



**AUGUST 8, 2024**

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# **STATE OF THE LEGISLATURE EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On August 8th, Richmond Memorial Health Foundation (RMHF) hosted a gathering of civic leaders, organizations, policy advocates, and racial and health equity champions from across the Commonwealth of Virginia. This gathering provided a platform for participants to share insights, exchange perspectives, and foster collaboration to advance health and racial equity throughout the Commonwealth. The day was marked by community-driven discussions, culminating in a celebration of the incredible work already accomplished and the promising future ahead to create a more healthy and equitable Virginia.

As part of RMHF's ongoing efforts to learn from community partners, this event brought together a diverse audience of key stakeholders, including speakers and panelists, whose contributions aligned with the Foundation's mission to explore the intersections of policy, advocacy, and equity. The event featured thought-provoking presentations and reflections, beginning with

keynote speaker Gihan Perera, a senior fellow at the Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity, a philanthropic adviser for Portabella Advisors, and a former program officer at the Ford Foundation. Gihan shared his personal organizing journey, and the lessons learned from revolutionary Black organizers, emphasizing the importance of empowering community voices. He left attendees with key takeaways from his 25 years of experience, highlighting the need for integrity, resilience, and a strategically aligned ecosystem encompassing legal, policy, organizing, and narrative approaches to drive change.





Key insights were further explored through dynamic panel discussions, including **Obstacles & Opportunities**, where panelists reflected on challenges faced by Virginia’s newly elected lawmakers. These newly elected lawmakers, some with lived experiences of homelessness or juggling multiple jobs, bring a deeper understanding of the issues at hand but also require support in navigating the legislative process. This conversation also touched on the need for advocates to break out of silos and collaborate on a holistic response to systemic inequities, particularly around language access, transportation, and health equity.

“Attending the State of the Legislature energized my commitment to work across program areas to envision a holistic and collective response to systemic racism and oppression in the Commonwealth. I connected with a lot of individuals and organizations doing incredible work – including around language access, transportation access, health equity, and more. I believe those connections will help me think about how we can support each other and our work in- and outside of the General Assembly building.”

-Maisie Osteen, LAJC, Panelist

Panelists from the **Strategies & Collaborations** session explored the necessity of relationship-building and long-term commitment to authentically shift power to communities. A successful organizing strategy, they noted, starts with listening to community needs, followed by forging partnerships with institutions, which can lead to solutions to ongoing challenges. Meaningful inclusion requires intentionality and a thorough understanding of the barriers to participation, including who has access to decision-making spaces.





“The State of the Legislature event brought together a lot of passionate and thoughtful advocates. I heard a lot of reminders of why I do this work, who I do it with, and how I want to do it. Two main takeaways that will strengthen my work are (1) we’ve got to collaborate well to build multi-issue/multi-racial/multi-ethnic movements because nobody lives single-issue lives and our liberations are all tied up with one another, and (2) we have to be pragmatic and principled to stay the course throughout the back and forth of elections.”

-Gustavo Espinosa, LAJC, Panelist

The day concluded with an inspiring closing session led by Rev. Dr. LaKeisha Cook, Co-Executive Director of the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy (VICPP), where the focus was on the power of community and the importance of collaboration in justice-centered work. Attendees left energized, motivated by the words of historical figures like Grace Lee Boggs, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and James Baldwin, and with a renewed sense of purpose to continue their work with passion and focus.





## STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS FOR RMHF

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As RMHF continues to advance its mission of promoting health and racial equity, several strategic considerations emerged from the event:

### LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIP BUILDING:

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Philanthropy must move beyond transactional grants and toward sustained investments in building relationships within communities. This includes deep listening and a commitment to understanding community priorities over time, enabling more effective partnerships and equitable outcomes.

- **What we heard is needed:** Relationship building requires community melding, listening, and understanding – an intentional and deliberate process that cannot be rushed and requires the necessary resources to do that work meaningfully.
- **Strategy questions we are exploring:** How can RMHF cultivate long-term relationships with community partners to ensure sustained investment in their work and a deep understanding of their priorities? What strategies can RMHF employ to move beyond transactional grants and foster a culture of trust and collaboration with community partners?



## POWER SHIFTING:

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A core theme from the discussions was the need to shift power toward historically marginalized communities. This means funding must support efforts to bring underrepresented voices to the table, not only as participants but as leaders of decision-making processes.

- **What we heard is needed:** Power shifting is not a matter of asking or inviting people to a meeting or into a room, it's a matter of having established authentic relationships and then partnering with advocacy organizations to determine community-driven solutions.
- **Strategy questions we are exploring:** How can RMHF support efforts to shift power toward historically marginalized communities, ensuring that their voices are not only heard but also influential in decision-making processes? What mechanisms can be implemented to bring underrepresented voices to the table and empower them as leaders in their communities?

## COLLABORATIVE ECOSYSTEMS:

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Effective philanthropy requires fostering ecosystems where legal, policy, organizing, and narrative strategies are aligned. RMHF should consider funding initiatives that break down silos between sectors, encouraging collaboration across health, housing, education, and justice systems to address the root causes of inequities.

- **What we heard is needed:** State of the Legislature originated as an opportunity for RMHF to listen and learn and culminated in an unplanned outcome of fostering an ecosystem by bringing together legal, policy, organizing, and narrative strategists.
- **Strategy questions we are exploring:** How can RMHF foster collaborative ecosystems that break down silos between sectors and encourage cross-sector partnerships to address the root causes of inequities? What initiatives can RMHF support to align legal, policy, organizing, and narrative strategies to create a more equitable, healthy, and just society?



## FLEXIBILITY AND ADAPTATION:

In a constantly evolving political and social landscape, philanthropic strategies must remain flexible. Supporting innovative approaches and adaptive leadership within communities will be essential to weathering changes while maintaining a focus on equity.

- **What we heard is needed:** Community partners need to be able to pivot when a window of opportunity opens or when roadblocks emerge and have the flexibility in both resources and grant requirements to do so.
- **Strategy questions we are exploring:** How can RMHF remain adaptable in a constantly evolving political and social landscape, while maintaining a focus on equity? What innovative approaches and adaptive leadership can RMHF support to ensure that its philanthropic strategies remain relevant and effective?

“Events like the inaugural State of the Legislature provided an environment for organizations to share in common goals and discuss the ever changing landscape around health equity. We have been living in extraordinary times where representation, education and intentionality matter, especially when trying to move the need forward. SAARA of Va appreciates the opportunity to walk in this shared vision with RMHF and hope to be a part of many more conversations!”

-Anika Richburg, SAARA

## HOLISTIC, MULTI-ISSUE FOCUS:

The interconnected nature of the challenges facing the Commonwealth requires a philanthropic approach that recognizes multi-issue, multi-racial, and multi-ethnic movements. RMHF should continue to prioritize funding initiatives that address systemic inequities holistically, ensuring no single issue is addressed in isolation.

- **What we heard is needed:** Our community partners, and their areas of focus, do not operate in a vacuum. They want more direct and indirect support to authentically develop community-driven approaches that weave together their efforts. Specifically, partners are looking for more direct support in the form of general operating support grants, and more indirect support in the form of gatherings like the State of the Legislature event.
- **Strategy question we are exploring:** How can RMHF prioritize funding initiatives that address systemic inequities holistically, recognizing the interconnected nature of the challenges facing the Commonwealth? What strategies can RMHF employ to ensure that its funding supports multi-racial, multi-ethnic movements that address the root causes of inequities?



## IN CONCLUSION

The State of the Legislature event displayed the Foundation's commitment to advancing health and racial equity alongside policy, advocacy and civic engagement leaders and organizations. The discussions underscored the importance of relationship-building, shifting power, fostering collaborative ecosystems, and maintaining flexibility in an ever-changing landscape. As RMHF continues to drive its mission forward, these strategic insights will guide future efforts to create a more just and equitable Commonwealth. By deepening its partnerships, amplifying the voices of marginalized communities, and promoting holistic approaches to addressing systemic inequities, RMHF is well-positioned to make a lasting impact in the pursuit of health and racial equity for all Virginians.