



Greater Gainesville International Center

2024 Annual Report

Mission – To celebrate, elevate and empower Greater Gainesville’s international community and better connect Gainesville with the rest of the world.

Vision – A Greater Gainesville that is welcoming to all neighbors and that serves as a hub for international economic and cultural connections.

A Year Defined by Growth, Collaboration and Connection

The Greater Gainesville International Center (GGIC) began 2024 with a bold vision: to strengthen our city's global connections, empower refugees and immigrants, and help build a community where people from every culture and background are welcomed. Our mission has advanced through transformative partnerships, innovative programs, and a commitment to serving our international neighbors through empathy and excellence.

This year marked a pivotal milestone as GGIC formalized an affiliate partnership with the International Rescue Committee (IRC). This collaboration not only elevated our capacity to resettle refugees but also underscored our role as a vital resource for Gainesville's growing international community. From organizing cultural festivals that drew thousands to helping newcomers navigate complex systems, GGIC remained steadfast in its mission to create an inclusive and thriving community.



Planning Meeting at Satchel's Pizza



Greater Gainesville International Center

2024 Impact by the Numbers

GGIC made significant progress in furthering our mission to **elevate, celebrate and empower our local International community and better connect Greater Gainesville with the rest of the world.** Here is how we have positively impacted our community by the numbers:

**Funds raised
in 2024**

\$ 106,326.76

Impact Snapshot

9

Cultural events hosted or co-hosted by GGIC featuring our diverse international community

7000+

People who participated in one of our 9 events

18

Number of refugees we helped make Gainesville their new home

600+

Direct service hours serving our new refugee neighbors

500+

Number of direct volunteer hours supporting our international community

36

Local businesses and organizations we partnered with

3

New Sister City partnerships formed, including in Ukraine, Brazil and Czech Republic

72

Hours of ESL and Cultural Orientation classes provided to newcomers

Refugee Resettlement: A New Beginning for Many



The highlight of 2024 was undoubtedly our affiliate partnership with the **International Rescue Committee**. Through this collaboration, GGIC welcomed and supported four refugee families from Afghanistan, Guatemala, and Venezuela. Each family's journey—from finding housing to enrolling children in school—was a testament to the resilience of newcomers and the strength of our community.

One notable story involved an Afghan family facing significant language barriers. With the help of dedicated volunteers and caseworkers, we secured employment for one parent and connected the children with Dari-speaking tutors. Their story exemplifies how targeted support and compassion can change lives.

Our cultural orientation sessions provided newcomers with the tools they needed to navigate life in Gainesville. Topics ranged from healthcare access to American cultural norms, ensuring that participants felt equipped and empowered to thrive in their new environment. These weekly sessions, coupled with survival English classes, were lifelines for families starting anew in an unfamiliar land.

Between July and December of 2024, GGIC raised nearly \$60,000 to directly support resettlement activities, including help with acquiring housing, furnishings, food and medicine, and a wide range of support services. In addition, GGIC raised more than \$20,000 in in-kind support in the form of donations and volunteer support for our newest neighbors. GGIC's activities were highlighted in IRC's national end-of-year report titled [Turning Hope into Action: Setting Up Refugee Resettlement in a New Community in Florida.](#)



Connecting Gainesville to the World



GGIC's legacy of a strong commitment to global connection continued in 2024 through programs like the latest partnership with the **Congressional Office for International Leadership's (COIL) Open World Program**. GGIC hosted a delegation of judges from Kazakhstan for a week of bilateral learning and exploration of topics associated with the US jurisprudence system. This was the 27th Open World delegation GGIC has hosted.

Judges Visiting from Kazakhstan September 2024

We also initiated an exciting new Sister City partnership with **São José do Rio Preto, Brazil**. GGIC helped coordinate a delegation visit to this newest prospective Sister City, and we expect a return visit in early 2025 to formalize this agreement.

Gainesville Mayor Harvey Ward meeting with delegation from Nizhyn, Ukraine prior to signing of MOU



Gainesville Delegation doing the Gator Chomp with Sao Jose do Rio Preto Mayor Edinho Araújo

GGIC also helped facilitate a new **Sister City partnership with Nizhyn, Ukraine**. GGIC hosted a series of three virtual meetings between our two city's respective mayors, as well as participated in the historic signing of an MOU between Gainesville Mayor Ward and Nizhyn Mayor

Kodola. The MOU promises to cooperate in areas such as educational and cultural exchanges, safe housing and prosthetics. The MOU signing was attended by a delegation of educators and students from Nizhyn as well as UF faculty and students and Mayor Ward.

Other Sister City Program accomplishments include a growing relationship with Ho, Ghana, that includes educational exchanges and two in-person visits in 2024, including District 21 House Member Yvonne Hinson. There are also continued exchanges with Duhok, Kurdistan, Iraq, and GGIC has also been finalizing new partnerships with Oloumuc, Czech Republic and Yopal, Columbia and renewing a long-neglected relationship with Matigalpa, Nicaragua. Despite challenging political circumstances, GGIC has maintained connections with Qalqilya, Palestine, Kfar Saba, Israel, and Novorossiisk, Russia.

Building Community



In 2024, GGIC became a cornerstone for cultural exchange and community building, hosting an array of events that celebrated the rich diversity of Gainesville's residents. Our efforts weren't just about gathering people—they were about creating safe and inclusive spaces where stories could be shared, perspectives could be broadened, and community could grow. These events reflect our belief that cultural connection is a powerful tool for inclusion and understanding. GGIC hosted or co-hosted nine multicultural events in 2024, connecting with over 7000 neighbors!

Lion Dancers at the Lunar New Year Celebration

- **Lunar New Year Celebration (2/25/24):** 453 attendees | Free | Partner: UF Harn, UF School of Music, Dr. Ting Dong
- **UF Chinese Music Ensemble (3/3/24):** 55 attendees | Free | Partner: UF, Foundation for the Performance of Music



- **Taste the World (3/23/24):** 145 attendees | \$50/\$25 | Partner: First Magnitude Brewing Co.

- **Afro Roots Fest (4/5-6/24):** 553 attendees | \$10-60 (some free tickets) | Partners: Gainesville Fine Arts Association, UF Center for Arts, Migration and Entrepreneurship (CAME), Community Arts and Culture

- **Earth Day Fest (4/20/24):** 250 attendees | Free | Partners: Climate Collaboratory, UF Geology Department, Cinema Verde, Life Unplastic, River Phoenix Center for Peacebuilding, Sustainable Ocean Alliance UF, Climate Reality Project (Gainesville Chapter), Keep Alachua County Beautiful, CLEO Institute

- **Our Story/Our Voice (4/22/24):** 7 attendees | Free | Partner: Climate Collaboratory, Gainesville Fine Arts Association

- **Night in Brazil (5/23/24):** 368 attendees | Free | Partners: Harn Museum, Capoeira 352, Gainesville Samba Reggae
- **Persian Music Ensemble (10/20/24):** 93 attendees | Free | Partner: UF, Foundation for the Performance of Music



- **Global Fest 2024 (11/2/24):** 1,250 attendees; five performances and dozens of artisans and chefs | Free | Partners: City of Gainesville, Gainesville Community Reinvestment Area, UF

- **SkateQilya (11/9/24):** 150 attendees | Free | Partners: How Bazar, City of Qalqilia

- **GLX (Weekly):** 3,600 attendees | Free | Partner: How Bazar
- We continued to bring people together through innovative programs like the weekly

Community Partnerships: United for a Common Purpose

GGIC's work would not be possible without the collaboration with international, national and local organizations and leaders. 2024 partnerships included:

★ International Rescue Committee (IRC)	★ Gators for Refugee Medical Relief (GRMR)	★ Latina Women's League
★ Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM)	★ Harn Museum of Art	★ Cinema Verde
★ Congressional Office for International Leadership (COIL)	★ Santa Fe College	★ Khadija Foundation
★ Sister Cities International (SCI)	★ Alachua County	★ Zero Waste Gainesville
★ International Research and Exchange Board (IREX)	★ City of Gainesville	★ Climate Reality Project
★ University of Florida (UF)	★ Gainesville Community Reinvestment Area (GCRA)	★ How Bazar
★ Center of Arts Migrations and Entrepreneurship (CAME)	★ Bread of the Mighty Food Bank	★ First Magnitude Brewing Co.
★ UF International Center	★ Interfaith Alliance for Immigrant Justice	★ Afro Roots Festival
★ UF School of Music	★ River Phoenix Center for Peacebuilding	★ Community Health Equity Institute (CHEI)
★ UF College of Education	★ Gainesville Fine Arts Association	★ Gainesville Immigrant Neighbor Inclusion Initiative (GINI)
	★ Foundation for the Promotion of Music	★ Human Rights Coalition (HRC)
	★ National Federation of Music Clubs	★ EDA Consultants Inc.
	★ OneBeat/Found Sound Nation	★ Constant Contact
		★ Satchel's Pizza
		★ Abuela's

Economic Empowerment: Opening Doors to Opportunity

At GGIC, we understand that economic self-sufficiency is a cornerstone of successful resettlement and integration. This year, we began building out programs to connect individuals with meaningful employment and support small business entrepreneurship. Our partnerships with local employers and organizations helped address barriers like language and transportation, enabling refugees to find jobs and work on starting their own businesses so they are able to build a better future in Greater Gainesville.

Plans for our **Gainesville International Center for Trade** moved forward as we envision Greater Gainesville as a hub that fosters global trade relationships, supports local businesses in international expansion, and elevates Gainesville's profile as a leader in international trade. Still in development, this initiative represents our dedication to long-term economic empowerment for our community

Digital Engagement: Connecting in a Virtual World

In 2024, GGIC expanded its digital footprint, using social media and our website to reach a broader audience. Our Instagram following grew by over 40%, and our website saw an 81% increase in traffic. These platforms became vital tools for storytelling, fundraising and community building, ensuring that our message reached far and wide.

Financial Overview

Despite financial hurdles, GGIC managed to raise \$112,729.55 in direct monetary and in-kind donations in 2024, with an end-of-year net balance of \$19,970.66. Fundraising events like **Taste the World** and grants from the Gainesville Community Redevelopment Agency played critical roles in sustaining our operations.

- However, challenges remain. Outstanding gaps between our expected revenue and expenses highlight the need for continued fundraising and strategic financial planning. As we look ahead, we are committed to securing the resources necessary to expand our programs and serve even more families.

GGIC has confirmed our affiliate partnership agreement with IRC and has been assured at least 50 new arrivals between January and October, 2025. This will come with a little over \$100,000 of financial support for both direct assistance to our families and staff support.

Looking Ahead to 2025: Building on a Strong Foundation

As we reflect on 2024, we are inspired by the progress we have made and the lives we have touched. In 2025, GGIC will:

- Continue refugee resettlement program under the IRC partnership.
- Launch the **Gainesville International Center for Trade** to boost local and global economic opportunities.
- Continue to host cultural events and exchanges, further enriching Gainesville's vibrant international community.



OneBeat Summit 2025

We are especially excited to partner with One Beat and Found Sound Nation to host the first ever One Beat Summit in Gainesville December of 2025. OneBeat is the gathering place for the musical leaders of the 21st century – an incubator for music-based social entrepreneurship, where innovative musicians from

around the world launch collaborative projects designed to make a positive impact on local and global communities. This unique summit will bring together 40 international musicians and additional alumni from across the United States for a three day exploration of art, community and inclusion.

Our work is far from finished, but with the support of our partners, volunteers and donors, we are poised to make an even greater impact in the year ahead. Thank you for being part of this journey.

Together, we are building a welcoming community for all of our neighbors and better connecting Gainesville with the rest of the world. Thank you!

Board of Directors

Lauren Poe, Mona Ashour, Steve Kalishman, Aquleela Khuddus, Laila Fakhoury,
Lisa Dias, Heshan Illangkoon, Sonia Klein, Eli Newman

The Greater Gainesville International Center is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and a d/b/a under Sister City Program of Gainesville, Inc. EIN: 59-3455491