From the Executive Director

Last year in the midst of the global pandemic, the Weldon Cooper Center released its first strategic plan, *Reimagining Public Service* as a way to chart a path forward for our organization that built upon our traditional strengths, while also identifying new opportunities to work with communities across the Commonwealth. Guided by the core values of access, collaboration, community, and impact, each of our teams thoughtfully engaged in public impact research and leadership development over the past year with the specific intent of addressing issues posed by the public health crisis, as well as those that have traditionally forced leaders across sectors to make difficult decisions. From conducting a demographics study to help in workforce development program planning or a comprehensive survey to better understand childcare needs, to facilitating city council retreats so that elected leaders can coalesce around a common vision, the Cooper Center was resilient in fulfilling our mission of building capacity across Virginia to address the challenges of 21st century governance.

This impact report is one way we plan on continuing our communication with our partners, stakeholders, and broader members of the community in order to convey how we are embodying the values, goals, and commitments set forth in our strategic plan through our work. I hope that as you learn more about our programs to provide UVA students with hands on professional development, our initiatives to assist localities across the Commonwealth in moving to alternative energy, and an overall focus on engaging with leaders from all sectors with a public service mindset, you are inspired to collaborate with us on our journey.

*Larry D. Terry*
The Weldon Cooper Center draws on ninety years of experience and expertise to support the needs of our communities and partners. Cooper Center professionals embrace mission and impact-driven service to individuals, organizations, governmental bodies, and communities who seek to serve the public good. We conduct advanced and applied research in collaboration with clients so they may make a difference in governance and community life. We offer training programs and expert assistance to public leaders as well as skill development for political leaders who seek to work cooperatively with others. Our work is guided by our values of access, collaboration, impact, and commitment to community. Through our research, leadership development programs, and local government engagement initiatives, we continue to work toward our vision of good governance, equity, and resilience in every Virginia community.

Through these five teams, the Weldon Cooper Center reimagines and carries out its mission of public service to the Commonwealth:

- Center for Economic and Policy Studies
- Center for Survey Research
- Demographics Research Group
- Sorensen Institute for Political Leadership
- Virginia Institute of Government, which includes the LEAD and SEI programs

**Vision**

Good governance, equity, and resilience in every Virginia community

**Values**

Access
Collaboration
Communities
Impact

**Mission**

Recognizing the challenges of 21st century governance, we deliver public impact research and leadership development to build the capacity of Virginia’s communities and organizations to serve the Commonwealth.
Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) is integral to the Center’s work

A critical part of our reimagining public service has been an examination of our values and priorities through the lens of inclusivity. How can we, as a Center, be a model for inclusive excellence? How can we ensure that our work is guided by our commitment to diversity and equity? To answer these questions, we began the important work of examining our DEI policies and practices.

In early 2021, as part of a greater University initiative, the Center completed an Inclusive Excellence Assessment and Plan. The first phase involved conducting a self-study to identify our strengths and opportunities for growth. Based on these findings, we crafted a list of eight preliminary goals for advancing our work in the area of diversity, equity, and inclusion. The goals ranged from improving representation of minority groups in important aspects of our work, to conducting an internal survey to assess the climate of the Center, to formalizing our DEI practices and policies. In the next phase, we will prepare a comprehensive report that includes finalized goals and a long-term action plan.

The Center will track its progress in meeting key strategic goals

At the end of the fiscal year, a Cooper Center team began developing metrics to track our progress in meeting the four goals in the 2020-2025 strategic plan. The metrics, once fully developed, will be shared publicly in an accessible, real-time dashboard. Even more importantly, the dashboard tracking system will help us evaluate our impact in Virginia communities across the Commonwealth and adjust our priorities and resources as necessary to better meet community needs.

LARRY TERRY
Executive Director, Weldon Cooper Center

"The more representative our public service organizations are of the communities we serve, the better we’ll be in identifying the issues of the Commonwealth. Taking on DEI as a primary strategy and focus for the work that we do can only produce more effective and more impactful work that is reflective of all needs and not simply a small group of people."

STRATEGIC PLAN: 2020-2025

In 2020, we finalized our five-year strategic plan after a year of reflection, conversations, and input from key stakeholders. The process was intentionally collaborative and inclusive so that the final plan would reflect the perspectives of all team members.

We also reshaped our mission and defined our core values of access, collaboration, communities, and impact, which served as a guide in the development of the plan. Three of our strategic plan goals focus on building the capacity of students, public leaders, and communities throughout Virginia. The fourth goal is a commitment to examine and reshape the Center’s internal practices and policies.

Writing these goals and sharing them publicly clarifies and affirms our purpose and commitments to the Commonwealth. In working to achieve these goals, we will move closer to realizing our vision: Good governance, equity, and resilience in every Virginia community.

VIEW PLAN
UVA PhD students explore careers in public service

One of our newest programs, PhD Plus, is a collaboration with the Office of Graduate & Postdoctoral Affairs. Through internships at the Weldon Cooper Center, PhD students have the opportunity to gain hands-on experience in public service work. The intent of these internships is to develop students’ professional competencies beyond those typically addressed within their academic training and expose them to a variety of career paths.

REBECCA BULTMAN
PhD Student, Religious Studies

“The PhD Plus program is a wonderful way to see how you might fit in careers outside the professorate. I have learned so much about myself and my skillset. It has been a confidence-building experience to see how graduate training translates into other areas and empowering to learn what new skills to sharpen.”

LAURA WHITE
PhD Student, Politics

“Working at CSR has grown my interest in a career in survey research and has given me ideas about how I might combine that with my other professional interests. I have also really enjoyed working with this group of people; they have been very generous in providing opportunities for me to learn and grow.”

OUR STUDENT PROGRAMS

The Weldon Cooper Center provides undergraduate and graduate students with hands-on, policy-relevant internships in public service, both within the Center and in organizations throughout the Commonwealth. By introducing students to careers in public service, we help shape the next generation of leaders. Students can engage with the Center through a variety of programs—PhD Plus, Wallerstein Scholars, the 22nd Century Scholars, and additional internships through the Weldon Cooper Center and UVA’s Internship Placement Program.

80 undergraduate & graduate students completed internships with the Weldon Cooper Center in FY2021.
This past year, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many students lost their summer jobs and internship placements. Several centers and institutes at UVA, including the Weldon Cooper Center’s Sorensen Institute, came together to fill the void by creating a new program: the 22nd Century Scholars Program.

This program provided students exposure to real world public policy issues in an interactive virtual five-week experience. Through hands-on leadership activities, mentorship from public service professionals, and a speaker series with top government officials, students gained a better understanding of the policy process and the tools needed to make a lasting impact in their communities. Due to its success, Sorensen again hosted 22nd Century Scholars in FY 2022.

Students help create clean energy dashboard for Virginia

Through the Weldon Cooper Center’s Energy Transition Initiative and in collaboration with Virginia Department of Energy, students developed an interactive dashboard to show Virginia’s progress in reaching its clean energy goals (carbon neutrality by 2050).

With guidance from Art Small, Principal Scientist, students managed all aspects of developing the dashboard. They conducted extensive research about Virginia’s electricity sector, created the data visualizations and overall design, built a user-friendly dashboard, and presented their work to the client (Virginia Energy). Their work will help increase transparency about Virginia’s progress toward its clean energy goals and make that data more accessible to policymakers, industry professionals, and Virginia residents.

"My experience showed me the importance of informative visualizations and the storytelling power that data holds...I learned an immense amount and was able to work with some really brilliant people on a project I was enthusiastic about."

ALEXIS FREITAS
Energy Dashboard Intern
4th-year undergrad economics and mathematics

Students gain skills to make lasting impact in communities

Throughout the five-week-long program, we really sat down and considered all of the factors and potential outcomes of a given policy or decision. This really forced me to engage critically in a way that I had never done so in the classroom.

THOMAS DRISCOLL
22nd Century Scholar
3rd-year undergrad history and foreign affairs

"My experience showed me the importance of informative visualizations and the storytelling power that data holds...I learned an immense amount and was able to work with some really brilliant people on a project I was enthusiastic about."

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4th-year undergrad economics and mathematics

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Virtual offerings increase access to leadership development programs across the Commonwealth

As was the case for many organizations, this past year was difficult for our Center as teams transitioned programs online in a way that would still foster meaningful experiences for participants. When our mission relies on in-person, small group, interactive leadership development programs, this is a big ask. Still, one silver lining did appear: Our programs became more accessible to more people from more places.

Virtual programs not only allowed more individuals to participate but also drew people from more diverse locations, especially those from smaller, rural, and remote localities. In addition, geographically distant localities were able to engage with one another, bringing together colleagues who would have not met otherwise. This experience demonstrated the importance of future online offerings to ensure that our programs continue to be accessible to a range of people.

ABOUT OUR PROGRAMS

The Weldon Cooper Center offers a range of development opportunities for leaders at all levels, from diverse backgrounds, and from across the Commonwealth (and beyond). The Senior Executive Institute (SEI) and Leading, Educating, and Developing (LEAD) programs focus on the needs of government and community leaders; the Sorensen Institute provides programming for future and aspiring political leaders; and the Constitutional Officer Education Program offers continuing education and certification for Virginia Treasurers and Commissioners. The goal of these programs is to facilitate effective and ethical leadership and provide participants with the tools to better serve their organizations and communities.

PARTICIPANT RESPONSES TO THE SEI AND LEAD SEMINARS

“I have participated in many webinars and this one is by far the best!”

“An outstanding webinar that combined a philosophical perspective with the need for resolve in creating and sticking to priorities during a time when we’re battling so many competing priorities.”

“Very inspiring and thought-provoking presentation.”

These participant comments were taken from an anonymous survey.

750 participants in 3 SEI/LEAD webinars

756 participants in 18 virtual certification courses

102 participants in 4 Sorensen programs
Certification programs see dramatic increase in rural Virginia’s participation

Housed in the Virginia Institute of Government, the Certification Program provides career development and certification opportunities for Treasurers and Commissioners in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Through this program, constitutional officers can gain the skills and knowledge to more effectively serve their constituency. In response to COVID-19, the certification program began offering online courses, allowing greater access to rural areas.

In 5 rural counties in Virginia, the total number of participants more than doubled, and the number of courses completed increased by more than 300% from 2019 to 2020.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>COURSES COMPLETED</th>
<th>2019</th>
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<tr>
<td>PARTICIPANTS</td>
<td>16</td>
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To show the full impact of COVID-19, we are using calendar year data as opposed to fiscal year data.

“These classes provide needed training and information for Commissioners of the Revenue, Deputies, and office staff. Every commissioner in Virginia should participate in this program, and providing an online option allows more of us to participate. The courses are well written and cover an array of subject matter. The program is well worth the time and money.”

-BRENDA B. RICKMAN
Commissioner of the Revenue
Franklin County, VA

“Online certification programming was extremely beneficial to our office. It gave us the opportunity to train more staff and offer several classes to those who would not have attended in person due to budget restrictions. Online certification programming is a great benefit; the program is an exceptional way to offer training that accomplishes the goal in a more cost-effective manner.”

-ERIC J. MAYBACH
Commissioner of the Revenue
Fauquier County, VA
During a Facetime call in 2020, Tarina Ahuja and Adam Ashley began talking about a youth response to COVID-19. Inspired by their experience in the Sorensen Institute’s High School Leaders Program (HSLP) where they were immersed in the world of policy-making, and driven by their belief that “youth voice belongs in politics and in policy,” they made the decision to start the Greater Good Initiative (GGI), a youth-led policy think tank. Since its founding, they have written 16 policies and seen more than 100 young people nationwide join the initiative.

Tarina and Adam completed the HSLP program in 2019, which gave them, according to Adam, “a 360 degree view of all of the aspects that go into getting a policy from an idea to an actual bill to a law.” By the time Adam completed the program, he had gained “the skills to really understand the importance of policy and, as a young person, how to get more involved in it.”

Sorensen provided Tarina and Adam not only the foundation and skills needed for public policy, but also the confidence to believe they could make a positive contribution through policy-writing.

“HSLP gave me the resources and understanding of where to begin advocacy work. The Greater Good Initiative is one of kind and we are trailblazing in the youth organizing community thanks to Sorensen.”

ADAM ASHLEY  
Founder, Greater Good Initiative

“Coming from Sorensen where we went so deep into policy-making we thought, why don’t we start a policy think tank? ...the Greater Good Initiative is a result of what we learned at Sorensen.”

TARINA AHUJA  
Founder, Greater Good Initiative
BUILDING RESILIENT COMMUNITIES IN VIRGINIA
The Weldon Cooper Center provides support to Southern Virginia

Survey assesses childcare needs in Henry County

In partnership with The Harvest Foundation and surrounding local governments, the Center for Survey Research conducted a survey to assess unmet childcare needs of parents who reside and/or work in the City of Martinsville and Henry County. The survey revealed several barriers to securing childcare, especially for households with an annual income below $50,000. Armed with the survey results, The Harvest Foundation secured funding through the Appalachian Regional Commission, and used the funds to address several of the needs identified in the survey. The funds have gone toward:

- programs to help develop the workforce pipeline for local care providers
- existing care providers for professional development and service expansion
- the creation of a new center for children with special needs.

The foundation is working on implementing an online dashboard to connect parents and providers.

"As we build local infrastructure, we still review and talk about the data [from the survey] to ensure we are addressing identified gaps in childcare needs. We have also used the data to secure funding to assist with implementation of strategies, staying focused on community needs."

SHERYL N. AGEE
Senior Operating Officer, The Harvest Foundation

Demographic study helps skilled-trade entrepreneurship program in the City of Martinsville

The Demographics Research Group, commissioned by the New College Institute (NCI), conducted a report to identify future labor trends for the Martinsville region and found that skilled trade jobs are expected to grow in the region between 2016 and 2026. Using the results of the report, NCI will apply for funding in order to establish a Center for Trades Entrepreneurship to help skilled trade workers gain necessary skills to run their own businesses.

“The report has helped define the scope of the project, including which trade industries to start with and who to target for the program,” said Matt Leighty from NCI.
VIG facilitates retreat for Richmond City Council to assist with strategic planning process

The Virginia Institute of Government (VIG) facilitated a two-day retreat for Richmond City Council to assist them in their strategic planning process and in identifying priorities. The VIG facilitation team

- interviewed individual council members
- analyzed the organization’s strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities
- compiled input from the two-day retreat
- developed recommendations on how the council could most effectively implement their key priorities and efficiently move legislation through their committees.

As a result of the partnership between VIG and the Richmond City Council, the council now has a clear road map for their important work and processes in place to help them more effectively serve their constituency.

“**This is the best retreat I have been to. My colleagues came together and this retreat will help us to come together even more.**”

REVA TRAMMELL | Richmond City Council

“**We made significant progress; we are going to be a stronger organization as a result of this retreat.**”

ELLEN ROBERTSON | Richmond City Council

ASKVIG helps local leaders navigate through COVID-19 challenges

The Virginia Institute of Government’s ASKVIG inquiry service allows local government leaders to collaborate and tackle issues facing their communities. In 2020, the service saw a 75% increase in the number of inquiries and a more than 150% increase in responses over last year. Local government leaders depended heavily on this critical online service to help navigate issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic, including the CARES act, COVID testing, COVID-related employee leave, and how to conduct locality business during the pandemic.
SolSmart Program Provides Guidance for Solar Decision-Making

SolSmart is a national designation program that makes the transition to solar easier and more affordable for communities. The Virginia SolSmart Advisors Program, launched in March 2020, is a partnership between the Weldon Cooper Center and the Virginia Department of Energy. Advisors from both groups provide support, technical assistance, and resources to Virginia localities as they develop and adopt solar practices and policies for solar at all scales. The service and designation is free for localities.

As of June 2021, Virginia SolSmart Advisors, who actively recruit localities to the SolSmart program, conducted SolSmart consultations with 21 unique localities and Planning District Commissions from across Virginia. Their support ranges from advising on zoning ordinance language to permitting and inspection process best practices.

ELIZABETH MARSHALL
Senior Project Manager, Virginia Solar Initiative

“These consultations give us the opportunity to gain important insights into the solar landscape in Virginia and learn more about the challenges and needs of Virginia localities. In return, we are better able to create relevant resources and tailor our approach to delivering technical support.”

In response to needs expressed by localities, Virginia SolSmart hosted a three-part Solar Permitting and Inspections training session for permitting and inspection staff to help smooth the approvals process and create internal efficiencies for staff. The training was attended by 109 people, representing 31 localities across Virginia.

ABOUT THE ENERGY TRANSITION INITIATIVE (ETI)

In 2020, the Weldon Cooper Center launched the Energy Transition Initiative (ETI) to provide research and support for the Virginia Clean Economy Act. The act mandates that Virginia be free of carbon emissions by 2050, which will involve implementing more large-scale solar and wind technologies, as well as increasing energy efficiency and consumer rooftop solar. The Energy Transition Initiative provides support in two important ways: 1) Conducting high quality research to inform policy and decision-making and 2) Providing research-based resources, tools, and guidance for Virginia localities through the Virginia Solar Initiative, a part of ETI.
Census 2020: Advocating for transparency and data accuracy

Due in part to the pandemic and in part to U.S. Census Bureau decision-making, the data from the 2020 Census will not be as accurate as it was in the past, subsequently impacting future funding allocation to communities. The Demographics Research Group, as the most prominent source for Virginia’s demographic data and research, worked diligently with members of Congress, the Governor’s Office, and local governments to raise and address concerns about census data quality.

The Demographic Group’s research and communication efforts regarding the census issues generated significant national attention, resulting in further efforts which include:

• presenting research findings and professional advice to the Census Bureau and serving on an expert group—the National Academies for Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, who provided guidance to the Bureau
• consulting with the National Conference of State Legislatures
• interviewing with the national and state media about the census
• providing guidance and support to other states seeking assistance.

The Demographics Research Group began producing national projections for 50 states and D.C. (without funding) when the U.S. Census Bureau stopped developing these projections in the 2010s. This year, the Demographics Group evaluated their population projections against the 2020 Census count for the total population and found that they were highly accurate, off by less than 0.5%.

National population projections are critical for understanding demographic trends, planning for the future, and informing policy decisions. Projections can help determine how future population growth will affect climate change, where critical social services should be located to support senior populations, and how the political landscape will look across the states. The projections have been widely used by a range of organizations, including the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Government Accountability Office, and the National Park Service.

The Demographics Group is seeking funding to continue this important work.
Impact Story: A map that inspires positive change

The racial dot map has helped promote awareness of equity and diversity issues in communities across the country.

Since its creation in 2013, the racial dot map has been spectacularly popular: It has been incorporated into history lessons in schools; featured in a wide variety of books and publications, such as National Geographic and Best American Infographics 2014; and used as a tool to help decision-makers more clearly see the connection between race and issues of equity.

In 2020, the Demographics Research Group collected stories from individuals and organizations who were using the map in order to better understand its impact. Over 1,000 people from diverse sectors—education, healthcare, nonprofits, government agencies, community groups, filmmakers, libraries—shared their stories. The Demographics Group found that people used the map in a wide variety of ways but most often to help promote equity and inclusivity in their communities. For example, the map was used to help create equitable school districts in Ohio, develop fair housing policies in New York, and overcome health disparities in Indiana.

ABOUT THE DOT MAP

Created in 2013 by the Weldon Cooper Center Demographics Research Group, the Racial Dot Map provides an accessible visualization of geographic distribution, population density, and racial diversity in every neighborhood in the entire U.S. The map displays 308,745,538 dots—one for each person residing in the country at the location where they were counted during the 2010 Census. Each dot is color-coded by the individual’s race and ethnicity.

REACHING BEYOND VIRGINIA

BENJAMIN WENDORF
Associate Professor of History
Worcester, MA

"The racial dot map is one of the most important tools I use in my teaching. It sparks intellectual and compassionate curiosity in students and encourages them to work towards a more just society."

TARIK ABDELAZIM
Center for Community Progress
Albany, New York

"I use the racial dot map during engagements with local governments to visualize the connection between race and disinvested neighborhoods. It is a powerful way to advance equitable outcomes in tackling vacancies."

Over 1,000 testimonials from users across the U.S. revealed that the dot map has been instrumental in helping people understand and talk about race issues.
Thank You for Your Support

The Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service accomplishes its work through collaborative partnerships across the Commonwealth. This past year, in the midst of a global pandemic, the Center found new ways to innovate and adapt, and we are a stronger organization as a result. Thank you for your understanding, your patience, and your continued support of the Weldon Cooper Center.

You can engage with the Cooper Center by

- Making a donation
- Learning more about our work
- Contracting with us to deliver high quality research and reports
- Participating in a leadership development program