



**Virginians Organized for Interfaith Community Engagement**  
*Organizing for a New Dominion of Justice and Political Participation*

### **VOICE 2017-2021 Organizing Agenda: A Closer Look**

**Background:** In October 2008, VOICE launched with 2,500 leaders from 40+ institutions with much excitement and expectation, committing the collective power of our institutions to create a *New Dominion for Justice and Participation* in the Old Dominion. Since then, VOICE has proven it builds power for the long-term, winning impressive victories, including:

- Holding the CEO's from Bank of America, JP Morgan Chase, and General Electric accountable for the foreclosure crisis in Prince William County, resulting in \$250 million in principal reduction and 1,500+ loan modifications that kept thousands of families from losing their homes;
- Addressing 1,500 housing & fire code violations in 5 apartment complexes in Fairfax, Alexandria, & Prince William;
- Preserving \$9 million in the Virginia budget and winning \$700,000+ in local funds to expand dental care for NOVA low-income adults;
- Organizing with tenants in Alexandria, Arlington and Fairfax to preserve more than 900+ units from upscale development and to create 1,000+ new affordable housing units on public and non-profit owned land;
- Training and organizing immigrant leaders to win on local housing, recreation, youth investment and immigration issues as well as to be a voice on national comprehensive immigration reform.

**Frame:** Today, we unite again across racial, religious, ethnic, income, and partisan lines to declare that it's time to deliver on the promise of living in Northern Virginia -- housing affordability, good public schools, safe and just communities, and respect for one another and for the diversity that is the foundation for a *New Dominion* and that powers a strong economy with opportunities for all.

Sadly, this promise is imperiled for many, while for others it has never been realized. Meanwhile, a divisive and deeply disturbing national political climate has disgusted many people, leading some to turn their backs on civic engagement and others to double down on the politics of division.

Over the last 15 months, VOICE listened closely as 3,000 residents in more than 250 sessions throughout Northern Virginia discussed their hopes, fears, and concerns. Their message: The promise of living in Northern Virginia is threatened by:

- Increasing land and property values that put affordable housing out of reach for many, from school employees to child care, health care, and small business workers to young couples looking to start a family;
- A funding squeeze for public schools that tends to affect low- and moderate-income students disproportionately, creates school overcrowding, and causes talented teachers to leave for areas where they can afford to live, while an emphasis on testing and achievement at any cost sucks the joy out of teaching and learning and contributes to alarming stress in schools;
- An inequitable and unjust Criminal Justice System in Virginia, which incarcerates minority youth and adults at disproportionate rates, destroying lives while others who are wealthier and commit similar crimes often avoid arrest, prosecution, and imprisonment;
- Discrimination persists in policy and practice in this region that has prided itself on welcoming immigrants and celebrating diversity;
- Fear engendered both by a perceived lack of personal safety in a world with growing gun violence and by real and perceived divisions between communities and law enforcement.

**Vision:** We must act NOW to change the trajectory in Northern Virginia -- to reclaim the promise of living here for ourselves and for the next generation. We must reclaim politics as an honorable pursuit in which people working together have the power to change their communities and their country for the better. We must lead by showing that, if we build trust through relationships that cross the usual lines of division, we will strengthen our region for the challenges ahead.

We are called to be POWERFUL agents of CHANGE, to be BOLD, to be PERSISTENT, to demonstrate HOPE for a better Northern Virginia. VOICE is expanding and broadening its membership in each jurisdiction so that we have the power to tackle county- and region-wide issues as well as to be a non-partisan force for VOICE's organizing agenda in statewide elections for Governor and Attorney General in 2017, and statewide and local elections in 2018 & 2019.

**VOICE 2017-2021 Organizing Agenda:** VOICE will build the power to make the following changes over the next 5 years:

**1) Increase Investment in Affordable Housing:** Northern Virginia counties lag far behind their regional peers in addressing the need for—(121,000 units in NOVA by 2023 according to a George Mason Center for Regional Analysis Study)—and investing in affordable housing—Montgomery County, MD and Washington, DC invest \$47 million and \$100 million respectively each year in local funds to finance affordable housing. Arlington, Fairfax, and Alexandria only invest approximately \$12 million, \$4 million, and \$2 million respectively. Over the next five years, VOICE will organize to increase annual local investment to:

- **\$100 million in Fairfax County by 2030, starting with \$50 million by 2021;**
- **\$51 Million in Arlington by 2025 to fully fund the Affordable housing Master Plan,** which mandates 17% of all County housing be affordable, a standard VOICE helped pass last year.
- **\$30 million in Alexandria City and Prince William County** to create or preserve 300+ affordable units per year.

VOICE will also **continue organizing with tenants to address housing code violations and preserve their properties** from upscale development most notably with:

- **public housing tenants in Alexandria to preserve 500 units in Old Town and near the Braddock Street Metro for current residents** that the Housing Authority has slated for redevelopment.

VOICE will also organize with its **partner religious denominations to identify land and investment funds that can be allocated to build affordable housing.** Leading by example, VOICE will then challenge all jurisdictions to

- **Dedicate state and county owned Public Land as well as air space on top of county and state buildings to build affordable housing,** including land controlled by WMATA/METRO.

**2) Organize with Parents/School Staff/Community leaders to build a power base to Strengthen Public Education, including increased funding to invest in top quality teachers and staff, to address school overcrowding, and interventions to address the achievement gap among minority, immigrant, and low-income students and their wealthier peers** as well as to win on specific local and county issues that school/community teams identify-- such as transportation for after school programs so all students can participate.

**3) Expand Pre-K for low-income families in Prince William County (PWCO), by accessing \$3 million** in state matching funds annually and **winning \$17 million to expand Pre-K** to the 1000+ low-income students who still need it.

**4) Organize for Just and Accountable, Comprehensive Immigration Reform, to Combat the climate of intolerance, especially toward Muslims, and to address injustices in housing, schools, employment, etc. faced by our immigrant brothers and sisters, including the state impasse on immigrants obtaining drivers licenses;**

**5) Address Gun Violence and Tackle the Roots and Effects of the Unjust and Inequitable Criminal Justice System through the Metro IAF/VOICE Do Not Stand Idly By Campaign.**

- Organize local jurisdictions and the Commonwealth to join 105+ other government entities from across the country to use their purchasing power to compel gun manufactures 1) to produce high tech, safe, "smart" guns that can reduce gun violence and 2) to hold the 1% of gun dealers that are the source 57% of guns used in crimes to abide by high standards for security, sales, record keeping, and cooperation with law enforcement.
- Organize a broad-base of individuals, families, and service providers to change Virginia's inequitable and unjust criminal justice system that arrests and imprisons a disproportionate number of African-Americans, has one of the highest youth incarceration rates in the US, has the lowest felony threshold for larceny--\$200—in the nation, and spends \$1.3 billion annually to incarcerate 37,000 individuals, where the black citizen to white citizen imprisonment rate is 5:1.