

MOST ADMIRED CEO AWARDS

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Carter Center CEO Paige Alexander is 'willing to go where others are not'



Paige Alexander, CEO of The Carter Center

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Editor's Note: This is a preview of Atlanta Business Chronicle's Most Admired CEO Awards, highlighting leaders who propel the performance of their organization and strength the fabric of the Atlanta community. The event will be held [Aug. 17](#).

When Paige Alexander returned to Atlanta June 1, 2020, the newly named CEO of The Carter Center saw her hometown and the nation in a way she never had before.

Covid-19 seemed to infect not only people, but also politics.

In cities across the country, protestors and police clashed over the murder of George Floyd, which happened just days before her arrival.

She left Atlanta in the early 1990s, traveling the world to work on humanitarian efforts and promote democracy. One of the first things she did when she returned, “I called Jason [Carter] and said we need to talk to your grandparents,” Alexander recalled to Atlanta Business Chronicle.

What came of that conversation was a shift. After 40 years of working in “hard places on hard problems” outside the U.S., The Carter Center would, once again, address domestic challenges as well.

“For me that just showed the flexibility and the willingness from the founders [former U.S. President Jimmy Carter and former First Lady Rosalynn Carter] to make sure we’re not just taking these messages overseas, but we’re willing to look in our own backyard.”

As she leads the center through its transition from being founder-led to a nimble organization able to address the issues of the day, Alexander carries with her lessons gleaned from the Carters: “the importance of not being afraid to take risks, and the willingness to go where other people aren’t willing to go yet,” Alexander said.

Under Alexander’s leadership, The Carter Center is still doing that. In addition to taking on domestic challenges, it is also forging ahead with longstanding efforts to improve mental health care, advance democracy and human rights, and eradicate “neglected tropical diseases.” So far this year, the Center’s staff has identified only one human case of Guinea worm disease, a parasitic illness caused by unclean drinking water. That’s down from 3.5 million cases in 21 countries in 1986.

What makes the work possible is the center’s staff, “experts in their areas, who I’m learning from,” said Alexander, who has spent more than two decades doing international development for nonprofit and governmental agencies.

The Carter Center, a nonpartisan, nongovernmental organization, has about 300 employees at its Atlanta headquarters, and nearly 3,000 workers overseas. Like many organizations, The Carter Center is also addressing current workplace challenges.

On recruiting and retaining a diverse workforce

“We at the Carter Center have attracted a lot of people, and the expectation is they’re going to come from Ivy League schools and speak two or three languages. I don’t think that’s necessarily needed in International Development. We’ve taken a much sharper look at some of our job descriptions to make sure that we’re not over asking, to diversify our incoming staff. We pay our interns now. We recruit from places that we had not recruited from before. We are finding our diversity numbers have gone up. About 44% of our workforce is diverse.”

While The Carter Center aims to resolve conflicts and improve health in some of the most remote parts of the world, it is still keeping an eye on technology, including artificial intelligence.

On artificial intelligence

“I think there’s a place for artificial intelligence (AI) because I think it provides some checks and balances,” Alexander said. “You can ask a simple question of AI and get a pretty remarkable answer ... I’m using [AI] mainly out of curiosity to see exactly what it can do. It’s another source of information and I’m excited it’s out there. It scares me a little bit. But I’m much more worried about the digital threats that happen during election cycles ... The inaccurate information that spreads like wildfire.”

“I don't know how to separate fact from fiction for a lot of people, and so if AI can do it effectively because people are checking it, maybe they’ll learn something. I think it's yet to be seen the effect that it will have, positive and negative.”

Atlanta's 75 Largest Nonprofit Organizations

Ranked by 2021 gross revenue

Rank	Organization	2021 Gross Revenue
1	Habitat for Humanity International Inc.	\$2.30 billion
2	MAP International Inc.	\$821.91 million
3	American Cancer Society	\$768.06 million

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