GDA Certified Downtown Professional Capstone Project

Capstone Project Overview

The GDA Certified Downtown Professional Capstone Project provides participants with the opportunity to apply the knowledge, tools, and strategies gained throughout the program to a real-world issue, challenge, or opportunity within their downtown district. This project should demonstrate your understanding of Georgia's downtown development principles, including what you learned throughout the program, and showcase your ability to plan and implement initiatives that positively impact your community.

Your completed project should serve as both a professional portfolio piece and a demonstration of your readiness to serve as a Certified Downtown Professional.

The capstone project must go beyond the routine duties of your position or your organization's existing annual work plan.

Final Project Requirements

- Written Submission (3–5 Pages)
    - Prepare a clear and professional report summarizing your project. The written component should:
        - Be 3–5 typed pages (excluding attachments or supporting materials).
        - Include your name, organization, and contact information on the cover page.
        - Follow the required project outline listed below.
        - Incorporate visuals, charts, and maps as attachments when appropriate.
- PowerPoint Presentation (10 Slides)
    - Create a visual summary of your project to accompany your written report. Your presentation will be used during:
        - The Annual GDA Conference (August), where participants present their projects to peers and evaluators. Be prepared to share which courses you integrated into your project.
        - A local presentation to your board, City Council, or community stakeholders. Photos or documentation must be submitted to the Education Committee to finalize the Capstone Project.
- Project Eligibility & Review
    - Participants must have no more than two classes remaining in the certification program before submitting a project idea for review.
    - Projects must be reviewed and approved by the GDA Professional Development Committee prior to implementation.

Project Elements

1. **Project Title**
    a. Provide a concise and descriptive title for your project.
2. **Executive Summary (1–2 Paragraphs)**
    a. Summarize the focus of your project, the problem or opportunity addressed, and the anticipated outcomes.
3. **Situation – Identifying the Need**
    a. Define the issue, challenge, or opportunity in your downtown district.
    b. Explain why this issue matters and its impact on the community.
    c. Include qualitative and quantitative data.
4. **Task – Goals and Objectives**
    a. Identify the primary goals of your project.
    b. Define measurable objectives that will indicate success.
    c. Consider economic, social, and cultural benefits.
5. **Action – Implementation Plan**
    a. Outline the specific steps taken or planned to address the issue.
    b. Discuss partnerships, collaborations, and key stakeholders.
    c. Describe data-driven decisions and best practices applied.
    d. Include a clear timeline or phased approach.
6. **Result – Impact and Lessons Learned**
    a. Summarize the results of your project, including both successes and challenges.
    b. Provide supporting data and visuals.
    c. Reflect on lessons learned and outline next steps for sustainability or improvement.
7. **Alignment with Downtown Development Principles & Curriculum Integration**
    a. Identify at least four CDP courses whose content directly shaped your project. Please name the specific tool, concept, or legal authority you applied and show how it is represented in your project.
    b. Explain how these were integrated into your approach and decision-making.
8. **Supporting Materials**
    a. Attach relevant documents, photos, reports, or other materials that reinforce your findings.

PowerPoint Guidelines

- **Slide 1:** Title Slide
    a. Project Title
    b. Candidate Name
    c. Organization
- **Slide 2:** Community & Project Summary
    a. Brief introduction of your community
    b. Overview of the issue, goal, and expected outcome
- **Slide 3:** Identifying the Need
    a. Clearly define the problem or opportunity
- **Slide 4:** Goals & Objectives
    a. Key goals and measurable objectives
    b. Visuals or infographics showing intended impact
- **Slides 5–6:** Implementation Plan
    a. Major actions taken
    b. Timeline or phases of work
    c. Photos of progress, if applicable
- **Slide 7:** Partnerships & Stakeholders
    a. Key collaborators (city officials, businesses, community groups, etc.)
- **Slides 8–9:** Results & Impact
    a. Before-and-after visuals, data charts, or testimonials
    b. Show measurable community or economic outcomes
- **Slide 10:** Lessons Learned & Next Steps
    a. What worked well
    b. Challenges faced
    c. Recommendations for future growth

Evaluation Criteria – Please refer to the rubric for further information.

Projects will be evaluated in the following areas:

- Clear understanding of downtown development concepts & curriculum integration
- Practical and actionable implementation
- Visual and written professionalism
- Demonstrated community impact
- Reflection and future sustainability

Examples of Eligible Projects

- Business retention and expansion initiative
- Streetscape or beautification improvement plan
- Wayfinding and signage master plan
- Public art or mural installation program
- Downtown marketing and branding campaign
- Vacant property inventory and activation strategy
- Small business pop-up or incubator project
- Upper-story housing or mixed-use redevelopment plan
- Downtown lighting or safety enhancement project
- Community event or festival revitalization strategy
- Heritage or historic walking tour with interpretive signage
- Downtown parking and mobility assessment
- Pocket park, plaza, or outdoor gathering space design
- Volunteer recruitment and downtown ambassador program
- Economic development or investor recruitment toolkit
- Gateway or corridor beautification project
- Cooperative advertising or shared marketing program for downtown businesses
- Technology integration project (QR codes, digital map, or smart kiosks)
- Long-term downtown master plan update or implementation strategy
    - Note: A combination of these ideas may be used for a final project. These are just ideas!

Example: Not sufficient: "Downtown festival." *Capstone-level:* "Event portfolio evaluation using economic impact and sponsorship data, leading to a restructured event strategy adopted by the DDA."

Example: Not sufficient: "Façade grant program." *Capstone-level:* "Façade grant pilot with eligibility criteria tied to design guidelines, a funding model, a baseline vacancy and condition inventory, and before/after measurement."