

2010 VIRGINIA ORGANIZING MID-YEAR REPORT



Real change, we are constantly reminded, is hard.

Reforming our health care system to provide access to quality, affordable health care for all has been an 80-year struggle. Stream-lining the restoration of voting rights process for former felons has been ongoing. Preventing lenders from preying on the poor feels never-ending at times. We've made progress toward these goals, but there's so much more work to do.

And so it goes with change. It requires a commitment that goes beyond passing a piece of legislation or getting someone elected. It requires a commitment to the long view, and a faith that ordinary people — with a little help — will do the right thing.

That's why Virginia Organizing works for real change by working where real change starts: with real people in local communities.

We listen to what they care about. We equip them with tools they need to take action. We connect them with like-minded folks nearby and across the state. It's an approach that cuts across the barriers of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, age, ability and geography.

Make no mistake. This approach takes time. It takes resources. It takes tenacity. But we believe it is the only way to create change that lasts.

Welcome to the 2010 Virginia Organizing Mid-Year report. Below are a few highlights, including some surprising news during this, our 15th year!



THE NAME CHANGES, BUT NOT THE IDEAL

On August 7, we celebrated our 15th anniversary in Richmond where we made a big announcement: Virginia Organizing Project will now be known as Virginia Organizing!

We hope you will agree that dropping the word “project” from our name reflects our permanence. We want our name to reflect our mission, which is long-term change in Virginia. The word “project” sounds temporary to some and make no mistake about it, we are in this for the long haul. Despite a new name and new logo, our work and our challenges remain the same. The name changes but not the ideal. The logo changes but not the people.

The name change is part of a rebranding process that we have been undergoing for the past six months. Hairpin Communications, a national firm, kindly donated their services. After speaking to dozens of our supporters about what they think of our work and our “brand,” they came up with some great recommendations — including the name change and getting a new logo.

EXPANDING CAPACITY

- **We purchased an old appliance store in Martinsville for an office.** No, we don't have deep pockets — we got it for \$48,000 — a reflection of a sad economy there. We plan to have lots of community meetings in the building and to do significant phone banking as we establish a more permanent presence on the Southside of Virginia. We have already received donations of desks, tables, chairs, computers, paint and more!



618 E. Church Street, Martinsville

- **We hired an organizer** to work in Danville and Southside Virginia.
- **We expanded our geographic reach.** Our organizers say:

“The new South Hampton Roads Chapter has seven active issue teams up and running — they have been instrumental in helping to network many of the long-standing and committed social justice groups in our region.” — Teresa Stanley, South Hampton Roads Organizer.

“At our most recent meeting [in Danville], community members invited by friends and family outnumbered those I had invited directly. It's starting to click for a lot of people.” — Nik Belanger, Danville Organizer.

- **Our work with national groups yielded big results** with the passage of health care reform and financial reform! See the Campaigns section below for other work on the national level.

STUDENT ORGANIZING EXPANDED

We have six active college chapters, and here are just a couple examples of their work:

- The Virginia Organizing Chapter at William and Mary registered over 300 students in time for the **Williamsburg** City Council elections and participated in an anti-discrimination rally to oppose the Attorney General's letter suggesting the repeal of non-discrimination policies at colleges and universities.

- Students in a University of Virginia Multicultural Education class learned about the legislative process and made more than 10,000 virtual phone banking calls (to push Members of Congress on **health care reform**, while also targeting state legislative districts to try to find more people who want to be active in their community and asking questions about state **budget/revenue issues**).

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Our commitment to **leadership development** steadfastly continued with workshops, trainings, constituent/legislator meetings and direct action, including:

- A Sexual Orientation and Oppression workshop in Hampton.
- Virginia Organizing leaders attended a statewide rally for laws against discrimination and demonstrated against Attorney General Ken Cuccinelli.
- In Harrisonburg, Virginia Organizing supporters protested the Attorney General’s stances on discrimination against LGBT people, global climate change and health care reform.
- Virginia Organizing leaders led a workshop on community organizing and our work for 150 Appalachia Service staff members going to work in central Appalachia this summer.

GETTING THE WORD OUT

We have seen rapid growth in participation with our social networking tools.

- **Our latest tech innovation is in video.** Each organizer has a Flip Cam to document leaders in action across the state.
- **Our Communications Director led media trainings** for staff, board and grassroots leaders, expanding our capacity to effectively engage the media.
- **We greatly increased our visibility in the media,** with 173 media hits in local, state, national and international media during the past six months.
- **We dramatically upgraded the website,** implementing best practices for engaging people on-line as a complement to our in-person organizing.
- **We developed a web-based tool for recording metrics,** methodically tracking our organizing outcomes.



- **We continue to come up with new ideas for grassroots fundraising**, hosting our first donor appreciation event, participating in a celebrity bartenders' event at a local restaurant and implementing the GoodSearch program.

CAMPAIGNS

National

- Virginia Organizing continued to support **health care reform** by spreading the word about the benefits of health care reform bill signed into law this spring.
- In the Martinsville area we hosted a **Barbershop Conversation** that allowed Congressman Tom Perriello to elaborate on the hard-fought and newly-won health care legislation. Similar health care education events have been held statewide.
- Virginia Organizing is celebrating a victory over high-priced lobbyists and special interest groups with the signing of the **financial reform** bill. After Wall Street firms and big banks helped crash the economy, we worked in support of Congress's efforts to increase regulation and hold big financial firms accountable for their actions. Virginia Organizing's statewide membership helped place op-eds and letters to the editor in newspapers from Richmond to Roanoke and held lobby visits with the staff of Senators Jim Webb and Mark Warner to voice our support for reform.
- Four of the **National Night of 1,000 Conversations** were held in Harrisonburg, Winchester, Martinsville and Richmond. People shared specific instances of being **racial profiled** as well as witnessing profiling. This kicked off Virginia Organizing's involvement in the Rights Working Group's Face the Truth campaign.
- Virginia Organizing helped organize a **Local Jobs for America Act** briefing with the Center for Community Change and members of Congress in Washington, D.C.
- We joined the March 21 **Immigration/Jobs Rally** in D.C., bringing seven buses from Tidewater, one from Martinsville and one from Charlottesville.
- After **meetings with constituents**, Congressman Rick Boucher agreed to co-sponsor the Local Jobs for America Act on jobs, while Congressman Tom Perriello committed to continue to vote for legislation that would increase jobs.



State

- We held **Bake Sales for the Budget** across the state to send the message that a cuts-only approach to the budget shortfall is irresponsible. We presented both an oversized (and an actual check) to the Governor's office for \$921.01.
- Virginia Organizing leaders headed to the post office on tax day, sending 1,000 postcards to Governor Bob McDonnell in protest of the state's **regressive tax system**.



- Virginia Organizing submitted ideas to the Secretary of the Commonwealth on how to improve the system to restore **voting rights** for former felons.
- A new campaign committee was established to help develop a strategy to get a lot of people involved in **budget/revenue questions** throughout the state. Under the banner of **Balance Virginia**, Virginia Organizing will be holding events and trainings throughout the state calling attention to Virginia's regressive tax structure.

Local

- The Providence Mobile Home Park Community experienced an incredible victory for **affordable housing** when the Chesapeake City Council voted unanimously to turn down the rezoning application that would have allowed for the applicant to displace 170 families and build condo units on the property.
- The Williamsburg Chapter worked to add **non-discrimination** for students and staff based on sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression to the school system's policy manual.



- Thanks to the work of Virginia Organizing and allied organizations, every jurisdiction west of I-81 in southwest Virginia now has a **drug court** (there was only one in the region two years ago).
- Virginia Organizing worked with the Mayfield Civic Association on preventing rail cars carrying **hazardous waste** from parking in residential areas of Fredericksburg.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

The **Virginia Civic Engagement Table** held a major leadership training April 23-24 and Virginia Organizing leaders and staff played key roles as speakers and trainers for the event. More than 100 representatives of partner organizations gathered in Richmond to hear speakers talk about the overall work of the Table and to take part in participatory workshops on a wide range of democratic skills.

Interns and volunteers went door-to-door **registering people to vote** and asking if they had a job. Those without jobs were asked if they would pose for a photo holding a sign saying, “I need a job” that was sent to Virginia’s senators, pushing them to act to create jobs.



VIRGINIA ORGANIZING BY THE NUMBERS

In the first half of 2010:

- 943 new people got active
- 480 community leaders learned a new skill
- 45 leadership training sessions were held, with 631 participants
- 22 interns worked with Virginia Organizing
- 42 groups received consultations from Virginia Organizing staff
- 105 letters to the editor, op-eds and radio spots went out statewide
- 460 one-to-one meetings were held between the organizers and people new to Virginia Organizing
- 65 constituent/legislator meetings were held
- 51 direct actions were organized, with 1,087 participants
- 39 community forums took place, with 691 participants
- Virginia Organizing knocked on 2,956 doors (get out the vote for special elections; jobs/unemployment issues)
- 11,095 phone banking calls were made on consumer finance reform, health care, jobs and unemployment

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