



Maria Balais
Executive Director
Leadership DeKalb

Maria Balais is the Executive Director for Leadership DeKalb. She is responsible for leading the membership organization in areas including leadership program development, fundraising, strategic planning, community relations, and board and volunteer coordination.

Prior to joining Leadership DeKalb, she had been a Community Relations Consultant since 2009, with clients from business, government and nonprofit sectors. Prior to consulting, she worked in both the public and private sectors. After receiving her BA from Agnes Scott College, she began working with the Hispanic community in metro Atlanta, beginning with the Latin American Association and the Mexican Center of Atlanta.

In the late 90's, Maria was recruited by the Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce to oversee the cultural affairs department as the Executive Director of the Arts & Business Council. By 2001, she was recruited to manage Sam Zamarripa's first Campaign for State Senate, who won and served two terms. Sam was the first Hispanic elected to the State Legislature in Georgia.

After working briefly in politics, she spent the next decade working in corporate community relations, including six years with ING Americas, managing their corporate foundation, overseeing \$5.8 million in philanthropic giving, volunteer programs and employee giving programs. Maria was then recruited as the community relations manager for Troutman Sanders, LLP, ranked one of the largest law firms in the U.S.

Maria has served on several boards and committees, and leveraged her community expertise for her clients, and now for Leadership DeKalb. She is also an "Urban Pioneer" and has resided in Downtown Atlanta for 20 years and she is mom to an 8 yr. old boy named CJ.