

IMPACT Greensboro: Building an Army of Change Agents

The energy is palpable as this eclectic group of grassroots leaders gathers for their monthly meeting at the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL[®]) in Greensboro. At first glance, you'd wonder what, if anything, they have in common. Young. Old. Wealthy. Homeless. Christian. Buddhist. Conservative. Liberal. Native. Refugee. And everyone in between.

Now in its third year, IMPACT Greensboro, a leadership incubator with diversity at its core, draws a colorful cross section of emerging community leaders who might not otherwise have the chance to participate in leadership development programs. Ironically, it's their differences that unite them, together with their desire to understand current community issues and engage in positive change. Each year, roughly 50 participants divide into interest groups covering topics such as economics, environmental sustainability, crime and safety, arts, diversity, education and housing. Meet four of them:

Reflecting the City's Diversity

IMPACT Greensboro participants work in groups on a "paper scrapper" based on their change style and discover how each style builds structure and how each is important to the whole team.

Zim Ugochowi, born to Nigerian parents in the U.S., joined IMPACT Greensboro at a UNC-Greensboro professor's prompting at age 21. "I found the exposure to different perspectives refreshing; it was challenging and thought-provoking to see how others think. IMPACT Greensboro gave me the confidence and skills that I apply in my work on social entrepreneurship. It's wonderful to have the ability to converse with anyone — any age, ethnicity or background." Now living and working in Bangalore, India as a [2011-2012 Luce Scholar](#) from [The Henry Luce Foundation](#), Zim was also one of three recipients from IMPACT Greensboro to receive the prestigious *2011 40 Leaders Under 40 award* from [The Triad Business Journal](#). The youngest person to ever receive this award, Zim plans to eventually return to Greensboro to pursue her career in social entrepreneurship.



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Cyndy Hayworth, a City Council candidate in the October 2011 primary and president of [Junior Achievement](#), says participation in IMPACT Greensboro removed her "blindness" to be able to see issues from others' perspectives. "We looked at parks, food deserts (neighborhoods with no grocery stores), transportation and more. I grew and changed — and now know how to walk in someone else's shoes to be a positive influence in our community."

Tim Tsujii, 30, is director of the [Guilford County Board of Elections](#) early voting program with a passion for making positive change in his native city; especially now that he's a father. He says the relationships and networking opportunities he's getting from IMPACT Greensboro are helping him become a change agent. Tsujii's team studies sustainable economy and toured a controversial Greensboro landfill. "We can't complain about anything without seeing first-hand and understanding all the issues and possibilities."

Annette Green, a 57-year-old educator and 2010 graduate of IMPACT Greensboro, is now a program facilitator. She and three classmates continue to meet and want to start a weatherization skill-training program for low-income youth. They recently pitched this idea to civic and community leaders and are hopeful the project will move forward.

Broad Community Support

CCL Vice President and Chief of Staff Mona Edwards has been a champion of IMPACT Greensboro from the beginning. "Now more than ever, we need people who are willing to roll up their sleeves and get involved," Edwards says. "I'm excited about the possibilities for IMPACT Greensboro and hope it can be a model for other community leadership development programs."

CCL provides project management, leadership development resources and meeting space for IMPACT Greensboro. Other support includes grants from lead funder the [Community Foundation of Greater Greensboro](#), [The Cemala Foundation](#), the [Weaver Foundation](#) and the [Tannenbaum-Sternberger Foundation](#), all in Greensboro. Supporters believe so strongly in IMPACT's ability to grow a network of engaged community change agents that they currently provide scholarships to all participants and underwrite the program costs. Plans are in development to broaden the financial support for sustainability of the program.

Stephanie Walker, IMPACT Greensboro's project director, says, "Today, and for decades to come, we will be influenced by this positive and powerful program. It's a true blessing to be able to nurture community leaders in this environment who will change our world - one community at a time."