

# STAYING IN TOUCH W/LOCAL NONPROFITS

Supported by RFM

## ORGANIZATION NAME: **Virginia Organizing Project**

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<b>Contact name:</b>	Joe Szakos
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<b>Direct phone:</b>	(434)984-4655
<b>Mission:</b>	"The Virginia Organizing Project (VOP) is a statewide grassroots organization dedicated to challenging injustice by empowering people in local communities to address issues that affect the quality of their lives. VOP especially encourages the participation of those who have traditionally had little or no voice in our society. By building relationships with individuals and groups throughout the state, VOP strives to get them to work together, democratically and non-violently, for change."
<b>Population(s) served (number, demographics)</b>	Citizens of Virginia, especially those who have not previously had a voice.. Since 1995, VOP has intentionally involved people who have never participated in working for change alongside those with many years of experience. VOP is intentionally diverse in its leadership development, and attempts to cultivate democratic skills amongst people who, regardless of differences in race, gender, class, sexual orientation, age, occupation, religion, geographic location or ability, believe in the importance of working through local, grassroots communities to ensure a better quality of life for all Virginia's residents.
<b>Main activities:</b>	Lobbying and grassroots organizing on national and state issues that impact Virginians. VOP has a joint plan of work with over 20 organizations across the state, supporting their work in the environment, education, transportation, human rights, and community support. <sup>1</sup> VOP has a staff of 8 community organizers across the state of Virginia working under the direction of Executive Director Joe Szakos. These organizers work to build local chapters and organize local community members around making positive social change. Current priorities are <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>(1) <u>Health Care Reform</u> – Major Current Effort of VOP- Ask Senators and Congressmen them to support a public health insurance option that will provide quality, affordable health care for everyone.</li><li>(2) <u>Local Issues</u> - In addition to several statewide campaigns, VOP works on various local issue campaigns across the state, focusing on what VOP chapter members want to change in their communities, including two housing campaigns in the Northern Shenandoah Valley and a housing campaign in Williamsburg.</li><li>(3) <u>Predatory Lending</u> – working with other organizations to close the loopholes with regard to payday loans by lobbying for legislation that will protect the consumer.</li></ol>

	<p>(4) <u>Racism</u> - Since 1996, the Virginia Organizing Project (VOP) has made <i>Dismantling Racism Workshops</i> manual an integral part of its work. In this publication, VOP has compiled practical tools and background articles to share with other organizations already active or interested in dismantling racism as part of their social justice work.</p> <p>(5) <u>Tax Reform</u>: Following are some of VOP's tax reform proposals for the Commonwealth of Virginia:</p> <p><u>Option A</u>: Eliminate State Income Tax Deduction for Federal Excess Itemized Deductions, for Virginia taxpayers with over 50K adjusted gross income (single) or \$100K adjusted gross income (married, filing jointly) (Virginia Resident Form 760, Line 10)</p> <p><u>Option B</u>: Modernize State Income Tax Brackets (rates for the bottom two tax brackets haven't been modified since 1919)</p> <p><u>Option C</u>: Add Two New Upper Brackets (Personal Income Tax)</p>
<p><b>Annual budget (w/administrative percentage):</b></p>	<p>\$1.2 million annually</p>
<p><b>Volunteer opportunities:</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Respond to the current action alerts from VOP email</li> <li>○ Sign up to receive e-mail action alerts - go to VOP website to sign up for alerts: <a href="http://www.virginia-organizing.com">www.virginia-organizing.com</a></li> <li>○ Become a VOP supporter.</li> <li>○ Write a letter to the editor.</li> <li>○ Host a gathering at your home to support VOP, contact Sally Bastian at 434-984-4655 ext. 229 or email her through our contact form.</li> <li>○ Volunteer at the Charlottesville office. contact Michele at 434-984-4655 or email her through our contact form.</li> <li>○ Tell your friends about the Virginia Organizing Project.</li> <li>○ Share your own healthcare system experience with the Virginia Organizing Project. We are collecting real stories from around the state to illustrate the healthcare crisis for elected officials and the media. Send your story to Brian Johns using the <a href="#">contact form</a> on their website or at: 276 619-1920.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Anything else like RFM to know about your organization:</b></p>	<p>Please call Sen. Warner and other members of Congress at 1-888-436-8427 to tell him that he health care system is broken. This is a central switchboard that can get you to your representatives/ Senators.</p>

**Observations from on-site visit (if possible): N.A.**

**Name:** Sally Gudas      **Date:** August 5, 2009