

# The Metro Atlanta Advantage

Metro Atlanta's diverse talent pool, innovation ecosystem, and unique culture make the region one of the top-ranked cities in the country to grow a business.



**M**etro Atlanta has become a magnet for successful businesses. A growing number of iconic companies have opened locations in the region, including Apple, Alphabet, Microsoft, Cisco, and Visa. They are joining giants like The Coca-Cola Company, Delta Air Lines, UPS, and The Home Depot that call Atlanta “home.”

In all, more than 330 global and North American businesses have chosen the metro Atlanta region as their headquarters. Startups and small and midsize businesses (SMBs) are doing so, too. More than 200 Inc. 5000 honorees are based in the region. Organizations in all stages of growth are opening tech and innovation hubs in metro Atlanta because of its leadership role in software engineering, cybersecurity, clean energy, and artificial intelligence (AI).

People are coming in droves, as well, drawn by the affordable housing, a thriving job market, and high quality of life. In 2022, Atlanta was among the metro

areas with the largest population growth in the country. *The Economist* ranked Atlanta the most livable city in the U.S., behind Honolulu. Money.com ranked Atlanta as the best place to live. And *Area Development* magazine declared Georgia the No. 1 place to do business for an unprecedented nine consecutive years.

Katie Kirkpatrick, president and CEO of Metro Atlanta Chamber (MAC)—an organization that brings together businesses, colleges and universities, and nonprofits to promote policies and programs that advance economic growth and enrich life in metro Atlanta—has lived in the area almost her whole life. She says companies have recognized Atlanta as a talent pipeline for decades. In the past, though, businesses would come to the area to recruit hires, then ask them to move away. Not anymore.

“Companies are recognizing that they can have their businesses here, adjacent to the talent they want to recruit and retain.” Kirkpatrick says.

For SMB owners, the region's appeal is multifaceted. Founders might cite a thriving economy, business-friendly policies, or a range of public-private initiatives. The biggest factors, though—the heart of what makes Atlanta so desirable for entrepreneurs—are the people, an unbelievable innovation ecosystem, and an electric and diverse culture.

## A fantastic fusion of backgrounds and disciplines

MAC interfaces with companies of all sizes and industries, so it has a unique understanding of local business trends. Kirkpatrick says company leaders often say one of the main reasons they choose Atlanta is its diverse talent pool. According to data from the U.S. Census Bureau, 48.2 percent of Atlanta residents are Black or African American, 41 percent are White, 5 percent are Hispanic or Latino, 5 percent are Asian, and 3.7 percent are two or more races. The result is true multiculturalism.

The region's robust higher education system acts as a feeder for the companies. The nationally recognized Technical College System of Georgia, composed of 22 colleges and 88 campuses, boasts a 99 percent job placement rate. More than 57 colleges and universities in the region, including four top-ranked Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), have campuses in metro Atlanta.

“You see a concentration of companies in our Midtown area because they want to be near Georgia Tech, which graduates more female and minority engineering students than any other school in the country; Georgia State University, which graduates more Black bachelor-degree candidates than any other school; and SCAD (Savannah College of Art and Design), which is where our creative professionals are being produced,” Kirkpatrick explains.

SCAD Atlanta has more than 40 top-ranked degree programs, including animation, film and television, interior design, industrial design, creative business leadership, and fashion design. The university is currently expanding its Midtown location, which opened in 2005, to support the 10 percent increase in enrollment experienced during the 2022–2023 academic year. Students are attracted to the city for many of the

same reasons companies and their teams want to be here.

"In Atlanta, SCAD students are surrounded by Fortune 500 companies, a thriving arts scene, and limitless opportunities for professional growth. SCAD students are able to take advantage of this diverse urban environment bursting with museums, parks, theaters, shops, music venues, and professional sports—all while pursuing their creative careers," says Paul Stonick, vice president of SCADpro, the university's collaborative innovation studio that generates business solutions for some of the world's most influential brands.

"The design solutions our students and faculty have created at SCADpro Atlanta have elevated this thriving community and translated to hundreds of job opportunities and internships for SCAD students and alumni," Stonick says.



In a first-of-its-kind degree program, a SCAD student uses virtual tools to design the footwear of tomorrow.

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**SCAD**

In addition to working with global brands like Delta and Coca-Cola, SCADpro recently partnered with the Atlanta Police Department to redesign their patrol cars. The update included new technology, more cargo space, and a sleek design.

In March 2023, SCADpro launched an interactive experience at THE GREEN, a lavish green space for outdoor events, dining, and entertainment at Phipps Plaza, a new modern mixed-use development in Buckhead, a sought-after commercial and residential area in Atlanta. SCADpro's work blended augmented reality with a mural to create a "phy-gital" experience that celebrated the plaza, and the city.

### A hotbed of (green) innovation

Whether the challenge is building a more sustainable future or making continued strides in social justice, Atlanta is leading the way. The area is positioned to be a leader in smart cities, electric vehicles (EVs), battery technology, and solar energy. Companies committed to lowering emissions, for themselves and society, have invested more than \$11.5 billion in Georgia since 2018, according to MAC. Kirkpatrick hopes the region will someday be recognized as the nation's clean tech capital.

In 2022, Hyundai Motor Group announced plans to build an electric vehicle factory near Savannah valued at \$5.5 billion. Hyundai is also partnering with the Korean manufacturer SK to build an electric battery plant in Bartow County, northwest of Atlanta. Rivian Automotive, an electric vehicle company founded in 2009, plans to build a \$5 billion electric vehicle production campus near Atlanta. This year, Qcells, a solar power company, announced the largest investment in U.S. solar power's history: \$2.5 billion to build a "complete solar supply chain" by opening two facilities in Georgia, according to the company. Qcells predicts this investment will create 2,500 new jobs in Georgia.

Collaborative efforts bolster the investments of individual companies. Drawdown Georgia Business Compact is a consortium of Georgia businesses working collectively to advance climate solutions and achieve net zero carbon emissions in Georgia by 2050. TK Elevator, a global leader in mobility



At 420 feet tall, the Innovation and Qualification Center (IQC) is Cobb County's tallest building and has North America's tallest elevator test tower.

products and services with an expansive presence in metro Atlanta, is one of the consortium's 16 founding members.

TK Elevator's North American Regional Business Support Center and local sales and operations branches account for more than 320,000 square feet of commercial space and employ nearly 900 people. The company opened the Regional Business Support Center campus in February 2022 to consolidate corporate functions from Atlanta, Texas, Florida, Utah, and Tennessee. Operations in Atlanta support more than 100 branches that install, maintain, and modernize mobility equipment.

TK Elevator is also one of the 40-plus companies to choose metro Atlanta for its innovation center. At 420 feet, its Innovation and Qualification Center (IQC) is the tallest building in Cobb County and features the tallest elevator test tower in North America.

Jeremy Rainwater, chief executive officer, Americas, TK Elevator, says the company selected Atlanta because of its breadth of engineering and STEM-focused talent and collaborative business climate.

"The support and collaboration between corporations, universities, and entrepreneurs has created a remarkable ecosystem where innovators

push one another to achieve more and bring creative solutions," he says.

One such collaboration is InnovATL, a platform started by MAC to unite the region's innovation leaders, including startups, corporations, and universities, and connect all the independently organized innovation-focused events.

Another public-private partnership of note is ATL Action for Racial Equity, a multiyear effort spearheaded by MAC to dismantle the effects of systemic racism in the region, in part by providing companies with playbooks for inclusive economic development, equitable corporate policies, education, and workforce development. "Companies and public sector partners are engaging together to advance this work, so it is an exceptional example of how Atlanta moves together," Kirkpatrick says.

### A great place to work—and live

James "Jay" Bailey, CEO of Russell Innovation Center for Entrepreneurs (RICE), an economic mobility engine that invests in Black entrepreneurs to strengthen businesses and communities, describes Atlanta as a "small town wrapped in tall buildings." While the area has all the amenities and resources of a commercial center, residents share a collaborative, inclusive, and friendly spirit.

"Anyone can live here and make their mark and find their community," Kirkpatrick explains. "If you're an individual looking for urban living and mass transit, we have that. If you're looking for a small community, maybe one that has a small-town feel with a city center and a town square, those exist in abundance. If you're looking for an exceptional arts and culture community, we have that. If nature is your passion, we have the Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area running through our region. We have hundreds of miles of trails."

Also, uniquely Atlanta has the rich civil rights history that courses through the veins of the region; a diverse music scene that includes legends and newcomers in hip-hop, R&B, country, and rock; and a deep love of sports, particularly the city's professional sports teams, including the Falcons, Braves, Hawks, and Atlanta United. In 2026, Atlanta will host the 2026 FIFA World Cup, joining Los Angeles as the only two U.S. cities to have been selected

to host a Summer Olympics, Super Bowl, and World Cup. There is always something to do in the city, which is part of what attracts students and professionals to the region. Atlanta continues to invest in infrastructure to make it easier to get out and explore the far corners of the metro area. The Atlanta BeltLine is one of the largest urban redevelopment programs in the country. It is designed to connect diverse communities through a 22-mile network of outdoor parks and street cars.

And for those who need to travel further, Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport puts the world at your fingertips and is consistently ranked the busiest, most efficient airport in the world.

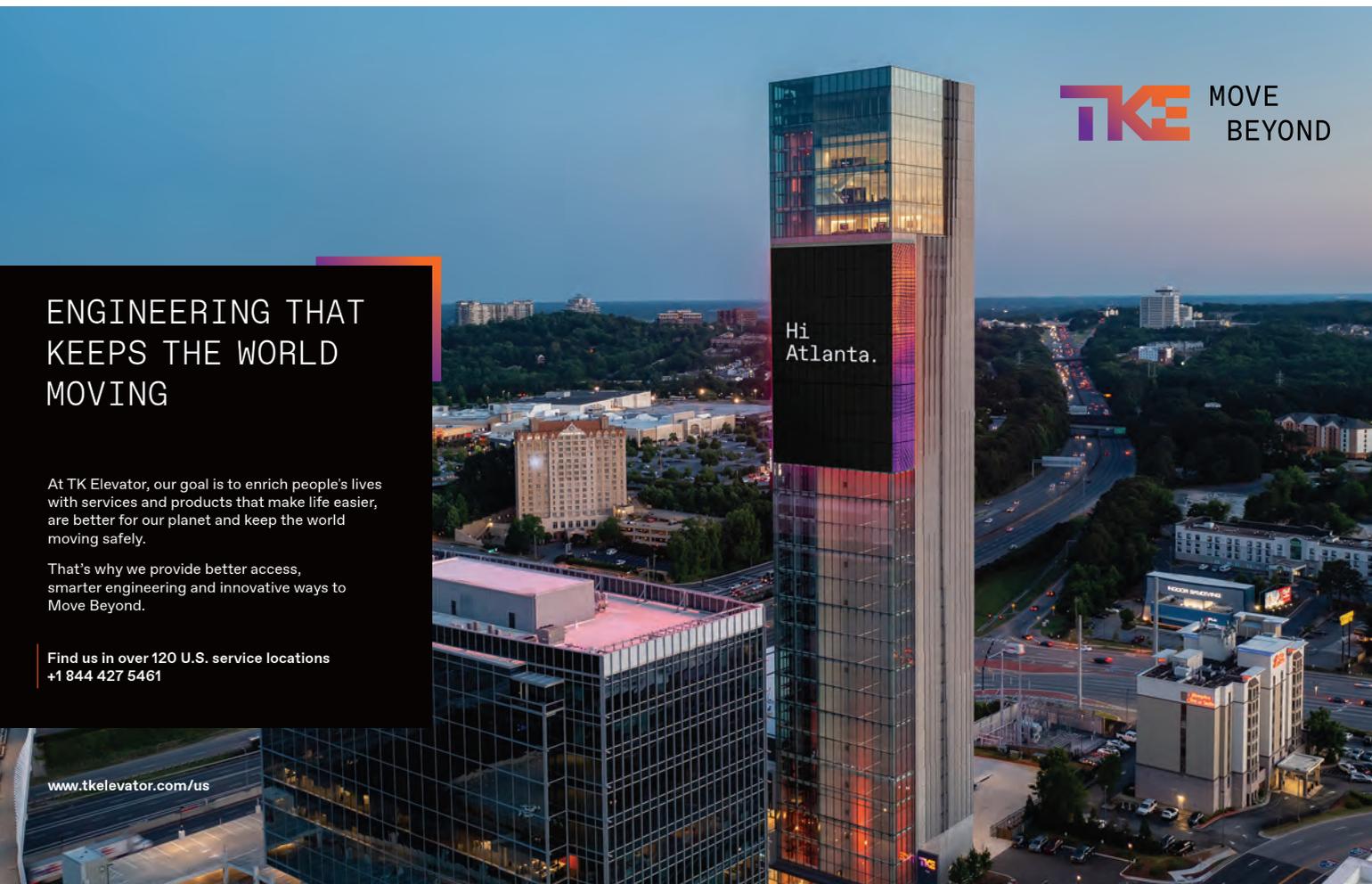
### **The startup advantage**

Metro Atlanta is rich with entrepreneurs and small businesses, from bootstrapped startups to venture capital-funded companies. These business leaders can draw from an exceptional network of mentors and peers. "You are not alone

in the journey of running a company here, because we have this exceptional concentration of small and medium-size enterprises," Kirkpatrick says. She believes the region will remain the top metro area in the country for business.

In addition, she predicts startups and SMBs will continue to flock to the city and its surrounding counties to take advantage of unique resources, including the Curiosity Lab at Peachtree Corners, a publicly funded living lab for testing next-generation mobility and smart city technologies in the real world, and RICE.

"Atlanta has the opportunity to be one of the most consequential cities of the next century," Bailey says. "With our colleges, our culture, our assemblage of Fortune corporations, and quite frankly our 'cool,' we have the ability to do what others have not: truly make opportunities inclusive, all while living in a city that is still affordable enough to dream." ■



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