



The Sapelo Foundation

Strategic Plan 2020-2025

December 17, 2019

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I. Introduction

For 70 years, The Sapelo Foundation has been committed to protecting Georgia’s environment and advancing social justice. As we enter our eighth decade, we will celebrate and learn from our past accomplishments and adapt our work to meet the demands of this pivotal moment in history.

This strategic plan is intended to guide Sapelo’s work from 2020-2025. We enter this period in a position of strength: a \$35 million endowment, a committed board, a dedicated new executive director, deep and growing partnerships, and a commitment to leverage all our resources. This plan reflects our major strategic priorities and will serve as a decision-making framework for all our work over the next six years. There is a corresponding operational workplan that provides more specificity about activities and tactics needed to implement these strategies.

II. Mission, Vision and Values

A. Mission: the change we seek.

We strive for a just Georgia, through partnerships and solutions that increase environmental protection, social prosperity, and civic power.

B. Vision: the future, if our mission is achieved.

All Georgians — especially marginalized communities, communities of color, and rural communities — live in healthy environments, have access to the resources they need to thrive, and engage in a just democracy.

C. Values and Practices: how we achieve our mission.

1. *Catalyze systemic change through power-building strategies of policy advocacy, civic engagement, and grassroots community organizing.*

A just Georgia requires changes to the policies and practices that have oppressed marginalized communities, and power is built among those communities. We support promising efforts focused on strategies of policy advocacy, civic engagement, and grassroots community organizing, which result in tangible systemic change and power building.

2. *Support marginalized communities—particularly communities of color—so they are included in and benefit from the creation and implementation of just policies and practices.*

A just Georgia requires that we engage and lift the voices of those whose participation in our democratic society has been systematically denied—in particular, communities of color. We support efforts that meaningfully engage marginalized communities in the pursuit of systemic change.

3. *Apply a statewide lens across Georgia’s rural-urban continuum.*

A just Georgia requires systemic changes across the state. Metro Atlanta is home to many strong statewide efforts, but we must also pay attention to rural areas and smaller cities outside metro Atlanta. We support statewide efforts that meaningfully engage communities in rural areas and smaller cities, as well as regional or local efforts outside of metro Atlanta, particularly when they connect to statewide efforts or serve as models for other regional or local efforts.

4. *Breakdown silos to unite interconnected agendas.*

Systemic change is not limited to a single place, community, or issue; connections across these lines are critical for building power and addressing root causes of systemic problems. We support efforts that work across places, communities, and issues to create a groundswell for systemic change.

5. *Strengthen networks and collaborations.*

Collaborative and coordinated action is critical for systemic change. In addition to supporting collaboration, we directly collaborate with a variety of actors as a learner, partner, leader, advocate, and catalyst for change.

6. *Strengthen capacity of our grantee partners.*

We rely on effective grantee partners to achieve our mission. We primarily strengthen their work by providing long-term and general operating support and by advocating for their agendas among our networks.

7. *Leverage all of our capital to advance our mission.*

The systemic change we seek is enormous. We use every resource available to us to achieve it. We are aligning 100% of our financial capital (95% endowment and 5% grants) with our mission. We also use our non-financial capital—our relationships, reputation, and board and staff expertise—to advance our goals.

III. Programs

We will continue to organize our grantmaking into three portfolios: (1) Environmental Justice & Protection, (2) Social Justice, and (3) McIntosh County. We support that work with special grant awards and funds which we call (4) Tools. These portfolios reflect our major objectives, strategies and desired outcomes. We will develop more specific funding criteria and related desired outcomes as we implement this plan.

1. Environmental Justice and Protection

Through this planning process, we affirm our longstanding commitment to the protection of Georgia's natural resources. We also recognize that threats to Georgia's environment disproportionately affect marginalized communities—particularly communities of color—which, due to systemic oppression, often lack the power needed to remedy these harms. Environmental protection in Georgia requires a thriving, collaborative and relevant environmental movement—one that reflects the needs of all people and extends beyond the usual actors and traditional environmental issues that have historically ignored the needs of marginalized communities. Going forward, we will prioritize support to environmental justice and protection efforts that engage marginalized communities in identifying environmental problems and shaping solutions for systemic change.

Objective: Increase the number of Georgians who: (1) shape and benefit from environmental policies, practices, and systems that are just and effective, and (2) prosper in safe, healthy, sustainable, and protected environments.

Annual Budget: Approximately \$500,000.

Strategies: Invest in partners that pursue systemic change for environmental justice and protection through **policy advocacy, civic engagement** and/or **grassroots community organizing**.

Desired Outcomes: As a result of these efforts, we seek to contribute to the following:

1. Increased passage and implementation of **policies, practices, and systems** that advance environmental justice and protection.
2. **Stronger collaboration** among organizations, collaborations, and networks that pursue environmental justice and protection efforts.
3. **Stronger capacity** of organizations, collaborations, and networks that pursue environmental justice and protection, as evidenced by:
 - a. Stronger policy advocacy, civic engagement, and grassroots community organizing work.
 - b. Stronger equity and justice lenses across their work.
 - c. Stronger organizational health, leadership, and membership.
4. More **Georgians**, especially communities of color and rural communities:
 - a. Participate in policy advocacy, civic engagement, or grassroots community organizing for environmental justice and protection.
 - b. Prosper in safe, healthy, sustainable, and protected environments.

Implementation: Given our role as both the initial investor and an ongoing investor in the Georgia Water Coalition, our support has helped it to develop into the backbone of the environmental movement in Georgia; we will continue to support the GWC, so that it can carry on this critical work. In addition, we will explore new efforts focused on the aforementioned objectives and strategies.

2. Social Justice

Sapelo has long pursued social justice, through a variety of strategies and always grounded in the fundamental belief that those most affected by injustice must be part of developing the solution. We will continue to support efforts that engage marginalized communities in the electoral process, organizing for community-defined change, and influencing policymaking. In particular, this is a historic moment for Georgia, with the structural injustices within Georgia's electoral system laid bare by the recent gubernatorial election. We hope to build on the recent momentum and support efforts that mobilize marginalized communities to participate in the democratic process.

Objective: Increase the number of Georgians who: (1) shape and benefit from civic and social policies, practices, and systems that are just and effective, and (2) prosper with full rights, protections, access, and agency in our democracy.

Annual Budget: Approximately \$500,000.

Strategies: Invest in partners that pursue systemic change for social justice through **policy advocacy, civic engagement** and/or **grassroots community organizing**.

Desired Outcomes: As a result of these efforts, we seek to contribute to the following:

1. Increased passage and implementation of **policies, practices, and systems** that advance social justice.

2. Stronger **collaboration** among organizations, collaborations, and networks that pursue social justice efforts.
3. Stronger **capacity** of organizations, collaborations, and networks that pursue social justice, as evidenced by:
 - a. Stronger policy advocacy, civic engagement, and grassroots community organizing work.
 - b. Stronger equity and justice lenses across their work.
 - c. Stronger organizational health, leadership, and membership.
4. More **Georgians**, especially communities of color and rural communities:
 - a. Participate in policy advocacy, civic engagement, or grassroots community organizing for social justice.
 - b. Prosper with fuller rights, protections, access, and agency in our democracy.

Implementation: Given our role as both the initial investor and an ongoing investor in GBPI and ProGeorgia—two of Georgia’s leading social justice “anchor organizations”—our support has helped them provide the resources and infrastructure necessary to build a strong social justice movement in Georgia. We will continue to support them for their field-building work. In addition, we will explore new efforts focused on the aforementioned objectives and strategies. We will intentionally explore some regional efforts, building off recent momentum in key places (e.g., southwest Georgia, coastal Georgia, etc.).

3. McIntosh County

For more than forty years, Sapelo has provided scholarships to students at McIntosh County Academy, helping them to attend higher education and reduce their debt burden. Due to changes in the McIntosh community, our recent analysis of those efforts, and data from the field of scholarship provision, we are pausing to reconsider how we can most effectively use our resources to support young people in McIntosh. We remain committed to improving outcomes that advance social prosperity for McIntosh youth and recognize that there are effective ways to do so beyond operating our own scholarship program. Over the course of this plan we will explore those options, working with local community partners and others to develop a new strategy for student success at McIntosh County Academy.

Objective: Advance social prosperity in McIntosh County across generations by improving outcomes for young people.

Annual Budget: Approximately \$100,000, pending formulation of plan.

Strategies: Implement a proven model for student success programming in McIntosh.

Desired Outcomes: More specific outcomes will be determined based on program model, but will seek:

1. More young people in McIntosh succeed in and graduate from high school.
2. More young people in McIntosh are aware of their options after high school graduation and succeed in the paths they choose for their lives, careers, and communities.

Implementation: We will explore partnerships with existing student success organizations to determine efficacy and feasibility for expansion or replication in McIntosh. We will maintain the *Annemarie and Richard J. Reynolds Jr.* name within the program.

4. Tools

Annual Budget: Approximately \$160,000 (combined total).

A. Smith W. Bagley Advocacy Award

Objective: Spotlight the outstanding work of awardees, so their nonprofit peers, foundations, donors, members, stakeholders, and community at large will have greater knowledge and appreciation of their efforts.

Strategy: Maintain this award in honor of our past President Smith W. Bagley, and his vision for a more just and equitable society. Maintain annual budget of approximately \$5,000.

B. Musgrove

Objective: Provide an inspirational place on the Georgia coast for nonprofit leaders to gather, think, plan, reflect, build relationships, and build power.

Strategy: Utilize a competitive award process (i.e., an in-kind grant for the use of the Musgrove facility) for both Sapelo-initiated efforts as well as those initiated by our partners. This is intended to reduce administrative burden and increase ownership—and ultimately effectiveness. Refine internal processes and practices to support this new approach. Maintain annual budget of approximately \$25,000.

C. Tool Funds

Objective: Strengthen our ability to flexibly and responsively support our grantee partners outside of our standard grantmaking cycle on time-sensitive issues of key importance.

Strategies:

1. Maintain the Organizational Development Fund (ODF) as it currently operates.
 - a. Executive director awards grants within annual board-approved budget.
 - b. Maintain annual budget of approximately \$30,000.
2. Establish a new Collaborative Opportunity Fund (COF) to support collaborative efforts among organizations that are working on important and urgent issues.
 - a. Executive director works with Tool Funds committee to award grants within annual board-approved budget.
 - b. Develop application and reporting processes.
 - c. Establish annual budget of approximately \$30,000.
3. Establish an Emergent Opportunity Fund (EOF) by reorganizing the existing discretionary “Program Tool Funds” that proactively support Sapelo-identified emergent opportunities (without application requirement). Consolidate into one fund to increase flexibility and the ability to support work across program areas.
 - a. Executive director continues to seek relevant opportunities for support, working with appropriate board committees and/or officers to make awards.
 - b. Maintain annual budget of approximately \$70,000. (This is the total budget for all four discretionary Program Tool Funds that are currently in place.)

Program Implementation

The following strategies relate to *how* we implement this work in our two primary portfolios (EJP and SJ) over the next six years. Following approval of this plan, we will develop a companion document—a comprehensive implementation plan and timeline.

1. **External Communications:** Update website, documents, and other external communications to reflect the priorities of this strategic plan and clarify grant goals, expectations, and processes.
2. **Grantmaking Process:**
 - a. Develop and utilize “Letters of Connection (LOC)” to provide an opportunity for organizations to share ideas prior to submitting applications.
 - b. Make full applications invitation-only, based on LOC and prior funding history.
 - c. Utilize “Requests for Proposals (RFPs)” as appropriate.
3. **Grant Structure:** Institute two-year grants, based on defined criteria, for most grantee partners. Maintain some single-year grants as appropriate. Internally, revise grant review and decision-making process to reflect two-year cycle, etc.
4. **Evaluation and Analysis:** In order to determine the effectiveness and impact of our grantmaking, we will analyze our processes, grants, and portfolios at regular intervals (e.g., during two-year grant renewal application, etc.).
 - a. Process assessment: Consider and adjust our grantmaking processes based on internal and external feedback.
 - b. Individual grant assessment: Analyze outcomes against grantee partner-identified goals for each grant
 - c. Portfolio assessment: Analyze the efficacy of our support across each portfolio, reflecting on our strategic priorities and results of both our grantmaking and leadership support. We will also consider how our mission investments align with each portfolio.

IV. Governance

Our trustees champion Sapelo’s values and mission, as well as bring an invaluable breadth and depth of relevant expertise. Their collaborative culture and high engagement strengthen our work. The governance role has expanded, and it is important to maintain the board’s collegial culture and deep engagement and also optimize trustee’s time and talents.

Objective 1: All trustees understand and can effectively execute their duties.

Strategies:

1. Develop clear roles and responsibilities for board members.
 - a. Develop “Board roles and responsibilities” document that delineates decision-making authority among various parties.
2. Address potential conflicts appropriately.
3. Ensure trustees have information needed to effectively govern.
 - a. Determine appropriate format and substance for sharing grant information.

Objective 2: Structure the work of the board, so that it can most effectively govern.

Strategies:

1. Maximize trustees’ time, talents, and strategic leadership roles.
 - a. Consider ways to address routine business more efficiently and increase time for strategic discussions and board learning.
2. Restructure committees by reducing from 10 to 9.

- a. Maintain six standing committees (three programmatic: SJ, EJP and McIntosh; three organizational: Administration, Investment and Governance) and three ad hoc committees (Musgrove, Smith Bagley, and Tool Funds). Eliminate Civic Engagement Committee and integrate into SJ and EJP Committees.
- 3. Give committees clear mandates.
 - a. Develop Committee Charters to clarify role and authority of each committee.
 - b. Change “Nominating” committee to “Governance” committee to reflect emphasis on all aspects of board governance.
- 4. Continue to support trustees’ learning.
 - a. Continue trustee site visits. Build in more dedicated time to reflect and debrief on learnings.
 - b. Develop expense policy to fund activities related to trustee learning opportunities (e.g., conference attendance, site visit travel, etc.).

Objective 3: Ensure that the board has a balanced composition to effectively govern.

Strategies:

- 1. Maintain approximate equal balance of community and family trustees.
- 2. Maintain two term-limited community trustee seats (with limit of two three-year terms), filling second vacant seat, with timely nomination of a new candidate.
- 3. Address the following topics through the Governance Committee and full board:
 - a. Age minimums and maximums for board service.
 - b. Length of term for board president.
 - c. Diversity among board officers and committee chairs.
- 4. Institute regular review of the board to ensure that it is functioning effectively.
- 5. Identify opportunities to engage family members (including next gen) beyond board membership.
- 6. Ensure cultivation and orientation of new board members.
 - a. Clarify roles of Governance Committee, trustees, and executive director in recruitment process.
 - b. Strengthen orientation process (e.g., create orientation manual, refine mentor program).

V. Operations

We have ambitious goals and want to make sure that we use our internal resources wisely. Historically, we have operated in a lean manner, and we remain committed to the efficient and responsible use of resources. At the same time, we recognize that in order to achieve our goals we must strengthen various aspects of our operations and pay attention to staff capacity and best practices.

Objective 1: Staff provides leadership and expertise necessary to implement the strategic plan, with the support and guidance of trustees.

Strategies:

- 1. Maintain current staff configuration and capacity.
 - a. As needed, utilize consultants to help execute specific priorities.
- 2. Clarify role and authority of executive director.
 - a. Review and update the executive director job description to reflect current priorities.
 - b. Institute formal annual review process for the executive director.
- 3. Review existing internal policies and procedures and update as necessary to ensure compliance with regulations, best practices, values, and this strategic plan.

VI. Finance

As stewards of tax-exempt dollars that must benefit the public, it is critical that we manage our endowment ethically and responsibly so that we are able to achieve our mission. In particular, over the next six years we will work to align more of our resources with our mission.

Objective 1: Effectively manage the foundation's finances and endowment.

Strategies:

1. Provide trustees timely, accurate, and comprehensive financial information.
2. Ensure Administration and Investment Committees are effectively fulfilling their role in financial (e.g., budget, audit, etc.) and oversight.

Objective 2: Increase alignment of endowment investments with our mission.

Strategies: Work with new financial advisors, Morgan Stanley Graystone, to:

1. Update and regularly review our Investment Policy Statement, managers, asset allocations, etc. aligned with our mission-related investment goals.
2. Determine assessment framework for non-financial outcomes and assess investments based on those outcomes.
3. Make investments aligned with our mission.
4. Engage in board learning related to mission-related investing.

Addendum: Grantmaking Criteria

To achieve our mission, we prioritize the following criteria when awarding grants.

1. **Mission, Values, and Portfolio Alignment** – Support grantee partners that share our pursuit of environmental justice and protection and/or social justice.
2. **Promising Efforts** – Support grantee partners that demonstrate **(a)** important needs, opportunities, or threats for just systemic change; **(b)** goals that, if achieved, can advance solutions for just systemic change; **(c)** coherent and data-informed plans or methodologies; and **(d)** evidence or likelihood for success, with an evaluation process.

The remaining six criteria assess the promise of an effort and determine if we are the right grantmaking partner.

1. **Primary Strategies** – Pursue **(a)** policy advocacy, **(b)** civic engagement, and/or **(c)** grassroots community organizing as the primary strategy. We prioritize promising efforts that include more than one of these power-building and complementary strategies for just systemic change.
2. **Marginalized Communities** – Ensure marginalized communities, particularly communities of color, are included in and benefit from the pursued just systemic change. We prioritize promising efforts that include and benefit more than one marginalized community.
3. **Place Focus** – Focus on **(a)** statewide efforts, with meaningful inclusion and perspectives of those living in more rural communities and smaller cities outside metro Atlanta, and/or **(b)** local or regional efforts based outside metro Atlanta. We use a statewide lens to consider just systemic change across all 159 counties on Georgia’s rural-urban continuum. Specifically: We use the United Way’s [13-county definition for metro Atlanta](#): Butts, Cherokee, Clayton, Cobb, Coweta, Dekalb, Douglas, Fayette, Fulton, Gwinnett, Henry, Paulding, and Rockdale. We support statewide efforts that work within those 13 counties, if grantee partners demonstrate that meaningful inclusion and benefits are not limited to communities within those 13 counties (note: option a for “place focus” criterion).
4. **Interconnected Agendas** – Breakdown silos in order to unite interconnected agendas for just systemic change across **(a)** strategies, **(b)** communities, **(c)** places, **(d)** issues, **(e)** sectors, and/or **(f)** movements. We prioritize promising efforts that include more than one interconnected agenda.
5. **Collaborative Approaches** – Engage in authentic and effective collaboration. We prioritize promising efforts for just systemic change driven by **(a)** formal networks, **(b)** less-formal collaborations of two or more organizations, and/or **(c)** anchor institutions that lead, convene, or support collaborative efforts. We tailor our support for each collaboration based on its structure, key partners, goals, and lifecycle stage (start-up, growth, maturity, or renewal). We particularly value partnerships between unlikely allies, who can generate greater power and new solutions together.
6. **Organizational or Network Health** – Demonstrate strong **(a)** financial sustainability, **(b)** internal capacity, and **(c)** strategic acumen, all essential ingredients for advancing a mission for just systemic change.

Note: We do not support the following:

1. Brick-and-mortar building projects, including construction materials and labor costs.
2. Endowment funds.
3. Fraternal groups or civic clubs.
4. Individuals.
5. Medical research.
6. Museums, aquariums, or other large public facilities.
7. National or regional organizations, unless their efforts specifically benefit Georgia and funds are allocated to Georgia. (This may include regrants to Georgia-based organizations.)
8. Organizations that are not tax-exempt.
9. Payment of debts.
10. Places of worship, unless their work is connected to broader efforts, communities, collaborations, or networks. (This may include regrants to places of worship.)