

Education to Action Toolkit: Virginia

The Insider's Guide to Grassroots Advocacy in Virginia
It's About Saving Lives



The *Education to Action Toolkit* is part of the Educational Fund to Stop Gun Violence's *Engaging Impacted Communities* Program.

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About Us

Educational Fund to Stop Gun Violence

The Educational Fund to Stop Gun Violence is a 501(c)(3) organization and public health think tank that identifies and implements evidence-based policy solutions and programs to reduce gun violence in all its forms.

OUR P.A.C.T. WITH YOU

The Educational Fund to Stop Gun Violence (Ed Fund) makes communities safer by translating research into policy. The Ed Fund achieves this by engaging in:

Policy Development: The Ed Fund is the gun violence prevention movement's premier research intermediary and founder of the Consortium for Risk-Based Firearm Policy, a group of academics and practitioners, who collaborate to develop innovative recommendations for policymakers.

Advocacy: The Ed Fund influences the policymaking process by lobbying, educating policymakers, and disseminating our message through media advocacy and outreach.

Community and Stakeholder Engagement: The Ed Fund works with community members and stakeholders to bring their voices to policy makers and create an impacted communities voter bloc trained to advocate for policies that reduce gun violence.

Technical Assistance: The Ed Fund supports policymakers and gun violence prevention advocates by drafting and implementing groundbreaking evidence-based policy.

Engaging Impacted Communities Program:

The Educational Fund to Stop Gun Violence recognizes that we must engage the communities most impacted by gun violence – specifically communities of color – in our work to reduce gun deaths. We do this by first building genuine relationships with community members. We then use a research grounded toolkit called Education to Action to turn these relationships into self-sustaining community advocacy networks, that advocate for policies that tackle the structural barriers at the root of violence and address the unregulated access to firearms that facilitates lethal violence.

Education to Action:

Education to Action mobilizes and trains a variety of stakeholders and concerned citizens from communities impacted by daily gun violence to advocate for policies that reduce gun violence. This toolkit and workshop highlights how advocacy for evidence-based gun violence prevention policies is linked with to a broader set of community concerns. It acts as a community organizing tool to facilitate increased outreach, involvement, and empowerment within the community.

Virginia Advocacy Network:

The Virginia Advocacy Network is one of our community advocacy networks made up of a coalition of citizens, faith leaders, law enforcement, and elected officials engaging communities in reducing gun violence throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia. The network is committed to our children, neighborhoods, and fellow Virginians to one day be free from the destructive force of gun violence. Our network participated in the 2015-2016 community convening process facilitated by the Urban Institute, the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, and the Joyce Foundation and is eager to implement the findings from the resulting research report, *Engaging Communities in Reducing Gun Violence: A Road Map for Safer Communities*.¹ We are implementing these findings through four working groups:

- *Policing:* Improving relations between law enforcement and communities of color.
- *Strengthening Communities:* Funding evidence-based community violence intervention programs that bring together community members and government agencies in an effort to identify high-risk individuals, interrupt cycles of violence, and connect these individuals to social services.
- *Gun Policy:* Reducing easy access to firearms for people at high risk of engaging in violence. This includes working on policies that prevent firearm trafficking, implementing a pilot violence prevention initiative and adopting a Violent Gun-Related Violent Crime Review Panel in Virginia.
- *Millennial Engagement:* Promoting youth and young adult participation in engaging impacted communities to reduce gun violence.



Kaaleah Jones shares why she became involved in the Virginia Advocacy Network

- Introduction -

What is Education to Action?

Education to Action (Ed2Ac) is a workshop and toolkit designed for anyone who wants to reduce gun violence in all of its forms. Many participants have been impacted by gun violence and want to take action. This workshop and toolkit will provide you with the advocacy tools needed to effectively advocate for change at the local, state, and federal levels and connect you to a network of people eager to advocate with you. ***These tools are not limited to gun violence prevention***; they can be applied to any issue you are passionate about. In fact, because gun violence is tied to larger issues of social justice and equity, we encourage you to also use these advocacy tools to address other issues in your community.

We invite you to join the movement in learning about and advocating for responsible and effective gun policy. We believe that it is a moral imperative to reduce death and injury from gunfire and endorse comprehensive and evidence-based policy to prevent gun violence.

Through Ed2Ac's three-step process, *Educate, Engage, Act*, you can help make this change happen. See Appendix 1 for the Ed2Ac flyer.

STEP 1: EDUCATE Learn about effective gun violence prevention strategies and policy approaches, as well as government structures and processes.

STEP 2: ENGAGE Connect with lawmakers, advocacy communities, and the media. Collaborate for change and for gun violence prevention.

STEP 3: ACT Take action with your community through effective advocacy. Use the power of people to create change in your community.

- Step 1: Educate -

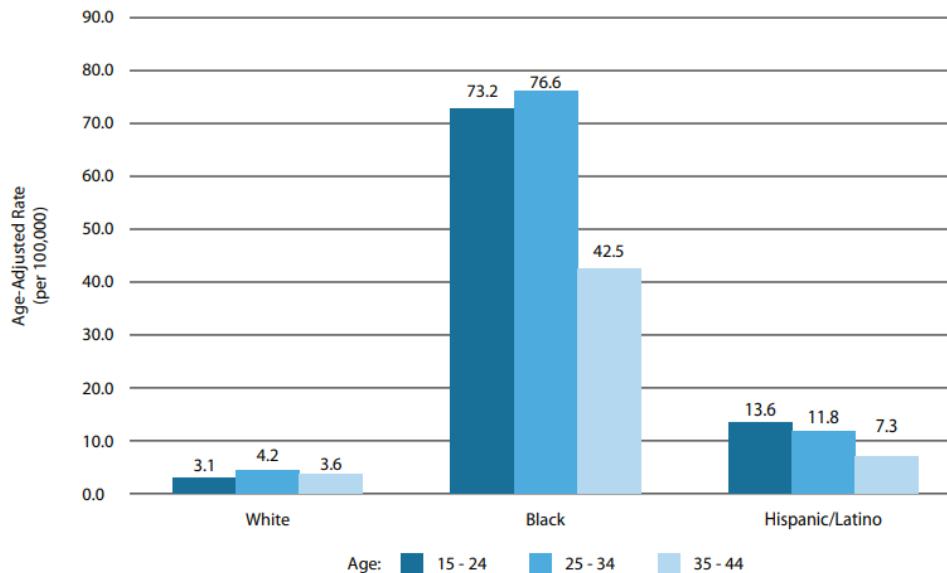
Gun Violence Disproportionately Impacts Communities of Color

Gun violence disproportionately impacts communities of color in the United States (Virginia included), though these impacted communities are often underrepresented in mainstream discussions of guns and gun violence. Homicide is the leading cause of death for Black boys and men ages 15 to 34 and the second most common cause of death for Hispanic men ages 15 to 34.² Nearly one out of every 1,000 Black males aged 20-24 were murdered by firearm in 2017.³ Young Black males are over 23 times more likely to be murdered by firearm than their non-Hispanic White counterparts. Young Black females are nearly 7 times more likely than their non-Hispanic White counterparts to be murdered by firearm.⁴

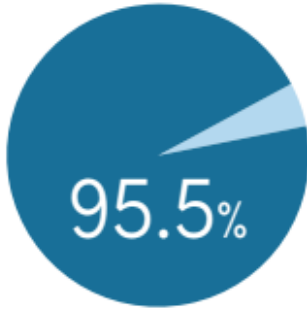
Young Black females ages 15-24 are nearly **7 times more likely** than their non-Hispanic White counterparts to be murdered by firearm.

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FIREARM HOMICIDE RATE BY AGE AND RACE, YOUNG MEN (2013-2017)



In communities of color, nearly everyone is impacted by the traumatic effects of gun violence. In fact, one study found that among Black people in the United States, the likelihood of having someone within their social network die by firearm at some point during their lifetime was 95.5%.⁵ Within disadvantaged communities of color in cities, exposure to gun violence is routine even for children.⁶ A survey of Baltimore City youth ages 12-24 found that 42% had witnessed a shooting compared to 4% of suburban youth.⁷ Likewise, a survey of middle school children enrolled in the Richmond, Virginia public school system found that 94% reported hearing gunshots and 44% of boys and 30% of girls reported witnessing a shooting.^{8,9}



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Too Many Guns, Not Enough Resources

In impacted communities, limiting the availability of illegal firearms and preventing firearm trafficking is important, but is only one of many necessary solutions to address safety and enhance wellbeing. In the field of public health, this concept is known as addressing the *social determinants of health*, or the social and economic conditions that impact communities’ health risks and outcomes.¹⁰ While preventing gun violence is a complex challenge, this also means that there are many opportunities to engage in meaningful and effective prevention.

To learn more about “the factors driving gun violence and about actionable policy strategies to make their neighborhoods safer,” the Urban Institute, the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, and the Joyce Foundation chose to learn directly from over 100 members of impacted communities (Richmond, Virginia; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; and Stockton, California). The results of their meetings were incorporated into a research report entitled “Engaging Communities in Reducing Gun Violence: A Road Map for Safer Communities,” which concludes that developing a holistic approach is key to reducing gun violence. Their four key findings are shared here, as presented in the *Engaging Communities* report:¹¹

Easy access to guns by a small group of “high-risk” people is a key driver of violence. Gun violence in communities of color is often driven by a small group of people who are caught up in the cycles of violence—sometimes no more than 0.25 to 1 percent of the city’s population. These individuals have often been exposed to gun violence, have had a history of perpetrating violence and are disconnected from social and community supports. It remains too easy for this group to obtain guns. In the hands of these high-risk people, guns escalate minor disputes into fatal incidents, and firearm violence poses a particular risk to law enforcement officers. Limiting easy access to guns by this group is an essential step in reducing gun violence.

Law enforcement tactics that diminish police-community relations harm public safety. When police are viewed as a trusted and socially legitimate authority, residents are more likely to obey laws and assist in gun violence prevention efforts. Indiscriminate law enforcement tactics that sweep in a wide swath of community members, implicit bias, and other factors that diminish police-community trust undermine public safety. Distrust makes residents less willing to share information with police and impedes law enforcement from effectively working with communities to prevent violence.

Social services that can prevent violence are woefully underfunded. Those at high risk to commit or to be victimized by gun violence, such as formerly incarcerated individuals and their families, face various challenges. These obstacles include trauma, a lack of job skills, and a lack of employment and educational opportunities. Effective social services that address these challenges can reduce gun violence, but currently these services are inadequately resourced.

Improving community engagement in violence prevention is an immediate reform opportunity. Social service agencies, religious institutions, law enforcement, and other stakeholders in all three cities reported being constrained by inadequate communication and collaboration. Some reported that existing coordination and data collection is not often sustained, and that decision-makers sometimes develop and implement plans in ways that are disconnected from the larger community. Excellent models are available for quickly and effectively building community engagement structures that not only improve communication across sectors, but also reduce violence.



Community members and criminal justice stakeholders meet to discuss how to address gun violence in Hampton, Virginia

As stated above, gun violence prevention, particularly in impacted communities of color, is a complex issue. Luckily there are a multitude of solutions to this problem that when paired together can reduce gun violence and strengthen communities. There are many opportunities for advocates to get involved.

How Can We Effectively Address Gun Violence?

As a multifaceted challenge, there are multifaceted strategies to address gun violence in impacted communities. The *Engaging Communities* report outlines the following solutions to their four key findings:¹²

To address the problem of easy access to guns by high-risk people:

- Prevent the diversion of firearms to people at high risk of engaging in gun violence through universal background checks, mandatory reporting of lost and stolen firearms, permit-to-purchase

laws, increased oversight of licensed firearm dealers, and community programs that discourage straw purchasing.

- Expand the list of people prevented from purchasing and possessing firearms to include those at higher risk to engage in gun violence, such as stalkers and those who have committed violent misdemeanors or domestic abuse against dating partners.

To improve relations between police and communities of color:

- Hire, train, and assess police to mitigate implicit biases and to promote procedurally just interactions with citizens.
- Hold police accountable through community satisfaction surveys, civilian review boards, body-worn cameras, and the collection of key data (e.g., use-of-force data, racial data on police stops and arrests)
- Create more positive police-community interactions through accountable foot patrols, police training in de-escalation tactics, and events that allow officers to engage with citizens outside of an enforcement context.
- Prioritize policing and prosecution of violent crimes and firearms trafficking, rather than broader, indiscriminate strategies (e.g., stop and frisk) that alienate community members.

To improve social services:

- Increase support for community-based programs that work with law enforcement, family members of people at high risk of committing violent acts, social service providers, and those who mediate disputes to change social norms and discourage gun violence.
- Invest in wraparound social services that address the full spectrum of challenges faced by many individuals at high risk of participating in gun violence as well as their families, such as mental health treatment, trauma care, drug treatment, housing, job training and placement, and mentoring.

To build community engagement structures across sectors:

- Sharing data and creating a homicide incident review system to inform strategic planning.
- Convening a strategic planning group that meets regularly, provides opportunities for meaningful community input, and develops a violence reduction plan with clear performance metrics.

Policy Priorities in Virginia

Through our work to reduce gun violence in communities throughout Virginia we have identified specific policy priorities that build upon the recommendations in the *Engaging Communities* report. Policy strategies that the Ed Fund and the Engaging Impacted Communities program advocates for in Virginia include: 1) Funding community-based violence prevention programs, 2) strengthening domestic violence protections by disarming domestic abusers, 3) enacting an extreme risk law to prevent firearm suicide, and 4) passing laws to prevent firearms trafficking.

1. Funding Community-Based Violence Prevention Programs: Communities disproportionately affected by gun violence deserve resources and dedicated funding streams to implement violence prevention programs and strategies to address the root causes of violence, poverty, trauma, and inequality. Research suggests that state investment in community-based violence prevention programs is an effective way to

reduce firearm violence. When adequately funded, these evidence-based interventions have reduced gun violence in cities by up to 40%.¹³

The Commonwealth of Virginia should allocate sustained funds for cities and nonprofit organizations across Virginia to establish community-based violence prevention programs.

Successful community-based violence prevention programs generally do the following:

- Deter individuals at high-risk for violence from engaging in firearm violence.
- Help individuals at high risk for violence to resolve potentially violent disputes before they occur.
- Connect those at high-risk for violence to education, employment, mental health, and housing services.
- Provide trauma informed services and culturally responsive mental health supports to individuals impacted by daily gun violence.

Examples of effective community-based violence prevention models

There are many authentic community-driven efforts to reduce gun violence that empower those most impacted by daily gun violence. Research shows that the following models have been especially effective at reducing gun violence. These models are strongest when they are paired together and when they are authentically led by individuals from within the communities most impacted.

Cure Violence

- Outreach workers are trained to identify conflicts within their community and help resolve disputes *before* they spiral into gun violence.
- These outreach workers are credible members of the community and well-respected by individuals at a high risk of violence. Outreach workers use their credibility to interrupt cycles of retaliatory violence, help connect high-risk individuals to social services, and change norms around using guns to solve conflicts.
- Cure Violence models have been used successfully in multiple cities, including Chicago, Philadelphia, and New York. New York’s neighborhoods with a Cure Violence site experienced 18% reductions in homicides while the matched control neighborhoods experienced a 69% increase from 2010-2013.¹⁴

Group Violence Intervention / Focused Deterrence

- Prosecutors and police work with community leaders to identify a small group of individuals who are chronic violent offenders and are at high risk for future violence.
- These high-risk individuals are called into a meeting and are told that if violence continues, every legal tool available will be used to ensure they face swift and certain consequences.
- These high-risk individuals are simultaneously connected to social services and community support to assist them in changing their behavior.
- An analysis of 24 focused deterrence programs found that these strategies led to an overall statistically significant reduction in crime. The most successful of these programs have reduced shootings in cities by an average of 30% and improve relations between law enforcement officers and the neighborhoods they serve.¹⁵

Hospital-based Violence Intervention programs

- Gunshot victims are provided wraparound services such as educational support, job training, and mental health services to interrupt retaliatory cycles of violence and the potential for re-injury.
- One study found that those enrolled in these programs were six times less likely to be hospitalized again for a violent injury and four times less likely to be convicted of a violent crime than those not enrolled in the program.¹⁶
- An evaluation of Baltimore’s program found that it saved the city \$1.25 million in lowered incarceration costs and \$598,000 in reduced healthcare costs.¹⁷

Trauma-informed programs with cognitive behavioral therapy

- Trauma-informed programs that employ cognitive behavioral therapy to those at risk for firearm violence have experienced significant decreases in firearm violence.¹⁸
- Cognitive behavioral therapy helps high-risk individuals cope with trauma while simultaneously providing new tools to de-escalate conflict.
- Trauma-informed programs in Chicago that provide high-risk youth with cognitive behavioral therapy and mentoring cut violent crime arrests in half.¹⁹

Shooting and homicide review commissions

- Shooting review commissions bring together law enforcement, community members, criminal justice stakeholders and service providers to examine firearm violence within their community and develop comprehensive intervention which address the underlying factors that lead to violence.
- The shooting review commission in Milwaukee was associated with a significant and sustained 52% reduction in homicides.²⁰
- A Department of Justice evaluation found shooting review boards to be an effective way to reduce gun violence by building trust between criminal justice stakeholders and the community.²¹

2. Strengthen Domestic Violence Protections by disarming Domestic Abusers: Guns and domestic violence are a lethal combination. More than half of all women murdered by an intimate partner are killed with a gun, and the chance of being murdered by an abusive partner increases five-fold when there is a gun in the home.^{22,23} Each year, around 75 Virginians - two thirds of which are women - are shot and killed by a current or former intimate partner.²⁴ Black women are 3.6 times more likely to be murdered by firearm compared to White women. Young Black women are particularly vulnerable; those ages 15-24 are nearly 7 times more likely to be murdered by firearm than their White counterparts.²⁵

Virginia law should be amended to require that *all protective orders* prohibit abusers from possessing firearms (along with purchase and transport) for the duration of the order. This legislative amendment should include temporary orders in addition to permanent orders. It should expand the definition of those protected to include dating partners and victims of stalking. The law should also include a component which ensures firearms are removed from abusers once prohibited. By enacting these changes the Virginia legislature will help prevent domestic violence and reduce domestic violence homicides.



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3. Enacting an Extreme Risk Law to Prevent Firearm Suicide

Suicide is a public health crisis in the United States, and firearms play a large role. An average of 20,000 people die by firearm suicide each year – over 60 every single day. Firearm suicides constitute 3 of every 5 firearm deaths and half of all suicide deaths in the United States.²⁷ Firearms are among the most lethal suicide attempt methods, with approximately 9 out of 10 firearm suicide attempts resulting in death. By comparison, the most frequently chosen methods of suicide attempt are significantly less fatal: poisoning/overdose and cut/pierce result in death in just 0.5-2% and 1-3% of attempts, respectively.²⁸

White males, especially those who live in rural areas, are disproportionately impacted by firearm suicide. Males are over six times more likely to die by firearm suicide than females. White males are 2.5 times more likely to die by firearm suicide than Black males. However, firearm suicide impacts Americans of all walks of life and it has become an increasing problem within communities of color. For example, the firearm suicide rate among Black males under the age of 24 increased by over 75% in the last five years.²⁹

An Extreme risk laws (also known as an Extreme Risk Protection Order or ERPO) can help reduce firearm suicides. These laws empower families and law enforcement officers to prevent gun violence by temporarily reducing access to guns by individuals who are at an elevated risk of endangering themselves or others. Through these laws, family members can reach out to law enforcement to file a petition with the courts to temporarily remove and prohibit the possession or purchase of firearms from individuals at high risk of causing harm to self or others. When the order expires, firearms may be returned. Research suggests that one suicide is prevented for every 10 extreme risk law orders issued. As of July 2019, extreme risk laws have passed in 17 states and the District of Columbia. The Virginia legislature should pass an extreme risk law to help save lives.

4. Passing Laws to Prevent Firearms Trafficking

The majority of guns that are used in gun violence within impacted communities are illegally trafficked into these communities. The Virginia legislature can reduce firearm trafficking by passing: 1) Reporting missing, lost and stolen guns law and 2) instituting a one handgun a month law.

Reporting Missing, Lost, or Stolen Guns: A Lost and Stolen Reporting law in Virginia would require individuals to report missing firearms to law enforcement within 24 hours of discovering the loss or theft. Police would then enter the information into an FBI firearms database. When people are required to report missing, lost, or stolen firearms to law enforcement, police can more readily trace firearms used in crimes and identify illegal trafficking networks. A Lost and Stolen Reporting law will: 1) help police recover lost and stolen guns more quickly, 2) reduce the flow of illegal firearms into Virginia's impacted communities of color, 3) prevent violent crime and, 4) hold irresponsible gun owners accountable. In addition, it will reduce interstate gun trafficking that fuels gun violence in impacted communities in other states.

One Handgun a Month Law: In 2012, Virginia repealed its limitation on purchasing more than one handgun a month allowing gun traffickers to purchase dozens of handguns and distribute these guns into impacted communities of color. Limiting the number of handguns an individual is allowed to purchase will help decrease the number of handguns being directed to the un-regulated market, which fuels day-to-day gun violence in impacted communities across Virginia and in other states. Virginia is the largest supplier of crime guns to cities across the East Coast. These lax gun laws not only fuel violence in cities like Richmond and Hampton Roads, but also in DC, Baltimore, and Philadelphia. Passing a One Handgun a Month Law will help reduce violence within impacted communities.

Who Represents Me?

Every Virginian is represented by elected officials at multiple levels, including federal (in Washington, DC), state (in Richmond), and local (in your county, city, or town, such as your local mayor and city council). It is critically important to engage and advocate at the local level, as the power of the people often has a great impact in improving communities. We encourage you to Educate, Engage, and Act in your local community and at the state or federal levels.

To engage in advocacy, a good first step is to learn who represents you. For the purposes of this toolkit we will be focusing on the state officials in Richmond, but these tactics and skills can be applied at any level of government.

Virginia General Assembly



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The Virginia General Assembly is the state-level legislative body for the Commonwealth, and is where Virginia's laws are made. It consists of two governing bodies, the Senate (40 senators) and the House of Delegates (100 delegates). In Virginia, all laws that regulate firearms must originate in the General Assembly because local governments in Virginia are prohibited from enacting these types of laws.

The General Assembly meets every year beginning on the second Wednesday in January in Richmond, Virginia. They are in session for 60 days in even-numbered years and 30 days in odd-numbered years, though the legislators have the option of extending the shorter session by up to 30 days if two-thirds of each house vote to extend. It is during these sessions that our legislators make laws.

Every Virginian is represented by one state senator and one state delegate in the Virginia General Assembly. State senators are up for election every four years, while delegates are elected every two years. Find out who represents you by entering your address at <http://whosmy.viriniageneralassembly.gov/>.

Voting in Virginia

Individual votes add up to reflect the voices of the voters. Elections can be determined by a very small number of votes, so your vote really counts! To register to vote in Virginia, you must be a U.S. citizen, a resident of Virginia, at least 18 years old by the next general election, and have had voting rights restored if convicted of a felony.

To register to vote, go to www.elections.virginia.gov. There, you can check to see if you are already registered, update your existing registration, register to vote for the first time, check identification requirements,³¹ find your polling place, and much more.

“I vote in every Presidential election...” Voting in Presidential elections is very important, but many of your representatives are not up for election during the Presidential election every four years. In fact, Virginia is unique because there is an election every year, whether for President, Governor, or other federal/state/local representatives. Check www.elections.virginia.gov for up-to-date voting information.

How Are Laws Made?

Just as Virginians are represented at the federal, state, and local levels, we are also subject to federal, state, and local laws. There are slightly different processes for each level; here we will discuss the state lawmaking process as well as the areas where *you* can take part.

The Virginia General Assembly is the branch of state government that makes laws for the Commonwealth of Virginia. They follow specific steps (outlined below) and only make laws during their legislative sessions, each year in January and February. Following are the steps for how a bill becomes a law:

1. A delegate or senator has an idea and introduces a bill, often inspired by a constituent or advocacy group. Bills can be proposed to: (1) add a new law; (2) make changes to an existing law; or (3) repeal an existing law.

TAKE ACTION: You can call, write, or meet with your elected officials to discuss the issues that are most important to you and the reasons why laws need to be enacted or changed. You can also work with advocacy groups that care about similar issues to draft potential bills for your legislator to introduce.

2. The bill is assigned a number and referred (sent) to the appropriate committee within the General Assembly. The committee is a group of legislators organized for the purpose of considering and deciding upon the outcome of a bill.

TAKE ACTION: You can track the committees that these bills are referred to and create email notifications when changes are made to the bill by using Virginia's Legislative Information System (LIS). See the website for more details: <https://lis.virginia.gov/>

3. The members of the designated committee consider the bill to decide which action to take. Often the representative who introduced the bill will speak about why they think the bill is needed. Representatives may invite experts to provide testimony on why they support or oppose the bill. The committee hearings are open to the public. *Anyone* has the right to attend a committee meeting and speak about legislation. Once the members of the public have spoken, the committee members will decide which action to take. They can either *report* (pass) the bill, *table* it for potential consideration at another time, or *fail to report* (defeat or reject) it, which means it stops moving forward and will not become a law. These committee hearings are generally the most important part of the legislative process, and the point where your participation is essential.

TAKE ACTION: You can attend committee hearings and participate by providing testimony in support or opposition to the bill. You do not need any special qualifications to testify. The testimony can be as simple as telling the committee your name and that you support or oppose the bill. You can also provide a short statement or story about why you support or oppose a specific bill. You do not have to testify to show your support. You can show your support for a bill simply by showing up for a hearing with a group of advocates.

4. If the committee decides to report (pass) the bill, it goes to the full legislative chamber it was introduced in (Senate or House of Delegates). The Virginia Constitution requires that the title of each bill be read three times or appear in the printed Calendar on three different days. On the third reading, the bill is put to a vote.

TAKE ACTION: You can follow your bill's progress through the Virginia Legislative System (LIS) <https://lis.virginia.gov/>. You can put pressure on your Representative to support or oppose a bill by calling or sending a letter. Finally, you can attend the vote of the bill to show your support or opposition.

5. If passed, the bill is sent to the other legislative chamber (Senate or House of Delegates). There, the bill goes through essentially the same procedure as it did in the chamber of origin. The bill is referred to a committee, considered with opportunity for public testimony, and reported (passed) by the committee. If both chambers pass the bill without amendment, it is sent to the Governor.

TAKE ACTION: You can engage in the same ways listed above as the bill progresses through the other legislative chamber.

6. Once the bill is on the Governor's desk, s/he has four options:
- A. Sign the bill into law;
 - B. Offer amendments, which sends the bill back to the General Assembly (if those changes are approved by both chambers, the bill becomes law);
 - C. Veto the bill (a veto can be overridden by a two-thirds vote the Senate and House of Delegates);
 - D. Take no action, which still allows the bill to become law.

TAKE ACTION: Even when a bill is on the Governor's desk you can take part in advocacy. You can write letters to the Governor, submit letters to the editor of Virginia newspapers about why the Governor should sign or veto the bill, and you can show your support or opposition on social media. All of these actions make a difference. They put pressure on the Governor and show the Administration that the citizens of the Commonwealth of Virginia have a voice.

Bills that become law are effective the first day of July following adjournment, unless otherwise specified. To see the whole Virginia law-making process in graphic form, see Appendix 2.

For more in-depth information about the Virginia General Assembly's legislative session, visit <https://sgr.virginia.edu/legislative-session>.

If you are still unsure about how you can take part in the legislative process, don't worry! In the next section you'll find an in-depth guide and lots of tips for engaging your elected officials.

- Step 2: Engage -

Connect with Your Elected Officials

Your elected officials' job is to represent you in the various levels of government. You can meet with them or their staff to advocate for issues that are important to you. For state-level legislators, you can go to the Capitol in Richmond or meet with them closer to home at their district office.

This section of the toolkit focuses on meetings with state-level legislators, but you can apply these tips to meeting with local and federal officials as well.

How to Set Up a Meeting with Your Elected Officials

1. Find out who your Delegate and Senator are at <http://whosmy.virginiasenate.gov/>.
2. Contact the scheduler in your legislator's district or Richmond office and ask for an appointment with the legislator or a *Legislative Assistant*.
3. Start calling to set up your appointment at least three weeks in advance and follow the directions of the scheduler.
4. Have dates and times available to give the scheduler (expect to be flexible!), as well as the issues you want to discuss and who will be present during the visit.
5. Confirm the visit by email or phone one or two days before the appointment.

Tips for Meeting with Your Elected Officials

Build a relationship: Think about meeting with your legislator as an opportunity to begin building a relationship. This encounter will be one of many. Make sure you have a reason to follow up!

Be prepared: You can help ensure a positive meeting by taking time to prepare.

- Learn about the legislative priority issues and study the talking points. Reflect upon why those issues are important to you, and if you have any personal stories you could share during the meeting.
- Learn about your legislator's positions by reviewing past votes and statements on the issues, and try to anticipate what kind of questions the legislator will ask and/or reasons the legislator may already support/oppose your asks. It helps to have responses prepared for opposing arguments and tying the issues into how they affect your local community.
- Always have an ask: Have questions prepared that you want to ask your legislator. You can ask about their position or perspective, or ask what you can do to help them. Again, this is an opportunity to build trust and develop a relationship.
- Always prepare a reason to follow-up. This helps you build a relationship.
- Bring a business card with you.

Stay organized: Use the *Legislative Advocacy Meeting Task Sheet* to organize your visit, including who will be speaking on which issues if you go with a group. Make sure to allot time for the legislator to talk! The task sheet is provided in Appendix 3.

Respect their time: Legislators and their staff have packed schedules, so make sure to show up on time, stay on your points, and keep the meeting concise. Often they are scheduled for 15-minute time slots. Always start and end your meetings by thanking them for taking time out of their busy schedules to meet with you and again, make sure to give them time to talk.

Make clear requests for action: For each issue you address, include a clear, actionable request for the legislator. For example, “We’d like the Senator to support ‘x’ bill.” If you are not able to meet the lawmaker directly, relay the “ask” to the staff member. The staff plays a critical role in shaping a legislator's agenda and position on issues and will relay the message.

Stay honest and positive:

- Be positive, friendly, and thankful to your legislator and the staff with whom you meet. It is common for a legislator to be late or interrupted, so remain calm and flexible.
- It is completely okay to not know an answer to a question - in fact, it gives you a good reason to follow up and keep building the relationship. Trust is paramount and can be lost if you provide false information when you do not know the answer to a question.
- Do *not* make up facts or stories. Say you do not know and will get the answer to them and then follow through on this commitment.
- You may not agree with the legislator’s stances on issues; remain respectful, but convey your talking points.

Take a picture: If appropriate, take a photo with your legislator (ask first!) and tweet it out or send to your colleagues.

Send a thank you note: After the meeting send a thank you note or email to the legislator expressing your appreciation for his or her time and any support he or she showed you during the meeting. Send them additional information if you promised to do so. More tips for follow-up are described in the next subsection.

Follow Up After Your Meeting

Your in-person meeting with your legislator is the beginning of a relationship, so stay in touch! During your meeting, you should have already created a reason to follow up with them - and now it is time to follow through. Send fact sheets and statistics, put them in contact with relevant stakeholders or constituents, answer any questions they asked of you when you did not have the answer, and forward relevant endorsements.

It is also critical to stay engaged and track your legislator’s responses to the issues. If the legislator takes action, express your gratitude. If the legislator does not take action, ask for an explanation. Here are some suggestions to help:

Continue to engage with them in person: Attend constituent meet-and-greets and community forums (these are usually announced in constituent newsletters, or you can ask a staff member for the schedule or to be put on the email list). The public is also often welcome at events such as announcements and ribbon-cutting ceremonies where your officials will be. While not “in person,” you can also call in when your officials make radio appearances.

Follow through:

- If they agree with you: organize an event with them, ask them to appear or speak at an event you have organized around your issue, or encourage them to speak out on the issue in public
- If they disagree with you: make your voice heard by asking them questions about your issue in public. If possible, film their answer with your phone so you can share it on social media. You can also organize a protest or press conference outside one of their official events (or office) bringing attention to your issue.

Connect with your elected officials electronically: Most legislators have a social media presence and this is another way to continue to build those relationships and raise awareness. Find their government website and subscribe to their constituent newsletter or sign up for email alerts. Then “like” them on Facebook, follow them on Twitter, and connect via other social media. You can write or respond on the legislator’s official page, or tag them in a separate post, and encourage others to speak out with you.

Sample Facebook Post: Act now with #Ed2Ac: Call your legislators and tell them to support to support SB 377, legislation that will keep track of stolen and illegal firearms, has been sent back to the General Assembly with amendments to strengthen and improve the bill. @DelegateName.

Sample Tweet: I just met with @[Your Delegate’s Twitter Handle] to ask for support of SB377 #doingmypart. Join me! @[handle] @efsgv #StopGunViolence

Consider posting a photo to **Instagram** of you advocating for gun violence prevention or adding a **Snapchat Story**, which enables your Snapchat followers to see what you’re doing to advocate and engage in your community. You can also “**Go LIVE**” on Instagram and Facebook, allowing your followers and friends to see the great work you are doing in real time through either social media platform.

Tap into Community Groups

Legislators are not the only people you can engage with! Tap into community organizations that are working on your issues.

Join Local/State Groups

Many local groups communicate via email, Facebook groups, other social media (such as Twitter and Instagram), and in-person meetings. Look in media coverage for local groups holding gun violence prevention actions and connect with them. Here are a few examples:

- Virginia Action Network - www.ed2ac.org
- Virginia Center for Public Safety - www.vacps.org
- Victorious Ambition - <https://lenzyvictorousterry.com/>
- Carol Adams Foundation - <https://www.caroladamsfoundation.org>
- RISE for Youth- <https://www.riseforyouth.org>

Faith and community leaders often can be strong partners in advocating for gun violence prevention and in addressing the root causes of gun violence. Speak to faith and community leaders, about joining or starting an effort to address gun violence. If a local group doesn't exist, start your own by using the tools you used today to host meetings with members of your community.

Join National Groups

Joining national groups is a great way to learn more about issues that are important to you and enhance your awareness of the movements you are engaged and related activities in communities across the country. To learn more about gun violence prevention, follow the Ed Fund on social media and sign up for emails via our website, www.efsgv.org.

Reach Out to the Press

The press is a great way to spread your message to the community at large. Here are some tips for working with the media:

Find local reporters: Figure out which local reporters (newspaper, radio, and television) have reported on guns, politics, or government. Reach out to these reporters and introduce yourself as an advocate/activist on the issue of gun violence prevention. Make sure to provide your contact information and let them know you will be available when they report on the GVP issue. Reputable local blogs may also be valuable contacts. See the following media outlet examples for ideas local to southeastern and central Virginia:

- Newspapers: Fairfax Times, The New Journal and Guide in Norfolk, Richmond Free Press, Virginia Pilot, Daily Press, Richmond Times Dispatch
- Radio: 104.7 Praise FM, 105.1 Kiss FM, 106FM, 89.5FM, 88.1FM, 94.1FM
- TV: WHRO, WTKR, WAVY, 6CBS, 8ABC, 12NBC, WWBT12, WRIC8, WTVR6, WCVE public TV

Write a media advisory when organizing an event or protest: A media advisory alerts press about an upcoming event they might want to cover. An advisory should be brief but detailed and give reporters the most important details at a glance. Email the advisory to local newsrooms (you can often find contact information online by searching for the news sources on Google) and follow up with phone calls to newsrooms to ensure that it was received. A media advisory includes:

- Who: Who will be attending? (activists, officials, faith leaders?)
- What: What is the event that is happening?
- When: Time and date the event is occurring
- Where: Name of location and street address (with directions if needed)
- Contact Information: Name, phone number, email address of event organizer

See Appendix 4 for a sample media advisory.

Build relationships: Like working with legislators, building relationships is also key to working with members of the press. Stay in contact with any reporters you know to provide ongoing information and make sure to ask them how you can help them.

Keep track of coverage: Set up Google alerts for your name, the name of your organization, and critical keywords so that you are alerted when you are covered in the news.

Share: Once news is printed/reported, share the coverage by emailing a link to the story to your supporters and by sharing it on social media.

- Step 3: Act -

Prepare and Practice Your Elevator Speech

Who might you end up sharing an elevator with? Be ready with your *elevator speech*! An elevator speech is a clear, brief message you want to share, as well as an ask. Your activism elevator speech says who you are, what you're passionate about, and what you're looking for. Preparing and practicing your elevator speech also helps prepare for public speaking engagements and telling your story effectively.

An elevator speech is quick – usually 30 seconds or less – designed to be delivered in the time it takes to ride from the bottom floor to the top of a building in an elevator. It can be hard to get your message out quickly and is important to prepare and practice.

12-second sample speech: The Virginia Action Network is a coalition of citizens, faith leaders, law enforcement, and elected officials engaging communities in reducing gun violence throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia. Will you stand with us on gun violence prevention?

30-second speech - write your own! You can say a lot in just thirty seconds, so what do you want people to hear? Take the time to think about what is important to you - we recommend writing it down and then practicing until you're confident speaking without your notes. This way, when you have the opportunity to speak about the issues you're passionate about, you'll be ready.

See Appendix 5 for a sample elevator speech.

Track Legislation

When you are advocating for policy and meeting with your legislators, it is good to know what legislation is being considered. You can track the status of proposed legislation in Virginia at the General Assembly's Legislative Information System (LIS) website, <https://lis.virginia.gov/lis.htm>. From their main webpage, click on "Bills and Resolutions" to search bills by number, lawmaker who introduced them, status, and more. A large majority of the gun legislation appears before the Senate Courts of Justice Committee and the House Militia, Police, and Public Safety Subcommittee #1; committee and subcommittee agendas can also be found on LIS. In addition to tracking legislation, you may also attend hearings in person at the Capitol in Richmond, Virginia.

If you are interested in comprehensive legislative tracking of firearms-related bills, we will provide you with a detailed legislative update each week when the General Assembly is in session. This in-depth update is compiled by our partners at the Virginia Center for Public Safety. Please email Kayla Hicks at khicks@efsgv.org to request this update.

Organize a Letter Writing or Phone Banking Event

Lead the way in making your community's voices heard. Letters to your elected representatives or to the press can help engage others in the GVP movement. You can share your policy perspectives and, if you like, your story. You can write letters or make calls individually, or organize a letter writing/phone banking event to help move your agenda forward and recruit new members or supporters to the GVP movement. For a sample letter to a legislator, see Appendix 6.

How to Set Up a Letter Writing Event

1. *Decide on your issues and gather info:* You may want to focus on one or two issues for the letter writing/phone calling campaign. Gather information on those topics so you and your participants are informed.
2. *Pick your date, time, and location:* Choose date/time and make sure your location has enough table space for letter writing.
3. *Publicize the event:* Flyers, bulletin inserts, and social media are great ways to spread the word!
4. *Gather materials:* Each participant will need letter writing materials as well as a sample letter, the names and addresses of their Representative. Make sure to have extra supplies on hand for additional letters, rough drafts, extra guests, etc.
5. *Host the event:* Kick off the event by explaining what an Ed2Ac letter writing event is and why it is important that folks are taking part in them.
 - a. Provide access to the issue talking points, and point out that participants each have sample letters to use as a guide.
 - b. If you can, invite a speaker to share a personal reflection on how the issue affects him/her and/or a local activist who works extensively in the issue area.
 - c. Once the letters are completed, gather them, count how many are being sent to each elected official (to be used in report back), and drop them in the mail.
6. *Share your work:* Make sure to take pictures/videos of your work and share them by posting to social media using hashtags (such as #SpeakUp4GVP) or emailing them to your supporters.

How to Set Up a Phone Banking Event

To organize a phone banking event, follow the general steps above, but instead of sample letters and writing materials, supply sample scripts, names, and phone numbers of legislators, etc. The following subsection details how to call legislators and provides a sample script.

Call Your Legislators

Calling your legislators is an easy and important way to engage in Education to Action, and it only takes a few minutes. This can be done as part of a phone banking event, as described in the subsection above, but can also be done independently when you have a few minutes to spare.

Call your legislators via the Virginia General Assembly Switchboard: You can call the General Assembly Switchboard at (804) 698-1990 to identify your Senator and Delegate and express your opinion on a legislative issue. When the General Assembly is not in session (March–December) you may call (804) 698-1500 for the House of Delegates Legislative Information Office and (804) 698-7410 for the Senate

Legislative Information Office to identify your Senator and Delegate and find out the phone number to their district offices. A sample script is provided below; write your own to tailor it appropriately. You will likely speak with a staff person, not the legislator himself/herself. The staff person will relay your requests to his/her boss, so make sure to include your name and home address so your call can be officially logged.

Sample script: Hello, my name is _____ and I'm calling today to support Senate Bill (SB ###) or House Bill (HB ###), which will require the reporting of lost and stolen firearms. This bill would help protect my community, reduce gun trafficking, and is supported by Governor Northam, a strong champion of responsible gun laws. This bill should be passed swiftly with bipartisan support. I would like to hear back if the Senator/Delegate plans to support this measure for stronger gun laws. Thank you.

Write a Letter for Publication

Writing a letter for publication is an incredible advocacy tool. If your submission to the local newspaper is published, your advocacy reaches a public audience. You can do this two ways, by responding with a letter to the editor or by submitting an op-ed. Examples of each are provided in Appendices 7 and 8.

A **letter to the editor** is generally a reaction to an editorial, an op-ed, or news item. It is short (150-250 words) and begins with specifically referencing the article (title/date) that you are responding to. Be sure to be courteous, even in disagreement, and use facts to back up your argument. Always check specific guidelines with each publication and follow them closely.

An **op-ed** offers the clear and concise point of view of the author at 650-800 words. An op-ed should grab the reader's attention with a strong point of view, offer clear and convincing points of evidence, and end with a strong closing statement. Be sure to respect the reader and avoid jargon or language is not clear to the average person. Always check specific guidelines for each publication and follow them closely.

Take Action in a Rapid Response Action Alert

Rapid response action alerts send legislators a powerful message by encouraging many people to send a coordinated message at the same time. When we all call, email, and tweet at the same time, our legislators

know we mean business! Rapid response action alerts will typically come to you as an email from our team at the Educational Fund to Stop Gun Violence, as well as on our social media posts. They will explain what is going on, why it is important for you to take action, and provide specific information about whom to contact. Then you make the call! See Appendix 9 for a sample alert.

Make an Impact with Social Media

These days, nearly everyone maintains a social media presence. *Liking, sharing, engaging, and following* where you feel comfortable can further your impact in exchanges with lawmakers and their constituents. Social media is also a great way to raise awareness in your community and share your advocacy with friends, family, and other contacts. Think about sharing stories, pictures, and facts while using relevant hashtags and location check-ins to increase your reach.

Sample Facebook post: Act now on #Virginia’s #GunViolence epidemic. Support SB###, which will track stolen and illegal firearms. This is important for keeping guns off the streets and out of the wrong hands. Please support this common sense legislation.

Sample tweet on Twitter: I’m asking @TwitterHandle to please support #SB111 to keep guns away from convicted abusers and high risk individuals. #VAGov #VAGunSafety
@TwitterHandle support #HB111. Addressing the root causes of gun violence and improving trauma support is gun violence prevention. #EFSGV #VAGVP

Instagram: Post a photo of you advocating for gun violence prevention measures. Make sure to remember to use hashtags and location tags as appropriate.

Snapchat: Add a Snapchat Story so your Snapchat followers can see what you are doing to advocate and engage in your community. Bonus: look for a local and public Snapchat Story - Richmond might be an example you find if you are in that region. These local Stories only pop up if you are in close proximity (to Richmond, for instance) and allow anyone else who is in this physical area with Snapchat access to watch this Story. Your Snapchat picture or video could be watched by hundreds of people or more.

Go LIVE: Instagram and Facebook both give the option of “going live” by streaming live video. This enables your followers to see the great work you are doing in real time through either social media platform. Go live!

Track and Share Your Success

Keep track:

- How many meetings did you take with elected officials?
- How many meetings did you have with groups to discuss gun violence prevention?
- How many events were organized?
- Did you receive any press coverage? If so, save the links/clips - please share them!
- How many phone calls, letters sent, social media comments to elected officials?
- How many letters to the editors/op-eds were written?
- How many people did you speak with? This lets you identify and grow the numbers of leaders in the movement - faith leaders, community leaders, etc.

Share your advocacy and action successes with us! We would love to hear about your advocacy.

- Twitter: @EFSGV
- Facebook: Educational Fund to Stop Gun Violence, Virginia Action Network

- Conclusion -

Thank you so much for taking the time to participate in this Education to Action Workshop. We hope that you will be able to take this information into your community to create and become the meaningful change in society.

Next Steps

Host an Education to Action Workshop: Do you know other people who could benefit from the Ed2Ac Workshop? Want to take your involvement in advocacy and gun violence prevention to the next level? Host a meeting for 15 to 20 people in your community and empower them through our free workshop, "Education to Action." This gives you an opportunity to become an advocate in your community, update key leaders about community needs and efforts to stop gun violence, and share the knowledge and tools provided in Ed2Ac workshops with friends. Learn more from our flyer (Appendix 1). Email khicks@efsgv.org to schedule your workshop today and request a PDF version of the flyer for distribution.

Vigil and Advocacy in Observance of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Birthday: In observance of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday, join us for an annual vigil in honor of all victims of gun violence and day of advocacy at the Virginia State Capitol in Richmond. Make your commitment today to attend (ask your community and faith leaders to join us!) by emailing Kayla Hicks at khicks@efsgv.org.

Take Action: Educate, Engage and Act – with your community, legislators, local gun violence and domestic violence prevention groups, press, etc. Now is the time to apply the skills you have learned through this workshop and toolkit! Keep us posted on how things go and reach out for additional support if needed.

#WearOrange: Each year on June 2, people across the country will join together and #WearOrange in honor of National Gun Violence Awareness Day. Americans nationwide will commemorate victims of gun violence and stand united in support of gun violence prevention. We hope you will #WearOrange and ask others to join you and do the same. We also encourage you to take pictures and share them on our social media pages. More information available at <http://wearorange.org/>.

Stay Connected: Sign up now at www.efsgv.org to receive important updates and legislative information. You can also keep posted via social media: like the Ed Fund and Virginia Action Network on Facebook (Educational Fund to Stop Gun Violence; Virginia Action Network) and follow us on Twitter (@efsgv).

What else can we do? If you have ideas or feedback please reach out - we would love to hear from you. Kayla Hicks can be reached at khicks@efsgv.org or (202) 408-0061 x1019.

APPENDIX 1: Education to Action Flyer

Education to Action

Grassroots Advocacy in Virginia: *It's About Saving Lives*

Education to Action “Ed2Ac” is a *free* workshop and toolkit from the Educational Fund to Stop Gun Violence. Ed2Ac provides critical information and practical tools that empower members of impacted communities to advocate for change to prevent gun violence at the local, state, and federal levels.

We believe that it is a moral imperative to reduce death and injury from gunfire and endorse comprehensive and evidence-based policy measures to prevent gun violence. Ed2Ac invites you to join the movement in learning about and advocating for responsible and effective gun policy.

Through Ed2Ac’s three-step process, *Educate, Engage, Act*, **you** can help make this change happen.



Education to Action teaches three powerful steps:

1: EDUCATE Learn about effective gun violence prevention strategies and policy approaches, as well as government structures and processes.

2: ENGAGE Connect with lawmakers, advocacy communities, and the media. Collaborate for change and for gun violence prevention.

3: ACT Take action with your community and legislators through effective advocacy. Use the power of people to create change in your community.

Education to Action is available across Virginia.

We’re looking for community leaders and advocates to host a workshop in their community:

What we provide: 90-minute workshop facilitated by expert community organizer and gun violence prevention advocate, plus workshop materials and our strategic toolkit handout for participants. We also provide light refreshments.

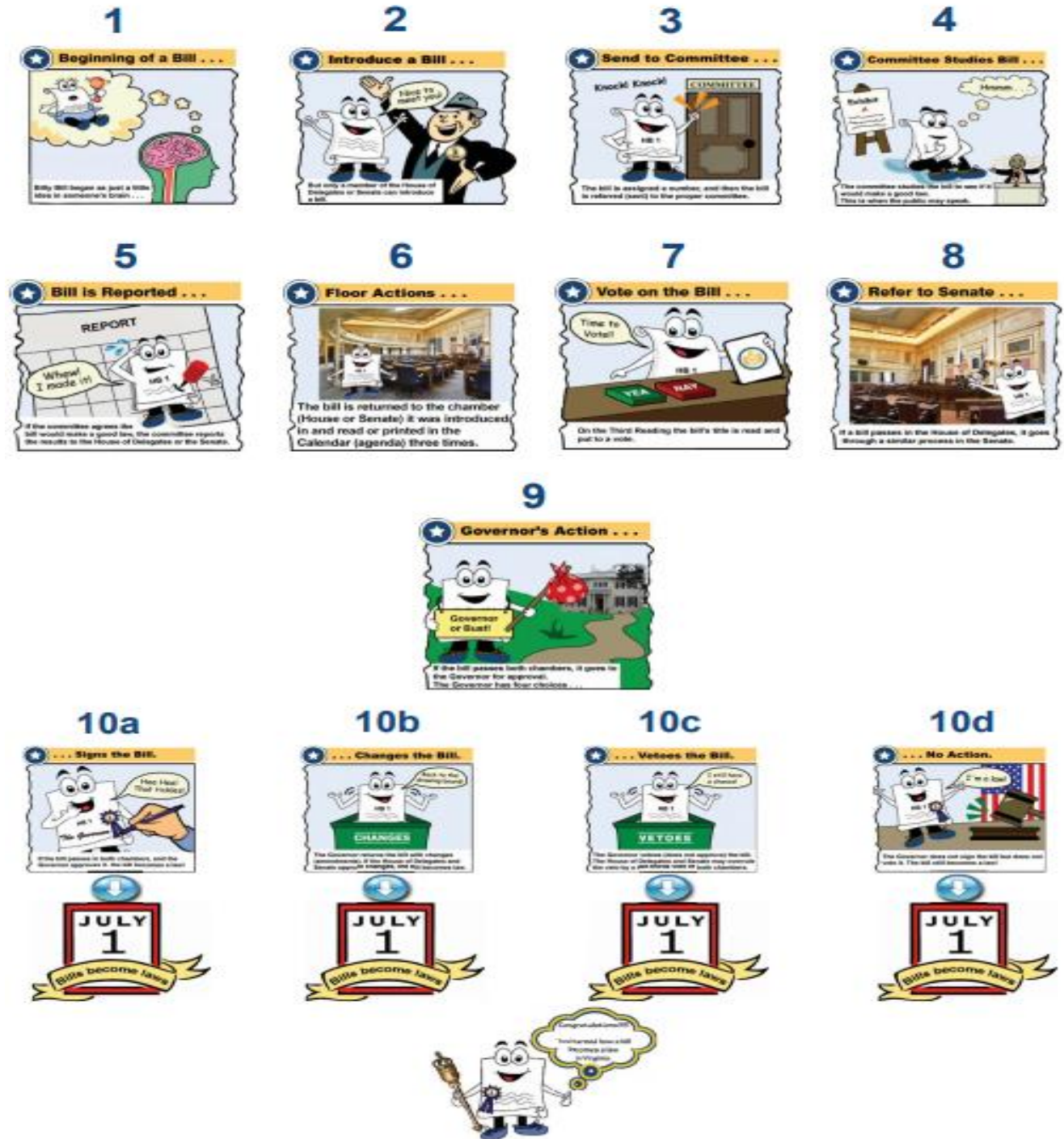
What you provide: Advertising for the event to recruit an audience of 15-20 community members and a meeting space (e.g. library, church, or community center).

Contact Kayla Hicks, Director of African American and Community Outreach, to schedule your workshop today. Phone: 202.408.0061 x1019 or email: khicks@efsgv.org.

APPENDIX 2: Graphic “How a Bill Becomes a Law in Virginia”

How a Bill Becomes a Law in Virginia

The following steps are the typical process by which bills become laws:



SOURCE: The Virginia General Assembly's *Capitol Classroom*, available at: <http://viriniageneralassembly.gov/capitolClassroom.php?secid=23&activesec=5>

APPENDIX 3: The Ed Fund's Legislative Advocacy Meeting Task Sheet**Legislative Advocacy Meeting Task Sheet**

Name of Legislator: _____

Staffers Present: _____

Meeting Date: _____ Time: _____

Location: _____

Meeting Preparation

Meeting Goal: _____

- In one sentence, what is the goal of your meeting?
- Practice your elevator speech before you visit with legislators

Meeting Note-Taker(s): _____

- Record any feedback, information, indication of support, or questions that were shared

Introducer(s): _____

- Begin the meeting with group member introductions
- Thank the legislator and/or staff members for their time
- Explain the purpose of the conversation and highlight the 3 main points or topics

Main Discussion Tips

- Choose 3 main points to bring up to the legislator
- Include personal stories to illustrate why these issues are important to you and your community

Topic #1: -

Discussion Leader(s): Kayla H. _____

Talking Points: _____

- Addressing the root causes of gun violence
- Address the problem of easy access to guns by high-risk people (e.g., stalkers, those who have committed violent misdemeanors or domestic abuse against dating partners)

Topic #2: _____

Discussion Leader(s): _____

Talking Points: _____

- _____
- _____
- _____

Topic #3: _____

Discussion Leader(s): _____

Talking Points: _____

- _____
- _____
- _____

Concluder(s): _____

Summarize and identify what you requested from the staffer/legislator. What is the ask?

During Meeting

Items to Follow-up on:

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

After Meeting

Thank You Letter Writer:

Reporter to Ed2Ac Coordinator: _____

Who will complete each follow-up task?

NOTES:

APPENDIX 4: Sample Media Advisory

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

[Date]

MEDIA CONTACTS:

Joe Smith JoeSmith7@gmail.com, 434-555-5555

ACTIVISTS RALLY ON HOLD MLK DAY TO PUSH FOR GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION POLICIES

Richmond, VA—A group of gun violence prevention activists from across the Commonwealth will be holding a rally to bring attention to the daily gun violence that impacts communities across Virginia. We will be calling on the General Assembly to vote in support of a package of sensible gun violence prevention policies that can save lives.

Over 1,000 residents across the Commonwealth have been killed in 2018 because of the easy accessibility to guns. It is time for this to stop and for the General Assembly to be a part of the solution, not the problem.

Speakers at Monday's event will include the Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security Brian J. Moran as well as Kayla Hicks and Lori Haas of the Educational Fund to Stop Gun Violence. We invite the media to attend this important event. The speakers will be available to the press for interviews.

WHAT: Martin Luther King Jr. Day rally to bring attention to gun violence in Virginia and to push for strong gun violence prevention policies.

WHEN: [Day], [Month] [Date], [Year] at [Time]

WHERE: [Address] (Directions if needed)

WHO: Speakers will include:

- Brian J. Moran, Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security, Commonwealth of Virginia
- Kayla Hicks, Director of African American and Community Outreach, Educational Fund to Stop Gun Violence
- Lori Haas, Virginia State Director, Educational Fund to Stop Gun Violence

APPENDIX: 5 Sample Elevator Speech

It's a pleasure to meet you Delegate _____. My name is _____ and I have lived in _____ my whole life. I live in a community that is impacted by daily gun violence. I have been personally impacted by gun violence when _____. I know that you are committed to your constituents and that you have passed laws to support our community. Please continue to support my community by passing legislation that funds community-based gun violence prevention. We know these organizations are effective. We need the support from the Commonwealth to continue to reduce gun violence in our community.

APPENDIX 6: Sample Letter to a Legislator

The Honorable Governor Ralph Northam
Office of the Governor
P.O. Box 1475
Richmond, VA 23218

The firearm homicide rate continues to rise in Virginia, particularly within communities of color. Over the last five years (2013-2017), Virginia's firearm homicide rate increased 45%, accounting for 345 deaths in 2017. In Richmond, the number of firearm homicides increased 122% over this same time period. In 2017, African Americans were killed by firearm homicide at a rate 8 times higher than their White counterparts in Virginia. Much of Virginia's firearm violence is concentrated within neighborhoods that face a host of systemic inequities -- discrimination, lack of economic opportunities, and under-resourced public services.

To reduce gun violence within these communities, the Commonwealth of Virginia should allocate \$10 million in the 2020 fiscal budget to community-based violence prevention and intervention programs. The Department of Criminal Justice Services should disperse these funds through competitive grants for evidence-based programs that 1) target individuals at highest risk for gun violence, 2) interrupt cycles of violence, and 3) connect the highest risk individuals to social services offered within the community.

Research consistently demonstrates that state investment in community-based violence prevention and intervention programs reduce firearm violence. When adequately funded, these evidence-based interventions can reduce violent crime by up to 30%. Research also finds that the cost of doing nothing is far too great both in lives lost and in economic costs. It is estimated that each homicide costs taxpayers between \$22,000 and \$44,000 in criminal justice fees alone. The total cost of just one homicide to society is estimated to be between \$4.1 and \$17.2 million. Therefore, an investment in community-based violence prevention can save countless lives and generate large cost savings in the long run.

We commend the Administration's commitment to reducing violence through allocating federal funding for hospital-based violence intervention programs and through broadening the federal Byrne Justice Assistance Grant to include community-based violence prevention efforts. The Administration should build off these developments by investing \$10 million from the general fund of the 2020 budget to effectively tackle gun violence in Virginia's impacted communities of color.

Sincerely, Educational Fund to Stop Gun Violence

APPENDIX 7: Sample Letters to the Editor

Policymakers must address root causes of gun violence

Richmond Times-Dispatch. July 8, 2019. Word Count: 125.

In Virginia and across the country, communities of color — especially young black men — are disproportionately affected by gun violence. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, non-Hispanic black men ages 15 to 34 are more than 20 times more likely to be murdered by a gun than their non-Hispanic white counterparts. Young black women and girls are nearly seven times more likely than their non-Hispanic white counterparts to be murdered by firearms. Our policymakers must do more to address this problem by passing policies supporting community programs that address the root causes of violence in communities of color. Gun violence affects community health; its impacts are compounded by poverty and systemic inequities. Addressing these inequities is essential to reducing gun violence.

Kayla Hicks - *Educational Fund to Stop Gun Violence*

Lives are at risk

Daily Press, March 7, 2014. Word Count: 218.

http://articles.dailypress.com/2014-03-07/news/dp-nws-edt-letsat-0308-20140307_1_climate-change-mental-health-initiatives-virginia-tech

Assault, sexual battery and stalking are all misdemeanor offenses that endanger Virginia families. Yet recently, members of the House of Delegates killed a common-sense bill that would have prohibited these offenders from owning guns for five years following their conviction.

A majority of violent crimes victimize people close to the offenders according to Bureau of Justice Statistics, meaning that perpetrators of these offenses pose the greatest threat to their family and friends. Restricting these convicts' access to deadly weapons helps protect families and communities.

The bill was widely supported by law enforcement, prosecutors and organizations supporting women and children. Despite this, it was dismissed without a vote by the Republican-controlled House of Delegates subcommittee, fearful of political retribution from the NRA and other pro-gun groups eager to paint the issue in terms of Second Amendment rights.

But while the statehouse plays politics, Virginia families remain at risk. Common-sense measures, like this one, intended to restrict dangerous people from owning guns not only make sense — they can save Virginians' lives.

As a commonwealth attorney, I have seen more than my share of tragedies that could have been prevented, if we had common-sense legislation in place to keep firearms out of the hands of violent domestic abusers.

It's past time for our legislators to act. Lives depend on it.

Anton A. Bell – Commonwealth's Attorney of Hampton, Virginia

Millennials Call For A Holistic Approach To Gun Violence Prevention

Adapted from Medium. March 16, 2016. Word Count: 213

<https://medium.com/@genprogress/millennials-call-for-a-holistic-approach-to-gun-violence-prevention-54c6abdca85e>

President Obama’s executive actions announced earlier this year regarding gun violence and creating “common-sense” gun laws are a step forward in the right direction. However, there is still an opportunity to expand resources to help the very people who are impacted the most by gun violence: communities of color. In order to truly produce positive change, we must address the root causes of gun violence in most impacted communities that persist due to systemic oppression.

We recognize that communities nationwide are experiencing similar incidents at an alarming rate. Due to the lack of economic opportunity and quality public educational, a clear pattern of inequality in communities of color continues to exist. This pattern contributes to a system of violence in urban communities and must be addressed at all levels of government.

One step towards addressing violence and allowing residents of low-income and under-resourced communities to create a sustainable life for themselves is increasing job opportunities. Moreover, providing adequate education funding to impacted communities is essential to assist communities nationwide as well. Receiving a quality education positions students to have more opportunities available when the time comes to seek employment and/or pursue higher education. Finally, we should incorporate trauma-informed education and provide adequate social services to help prevent violence and help communities heal.

Lauren Footman, Yeadon

We will be heard

Adapted for this toolkit from letter originally published in the *Daily Press*. Word Count: 134.

In his guest column "Why a Domestic Violence Gun Bill Failed in the Senate" (March 15, 2014), Senator John Doe justifies killing a bill that would have kept firearms out of the hands of violent criminals and those convicted of domestic violence.

As a gun owner, I am appalled by our legislators' complete lack of support for families in Virginia. Responsible gun owners should be ashamed that our legislators neglected the opportunity to save the lives of countless women, men, girls and boys. Reducing intimate partner and family homicide across the Commonwealth should not be a partisan issue.

This was Virginia's chance to set a model for the rest of the country. Senator Doe may have heard the last of SB 510, but he will certainly hear from us during the next election cycle.

Kayla Hicks, Hampton

APPENDIX 8: Sample Op-Ed

To Stop Gun violence Virginia Must Invest in Community-based Violence Intervention Programs

Fictitious Virginia Newspaper, August 5th, 2019. Word Count: 796.

The tragic mass shootings in Gilroy, California, El Paso, Texas, and Dayton, Ohio, over the past week have made the headlines, but communities across the country are also mourning gun deaths. Each day, nearly 100 Americans are killed by guns. And the violence within the communities most impacted - communities of color - is often ignored

This is the case in Virginia where communities of color across the Commonwealth are disproportionately burdened by firearm violence. These same communities face a host of systemic inequities linked to violence - discrimination, lack of economic opportunities, and under-resourced public services. In order to reduce the violence, we must address these inequities and provide resources to heal these communities.

We can start by pushing our state legislators to invest in community-based violence intervention programs shown to reduce gun violence in impacted communities of color. These programs bring together community members, social service providers, and, in some cases, law enforcement to identify and provide support for individuals at highest risk for gun violence. They also support individuals with the trauma associated with living in neighborhoods where witnessing gun violence is routine.

These programs can take a number of forms. Here, we take a closer look at how investing in three different types of programs that can reduce violence across the Commonwealth.

One type of community-based violence intervention program is called a Shooting or Violent Crime Review. These reviews bring together criminal justice stakeholders, researchers, and individuals from the communities most impacted by violence to share their knowledge of violent gun crimes to develop prevention and intervention strategies. The Violent Crime Review identifies patterns and root causes of gun violence and develops recommendations. A US Department of Justice report examining Milwaukee’s review found that this type of community-based violence intervention program “better positioned criminal justice, social service, and community-based organizations to address high-risk places and high risk people central to recurring homicide problems,” and it was associated with a significant and sustained 52% reduction in homicides.”

Another evidence-based model is called Cure Violence. This model hires “violence interrupters” to engage with the friends and families of shooting victims, help them settle disputes before they spiral into additional violence, and change neighborhood norms around using violence to resolve conflict. This model has reduced violence in multiple cities. In New York City neighborhoods with a Cure Violence site experienced 18% reductions in homicides while the matched neighborhoods without Cure Violence experienced a 69% increase.

The Group Violence Intervention model is a collaborative effort between law enforcement and community leaders to engage with vulnerable individuals linked past acts of violence. These individuals are called into a meeting and are told that if violence continues, every legal tool available will be used to ensure they face swift and certain consequences. Simultaneously, community leaders connect these individuals to social services and community support to assist them in changing their behavior. In numerous cities this model has improved relations between police and the community, and reduced violent crime by up to 30%.

All three of these models are effective because they work with those who are at risk of being a victim or perpetrator of violence, and they address the root causes of gun violence. They give communities the resources to treat the negative ripple effects that violence has within communities— and in doing so, they prevent the cycles of violence.

After years of dedicated advocacy we have finally pushed the state to fund these life-saving investments. This past year, Governor Ralph Northam invested \$2.45 million Hospital-Based Violence Intervention Programs to run in seven hospitals across Virginia.

Likewise, the Governor allocated a small amount of grant funds to pilot a Violent Crime Review in Hampton, VA. This evidence-based review is part of a larger public safety endeavor called Community Empowerment to Reduce Violence (CERV). The CERV brings together the Commonwealth Attorney’s Office, the Hampton Police Department, researchers from The Johns Hopkins University, and individuals impacted by daily gun violence to identify the risk factors that drive gun violence in Hampton and develop strategies to address these factors.

While the Governor’s investment in these programs is a step in the right direction, the current funding is not enough. States that have experienced sustained reductions in violence from these programs have invested five to ten times more than the amount the Governor has invested. We encourage the Governor to follow the lead of states including California, Massachusetts, and New York in making real long-term investments in community-based violence intervention programs to sizably reduce gun violence throughout the Commonwealth.

Our state policymakers must recognize that gun violence is more than tragic mass shootings. It occurs every single day. They must recognize that communities of color in Virginia are disproportionately impacted by gun violence. And they must take action by immediately investing in these evidence-based programs proven to save lives.

Ari Davis – Educational Fund to Stop Gun Violence

APPENDIX 9: Sample Rapid Response Action Alert

EMAIL SUBJECT: Rapid Response Action Alert

Dear Supporters,

The Virginia General Assembly will hold a hearing on multiple life-saving gun violence prevention bills tomorrow. The bills include:

- Funding community-based violence intervention programs
- Extreme Risk Law to temporarily remove firearms from people who pose a danger to self or others
- Making it easier for law enforcement to remove firearms from convicted domestic abusers.
- Universal Background Checks on all gun sales
- Reinstating one gun a month law in Virginia

These bills will be voted on tomorrow in the Senate Courts of Justice so it is vital that you contact your state representative TODAY to ask for their support!

Sen. Tommy Norment: (804) 698-7503

Sen. Jill Holtzman Vogel: (804) 698-7527

Sen. Mark Obenshain: (804) 698-7526

Sen. William Stanley: (804) 698-7520

Sen. John Edwards: (804) 698-7521

Sen. Bryce Reeves: (804) 698-7517

Sen. Ryan McDougle: (804) 698-7504

Sen. Richard Stuart: (804) 698-7528

Things are moving very fast so look for more emails soon and continue to check our Facebook page for the most up-to-date information. Thanks for your patience and for all your hard work on this issue. Stay tuned for more information as it becomes available.

Sincerely,

Lori Haas, VA State Director

Educational Fund to Stop Gun Violence

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