



VIRGINIA FUNDERS
NETWORK

The Power and Potential of Policy and Advocacy:

A Report for
Virginia Funders

FALL 2021

PREFACE

ABOUT THE VIRGINIA FUNDERS NETWORK

Launched in 2020, the [Virginia Funders Network](#) (VFN) is a statewide membership association composed of nearly 100 philanthropic organizations working to improve quality of life in the Commonwealth. Each year, our members invest more than \$250 million to support a wide range of Virginia’s community needs in areas such as education, health, housing, economic vitality, and social justice. Together, we’re building a connected, collaborative philanthropic community that advances opportunities for all Virginians and helps to fulfill our collective vision of a Virginia where all communities and residents are valued and thriving.

INTRODUCTION

Across the Commonwealth of Virginia, philanthropic funders are advancing their missions and visions in myriad ways. Increasingly, grantmakers are engaging in and funding policy and advocacy strategies and activities as a way to achieve their goals and increase their social impact.

In an effort to better understand this trend, the Virginia Funders Network (VFN), engaged Robin Mockenhaupt of Robin Mockenhaupt Consulting, LLC in spring – summer 2021 to conduct a field scan of policy and advocacy organizations and resources in Virginia. The scan, which culminates in **this report**, provides an overview of the current state of policy and advocacy efforts and organizations in the Commonwealth and answers key questions for VFN and its members, including:

1. What does the policy and advocacy landscape currently look like in Virginia? What are the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats?
2. Why, when, and how do funders engage in policy and advocacy in Virginia? What impact do funders hope to have?
3. How can VFN support members and funders in Virginia to engage in policy and advocacy activities?

This report is a summary of the findings of that scan, and is organized in four parts:

- Part 1** Includes an introduction and definitions used in the report, to help funders have shared language and understanding about policy and advocacy
- Part 2** Includes the findings and analysis of themes, including some brief vignettes of how Virginia funders are using policy and advocacy strategies
- Part 3** Includes resources for funders, including educational resources and a listing of Virginia organizations
- Part 4** Includes a description of the methodology and acknowledgements to the many people who aided in the creation, review, and production of this document.

We hope you find this report to be a useful resource as you work to advance opportunities for all Virginians and improve quality of life across the Commonwealth.



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report, commissioned by the Virginia Funders Network (VFN), provides an overview of the current state of policy and advocacy efforts among funders and policy and advocacy organizations in the Commonwealth. A field scan with 80 organizations and 100 individuals was conducted in spring - summer 2021. The findings are summarized in this report, and answer key questions for VFN and its members, including:

1. What does the policy and advocacy landscape currently look like in Virginia? What are the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats?
2. Why, when, and how do funders engage in policy and advocacy in Virginia? What impact do funders hope to have?
3. How can VFN support members and funders in Virginia to engage in policy and advocacy activities?

Five common themes were identified in conversations with Virginia funders:

1. **Policy and advocacy are powerful tools for funders who want to have greater impact:** Funders who use policy and advocacy see these powerful strategies as not only core to their missions, but also critical to the kind of social impact and systems change they hope to achieve.
2. **Involvement in policy and advocacy can help to increase opportunity and equity, especially for communities and populations that have historically been marginalized or excluded from decision-making and resources:** One of the primary reasons funders and nonprofit organizations in Virginia say they use policy and advocacy strategies is to increase fair and just opportunities for identified communities and populations.
3. **Organizational capacity investments can help ensure a diverse and thriving policy and advocacy community:** Investment in a spectrum of policy and advocacy expertise and capacities are needed to ensure that the Commonwealth has a robust policy and advocacy community capable of expanding opportunities for all Virginians.
4. **Strategic partnerships across sectors and issues can foster collective impact:** Working together and across issues and sectors (e.g., business, government, nonprofits) gives funders an opportunity to create real and lasting change.
5. **Virginia Funders Network can help members effectively use policy and advocacy to advance opportunities for all Virginians:** A membership association like Virginia Funders Network can provide opportunities for education, support, networking, and collective action for funders across the state.

- PART 1** Includes the introduction and definitions used in the report, to help funders have shared language and understanding about policy and advocacy.
- PART 2** Discusses the findings and analysis of themes, including some brief vignettes of how Virginia funders are using policy and advocacy strategies.
- PART 3** Highlights resources for funders, including educational resources and a listing of Virginia organizations.
- PART 4** Describes the methodology and lists acknowledgements.

With the growth of the policy and advocacy community in Virginia, with changes in social and cultural awareness as a country and state, and with all states facing recovery from a global pandemic, this is a ripe time for VFN and the philanthropy community to be engaged in policy and advocacy activities. Virginia funders are poised to reach an unprecedented level of effectiveness, and policy and advocacy can be critical tools to accomplishing this vision.

PART 1:

INTRODUCTION AND DEFINITIONS

Bolder Advocacy, 2021

When a foundation invests in advocacy, either by supporting nonprofits or engaging in advocacy itself, the value of its overall giving is multiplied exponentially. It's important to know that foundation support for nonprofits that engage in advocacy, including lobbying and election-related activities, isn't just legal—it's important, powerful, and fundamental to democracy.

1 Definitions

2 Virginia Funders Engagement in Policy and Advocacy

3 Considerations for Beginning/Deepening Policy and Advocacy Activities

4 Examples of Foundation Engagement in Policy and Advocacy

1 Definitions

While the words “policy” and “advocacy” can conjure up vastly different ideas and connotations for different readers, this report focuses specifically on **public policy** (e.g., policies of governments).

PUBLIC POLICY:

The set of principles, laws, plans, behaviors, and actions that government entities (i.e., federal, state, local) choose to do, or not do. For example, the [American Rescue Plan Act \(ARPA\)](#), which was signed into law by President Biden in March of 2021, included several measures that provide economic relief to those who experienced pandemic-related hardships due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It included nearly \$7 billion in funding for Virginia businesses and organizations to expand access to affordable health coverage, address students’ learning loss and mental health challenges, provide assistance to small businesses and local governments, and more.

ADVOCACY:

Public support for, or recommendation of, a particular cause or policy. Advocacy means making the case for your cause or mission (Bolder Advocacy, 2021). Non-profits and funders can and do use many types of advocacy strategies to help ensure that public policy supports and advances the causes they care about. For example, [Voices for Virginia’s Children](#) is an organization devoted to advocacy for kids, focusing on policies related to early care and education, child welfare, health and mental health, economic security, etc.

Being involved in public policy and advocacy means being aware of and engaged in the ideas and actions of government and the officials elected to represent us, at the national, state, and/or local levels. Government is the mechanism for the public policy process, and our elected officials and their staff members drive and create the policies that eventually become law. As their constituents and important stakeholders in civil society, elected officials need to hear from us about the types of policies that will help strengthen Virginia communities and ensure that all residents of the Commonwealth have opportunities to thrive.

2 Virginia Funders' Engagement in Policy and Advocacy

Some funders interviewed for this scan have used policy and advocacy strategies for decades while others have chosen not to pursue these strategies for a variety of reasons. Many funders are somewhere in the middle – interested in how policy and advocacy can help advance their organization's mission, but not sure where to begin or what can legally or practically be done. Some use these strategies and tools but don't use the terms policy and advocacy, choosing to work behind the scenes to influence decisionmakers in their communities.

In interviews, the main reason Virginia funders gave for engaging in policy and advocacy was an understanding that many of the social challenges philanthropy is trying to tackle are too big and intractable for grant dollars alone to make a significant impact. Those funders who are going beyond dollars and using their voice, influence, and convening leaders at all levels, are more likely to achieve the widespread and permanent outcomes and changes they seek.

There are many misconceptions about funders' support of policy and advocacy: it's legally risky, it's too controversial, it doesn't deliver tangible benefits, it can't be measured and evaluated. Some foundations see policy and advocacy strategies as an "add on" set of activities rather than part of their organization's overall strategic approach. While there are important legal and technical issues to be considered and understood, there are countless helpful resources (see Appendices) that address the myths and misconceptions around policy and advocacy and provide guidance to foundations interested in using these strategies to maximize their impact.

3 Considerations for Beginning/Deepening Policy and Advocacy Activities

Consider the following questions as you consider beginning or deepening involvement in policy and advocacy strategies:

- Will this help achieve your mission, goals, and reflect your values?
- Do you want to have influence on what might be possible?
- Are you curious about how your organization might have more impact?
- Can you take small steps that will help you learn what is important and has impact?
- Have you talked with Board members, staff and other key stakeholders about using policy and advocacy strategies, or laid the groundwork to do so?
- Do you have trusting relationships and collaborate with key partners? Will relationships change (positively or negatively) if you get involved in policy and advocacy, and how can these relationships be maintained/developed?
- Do you have the skill sets on your team (Board, staff, grantees, or volunteers) or can you leverage/partner with others to get needed skills?
- Do you understand what time might be involved? Policy change is a journey and can take time to achieve desired goals.
- Do you know how much you are willing to do, and what the benefits and opportunity costs might be?
- How would you define success?

Funders of ALL shapes and sizes can legally pursue policy and advocacy strategies and activities in small or big ways. You don't have to be a large organization to use these tools. Advocacy is often a natural evolution for many foundations, and is typically a strategy to accomplish the foundation's goals, not an end in itself. While community foundations have more legal latitude than private foundations, all funders can engage in policy and advocacy activities, ranging from increasing awareness of various policies to building will among the public or decisionmakers to taking action on specific legislation. For example, these activities might include participating in local boards and commissions on policy issues of interest; funding data collection, policy research, and/or public education campaigns; funding grantees to build coalitions and movements; or using your organization's voice to help shape the public debate. Policy and advocacy strategies are especially important when a goal is to make sure that underrepresented and marginalized communities have a voice in decisions that affect them.

4 Examples of Foundation Engagement in Policy and Advocacy

CREATING AWARENESS

- ✓ Educating key audiences about policy issues (e.g., community residents, policymakers)
- ✓ Writing Letters to the Editor or Op Eds
- ✓ Funding data collection, policy research and/or analysis

BUILDING WILL

- ✓ Identifying and building the capacity of policy champions
- ✓ Funding community engagement and organizing
- ✓ Shifting mindsets about specific policies and how they affect communities/audiences

TAKING ACTION

- ✓ Engaging in rulemaking/regulatory processes
- ✓ Funding coalitions and technical assistance
- ✓ Advocating for different uses/allocations of government funds

See Part 3: Appendix & Resources for more policy and advocacy definitions, including community engagement, community organizing, power building, etc.

PART 2

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Five common themes were identified in conversations with Virginia funders:

- 1** Policy and advocacy are powerful tools for funders who want to have greater impact.
- 2** Involvement in policy and advocacy can help to increase opportunity and equity, especially for communities and populations that have historically been marginalized or excluded from decision-making and resources.
- 3** Organizational capacity investments can help ensure a diverse and thriving policy and advocacy community.
- 4** Strategic partnerships across sectors and issues can foster collective impact.
- 5** Virginia Funders Network can help members effectively use policy and advocacy to advance opportunities for all Virginians.

Each of these themes is described in the next pages, along with some examples of how organizations in Virginia have realized them.

1 Policy and advocacy are powerful tools for funders who want to have greater impact

Funders who use policy and advocacy see these powerful strategies as not only core to their missions, but also critical to the kind of social impact and systems change they hope to achieve. In examining the criteria for impact and the audiences they hope to reach, funders recognize that being engaged in policy and advocacy must be included in the ways they use their influence. While some have specifically included these strategies in their strategic plans, others are using these strategies but don't necessarily use the terms "policy" or "advocacy" to describe their influence work.

Example:

Williamsburg Health Foundation

After President & CEO Carol Sale joined the [Williamsburg Health Foundation](#) in 2018, she and the staff began a process to strengthen the foundation's core understanding of the role foundations can play in advocacy work, which led to an update of the foundation's strategic plan. While the existing plan had an acknowledgement of the importance of health in all policy and advocacy, developing a new plan offered an opportunity to bring these functions more to the forefront in an intentional way. Following a year of advocacy training for the board and staff in 2019, a new plan was developed during 2020. Staff built on their newly learned skills and strategic direction early in 2020 with funding of the Oral Health Coalition to advocate for an oral health benefit through Medicaid. A Board Committee was reorganized to focus on External Affairs, which included advocacy, public communications, and annual awards. The staff and Board began discussing aspects of the emerging strategic plan at

each Board meeting, and Bolder Advocacy conducted an educational session for Board members and staff about what foundations can legally do. Follow-on discussions have included sessions on what the foundation should be doing in support of their strategic plan, as well as two sessions with local nonprofits about how they can advocate for themselves. A new strategic plan and advocacy plan were developed and approved, and the Foundation is now in implementation phases. Implementation includes funding for policy and advocacy groups that address the Foundation's strategic priorities. Staff also meets with local elected officials and hosts breakfasts for local legislators and their aides about issues of importance. Carol Sale reflected "we have come to realize that funding "upstream" is imperative to begin making lifelong changes for better health in our community and a lot of that work begins with advocacy."

Example:

ACT for Alexandria

The 2020 Census was the impetus for [ACT for Alexandria](#), a community foundation, to start small and fund policy and advocacy activities in addition to funding direct service support for Alexandria nonprofits. The Census was an opportunity for the Foundation and community organizations to “build their muscles” around policy and advocacy, and to foster civic engagement for residents of the city. An important role the Foundation played was to serve as a connector in Alexandria, bringing together nonprofits, the City’s Complete Count Committee, and the business community. This collaboration resulted in a complete count for the City of Alexandria in the 2020 Census. ACT also provided mini-grants to community organizations to serve as trusted messengers and promote the Census. The working relationship with City government deepened as ACT mobilized the community around COVID response.

This work evolved into advocacy regarding pandemic recovery. ACT supported nonprofits, the faith community, residents, and other community leaders in participating in the City’s decision-making process around the use of ARPA funds. ACT used their influence and voice by providing public testimony at City Council meetings and creating advocacy tools and resources for nonprofits to use. ACT plans to align the funding priorities of its discretionary Resilience Fund to complement and/or fill in the gaps from the city’s ARPA allocations. “When we began working with the City on the 2020 Census, we saw how we could partner with local government and mobilize the community to achieve our collective goals,” explained Heather Peeler, ACT’s President & CEO. “We started with a small step that blossomed into deeper partnership.”

The strategic priorities of Virginia funders are diverse, including education, health, housing, economic security and workforce development, democracy and civic participation, criminal justice, the arts, social justice, and more. The policy strategies funders use varies according to issue areas, funders’ geographic focus, and the level of comfort a funder’s board and staff have in using the organization’s voice and influence, in addition to their traditional grant dollars. **Below are some examples of policy issues cited by Virginia funders as areas of interest.**

- **An important economic security and workforce policy issue is providing funding for trained and certified community health workers (CHWs).** CHWs are lay community members who provide culturally appropriate health education and information, help people get the care they need, give informal counseling and guidance on health behaviors, advocate for individual and community health needs, and provide some direct services. [Studies](#) show that community health workers can save money in emergency room visits and chronic care for patients.

Increasingly, foundations are being asked to pay for these community health workers, particularly those serving immigrant and non-English speaking communities. A policy change that allowed Medicaid to cover these workers could save the state important funds that could be used elsewhere, while providing more access to health care for Virginia communities and residents. In addition, CHWs can help make sure current eligible Medicaid enrollees don't lose coverage, which is particularly important now that Virginia's Medicaid program includes a dental health benefit.

- **Work to increase the supply of, and expand options for affordable housing is happening in multiple regions.** Many Virginia households are cost burdened, spending more than a third of their income on housing. That limits the ability of families to pay for other needed expenses, like

health care and food. Restrictive zoning policies and inadequate funding of low-income housing are two policy issues of importance in many parts of the state, and on which several funders are engaged.

- **Several Virginia funders are interested in education, from pre-K through post-secondary training, and the impacts of the COVID pandemic have raised the visibility of these issues.** Young children's growth and learning is one of the most important factors in school success. Several Virginia funders support funding of early care and education, including policies that encourage access to quality child care and pre-K for all Virginia families, and training for early childhood professionals.

Several suggestions for funders who are considering more engagement in these areas emerged from funders who use policy and advocacy tools:

- **Assess the capacity/readiness of leadership at the governance, executive, and staff level, and develop/acquire those skillsets over time.** Discuss the values and goals of engagement and educate staff and Board members about what policy and advocacy is (and isn't), and what engagement funders can legally have.
- **Listen to grantees, partners, and community members to help understand the most pressing community issues that need to be addressed through policy engagement and action** (e.g., community site visits, panels of community members, surveys/research).
- **Start small, experiment, and learn as an organization;** get involved through an issue the foundation cares about deeply. Use discretionary funding at first (if possible), as there may be more flexibility, innovation, and willingness to take smart risks.
- **Incorporate policy and advocacy strategies into a strategic plan development/updates;** have the plan formally approved by the Board.
- **Create or expand an existing committee or workgroup of the Board to focus on policy and advocacy,** such as a Program and Policy Committee, or an Advocacy and Communications Committee.

2 Involvement in policy and advocacy can help to increase opportunity and equity

One of the primary reasons funders and nonprofit organizations in Virginia say they use policy and advocacy strategies is to increase opportunities for the communities and populations they care about. Some groups describe their work as helping to ensure that individuals, families, communities, and entire generations who have historically been held back or excluded from opportunity are included, valued, and have opportunities to thrive. Others focus on more recent events like the pandemic and subsequent economic impacts that have exacerbated longstanding disparities, and want to assess if philanthropic “business as usual” is actually working for those in need. Many groups use terms of equity, justice (e.g., racial, social, economic, health), power, and fairness. While the language used varies by organization, the theme that policy and advocacy can help increase opportunity and equity was highlighted in most of the interviews conducted for this report.

Policy has the power to change narratives, mindsets, behaviors, and increase opportunity. For example, tobacco control policies led to changed mindsets about the dangers of tobacco use, the importance of clean indoor air, and led to healthier outcomes for many people. Policy change at all levels of government can promote wellbeing on a number of social and economic issues, and advance opportunity and equity. Sometimes policies have created inequities, like redlining in housing policies, and policy change is needed to provide fair opportunities for all. Policy change can be long-lasting and self-sustaining, but it can also take significant time to achieve desired outcomes; some Virginia organizations cited their work to effect specific policy change taking a decade or longer. Policies can also change when new leaders and administrations come into office, so constant effort is needed to promote, protect, or defend desired policies. Funders and advocacy organizations talked about the need to be strategic, patient, persistent, and understand that making important social change is a long-term learning journey that requires vision, skillsets, time, and is “not for the weak.”

Example:

Robins Foundation

[The Robins Foundation](#) in Richmond, Virginia has a sixty-year legacy of furthering education for students at every level of the socioeconomic spectrum. In 2014, the Foundation's Board empowered staff to find and execute ideas that would lead to transformative change through the lens of education's role in combating intergenerational poverty. One resulting idea was the Community Innovation Grants (CIGs), which are awarded to nonprofits that offer innovative solutions to complex problems in emerging communities. Recipients of these grants are a diverse group whose accomplishments make clear the role education can play in setting kids up for success, reducing poverty and creating meaningful and lasting impacts.

You may already benefit from the Robins Foundation's grantee partners, without even knowing it. An early CIG recipient was [CodeVA](#), a statewide policy initiative focused on ensuring computer science education for all Virginia's students. The initiative secured passage of three legislative bills impacting 1.3 million students, and made Virginia the first state to create a

coding curriculum requirement. [ART 180](#), another grantee, is a youth self-advocacy initiative who partnered with [Legal Aid Justice Center](#) and [Performing Statistics](#) to focus on eradicating the school to prison pipeline. ART 180 uses best practices in youth development to facilitate workshops and create opportunities for young people to express themselves through art. The initiative's exhibitions have toured the state, including installations in the General Assembly to raise awareness and impact policy. This CIG initiative to disrupt the school to prison pipeline also led to the creation of other youth advocacy organizations, including [Rise for Youth](#).

Robert Dortch, the Foundation's VP of Program and Community Innovation, says, "These are examples of how coming at enduring systemic problems from new, creative, and strategic angles, can create significant change across an entire lifetime. School is where so much development happens, and we will continue working with our visionary community partners to create innovative, effective programs that ripple out from there to make a lasting impact."

Example:

Richmond Memorial Health Foundation

[Richmond Memorial Health Foundation](#) (RMHF) has roots as a [health legacy](#) foundation. Since 2015, the organization has been on a learning journey to understand both the social determinants of health and the impact of race on health. A report published in 2015 by VCU's Center on Society and Health, outlining [the stark discrepancies in life expectancy](#) between neighborhoods less than 5 miles apart, prompted Trustee Dr. Bill Nelson to ask, "Is it morally acceptable for one's zip code and race to determine their health outcomes?" RMHF Trustees, motivated by their learnings and passion for greater impact, adopted the mission "Fostering an equitable and healthy Richmond region" that has set the course for organization's work since 2016. [Abraham Segres](#), Vice Chair of RMHF's Trustees and Vice President of Quality and Patient Safety for the Virginia Hospital and Healthcare Association says, "At RMHF, the Trustees seek to invest in strategies that realize large-scale, lasting change to advance health equity. Policy and advocacy work is one of the most effective ways to reach this

goal. One of our first actions in that space was to invest in organizations working to support Medicaid expansion through research and public education. The work of our partners and many others has resulted in Medicaid now serving more than 1.5 million Virginians. Expanded access to care is core to health equity and RMHF's mission and we will continue to advocate for it through support of our policy partners."

In response to the realities of public health in our region and with guidance from our [Equity + Health Fellows](#), RMHF has transitioned from a passive funder to a champion for equity and health. Says RMHF Trustee Deborah Ulmer, "The Foundation's commitment to this work reflects the deep learning our Trustees have done and continue to do, and our belief that health care and social services delivery alone will not get us where we need to go. We will continue supporting policy and advocacy efforts that stand to advance health equity for our region."

Several suggestions for organizations considering this work emerged from funders who use policy and advocacy as a means to focus on opportunity and equity:

- **Use an opportunity and equity lens** to determine where to focus and set priorities.
- **Understand the audiences you communicate with, and pay attention to the language used to discuss opportunity and equity.** Test what words resonate best with the communities and populations you serve.
- **Be willing to have honest and sometimes difficult conversations** with staff, Board members, communities, and other stakeholders.
- **Consider what the organizational risk tolerance is and how much the organization is willing to do.**
- Analyze leadership dynamics among key groups and individuals and **understand how recognized and unrecognized power can be built in people, communities, and organizations.**
- **Be patient, persistent, and understand that this is a long-term journey.**

3 Organizational capacity investments can help ensure a diverse and thriving policy and advocacy community

The policy and advocacy community in Virginia has grown and matured over time. For many years there was a perception of only a handful of advocacy organizations working in the state. Over the past 10-15 years, the infrastructure has grown and developed, with the establishment of more groups and a deepening of expertise and focus on particular policy issue areas. Today, the general assessment from interviewees is of a growing and increasingly strong advocacy community which has built relationships over time, knows its “lanes of expertise,” and generally works well together in coalitions. Whether the goal is to pass or prevent passage of legislation on a particular issue, defend against budget cuts, rally for more funding, or to educate certain audiences about the impact and implementation of a law or regulation, it’s clear that a spectrum of policy and advocacy expertise and capacities are needed to ensure that the Commonwealth has a robust policy and advocacy community capable of expanding opportunities for all Virginians. Some of these capacities and areas of expertise include funding and understanding research and analysis of policy options and alternatives, development and implementation of campaigns, strong and diverse coalitions, stakeholder engagement and movement-building, effective communications strategies and support, active grass “roots” and grass “middle” networks, and financial resources ([Community Catalyst, 2021](#)).

Interviews included organizations that provide general legal aid, policy think tanks, state advocacy organizations, state and local community engagement and organizing, and those groups focused on one or more particular issue area (e.g., health, housing, education). Most organizations recognize the cross-issue connections of the social, health, and economic determinants. Advocacy campaigns often address multiple policy issues. For example, groups focused on education might also address policies associated with intergenerational poverty, housing, and criminal justice, as these systems all impact educational outcomes. All organizations focus on those Virginians most affected or in need, and all talked about the deep connections between advocacy and opportunity, equity, and justice. Issues of [intersectionality](#) also were raised in interviews, with a focus on those individuals facing multiple barriers to opportunity.

In the past 12-18 months, policy and advocacy organizations in Virginia, like many in the social change space, have been working at and above capacity to respond to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the resultant economic crises and its impacts on Virginians, particularly low-income and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities. In addition, Virginia has had an active General Assembly and Administration and leadership and staff at policy and advocacy organizations report being tired and stretched overly thin, a concern that the funding community should be aware of and work to help address.

The geographic footprint of advocacy organizations in Virginia was also highlighted across interviews, including what “statewide” coverage or impact means. Some groups describe themselves as statewide if they have a presence in Richmond. Others have offices in different cities or counties in the Commonwealth, and some are present in a few Virginia regions, often those areas with larger population density. Very few organizations have a footprint across the entire state, and those that do often have fewer resources and presence in more rural areas. When analyzing the network of organizations, capacity, and collective impact across the state, this is a noted gap.

Example:

Support for including an Oral Health benefit in Virginia’s Medicaid program

Like many advocacy efforts, the successful campaign to include an Oral Health benefit in Medicaid was a decade long effort that involved many players and phases. The first 5-6 years were primarily focused on education and shifting mindsets of key partners from thinking about providing dental care to covering Oral Health care. [Oral Health](#) is essential to general health, mental health, and wellbeing, affects school performance and attendance at work or school, and diseases costs taxpayers billions of dollars each year. The focus of the campaign was on why the oral health benefit was important and why policymakers focus was important.

About 5 years into the campaign, funders like the Richmond Memorial Health Foundation and the DentaQuest Foundation became engaged, followed by additional financial support from other members of the Virginia Consortium for Health Philanthropy. Funding provided policy and advocacy organizations like [Virginia Health Catalyst](#) the ability to elevate the importance of this health priority. Philanthropic funding supported “grass middle” workers and organizations (i.e., home visitors, community health workers) as well as grassroots advocacy. Funders also supported the development of policy financing options, communications and messaging

for the public and for decision-makers, policymaker education, and policymaker implementation, to ensure that policy worked “on the ground.” An OpEd from foundation leaders was shared with key committee members in the state legislature, highlighting the importance of this needed oral health policy change that “no amount of philanthropy could fix.” Medicaid expansion happened in Virginia in 2018, and

the adult oral health benefit finally went into effect on July 1, 2021. Sarah Holland, CEO of Virginia Catalyst, reflects that “funders have the opportunity to use their power, in addition to their checkbook. The ‘superpower’ that funders have is to go beyond grantmaking and in addition to the money, use their voice and influence to convene, educate, and make the case for what they believe is important.”

Several suggestions emerged about the infrastructure, resources, and support needed to effectively nurture Virginia’s policy and advocacy community. There was enthusiasm among policy and advocacy organizations to understand and connect with the funding community, including business/corporate funders and state/national funders. There was also interest in VFN serving as a central collaborative space for bringing policy and advocacy and the funding communities together to work on coordination, collective planning, and impact.

- **Encourage funders to invest in legally-allowable policy and advocacy organizations and functions.** While the infrastructure is stronger than in the past, there is still hesitancy among many funders to be engaged in or fund policy and advocacy, especially advocacy activities of nonprofits. Some funders may fund policy research or analysis, but this may not be coupled with action.
- **Expand organizational capacity to cover the entire Commonwealth,** in addition to specific regions within the state (e.g., Northern Virginia, Richmond, Hampton Roads regions).
- **Strengthen the advocacy infrastructure at state, community, neighborhood, and grassroots levels.** Activities like community engagement and organizing will help to raise community members’ voices. Empowering people in local communities to address issues that affect the quality of their lives will make policy outcomes even stronger.
- **Provide multi-year, flexible, general operating support and unrestricted funding,** that will allow organizations to be nimble and innovative, and build capacity.
- **Provide communications support** on shifting mindsets, framing issues, and developing and testing messages, especially around more equitable opportunity.
- **Support training and coaching for nonprofits and funders on an array of issues,** including policy and advocacy, community-centric approaches, leadership development, relationship building, etc.

4 Strategic partnerships across sectors and issues can foster collective impact

African Proverb

*If you want to go fast, go alone.
If you want to go far, go together.*

No one sector or organization has the resources needed to address the complex issues facing Virginia or our communities. Working together and across sectors (e.g., business, government, nonprofits) gives funders an opportunity to create real and lasting change. Collaboration takes shape in many forms (like networks, movements, collective impact) and in many funding possibilities (such as co-funding or pooled funds). For example, collective impact can bring people together, in a structured way, to make social change. Collaborative funding models like co-funding, using pooled funds, or blended and braiding funding allows multiple funders to share the costs of funding programs and policy activities. However, collaboration among funders can be challenging, especially if they are place-based or don't share priorities or a common vision that would mutually benefit an array of communities and organizations. The experience of the Virginia Consortium for Health Philanthropy (VCHP) was that – in addition to seeking a specific project or idea for collaboration – funders could look at issues that were relevant to multiple communities and support knowledge-building and tool-sharing across issues and regions.

During the pandemic, many funders across Virginia came together with business and nonprofit leaders and other stakeholders in their communities to help address emergency needs, including responding to the immediate health crises and addressing residents' basic needs for food, shelter, childcare, and broadband access. These relationships, forged during a time of crises, can now be leveraged with their effective use of ARPA monies in Virginia counties and cities. While partnerships with government and business were mentioned as examples, few interviewees mentioned partnerships with academic institutions with public policy schools or departments.

This may be an opportunity and potential strategic partnership for more funders and nonprofits to use in the future, such as seen in the next vignette.

Example:

Community Foundation of the New River Valley

With a staff of three and a smaller endowment, the [Community Foundation of the New River Valley](#) wanted to work strategically to accomplish their mission in four counties and one city in rural, southwest Virginia. The staff developed relationships with several partners in the region, namely the NRV Regional Commission (NRVRC) and academic institutions Virginia Tech, Radford University, and New River Community College. The partnership with NRVRC has provided valuable connections to local government officials, and helped the Foundation to identify regional needs to inform grantmaking and other programs.

With this knowledge in mind, CEO Jessica Wirgau engaged researchers at Virginia Tech to do a network analysis on early childhood organizations and providers, a key area of need in the region and a focus for Foundation support. The academic institution provided legitimacy for the effort and a tool for understanding regional needs, strengths, and relationships that respondents had not previously seen. The

CFNRV then brought respondents together to review the findings and use them as a jumping off point to identify [three priorities](#) they would work on together, which has evolved into [First Steps](#), a coalition that builds connections between providers supporting young children and families. The university-community partnership has continued beyond the initial analysis, providing ongoing evaluation of First Steps' activities, and it's been replicated in other issue areas, like food access and community health. These networks have also moved into policy and advocacy activities by providing members with common messaging, templates for communicating with legislators, and shared data. Wirgau shares, "By leveraging our partnerships and using a network approach, we've been able to accomplish far more than we could with grants alone. We've positioned ourselves as a regional leader and resource, which has expanded our impact and attracted new donors, a clear win-win for the CFNRV."

Several suggestions for organizations considering this work emerged from funders who use policy and advocacy as a means to focus on opportunity and equity:

- **Understand the external environment and the policy context in which you work** - in the local community, in Richmond, and nationally.
- **Identify what issues are important to you and your partners**, what issues have traction, what current policies are (and aren't), and where there is support for change.
- **Develop and expand relationships with other strategic partners, organizations, and stakeholders who are interested in policy and advocacy**, including elected officials, advocacy groups, governmental and non-profit agencies and organizations, the business community universities, etc. Join a local task force or commission addressing topics of funder interest.
- **Use of influence as a funder** – such as convening and communicating with key stakeholders – may have more impact than grants and projects alone.
- **Identify and create opportunities for pooled funds and/or braiding and blending of funds**, to support a collective impact approach in cities/counties/communities, as well as at the state level.
- **Start with one project/program and build relationships over time**. In the end, relationships develop at the speed of trust.

5 Virginia Funders Network can help members effectively use policy and advocacy that advances opportunities for all Virginians

Dr. Seuss, *The Lorax*

*Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot,
nothing is going to get better. It's not.*

A membership association like Virginia Funders Network can provide opportunities for education, support, networking, and collective action for funders across the state. Based on the interviews and conversations, a SWOT Analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) of the policy and advocacy landscape in Virginia points to several possible options for VFN and the Commonwealth’s philanthropy community.

STRENGTHS

Use of policy and advocacy by VA funders has grown over the past decade.

A focus on systems change can help funders significantly advance their missions and increase outcomes.

Virginia has an increasingly connected and growing policy and advocacy community.

S

Focus on engaging and giving voice to community residents, and enabling them to advocate for their families, neighborhoods, etc.

O

Better understanding and awareness of the systemic impacts of racism and discrimination on social determinants of wellbeing.

VFN can provide learning, connections, and help to leverage collaborations within and outside the Commonwealth.

OPPORTUNITIES

WEAKNESSES

Advocacy is still a “hard sell” among some in the funding community, especially at the Board and Trustee level.

Some regions in the Commonwealth (especially outside cities) are served by fewer policy organizations.

W

Few connections exist between funders and university policy programs/expertise.

T

Lack of understanding among some funders about what policy and advocacy activities are legally allowable.

Political polarization and distrust among leaders and electorate to accomplish common goals.

National and global crises (i.e., COVID) affect Virginia residents, economy, and wellbeing and require significant time, energy, and response from community leaders.

THREATS

Suggestions were offered as to possible roles for the Virginia Funders Network in policy and advocacy, including:

- **Provide regular education for philanthropy staff and Board members about the reason for and benefits of funders using policy and advocacy strategies:** What is possible? What can legally and realistically be done? What are the needs? How to best support grantees, advocacy organizations, communities, and residents to advocate for themselves?
- **Share best practices and facilitate relationships across Virginia's funders** and help to identify common issues that are relevant across places, regions, and the state.
- **Provide annual, easy to understand updates on what is happening at the General Assembly,** especially for those funders not near Richmond.
- **Identify potential opportunities for engagement** far enough in advance so funders can plan and implement them.
- **Provide a framework and guidance for VFN networking groups' engagement in policy and advocacy.**

In addition to supporting the networking groups involvement in policy and advocacy on specific issue areas (e.g., housing, education, health, social justice), there may be occasions when VFN wants to use its influence and voice to advocate for important issues in philanthropy or the state. These opportunities can be considered in the future, as funders develop and deepen their involvement and engagement. In addition, some states (e.g., NC, MI, CT, NM) and cities (e.g., Los Angeles, Pittsburgh, Denver) have created Philanthropy Liaisons with the state or city government. The role is to improve interaction between state/city government and the philanthropic sector, educate philanthropy and government about each other, and encourage collaboration on projects. Perhaps a philanthropic liaison can be developed in Virginia, with support from the funding community.

SUMMARY AND FINAL THOUGHTS

With the growth of the policy and advocacy community in Virginia, with changes in social and cultural awareness as a country and state, and with all states facing recovery from a global pandemic, this is a ripe time for VFN and Virginia's philanthropy community to be engaged in policy and advocacy activities. As a philanthropy-serving organization (PSO), VFN has an opportunity to not only serve, but also to lead its members. Funders want their resources – financial, reputational, and human – to make a difference. The key question is what kind of a difference do Virginia funders, and VFN, want to make?

Based on the results of this scan, now is the time to capitalize on the momentum of increased opportunities and successes of the last several years. VFN is in a position to be an important resource to ensure that all Virginia residents have opportunities to thrive, especially those whose voice has historically been left out of decision-making. VFN has the opportunity to leverage the key resources of not only the Commonwealth's philanthropic community, but also national and regional funders, to build investment in the future of Virginia. It can network with other key stakeholders and build partnerships through collaboration and coordination, to accomplish more together than can be accomplished by any one group alone. VFN's vision is a Virginia where all communities and residents are valued and thriving. Virginia philanthropy is poised to reach an unprecedented level of effectiveness, and policy and advocacy can be a critical tool to accomplishing this vision.

PART 3

APPENDIX

Resources on policy, advocacy, and impact for funders.

1 Organizations that can provide general policy and advocacy education, training, and materials for funders

2 Resource Guides on Philanthropy and Policy and Advocacy

3 Policy and Advocacy Organizations

1 Organizations that can provide general policy and advocacy education, training, and materials for funders

[BOARD SOURCE](#)

The [Stand for Your Mission campaign](#) seeks to unleash the full potential of the nonprofit sector to create positive impact by engaging board leaders more directly in the advocacy work of their organizations.

[BOLDER ADVOCACY](#)

A program of Alliance for Justice that promotes active engagement in the policy-making process by giving nonprofits and foundations the confidence to speak out courageously and protecting their right to do so.

[COUNCIL ON FOUNDATIONS](#)

As a national voice for philanthropy, the Council works to create an environment in which philanthropy can thrive by promoting policies that allow the philanthropic sector to remain vibrant, inclusive, innovative, and effective.

[SOUTHEASTERN COUNCIL OF FOUNDATIONS](#)

SECF is proactive in the public policy space – “strength in numbers” is essential to achieving success in state capitols and in Washington, where members empower one another to mount a vigorous defense of philanthropy, educate policymakers, and promote the ability of funders to address community priorities.

[UNITED PHILANTHROPY FORUM](#)

United Philanthropy Forum influences public policy to create a more supportive environment for philanthropy to flourish and to advocate for the policy issues and causes that are important to the Forum’s members. The Forum helps regional and national philanthropy-serving organizations to promote effective policy.

[VIRGINIA PUBLIC ACCESS PROJECT](#)

A nonprofit that elevates public understanding of politics and government by organizing and presenting information in ways that are easily accessible and free of partisan bias.

2 Resource Guides on Philanthropy and Policy and Advocacy

<u>Advocacy Defined</u>	Bolder Advocacy
<u>Advocacy Strategy Framework</u>	Center for Evaluation Innovation
<u>Advocacy Toolkit</u>	Council on Foundations
<u>Approaching the Intersection: Will a Global Pandemic and National Movement for Racial Justice Take Philanthropy Beyond Its Silos?</u>	TCC Group
<u>Community Power Building</u>	Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions
<u>Effective Collaborations: Recommendations for a Connected Philanthropic Infrastructure</u>	Council on Foundations
<u>Forum Public Policy Principles</u>	United Philanthropy Forum
<u>Foundations and Public Policy Grantmaking</u>	The James Irvine Foundation
<u>Framing and Policymaking</u>	Frameworks Institute
<u>Informing Advocacy and Communications Capacity Building Efforts</u>	Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
<u>It's All About the Base: A Guide to Building a Grassroots Organizing Program</u>	Community Catalyst

<u>Leading Locally: A Community Power Building Approach to Structural Change</u>	USC Dornsife Equity Research Institute
<u>Philanthropy Advocacy Playbook</u>	Bolder Advocacy
<u>Power Moves: Your Essential Philanthropy Assessment Guide for Equity and Justice</u>	National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy
<u>A Primer on Community Power, Place, and Structural Change</u>	USC Dornsife Equity Research Institute
<u>Public Policy and Advocacy for Grantmakers</u>	Council on Foundations
<u>Stand for Your Mission</u>	BoardSource
<u>Terminology</u>	Bolder Advocacy
<u>The Half Sheet</u>	The Commonwealth Institute
<u>What's Next for Philanthropy in the 2020s?</u>	Deloitte
<u>Why Engage in Advocacy?</u>	Council on Foundations

3 Policy and Advocacy Organizations

There are many organizations in Virginia that engage in policy and advocacy as a part of their mission, ranging in philosophical and political beliefs. The list below is far from comprehensive, but it represents a sample of the differing foci and constituencies that make up the policy and advocacy community in the Commonwealth. The Virginia Public Access Project (VPAP) [lobbying database](#) is a good place to connect to lobbyists and issues and find contact info.

[AARP Virginia](#): A national organization with a Virginia presence that focuses on making a difference for Virginians 50+ and their families.

[American Civil Liberties Union Virginia](#): ACLU Virginia is a private, non-profit organization that promotes civil liberties and civil rights for everyone in the Commonwealth through public education, litigation, and advocacy with the goal of securing freedom and equality for all.

[African Communities Together](#): ACT is an organization of African immigrants fighting for civil rights, opportunity, and a better life for families here in the U.S. and worldwide. ACT empowers African immigrants to integrate socially, advance economically, and engage civically. They connect African immigrants to critical services, help Africans develop as leaders, and organize communities on the issues that matter. The Virginia office is located in Arlington.

[Americans for Prosperity Virginia](#): Through broad-based grassroots outreach, Americans for Prosperity Virginia is driving long-term solutions to the country's biggest problems. AFP activists engage friends and neighbors on key issues and encourage them to take an active role in building a culture of mutual benefit, where people succeed by helping one another.

[Appalachian Sustainable Development](#): A multistate organization including Virginia, with the goal to transition Appalachia to a more resilient economy and a healthier population by supporting local agriculture, exploring new economic opportunities, and connecting people to healthy food.

[Asian Americans Advancing Justice](#): AAAJ is an affiliation of five organizations advocating for the civil and human rights of Asian Americans.

[Campaign for Housing and Civic Engagement](#): A statewide campaign to raise awareness of housing issues, spearheaded by the Virginia Poverty Law Center and the Virginia Housing Alliance.

[Casa de Virginia](#): CASA is an organization with headquarters in Maryland and offices in Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia. In Virginia, offices cover the northern VA counties of Arlington, Fairfax, Loudon, and Prince William. The organization provides services to the immigrant community in different areas: legal, education, health, and pro bono services.

Community Catalyst: A national organization, Community Catalyst's mission is to organize and sustain a powerful consumer voice to ensure that all individuals and communities can influence the local, state, and national decisions that affect their health. The headquarters is in Boston, MA, there is a Washington, DC office, and they fund work in Virginia.

Court Appointed Special Advocates for Children: CASA supports and promotes court-appointed volunteer advocacy so every child who has experienced abuse or neglect can be safe, have a permanent home, and the opportunity to thrive.

Equality Virginia: An advocacy organization in Virginia seeking equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people.

Housing Forward: A resource for affordable housing data and actionable insights, Housing Forward equips advocates to advance affordable housing across Virginia. Their work ensures affordable housing in Virginia is planned, developed, and built with purpose to end the cycles of poverty, racism, and community violence.

Housing Opportunities Made Equal of Virginia: HOME addresses housing-related systemic inequities that perpetuate segregation, concentrations of poverty, and wealth inequality. They focus on three key areas: fair housing enforcement, housing counseling and education, and housing research and policy.

The Impact Project: A project of the Hopewell Fund, the organization works in 14 states, including Virginia, to unite people behind common-sense solutions that give Americans a fair shake and hold government accountable to better serve the people it represents. Major areas of focus are democracy work and economic security issues.

Just Trust: A grantmaking organization funding in four states and expanding to others, dedicated to dramatically shrinking the overall footprint of America's criminal legal system—from the number of people incarcerated, to the more invisible and harmful ways it holds individuals, families, communities, and entire generations back from opportunity.

League of Women Voters of Virginia: A national organization with a Virginia presence, the League encourages informed and active participation in government to increase understanding of major public policy issues and to influence public policy through education and advocacy. Two focus areas are voter's service/citizen education and action/advocacy.

Legal Aid Justice Center: LAJC partners with Virginia communities and clients to achieve justice by dismantling systems that create and perpetuate poverty; justice means racial justice, social justice, and economic justice.

Local Initiatives Support Corporation Virginia: LISC Virginia brings together key local partners, community leaders, and decision-makers to take on pressing challenges, incubate innovative solutions, and develop smarter public policies in community development. LISC leverages its extensive toolkit of loans, grants, equity investments, and local expertise to enact meaningful change in neighborhoods.

Mental Health America of Virginia: The oldest mental health advocacy organization in Virginia, MHAV works in advocacy, recovery education, and support.

[National Alliance on Mental Illness Virginia:](#)

NAMI Virginia provides support, education, and advocacy for individuals and families in Virginia affected by mental illness.

[NAACP Virginia:](#) A national organization, NAACP in Virginia works to secure the political, educational, social, and economic equality of rights in order to eliminate race-based discrimination and ensure the health and well-being of all persons.

[NAKASEC Virginia:](#) NAKASEC develops holistic programs and campaigns that are guided by community members, meets immediate needs while building Asian-American community power to make long-term systemic changes that address the root causes of these needs, and centers human connections.

[New Virginia Majority:](#) New Virginia Majority builds the power of marginalized communities to change the political systems that aren't working. They mobilize to end mass incarceration, expand voting rights, build a just economy, protect immigrants, and preserve the environment.

[The Commonwealth Institute:](#) A research and policy organization, TCI advances racial and economic justice in Virginia by advocating for public policies that are designed in partnership with people most impacted and shaped by credible, accessible fiscal and policy research.

[Virginia Association of Counties:](#) VACO exists to support county officials and to effectively represent, promote and protect the interests of counties to better serve the people of Virginia.

[Virginia Association of Free & Charitable Clinics:](#) The nation's oldest free clinic association, leading the healthcare safety net in Virginia by bringing healthcare leaders, professionals,

community members, and stakeholders together to ensure Virginia's underserved have access to quality care. They support and advocate for 60+ member clinics so that Virginia's underserved have access to quality care.

[Virginia Association of Planning District](#)

[Commissions:](#) The Virginia Association promotes coordination and cooperation among the Commonwealth's Planning District Commissions/Regional Councils to heighten their effectiveness and efficiency; provide mutual assistance and the exchange of ideas; and otherwise promote understanding for how PDCs/RCs can help save their regions and the Commonwealth time and money.

[Virginia Chamber of Commerce:](#) A national organization with a Virginia presence, the Virginia Chamber of Commerce is the leading non-partisan business advocacy organization that works in the legislative, regulatory, civic, and judicial arenas at the state and federal level to be a force for long-term economic growth in the Commonwealth.

[Virginia Civic Engagement Table:](#) As a state organization, VCET strengthens and connects Virginia's progressive nonprofit organizations and activists. Their partners work together to advance equality, justice, and opportunity, to win shared policy victories, and strive to engage underrepresented communities in the democratic process.

[Virginia Coalition for Immigrant Rights:](#) VACIR is a multi-racial, multi-ethnic coalition of organizations that exist to win dignity, power, and quality of life for all immigrant and refugee communities.

[Virginia Community Voice](#): Operating primarily in the Richmond community, Virginia Community Voice equips neighbors in more marginalized communities to realize their vision for their neighborhoods, and prepare institutions to respond effectively.

[Virginia Conservation Network](#): Comprised of over 150 network partners, Virginia Conservation Network is committed to building a powerful, diverse, and highly-coordinated conservation movement focused on protecting our Commonwealth's natural resources.

[Virginia Early Childhood Foundation](#): VECF is Virginia's public-private partner in building strategic and sustained focus on the healthy development and school readiness of the state's youngest children. They work in tandem with diverse stakeholders to ensure equitable opportunities for all families with young children to thrive. Three areas of focus are systems building and capacity, partnerships and innovation, and policy and advocacy.

[Virginia Environmental Justice Collaborative](#): VEJC works to build the health and wealth of Virginia communities of color, low income communities, and communities overburdened by pollution, by reducing the disproportionate impact of environmental hazards through educating, empowering, and mobilizing grassroots organizations and individuals to speak for themselves and through building an alliance to advocate to equitable policies and practices.

[Virginia Foundation for Healthy Youth](#): Established in 1999 by the Virginia General Assembly, the Virginia Foundation for Healthy Youth empowers Virginia's youth to make healthy choices by reducing and preventing

youth tobacco and nicotine use, substance use, and childhood obesity. VFHY receives no taxpayer funds and is solely funded by a small share of Virginia's annual payments from the nation's major tobacco manufacturers through the Master Settlement Agreement .

[Virginia Health Care Foundation](#): Established in 1992 by the Virginia General Assembly and its Joint Commission on Health Care as a public/private partnership, Virginia Health Care Foundation has a mission to increase access to primary health care for uninsured and medically underserved Virginians via innovative service delivery models.

[Virginia Health Catalyst](#): An organization that works to ensure all Virginians have equitable access to comprehensive health care that includes oral health. The organization focuses on four pillars: public health, policy, public awareness, and clinical and community care.

[Virginia Hospital and Healthcare Association](#): A state association working to transform Virginia's health care system to achieve top-tier performance in safety, quality, value, service, and population health. VHHA is focused on improving access to care; continuing to improve health care safety, quality, and service; promoting a vibrant, high-value health care system; and, advancing population health to promote health and economic opportunity for all Virginians.

[Virginia Housing Alliance](#): Formed as a result of a merger between the Virginia Coalition to End Homelessness (VCEH) and the Virginia Housing Coalition Information Services (VHCIS), the Virginia Housing Alliance focuses on advocacy, education, and capacity building.

[Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy](#): The Interfaith Center engages people of faith and goodwill to advocate for economic, racial, and social justice in Virginia's policies and practices through education, prayer, and action. They focus on economic justice, justice reform, health equity, and immigration justice.

[Virginia League of Conservation Voters](#): The league is the political voice of the state's conservation community, working to make sure Virginia's elected officials recognize that our natural heritage is an environmental and economic treasure for all.

[Virginia Municipal League](#): A statewide, nonprofit association of city, town, and county governments, to improve and assist local governments through legislative advocacy, research, education, and other services.

[Virginia Organizing](#): Formerly known as the Virginia Organizing Project, a non-partisan grassroots organization dedicated to challenging injustice by empowering people in local communities to address issues that affect the quality of their lives. Seventeen chapters function across the state and local organizers identify issues of interest, such as environmental, health care, criminal justice, and dismantling racism.

[Virginia Plus](#): Virginia Plus is a membership organization for progressive donors to collaboratively learn, strategize, and fund civic engagement organizations in Virginia. They support organizations working in a coordinated fashion to increase voter turnout and engage communities in the legislative process through year-round organizing.

[Virginia Poverty Law Center](#): A nonprofit committed to breaking down systemic barriers that keep low-income Virginians in the cycle of poverty through advocacy, education, and litigation. They advocate for legislation that benefits low-income Virginians and provide training to legal aid organizations throughout the Commonwealth in housing, consumer rights, domestic and sexual violence, elder rights, family and child welfare, health insurance, and public benefits.

[Virginia Small Business Association](#): NFIB is nonprofit, nonpartisan and is the voice of small business, advocating on behalf of America's small and independent business owners. Virginia Small Business Association, located in Richmond, represents members before the General Assembly and engages in grassroots activism and member development throughout the Commonwealth.

[Voices for Virginia's Children](#): A Virginia organization devoted to advocacy for kids, focusing on early care and education, child welfare, health and wellness, mental health, family economic security, trauma, and racial truth and reconciliation. They are the home for the Virginia Kids Count database.

PART 4

METHODOLOGY AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

How we approached this report and our gratitude for those who supported it.

1 Methodology

2 Acknowledgements

1 Methodology

The scan is based on phone/Zoom interviews held with 80 organizations and 100 individuals over a 5-month period from April to August, 2021. The organizations fell into five major categories: 1) business, governmental, and nonprofit associations, 2) funders, 3) government affairs/relations organizations, 4) philanthropy-serving organizations, and 5) policy and advocacy organizations. Groups to interview were identified through recommendations from key individuals, beginning with VFN staff and Board, then through input from interviewees who suggested other organizations that should be contacted (e.g., a “snowball” sample). Advantages of the interview approach are sampling convenience, and good knowledge of the community among VFN members and policy and advocacy organizations themselves. The limitations of the survey include sampling bias, as social networks are not random, as well as the short survey duration (5 months).

A special mention should be made of the social environment during the survey administration period, spring - summer 2021. A number of contextual factors were highlighted during conversations that are reflective of this time period. These include, among others: the beginning of a slow recovery from a global pandemic affecting the health and economic wellbeing of individuals and organizations, the impacts of the last 18-months on leaders and organizations’ health and wellbeing, the effects of racial awareness and social/cultural change, the political polarization in the country, and the upcoming fall elections and political environment in Virginia.

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**VIRGINIA FUNDERS
NETWORK**