

Faithful and Strategic Engagement in Metropolitan Richmond

Facilitator's Workbook

Purpose

The purpose of this workbook is to enable you as a facilitator to lead a four-part conversation with members of your faith community who are interested in one, learning more about metropolitan Richmond; and two, reflecting upon how your community can respond in a faithful, strategic, and relevant way to the region's most pressing needs. What follows is the audio script for each of the four modules. This script will prompt you to pause the video at certain points to enable discussion among participants. We suggest you view each module before leading the discussion.

Introduction

In his lecture, "The Five Essential Questions in Life," James Ryan suggests that when we ask "I wonder if," we envision new possibilities for our future. In this four-part conversation, we begin by asking: what if all the people of good will in metropolitan Richmond aligned their monetary donations and volunteer efforts to address our region's most pressing problems? What would that take? What would that look like? Could we more rapidly, broadly, and effectively empower lives and transform neighborhoods? And what if communities of faith were to play a key role in this effort?

Through shared learning and discussion, faith communities can: one, develop a deeper understanding of the region's most pressing human needs; two, reflect upon their giving patterns and volunteer efforts; three, gain practical tips for working with nonprofits and volunteers; four, make connections between works of mercy and the pursuit of justice; and five, strengthen our collaborative engagement in transforming RVA.

Module One: The Region We Seek to Serve

"God loves human beings. God loves the world—not ideal human beings but people as they are, not an ideal world but the real world." Dietrich Bonhoeffer

“Couldn’t we at least agree . . .” is another essential question that James Ryan suggests we ask. Couldn’t we at least agree that most human beings—perhaps all—want an opportunity in life. They want the opportunity to thrive, succeed, take chances, realize their potential, demonstrate their worth, contribute. Human beings want—need—more than one opportunity. In other words, one mistake should not and cannot close the door to future opportunities.

And people want some say so—choice—about how they can pursue those opportunities. If we can agree on the basic human yearnings of choice and opportunity, then the question before us is: what are the essential elements in any community that enable meaningful opportunity?

Pause Video

Discussion Question: What are the characteristics of a community that enable residents to pursue their potential, to thrive?

Resume Video

A community of opportunity is a community that boasts attractive, sustainable, affordable housing—both rental and owner occupied. These houses line safe streets. The children and adults in these homes have access to affordable healthcare and healthy foods. The children attend high performing public schools—pre-K, K-12, and beyond.

The adults hold jobs that pay wages that enable them to meet their needs and the needs of their loved ones. The jobs, the schools, and the houses are connected by a multi-modal public transportation system that reaches deeply and broadly throughout the region. And woven throughout all of this is a rich tapestry of natural, recreational, and cultural amenities that are accessible and affordable to all.

Simply put, a community of opportunity is a community in which the circumstances of one’s birth do not irrevocably set the trajectory of one’s life.

In a community of opportunity, the conditions exist that provide each person with the chance to flourish. Is metropolitan Richmond a community of opportunity for everyone? No.

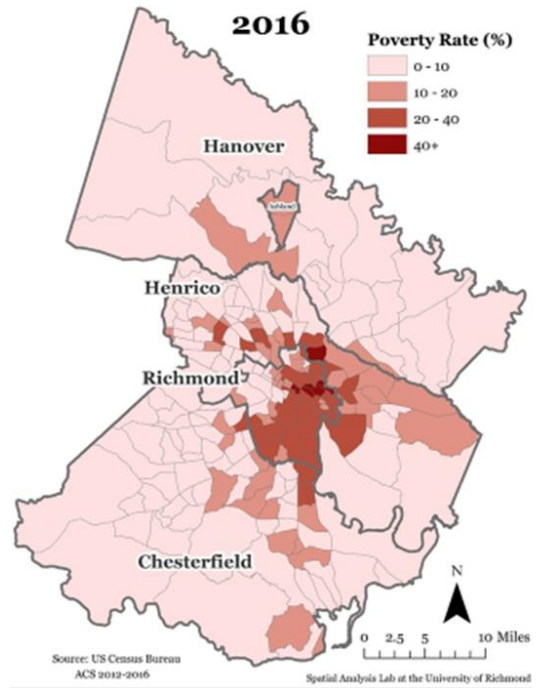
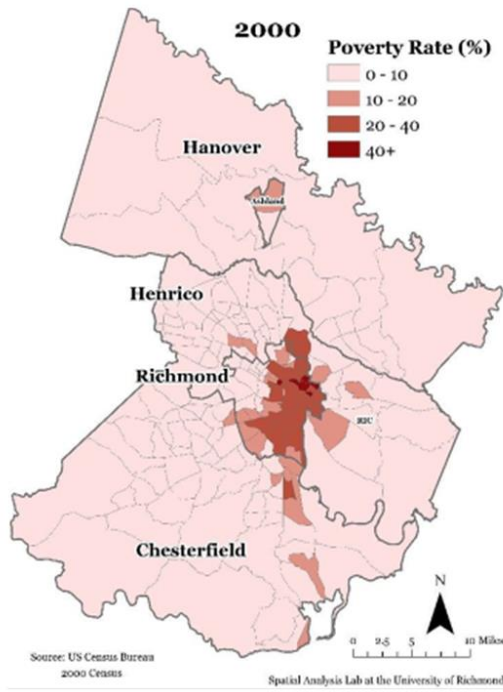
Parenting magazine rates us as the 6th best city for families, but 40% of our city's children live in poverty. Almost 35% of the region's households pay too much for housing. We're known internationally as a foodie destination, yet 22% of city residents are unsure how they'll secure their next meal. Our region is home to some of the best public schools in the country. But in Henrico County, over 9,000 children (almost 20% of all students) attend unaccredited or partially accredited schools; in the City of Richmond, that number is 11,141 (45% of all students). We're the 44th largest metropolitan area in the country, and yet our transit system ranks us 92nd out of the top 100 metros in terms of transit connectivity.

These conditions contribute to vast, damaging disparities. The distance between Gilpin Court and Westover Hills is 5.7 miles; the difference in life expectancy is 20 years . . . 5.7 miles, 20 years. If this is unacceptable, then how can we help? "How we help matters as much as that we do help," notes James Ryan. "If you ask how can I help, you are asking with humility for direction. And you are recognizing that others are experts in their own lives and they will likely help you as much as you help them." That is this spirit in which this work is offered: people of faith can help address the challenges of our region. They can do so strategically, and in ways that respect the inherent dignity and worth of each person they encounter.

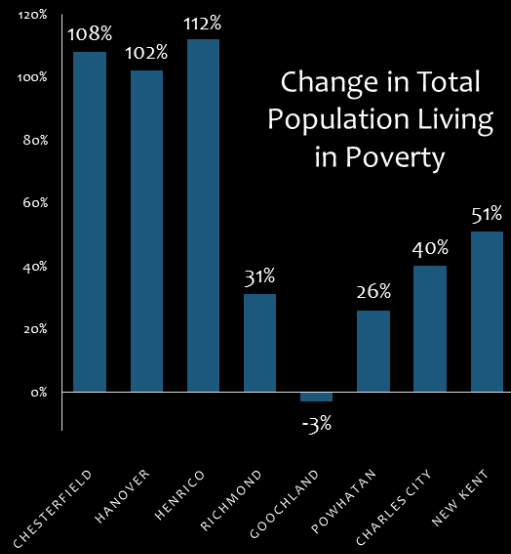
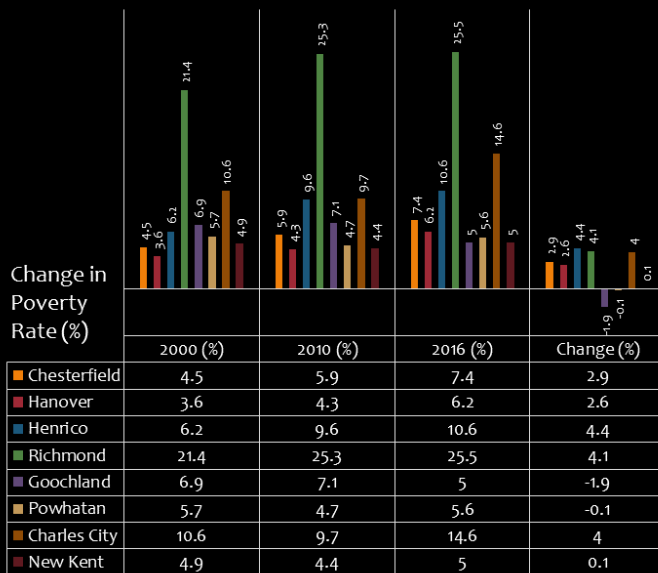
Where are we in metro Richmond?

Poverty

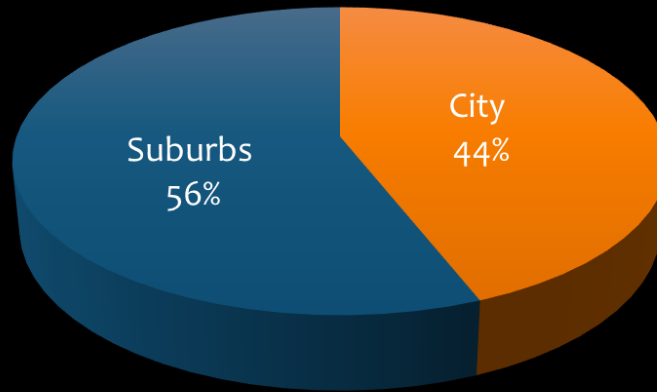
Poverty is porous; it knows no jurisdictional boundaries. As the following graphics illustrate, during the first sixteen years of this century, the rate of poverty grew rapidly in Hanover, Henrico and Chesterfield. In metropolitan Richmond, impoverished people are more likely to reside in a county rather than the city. While this trend is difficult for many to accept and bespeaks numerous challenges for the suburban jurisdictions, it offers opportunities for progress as well. Challenges that have confronted the City of Richmond for decades are now shared by the counties; solutions and the efforts to enact solutions can be shared as well.



Population Living in Poverty in the Region (2000 – 2016)



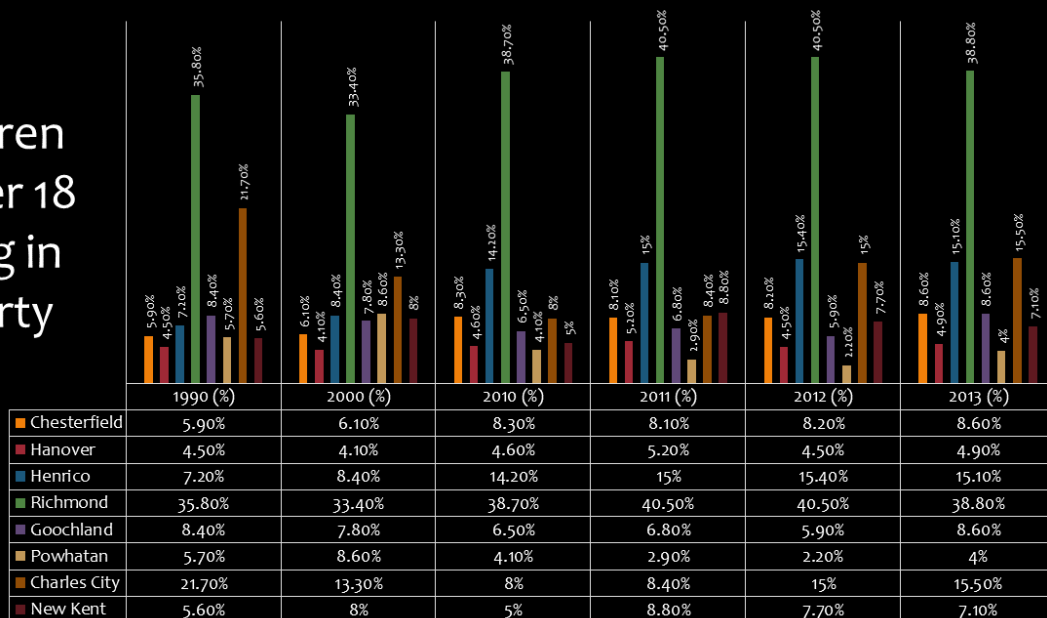
Number of People Living in Poverty



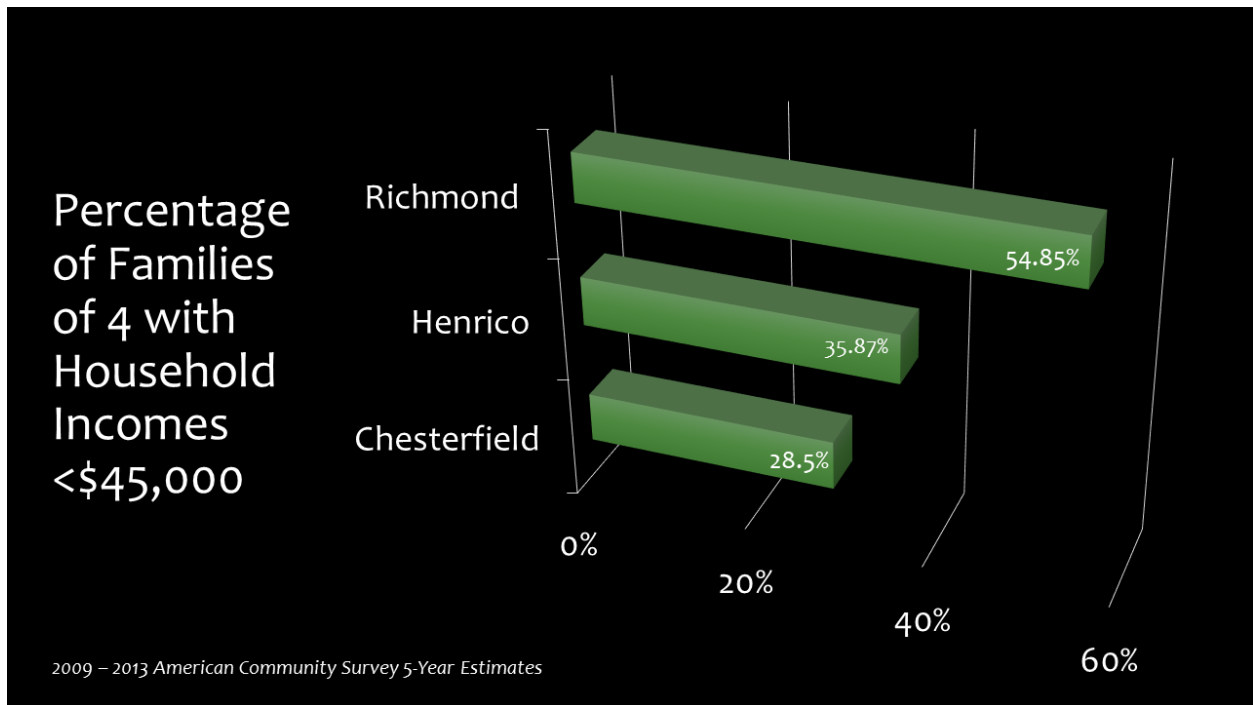
2009 – 2013 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

The number of children living in poverty and the concentration of poverty have direct and dire consequences for the region’s schools. Children who live in families earning less than \$45,000 annually qualify for free and reduced lunch.

Children Under 18 Living in Poverty



2009 – 2013 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates



Affordable Housing

Just as poverty is a regional challenge, so too is the lack of affordable housing. In each jurisdiction, almost one third of all households are housing cost-burdened, meaning they spend more than 30% of their gross monthly income on housing costs (rent or mortgage plus utilities). Over 55,000 households in the region spend more than 50% of their gross monthly income on housing. Having to devote this much income to housing leaves very little income for life’s other necessities—food, clothing, medicine. There is no money left at the end of the month to save for a child’s education or for retirement.

Thousands of our neighbors are one car break down, one unexpected medical bill, etc., away from falling behind on their rent or mortgage; they live day to day on a financial ledge. And fiscal stress leads to emotional stress which leads to compromised physical health.

Percent of Households by Cost Burden



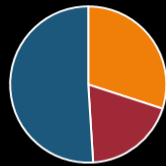
From the Virginia Center for Housing Research at Virginia Tech

Total Number of Cost Burdened Households in the Region

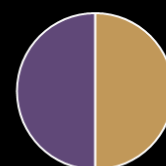
Approximately 35% of all households in the Richmond region are cost burdened



130,600
Households with
Cost Burden >30%



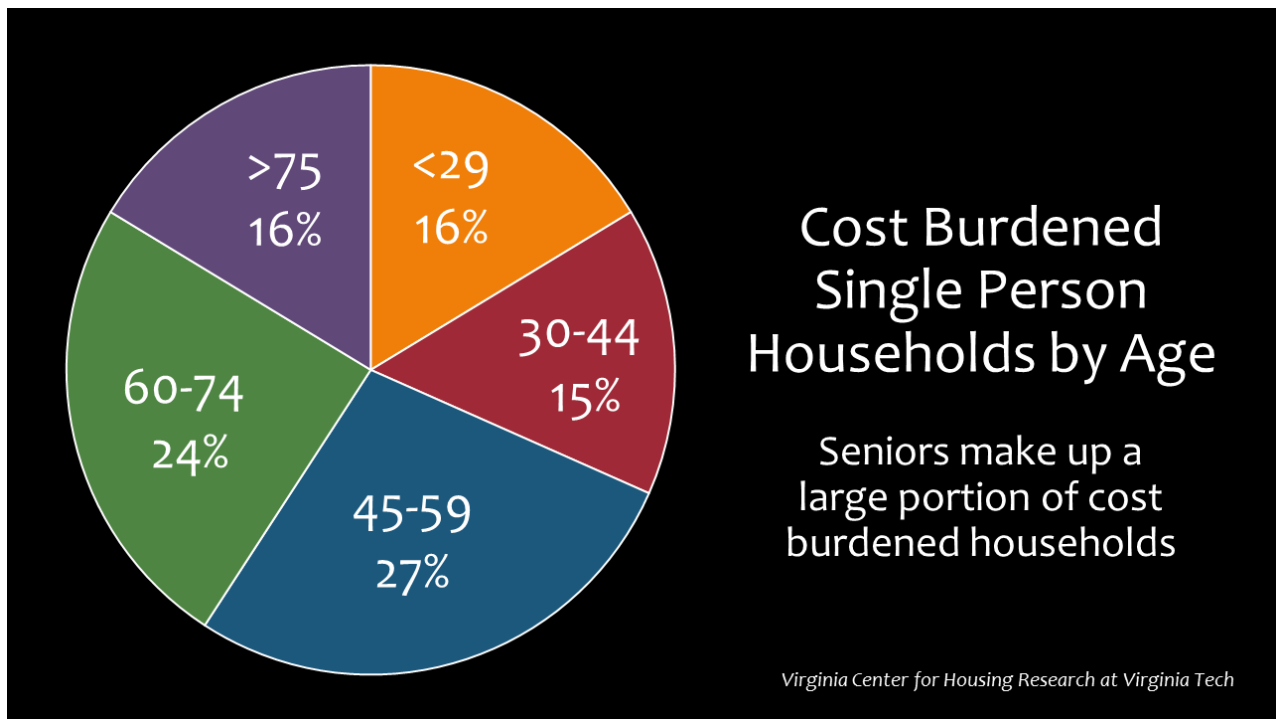
74,900
Households with
Cost Burden 30-49%



55,700
Households with
Cost Burden >50%

Virginia Center for Housing Research at Virginia Tech

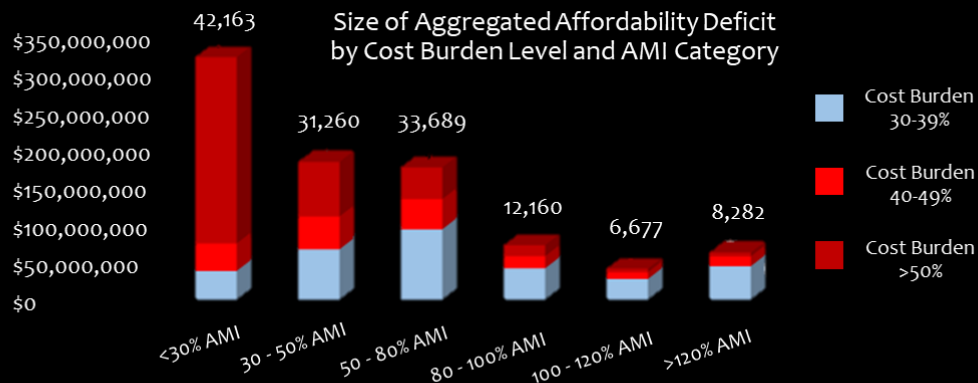
Thousands of seniors in our region struggle to find and keep stable, affordable housing. A full 40% of the single person households that are cost burdened are people 60 years or older. It is one thing to be financially stretched in one's 20s, before reaching peak earning years. But when someone is fiscally stressed at the age of 60 and beyond, that's not temporary; that's a way of life.



Finally, our affordable housing challenges negatively impact our region's economic health and competitiveness. The annual difference between what residents of our region can afford to pay for housing and what they actually spend is \$862 million. That's millions of dollars that do not flow into our regional economy, millions of spending capacity that would generate the need for thousands of jobs. We all suffer when our neighbors suffer.

Region's Annual Affordable Housing Deficit \$862 million

An average of \$6,422 per cost-burdened household

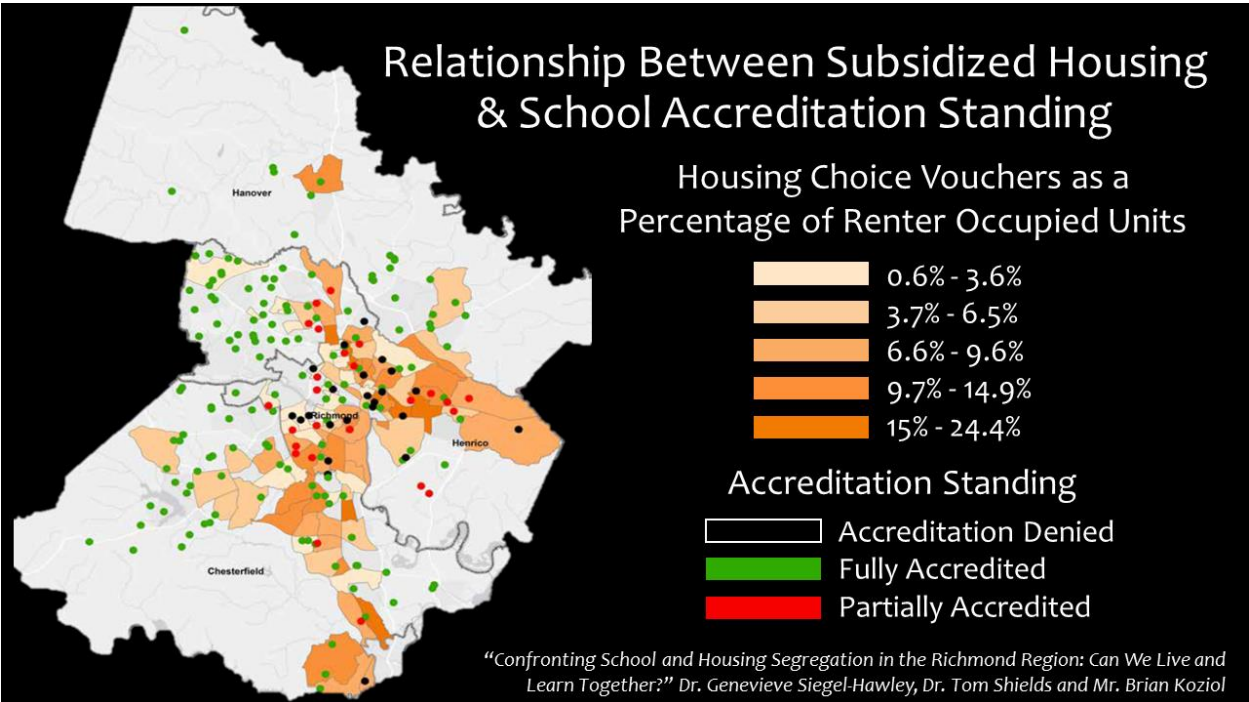
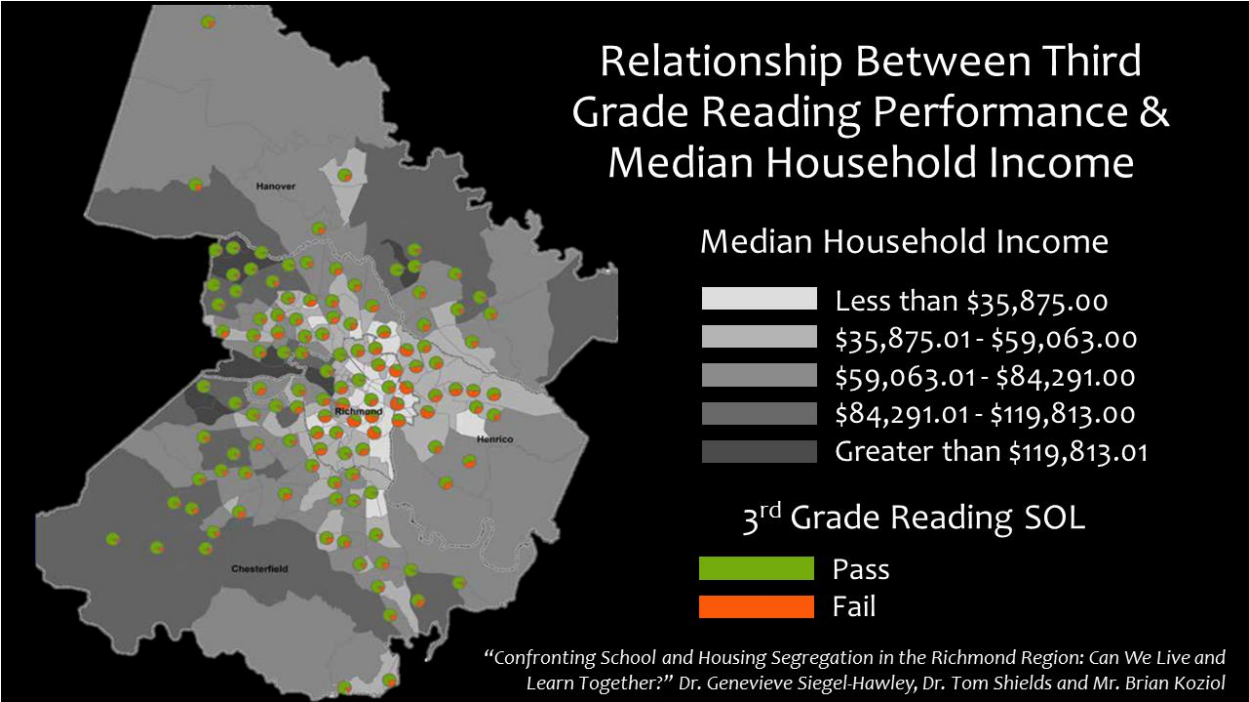


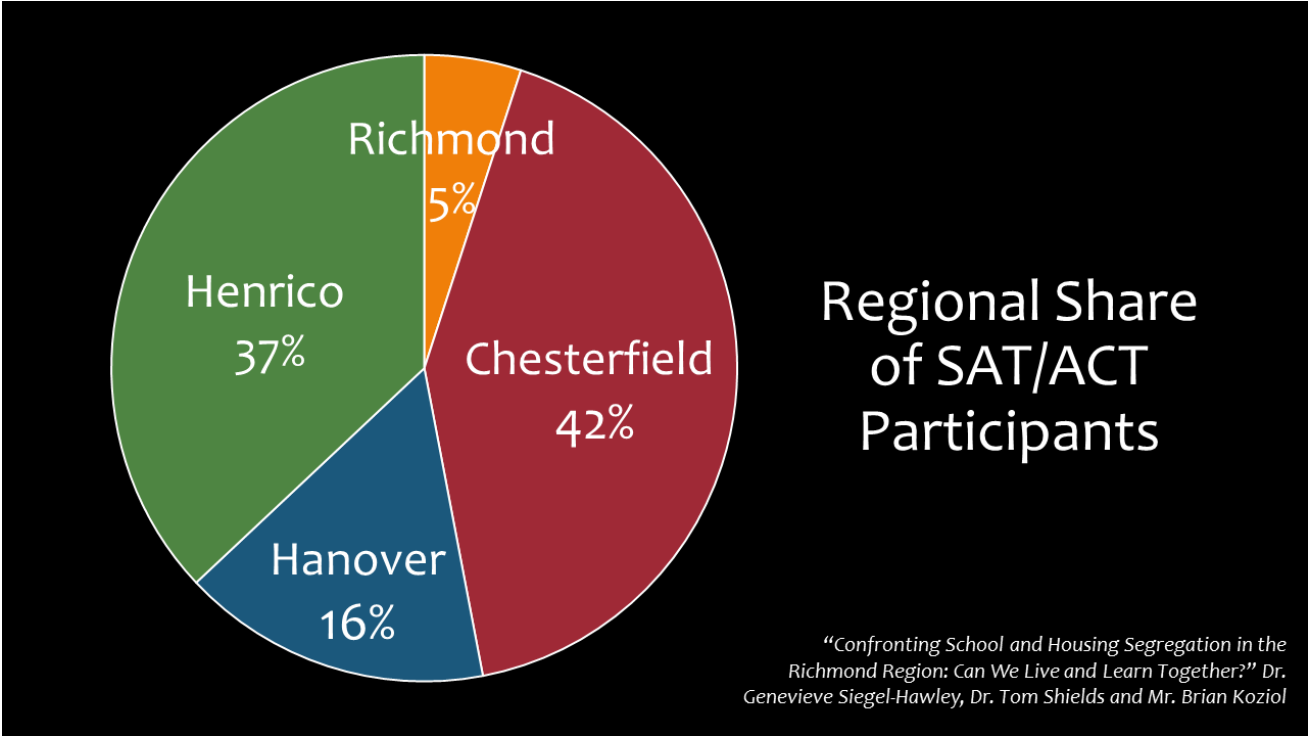
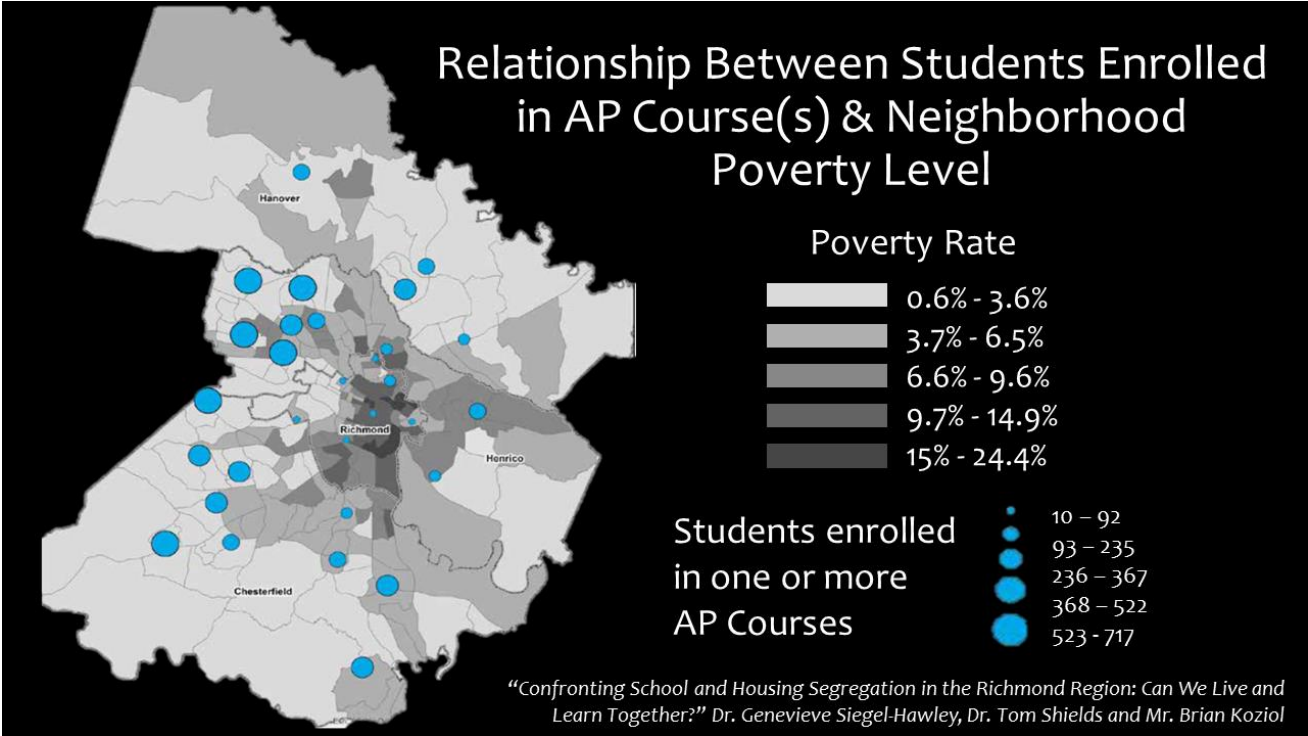
Virginia Center for Housing Research at Virginia Tech

Educational Inequities

In 2017 researchers from the University of Richmond, Virginia Commonwealth University, and Housing Opportunities Made Equal released a report that offered an analysis not of educational outcomes but of educational opportunities in the region. As reflected in the following graphics from the report, “Confronting School and Housing Segregation in the Richmond Region—Can We Live and Learn Together” makes it clear that low-income persons of color are far more likely to attend unaccredited schools, schools in which a majority of students are failing third grade reading SOLs, and high schools with far fewer Advanced Placement class options.

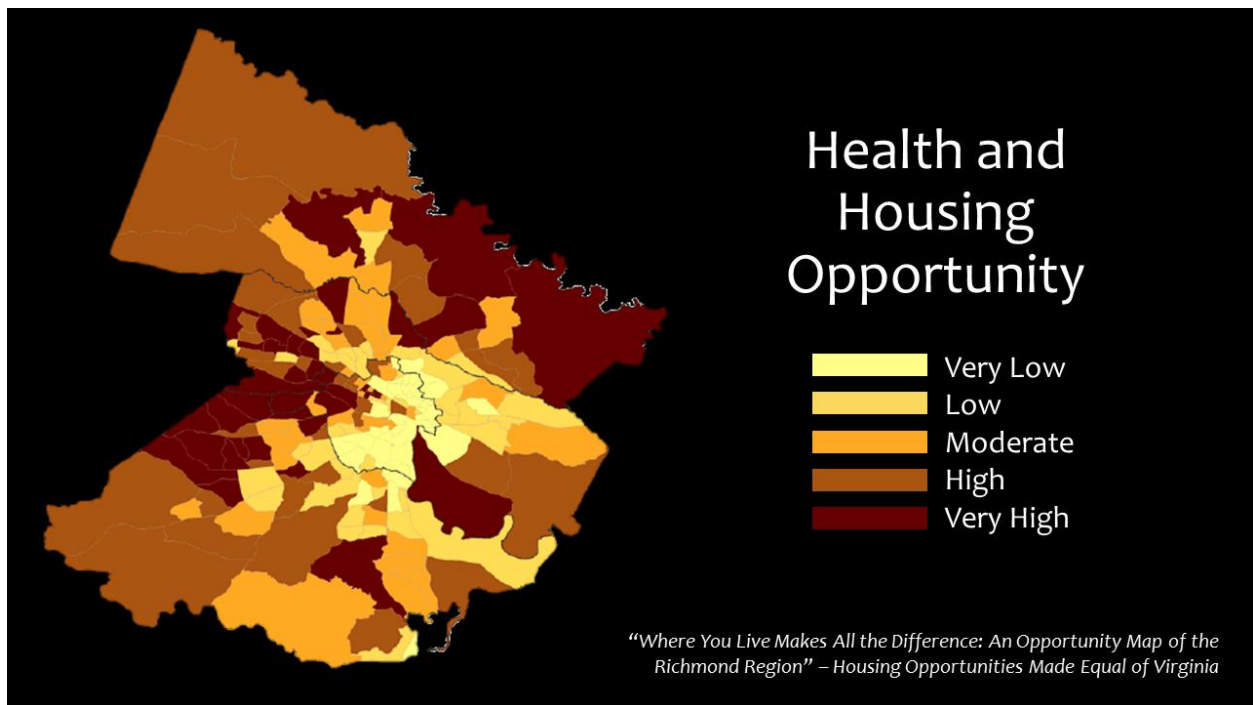
These systemic inequities cast long shadows. To give just one example: because Advanced Placement classes are a key driver of GPA and GPAs are a critical factor in college admissions, and a college education can prove profoundly influential for future employment and the creation of networks that open avenues to other opportunities, educational inequity perpetuates the cycle of fewer employment choices, financial stress, and makes it staggeringly difficult to climb the wealth building ladder out of poverty.



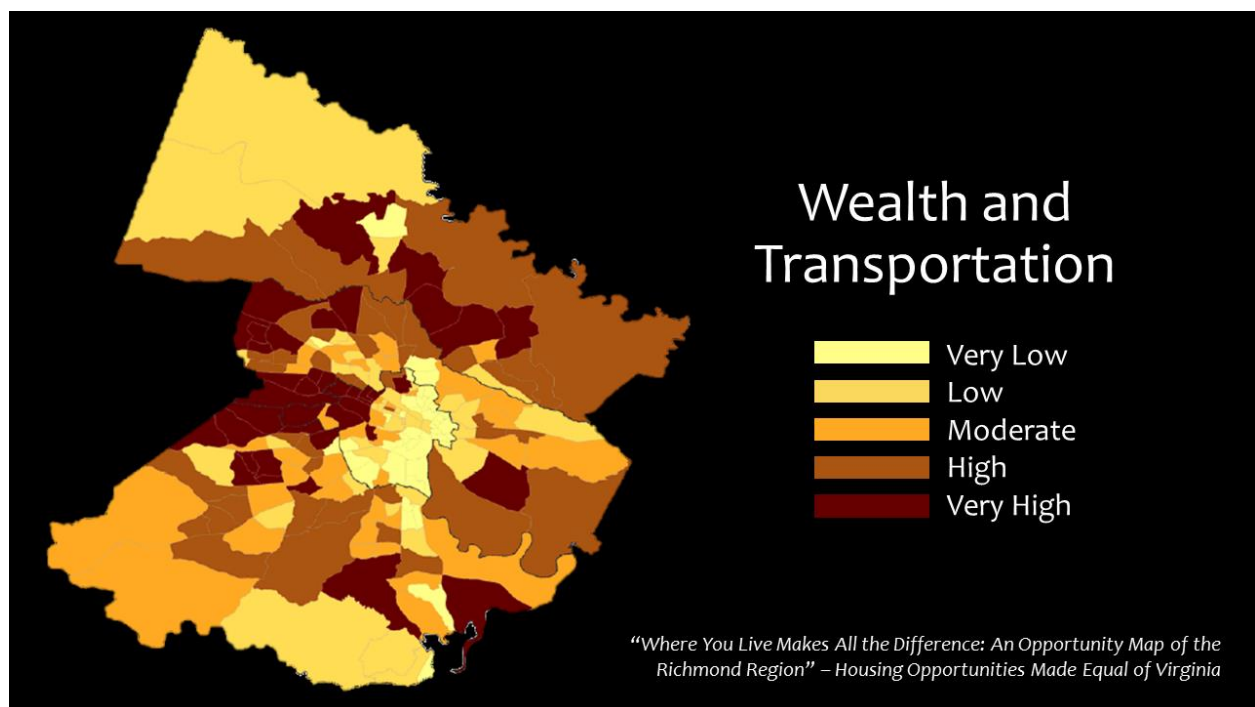


In “Where You Live Makes All the Difference: Access to Opportunity in the Richmond Region” HOME (Housing Opportunities Made Equal of Virginia) mapped 22 social-economic variables to paint a picture of opportunity—or the lack thereof—in the region. As the report notes, the neighborhoods classified as “very low opportunity” are home to “the majority of the African-American population of the region. These are the same neighborhoods that have the lowest educational attainment outcomes, highest rates of foreclosure, greatest rates of poverty, and lowest rates of homeownership in the entire region.”

In reviewing health outcomes, HOME examined socio-economic variables such as visits to the family doctor or dentist in the last 12 months; households carrying medical/hospital or accident insurance; households using prescriptions drugs for high blood pressure and asthma. A large swath of the City’s southside, the City’s East End, and central Henrico have low opportunity neighborhoods, with the high opportunity neighborhoods concentrated in the City’s west end and the western reaches of the suburban jurisdictions.



The same pattern holds true when it comes to transportation and housing as a key component of household wealth. HOME measured: homeownership rates; median house value; median household income; poverty rates; the percentage of population on public assistance; bus stops per census tracts; and the percentage of workers with a commute time of 45 minutes or greater. Reliable, affordable transportation options equal greater mobility; and greater mobility equals greater locational, educational, and vocational choice and opportunity.



While these challenges may appear daunting, true progress is being made. As a region, we continue to reduce the number of people experiencing homelessness. Chesterfield, Henrico, and the City of Richmond are each dedicating new staff positions and additional dollars to address housing needs. Creative efforts are underway to transform vacant city lots into vegetable gardens and urban orchards. School systems are recognizing the need to provide greater support in the areas of ESL (English as a Second Language) students, trauma informed care, and connecting students and their families to a variety of community benefits and supports. Work is underway to increase

the number of teens and adults earning certifications that will act as onramps to high-wage employment opportunities. And our regional transportation system has gained significant ground—with the launch of the Bus Rapid Transit system and the expansion of bus service/hours of operation in Henrico, connecting housing and jobs along the Broad Street corridor, all the way to Short Pump.

Facilitator's Note: Capture responses to questions on a flip chart.

Discussion Questions:

- 1. What is your reaction to the data? Does it surprise you? How does it make you feel about the region you call home?**
- 2. What is your reaction to the clear correlation between race, poverty, and low opportunity neighborhoods?**
- 3. Does the data raise any questions for you? Are there issues you want to learn more about?**

Module Two: A Congregational Self-Assessment

Facilitator's Note: Prior to the presentation of this module, you will need to enlist the staff of your faith community for assistance in completing the spreadsheet “Inventory of Nonprofit Partners.” This can be found on the website FaithfulEngagementRVA.com and on the next page.

While staff should be able to provide the names of the recipient organizations and the amount of the most recent contributions as well as those of the last five years, your fellow volunteers may be needed to estimate the # of volunteers (within your faith community) participating annually with the nonprofit as well as the number of people served by these projects. Of course, if your community utilizes a grant application/reporting requirement that includes these elements, then these data points should be available in those reports.

We suggest that you leave the last category—Relief/Empowerment/Systems Change—for group discussion when reviewing the spreadsheet.

Completing this spreadsheet should provide a clear picture of congregational priorities and, perhaps, highlight any disconnects between people's assumptions about priorities versus how the dollars are actually deployed and the volunteers utilized.

To complete this module, you will need to visit FaithfulEngagementRVA.com and print off the following documents for each participant:

- 1) Inventory of Nonprofit Partners
- 2) Action/Alignment Chart

“I am a little pencil in the hand of a writing God who is sending a love letter to the world.” Mother Teresa

Why do we volunteer, why do we give?

We “give back” because our parents taught us to do so, or it’s a cultural norm, or it’s a status symbol, or it makes us feel good, or we want to model servant leadership for our children, or donations make for good tax deductions. As individuals we volunteer our time and give our money for a number of reasons. As people of faith, we want to ease and end suffering. As our sacred texts and traditions tell us, to seek to meet human need is to love god.

In the Gospel of Matthew (25: 31-40) we read: “Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’”

And from the Quran (76: 8 – 9)-we hear these words: “[The righteous are those] who feed the poor, the orphans and the captive for the love of God, saying: We feed you for the sake of God alone; we seek from you neither reward nor thanks.”

Facilitator’s Note—Commentary to Introduce the Inventory of Nonprofit Partners:

Beyond the question of “why” we engage—whether through donations or volunteer service projects—there are some equally important questions that we need to reflect upon and to do this it will be helpful to review our giving/volunteer patterns over the last five years.

PAUSE VIDEO

Review Inventory of Nonprofits Spreadsheet with Participants

Facilitator's Note: Consider recording the responses to the discussion questions on a flip chart, so folks know that their voices are heard. After participants have had a chance to review the spreadsheet, resume the video, pausing for each discussion question.

Discussion Questions:

In reviewing the spreadsheet, what are your general impressions? Do you see any patterns or priorities reflected in our giving?

Based on our giving and volunteer patterns over the past five years, are we seeking to serve a specific geography? A target population? A specific need(s)?

Thinking back to Module One and what we learned about our region's most pressing needs, is our engagement aligned with these needs? In other words, is it relevant, impactful?

Does our engagement perpetuate the status quo? If so, what are the consequences of our actions for our neighbors and their neighborhoods? Is our engagement helpful or harmful?

Are we engaging with organizations focused on meeting immediate needs, empowering others, or systems change? For example, food pantries meet immediate needs; community gardens empower people to create and sustain their own food sources; and organizations that advocate for public policy changes to eliminate food deserts are working towards systemic change.

Facilitator's Note: During this discussion, complete the last column of the spreadsheet.

Based on our giving/volunteer patterns, what are our engagement priorities?

Have we been intentional in our decisions regarding why, when, where, and how we engage?

Facilitator's Note: Provide each participant with a copy of the Action/Alignment Diagram – available on the next page & FaithfulEngagementRVA.com

Moving the Needs: System Changes, Lives Transformed



Community Needs: Shelter, Food, Health, Education, Transit

Resume Video

Now that we have reflected upon how we engage in metropolitan Richmond, let's ask the alignment question of our nonprofit partners. Does their work align with the region's most pressing problems? Some nonprofits do amazing work, but their missions are not focused on the regional challenges that impede people's ability to flourish. Other nonprofits seek to address these challenges, but their efforts produce few results.

The following diagram is designed to help us evaluate the relevance and impact of our nonprofit partners. The vertical axis measures impact. If the nonprofit is changing lives, transforming neighborhoods, and accomplishing systemic change, then the nonprofit should be placed in one of the upper "high action" quadrants; if their impact is minimal, then they should be placed in one of the lower, "low action" quadrants. The horizontal axis measures alignment. If the mission of the nonprofit focuses on the most pressing regional needs, then the nonprofit should be placed in one of the quadrants on the right side of the chart. If the nonprofit's work focuses on issues that are not related to those community characteristics necessary for people to thrive, then the nonprofit should be placed in one of the quadrants on the left side of the chart.

Facilitator's Note: Pause video to allow participants to complete the diagram and discuss why they have located each nonprofit in a given quadrant.

Discussions Questions – Pause video after each question

Are we partnering with nonprofits that have high alignment and high impact?

If not, why? If there are specific reasons, what are they? Let's name them.

Are there adjustments we should make in our giving/volunteer decisions? If the answer is yes, Module 3 will offer tips on how to make those adjustments.

Module 3: Best Practices

To complete this module, you will need to visit FaithfulEngagementRVA.com and print off the Sample Grant application for each participant.

“I have found that among its other benefits, giving liberates the soul of the giver.” Maya Angelou

“The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in service to others.” Mahatma Gandhi

In Module 2, we conducted an inventory of our how we have deployed our financial and volunteer resources over the past five years to see if any patterns and priorities emerged. We asked and answered questions about alignment and accountability. In this module, we learn about best practices that we can utilize to ensure alignment and to accomplish accountability.

Look and Learn before You Leap:

As we’ve discussed, the human needs in our region are many and varied. And when compassionate people see a need, our instinct is to respond as quickly as possible. Sometimes that instinct places people on the path of establishing a new nonprofit. But before you leap, look and learn. Look out and scan the current environment. Are there nonprofits already in place that are seeking to meet the specific needs, populations, neighborhoods where we see even more need?

Several organizations host databases that can facilitate your scan of the nonprofit universe:

Hands On Greater Richmond, handsonrva.org

The Community Foundation, giverichmond.guidestar.org

United Way of Greater Richmond & Petersburg, yourunitedway.org

If there are nonprofits already working on the needs your faith community wishes to address and the neighborhoods you seek to serve, then the next step is to evaluate the business models and practices of these nonprofits.

Begin with their website. The nonprofit's website should indicate the year the nonprofit was established, the focus of their work, the number of staff, a list of volunteer leaders (Board of Directors), major donors and partners, and whether the nonprofit utilizes volunteers to execute their work.

Responsible Stewardship:

To facilitate a uniform approach to decision-making when it comes to funding non-profits, many faith communities use a grant process. Some communities employ an open process allowing any and all nonprofits to apply for funding, while others invite specific nonprofits to apply. If your congregation has identified its funding priorities, an invitation strategy that aligns with those priorities probably makes the most sense.

A grant process/application provides the faith community with . . .

A time table for decision making;

A basis by which to compare requests;

A snapshot of the organization's fiscal health;

An accountability matrix

A grants process/application provides the nonprofit with . . .

A reliable and timely protocol for requesting funds;

A platform to education about their work;

The process and application serve several purposes: from the perspective of the faith community, it creates a time table for the decision-making process and a basis by which to compare the various requests for financial assistance. The grant application generates a synopsis of the fiscal health of the nonprofit, a written record of how the money will be deployed, when the money will be spent, and who will benefit; in short, an accountability matrix. From the perspective of the nonprofit, a grants process/application creates a reliable and timely protocol to follow and provides a platform to educate generally about their mission and specifically about how the funds will be used.

Facilitator's Note—Pause the video and disseminate the sample grant application. Ask participants to review the application.

Resume Video

Missions & Outreach

Request for Funding

*Preamble stating the giving priorities of the faith community—
whether focused geographically or on specific needs, e.g., hunger,
housing, health care.*

Date _____

Name of Organization _____

Address _____ Zip _____

Telephone _____ Web Address _____

Contact Person _____ Title _____

Telephone _____ Email Address: _____

1. Amount of funding requested: \$_____
2. Please provide a clear, succinct description of the project for which funds are requested, including the date of the project/event (if applicable) and how--specifically--the funds will be utilized:
3. Is this a new program? Yes/No Is this program one-time or ongoing?
4. The approximate number of people who will benefit from this program:
5. Is the project/program tied to a specific neighborhood or geographic area?
6. What are the primary organizations with which you partner?
7. What other organizations provide similar services in the area in which your organization operates?
8. How much money has been raised to date, and what are your other sources of funding for this specific project?

9. Information about your organization:

- A. Briefly describe your organization: date of inception, mission, significant accomplishments, etc.
- B. Please identify your organization's primary sources of annual income, noting the approximate percentage of funding from each of the following:
- Government _____ Corporate _____ Individual Donors _____
- Foundations _____ Faith Communities _____
- C. Please list the faith communities that provide financial support to your organization (if numerous, listing a minimum of three is sufficient).
- D. Please enclose copies of the following:
- IRS letter of exemption from federal income tax payment under section 501 c (3);
 - Latest copy of IRS form 990 or equivalent
 - Most recent balance sheet and operating statement
- E. To the best of your knowledge, please list any staff members or lay members who are affiliated (volunteer) with the organization.

10. Have you applied for and/or received funds from us during the last two years?
Yes _____ No _____ If yes, list the amounts(s):

11. Is there non-monetary support that our faith community might provide? (Please be specific.)

12. Are there volunteer opportunities for our members—either on our campus or in the community? Are there intergenerational volunteer opportunities—children, youth, parents, seniors? (Please be specific.)

13. Regardless of the funding decision made, may we share these volunteer opportunities with our members?

Signature of Chief Staff Executive of Applying Nonprofit

Application Deadline/Contact Information of Lay Leader Collecting the Grants

Within one month of the event/project completion or within three months of the receipt of the grant if the funds are for ongoing operational expenses (but no later than X date), please submit the following project summary:

1. Name of Project/Event (if applicable)
2. Date(s) of Project/Event
3. Estimated # of individuals served
4. Estimated # of volunteers from our faith community
5. A **one paragraph** synopsis of the specific use of the funds which illustrates the impact of the grant received.
6. One photograph that is illustrative of the project/work.

Note that the grant application includes a requirement that the nonprofit provide its most recent IRS 990 form and its most recent financial statements covering a full fiscal year.

Evaluate grants by asking:

--Alignment?

--Fiscally sound?

--Funding operations or projects?

--# of people served?

--How volunteers are deployed?

In evaluating each grant application, questions to consider include:

- Is the work of the nonprofit aligned with the region's most pressing needs and the funding priorities of our community?
- Is the nonprofit fiscally sound?
- Are the funds requested for ongoing operational needs or specific projects? Does that matter to us? Do we have a preference for funding operations or specific projects?
- Is the nonprofit clear about how the funds will be utilized and the number of people they anticipate serving?
- Is the nonprofit specific about how volunteers will be deployed?

While some congregations may wish to disseminate awarded funds in one allocation, others may choose to disseminate the funds in installments throughout the year. The timing of the release of funds should be made clear in the grant award letter. All nonprofits receiving funds should be required to provide a written report, annually, of how the funds were utilized. This report should provide an understanding of:

How the money was used;

How the money made a difference; and

How volunteers were utilized;

Communications: Inform, Invite, Inspire

While a small number of people might serve on the committee making the funding decisions, all members of a faith community can play an active role in the congregation's faithful and strategic engagement within the region—especially through their financial contributions and volunteer efforts. To capture and keep people's passion for service, a strategic approach to communications is essential.

First, if one does not exist, create a calendar that displays all of the service projects, mission trips, and supply drives the faith community supports throughout the year. Chances are there's lots going on, and there's lots of demand for more activities to be added. A calendar makes it easy to ask the spacing/pacing questions: Do we have enough space between events to adequately communicate about them? Will the pace of our work fatigue clergy, volunteers, and donors? If the answer to either of these questions is "yes," then consider the following ground rules: only one supply drive a month; and limit the drive to only two weekends of worship services. Institute one or two sabbath months a year, where a rest is taken and no service project or supply drive is scheduled.

Adequately communicating your faith community's engagement in the Richmond region isn't just about registering for a service project, it's all about developing an engaging way to inform, invite, inspire.

Inform . . . Before most people will squeeze another activity into a busy weeknight or give up a Saturday morning, they will want to understand the need they are helping to address through volunteering and the organization through which they are serving.

Invite . . . Make the ask compelling and make it easy for members to register for the service project or sign up to provide specific supplies.

Inspire . . . Upon completion of a project or a supply drive, it's critically important to report back to the congregation. The report should include measurable results in terms of supplies collected (X # of pounds of food), people served (40 men served lunch for a week), or work completed (an accessibility ramp built and installed). But of equal importance is a participant's

reflection on how they grew in their faith as a result of the experience. Never omit this last component.

Volunteers: Recruitment, Relevance, and Retention

Recruitment . . . A key to recruitment is to know your audience. If your congregation consists largely of families with children whose weekends are chock full of sports and other activities, then recruiting these families for Saturday morning service might prove difficult. The more you know about your congregation, the more strategically and successfully you will be able to craft service projects that work with their schedules and their preferred level of engagement. That's another best practice—throughout the year, create service projects that vary in intensity. Some congregants will be comfortable only with service projects held on the site of their mosque or synagogue; others will want opportunities to serve in areas of Richmond they have never before experienced.

Another key element of recruitment is communications. What are the means of communications and the communication platforms most often utilized by members of your faith community? Chances are you will need to deploy a variety of media to recruit volunteers.

Relevance . . . People want their service to matter in ways small and large. Here again thoughtful communications that connect the dots are key. If your congregation is collecting books for an undeserved elementary school and that's all they are told, surely some folks will supply the books. But if they are told that from kindergarten to third grade, children learn to read; from third grade on, they read to learn. And that reading on grade level by third grade is such a clear indicator of a child's future, that we predict our future prison population based on the number of children who reach third grade and cannot read on grade level, then perhaps the book supply drives lead to a volunteer reading program with the school. Perhaps the next supply drive is for food, so children can leave school on Friday with a backpack of food that will keep their bellies full until they return on Monday. *Connecting the dots between one human need and another and another is critically important to understanding the ecosystem of challenge and privilege that is metropolitan Richmond.*

Another element of relevance is understanding how all of our lives are interconnected. How is it that life on Jeff Davis matters to those who reside in Short Pump and vice versa? People of faith have the traditions and language that enable them to give specific voice to our connectedness.

Retention . . . The quickest way to lose a volunteer is to leave them idle. As tempting as it is to take an “all are welcome” approach, do not overbook a service project. If the nonprofit indicates that twelve volunteers are needed, do not recruit twenty. Better for twelve people to be exhausted than twenty people to be bored. Each service project should have a team lead. The team lead should be responsible for interacting with the nonprofit to gain an understanding of the specifics of the service project and what will be expected of the volunteers. During the project, the team lead should have as his/her first priority to ensure that all volunteers are actively participating at levels that are appropriate for them.

Within a couple of days of the conclusion of a project, all volunteers should receive a sincere thank you and a feedback opportunity that allows for anonymous comment. If possible, the team lead should send thank you notes that offer specific praise. While the nonprofit should undertake its own follow up with the volunteers, it is critically important that volunteers feel that their efforts were important to and recognized by their community of faith.

Discussion Questions – Pause after each question for discussion

What are your key learnings/take-aways from this session?

What best practice do we need to devote some attention to—stewardship of the dollars, communications, or volunteer recruitment/retention?

What are our next steps?

Module 4: Mercy and Justice

“The spiritual traditions do not deny the reality of the outer world. They simply claim that we help make that world by projecting our spirit on it, for better or worse. . . . Our complicity in world making is a source of awesome and sometimes painful responsibility—and a source of profound hope for change. It is the ground of our common call to leadership, the truth that makes leaders of us all.”
Parker Palmer

Servant Leadership

Many people of faith eagerly lead lives of service, so understanding themselves as servants comes naturally. But ask these same individuals if they see themselves as leaders, and the response of many is a shake of the head; when the correct answer is “yes.” Leadership is a relationship of influence; an opportunity to influence is an opportunity to lead. Each and every day, people of faith have opportunities to engage in servant leadership; and our region desperately needs us to seek, see, and seize these opportunities.

Much has been written about servant leadership, so what we offer here are just a few of the shared characteristics of servant leaders in our region whom we admire. We believe these characteristics reflect an intentional, fundamental decision to orient one’s life beyond self and for others. This other regarding intentionality breeds clarity of purpose and consistency in action.

Characteristics of Servant Leaders:

The first characteristic is **self-awareness**. Servant leaders recognize that they do not live in isolation, they live in relationship with others—for better or worse—so life is messy and complex but also surprising and joyous. The challenges of this world are not ours to solve alone, even if we could; but we cannot. Servant leaders recognize and acknowledge their limitations. We need others—their differences, their insights, their intellect, their inspirations. Here’s how the author Krista Tippett puts it: “Human relationship—which begins with seeing an ‘other’ as human—is the context in which virtue happens, the context in which character is formed. It is an elemental piece of truth, against which individualistic American culture struggles, that we human beings need others from our first breath—at first to stay alive and in the end to be alive in spirit.” (Speaking of Faith, Krista Tippett)

True self-awareness engenders true humility. And it is in genuine humility that the possibility of servant leadership is borne. **Humility** requires neither self-abasement nor false modesty. Plenty of confident individuals possess a healthy sense of self and are also truly humble. They recognize that their accomplishments have been achieved through the aid of another, often several others. As the ethicist Reinhold Niebuhr put it: “nothing we do, however virtuous, could be accomplished alone; therefore, we must be saved by love.”

If progress is being made in our region on any of the complex challenges that confront us—racial reconciliation, educational equity, transportation, affordable housing, food security, environmental conservation—that progress is being accomplished by servant leaders working in collaboration with those they seek to help and with one another—public officials, corporate citizens, philanthropists, faith leaders, non-profit volunteers. These people are different, sometimes very different. They don’t look alike, think alike, vote alike, worship alike. But they are smart enough to know that what they hold in common is far more important and powerful than their differences; they are intuitive enough to see the value in one another; they are generous enough to express their need for one another; and they are humble enough to find personal satisfaction in the fulfillment of communal ambitions.

Another element of a life lived beyond one’s self and for others is **stewardship**. Exceptional servant leaders are exceptionally effective stewards—of the creation, of the resources entrusted to them. Stewards of relationships; because it is absolutely true that in this 1.3 million “small town” that we call metropolitan Richmond, it is through relationships that stuff gets done, especially the tough stuff.

Servant leaders are stewards of opportunities. Opportunities that they work really, really hard to create and voila, they happen. And then there are those opportunities that come to us in the guise of problems, problems that challenge us to see within them what’s possible and then “to make the possible, the real.”

Seeing possibilities even amidst life’s problems is a discipline, it’s the discipline of **hope**. One can be a cynic and the value of cynics is that they quickly clear away the clutter and see problems for what they are. But that’s just a diagnosis, not a cure. In other words, cynicism doesn’t provide a path

forward. Hope does. Focused, tenacious hope sees clearly, but then says, “even so” and “despite that;” people of hope press on.

As Krista Tippett puts it: “[hope] references reality at every turn and reveres truth. It lives open eyed and wholehearted with the darkness that is woven ineluctably into the light of life and sometimes seems to overcome it. Hope, like every virtue, is a choice that becomes a practice that becomes spiritual muscle memory. It’s a renewable resource for moving through life as it is, not as we wish it to be.” (Becoming Wise: An Inquiry into the Mystery and Art of Living, Krista Tippett)

Servant leaders practice hope, especially when there is little cause for optimism. They model **resiliency** and seek to encourage it in others. And resiliency is essential for any effort that seeks justice through systemic change; because righting centuries of wrong and addressing imbedded inequities—whether these are reflected in unequal schools, inferior housing, disinvested neighborhoods, scarce job opportunities or limited transit—is frustrating, fatiguing, and fraught . . . but worth it nonetheless. “[Resilience] acknowledges from the outset that things will go wrong,” writes Tippett. “We will make messes, and disruption we do not cause or predict will land on us. This is the drama of being alive. To nurture a resilient human being, or a *resilient city*, is to build in an expectation of adversity . . . Resilience honors the unromantic reality of who we are and how we are, and so becomes a refreshingly practical compass for the systems and societies we can craft.” (Becoming Wise, Tippett)

Faith enables resilience and hope. Whereas hope is the energy that helps us do the daily work of mercy and justice, faith enables us to get our heads up and look out. Faith is the long view of things; and that’s essential if transformation is our goal. Because transformation takes years, often generations. Faith is clarity of vision and clarity of purpose that breeds consistency of effort. Faith says, “let’s not be distracted, let’s stay the course.” And yet the long view of faith must ultimately be tied back to now, in the words of Reverend King, “the fierce urgency of now.” Now is the time to seek justice; now is the time to envision and then build a Richmond region in which all have the opportunity to thrive. Now is the time for people of faith to serve and lead more broadly and deeply than ever before.

Facilitator's Note: Pause video for discussion.

Discussion Questions:

- 1. Do these characteristics of servant leadership resonate with you?**
- 2. Can you think of specific examples of when you have acted as a servant leader or you have seen others exercise servant leadership?**
- 3. How can we help one another grow as servant leaders?**

Mercy as an Onramp to Advocacy

Throughout the Richmond region, many of our faith communities excel at mercy—they shelter the homeless, feed the hungry, comfort the sick. But when it comes to seeking justice—systemic change that would mitigate the need for missions of mercy—we often step back or to the side. Perhaps that's because to accomplish systemic change almost always requires engagement in the public sphere, in shaping public policy. And since we live in a society in which all too often partisan politics and public policy are mashed together in an ugly mix, communities of faith turn away from the conversation either due to historical aversions or from fear of creating very real and present divisions within their congregations.

But because we have not brought about systemic changes in public policy and thus ushered in transformation, what should be **occasional** interventions to meet the basic needs of some citizens has become our **normative response** and thus a way of life for thousands of individuals. We are better than that; our neighbors deserve better than that.

If we are willing to feed the hungry, doesn't it make sense to support the elimination of food deserts? If we will work to shelter the homeless, can we not supplant NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) with policies that support the development of affordable housing throughout the region? Jobs that pay well make the ability to afford housing that much more easily accomplished. Since educational opportunities make employment opportunities more likely, should not the faith community have something to say about the state of our schools? If mobility means greater locational, educational, and vocational choice; and

that choice translates into greater opportunity, then shouldn't we want a regional transit system that reaches deeply and dependably into our region?

Food, shelter, health, education, the opportunity for meaningful work, and a way to get from here to there—we hold these needs in common; our efforts to meet them should unite not divide us. And they can, if we resist the temptation to turn away from the public sphere; but instead enter it humbly yet fiercely, willing to use ethical language that names what is at stake—people's lives—and the language of faith that connects us more deeply and richly to our common humanity.

The mandate to love one's neighbor, show mercy, and pursue justice is shared across faith traditions. To seek to meet human need is to love God; it is to mirror the mercy, compassion, and justice we identify as belonging to God. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus is asked which is the greatest commandment; and he responds by quoting the Hebrew scriptures: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" To live in right relationship with our God, requires that we live in right relationships with our neighbors. The Qur'an expresses it in this way: "Worship Allah and join none with Him; and do good to parents, kinsfolk, orphans, the poor, the neighbor who is near of kin, the neighbor who is a stranger, the companion by your side, the wayfarer you meet."(4:36) And from the prophet Micah we hear: "And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."(6:8)

For people of faith in twenty-first century metropolitan Richmond, love of neighbor cannot be relegated to private actions; mercy alone is insufficient. Love of neighbor requires the pursuit of justice; and the path to justice runs through public policy. Robert Lupton, author of *Toxic Charity*, suggests that for our engagement to be beneficial, we must hold mercy and justice together: "Mercy is a force that compels us to acts of compassion. Mercy is a door, an opening, an invitation to touch a life, to make a difference. But it is not a destination." When held together, mercy and justice "lead us to holistic involvement. Divorced, they become deformed. Mercy without justice degenerates into dependency and entitlement, preserving the power of the

giver over the recipient. Justice without mercy is cold and impersonal, more concerned about rights than relationships. . . . Mercy combined with justice creates: immediate care with a future plan; emergency relief and responsible development; short-term intervention and long-term involvement; heart responses and engaged minds.”

When we insist on both mercy and justice, we follow in the footsteps of our faith ancestors; more importantly, we prove faithful to our god. And as grace would have it, our own faith is enriched.

Advocacy Enables Spiritual Growth

Advocating for systemic change that transforms the lives of our neighbors and our communities is a faithful and fitting response to the injustices and iniquities in our world. If we want the “beloved community” to be our reality, we have to be willing to work for it. When we engage in acts of service, more often than not we feel physically energized, emotionally uplifted, and spiritually enriched; the same can hold true for advocacy.

But how we go about the business of advocacy matters. We would never want to be guilty of the old saying “what you do speaks so loudly, I can’t hear what you say.” Respectful encounters and civil civic discourse should be the touchstones of our efforts.

When seeking to influence public policy, consider the following steps.

Learn . . .

While the opportunities to weigh in on policy debates (which are fundamentally discussions of our values) are many and come at us with great frequency and urgency, if we attempt to advocate without first understanding the issues, we’re simply adding to the noise.

So the first step in faithful advocacy is to seek to understand the substance of an issue as well as differing opinions. In the Richmond region, numerous groups have collected data and conducted studies on several fronts—poverty, transportation, affordable housing, food insecurity, educational inequities, senior access to health care and other services, etc. Often these advocacy organizations and nonprofits welcome the opportunity

to speak to groups. So read the reports, host speakers, and create opportunities for conversations among your communicants.

Listen . . .

The first step in loving our neighbors is to be still, be quiet, and listen to our neighbors, allowing them to express their wants, needs, aspirations. But it's hard to listen to people, if you're not in the same room with them. If a faith community wants to understand the perspectives of those they seek to help as well as the perspectives of those who may disagree with a proposed policy, e.g., expansion of transit or the construction of affordable housing, then it's incumbent upon the faithful to create safe spaces for candid conversation and active listening.

Pray . . .

The act of prayer can take on many forms and meanings, but certainly one element of prayer is that it bespeaks the discipline of humility. At its most basic, prayer is an acknowledgment of our limits. There's something comforting in that. Prayer is not abdication—it's all in god's hands—but rather an acknowledgement that while our agency may be limited, it can prove powerful and productive. We can pray for guidance, for patience, for persistence; we can pray for the grace to live respectfully with our differences, and for forgiveness when we fail to do so.

Vote . . .

Voting matters. While hundreds of Richmond area residents promote public policies that will further justice and equity, at the end of the day, it's the elected officials whose votes block or enact such policies.

Act . . .

“I prayed for freedom for twenty years,” wrote Frederick Douglas. “But I received no answer until I prayed with my legs.” Advocacy requires that we act. When some folks hear the word “advocacy” they might think of hired lobbyists who walk the halls of the General Assembly or testify before City Council. They may think of community organizers who encourage demonstrations of support or opposition. While these elements are part and

parcel of our political process, equally important are smaller gestures—writing a letter, making a phone call, sending a well-timed text. It’s important that the appointed and elected officials hear from members of faith communities.

Become a YIMBY—Yes, In My Back Yard, in other words, support the development of affordable housing throughout the region. You can register this support by contacting elected officials directly or by offering comments during the public comment segment of each meeting of the Boards of Supervisors or City Council. The Pulse, the region’s Bus Rapid Transit system, represents one of the most significant investments of public dollars into the region in decades. In addition to BRT, Henrico is expanding its bus routes and hours of service—a clear effort to more effectively and efficiently connect people, housing, and jobs. But for the expanded bus routes to remain in operation, they need riders. We can be those riders—the most tangible way to advocate for transit is to use it.

Be in Relationship . . .

Like everything else in life, public policy is accomplished through relationships. And just as relationships in our private life require time and attention, so do the relationships with elected and appointed officials. Because they recognize the power of the pulpit, many public officials welcome the opportunity to hear from and speak to communities of faith. Within the Richmond region, the overwhelming majority of these officials can and do put partisan politics to the side when addressing pressing priorities such as housing, workforce development, food deserts, etc.

It’s equally important that people of faith seek to be in relationship with one another. Faith communities and inter-faith dialogues should be safe spaces in which honest, uncomfortable conversations about race, class, inequities, injustice can be held. In finding the courage to be vulnerable with one another, we will strengthen the authenticity and effectiveness of our witness. If we are to transform this regional community we love into the *beloved* community, we must do mercy and seek justice. Let’s get to work.

Discussion Questions:

- 1. What steps must our community of faith take to move from mercy to advocacy?**
- 2. What are the policy issues that we want to learn more about?**
- 3. What are some specific ways that our faith community can show its support for these causes?**