
2018 NACo-NCCAE Knowledge Management Forum

Virginia Association of Counties' Update

August 27-28, 2018

County Challenges

A short list of significant challenges currently confronting Virginia's counties. This list encompasses both emergent issues and older concerns voiced by our members.

Rural Broadband: Virginia's rural counties continue to lack meaningful access to broadband services. Without this crucial connectivity, many counties struggle to grow, facilitate economic development, and reach their full potential.

Education Funding: Complex funding formulas govern state contributions to K-12 education funding. Structural funding cuts made during the recession have led to continued underfunding by the state. This funding is not reflective of the true costs of operating school divisions, and localities continue advocacy efforts to revisit these funding decisions.

Medicaid Expansion: Virginia's General Assembly recently acted to expand Medicaid to new populations in accordance with the Affordable Care Act. County leaders have raised concern that details of the expansion will result in increased county expenditures due to the nature of Virginia's state-supervised, locally-administered social services system. A system which will be largely responsible for eligibility determinations and enrollment, potentially playing a significant role in administering the proposed work requirement once Virginia's waiver request is approved. Navigating a new system and keeping costs low may prove to be a significant challenge.

VACo Advocacy

A non-exhaustive list of major advocacy campaigns led by VACo in recent years. These campaigns are ongoing and are often relitigated each year in various forms.

Rural Broadband: Securing sufficient funding and attention to the issue of broadband expansion requires constant vigilance. VACo has consistently advocated for additional funding for rural broadband, and in the last state budget saw modest gains in such funding. During the 2017 session, VACo lobbied against and defeated legislation that would have severely limited localities' ability to undertake public-private partnerships to build out broadband networks.

Education Funding: Education costs assume the vast majority of any Virginia county budget, therefore, one of VACo's most forceful advocacy campaigns is the securing of additional education dollars for counties in the Commonwealth. The state has increased education funding in the past

several legislative sessions, though per-pupil direct aid still lags pre-recession amounts when adjusted for inflation.

Equal Taxation Authority: Virginia's counties operate on an uneven playing field since counties do not enjoy the same taxing authority as Virginia cities and towns. This imbalance prevents Virginia counties from generating much-needed revenue. Equal taxing authority remains one of VACo's most significant advocacy campaigns.

Messaging and Outreach

VACo's communication arm serves as a voice for Virginia counties, a member-engagement tool, and a mechanism for marketing and branding. Examples include:

The VACo Podcast: Inspired by the rise of podcasting and the renewed interest in policy and political knowledge this technological revolution has sparked, VACo has jumped into the fray by hosting its own show. VACo's podcast, *County Pulse*, explores the ins and outs of issues like rural broadband, opioid abuse, and the state budget.

Social Media: By utilizing Facebook Live on a consistent basis at all VACo events, VACo has expanded its viewership and its communicative reach to more of its membership and the public. Viewers prefer short, unscripted summaries and analysis, and brief policy discussions.

Traditional Media: VACo continues to work with and support traditional media outlets. In 2018 VACo placed two op-eds in major Virginia publications. These op-eds increased VACo's exposure to the public and illustrated its relevance and expertise in state policy discussions. VACo receives roughly one media request per week and responds to each inquiry within 24 hours.

Working with Counties

VACo collaborates with Commonwealth counties to resolve the issues communities face through advocacy and education.

Broadband Blueprint: VACo developed its [Blueprint for Broadband](#) to address Virginia's digital divide. This four-step plan advocates for the common good in the Commonwealth by putting forward community-based and cost-effective methods for expansion.

Healthy Counties Initiative: This 2018 Presidential Initiative seeks to promote awareness of counties' efforts to build healthy communities and help counties learn from each other's successes. This program offers a wealth of helpful resources, including real examples of success, research materials, webinars, and helpful columns on issues of food insecurity, obesity, and physical activity.