



04 REGIONAL STRATEGIES

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Introduction

Beyond being five localities with shared borders, the NRV is a close-knit network of people and communities living and working together across a range of initiatives and interests. Each jurisdiction plays a role in the region's interconnected economy and housing market.

The data findings and observations from the previous chapter were discussed with the housing study's Leadership Team and Consortium comprising representatives from local government staff, area nonprofits, lenders, bankers,

realtors, and housing service providers. The following seven strategies were developed with their input and guidance.

A distinguishing factor between strategies chosen for regional versus local implementation was whether the issue was shared across every jurisdiction and whether action items for these strategies would benefit from regional partnership and collaboration.



STRATEGY ONE

Conduct a Housing Education Campaign

Public support for housing is a critical element for advancing public policies that increase housing opportunities. A cross-sector education campaign is necessary to achieve widespread enthusiasm for better housing across the New River Valley. This campaign will use strategic partnerships to advance a positive image of housing and demonstrate the importance of housing on the region's current and future success.

The campaign should be divided into distinct efforts based on audience type:



General public



Elected officials



Anchor institutions



Landlords



Housing builders and developers

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Immediate

- Discuss this strategy with major regional stakeholders who might lend their support. Examples include the United Way of the New River Valley and the Community Foundation of the New River Valley.
- Explore the formation of a work group to oversee an education campaign at a high level and ensure consistent messaging.
- Gather contact information for primary stakeholders in each of the suggested categories.
- Determine which persons/organizations will lead outreach efforts for each audience type.
- Outline “scripts” and major talking points needed for audience types.

Short-term (next 12 months)

- Develop an outreach plan by assigning contacts to designated liaisons with specific pitches and requests.
- Create outreach materials as needed, including fact sheets, social media posts, “layperson” policy briefs, presentation slides, and other relevant content.
- Investigate funding opportunities to sustain dedicated outreach efforts and potentially hire marketing consultant(s).

Mid-term (12-24 months)

- Plan, organize, and host a regional housing summit to gather all stakeholders. Focus themes on regional cooperation and collaborative solutions.
- Evaluate progress to determine long-term goals of campaign(s); assess, reevaluate, and redesign outreach efforts as necessary to reflect changing housing needs in the region.

Long-term (24+ months)

- Consider a formal public opinion poll on attitudes toward housing development and affordability. The Campaign for Housing and Civic Engagement (CHACE) conducted a statewide poll in 2017 with the help of the College of William & Mary and should be used as a reference.



METRICS TO EVALUATE SUCCESS

- ✓ Measure the collective impact of the campaign by asking nonprofit and private organizations to support the effort and track total signatories by quarter. Set goals by audience type.
- ✓ Track number of participants for public meetings or events held.
- ✓ Within the first year, aim for three to five media pieces, which may include op-eds, letters to the editor, and television/radio interviews.
- ✓ Conduct public opinion surveys, whether informally (i.e., conducted via an online collector and distributed via community mailing lists and similar outreach) or through a formal poll conducted by a research firm.



“The Power of Home” Campaign

In the spring of 2018, the Richmond City Health District kicked off a multimedia campaign called “The Power of Home.” The campaign’s message centered around the idea that good housing is an important form of healthcare: a quality home gives us comfort, safety, and well-being.

A working group of housing and public health experts, advocates, and leaders helped develop and hone the major messages. A consultant then created talking points and social media graphics and strategies, recorded podcasts, and coordinated newspaper articles and other mass-media exposure.

The campaign also featured direct quotes and interviews with public housing residents and other community members to tell their stories.

STRATEGY TWO

Create a Regional Housing Trust Fund

Housing trust funds (HTFs) are widely used across the United States, with more than 300 active funds as of 2020. Although most of these funds are intended for a single jurisdiction, communities are collaborating to explore multi-jurisdictional funds. This is because housing markets are regional, and regional strategies can better address problems that go beyond city, county, or town limits.

The three most-common fund structures are the following:

A. Fully Regionalized Funds. The simplest structure is a single pool of funds that receives both public and private dollars. These funds are governed by a regional body with oversight that usually includes at least one representative from each jurisdiction.

B. Shared Priorities, Separate Funds. Funds may share priorities and funding criteria but maintain separate funds for each jurisdiction. Projects are not funded in a jurisdiction until that fund has sufficient capital to support a project. Shared priorities are established through a joint process and are revisited as regional circumstances change.

C. Unique Priorities, Separate Funds. Regional funds may also maintain separate funds for each jurisdiction, and each fund sets its own priorities and project scoring criteria. These funds benefit chiefly from the efficiency of a single administrator as well as an enhanced ability to attract private sources of capital.

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Immediate

- Educate elected officials in all participating jurisdictions about the advantages of a regional fund and the regional housing needs to be addressed by such a fund.
- Utilize a distribution model similar to the NRV HOME Consortium. Local and regional leaders must discuss the administration of the Regional to include the pros/cons of implementation through existing or new organizational frameworks to determine the best path forward.

Short-term (next 12 months)

- Determine the level of support that is achievable from the participating jurisdictions.
- Identify additional sources of capital—including participation from lending institutions, corporations, and charitable foundations.
- Develop a detailed implementation model that incorporates all sources of capital the trust fund will administer.

Mid-term (12-24 months)

- Explore the potential for “dedicated” sources of revenue to the fund, which allow for greater predictability in the volume of resources and prevent fiscal cycles and shifting political priorities from affecting the operation.
- Consider allocating some funding for predevelopment activities to supporting and building a pipeline. These funds should be flexible and forgivable if a project does not move forward.

Long-term (24+ months)

- Monitor and evaluate fund performance by determining whole or partial fund unit production and unit affordability.
- Gather data from recipients on information including demographics of residents and lease-up trends to measure greater community impacts.



METRICS TO EVALUATE SUCCESS

A successful HTF must measure both outputs and outcomes.

 **Outputs:** Collecting data on the number of housing units assisted, their location, cost, and other relevant data points is critical regardless of whether these metrics materialize until the second or third year.

 **Outcomes:** More critically, the fund must measure who is being helped and assessing whether objectives are accomplished. Although this information is more difficult and time-consuming to collect than that on outputs, it is crucial to sustaining commitments from funders in the long run.



Examples of outcome oriented questions include the following:

- Are seniors able to stay in the homes longer and more safely?
- Is housing stability allowing children to be more successful in school, helping parents to achieve greater job stability and improved earnings?
- Is permanent supportive housing resulting in fewer emergency room visits?



STRATEGY THREE

Partner with Anchor Health Institutions

Partnerships with anchor health institutions to address housing conditions are becoming an increasingly common strategy in many communities. Efforts started decades ago by large hospitals in urban areas to revitalize neighborhoods surrounding their facilities have evolved into a multi-faceted array of efforts with multiple objectives.

Housing and health initiatives in the NRV should begin with strategic one-on-one conversations with LewisGale and Carilion to determine the level of interest and the specific issues for engagement.

Ensuring safe and appropriate housing for patients who are being discharged from the hospital or from rehab following a hospitalization is a clear first engagement topic. The region should consider a pilot program around hospital discharge and explore opportunities for greater investment in housing development and improvement. This program will help create an environment where localities, housing providers, healthcare practitioners, and local service providers are in regular communication with each other and can better understand the systems that each operates.

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Immediate

- Hold initial meetings with each of the healthcare systems. Identify the critical staff within these institutions for engagement and begin to identify key interests of these institutions with respect to housing. Discuss approaches and partner possibilities for post hospitalization “re-entry” housing assistance.
- Meet with housing providers in the region to develop an understanding of interest in housing–health collaboration. Inventory the capacity of housing providers to deliver relevant services, such as accessibility improvements to homes.

Short-term (next 12 months)

- Based on the results of the initial meetings, develop a proposal for a pilot collaboration such as a program to assist patients leaving a hospitalization and returning home.

Mid-term (12-24 months)

- Establish semi-annual meetings between healthcare providers and housing providers to provide mutual education of all participants. Develop an agenda of potential opportunities for collaboration based on best practices in other communities. Explore opportunities for healthcare providers to deliver services within housing communities, especially preventive care.
- Determine schedule for Carilion’s next community health needs assessment and use the opportunity to include housing conditions and affordability in the assessment data.
- Consider hosting a half-day conference on housing–health collaborations to educate a broader range of residents in the region, including policy makers and elected officials.

Long-term (24+ months)

- Consider planning and conducting an annual event in the region on this topic to provide progress updates, share success and challenge stories, and hear from practitioners.





METRICS TO EVALUATE SUCCESS

- ✓ Health and housing collaborations offer a unique opportunity to measure actual outcomes. Instead of tracking only the amount of funding committed, or number of homes repaired, these programs can measure the real objective—the improved health of the homeowner or tenant.
- ✓ Working with the healthcare system, the collaborative can track hospital readmissions as well as improved health outcomes (e.g., fewer falls, less anxiety, and greater satisfaction). These measures are far more compelling for funders and can set a basis for social impact bonds and other innovative funding strategies.



STRATEGY FOUR

Partner with Non-Health Anchor Institutions

There is increasing recognition that anchor institutions such as universities and other large employers can play a greater role in addressing a wide range of community needs, including affordable housing.

These institutions can collaborate with the public sector and housing providers to address housing costs and conditions using their capabilities by, for example, providing lower-cost capital or making land available.

Several large employers in the region should be approached regarding their interest in participating in a public-private partnership focused on affordable housing, including Virginia Tech and Radford University as well as non-education corporations (e.g., Volvo).

How Corporations Can Support Affordable Housing:

- Employee volunteers for building and repair
- Down payment assistance
- Home sales price write downs
- Land for new homes
- Mortgage interest buy downs
- Support for special home amenities
- Investment

Institutional interest implies that partnerships should be developed that include all sectors necessary for affordable housing development, including developers, builders, realtors, management companies, and lenders. The state housing finance agency, Virginia Housing, has a long-standing interest in employer assistance programs for housing and should be engaged early in the discussion.



IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Immediate

- Approach each partner separately to allow for differing policies and decision-making processes of each university and corporation.

Short-term (next 12 months)

- Develop a specific strategy for each institution depending on its interests.

Mid-term (12-24 months)

- Implement at least one housing initiative with Virginia Tech, Radford University, and Volvo. Consider holding a housing symposium specifically for employers in the region about housing needs and challenges with examples of best practices and examples of employer engagement elsewhere in the state.

Long-term (24+ months)

- If the regional economy and major employers change significantly, engage new entities in housing conversations.
- Monitor wage levels for major industries and regional occupations compared to housing affordability, and use data to guide planning and discussion.



Johns Hopkins University “Live Near Your Work” Program

Johns Hopkins University has operated a program for nearly a decade that helps certain university employees buy a house near campus. The “Live Near Your Work” program offers grants to full-time JHU employees to assist them in purchasing a home. The grants range from \$5,000 to \$36,000 depending on the neighborhood.

METRICS TO EVALUATE SUCCESS

- ✓ The primary metrics for the program include the amount of funding directed to the initiative, number of affordable homes developed, and number of social and economic characteristics of households assisted.
- ✓ Through periodic surveys, the program should also seek to measure increases in knowledge and awareness of housing challenges among employers in the region. Goals should be established for increasing employer appreciation of the issue.



STRATEGY FIVE

Address Common Manufactured Housing Challenges

Whereas manufactured homes provide a much-needed source of low-cost housing, they also have challenges. Older mobile homes often present serious health, safety, and energy efficiency hazards.

To better understand the scope of manufactured housing in the NRV, the region should undertake a comprehensive research survey primarily focused on mobile home parks. Census Bureau data on parks is limited; thus, a survey to generate accurate information on the size and quality of the region's parks is useful. This knowledge, in turn, helps drive well-informed policy decisions and resource allocations.

In 2016, the Manufactured Home Community Coalition of Virginia (MHCCV) completed the first comprehensive report on mobile home parks in the Richmond region, *An Assessment of Central Virginia's Manufactured Housing Communities*. This study should serve as a template for similar work in the NRV.

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN



Immediate

- Determine whether research will be conducted by staff within the region or contracted out to a third-party firm.
- Gather a list of persons and organizations in the region or across the state who may serve as project advisors owing to their knowledge and background.
- Contact local planning and zoning officials to determine whether they have reliable lists of manufactured home communities in their jurisdictions.
- Develop a list of potential funding entities and submit proposals to interested parties.

Short-term (next 12 months)

- Create a standardized database for known manufactured home communities in the region.
- Develop park survey criteria and methodology. If possible, contact park owners to collect information about lot rents and other community data.
- Begin Census data collection and analysis.

Mid-term (12-24 months)

- Conduct in-person park survey to gather on-the-ground information about community and housing conditions.
- Draft and finalize report, including analysis of findings and key takeaways for policymakers.
- Determine and implement process for public dissemination of the study.
- Identify and pursue next key steps identified in the report.

Long-term (24+ months)

- Conduct a scaled-down “check-in” survey to parks in the region to determine whether the number of units or vacancy rates have changed.
- Make note of any significant changes in park ownership and connect with new owners looking to make good impressions in the community.

METRICS TO EVALUATE SUCCESS



The following are examples of major knowledge gaps that should be filled when this study is completed:

1. How many mobile home parks are in the NRV?
2. How many households live in these communities?
3. What are the major strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats for parks?
4. What are the demographics and socioeconomic situations of park residents?



Shifts in funding/service priorities by local governments and community development organizations for manufactured home communities may also imply success.





STRATEGY SIX

Grow Building Construction Trade + Workforce

A shortage of building construction and specialty trade contractors in the NRV is a major constraint on the construction of new homes and rehabilitation and upgrade of existing homes. The shortages result in increasing project costs and transaction costs for both new home construction and renovation and rehabilitation projects. Rising costs make the construction of new homes and apartments that are affordable to local for residents more difficult. Moreover, high costs and long wait times to complete home renovation or maintenance projects may worsen deferred maintenance and deterioration of existing housing stock.

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Immediate

- Compile baseline economic and workforce/labor market data on the building construction and specialty trades industry sectors to enable tracking of regional and national building industry trends.
- Compile inventory of existing education and skills training programs for building trades workers.
- Compile inventory of existing small business development programs and resources as well as business resources targeted to home-building firms.
- Promote existing resources to businesses and share the list with other resource providers.
- Research the strategies of peer regions to address construction trades skills shortages.

Short-term (next 12 months)

- Convene regional education and training providers to identify and assess existing building trades education and training programs.
- Convene regional residential building construction and specialty trade/remodeler firms to discuss workforce needs/shortages.
- Build teams to pursue funding and address gaps in the region's training system.

Mid-term (12-24 months)

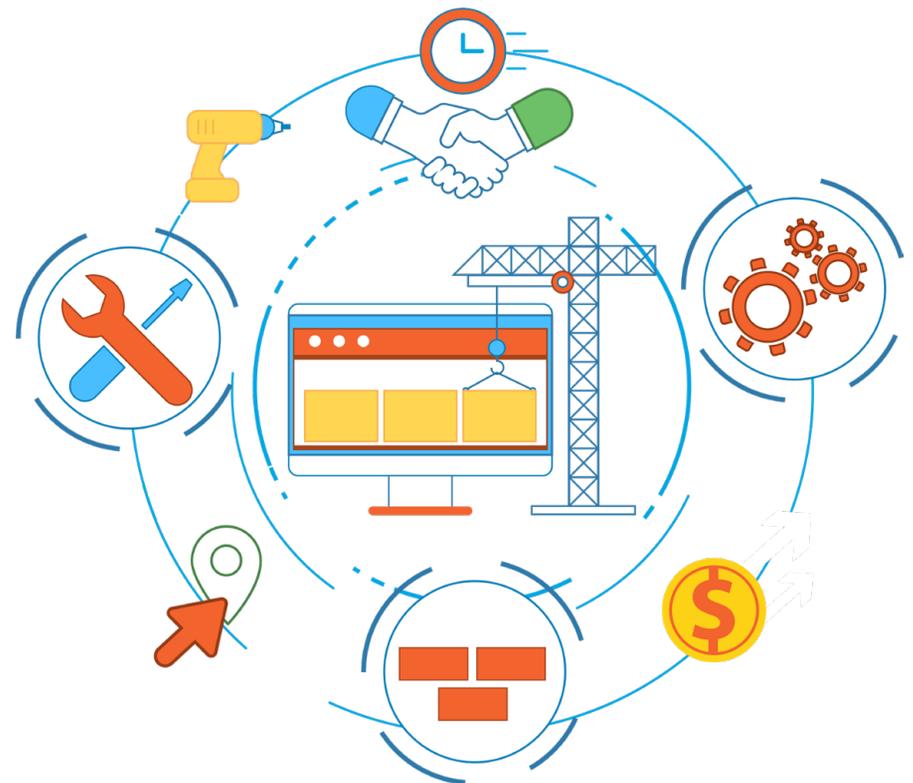
- Partner with local building construction and specialty trade firms to pilot internships/job shadowing (or more formal apprenticeship program) for students in appropriate training programs at local high schools or colleges.
- Partner with regional business development service providers and industry trade groups to pilot business training and consulting offerings tailored to those who may benefit from improved business practices, including building construction or specialty trades firms, developers and real estate investors, and rental property or mobile home park managers.

Long-term (24+ months)

- Provide pipeline of graduates from local schools and universities with the credentials local building construction industry firms require to remain productive and replace skilled trades workers nearing retirement age.
- Partner with local building construction firms to offer a list of preferred local contractors for home habilitation or housing projects in coordination with local government or regional housing programs and grants.

METRICS TO EVALUATE SUCCESS

- ✓ Increase in number of firms and size of firms in the building trades.
- ✓ Increase in number of jobs and earnings of workers in target construction trades occupations.
- ✓ Increase in number of graduates of regional construction trades training programs
- ✓ Decrease in cost or wait-times for residential remodeling construction projects
- ✓ Increase in number of businesses (local and non-local) participating in proposed regional housing development projects/initiatives.





STRATEGY SEVEN

Provide Support for an Aging Population

An increasing number of older adults locally and nationally are choosing to “age in place” and stay in their homes and communities if possible. The senior population of the NRV varies significantly across jurisdictions. The Town of Blacksburg and City of Radford comprise less than 10 percent seniors, partially because of the large numbers of college-aged residents who attend the universities in the area. In contrast, the senior population is close to 25 percent in nearby Giles, Floyd, and Pulaski. The entire region comprises approximately 16 percent of residents 65 and older. This trend will continue to grow for the next decade in-line with statewide trends.

Housing for seniors who age in place is often not suitable for their changing mobility status. Designing an Aging in Place (AIP) program involves at least two essential categories: home modification and community adaptation.

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GENWORTH’S COST OF CARE SURVEY IN 2019 PUT THE AVERAGE COST OF ASSISTED LIVING AT \$4,800 PER MONTH AND NURSING CARE AT \$8,200 PER MONTH FOR VIRGINIA. USING THIS STANDARD, A HOME MOD OF \$50,000 WOULD PAY FOR ITSELF IN LESS THAN A YEAR.

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IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Immediate

- **Evaluate networks/programs:** Coordinate with the AIP Leadership Team in the area to understand existing networks and programs that support AIP.
- **Identify gaps:** Learn where gaps exist in housing needs and services for seniors.
- **Map areas of concentration:** Map the location of senior households in the area using tract or block-group level ACS estimates to understand where concentrations exist.
- **Evaluate survey data:** Review prior surveys of senior renters and homeowners in the region to get up to date on their preferences and their plans with respect to housing. Update findings as needed.
- **Seek Best Practices for AIP policy:** Research best practices from similar communities on how they built AIP into policy and program decisions at the local level.

Short-term (next 12 months)

- **Update action plan:** Update and expand on the AIP Leadership Team's prior Action Plan to integrate key findings from this regional housing study.
- **Establish timeline & resources:** Develop a timeline for priority AIP initiatives and identify the resources needed for implementation. If resources do not permit full scale implementation, identify initiatives that can be piloted.
- **Identify collaborative partners:** Do not duplicate services—find providers who are currently involved in AIP activities and recruit them to create a comprehensive program that incorporates a continuum of initiatives.
- **Develop a home modification program:** Implement a comprehensive home modification initiative that incorporates the following elements: home assessments, quality construction, financial assistance, and program navigation assistance.

Mid-term (12-24 months)

- **Prioritize needs:** Support localities in mapping and prioritizing the needs of their residents.
- **Incorporate AIP in housing education and outreach:** Make AIP part of follow-up housing study conversations and outreach. Make AIP a track within a housing forum event.



METRICS TO EVALUATE SUCCESS

- ✓ Resident tenure in their home
- ✓ Improvement in health conditions
- ✓ Decrease in the number of injuries incurred in the home
- ✓ Increase in access to services
- ✓ Increase in happiness and satisfaction because of access to services, entertainment, cultural stimulation, and socialization (measured through surveying)