



*A Tool for Building  
Civic Engagement*

# Virginia Community Engagement Index

# Serve Virginia

“

Inspire Virginians from all parts of the Commonwealth to engage in service and volunteer experiences to combat disparities and meet our most pressing needs



2022- 2024 State Service Plan



# Our Work is Guided by Three Interrelated Strategies



Over \$500,000 in MATCH funding to AmeriCorps State grantees from VFN members this year alone!

Thank you for your  
partnership!



## Our Challenge:

Develop a study that could assess how residents were engaging and what they prioritized in their communities, while also gaining insights that could lead to a fuller understanding of the service landscape, strategies for promoting greater awareness on the part of residents, and tactics for boosting volunteer recruitment and program development.

**84%**

Said it was very important to gain a greater understanding of community-level needs

**60%**

Said community organizations lack the volunteer cultivation, training and recruitment resources to boost volunteerism rates effectively

**63%**

Said limited awareness and understanding on the part of resident for how they can serve was an important barrier to address

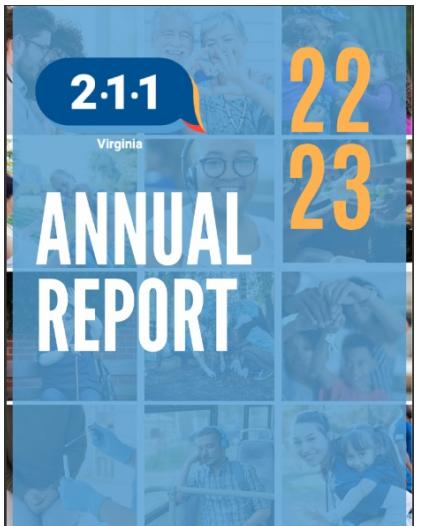
**55%**

Said they felt there was limited inclusivity of “community-level” service in how, we as a sector, think about and measure engagement



## Volunteering and Civic Life in America

Every two years, AmeriCorps produces comprehensive research about civic engagement trends in the United States.



### COMMUNITY HEALTH ASSESSMENTS

A community health assessment is a careful, systematic examination of the health status of the community that is used to identify key health problems and assets in the community. Data from the assessment will inform decision-making, prioritization of health problems and development of plans to improve the health of the community. The success of the CHA is owned and led by members of each community, so that the results accurately reflect the opinions of people who live, work, play, and pray in each community in the Commonwealth.



## WHAT THIS STUDY NEEDED TO BE

- More unique to Virginia
- More encompassing of all avenues of community engagement (formal service and volunteering, informal neighborly acts of aid, civic and democratic action, etc.)
- More illustrative of community priorities — where should we be channeling resources and volunteers
- More indicative of messaging and strategies to drive recruitment and retention

## Our Process

# Building Our Survey



LEVERAGING INSIGHTS FROM OUR CORE TEAM TO PINPOINT MOST ACTIONABLE AREAS OF INQUIRY

LEVERAGING NATIONAL PARTNERS FOR THOUGHT LEADERSHIP & TO DETERMINE QUESTIONS THAT MIGHT SERVE AS NATIONAL COMPARISONS\*



POINTS  
OF LIGHT



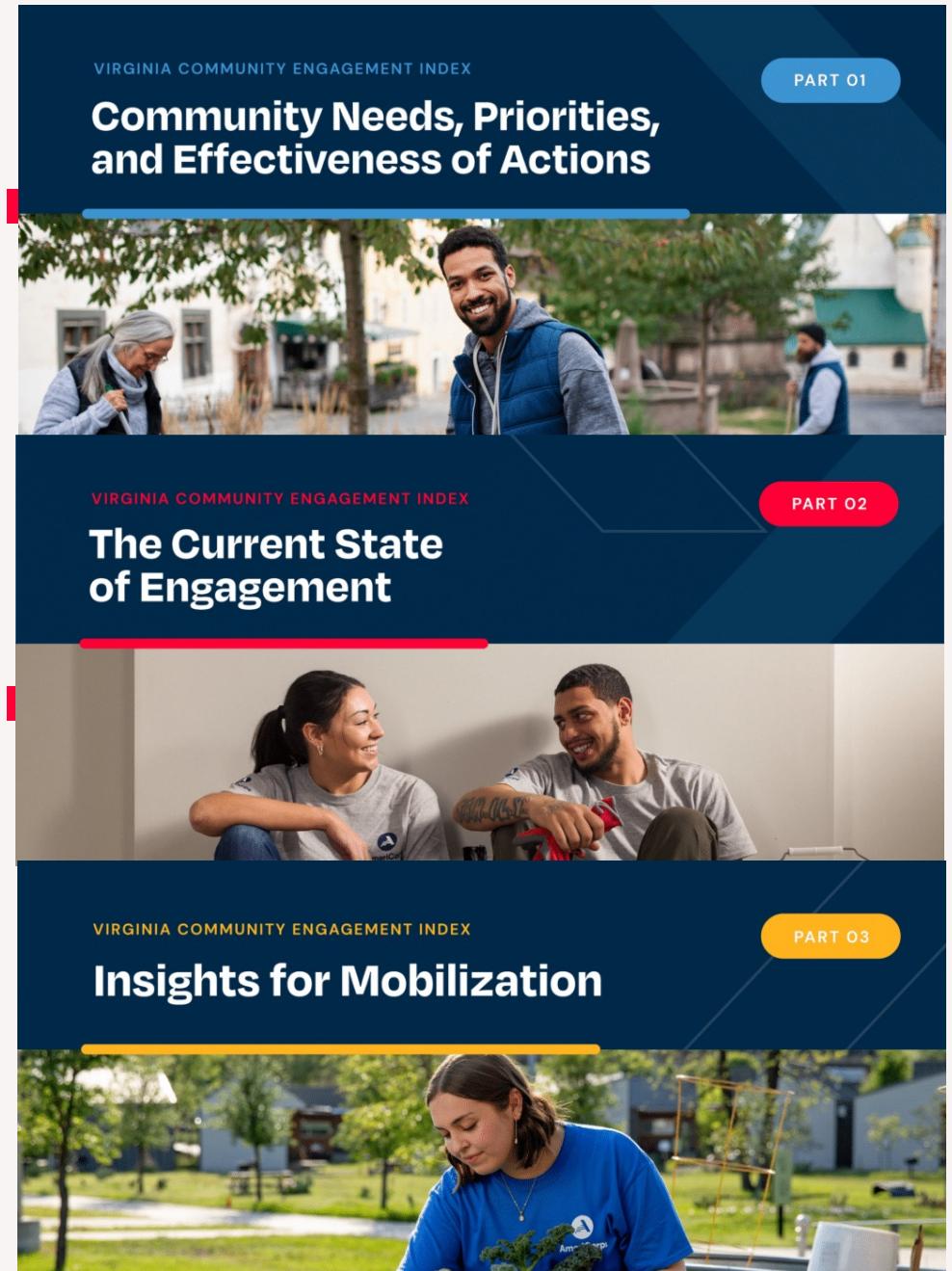
AmeriCorps



## Our Results

# What We Learned

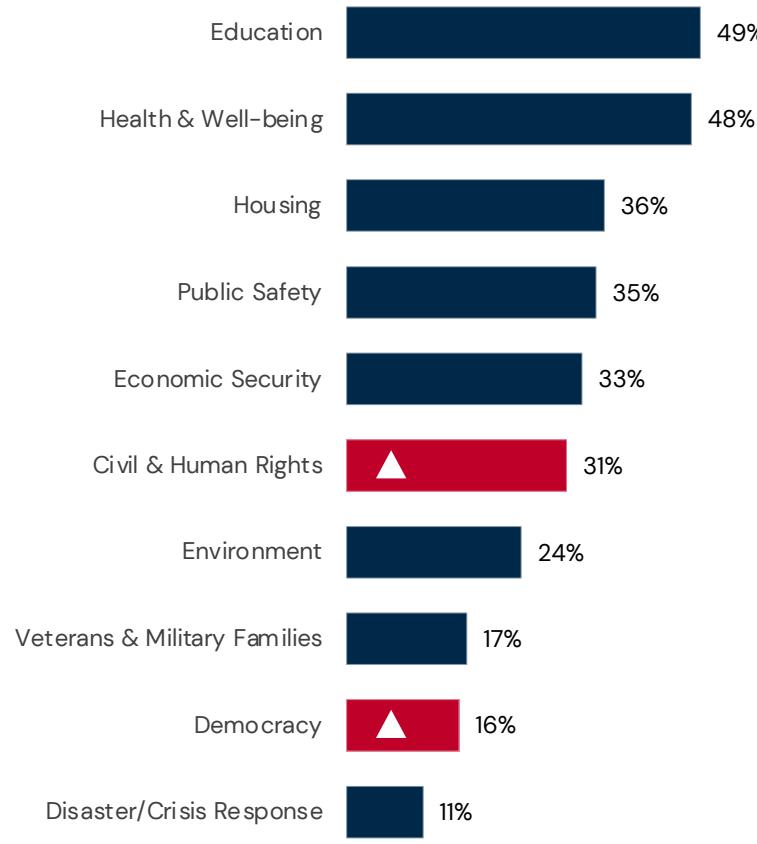
- What Virginians care about, and how they rank community priorities
- How Virginians invest their time, talent, and treasure against the needs they see in their communities
- Why Virginians start volunteering, and what keeps them engaged



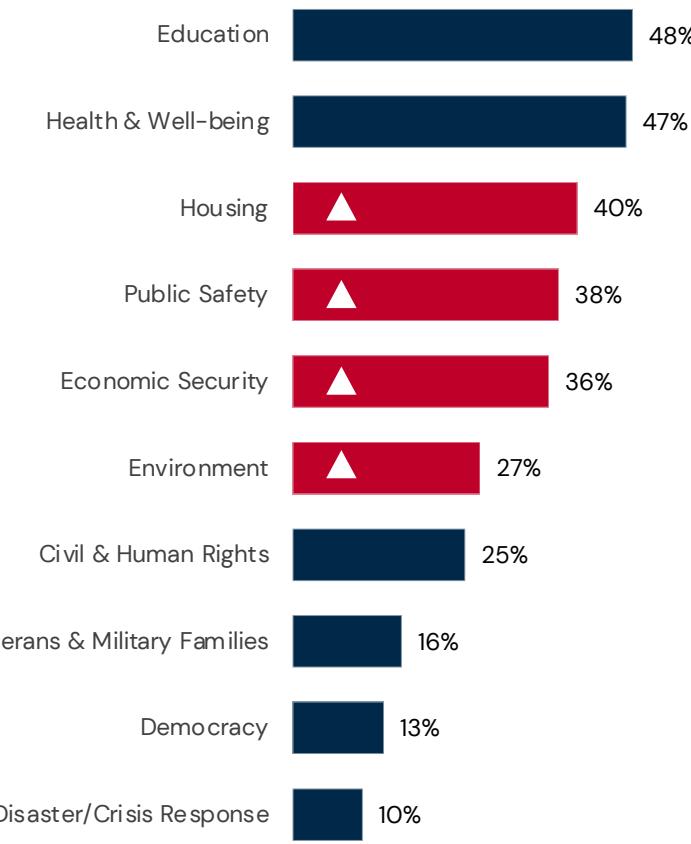
# State vs. Local Priorities

When comparing state and local priorities, respondents place higher emphasis on housing, public safety, economic security and the environment on the local level, while placing higher emphasis on civil and human rights and democracy on the state level.

## STATEWIDE PRIORITIES



## LOCAL PRIORITIES



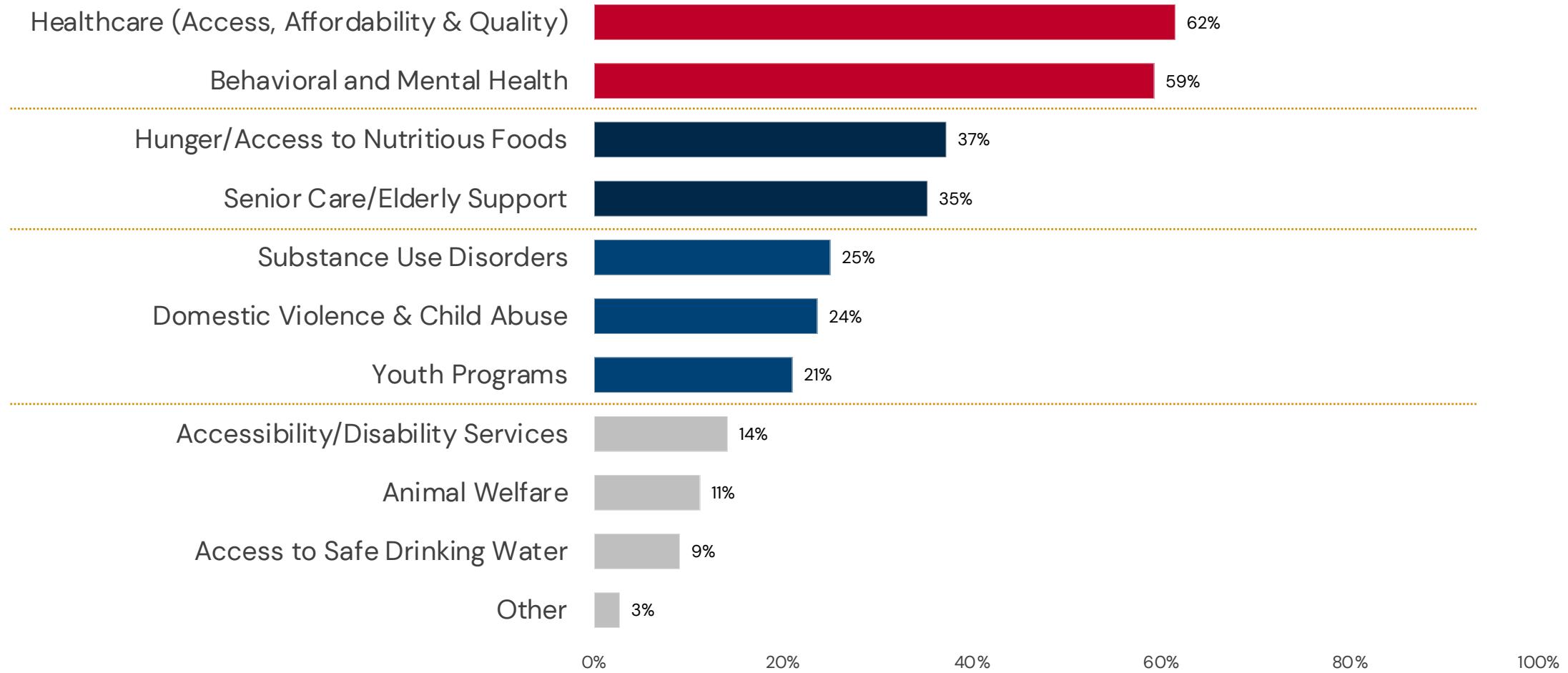
Q12. Of the following options, what should be the Top 3 priorities for Virginia?  
Q13. Of the following options, what should be the Top 3 priorities for where you live?

n = 6,379  
n = 6,374



## HEALTH & WELL-BEING: What needs to be addressed

The vast majority of respondents point to access, affordability and quality of healthcare services and behavioral and mental health as the top priorities to address.



Q14.1. You chose Health & Well-being as a top priority for where you live. Thinking of that priority, which of the following "areas to address" are most important? *Please select three options.*

n = 3,100

# How do we mobilize?

## Active & Frequent Engagers

Defined as those who report volunteering more than a few times a week and/or have engaged in 5 or more civic actions in the past 12 months.

**28% of the survey population\***



### GOAL

Broaden their influence and build up as ambassadors — those who can spread awareness of opportunities and extend the invitation to serve.

## Active but Sporadic Engagers

Defined as those who have volunteered within the past year but report having decreased their frequency of volunteering.

**14% of the survey population\***



### GOAL

Reignite their passions through specific invitations to serve that align with their community priorities and the impacts they hope to make — both for their communities and themselves.

## Potential Engagers

Defined as those who did not report volunteering with an organization within the past 12 months.

**30% of the survey population\***



### GOAL

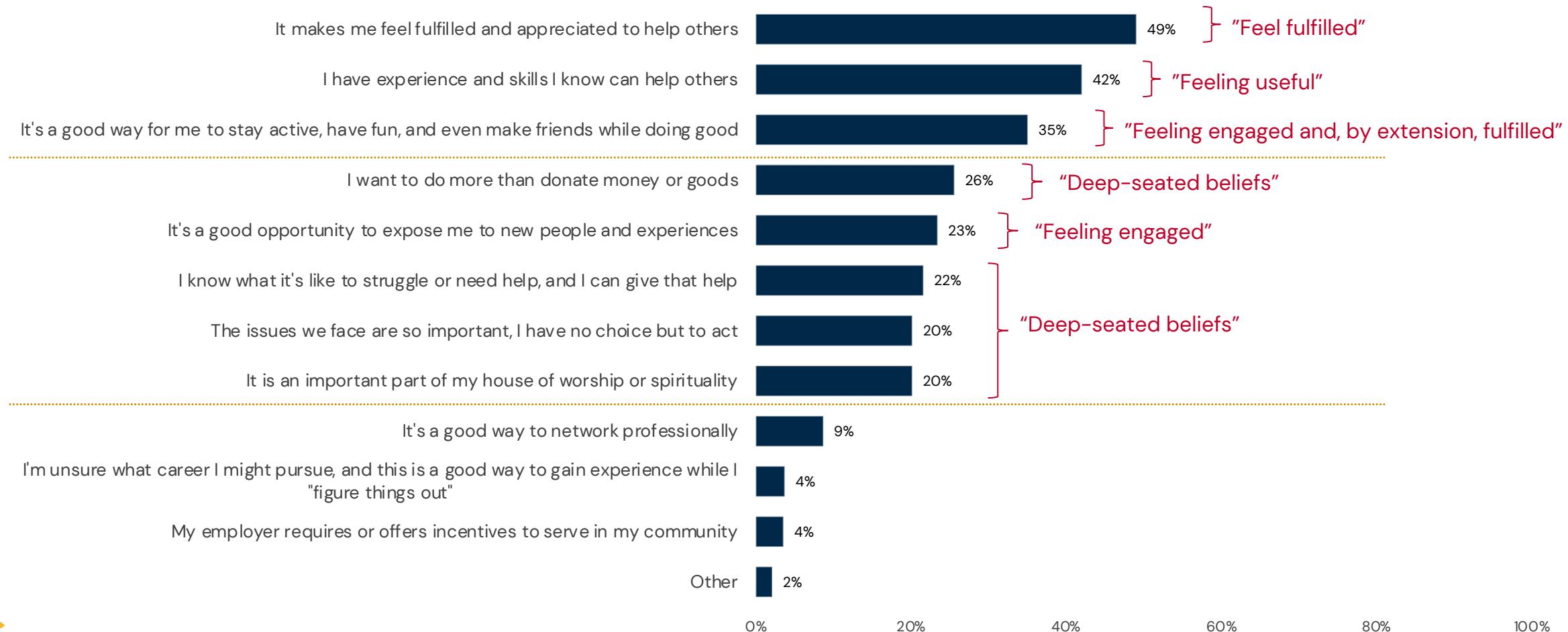
Spark an interest to explore more "formal" avenues of service using what we know about the drivers of volunteerism while capturing and celebrating the ways in which they're already making a difference.

\*Note: These groups are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Therefore, their percentages are not intended to add up to 100% of the total survey population.



# Why They Keep Volunteering

Respondents most often cite personal fulfillment as the reason they continue volunteering — whether that fulfillment comes from knowing they've helped or having shared the experience with others. Beyond that, a desire to do more in the face of current challenges, or because of personal beliefs, also rates highly as a motivating factor.



Q10. Why do you continue to volunteer or give back? Select up to three descriptions that best match your experiences.

n = 4,355



# Virginia Community Engagement Index

Building a Culture of Service, Volunteerism,  
and Civic Action in the Commonwealth



VCEI

## Milestones

- **November 2021:** State Service Plan introduced
- **July–September 2022:** Fact-finding; Core Team development
- **October 2022:** Core Team Kickoff
- **February–April 2023:** Survey Fielding and Analysis
- **May 2023:** Summit Launch
- **May–July 2023:** VCEI–State Findings Refinement and Finalization
- **September 2023:** VCEI–State Report Launch with "deep dive" appendices (print and web)

# Launching the VCEI

- Engaging people around findings
- Using "insights for mobilization" to focus on action strategies to utilize the data



## 2023 VA VOLUNTEERISM SUMMIT

- Keynote session
- Workshop presentation
- Interactive booth

## SHARING WITH OTHER STATES

- America's Service Commissions
- AmeriCorps HQ

## PROMOTING ACROSS NETWORKS

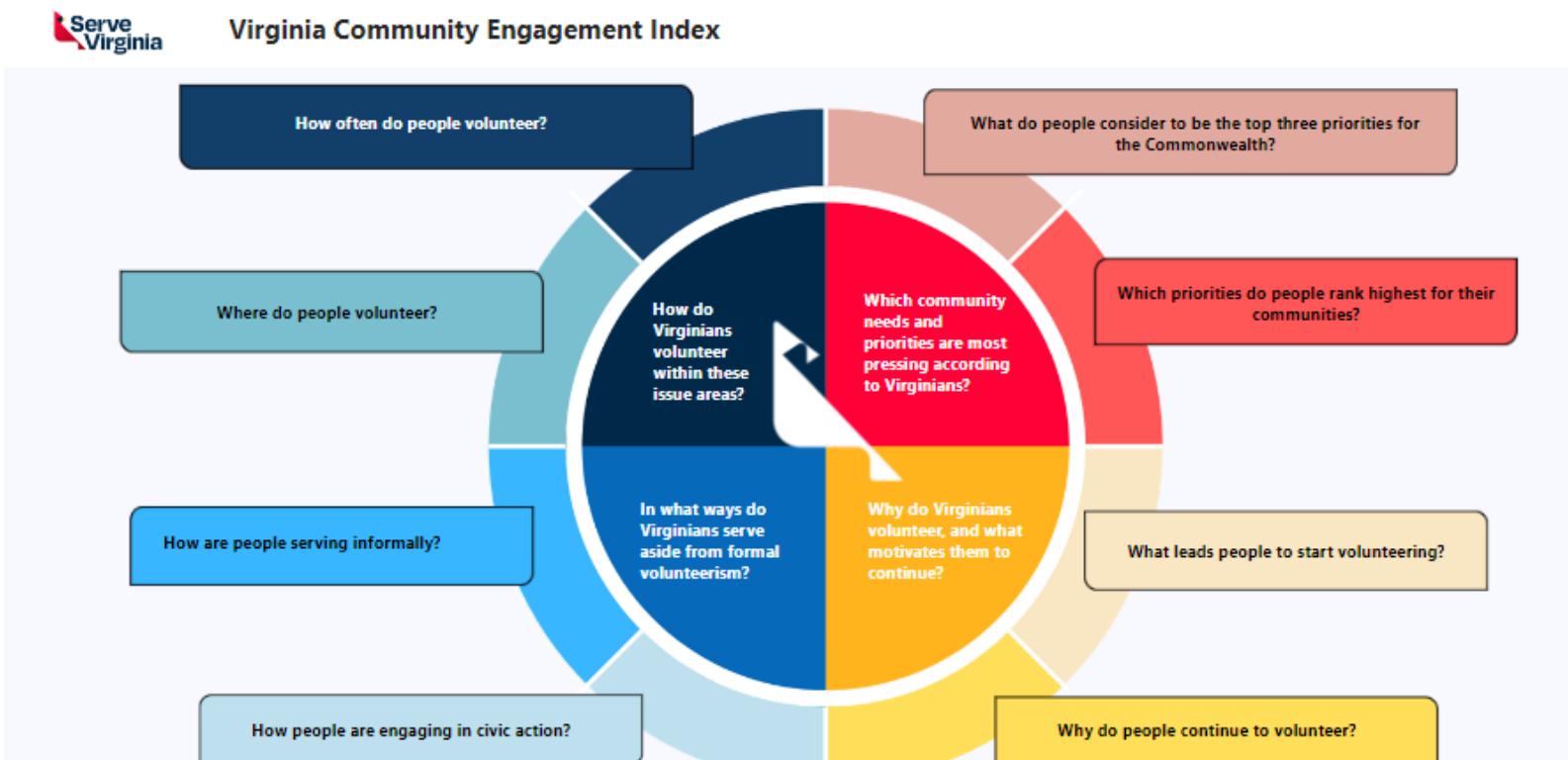
- United Ways of VA
- Local DSS
- VA Capacity Builders

## ON THE ROAD

- Active Citizen's Conference
- Center for Nonprofit Excellence
- AmeriCorps Evidence and Impact webinar

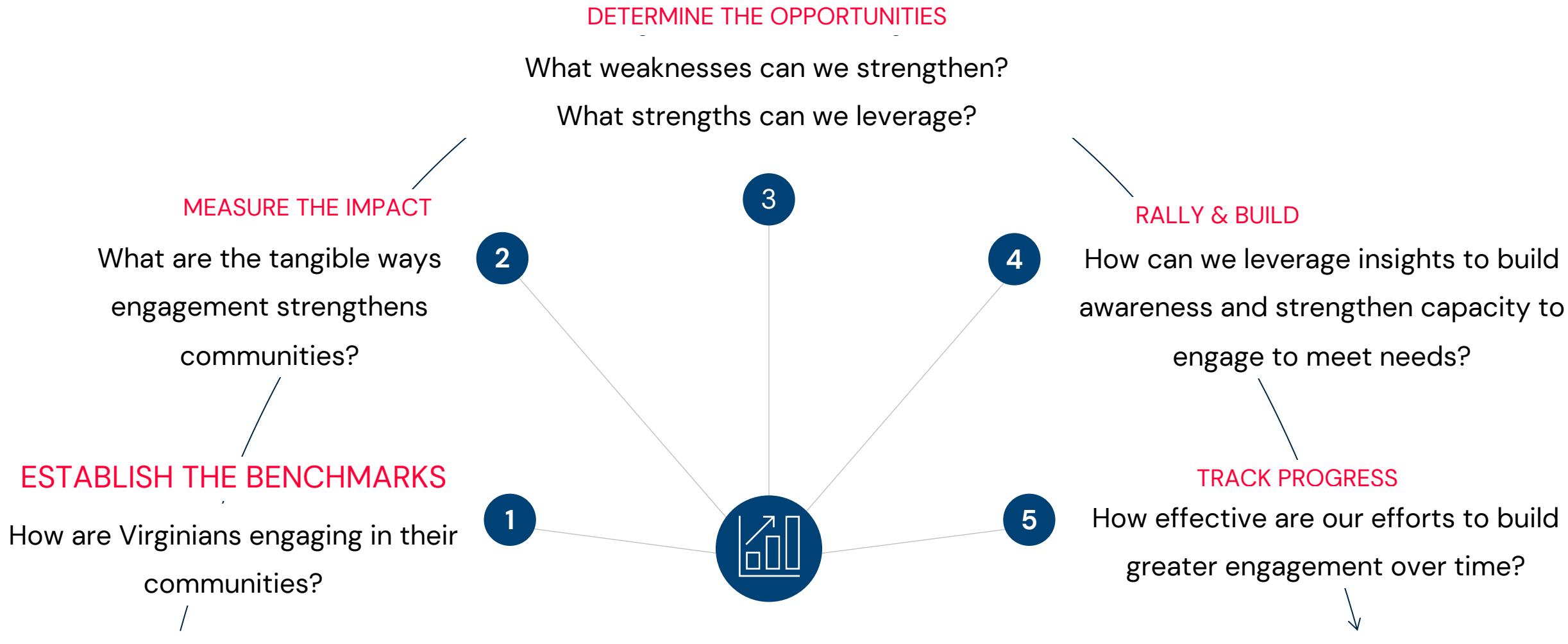
# Interactive Regional Data Dashboard

Whether you need evidence to support a proposal for new community-based initiatives in your region or are simply curious to learn more about what civic engagement looks like in your community, take a deeper dive into the Virginia Community Engagement Index (VCEI) data with this interactive regional data dashboard. Click on any of the questions below to learn more and sort responses by region and demographics, or [CLICK HERE](#) to get in touch about your specific interests in the data.



Powered by [Office of Data Governance and Analytics](#)

# Formalizing Our Goals





# Civic Leadership: Community Engagement Index

# 9 ways foundations can create **Systems Change**

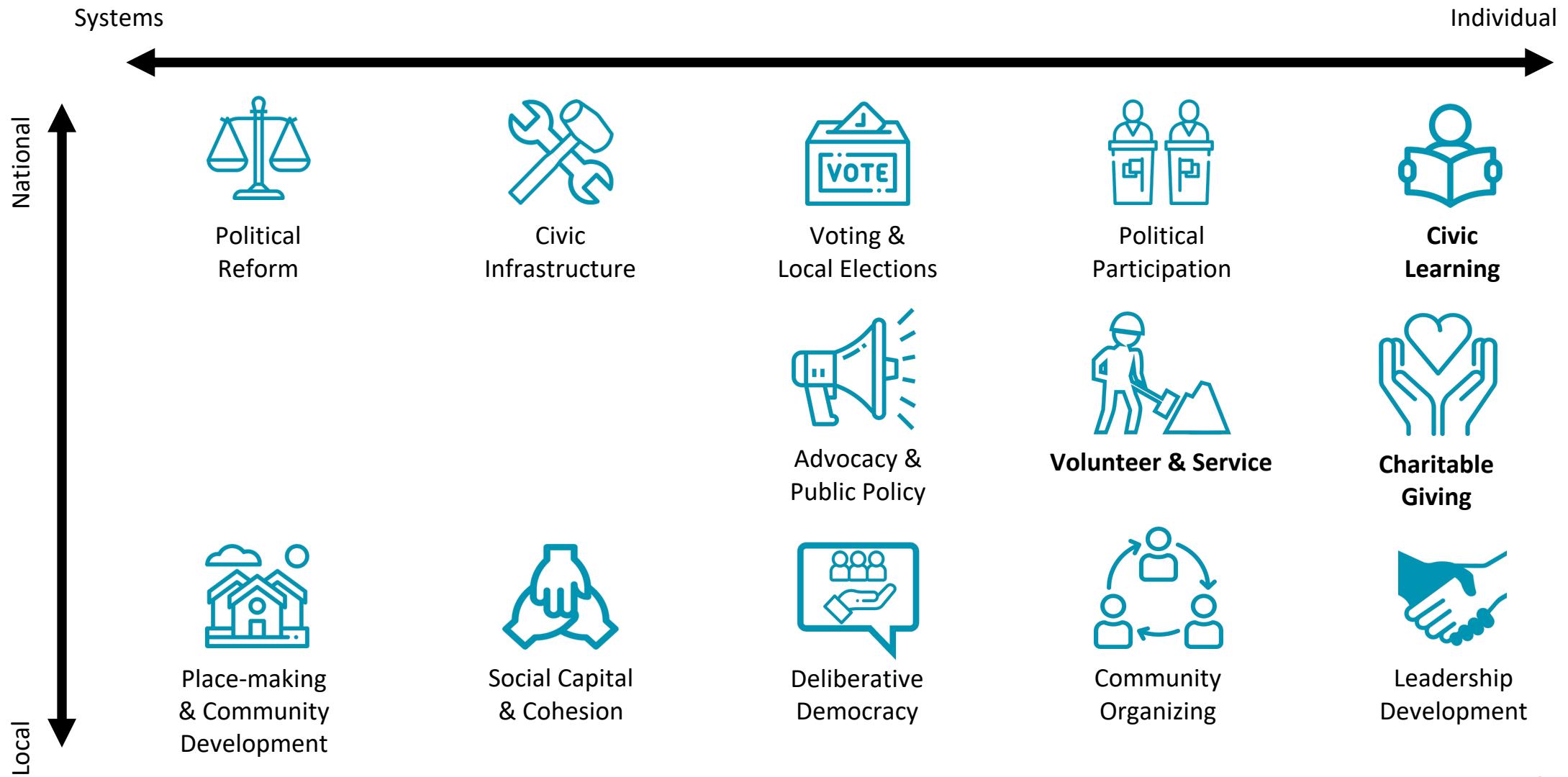
Increase the quality and reach of programs and services

Affect public and private sector actions and investments



Address underlying conditions:  
mental models, power dynamics, and relationships

# Impact Scale of Civic Engagement



# Central VA Core Team Process



# VCEI – Central Region Development Steps

- ✓ **Develop Core Team** (May – June 2023)
- ✓ **Analyze Central Region Data** (May – July 2023)
- ✓ **Kickoff VCEI – Central Core Team Meeting** (July 28, 2023)
  - ✓ Align on Objectives and Deliverables
  - ✓ Review VCEI – Central Region Data Topline
- ✓ **Implications Discussion – Core Team Meetings** (Aug. 22 & Sept. 26, 2023)
  - Dig Deep on the VCEI Central Region Data
  - Determine Implications and Impact for Region
- ✓ **Engagement Strategies Development – Core Team Meetings** (Oct. 13 & Nov. 1, 2023)
  - Determine Regional Engagement Focus Areas (Oct. 13, 2023)
  - Develop Engagement Plan and Metrics (Nov. 1, 2023)



**S** Key Spaces**E** Equip**R** coRps**V** Voice**E** Experience

Strategic Focus Areas →

Actions We Can Take ↓

Strengthen and expand faith-driven, education-based, and employee/er service efforts.

Equip nonprofits through convening, training, and resources.

Leverage national service as part of community solutions.

Enable individuals and organizations to influence policies and increase awareness of community needs.

Enhance the experience of volunteering and serving in communities.

**C** Communicate Strategically

- Reframing service, volunteerism, and civic engagement
- Demonstrating value and impact through enhanced storytelling and metrics
- Developing more effective, multi-channel communications and outreach strategies

Tactical Thought-Starters

**E** Engage Intentionally

- Engaging and building trust with under-represented populations
- Developing effective programming to build knowledge and skills of full sector to engage
- Connecting people with opportunities to get involved

Tactical Thought-Starters

**I** Invest Resources

- Developing training and templates
- Identifying funding streams
- Advocating for effective policies

Tactical Thought-Starters

**Projects/Initiatives to Implement in 2024**

Sector Summits - School, Faith, Corporate by Fall '24

**Outcome(s):** Program Development; Resource Sharing; Communications Strategies

Central Region Research Meta-Analysis

**Outcome(s):** Resource repository; Website; Continuum of learning opportunities

Planning grant to expand national service through new or existing programs

**Outcome(s):** Operational grant; Impact Community Framework

Landscape Analysis and Recommendations

**Outcome(s):** Regional policy trackers; Orgs with advocacy/ community voice initiatives

Landscape Analysis and Recommendations

**Outcome(s):** Civic Learning programming; Civic Leadership recognition programs

**Fundamentals**

Stewards: M. Nivar/J. Seagraves; S. Fleming. J. Patja Howell  
Funders: Altria/CapOne

Stewards: V. Diamond, M. Goodman-Smith  
Funder: CFgR

Stewards: V Diamond, B. Sipe  
Funder: Serve Virginia

Stewards: TBD  
Funder: Serve Virginia

Stewards: G. Cavallaro/ B. Bush  
Funder: CFgR

# Tools and Templates



## Structure leads to sustainability!

Key Spaces - Employee Sector Coalition			
VCEI Central Strategic Tactical Actions (CB)		Objectives	
Targeted Actions Key Components	Targeted Actions Key Components	Detailed Steps	Timing
Communicate Strategically (C)	A.		
	B.		
	C.		
Engage Intentionally (E)	A.		
	B.		
	C.		
Invest Resources (I)	A.		
	B.		
	C.		

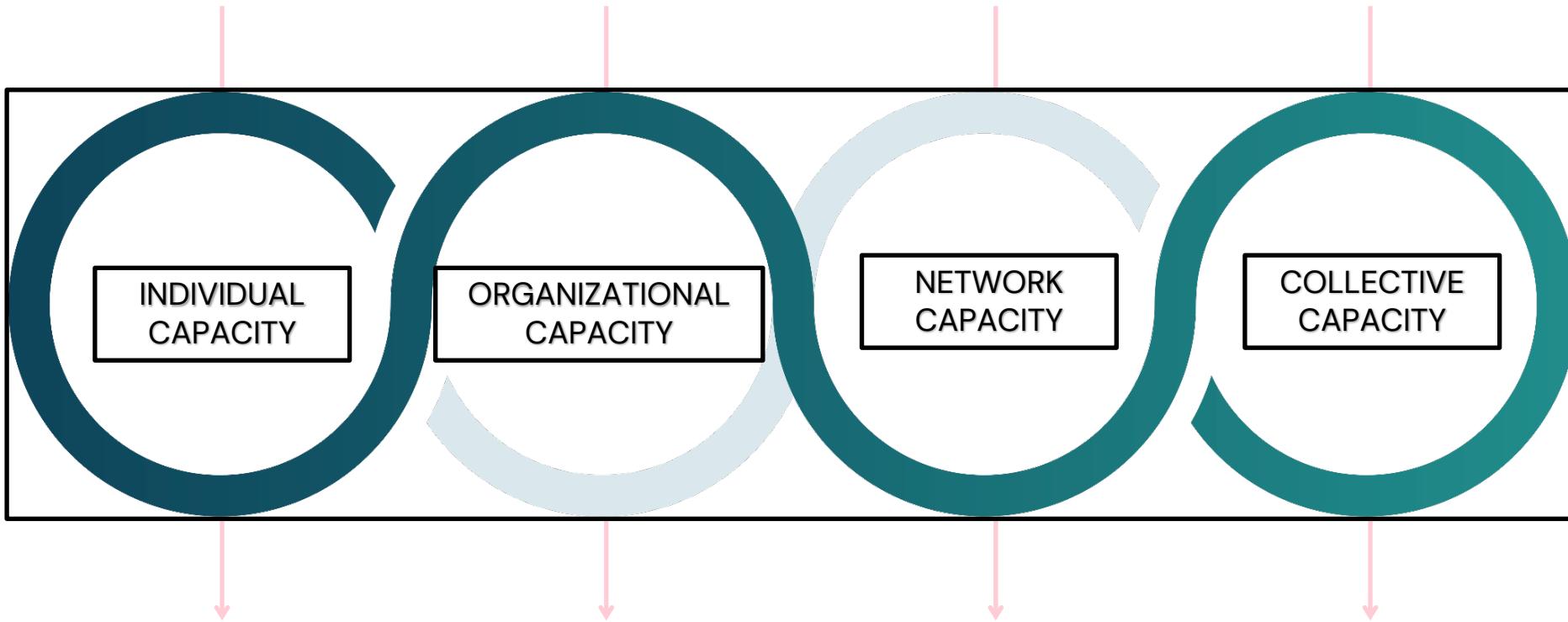
H26		COMMITTED (Y/N Date)													
VCEI CENTRAL REGION SERVE AND SUPPORTING PROJECT PLAN															
VCEI CENTRAL REGION SERVE PLAN															
REGION GOAL:		To build a stronger service, volunteerism, and civic engagement ecosystem to meet needs in Central Virginia.													
STRATEGIES															
S-Key Spaces		Strengthen and expand faith-driven, education-based and employee/er service efforts.													
E-Equip		Equip nonprofits through convening, training, and resources.													
R-corps		Leverage national service as part of community solutions.													
V-Voice		Enable individuals and organizations to influence policies and increase awareness of community needs.													
E-Experience		Enhance the experience of volunteering and serving in communities.													
PROJECT-SPECIFIC PLAN															
DATE UPDATED:															
ATTENDEES:															
PROJECT GOAL:		This project will support X strategy (SERVE-pick)													
PROJECT STEWARD:															
PROJECT DESCRIPTION:															
OBJECTIVES of the PROJECT:															
1															
2															
3															
4															
5															
		ACTION AREAS		SPECIFIC DETAILS		TIMING	RESPONSIBLE	RESOURCES NEEDED/ DECISIONS TO							
								COMMITTED (Y/N Date)							
								NEXT STEPS							

## The VCEI “Tool Kit”

- ❖ **At-a-Glance Regional Plan Template:** Central Region plan that will be used as a template for other regions or organizations.
- ❖ **Project Template:** Specific project plan that can be used for any project within a strategy (Project objectives, tactics, owners, funders, timing, and metrics)
- ❖ **VCEI Sample Metrics:** Metrics that tie back to the VCEI state and regional data. They can be used in project plans to gauge effect of actions on overall service and volunteerism.
- ❖ **Tactical Thought Starters:** Tactical ideas or actions that can be used as thought starters for building out project plans.



# Applying the VCEI Central Region Plan



Which insights and actions from this plan can you implement immediately to improve how you work?

Which insights and actions from this plan can you take to your colleagues to enhance your organization?

Which insights and actions from this plan can you share with people in your professional or personal networks?

Which insights and actions from this plan can be most effectively implemented against specific community priorities?

# Regional Alignment



# Focusing on economic mobility

is key to closing opportunity  
gaps right here in our local  
communities.



# Coming together to tackle these challenges head on.

**We are now building the right partnerships at the right time.** A diverse group of community members – including public and private partnerships, local government representatives, business owners, and residents – are presenting a unified front to ensure everyone has the ability to thrive and a stronger future for RVA is possible.



Our collective vision is to:

Establish leadership buy-in and a network of ambassadors to support our focus on accelerating inclusive prosperity across the region for the next 10 years.

Encourage the community to provide input on priorities, help identify solutions, and actively participate in promoting economic mobility for all.

Explore areas that will give us a basic framework to identify priorities, promote collective action, and measure progress.

Establish an accountability structure to sustain these efforts over time.

Engage as many new advocates as possible, getting even more participants on board.

# What have we learned?

Too many residents are not benefitting from growth in the region.

We need to make sure everyone – regardless of race, gender or zip code – has the same opportunities and an equal chance to thrive.

## Community Priorities by Region

Our top five key areas of focus align with the initial regional and community sentiments when priorities were ranked.

Priorities	Central	Eastern	Northern	Piedmont	Western
Education 48%	53%	48%	46%	48%	52%
Health & Well-Being 47%	50%	43%	48%	49%	54%
Housing 40%	39%	39%	40%	50%	50%
Public Safety 38%	35%	41%	39%	34%	26%
Economic Security 36%	36%	35%	37%	39%	40%
Environment 27%	27%	27%	28%	23%	24%
Civil & Human Rights 25%	30%	23%	24%	25%	18%
Veterans & Military Families 16%	10%	23%	14%	12%	18%
Democracy 13%	13%	11%	15%	11%	9%
Disaster/Crisis Response 10%	8%	10%	10%	9%	9%

Based on survey data from 6,374 respondents answering the question: Of the following options, what should be the top three priorities for where you live?



# Ensuring accountability diverse perspectives

## PEOPLE FIRST

Neighborhood and Resident Engagement

## COMMUNITY NETWORKS

Civic associations, CBOs, churches, schools, citizen advocacy groups

## ANCHOR ORGANIZATIONS

Large nonprofits and coalitions, faith networks, school systems, small business networks, public providers

## COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP

Corporate, business, funders, government, higher education, school leaders



# AmeriCorps Planning Grants



## Program Year 2023–2024

- College of William and Mary
- Norfolk State University
- United Way of Martinsville and Henry County

***We anticipate 10 new planning grants awarded for a Sept 1<sup>st</sup> start and invite VFN members to join our planning grant efforts.***



## NEXT STEPS

# Serve Virginia in 2024 and beyond

- Policy work
- Promoting AmeriCorps opportunities to serve and partner
- Increasing VCEI utilization
- Volunteer awards and recognition

## NEXT STEPS

### Partnering with Serve Virginia

**Servevirginia.org**



#### Implement the VCEI

Help sponsor the VCEI for your company, community or network of partners



#### Improve volunteer engagement

Join our network and attend the virtual Volunteerism Summit (May 15 & 16) for best practices on engaging employees in volunteerism



#### Nominate, or be nominated, for a Governor's Award on Service and Volunteerism

Nominations will open later this spring, sign up for our newsletter at [servevirginia.org](http://servevirginia.org) to stay informed.





AND

