



2012 Mid-Year Report



Real People. Real Change.

WELCOME

When we talk about real people and real change, it's not just a slogan we use.

Virginia Organizing believes that behind every single issue, behind every vote and policy, behind every reform, there are real people being directly affected by the choices of policymakers.

We can't forget that people will lose Medicare, Medicaid, or Social Security benefits if those programs are reduced. People will continue to be denied insurance coverage for pre-existing medical conditions if the Affordable Care Act is overturned. People are being bullied by big banks and predatory lenders.

These people are us, our families, our neighbors, our friends, people we see in the grocery store and at our children's schools. These are real people.

You know as well as we do that real change doesn't happen overnight. Change takes time, resources and commitment. Yet every day, across the Commonwealth, real people are making an effort for change.

We know real change is more than just one policy or bill being passed. Real change is about communities coming together to create something better for the long run.

This year, we've made many steps toward real change because real people in local communities continue to step up to the challenge! Enjoy reading about our many victories and celebrations and the work we still have left to do this year and beyond.

Thank you for your continued support. You make real change possible for real people. Welcome to our 2012 Mid-Year Report, where you can see what we're doing and how you are helping!



Virginia Organizing spent time at the African American Heritage Festival in Harrisonburg.



Real people divested from the big banks in Charlottesville.

VIRGINIA ORGANIZING BY THE NUMBERS

In the first half of 2012:

- 824 new people became active.
- 517 leaders learned a new skill.
- 45 leadership trainings were held with 646 participants.
- 51 letters to the editor and op-eds were published statewide.
- 52 direct actions occurred with 912 participants.
- 3 workshops on dismantling racism/classism/heterosexism were conducted with 47 participants.
- We added 287 new fans on Facebook, 39 new videos on YouTube with 1,259 views and new followers on Twitter.
- 15 Interns learned important organizing skills.
- We collaborated with 38 different groups through our Joint Plan of Work program on issues like the environment, transportation, human rights, and community support.
- 19 community forums were held with 1,116 participants.
- 478 one-to-one meetings occurred.
- 26 constituent/legislator meetings took place.
- 15,710 phone banking calls were made on issues of health care reform, voter participation, local campaigns, economic issues, and more.



Virginia Organizing leaders rallied around issues of tax fairness and health care coverage.

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE

LOCAL CAMPAIGNS

- The Washington County Chapter won its anti-hydrofracking campaign! The County Board of Supervisors voted not to allow drilling before 2014, when an EPA study is expected on the issue. This is just another example of how hard work and people using their voices to stand up for their communities can work to their advantage!



The Washington County Chapter held a meeting about hydrofracking.

- Over a dozen UMASS students opted to spend their spring break with Virginia Organizing learning about community organizing. The students spent the week in Richmond knocking on 1,900 doors, making 1,100 phone calls and planning for a community meeting on local transportation issues.

- The Harrisonburg Chapter conducted “The Rockingham County 287g Listening Project” to collect stories of how their community has been affected by local 287g law enforcement agreements which leads to racial profiling of Latino immigrants. In the first half of the year, a total of 100 interviews were completed!



Harrisonburg Chapter leaders conducted listening project training.

- We gave a warm welcome to the newest chapter of Virginia Organizing, the Martinsville-Henry County Chapter! The chapter is committed to voting rights and building a strong statewide organization. Welcome, Martinsville-Henry County Chapter! We know you will do great things! In the first half of the year, our newest chapter has held direct actions, conducted chapter meetings, and led trainings for area students.



The Martinsville-Henry County Chapter protested the "Ryan" budget.

- The South Hampton Roads Chapter joined the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Missing Voter Project and the Virginia ACLU in hosting "Democracy's Ghosts," a film screening and forum on voter suppression in Virginia: past, present and future.

- Virginia Organizing leaders from across the state headed to Charlotte, NC for a Bank of America shareholders' meeting. Virginians spoke out against Bank of America's harmful practices inside and outside of the shareholders' meeting.



Demonstrators in Virginia Beach protested outside an area Bank of America.

- The Danville Chapter hosted a community meeting on an exciting new program to help lower renters' monthly utility bills and create jobs by weatherizing up to 300 rental units.

STATE CAMPAIGNS

- Virginia Organizing held a Broken Hearts Day on Valentine's Day at the General Assembly to express our disappointment with the focus on partisan politics instead of jobs and economic recovery. Legislators were presented with a heart-shaped candy box – minus the candy. In its place was a note that said, "Disappointed? So are we! We want a General Assembly that works for All Virginians."
- We are continuing our work in civic engagement and started a campaign to help get voters to the polls and to understand the new ID requirements for voting.
- As a part of the Better Choices Coalition, Virginia Organizing advocated for tax fairness and a balanced approach to budgeting.
- Across the state, Virginia Organizing chapters engaged in divestment actions to bring awareness to the corruption of big Wall Street banks that finance the coal and payday loan industries and receive income tax refunds while moving jobs overseas. Virginia Organizing has led the effort to educate consumers and encourage everyone to move money to a local bank or credit union.



Virginia Organizing leaders shared why the General Assembly broke their hearts in 2012 at our Broken Hearts Day.

VIRGINIA GENERAL ASSEMBLY SUMMARY

The 2012 Virginia General Assembly brought about an extreme agenda that included, among other things, restricting voter rights and discriminating against same-sex adoptive parents. Virginia Organizing worked on a variety of issues this year and below is a brief summary of what happened.

- We had a victory in health care reform with a bill that allowed eligible legal immigrant pregnant women and children to be covered under Medicaid during the first five years of lawful residency. Unfortunately, the legislature chose to follow the Governor's lead by not acting on legislation to establish the state's health benefits exchange required by the Affordable Care Act.
- Members of the General Assembly continued to stand up for big businesses profiting from foreclosures and predatory loans. All bills designed to protect homeowners from harmful banking practices and consumers from the usurious rates of predatory loans were defeated in spite of the efforts of Virginia Organizing and several other groups.
- Fortunately, several bills were defeated in committee to eliminate the "Triggerman" rule that prohibits capital punishment being imposed as a penalty for persons who did not actually commit the murder.
- Voter ID bills requiring voters without proper identification at the polls to cast a provisional ballot were passed and signed into law. These new laws, that will make it more difficult for many citizens to vote, were supposedly introduced to address problems of voter fraud, which is virtually non-existent in Virginia.
- Adoption and child placement agencies may now lawfully discriminate against potential adoptive or foster couples based on a moral or religious belief, limiting same-sex couple rights. In addition, attempts to strengthen anti-discrimination measures in public employment were defeated.
- With the support of Virginia Organizing and numerous other organizations, the General Assembly defeated two harmful immigration bills. One bill would have required non-English speaking defendants to pay for the costs of interpreters if convicted of a criminal offense. The other was an Alabama-style bill that allows police to check immigration status based on "reasonable suspicion" of undocumented status.

NATIONAL CAMPAIGNS

Health Care Reform

- When the Affordable Care Act (ACA) was challenged at the U.S. Supreme Court, Virginia Organizing took action. We held three small business health care breakfasts to discuss the law, and six rallies across the state for the birthday of the ACA in March. Leaders were also present in D.C. all three days of oral arguments. The Supreme Court upheld all the benefits and the individual mandate that pays for the law on June 28, 2012.
- Virginia Organizing leaders attended and testified at every Virginia Health Reform Initiative (VHRI) meeting to advocate for full implementation of the law and a state-run health care exchange.
- Post-decision rallies of support were held in Danville, Augusta County, Charlottesville, and Virginia Beach after the ACA was upheld by the Supreme Court.
- Virginia Organizing members spoke to local, state, and international media outlets about the decision. Members also wrote letters to the editor about health care reform placed in newspapers across the state.



Virginia Organizing held health care rallies before and after the U.S. Supreme Court decision across Virginia and in D.C. during Supreme Court arguments.

Social Security

- This year, we held dozens of forums across the state to educate people about Social Security.
- Virginia Organizing leaders held U.S. Senator Mark Warner accountable for failing to protect Social Security, a benefit that has been paid for by the American people, in the “Missing the Mark” campaign. Leaders had their picture taken with a cardboard cutout of Senator Mark Warner and sent those photos to the Senator.



Leaders in Staunton posed with a Senator Mark Warner cutout.

- Hundreds of postcards were sent to Senator Warner in support of Social Security.

Budget and Tax Fairness

- During the first half of the year, Virginia Organizing focused on divestment from large Wall Street banks like Bank of America to investment in local community banks and credit unions as part of our campaign to hold corporations accountable to taxpayers and paying their fair share.
- We made hundreds of calls to Congress to fight for the Bring Jobs Home Act and against extending Bush-era tax cuts to the wealthiest 2% of Americans.



Another Virginia Organizing leader held banks accountable.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Virginia Organizing leaders and interns from across the state have spoken out about what inspires them to be involved in change. We hope their words inspire you, too!

“There seemed to be a lot of hopelessness and it made me understand what people were saying when they used the phrase, ‘end of the line.’ The experience actually gave me a little hope. Hope that with this information, Virginia Organizing and the community can come together and do something about these issues.”

–Robin Schrantz, Virginia Organizing Intern
On her experience with the Harrisonburg Listening Project

“I have been working as a leader with the local non-partisan Virginia Organizing Voter Participation Team for the last few years and have been committed to making sure that each and every American gets an opportunity to vote. People that make mistakes and pay their full debt to society should be given an opportunity to re-invest themselves in the community that includes the basic right to vote. I am proud to be a volunteer that assists people in this effort.”

–Debra Grant, Virginia Organizing Leader
From a submitted letter to the editor

“In the last few years, thousands of local small businesses have been forced to give up covering their employees because of skyrocketing [health care] costs.”

–Virginia Main Street Alliance
In a letter to Virginia state Senator Jeff McWaters

“I feel that I am always on the lookout for ways to challenge the oppression of marginalized groups.”

–Jenika McCrayer, Virginia Organizing Intern



Real people. Real change.
All across Virginia, you've been
working. Thanks for making the
first half of 2012 so great!

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