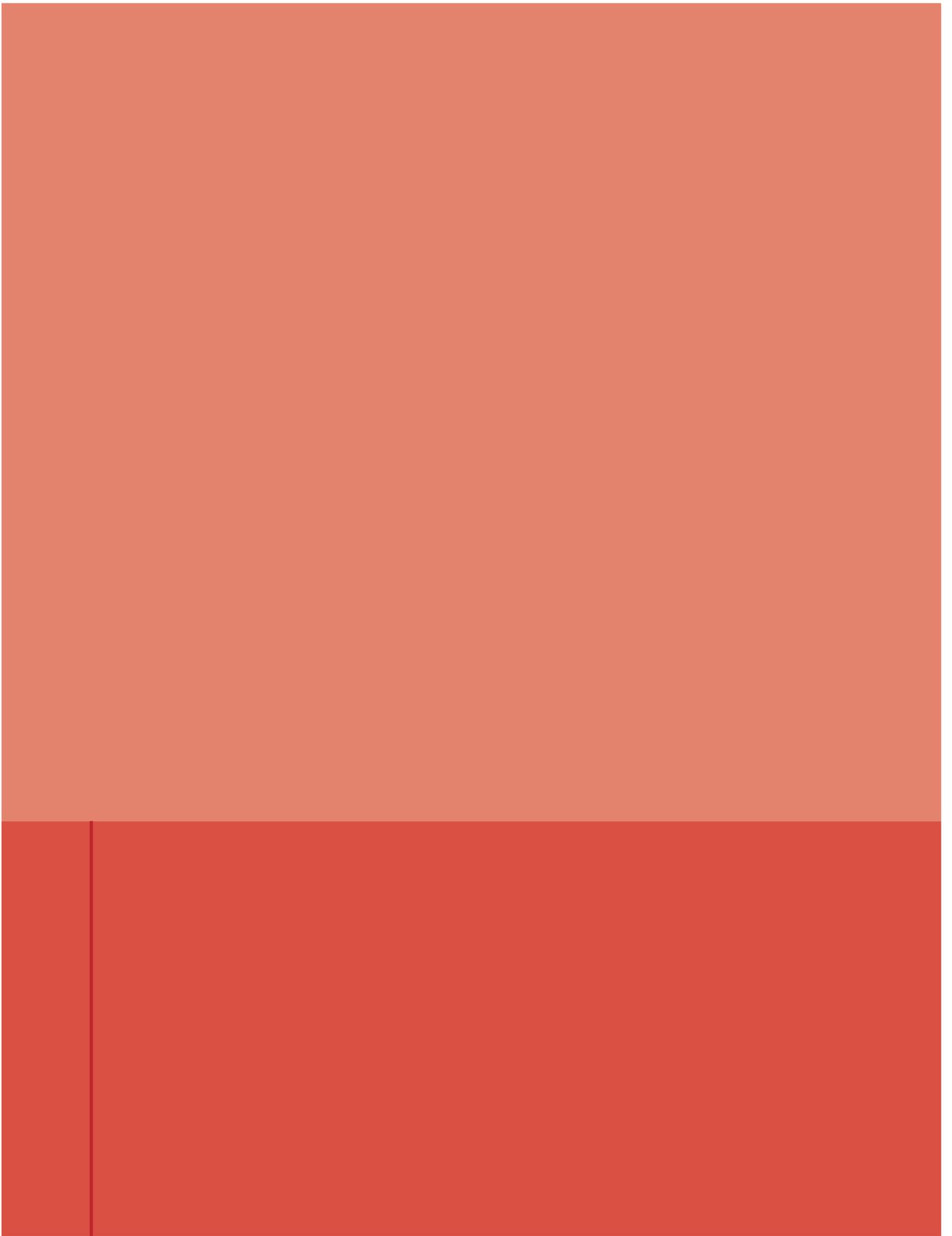




A CASE STUDY OF
VIRGINIA'S
CIVIC ENGAGEMENT
LANDSCAPE



PURPOSE AND APPROACH OF CASE STUDY

ABOUT FCCP

The Funders' Committee for Civic Participation (FCCP) is an innovative and thought-provoking network that shares an underlying conviction that all people deserve a voice in our democratic process. FCCP serves leaders in the philanthropic community working to further this vision, with heightened attention to issues of equity and historically disenfranchised and underrepresented communities. FCCP's members support nonpartisan efforts to engage voters, eliminate structural barriers to voting, advance reforms to improve government and electoral systems, and inspire public involvement in civic life.

FCCP believes that strong organizations and networks are what make powerful participation possible. This includes structural reforms, strengthening and protecting democratic institutions, organizing communities, and integrating voter engagement. Critical to this is a culture of participation where impacted communities have the power to make a difference on issues that affect their lives — one that inspires their engagement and builds collective power and an equitable and open democracy that gives people meaningful opportunities to exercise their voice.

WHY A CASE STUDY ON CIVIC ENGAGEMENT?

With support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, FCCP commissioned this case study to illustrate what present-day civic engagement strategies now entail, the current landscape of those strategies that lead to expanded democratic participation, and to use on-the-ground examples in Virginia to show how a broad range of groups employ these tactics. This case study aims to (1) help funders new to civic engagement navigate the different ways they can invest and (2) provoke long-term funders of civic engagement to reflect on their approach. It sets out to lift up the best practices that exist in Virginia, which have driven a more open and equitable democracy, have helped create a culture of participation, and have brought about lasting change for the lives of everyday Virginians.

Methodology: This case study utilized in-depth interviews and document review from over 25 organizational leaders in Virginia representing grassroots organizing groups, individual donors, foundations, public health organizations, nonprofit community organizations, labor unions, political organizations, policy think tanks, legal organizations, community development corporations, research and analysis institutes, and advocacy organizations.

Many participant organizations are anchored in the “urban crescent” representing the metro DC area to Hampton Roads, although we interviewed organizations with chapters/members in small and midsize cities in the central and southwestern parts of the state. FCCP has a particular focus on ensuring that impacted communities have equal access to participation and decision-making in the democratic process. Interviewees were identified through this lens, prioritizing organizations that are led by and/or serve impacted communities. Last, this case study defines civic engagement broadly and works to illustrate both “inside” and “outside” approaches to enacting policy reform and engaging citizens in democratic practice. Inside approaches include professional lobbyists and legal and policy expertise; outside approaches are driven by grassroots citizen engagement.

FIVE KEY FINDINGS IN THE VA CASE STUDY

- 1. The landscape is broader and deeper.** In the past twelve years, new kinds of grassroots-driven organizations have been created and existing organizations have evolved to better engage voters, eliminate barriers to voting, and inspire public involvement in civic life. This new landscape creates a more diverse set of entry points for funders to invest in.
- 2. Funders increasingly view civic engagement as a year-round cycle.** Civic engagement is often confused with a narrow set of election-related strategies. That view is shifting and funders in Virginia are leading the way in the development of a year-round approach to civic engagement that integrates legislative, advocacy, accountability, voter engagement, and census work.
- 3. Organizations are becoming homes for people.** Nonprofit organizations are increasingly becoming the political home for everyday people. This is especially true for multi-issue organizations as well as for those organizations that are also able to do candidate-specific work with aligned (c)(4)s and PACs. Many of these organizations have now contacted the same set of voters for more than 10 years and are developing voting blocs of people who are deeply invested in a shared agenda developed through effective organizing strategies.
- 4. Data and technology are tools to improve this work, but shouldn't be the drivers of strategy.** Virginia is an example of how organizations and leaders enacted multiyear strategies to win important policy reforms, expand the electorate, and produce outcomes that many did not think possible 10 years ago. Virginia organizations and leaders use technology and tools in service of a homegrown analysis anchored by their connection and accountability to their communities.
- 5. Translating large-scale voter engagement into ongoing organizational participation remains elusive.** Nonprofit organizations in Virginia are able to register and engage hundreds of thousands of voters in a single cycle. However, the funnel from voter engagement to ongoing involvement in those organizations remains small. Grassroots organizational leaders are exploring ways this might be addressed in future cycles.

LANDSCAPE OVERVIEW

Virginia has been at the center of the national conversation for its shifting political landscape. This shift in the “Old Dominion” or “Commonwealth” state, with deep ties to its colonial past, is largely due to rapidly changing demographics and emerging organizational capacities in place to harness the growing potential for social change.

POPULATION AND DEMOGRAPHICS

Virginia has experienced a decade of rapid population growth. The state will have added 700,000 people between 2010 and 2020 and is expected to become the 10th most populous state by 2040, with over 10 million inhabitants. Virginia’s racial diversity will continue to expand over the next few decades. Whites will comprise less than a majority of Virginia’s population by 2040 — 47.4% — according to recent projections by the Demographics Research Group at the University of Virginia.

Non-Hispanic whites currently make up the majority, 61.5% of Virginians. Black or African American people represent the largest minority at 19.90% of the population, followed by Hispanic or Latinx people at 9.60%. Asian American Pacific Islanders make up 7%, and 3.10% of Virginians identify as being two or more races.

POLITICAL CONDITIONS

Virginia is one of only five states in the U.S. to hold gubernatorial elections in nonpresidential or congressional midterm election years. Because of this, statewide elections are held every year.

Although many states have strict laws against coordination between 501(c)(4) organizations and political campaigns, Virginia has essentially no tax-code or election-law restrictions on such coordination. While campaign finance laws exist at the federal level and in nearly every other state, Virginia sets none. As long as campaign donations are properly reported, there is no limit to the amount individuals, corporations, and unions can make to individual candidates and ballot-measure campaigns in Virginia. Due to the aforementioned limitless contributions, corporate influence on legislation is significant. Companies like Dominion Energy pour thousands of dollars into the campaigns of legislators from both political parties to maintain governing influence. Virginia is also a Dillon Rule state versus home rule, giving local governments limited authority.

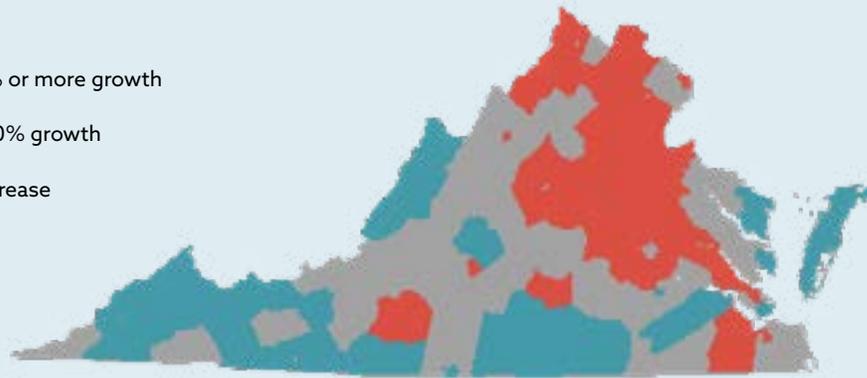
GEOGRAPHY

Virginia’s Urban Crescent connects the metro DC area in Northern Virginia, through Richmond into the Hampton Roads region. Although only 15% of the Commonwealth’s landmass, the Urban Crescent represents 64% of Virginia’s population and 79% of its economy. The Urban Crescent population is projected to grow 40% by 2030, and communities of color make up a large part of that growth.

In contrast, much of rural Virginia is aging and less diverse. While significantly less populous, there are small and midsize cities throughout Central and Southwest Virginia that play critical roles in advancing policy changes in the state.

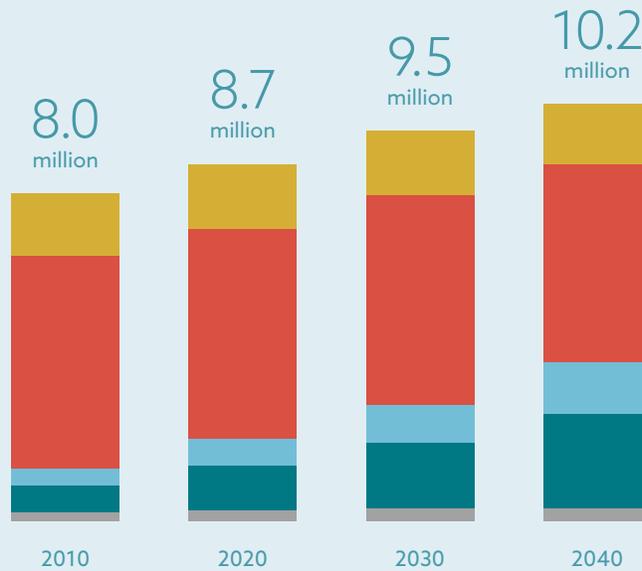
POPULATION CHANGE IN VIRGINIA 2020-2030

- 10% or more growth
- 0-10% growth
- Decrease



TOTAL POPULATION OF VIRGINIA

- Black
- White
- Asian
- Hispanic
- Other



Source: Virginia Population Projections, University of Virginia's Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service, June 2017

STRONG ORGANIZATIONS AND NETWORKS

Virginia has a broad landscape of nonpartisan organizations involved in civic engagement or, as defined in FCCP's theory of impact, "fighting for political and cultural power, representative government, and a culture of participation and fairness." Virginia's civic engagement landscape includes a broad spectrum of civic engagement organizations ranging from think tanks, to community organizations, to grassroots-led organizing groups, to policy advocacy groups, to social service agencies, to state tables that provide technical assistance, to donor tables. At the heart of this civic ecosystem are a set of aligned organizations that have worked closely together in formal and informal ways to build capacity to increase democratic participation and enact policy. Leaders of these groups are in constant communication and are the primary architects of mobilization, policy, and engagement strategy in Virginia. Some of the core groups leading civic engagement work in the state include New Virginia Majority, the Commonwealth Institute, Homecare Workers Union (SEIU 512), Progress Virginia, and Planned Parenthood.

This section is divided into four parts:

1. A summary of integrated voter engagement approaches and organizing strategies.
2. An overview of the approaches to advance structural reforms in Virginia.
3. An analysis of current work to strengthen and protect democratic institutions.

4. An in depth look at civic engagement efforts that led to Medicaid expansion.

VIRGINIA: ORGANIZING COMMUNITIES AND INTEGRATING VOTER ENGAGEMENT

Virginia's ecosystem consists of a few core multi-issue statewide organizations, a state voter engagement coordinating and technical assistance group, numerous single-issue and constituency groups, and a number of coalitions. The two anchor multi-issue statewide groups are the Commonwealth Institute (TCI) and New Virginia



Inside game does not work unless (1) candidates are being elected on a clear platform and (2) there is a base that demands those policies be passed and implemented.

— VIRGINIA DONOR



It is the ongoing sustained work that builds trust and credibility. It's the work that happens year after year, organizers visiting the same neighborhoods, that results in a fundamental change in the level of participation. Elections are not the end point, but a piece of the strategy.

— VIRGINIA GRASSROOTS LEADER

Majority (NVM). NVM is primarily an organizing and voter-mobilization group, has broad reach across the state, and deploys a wide range of civic engagement tactics. For example, it works with residents to build political consciousness, offers training and skill building, creates social capacity in neighborhoods to surface and address multiple priorities, and teaches people how to navigate government at all levels to voice policy concerns. NVM works through its membership base, which includes thousands of resident leaders who actively volunteer to work on issues they care about. Similarly, the Commonwealth Institute is primarily a policy research and analysis group that also serves to craft and drive legislative strategy, convene coalitions, and support other groups to engage in policy discussions.

The state coordinating and technical assistance organization, Virginia Civic Engagement Table, serves to “strengthen and connect Virginia’s progressive nonprofit organizations and activists and act as a hub for the larger progressive community.” It does this by providing tools such as voter-file access, modeling, training on best practices, and coordinating nonpartisan voter engagement efforts, such as voter registration.

Some of the (c)(3) table partners include CASA de Virginia, the League of Women Voters, the League of United Latin American Citizens, NARAL, the Virginia League of Conservation Voters, and many other smaller, emerging groups. The table is affiliated with State Voices nationally.

Virginia has a diverse and vibrant set of constituency and single-issue organizations (which primarily focus on one issue such as climate change) that play a sizable role in civic engagement. Organizations like NAKASEC, a Korean American community association, work with both adults and youth on a range of issues and have recently begun to develop a door-to-door canvass to organize members around local issues while talking about voting. The Virginia Latina Advocacy Network does year-round organizing and leadership development tied to get-out-the-vote efforts, and is working to shift the narrative and culture around reproductive health equity. Chesapeake Climate Action Fund, which focuses on environmental issues, is another example of an organization that has emerged and is building a base of activists in Northern Virginia. Virginia Organizing is a community organizing group focused on small towns, midsize cities, and rural organizing in the Central and Southwestern part of the state.

A number of coalitions exist in Virginia that work on specific issues, such as Healthcare for All Virginians, which worked to pass Medicaid expansion. Green New Deal Virginia, which was recently launched, primarily focuses on climate change. And Virginia for All of Us is a new coordinating body that works to unify state legislative priorities and advance message and narrative work. These coalitions can serve as coordinating bodies for collective work, launch statewide strategies, or replicate policy changes in municipalities. However, these coalitions can vary in capacity: Some have staff and budgets, while others do not. They can vary in terms of effectiveness depending on leadership, context, and the initial reasons for convening them.

A gap worth noting in this overall landscape is Black-led organizations in the state that have the capacity to conduct civic engagement. While organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Urban League have a presence in Virginia, there is a dearth of well-funded organizations mobilizing Black voters or doing grassroots organizing at scale in Black communities. In an effort to address this gap, leaders started the Virginia Black Organizing Collaborative (VA BLOC), which has been anchoring its work in Hampton and Newport News. The project is led by Delegate Marcia “Cia” Price, a prominent Black leader, and has the potential to increase participation in Black communities. But more is certainly needed.

ADVANCING STRUCTURAL REFORMS

At the heart of the idea of civic engagement is the notion of a fair and inclusive democracy. Structures in states determine important criteria, such as who has access to voting, the way in which districts are drawn, the forms of identification required to vote, who gets counted in the census, whether non active voters get purged, and rules for campaign contributions and transparency.

In Virginia, perhaps the best example is the ongoing multiyear campaign to restore voting rights to people convicted of a felony, thereby



We have to rebuild faith in government and its ability to solve problems. This has to be our focus.

— VIRGINIA STATE-BASED LEADER

ending the practice of disenfranchising hundreds of thousands of voters. Currently, the Virginia Constitution says felons cannot vote unless their civil rights have been restored by the governor or other authorities. In April 2017, the Governor personally restored 170,000 individuals’ right to vote as a result of a three-year organizing and lobbying effort by grassroots organizations and policy groups. Today, groups are working on a broad voting-rights constitutional amendment that would include ending this practice. The amendment would be passed by the legislature in 2021 and then brought to voters in November of 2022.

Most organizations in Virginia are connected to efforts for structural reform, which they view as a natural outgrowth of their work. As one grassroots organizer said during an interview, “We lead with local. In our experience, if folks learn at the local level about power, how it works and how to organize, it’s easier to go up to the state and federal.” There are also national organizations, like Indivisible, that have state-based chapters working to move a national conversation about redistricting.

Addressing structural barriers to participation is a long-term investment. Funders should expect it to require multiyear funding and also, typically, statewide legislation or ballot measures.

STRENGTHENING AND PROTECTING DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

FCCP sees the strength and health of democratic institutions as fundamental to civic engagement. Its members fund organizations fighting for a fair and independent judiciary, an open and secure internet, a Department of Justice that stands up for impacted communities, and much more. At the center of this fight is whether or not people believe in government as an effective and important tool to address the issues that impact their lives. In the



We all share the same values, not just about the work we're doing but how we go about the work. We have worked intentionally to build a shared assessment of our theory of change and path to power so that we all understand that the power is rooted in the people we activate, and in the extent to which we can bring their voices forward. The biggest power that we have is people. If we're not invested in and in touch with that, then we don't have any power at all.

— ANNA SCHOLL,
PROGRESS VIRGINIA

age of “fake news,” social media, and interference in our elections by foreign powers, our democratic institutions are increasingly fragile.

MEDICAID EXPANSION

One example of robust and multilayered civic engagement strategy that resulted in significant policy change is the effort to expand health care access. Four hundred thousand Virginians are now able to get health care as a result of the bi-partisan passage of Medicaid Expansion in VA in 2018. What most don't realize is the effort to pass the policy was six years in the making and included grassroots organizing, deep research on the impacts of inaction and benefits of expansion,

years of developed policy expertise, broad and in-depth coalition work of long-term allies and unlikely partners, and bold and swift financial support by philanthropy that had trust in the groups on the ground.

In Virginia, Progress Virginia plays a leading role in messaging, narrative, and online organizing. Similar communications hubs in other states play a critical role in the civic engagement ecosystem. They seek to be a credible voice in advancing solutions to critical community problems and work as a communications team for much of the nonprofit community. They are in some ways a “marketing department” for ideas such as Medicaid expansion and the restoration of voting rights.

Progress Virginia was founded in 2011 after a landscape analysis identified the need for more communications capacity and a voice that could speak across issue silos. They have a 501(c)(3) arm that primarily provides communications staffing to issue coalitions, and a 501(c)(4) arm where more of their message research and development, coordination, and dissemination happens.

THE MEDICAID FIGHT: PEOPLE EXERCISING THEIR POWER

At the core of the fight for health care expansion were grassroots organizations and larger institutional partners all organizing and mobilizing individuals in strategic geographies across the state to exercise their power. Change, an important component of civic engagement, is, as one practitioner on the ground put it, “about accountability, and that can't happen without people.” Groups organized those directly impacted and the community was able to tell their story and hold elected decision-makers accountable.

Decision-makers needed to understand what it was like to walk in the shoes of individuals directly impacted. That could only happen if directly impacted individuals were engaged, actively telling

their story to key strategic decision-makers and constantly demanding action. It was a critical component in securing the support of state legislative delegates and moving some from the “no” to the “yes” column.

Delegate Terry Kilgore (R) represents Virginia’s First House of Delegates District, which spans the southwestern corner of the state. Since 2006, Virginia Organizing’s chapter members have been meeting with Delegate Kilgore on local and statewide issues, despite disagreements on positions. In 2013, the Medicaid crisis came to a head as the County Hospital in the district was closed. Virginia Organizing members immediately began mobilizing, keeping up the momentum and pressure on elected leaders (including Delegate Kilgore), personalizing the fight and connecting the crisis to the state’s failure to expand Medicaid. By 2017, an agreement was reached to reopen the hospital in 2018. In February 2018, Kilgore announced that he would support a version of Medicaid expansion, espousing many of the talking points carried by community members over the year.¹ Kilgore also worked to secure additional rural Republican support.

Getting directly impacted community members to engage and take action was possible because of the ongoing, sustained work by groups on the ground. Their organizing started with real intentionality on whom to engage — looking for folks who were “sitting on the sidelines.” Then they moved on to doing ongoing, sustained work with members of the community working together to build change. This often means identifying and then addressing the underlying issues that keep these individuals on the sidelines, and providing the tools and training that put community members in the driver’s seat to change. In the immigrant community, for example, this meant setting up democracy schools and citizenship pipelines.

Ultimately, this is the work — ongoing, sustained work in community, in partnership with community — that builds trust and a foundation for these organizations. The results are new institutions of democracy where people are building their political identity together and creating a political home that is, as one practitioner on the ground put it, “a strategy and structure for change.”

In the Medicaid expansion fight, organizations built upon this foundation, equipping leaders with the necessary skills for the campaign by starting with the basics — building a power map connecting the dots on who had the power to decide on Medicaid expansion and then providing community leaders with information on who their representatives were, where they were, and how they could be reached. Next was building their ability (and sometimes confidence) to exercise their voice and to engage directly with their representatives — training on how to tell their story, how to ask questions, how to testify at hearings, how to organize lobby visits, and for some, how to organize a successful public event and rally. All of this was possible because of the authentic relationships built over time by these organizations with community.

THE COALITION

The Healthcare for All Virginians (HAV) Coalition was created in 2015 to organize for the passing of Medicaid expansion. The group itself was a combination of likely and unlikely allies that ebbed and flowed over the years, but it was a critical hub anchored by a core group of organizations doing substantive work to advance the campaign for Medicaid expansion in Virginia.

¹ Kilgore did have his first Democratic challenger in a decade in 2017, but also won handily with more than 75% of the vote.

CREATING OPPORTUNITY

A MEDICAID EXPANSION TIMELINE

2013

The health care crisis comes to a head particularly in rural Virginia, where hospitals begin closing. Groups start mobilizing to hold delegates, largely conservative in rural Virginia, accountable for the closures and to connect the dots between the closures and the failure of state representatives to pass Medicaid expansion. Actions become regular and Delegate Kilgore (R) in particular is targeted by Virginia Organizing.

2014

Terry McAuliffe wins the governor's race but does not have the votes to pass expansion. However, groups on the ground begin to exercise their power in Richmond, joining together on "deal breaker" issues for McAuliffe and holding regular weekly meetings with legislators.

2015

Medicaid expansion is lifted up as the key issue in the 2015 elections. Republicans continue to control the senate and the house, but do lose their veto-proof majority in the House of Delegates. Groups on the ground continue to build strategic alliances and enhanced infrastructure to support their fight for Medicaid expansion. Progress Virginia launches its progressive narrative project in 2015. The Healthcare for All Virginians (HAV) Coalition is also created.

2016

The fight hits a lull after the 2016 election because of federal attacks. Organizations in Virginia move into defensive mode against federal attacks and coalition participation in the fight for state Medicaid expansion wanes, but organizing and base building picks up as communities face the prospect of setbacks in the Affordable Care Act and attacks against immigrant communities.

2017

This is a pivotal moment. Medicaid expansion is the issue for the HAV Coalition, which creates a 2017 platform built on the extensive policy work driven largely by prior coalition work. For those organizations with the capacity for direct, partisan electoral engagement, it's clear that state legislators will be elected on the issue or held accountable for their support of Medicaid expansion. If you want to win in Virginia in 2017, this is the number one issue. 501(c)(4) groups make the issue part of their endorsement process; based on the past performance of electoral groups on the ground, candidates know that, with that endorsement, comes on-the-ground work to help get them elected.

THE MOMENT

2017 ELECTIONS OPEN THE DOORS TO CHANGE

Ask anyone on the ground what they expect in November 2017 and they will all admit their shock at the massive wave that sweeps over the state. Overnight, the doors to change open. Donors jump in immediately before the end of the year; groups on the ground are able to regroup and move quickly on an organizing and legislative agenda for 2018.

There were 110 coalition members. The voices were broad and intersectional and geographically diverse, with varying levels of participation. This included:

- Strong policy expertise: key trusted policy allies including the Virginia Poverty Law Center.
- Independent fiscal and economic analysis capacity: The Commonwealth Institute was able to make the direct case of the impact of action and inaction on Medicaid expansion and equipped everyone – from community members to coalition leaders to legislators – with the data they needed to make their case.
- Organizing organizations with mobilized bases of directly impacted people, both at scale and with the capacity for deep engagement with key decision-makers.
- Faith leaders organized through the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy that had geographic diversity, including rural and more traditionally conservative counties.
- Hospital and healthcare associations: This partnership was pivotal. Adding a voice that could give credence to the case for expansion, these organizations could often leverage different kinds of conversations with legislators and, most importantly, the Hospital Association agreed that they would cover the state’s 10% contribution through a tax levied on the hospitals.
- More mainstream organizations, including AARP, that had relationships with legislators but also had a broad base of members across the state.

Some of the most important ingredients in this coalition based on conversations across the board were:

A common belief/shared commitment that people, particularly those directly impacted, needed to be engaged and at the core of the strategy. Together, these groups brought the

scale and demographic and geographic diversity to win. In particular, they were able to enlist urban Democratic legislators and rural Republican legislators together in supporting expansion.

The frequency with which a core set of deeply committed organizations met – at a minimum every single week, with some groups meeting regularly twice a week. Organizational leaders rarely missed a meeting.

There was a significant level of trust among the organizations, built largely off of the frequency of the meetings, but the result was “respect” for the role that each group played. The work was divided up according to the expertise at the table. It was made clear early on that “not everyone was going to do everything” that instead members of the coalition would “use the voice that was natural to them.” Some groups were willing to do more public activities with “stronger” messaging and, while others at the table were unwilling to join, it did not disrupt the trust or commitment at the table. Some coalition partners would pair up to do these activities and use their own organizational names.

There was also a commitment to centralized tools – *the same set of data, the same policy priorities, and the same talking points.* It made the demands clear and strengthened the work on the ground and the coalition. In this, the deep policy work of VPLC and the independent analysis of TCI was key. TCI was also able to provide groups on the ground with the data they needed as the campaign progressed.

USING EVERY TOOL IN THE TOOLBOX

The coalition used a vast array of tactics to elevate the fight for expansion, engage more of a community base, and push and hold legislators accountable:

- Canvassing on the doors around Medicaid expansion – both (c)(3)s and (c)(4)s – directing people to immediate phone calls and letter writing to decision-makers.

- Legislative meetings in-district and at the capitol with real people telling their stories and asking critical questions – New Virginia Majority, SEIU, and AARP all mobilized a diverse array of individuals.
- Letter writing and postcard writing with leaders and members across the state – community organizations and in churches.
- Organizations had members trained and speaking out publicly and to the legislature – NVM, SEIU, AARP, Virginia Interfaith Center (VIC), and others trained and then connected their members to tell their story publicly and at the legislature.
- Held community conversations in the districts across the state.
- Direct actions in the district and in front of the legislature, including large press conferences and public rallies. Organized community members also protested in front of legislator district offices. The James River Chapter of VIC stood outside of state Senator Tommy Norment's office for two hours a day for 18 weeks – strengthening the chapter and building solidarity through action.
- Utilized the elections as a tool – including (c)(4)s exercising their influence through direct endorsements and political engagement, where they centered Medicaid expansion.
- Completed a power mapping of the legislature to know and understand potential targets and decision-makers.
- Had a bipartisan strategy: they targeted both Democrats and Republicans. They knew that they weren't just going to have a few Republicans; they needed a bunch of them to come over together.
- Executed an inside-outside strategy and were in constant conversation with the new administration's staff.
- Completed a power map of the groups: with an understanding of capacities, geography, and willingness to take action.
- Prepared district-specific data that showed impact by state house and senate to tailor their messaging.
- Maintained an ongoing social media presence utilizing their base of members – VCO had 100 volunteers on social media teams.
- Came up with a public media strategy that included radio and TV.

COMPROMISES ON THE GROUND

“Without something related to a work requirement, the bill would not have gone through. However, we structured the language so that the restrictions would be subject to the administration seeking and securing a 1115 waiver, knowing that the administration would seek public comment on the waiver (which they called Virginia COMPASS). This gave us an opportunity to organize during that waiver request period and, in the meantime, Virginians would be enrolled in the Medicaid program without any additional restrictions. This also bought us time to demonstrate to the public that the program is good, and it’s harder to take something away from people once they are already enrolled. In the first year, more than 200,000 Virginians enrolled. We also banked on this long waiver process giving us time for the political landscape to shift enough that the administration would cancel the waiver request and not seek work requirements, which is exactly what occurred.”

COMMUNITY LEADERS IN VIRGINIA

Civic engagement organizations are powered by volunteer community leaders. Typically, staff organizers work with member leaders to move up a “ladder of engagement” from taking action in a small way, like attending a meeting or signing a petition, to volunteering, building teams, and driving strategic decisions for the organization.

- NAKASEC leader: Gabi Huesca moved to the U.S. when she was 12 years old from Korea. She first got involved in NAKASEC in 2016, after the election of Donald Trump. She was frustrated, feeling like she could be doing more, and went to a rally she saw promoted on social media. She met the staff, got on the email list, and then attended a canvass. Rather than a quick “get out the vote” conversation, it was a relational conversation about the issues community members care about. “The canvassing I’ve done with NAKASEC is nothing like anything I’d ever done before. We targeted a community that had a lot of Asian families and we went out and asked a series of questions. . . . People were really engaged, they were really excited to share their opinion and they were most excited that anyone cared to hear them. That feeling that ‘somebody cares about what I think’ fuels them to go vote.”
- “I think it’s because it’s a Korean American organization, and the staff and volunteers are immigrants or descendants of immigrants. I think whereas in a lot of campaigns people might get the door slammed in their faces, we have a more nuanced approach to get people to open up. ... There’s a cultural sensitivity that allows NAKASEC a literal foot in the door. They make the effort to actually get to know their community, to ask community members about their opinion on how to bring about change together.”
- Virginia organizing leader: James Lindsay. After someone close to him passed away young, Lindsay joined the Virginia Organizing health care committee and began advocating for access to quality health care. He organized other people in his community, gave testimony, wrote letters to the editor, participated in interviews, and attended forums and rallies over the course of his decade-long commitment to expanding healthcare access in Virginia. Until 2008, he had volunteered at local food banks, but had never been involved in advocacy for structural change.
 - “It was a godsend. To be part of a structured avenue for advocacy made all the difference in the world to me.”
 - “The people who were suffering from this critical problem were invisible. The framework that the healthcare coalition and Virginia Organizing provided to make change was so essential. ... It was the effort to make people recognize the real faces, stories, and consequences of this in our community that made the difference.”
 - “There was a shame about being uninsured, to bring that out of the shadows, and to say wait a minute, this is a widespread problem. This is about someone in your family or community that is not going to get diagnosed, not get treatment.”

THE ROLE OF FUNDERS

More funders are investing in civic engagement strategies because there is a growing recognition that those investments lead to better policy wins, a more vibrant democracy, and the development of people in a way that other strategies do not. The outcomes outweigh the risks. There are many entry points for funders to invest in the civic engagement landscape: they can fund organizations directly, join pooled funds, become a part of a state donor table, support coalition work, or provide resources for specific capacities and research.

In Virginia, two examples are worth lifting up. The first is the Richmond Memorial Health Foundation. The Health Foundation has stepped into the advocacy space — explicitly supporting policy and advocacy work, utilizing an equity agenda, and investing in grassroots leaders. Virginia-based foundations, many of which are family foundations, are new to this work and still battling the realities of being in the South, including the racial and economic history of the state. The Richmond Memorial Health Foundation shifted its lens because its trustees became strong advocates

of Medicaid expansion; they recognized that only through broad participation and support would they see that policy passed. They've continued to fund civic engagement because they see it as a piece of their theory of change and how they deliver better health outcomes for people in the state.

Second, Virginia has a strong and emerging donor table that has accelerated the capacity of organizations to scale up and work together for bigger change and better electoral outcomes. While this donor collaborative focuses primarily on (c)(4) funding, it plays a critical role in supporting independent political power and the ability to hold public officials accountable for their agendas.

Last, there is an effort led by the Robins Foundation aimed at establishing a philanthropic network with a policy and engagement focus. They are currently constructing a civic engagement frame to inform their giving.

CONCLUSION AND IDEAS FOR FURTHER EXAMINATION

In the past 12 years, new kinds of organizations have been launched and existing organizations have evolved to better engage voters and to carry out a broad range of civic engagement strategies in Virginia. This new landscape creates a more diverse set of entry points for funders to invest in. Funders can directly support anchor organizations such as New Virginia Majority, technical assistance and tool providers like Virginia Civic Engagement Table, coalitions working to change state policy, or a multitude of single-issue or constituency-based groups that carry out civic engagement.

Second, funders can invest in a year-round approach to civic engagement that integrates legislative, advocacy, accountability, voter engagement, and census work. Funders worried about the perception of influencing elections can invest in core capacities that are the scaffolding of voter engagement, such as leadership development, issue-based organizing, and general operating support for groups that do this work. Nonprofit organizations are increasingly becoming the civic home for everyday people. This is especially true for multi-issue organizations and organizations that are also able to do candidate-specific work with aligned (c)(4)s and PACs. Many of these organizations have now contacted the same set of voters for more than 10 years and are developing voting blocs of people who are deeply invested in a shared agenda.

Third, Virginia is an example that this work is not a short-term investment. Virginia organizations carry out multi-year strategies to win important policy reforms such as Medicaid expansion. This was only possible because a few core funders supported it early on and were willing to stick it out over six years.

Fourth, Virginia leaders use technology and tools in service of a homegrown analysis anchored by their connection and accountability to their communities. It is tempting to believe the data and targeting firms that present an analysis of which voters matter and how to approach them. They view voters as consumers to be swayed with the right advertising. That is not the path to build a vibrant democracy and Virginia organizations know this. Data is a powerful analytical tool, but it has to be in service of a vision, values, and on-the-ground knowledge of a place.

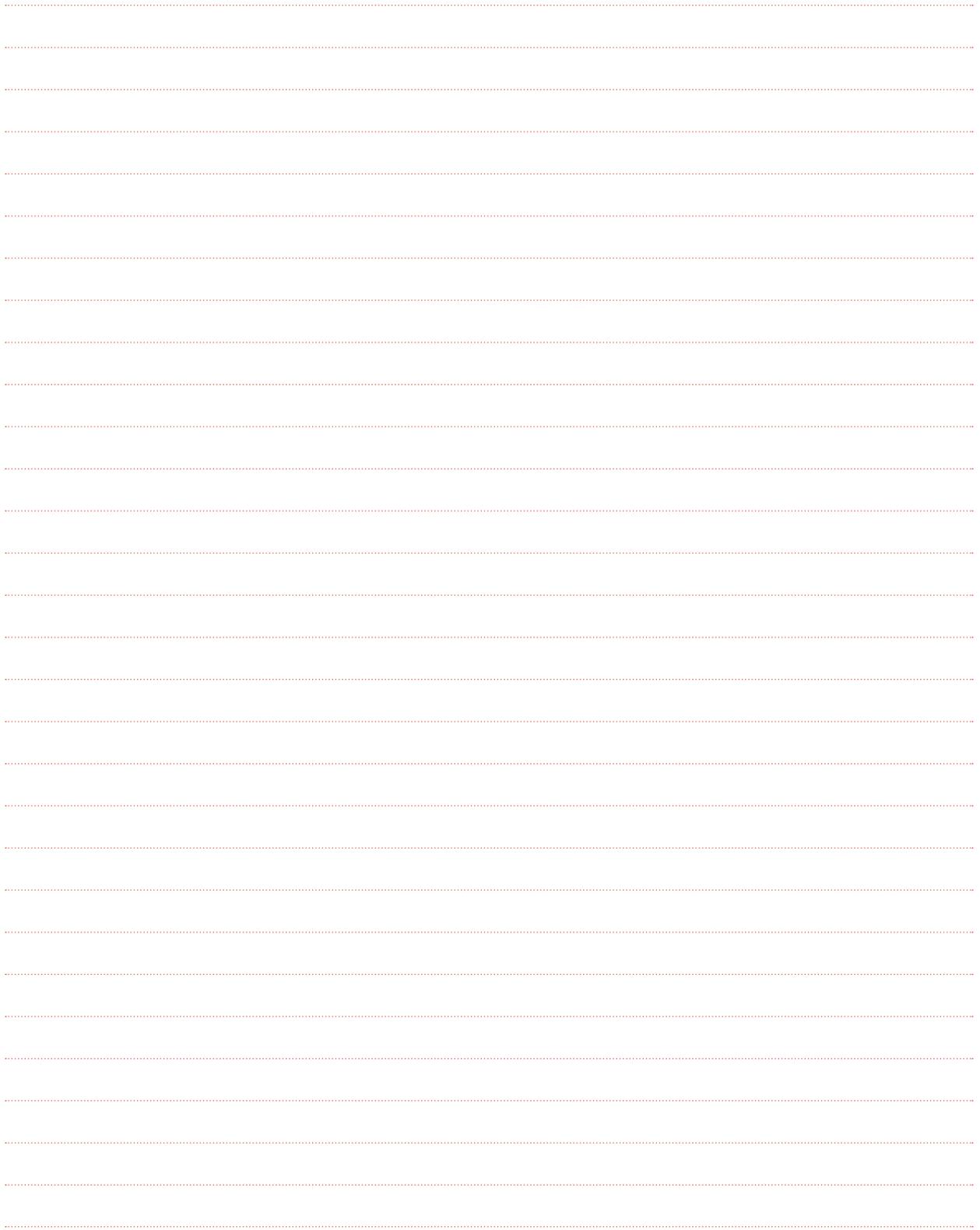
Last, nonprofit organizations in Virginia are able to register and engage hundreds of thousands of voters in a single cycle. However, the funnel from voter engagement to ongoing involvement in those organizations remains too small. This funnel could be increased by additional funding immediately after an election cycle to allow groups to experiment with new ways of using the voter lists that have been built.



Jill Hanken, health attorney at the Virginia Poverty Law Center, has worked on expanding health care in Virginia for almost 40 years.



Healthcare for All Virginia Coalition key members anchored the fight for Medicaid expansion.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

FCCP extends its thanks to Kirk Noden, Molly Shack, and Crystal Zermeno for authoring this report.

Support for this research was provided by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect the views of the Foundation.

ABOUT FCCP

For more than thirty five years, the Funders' Committee for Civic Participation (FCCP) has been a driving force in civic engagement grantmaking. FCCP is an innovative and thought-provoking network that shares an underlying conviction that all people deserve a voice in our democratic process. We seek a society where impacted communities have the power to make a difference on issues that affect their lives, a culture of participation that inspires their engagement, and an open and equitable democracy that offers meaningful opportunities to exercise their voice. From individual family foundations to state funding collaboratives to national grantmakers, our members come in all forms with varying interests and experiences in the civic participation space. We provide members the tools they need to support short- and long-term civic engagement strategies, create meaningful spaces for them to foster collaboration and strategize on critical areas of need, and deepen philanthropy's engagement in civic participation overall.

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