the community.

It all started with a conversation – a conversation that has economic, racial, age, gender and religiously diverse representation, and that is reflective of the composition of the community itself.

The model for these conversations came from the Dialogue to Change work of Everyday Democracy -- a “study circle” back in the **mid-1990s**, when there was community conflict regarding affordable housing, the building of a parking deck in an historic neighborhood, and controversial School Board issues.



Everyday Democracy and Decatur, Georgia’s relationship began when Jon Abercrombie, now a Senior Associate for Everyday Democracy attended a “study circle” orientation which resulted in the rollout of the Decatur Round Tables that was aligned with the City’s 10-year strategic plan. He now refers to the Better Together Advisory Board in Decatur as having “the same DNA” as

Everyday Democracy efforts. “We all recognize the need to keep dialogues active, inclusive, racially and economically diverse,” he said, “and driven toward action and progressive change.”



In 2001, the City Schools in Decatur used this process to address a serious funding and sustainability issue. **In 2010**, when it was time for the City of Decatur’s next 10-year strategic plan, the city benefitted from the Decatur Round Tables visioning process, and in **2015**, Decatur

rolled out the Better Together initiative, an advisory board and a missional partnership formed in alignment with the city’s new 10-year strategic plan.

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Since then the city has had well over 1,000 of its residents engaged in tackling the city's challenges.

In the past two years, Better Together has been working on increasing the city's active volunteers; improving affordable housing; and building trusting relationships while addressing racial equity with police that includes open dialogue with the police department and *Creating Community 4 Decatur*, (the local Black Lives Matter group). The initiative is also working on a plan to remove a confederate memorial on their public square. The results of the Better Together planning has now been added to the City's overall plan endorsed by the Decatur City Commission.

Earlier in 2017, more than 250 people attended a five-hour community conversation to connect more community members with the Better Together plan. The event generated 625 action ideas that were distilled into 60 items for the final plan. The city of Decatur also identified thirty-five people from 50 different organizations as partners in their collaboration.

*Linda Harris, chief of civic engagement, education & communication for the city of Decatur, Georgia and former project manager for the Better Together Initiative, Everyday Democracy Senior Associate, Jon Abercrombie and Renae Madison contributed to this story.
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Everyday Democracy works to strengthen democracy by making authentic engagement and public participation a permanent part of the way we work as a country. Since our founding in 1989, we have worked with hundreds of communities throughout the US, and we now offer an array of flexible resources and discussion guides, technical assistance and coaching. Our Dialogue to Change process uses solid engagement principles with a racial equity lens, and leads from personal connection to sustained action. We also work with Anchor Partners, and throughout the country, to expand our impact and create a democracy movement. Everyday Democracy is a project of the Paul J. Aicher Foundation.