

Virginia Funders Network
Case Statement
August 11, 2020

Virginia philanthropy is poised to reach an unprecedented level of effectiveness. In recent years, new leaders have brought energy, wisdom and courage to their work. They have begun working together, exhibiting unparalleled levels of collaboration, shared work and learning. Today is the perfect time to launch the Virginia Funders Network (VFN) to broaden and capitalize on these early successes, with a goal of achieving improved outcomes in areas such as education, health, poverty, housing and social justice.

The vision of the VFN is to enhance the effectiveness of Virginia funders through networking, collaboration, learning and leverage.

The VFN's members have diverse funding interests, and each member is an independent entity. However, we share certain values that are core to the VFN as a whole.

- We affirm the humanity of all Virginians. In doing so, we stand against racism and discrimination of all kinds.
- We strive for equity across Virginia's communities, bringing this focus to funders that address many needs including food security, health, housing, civil liberties and education.
- We practice neutrality across Virginia's regions, providing equal opportunity and access throughout the VFN's leadership, governance and practices.

The VFN's Ten Value Propositions for Members

Every Virginia funder is unique. Each serves a specific geographical area. Each has an individual or board that establishes guidelines for what will be considered for funding. So, if the VFN's members are all different, then why should they join a statewide network? The VFN offers ten reasons why EVERY Virginia funder should join.

1. **Networking together** — Few funders can effect positive change at any scale by working in isolation. Funders learn best practices from one another. The VFN offers two kinds of Networking Groups—those that are issue-focused (such as health, housing or early childhood education) and those that connect funders by type (such as, prospectively, the Virginia Consortium for Health Philanthropy or community foundations). Annually, all VFN members meet face-to-face at the Annual Conference, where members deepen and broaden their statewide relationships.

2. **Networking with statewide leaders** — The VFN offers at least two virtual opportunities annually for its members to hear from and converse with statewide leaders. These meetings occur both before and after the General Assembly session. Then, at the Annual Conference, we invite statewide leaders to meet with us in person. Most recently, on June 8, 2020 we met with four experts from McGuireWoods Consulting to learn about the actions of the General Assembly and Veto Sessions that affect health, education, housing and workforce and economic development.
3. **Advocacy** – The VFN uses its voice to speak out for Virginia philanthropy on the VFN’s shared values, expressed above. Additionally, our Networking Groups will identify situations where philanthropy alone is unable to achieve the change we seek. In these cases, these collaborators may share the expense of advocating for policy changes that will benefit the lives of those they seek to help. Each Networking Group that engages in advocacy will share its experience through the VFN’s communications channels and the Annual Conference.
4. **Leverage** – National foundations have at various times expressed interest in pursuing their grantmaking objectives more broadly in Virginia. However, they have conveyed to Virginia-based funders that they are hindered by Virginia’s lack of effective coordination among its funders, as compared with neighboring states like North Carolina. The VFN serves as a statewide partner for these national foundations, connecting them with Virginia’s funders to form effective funding coalitions. We welcome the opportunity to work together on our many shared interests and objectives.
5. **Leadership opportunities** – The VFN’s Advisory Board, Committees, Networking Groups and Annual Conference all serve as leadership development opportunities for the staff and trustees of its members. Funders of all types and locations—rural and urban—have equal access to these opportunities.
6. **Leadership development** – The VFN hopes to collaborate with other leadership development programs, such as the Southeastern Council of Foundation’s Hull Fellows Program and Lead Virginia. At the Annual Conference, we will provide a space for Virginia’s emerging philanthropic leaders to share what they are learning in various programs and to form important in-state peer relationships.
7. **Understanding Virginia’s Regional Similarities and Differences** – Each year, the VFN submits to its members a request for proposal to host the Annual Conference (planning 3 years ahead). The VFN is committed to locate its conferences in all of Virginia’s regions over time; however, the conference cannot locate in a region where there is no hosting member.

8. **Annual Conference** – Once a year, Virginia’s funders gather for up to three days to network, learn and find inspiration together. Conferences are designed with multiple objectives in mind:

- Networking across issues, funder types and geographical regions;
- Gaining a better understanding of our host’s geographical region;
- Conversing with philanthropic thought leaders regionally and nationwide.

Each year, the Advisory Board issues an RFP for the Conference host three years out. Proposals will be evaluated considering factors such as local learning opportunities, collaboration among host funders, accommodations and accessibility. Over time, we hope to gather in each region of Virginia.

9. **Rapid response network** — The VFN office acts as the “nervous system” that rapidly connects members with others who share their philanthropic interests or concerns. With our CEO and staff serving as the hub of this information flow and employing technology, we react statewide at high speed. During emergencies such as COVID-19, members rapidly ascertain how Virginia’s various regions are acting and reacting. We develop and deploy best practices in real time.

10. **Experienced CEO** – The VFN’s CEO is an experienced connector and member of the philanthropic community. Members have ready access to the CEO, who connects them with other funders and with resources outside the philanthropic community. Having access to the CEO is like having a pro on your staff.

The VFN’s Ten Rules of Engagement

1. **Representative** – Beginning with the Advisory Board, the VFN’s leadership reflects the diversity of Virginia’s regions and a range of funder types, as well as personal aspects of diversity including but not limited to gender, race and age.

2. **Diversity, Equity and Inclusion** – In the context of a statewide network, the VFN is committed to ensure fair opportunities for participation by members across all of Virginia’s regions. We endeavor for our Advisory Board, staff and volunteers to represent diverse people and perspectives. And, we insist at all times on practicing respect for the many viewpoints expressed by the VFN’s members.

3. **Neutrality** – The VFN operates as a fiscal agency of the PATH Foundation in Warrenton, and its offices are virtual. Thus, the VFN’s staff may reside anywhere in Virginia. The VFN serves

members in all regions of Virginia—both rural and urban areas—with equal ease and effectiveness.

4. **Respect for our members' time** – The VFN maximizes its use of technology to host its networking group meetings, its Advisory Board meetings and its Committee meetings.
5. **Respect for each other** – The VFN is a safe space, where funders of all kinds and in all of Virginia regions work collaboratively on issues of shared interest. Members may not use any VFN hosted discussion as a forum to solicit or coerce other members.
6. **Collegiality** – The VFN welcomes all funders, regardless of the source of their grant funds. Thus, United Ways, Jewish Federations, community-focused religious funders and government funded grant makers are all encouraged to join the VFN.
7. **Affordability** – The cost of membership is very reasonable at \$1,000/year. Additionally, the VFN solicits members annually to further support the VFN to a degree that reflects the perceived value of the VFN's work.
8. **Fairness** – Some of the VFN's activities appeal to a segment of funders, but not to all funders. An example is issue-related advocacy work. To be fair to all of the VFN's members, the participating funders will share any related expenses among themselves.
9. **Low Overhead** – By operating virtually, the VFN keeps its overhead to an absolute minimum. Initially, we have only two employees.
10. **Learning Community** – The CEO regularly shares with members informational materials of value, and occasionally creates opportunities to discuss books and articles relevant to Virginia's philanthropic community.

Membership

VFN anticipates members from a wide array of private foundations, family foundations, corporate giving groups, individuals and other entities that fund philanthropically and who are committed to addressing the myriad issues in the Commonwealth. In order to encourage broad participation among Virginia's funding communities, the initial membership has been set at \$1,000. However, VFN has already secured a significant number of commitments at larger amounts from funders who wish to ensure the group's viability and who see strong alignment with VFN's values and purpose.

VFN Advisory Board

Two successful conferences were hosted in Richmond (2019) and Charlottesville (2017). From the momentum following the 2019 event, a group of willing participants formed this Founding Advisory Board to bring the Virginia Funders Network to fruition.

The Founding Advisory Board supports seeking diversity on the Advisory Board in many aspects. All regions of Virginia must be represented, as well as each major type of funder (e.g., Health, Community Foundations, Corporations, Family and Independent Foundations). We seek to include small as well as larger funders among the leadership, and we seek to achieve diversity in race and gender.

Founding Advisory Board:

Annette Beuchler	Obici Healthcare Foundation
Scott Blackwell	Community Foundation for a Greater Richmond
Victor Branch	Bank of America, Richmond Market
Clark Casteel	Danville Regional Foundation
Kelly Chopus	Robins Foundation
Christy Connolly	PATH Foundation
Mark Constantine	Richmond Memorial Health Foundation
Deborah DiCroce	Hampton Roads Community Foundation
Mary Fant Donnan	The Alleghany Foundation
Erin Hogan	Bank of America Private Bank
Travis Jackson	Wythe-Bland Foundation
Dan Layman	Community Foundation for the Central Blue Ridge
Patricia Mathews	Northern Virginia Health Foundation
Amy Owen	Community Foundation for Loudoun and Northern Fauquier Counties
Heather Peeler	ACT for Alexandria
Sari Raskin	Community Foundation for Northern Virginia
Carol Sale	Williamsburg Health Foundation
Lynne Tadlock	Claude Moore Charitable Foundation

Initial Networking Groups

Each Networking Group will have co-chairs who take the responsibility to set the agenda, invite guest speakers, achieve outcomes and communicate with the broader membership.

By Funder Type:

Community Foundations
Corporations
Family and Independent Foundations
Health Funders

By Issues:

Affordable Housing (including homelessness and refugees/immigration)
Arts and Culture
Crisis Response and Sustainability (including COVID-19, environment)
Economic Transformation (including economic development, workforce development)
Education (including workforce development)
Health (including Medicaid impact on health safety net)
Impact Investing and Social Entrepreneurship
Poverty (including generational poverty, economic mobility, seniors, food access, financial stability)
Social Justice
Trustees Only