



PEOPLE FIRST

**AN INTEGRATIVE GUIDE TO NONPROFIT
CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN A POST-PANDEMIC SOUTH**

DEVELOPED BY ASHLEY ROBINSON WITH EBONĒ SHARDAE WILLIAMS AND THE
SOUTHERN ECONOMIC ADVANCEMENT PROJECT CIVIC ENGAGEMENT WORKING GROUP

INTRO

PEOPLE FIRST: An Integrative Guide to Nonprofit Civic Engagement in a Post-Pandemic South offers information, considerations and resources to help Southern nonprofit groups develop core competencies on constituent and community engagement in a post-pandemic South. This guide is designed for nonprofit organizational leadership and staff, academics and movement leaders who seek to integrate the voice of its community members and constituents through the promotion of civic engagement. This guide is a project of the Southern Economic Advancement Project's (SEAP) SouthStrong recovery campaign. SEAP amplifies the efforts of existing organizations and networks that work towards broadening economic power and building a more equitable future. Broadening economic power brings attention to how race, class and gender intersect social, environmental, and economic policy in the South. SEAP explores policy ideas designed to directly address these connections. SEAP focuses on twelve Southern states and marginalized/vulnerable populations within the region and is a fiscally sponsored project of the Roosevelt Institute.

WHAT IS SOUTHSTRONG?

SouthStrong is a recovery campaign of the Southern Economic Advancement Project and is a collection of Southern organizations and scholars seeking an equitable and **people-first** response to economic recovery in a post-pandemic South. The principles of SouthStrong have attracted almost 200 (and counting) nonprofit and policy organizations, grassroots leaders, activists and scholars who have committed to collectively drafting a blueprint for a Southern strategy that prioritizes sound policy in the areas of, but not limited to, public health and safety, good jobs, workers' rights, high quality childcare and environmental justice.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We wish to thank the SouthStrong Civic Engagement working group members for playing a key role in shaping the research approach, which required each member's organizational expertise on the subject of civic engagement. With this, the SouthStrong Civic Engagement team invited and encouraged working group members to question, critique, and raise concerns during the developing stages of our research. Their invaluable input made for a more robust and informed process. We thank the members for their time, insight and support of this important work and for their contributions to our research approach and subsequent guide.

OUR VALUES

PEOPLE FIRST: An Integrative Guide to Nonprofit Civic Engagement in a Post-Pandemic South was developed on the belief that a strong civic engagement program is core to the groundbreaking work of many nonprofit organizations and advocates who are based and/or serve diverse constituencies within the Southern region of the United States. The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare the social and economic inequities shouldered by people of color and workers making low wages. Combating this public health threat and mitigating the economic fallout will require strong civic engagement focus, coordination among neighboring states and bolstering of public services. Given the South's history of poor, limited worker protections and structural racism carried out by a host of discriminatory policies and practices, equitable and targeted access to these public resources must be a priority.

We firmly believe that people can and want to transform their lives to reclaim their power and voice which may have been muted due to the historic Southern political trends and socio-economic circumstances that are custom to the region. Nonprofit, academic and other service organizations like those we will mention in this guide and the populations who access their services, believe that:

- 1 The core components of servicing and empowering marginalized communities, particularly in the South, embeds elements of civic engagement into all programs;
- 2 Organizations that service diverse populations of people in the South are heavily reliant on developing trust while building and maintaining strong relationships;
- 3 These organizations should not be overlooked as primary sites of social change and justice work;
- 4 Communities and its constituents (visible and invisible) rely on service, no matter the level;
- 5 These organizations also have exceptional reach to marginalized, low-income and communities of color;
- 6 Such providers have a deep understanding of the systemic and structural barriers that create long-term obstacles for its target population.

METHODOLOGY

The findings and recommendations in this guide are based on an internal survey conducted from August 31 to September 11, 2020. The SouthStrong recovery campaign's Civic Engagement Team surveyed and administered a 41-question online survey to SouthStrong partners in an effort to learn more about each organization's civic engagement pivots and successes prior to and during the pandemic. Responsive organizations were diverse in their program focus, target population and service area. Each organization's input supports the development of targeted programmatic recommendations, innovative best practices, response tactics, resources, recommendations and considerations to inform this guide for organizations who have signed onto SEAP's SouthStrong Statement and Principles.

In the course of this work, we have learned a tremendous amount overall about SouthStrong partner organizations and their associations with diverse populations, the impact COVID-19 has made on these populations and identified the common threads shared amongst their work. The surveys used to collect the data shared in this guide were written and analyzed by the SEAP Civic Engagement Team, and the conclusions, program recommendations and calls to action belong to SEAP and their SouthStrong COVID-19 recovery campaign.

The data analyzed here rely on self-reported information from 47 respondents of 159 total nonprofit groups, academic institutions, policy organizations, grassroots movement leaders and scholars. Respondents were invited to answer a mix of multiple choice and open-ended questions about challenges and changes in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, experiences in providing direct constituent service, pivoting their primary purpose work, highlighting civic engagement focuses, capacity, funding, identifying gaps, voter mobilization efforts, and recommendations and requests for policymakers.

The surveys were administered by the SEAP Civic Engagement Team via an online survey portal. The survey, designed by SEAP in collaboration with its Civic Engagement working group, was made available to all SouthStrong signers between August 31 – September 11, 2020, in all 12 targeted states.

MEET THE SEAP CIVIC ENGAGEMENT TEAM

ASHLEY ROBINSON

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT PROJECT LEAD Ashley Robinson brings over a decade of experience in management and program development. Professionally, she provides development, training and coordination support for nonprofit organizations with a focus on social change, deep issue awareness, constituency engagement, issue advocacy and tactical accountability.

Formerly, Ashley served as Chief of Staff to former Georgia House Minority Leader Stacey Abrams and Caucus Director to the Georgia House Democratic Caucus, supporting 5 election cycles and overseeing 7 legislative sessions. She is also the Founder and Principal of an electoral staff training program geared toward building the capacity of young people of color in the South and Southwestern region of the United States.

A daughter of the South and proud Spelman College alumna, Ashley roots her approach through the greater lens of prosperity and potential with the assumption that communities, particularly marginalized communities, are the architects of their own sovereignty. She is a firm believer that a strong civic engagement approach, particularly in the South, is an essential building block for transformational legislative wins and developing more beneficial governmental/institutional partnerships.

EBONË SHARDAE WILLIAMS

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT PROJECT COORDINATOR

Ebonë Williams, creatively known as Ebonë Shardae, is an activist and strategic consultant assisting impact-driven entrepreneurs and organizations to clarify their operational direction, create valuable content and experiences, and form strategic partnerships.

Ebonë holds seven years of experience working in government and public policy, as well as advocating on the behalf of working families and marginalized groups. She has worked with esteemed organizations such as New America, a public policy think tank, the Estell Group, a Woman of Color owned and operated government relations firm, the American Federation of Teachers, the Atlanta-North Georgia Labor Council, the Georgia Legislative Black Caucus and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Additionally, she has worked on campaign trails for 2016 Presidential candidate, Hilary Clinton, and 2018 Georgia gubernatorial candidate, Stacey Abrams.

Ebonë is both a proud Atlanta native and Howard University Bison. She attributes her experiences growing up and throughout college to her personal and professional values that are people-centered and strongly tied to her passion for civic engagement and education. Her approach to amplifying the need to be civically active is from a holistic lens, emphasizing that our entire human experience is affected by social action and political decisions being made every day.

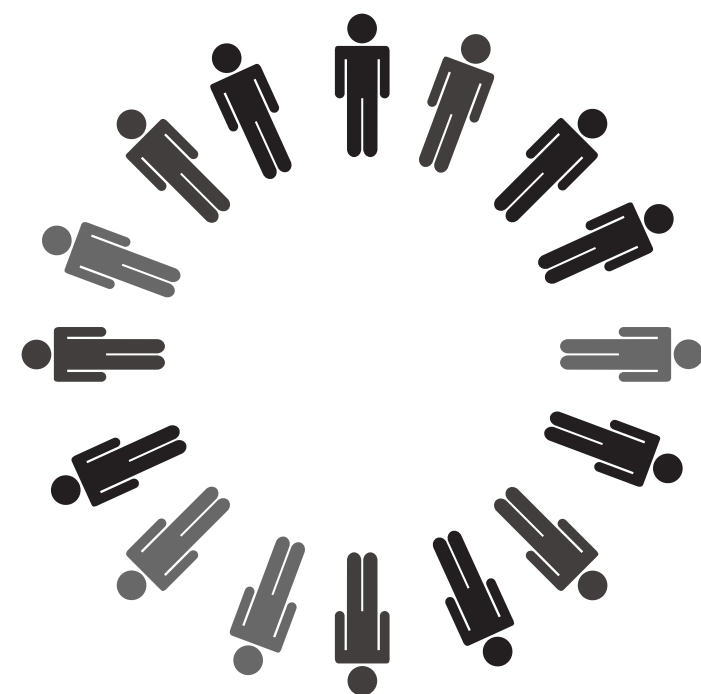
PEOPLE FIRST: An Integrative Guide to Nonprofit Civic Engagement in a Post-Pandemic South
is organized into 7 sections:

1



**Summary of Findings &
Common Themes**

2



**Community Engagement in
the South**

3



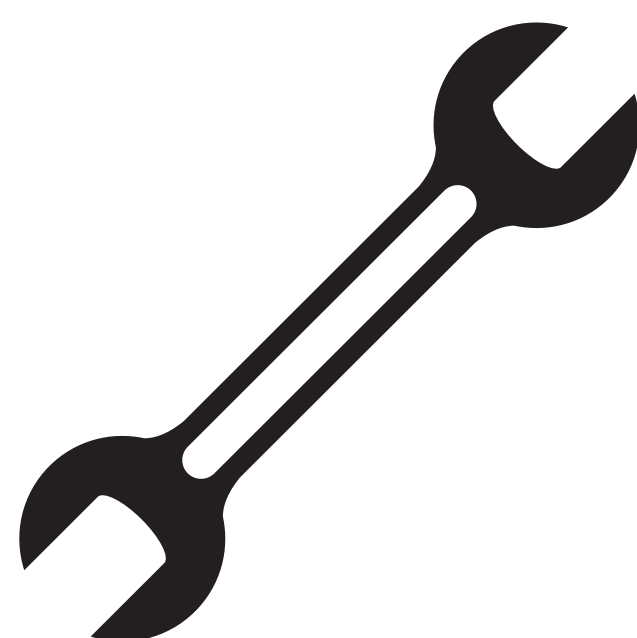
**Capacity, Gaps &
Resources**

4



**Meeting the
Community's Needs**

5



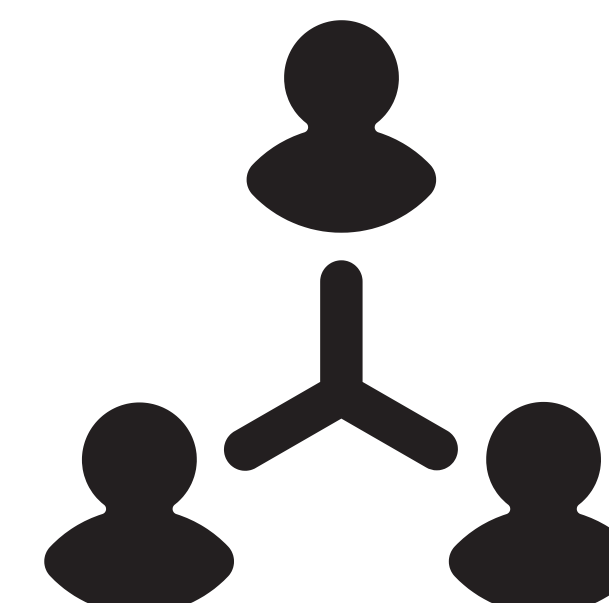
**Overcoming Barriers
through Community and
Maintenance Building**

6



**State Reopening &
Accountability Work**

7



Resources



**IN THE SOUTH,
RELATIONSHIP
ALWAYS
COMES FIRST.**

- NORTH CAROLINA SOUTHSTRONG PARTNER

KEY DEFINITIONS

THIS GLOSSARY DEFINES SOME OF THE MOST COMMON TERMS YOU WILL READ THROUGHOUT THIS GUIDE.

Asset: A useful or valuable thing, person or quality.

Asset-Based Community Development: An approach for sustainable community driven development that builds on the assets that are already found in the community and mobilizes individuals, associations and institutions around them.

Asset-Based Thinking: Thinking and acting based around perceived assets, strengths, opportunities and benefits.

Asset Mapping: A tool for community development in which the strengths and assets of a community are identified and depicted on a map in order to help uncover solutions for community needs.

BIPOC: Black, Indigenous and People of Color

Case Study: A particular instance of something used or analyzed in order to illustrate a thesis or principle.

Class: A relative social category based on income, financial resources, education, status, and/or power. Class categories are usually associated with levels of access to resources such as money, contacts and education, status and/or power.

Collaboration: The action of working with a person, group or institution to produce or create something aligned with parallel values.

Community: An interdependent group of people defined by common place, intention and tradition or spirit.

Community Capital: The financial, social, physical, environmental, human, political and cultural capital available within a community in which investments generate additional resources and benefits for the community.

Community Organizing: The coordination of cooperative efforts by an individual or group of people to promote the interest of their community or a campaign.

Consensus: A group process for reaching a decision that integrates the interests and beliefs of all participants for whom all agree or support.

KEY DEFINITIONS

THIS GLOSSARY DEFINES SOME OF THE MOST COMMON TERMS YOU WILL READ THROUGHOUT THIS GUIDE.

- Constituency:** A body of people who are eligible to vote and elect a leader, or a group of supporters or potential supporters.
- Culture:** The structures and practices that human societies create to give order and meaning to their lives.
- Deficit-Based Thinking:** A way of thinking and acting based on perceived weaknesses, threats, needs and deficits.
- Democracy:** A government based on the principle of equality, in which the people exercise power over public decisions to achieve the common good.
- Diversity:** The practice of understanding that each individual is unique with the recognition and celebration of such differences. These can be along the dimensions of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs, or other ideologies.
- Gender Identity:** How we see ourselves. Some of us see ourselves as women, some as men, some as a combination of both, some as neither. Some of us have complex identities that may even be fluid and change over time.
- Gender Expression:** How individuals choose to express their gender identity to others.
- Identity:** Characteristics humans use to structure and interpret one another’s associations and interactions (ethnicity/race, social class, gender, religion, sexual preference, age, etc.).
- Learning:** The acquisition of knowledge coupled with an understanding of how that knowledge can be put to use.
- Nation of Citizenship; Immigration Status:** Nation of citizenship refers to where one holds citizenship status. Immigration status refers to the status of a person’s residency – in this context, within the United States.
- Native American, Tribal or Indigenous Affiliation:** Native American/Tribal sovereignty in the United States is the inherent authority of indigenous tribes to govern themselves within its borders. Indigenous people are increasingly faced with threats to their sovereignty, safety and access to natural resources.

KEY DEFINITIONS

THIS GLOSSARY DEFINES SOME OF THE MOST COMMON TERMS YOU WILL READ THROUGHOUT THIS GUIDE.

Partnership (Collaboration): A give-and-take relationship based on mutual goals and objectives

People of Color (POC): Often the preferred collective term for referring to non-White racial groups, rather than “minorities.” Racial justice advocates have been using the term “people of color” (not to be confused with the pejorative “colored people”) since the late 1970s as an inclusive and unifying frame across different racial groups that are not White, to address racial inequities. While “people of color” can be a politically useful term, and describes people with their own attributes (as opposed to what they are not, eg: “non-White”), it is also important whenever possible to identify people through their own racial/ethnic group, as each has its own distinct experience and meaning and may be more appropriate.

Policy: A course or principal of action adopted or proposed by a government, party, business, group or individual.

Power: The capacity to make and carry out decisions that affect one’s life.

Racial Justice: The systematic fair treatment of people of all races, resulting in equitable opportunities and outcomes for all. Racial justice—or racial equity—goes beyond “anti-racism.” It is not just the absence of discrimination and inequities, but also the presence of deliberate systems and supports to achieve and sustain racial equity through proactive and preventative measures.

Race: A grouping of humans based on shared physical or social qualities into categories generally viewed as distinct by society. There are often social and artificial constructs with exceeding social, economic and political significance.

Religion: An institutionalized or personal system of beliefs and practices relating to the divine. Faith is a system of religious or spiritual beliefs. Spirituality is an individual’s belief and commitment to matters that are considered to be sacred to the individual.

Sexual Orientation: The type of sexual, romantic, emotional/spiritual attraction one feels for others, often labeled based on the gender relationship between the person and the people they are attracted to (often mistakenly referred to as sexual preference).

KEY DEFINITIONS

THIS GLOSSARY DEFINES SOME OF THE MOST COMMON TERMS YOU WILL READ THROUGHOUT THIS GUIDE.

Social Capital: The features of social organizations such as networks, norms and trust that increase a society’s productive potential.

Social Change: The transformation in the formal and informal systems of society that lead to positive outcomes such as greater openness, equality and appreciation amongst people.

Target Population: The precise targeting, support and servicing of an impacted population within a larger, more general population.

Theory of Change: An organization’s intended and defined path to social impact and change that considers the short-term, intermediate and long-term causes that impacts the goal.

Credit: Thanks to C4 Atlanta’s Hatch Training Intensive Student Workbook for contributing to this definitions page.

Sources: artEquity, Ignite! The Anti-Racist Toolkit, The Culture War in the Civil Rights Movement by Joe Street, Race Forward, “[Race Reporting Guide](#),” King Center, Positive Peace Warrior Network, Colors of Resistance, Baltimore Racial Justice Action, Aspen Institute and Movement Strategy Center.

SECTION 1: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS & COMMON THEMES

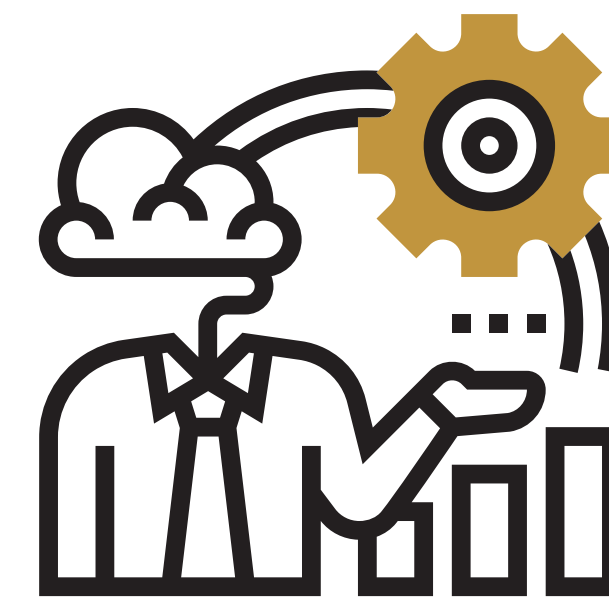
“The increased need is a constant for our organization. We never come close to meeting the actual community need and we regularly respond to disasters and emerging issues that force us to re-evaluate our priorities and allocation of resources.”
– Florida SouthStrong Partner

Based on the successes and roadblocks experienced by SouthStrong partners and survey participants, this guide is intertwined across three common themes:



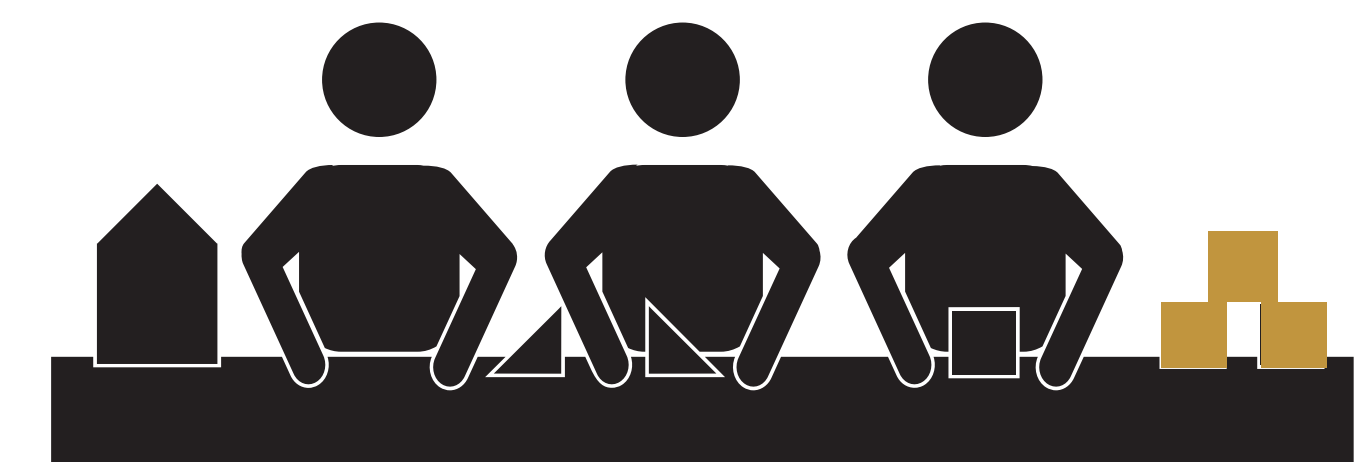
COMMON THEME #1:

SERVICE TO DIVERSE COMMUNITIES



COMMON THEME #2:

CAPABILITY AND CAPACITY



COMMON THEME #3:

EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY BUILDING

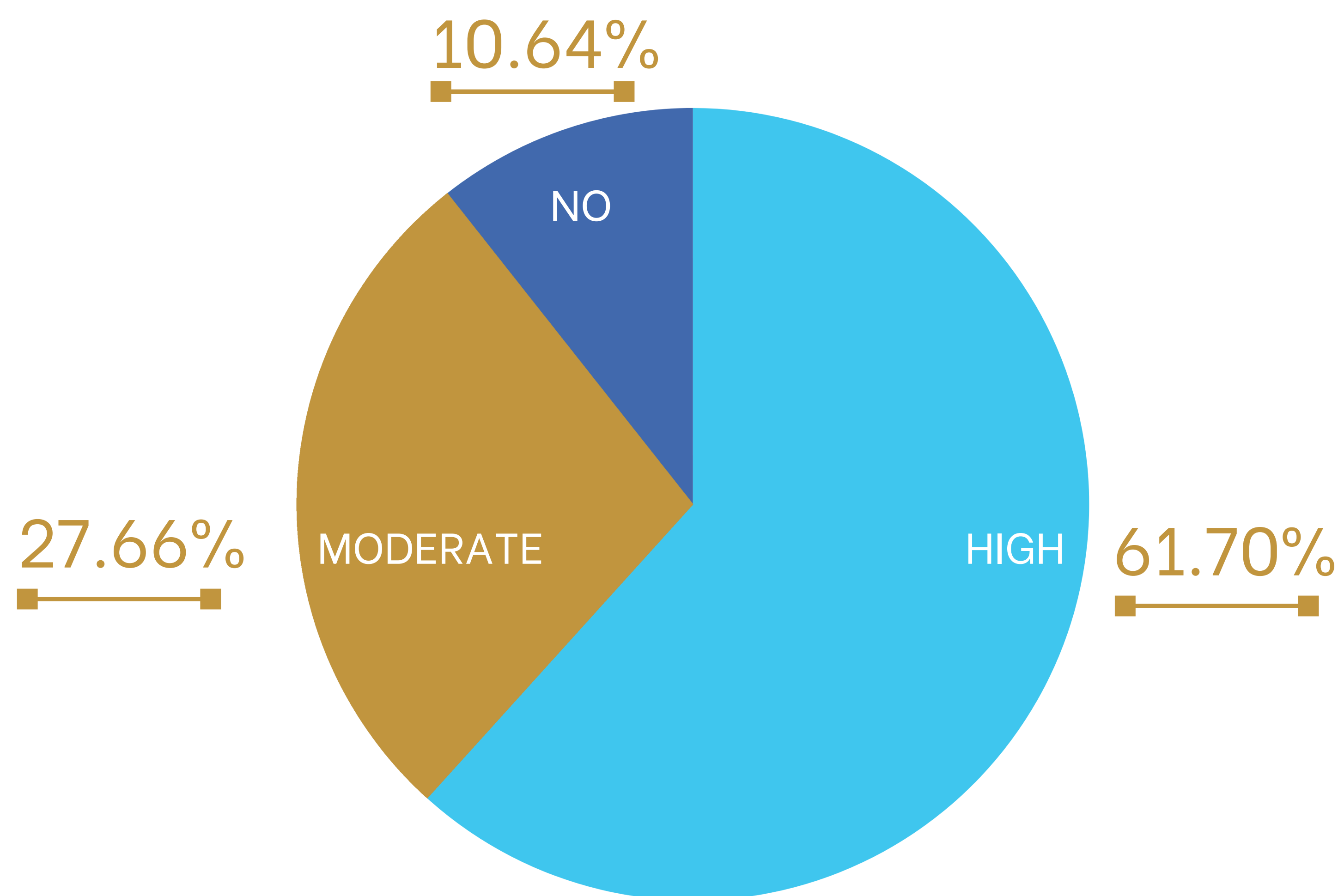
National demographic trends project America will continue to become more racially and ethnically diverse by 2030, and that these populations vary across cities and regions. Particularly in the Southern region, demographic factors play a key role in directing SouthStrong partners approaches and resources to their community base. Based on recent Census data¹, 38% of the United States' total population reside in the South and is the fastest growing region in the US with more than 14.3 million people added in a 10 year span (2000–2010)².

Prior to the COVID-19 health crisis, nonprofit and NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) were used to meeting the needs of their base despite what they had available to them. In movement work, it is common to have a small overworked staff who are forced to do a lot with very little. Surveyed partners identified two high stress points affecting their abilities to fully meet the needs of their populations: access to funding and limited staff capacity.

Echoed within our Civic Engagement Working Group and throughout survey responses; Southern organizations have grown accustomed to working in silos. Grassroots organizations understand the effectiveness of learning about the needs of their constituency and connecting with other stakeholders to amplify their messaging and on the ground work. SouthStrong partners are interested and ready to act on intersectional issues, policies and services across local jurisdictions and state lines, with a heavy emphasis on maintaining integrity and transformational collaboration.

SECTION 2: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN THE SOUTH

“...Many in the South have apathy towards civic engagement, but if it is done at the right time, it can be effective. No matter the timing, it has to gain the trust of the citizens.” – Georgia SouthStrong partner



Was civic engagement a high priority in your organization's strategic planning prior to the pandemic?

Based on the mission statements provided by SouthStrong partners, comprised of NGOs, academic institutions, advocates and advocacy groups, their intended impact includes some form of shifting the civic and social lives of their constituency and the communities they represent.

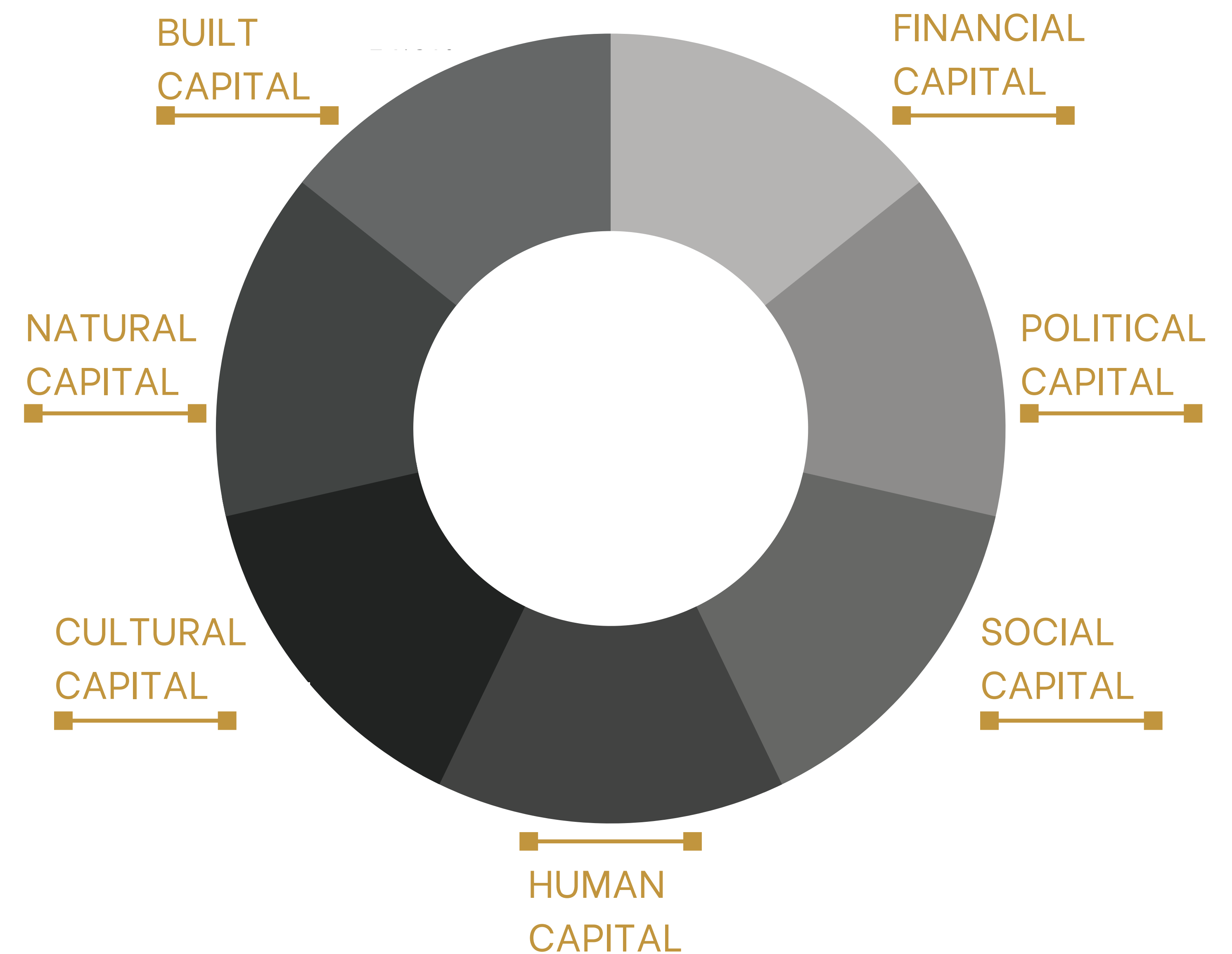
Given the unique nature of civic engagement work, we asked partners to share their perspective on the uniqueness of civic engagement, specifically in the Southern region, and asked if civic engagement was a high priority in their organization's strategic planning prior to the pandemic. While close to 90% of surveyed organizations made civic engagement either a high or moderate priority collectively, over 10% of respondents *did not* hold civic engagement as a priority. However, in open-ended responses, organizations have since shifted the priority to include civic engagement tactics in the wake of the COVID-19 health crisis.

When an organization's target population has continuously felt the effects of marginalization, deceit or inaction from officials in power, civic engagement strategies can be tough to implement. However, a common thread among SouthStrong partners is centered on the importance of relationship building which can only be effective when an intentional foundation of trust is formed amongst all involved.

LET'S GET TO WORK!

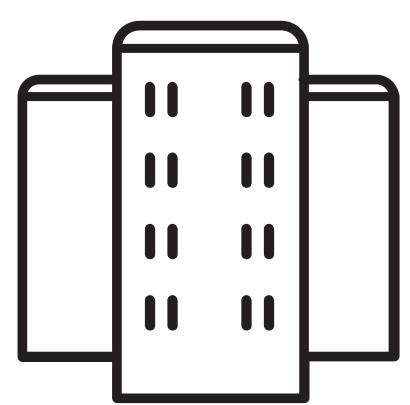
Civic Engagement in the South relies heavily on trusted relationships. More importantly, when diving into deep engagement of historically marginalized communities, such as Black and Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC), there are systems and theories we should consider in our approach. The foundation of any community outreach and support begins with properly assessing the community and how it functions, the identities of those living and working there and their needs and strengths. We will explore the asset-based approach to community development that builds on its assets to mobilize people. It is important to approach community organizing and development from an asset-building framework and we start with what is already within the community and exploring “community capital” is one of the first starting points to best understanding *your* community.

Cornelia and Jan Flora with Susan Fey developed the Community Capitals Framework while professors at Iowa State University as an approach to analyze how communities work. They found that communities were most successful if seven key capital components were attended to. Defined in the diagram to the right, are the seven key capital components to help us to understand the breakdown of community: built capital, natural capital, cultural capital, human capital, social capital, political capital and financial capital.



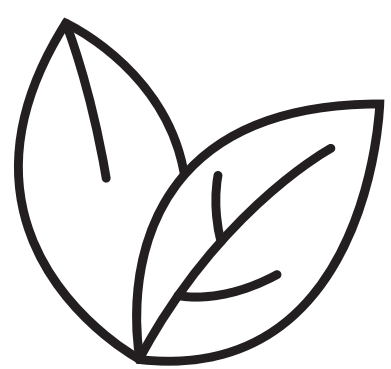
**This model was adapted from “Spiraling-Up: Mapping Community Transformation on with Community Capitals Framework.” Emery and Flora (2006).*

LET'S EXPLORE EACH FURTHER



1

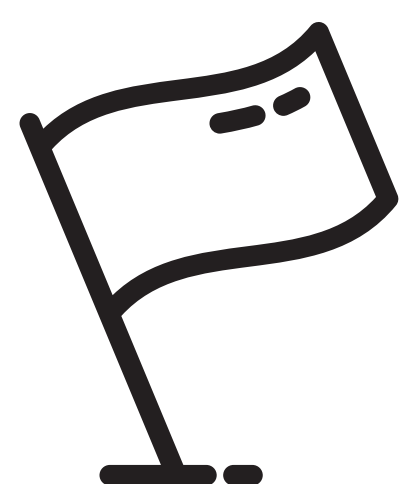
Built Capital includes human-made structures like your community's buildings, equipment, information and infrastructure. Are there historic or abandoned buildings in the community? What type of equipment is needed for maintenance? If you live in an agricultural community then you'd probably see a lot of tractors and other farming equipment. Where do residents and visitors gain information about the community? How is the infrastructure within the community set? Are there bridges, highways or state roads? What is the condition of infrastructure?



2

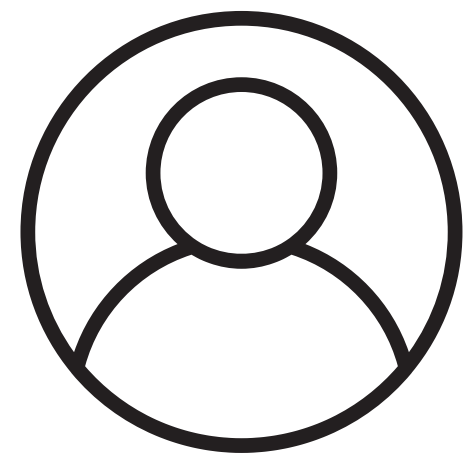
Natural Capital includes the community's natural resources and the man-made system to support the natural ecosystem is broken down into three categories:

- Natural Resources – The food, water, metals, wood and energy that are natural to the environment.
- Ecosystem Service – This includes the infrastructure that maintains your community's natural resources for safe use. These structures include, but are not limited to fisheries, soil fertility treatment, water filtration or carbon dioxide → oxygen conversion.
- Beauty of Nature – The overall natural beauty of your environment. Whether your community has mountains, seashores, forests, etc., it is important to take inventory of the natural landscape of your community and the beauty it offers.



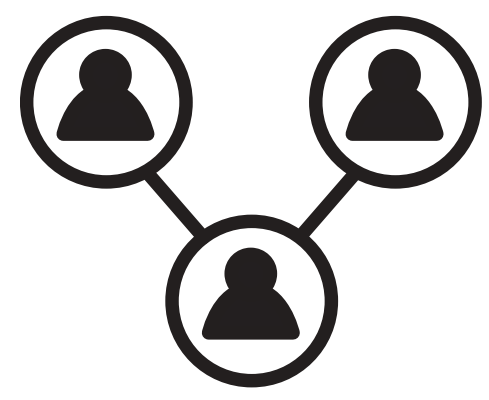
3

Cultural Capital is how the people in your community think, act and share values related to cultural linkages, heritage, tradition and/or language. This could include the broad perspective of how community members believe they can influence their futures and the spectrum for which that resides. More tangibly, think about how the community publicly celebrates diverse people and their culture(s).



4

Human Capital considers the skills, health, ability and education of your community's residents. When thinking about human capital, a few questions to ask yourself may include: What types of industries exist within the community and what are the skills needed for its people to work? How healthy is the community's people overall? Is there a hospital or access to medical care in the area? What type of education offerings are available within the community? Are there a lot of public or private schools? Are there any institutions of higher learning embedded within the community? What is the average highest level of education attained from the community's residents?



5

Social Capital considers the strength of various connections within the community. These include family, neighbors, the overall community and how the government interfaces with these groups. When thinking about the community's social capital, it's important to think through the ways in which people socialize and create spaces for networking, togetherness and fun.



6

Political Capital is the community's access to power and its brokers. This capital also refers to how the community uses their individual and collective voice to speak and act for the overall well-being of the community. How are residents actively participating in the political process or elections as activists, candidates, policy analysts, etc.? How diverse are residents who are participating?



7

Financial Capital are the available resources that can be used to support and invest in the infrastructure of the community. Whether business development, youth, capacity building or the support of civic and social entrepreneurship, financial capital is essential to the upward mobility of the community for the present and its future.

All seven types of capital are necessary for communities to function, and should be **cared for**, nurtured and improved by the community over time.

CREDIT: [HTTP://SRDC.MSSTATE.EDU/FOP/LEVELTHREE/TRAINARC/SOCIALCAPITAL/COMMUNITYCAPITALSTODEVELOPASSETS-EMERYFEYFLORA2006.PDF](http://SRDC.MSSTATE.EDU/FOP/LEVELTHREE/TRAINARC/SOCIALCAPITAL/COMMUNITYCAPITALSTODEVELOPASSETS-EMERYFEYFLORA2006.PDF)

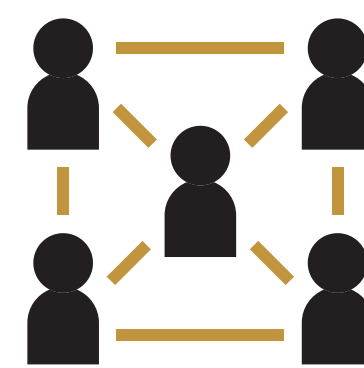
DEFICIT-BASED VS ASSET-BASED DEVELOPMENT

Think about a time you, a friend or family member needed something. Did you or that friend or family member immediately ask a neighbor, or did you seek assistance from a professional service or institution? We immediately seek the counsel of those we trust the most who can then direct us to the services and institutions they trust. If we approached solutions by leading with assets, or the internal capacity that exists, we could create shared responsibility within a community for its needs. To successfully assess a community's needs, the principles for approaching existing community capacity are outlined below:



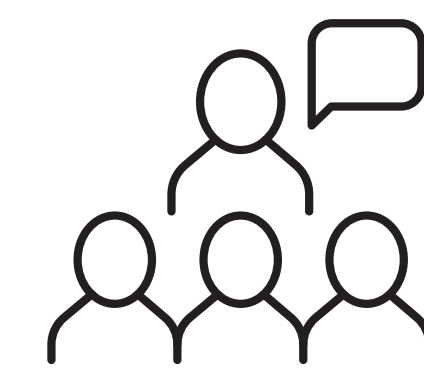
Everyone Has Gifts

People can and want to contribute to the community. Everyone in the community has something to offer. Everyone is needed and gifts must be discovered.



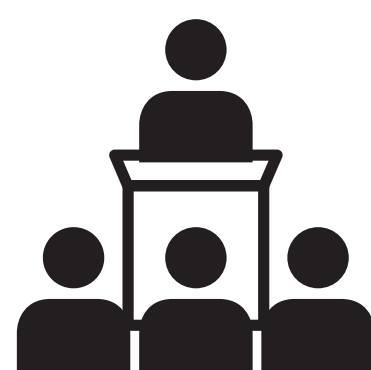
Relationships Build a Community

Recognize them, make them and utilize them. An intentional effort to build and maintain relationships is key.



People are at the Core

It is essential to engage the wider community as active participants not just as recipients of services.



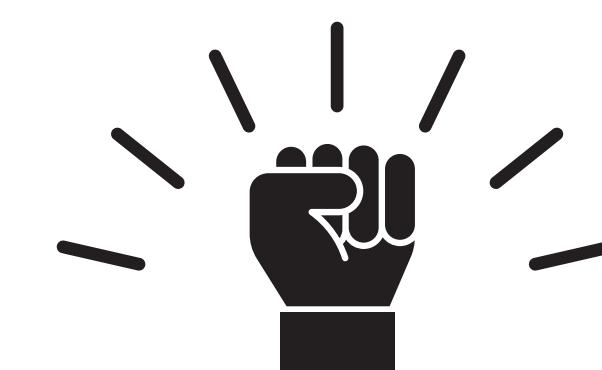
Leaders Actively Engage Others

Leaders from the wider community of voluntary associations, congregations, neighborhoods and local business can engage others from their sector. This form of leadership utilizes relationships, inclusion, showing and sharing to lead involvement based on trust.



People DO Care

We must discover what people in communities care about rather than respond to needs.



Motivation to Act

Communities are filled with motivations that move its people into action. However, we must listen for those motivations and highlight what they are: whether issues or contributions.



Listening Conversation

A great way to discover motivation and invite participation is to host one-on-one meetings or small group conversations. Forms, surveys and asset maps can be useful tools to help guide your listening and build relationships.



Ask!

By asking questions and inviting community members to activities, this shows that you are listening and that their talent and perspectives are respected. Terms like “join us” or “we need you” encourage this heightened level of support.



Encourage Stronger Participation

Usually, outside experts are commissioned to help communities solve their problems. Instead of this “outside-in” approach, a more powerful way to engage the community is to address pressing questions with the community and agencies/institutions should take the lead in helping find answers.



Organize from the “Inside-Out”

Local folks who control the organization have a unique perspective by being on the inside. If you empower local leaders to set their own agendas, then you are allowing them to organize from the “inside-out.”



Institutions Have Reached Capacity for Problem-Solving

Institutions such as government, nonprofit organizations and businesses are at capacity (both administratively and in bandwidth) to solve every community problem. The institutions will be unsuccessful in solving these problems unless they increase their capacity by engaging the community in finding solutions.



Institutions’ Role as Servants

Local residents are more well-equipped to engage their communities. Institutional leaders have a responsibility to lead by taking a step back and creating opportunities for citizens to fully engage in democracy.

CONTENT ADAPTED FROM: [HTTPS://WWW.NURTUREDEVELOPMENT.ORG/ASSET-BASED-COMMUNITY-DEVELOPMENT/](https://www.nurtureddevelopment.org/asset-based-community-development/)

SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES

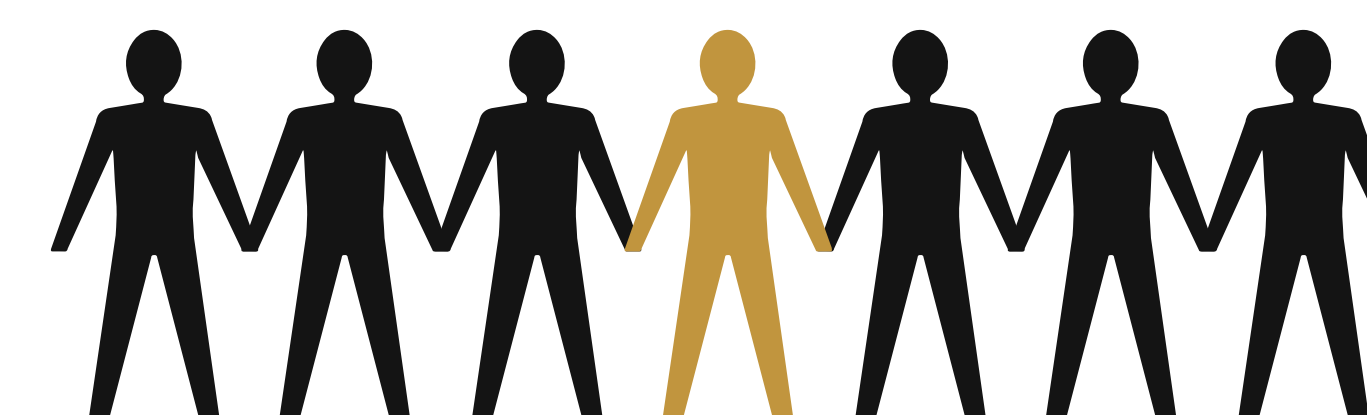
DEVELOP TRUST

Relationship development and maintenance sits at the core of any successful civic engagement strategy. Through your work, you have the power to transform communities, but in order for you to make your greatest impact and receive overwhelming community buy-in, you must serve as a trusted partner in helping the impacted community realize their full potential. Again, the key word here is trust, and it is not difficult to ascertain if done with respect, an open mind, patience and honesty. In the South, people are driven and often moved to action by their relationships and that action is determined by the role social action groups and organizations play in their lives. As you present your mission and purpose to community members, they may seem hesitant at first but consider this apprehension the result of a long history of broken promises from institutions and government entities who are required to serve them. Being an active participant in the lives of those assumed to have little interest in the civic trajectory of their community takes work, but is rewarding when you are welcomed with open arms by a community who cares very deeply about their future. Start your approach with the assumption that regardless of the community's status, its residents can and want to transform their community and their own lives for the better. Below, we'll explore proven ways you can build trust with any community you are looking to support.



Ask Questions & Listen

We can't stress this point enough. Listening is a key component to hearing the community. Be intentional with the questions you pose when learning more about the community, and be prepared to hold genuine space for people to share their stories or responses. Whether you host a listening session, focus group or survey a targeted area with deep canvassing – understanding the concerns and needs of the community is your ultimate goal. For example, your organization may be working on preparing your legislative priorities for the upcoming year's legislative session and you decide to canvass a district's residents on their thoughts on expanding Medicaid. However, you find in your canvass results that education cuts are deeply affecting educational outcomes for school-aged children. Now knowing this, you can more confidently pivot your legislative strategy, work with the legislator(s) who represent the community and have a better frame of reference to discuss an issue that actually affects the people.



Identify the Leaders It is important to identify the community leaders and influencers of your community. These may be faith leaders, elected officials, long-time residents or activists. Whatever the makeup of this group, the intent is to work closely with them to develop realistic benchmarks, goals and next steps as you work together to bring long-lasting change to the area.

SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES

Entertain “Front Porch Conversation” In the South, business comes secondary to relationships and communities are very sensitive to perceived outsiders. This statement is not an indictment on business dealings or an assumption of a deprioritization of necessary work, but rather a recognition that the people *doing* the work matters in the South and that dealings are less transactional. When engaging with any principal, elected official, community leader or influencer, conversation will often start around an array of familial topics like sports (particularly SEC football), family, travel or food. Welcome these conversations and be an active participant in getting to know the person you are engaging with. This is part of the relationship building process that is weaved in the culture of “Southern hospitality” in the South.



Host 1:1 Meetings 1:1 meetings are typically in-person meetings with a community member, leader or influencer to discuss your intentions within the community. These meetings are helpful to build community support for your particular issue. During these sessions, leaders should be asked questions about their work and their reach while you gauge their interest in helping support your work. These meetings typically last 30 minutes to an hour depending on the topics discussed. Be sure to ask about any contacts they would be willing to connect you to within the week. It is important to bring a tool to capture the names and contact information from the person you are meeting with.



Keep Your Word When you are beginning to build trust in a community, it is important that you quickly develop a reputation for delivering on your promises, both big and small. This does not mean guaranteeing your organization will fix the issue or policy or even reach the desired outcome, it simply means you will work diligently toward it. Communities, especially diverse communities in the South, unfortunately have become used to being on the receiving end of broken promises, so your commitment to being different through swift follow-through is vitally important and shows you are serious about the investment you’re making in the community. Remember, “the fortune is in the follow-up” and is mutually beneficial for you and the community.



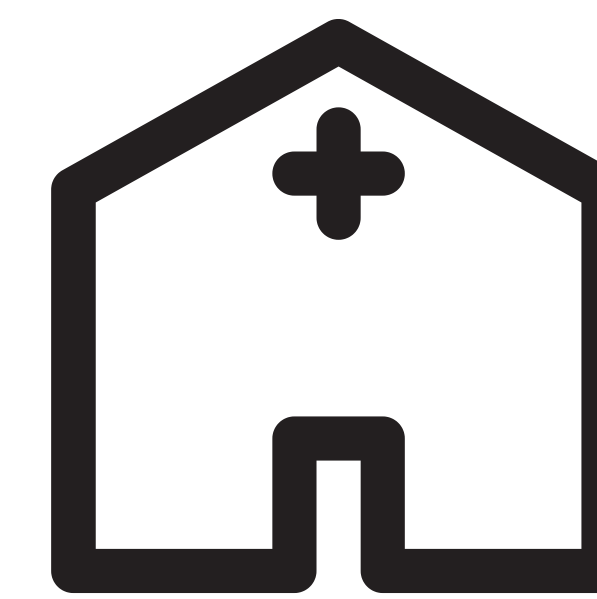
Give Homework Assignments Want to move community stakeholders to action fast? Give them a homework assignment! Although this assignment won't be reviewed and graded for a report card, it will be helpful to your work and will also give your stakeholders an opportunity to actively participate in altering the future of their community in a positive way. This "homework assignment" reinforces the idea that community stakeholders possess the expertise needed to reach community sovereignty and removes the notion that they are being saved or "worked on" but that you all are working together.



Check-In Often Keeping your line of communication open often is a key facet in building a solid community relationship. Checking in with your identified community stakeholders, or cold-calling/emailing new contacts further establishes the seriousness of your objective and that you intend on maintaining a long-lasting relationship after the work has been done. Personally, whether friends or family, we develop a tight-knit bond with certain individuals because we communicate with them often. Any relationship takes work and that is no different when building relationships within the community.



You Are the Student Although your organization may possess the much needed research, information and/or policy recommendations for the community's benefit, remind your team that you are to assume the role as students of the community. Think of your relationship as a dance, and you each take turns leading as you both are in positions to teach one another. You'll begin to find your groove eventually, but starting in a space of submission to the community recognizes the teaching that comes from their expertise through their lived experience within the community.



Tap Into Faith Many people in the South are led by their faith beliefs. Faith leaders and their institutions of worship are revered as anchors to their communities and offer a wide array of services such as, but not limited to, counseling, housing, food and even bills and utilities support. When appropriate, enlist the support of faith leaders within the community. Not only can they offer much needed validation to your work, but will work alongside you in your strategy as a trusted messenger sharing key issue points to reach their congregation and surrounding community in ways you may not.



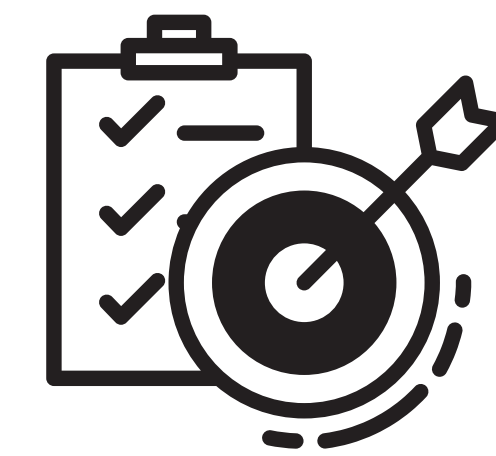
Stay Transparent and Honest When working within any community, set an example of what honest and transparent leadership looks like by keeping them in the loop. Based on the nature of our work, sometimes we are not always the recipients of good news, but it is always a good idea to keep your stakeholders abreast of any and all developments as well as any budgetary wins or roadblocks. When dealing with funds particularly, give constant updates on approved spending, gifts or other items of note. Do not assume that all donors, volunteers, or other community members will read heavy text documents and be sure to offer updated information on legislation, internal wins or pivots. Any financial information and updates should be in both long and summarized formats.



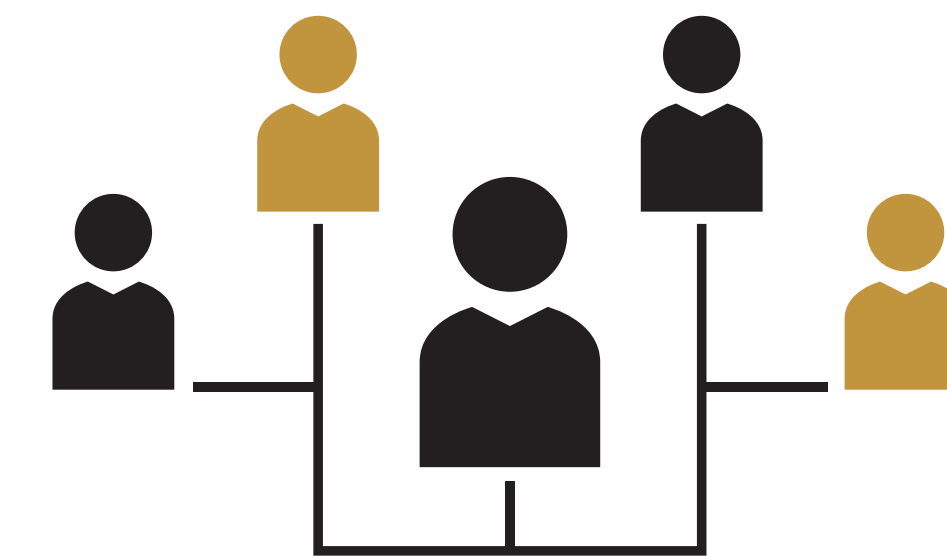
Make an Ask! Would your closest friends and family help you with meeting your goal? More than likely, yes. However, it is important to make sure that when you engage anyone in participating in an activity for your mission, you **MUST** make a direct ask. Why ask for anything? You want the person in your new or existing relationship to feel empowered and know they have a role within your mission. This establishes the level of accountability they have to you and your mission and allows them to own a piece of that. Make the ask specific and actionable. No matter the request, failure to make a direct ask could be the difference between stagnation or moving your issue forward.

Examples of Direct Asks Include:

- “*Could you provide me the names of 5 people within your network who you believe would be interested in learning more?*”
- “*Do you mind making the connection to [name] by this Thursday?*”
- “*Would you co-host a virtual town hall on [issue] with our organization on [date]?*”



Set Realistic Goals and Manage Expectations Taking inventory of your own internal capacity is important. When working alongside a community on a project or issue, set realistic goals and manage expectations by clearly stating the capacity of your team and not making promises you cannot keep. If your team is small, and you are handling a large issue, you may need to more heavily rely on the skills and capacity of the community (this is where your asset-based development comes in, wink wink). When you are honest about what you can do, you remove unnecessary stress on the team and the accompanying assumption that you will tackle everything alone. Be reminded that people are understanding and more flexible than we realize, so don't be afraid to be honest about what you can commit to and delegate the rest.

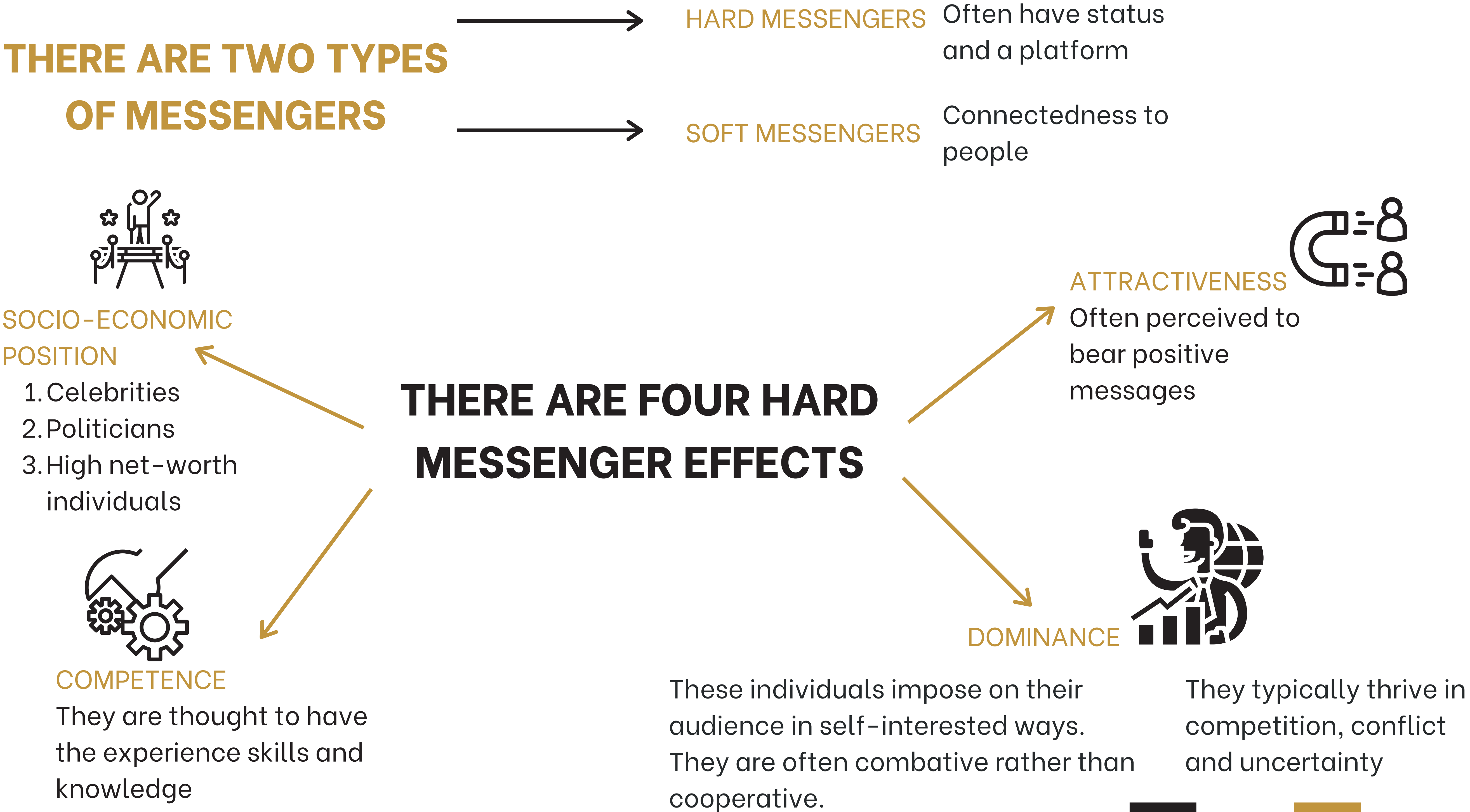


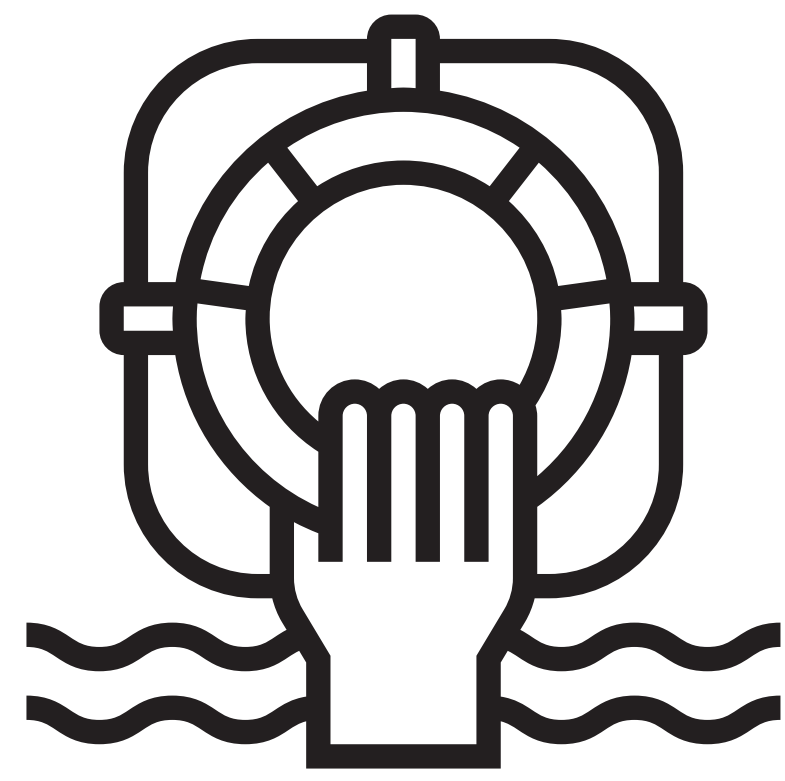
Offer Your Network and Resources One of the key tenets to the SouthStrong network is the peer-to-peer sharing of beneficial resources and networks. Everyone has a network, and one of the best ways we can show support is by extending our network to those who may need it. When working within a community, offer your networks and share any resources that you may come across that could help the community. Whether your network includes a group of donors focused on decreasing maternal mortality rates or granting available financial resources to youth doing voter registration, all network connections and resources are welcome. This is the time to help the community and any of its leaders shine (many who have been working within the community for decades).

THE TRUTH BEHIND TRUSTED MESSENGERS

THE MESSENGER MATTERS

In the South, trusted messengers matter. Studies have shown that the perceived trustworthiness of the messenger is oftentimes more important than the actual message. Joseph Marks and Stephen Martin, authors of *Messengers: Who We Listen To, Who We Don't, And Why* help us break down how trusted messengers show up in the world, and how we, their loyal following, often perceive them. Below, we outline their theory to help us better determine what type of trusted messenger we may need to accomplish our goals within the community and how to weed out those that cannot help our causes.



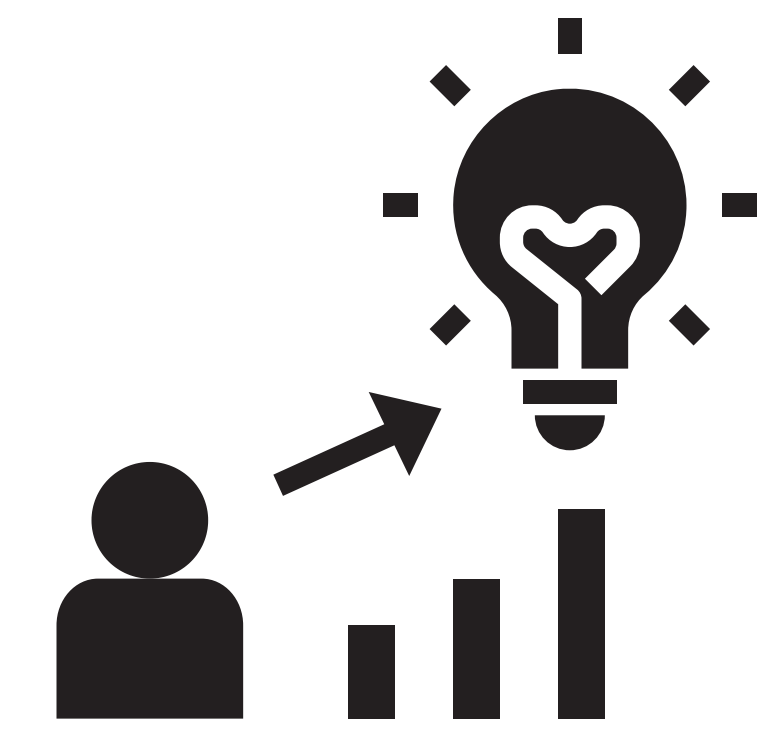


VULNERABILITY

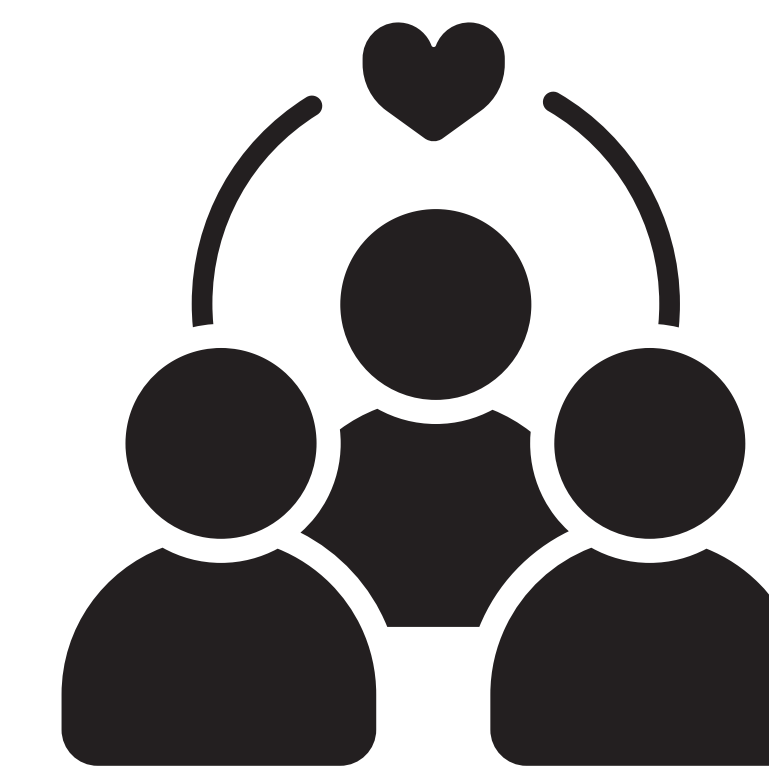
Our impulse to help others

CONVERSELY, THERE ARE FOUR SOFT MESSENGER EFFECTS

CHARISMA



These are individuals who possess a compelling attractiveness or charm that inspires devotion in others.



TRUSTWORTHINESS

A messenger can earn “group credits” from their audience that can help cover the cost of future mistakes or even wrongdoing they may engage in. This may help explain how some messengers can deceive and lie to their audiences while still maintaining their position and loyalty.

Trust is crucial to any human relationship.

Two broad forms of trust:

Competence based trust

Confidence in a messenger’s capabilities

Integrity based trust

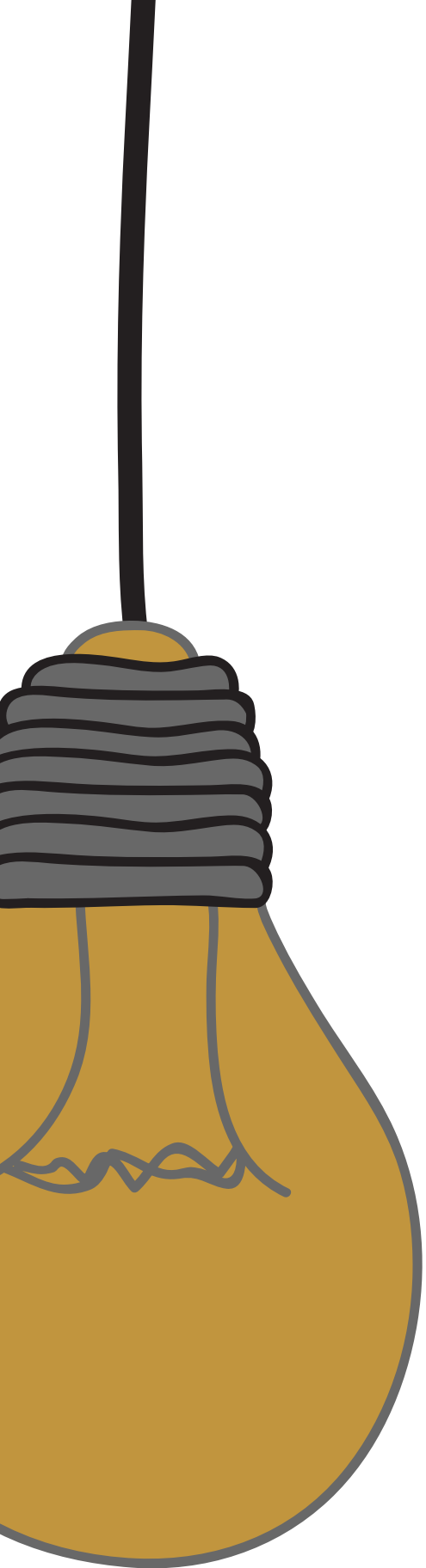
Belief that the messenger will uphold good moral standards even if the temptation to violate them arises.

WARMTH

These are individuals who care about the welfare of their audience and would rather cooperate than compete and don’t seek to use their status but rather benevolence.

They often use warm language to help smooth their social interactions.

SOURCE: [HTTPS://WWW.MESSENGERTHEBOOK.COM/](https://www.messengersthebook.com/)



PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN ACTION

Who is Fair Count?

A 501(c)(3) organization, Fair Count is dedicated to partnering with hard-to-count (HTC) communities to achieve a fair and accurate count of all people in Georgia and the nation in the 2020 Census, and to strengthening the pathways to greater civic participation.

What is Unique About Fair Count's Civic Engagement Approach?

Fair Count was founded with the understanding that [HTC communities](#) require a deeper level of engagement and education than others. With that, Fair Count developed their strategy around a unique civic engagement strategy that recognizes the barriers to Census participation in mostly rural areas of Georgia.

“COUNTING”
ON CIVIC
ENGAGEMENT
FAIR COUNT





According to www.nonprofitvote.org, the Census Bureau recognizes a range of sociodemographic and other groups as hard-to-count. The following list of persons are at risk of being undercounted in the decennial census. These individuals are considered hard-to-locate; hard-to-contact; hard-to-persuade; and/or hard-to-interview.

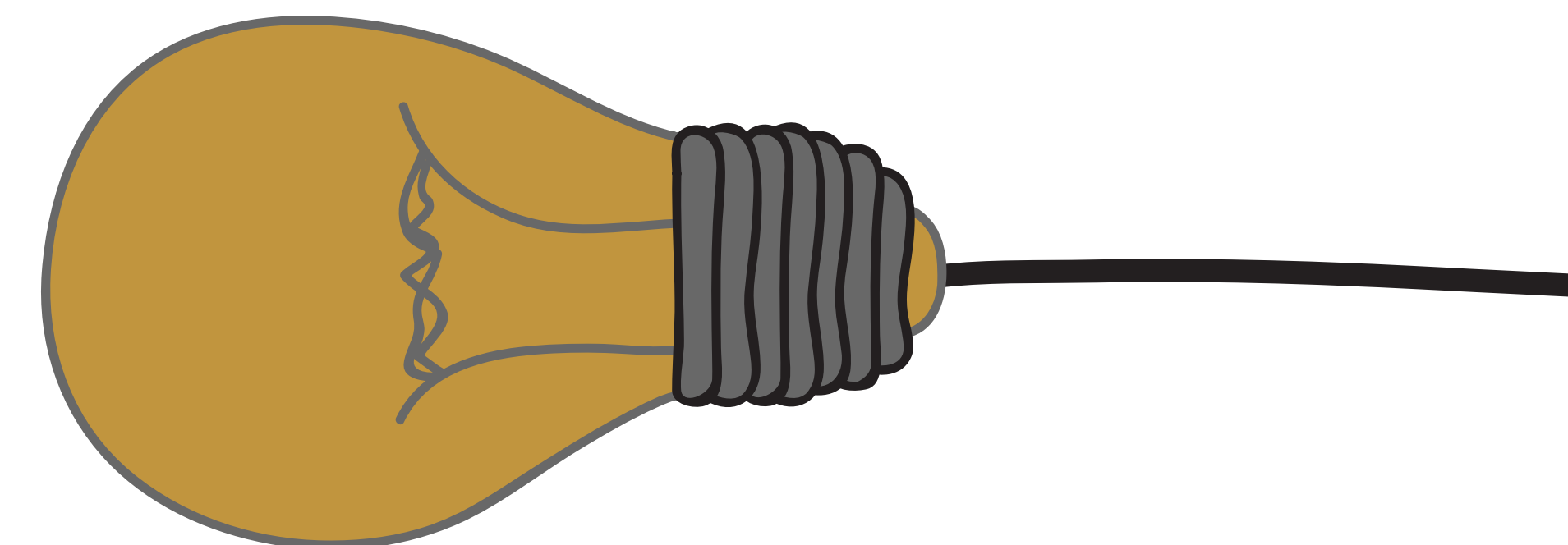
- Complex households including those with blended families, multi-generations, or non-relatives
- Cultural and linguistic minorities
- Displaced persons affected by a disaster
- Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer/questioning persons
- Low income persons
- Persons experiencing homelessness
- Persons less likely to use the internet or those without internet access
- Persons residing in places difficult for enumerators to access, such as buildings with strict doormen, gated communities, and basement apartments
- Persons residing in rural or geographically isolated areas
- Persons who do not live in traditional housing
- Persons who do not speak English fluently (or have limited English proficiency)
- Persons who have distrust in the government
- Persons with mental and/or physical disabilities
- Persons without a high school diploma
- Racial and ethnic minorities
- Renters
- Undocumented immigrants (or recent immigrants)
- Young children
- Young, transient persons

How Did Fair Count Pivot Their Civic Engagement Approach During the Pandemic?

Face-to-face conversation will always reign supreme as the most effective way to engage and organize any community, however at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, Fair Count staff found themselves asking a difficult question while making the virtual organizing pivot, “how do we authentically organize HTC communities when our actual target populations are not online?” This was particularly difficult because their target communities are heavily rural with very limited broadband connectivity.

Their pivot required a swift assessment of their social media platforms, online engagement, staff focus, available outreach tools and identifying which partners, if any, were already engaging in meaningful ways. Fair Count had to consider the following:

- “What organizations and/or partners were already hosting online events that we could tap into or partner with?”
- “Where does our target population most engage online? More specifically, who has access to engage?”
- “How can we stay creative in our engagement, when we’re unable to showcase the initial innovative strategy?”



The below considerations also forced Fair Count to test out new theories of engagement:



Local partnerships have always been the bedrock to Fair Count's approach, but this localized focus proved itself a top priority in the midst of the uncertainty of the pandemic. More than ever, Fair Count prioritized highlighting local voices and organizations who were deemed as trusted messengers in the community.



Fair Count organized their efforts with local faith leaders on Census engagement. Why? Faith leaders and places of worship are a vital part of many communities, particularly those in the South. Faith leaders gave Census-themed sermons and passed commitment cards to their congregations in support and partnership of Fair Count's Census work.



Fair Count's streamed online events received more traffic after being aired live. Why? Since Fair Count recorded the event, they were able to share the event widely within their network through online platforms and even via their texting campaigns. This resulted in an uptick of engagement of their previously aired events for those who were interested, but unable to attend.



Fair Count switched to phone banking and patch-through calls connecting community members directly to the Census Bureau, thus removing the responsibility of residents needing to make the call themselves.



Fair Count relied more heavily on SMS texting campaigns to reach their population. This offered a direct touch to community members who needed information on the Census and its importance. Now, more people utilize cell phones as their sole mode of internet connectivity and can complete tasks on their phone, rather than on a computer. Sending a text with embedded links makes that easy.



Fair Count distributed over 200 hotspots in targeted rural community spaces that receive high foot-traffic (like community centers, churches, or barber shops) in mid-2019, however, limited broadband is a larger rural Georgia issue. To ensure no one was left out of the engagement, Fair Count met rural community members where they were and hosted telephone town hall meetings to remove the virtual barrier of participation for many.



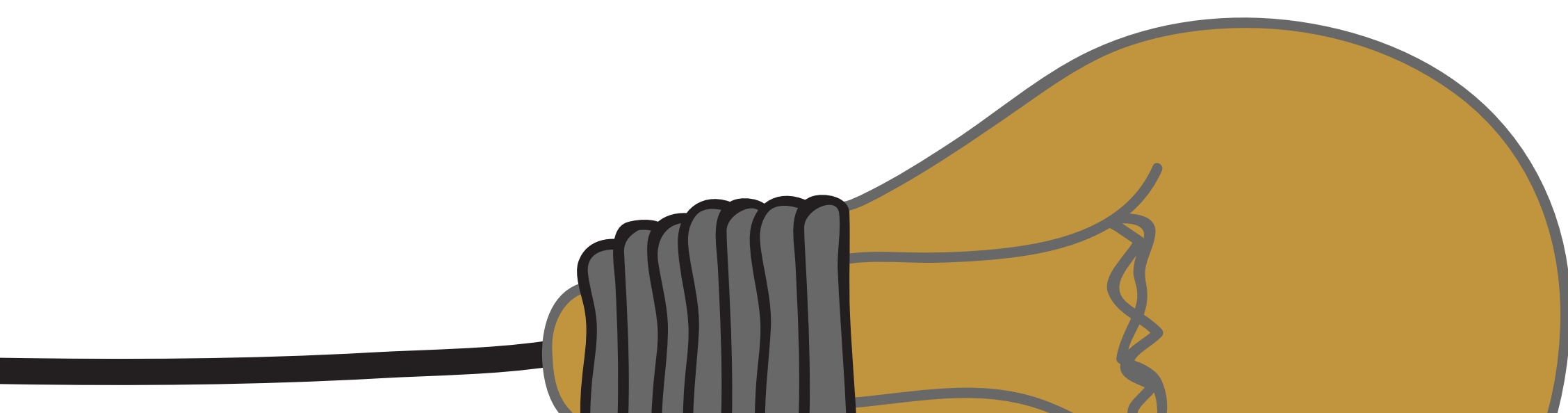
Fair Count organizers who were embedded in target areas were shifted from their canvass efforts to phone banking, texting and researching essential services. While staying true to their mission, Fair Count also had to meet the needs of those who were hardest hit in low-income and communities of color, with the distribution of 400,000 Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) kits and food at local food banks where hundreds completed their Census applications on-site.



Prior to the start of the COVID-19 public health crisis, Fair Count had a statewide bus tour planned to encourage in-person Census sign-up and engagement. Having to pivot, the bus tour went virtual which allowed for further reach. Various topics were covered like healthcare, education and services that are all impacted by the Census where experts could talk more about the topics. Fair Count used local influencers and leaders to promote the events, and even added multi-state tour stops. Fair Count's virtual bus tour hit more than 75 counties in Georgia and made stops in other states like Florida, South Carolina, Mississippi, Alabama and Louisiana.

Fair Count made its COVID-19 programming pivot still prioritizing their mission and because of their quick thinking and creative strategy, civic engagement served itself to be the organization's saving grace.

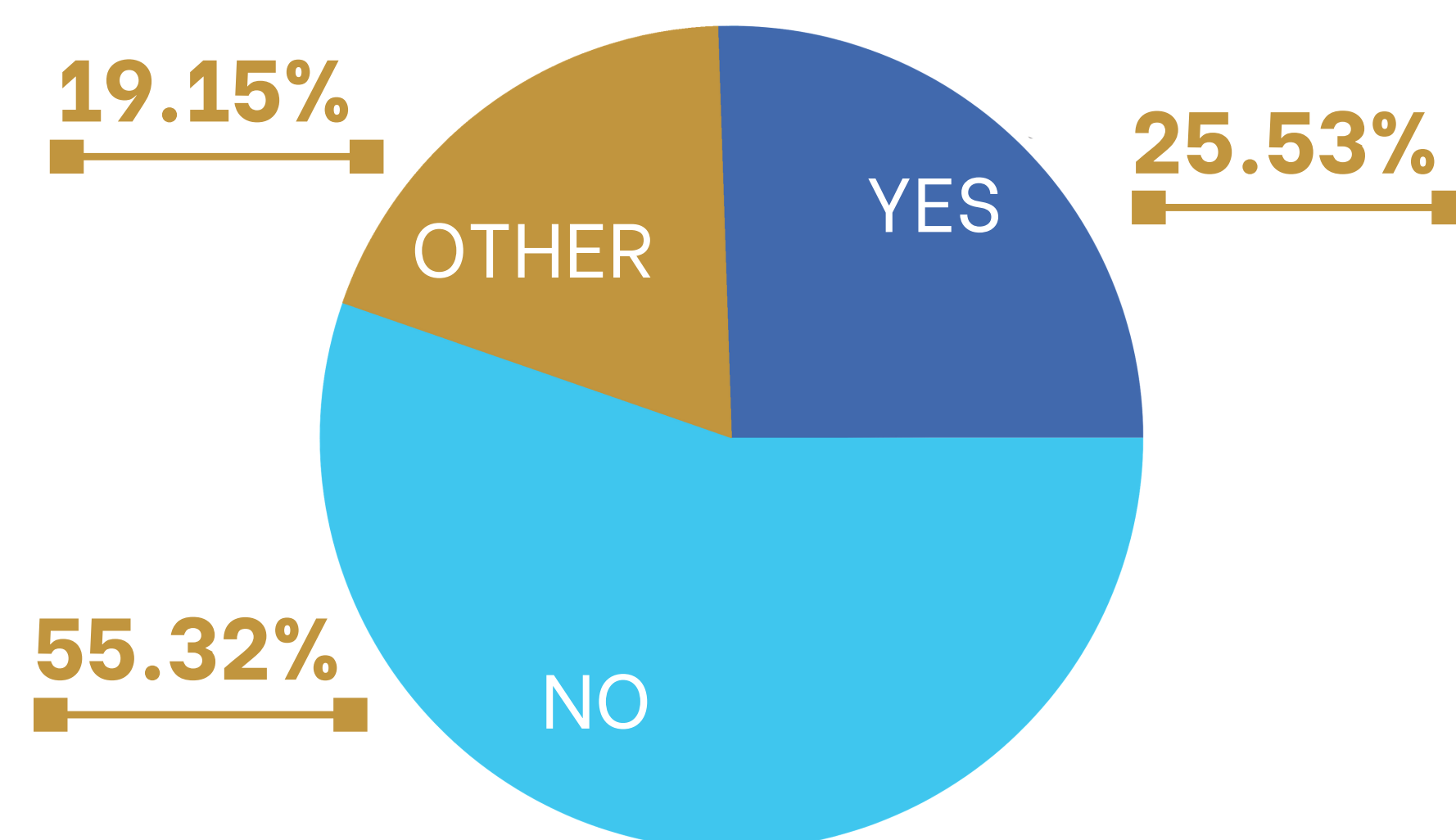
This information was shared at the approval of Dr. Jeanine Abrams McLean, Vice President of Fair Count.



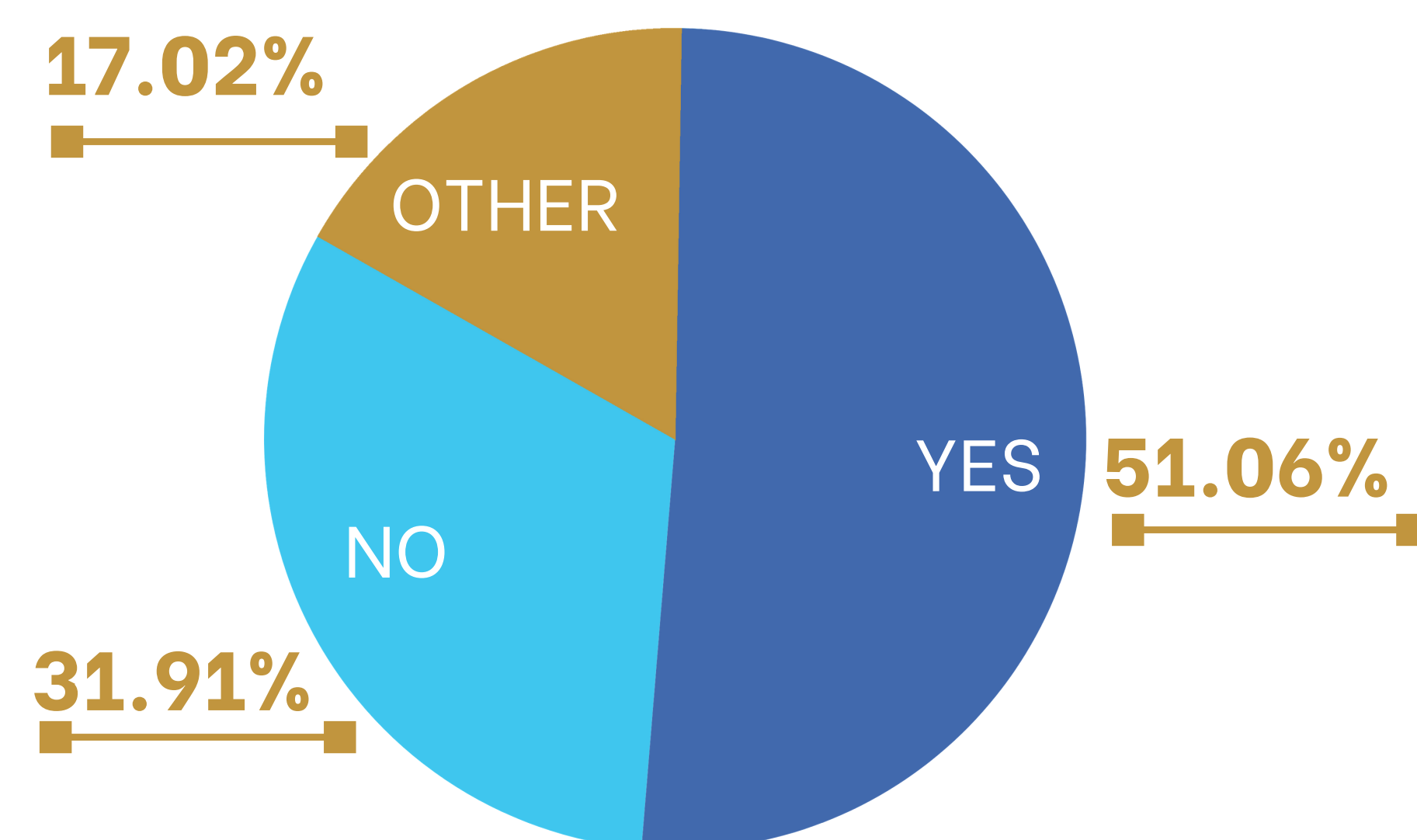
SECTION 3: CAPACITY GAPS & RESOURCES

“We received a small donation that allowed us to purchase a Zoom account (to not be bound to 40 minutes, and other aspects of the free version). And another gift allowed us to continue paying rent on our very small office space. We also received a modest Covid/LGBTQ grant, but it requires so much of us as part of the grant that it is almost more taxing than it is helpful since we are so small and always struggling anyway.” – North Carolina SouthStrong Partner

To assist your organization’s civic engagement, have you had to increase your staff capacity in response to the pandemic?



Has your organization been financially affected by the pandemic or experienced any budgetcuts?



“Other” Includes:

- Recruitment of college interns
- Focus on maintenance of staff through a PPP loan
- Need to increase, but unable to due to funding
- Have already staffed up for voter registration program and have been able to keep that staff.

Over 55% of respondents stated that their staff capacity did not change even given the increased need of their populations during COVID-19, while over 50% of respondents were financially affected by the pandemic. This finding offers insight into the challenges of nonprofit work for its leadership and their staff who service these diverse populations. These groups face the challenge of access to funding, its proximity to groups who service the most impacted and granting to organizations who are forced to survive a global public health crisis, harsh economic times and low morale while still meeting the needs of its constituents. In open-ended responses, nonprofit leaders talked about the need to increase their staff capacity, but the inability to do so, due to lack of funding, makes it incredibly difficult. SouthStrong partners are still meeting the increased needs of their communities with less money and little staff. Particularly during COVID-19, these organizations work around the clock to meet the increased service need but there are several challenges these organizations may face in meeting their full potential of capacity:

ORGANIZATIONAL OBSTACLES TO FULL POTENTIAL



Limited funding

Many nonprofit organizations depend on government funding in the form of grants, a matching scheme, or they may serve as safety net organizations to fill a gap when funds are short. As budgets shrink on the federal, state and local levels, this means there is less money to go around, which ultimately results in a decrease in staff capacity, programs or offered services.



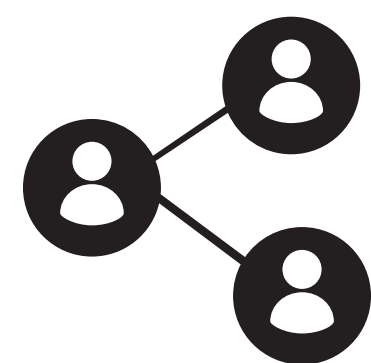
Stable cash flow and accurate budgeting

Consistent cash flow is difficult to achieve for most nonprofits which can make budgeting difficult. As income becomes more unreliable, the focus shifts to prioritizing administrative costs than programs. This unstable cycle forces organizations to run on a shoestring budget, thus learning how to do a lot, with very little.



Demand on results

This is often a vicious cycle smaller organizations are trapped in – you are unable to receive more funding if you are unable to show the impact of your work which is more difficult to calculate with less staff to share that responsibility.



Social impact work may come before business objectives

With increased demand on services and performance, nonprofits may struggle with managing its day-to-day business operations. This results in the organization's goals may supersede the goals of the business and leaves little for business sustainability.



Attracting and retaining top talent

Top talent who are attracted to offering their skills and expertise to the issues and causes they care about are already dedicated to the work, but retaining them may be tricky with limited resources.

CONTENT ADAPTED FROM: [HTTPS://WWW.UNIT4.COM/BLOG/8-CHALLENGES-FOR-NONPROFIT-ORGANIZATIONS](https://www.unit4.com/blog/8-challenges-for-nonprofit-organizations)

ORGANIZATIONS OBSTACLES TO FULL POTENTIAL



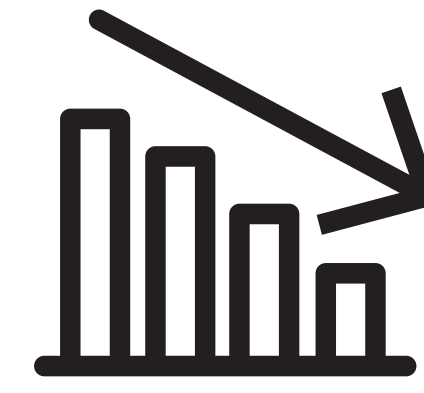
Increased need for services

Nonprofit organizations, now more than ever since the COVID-19 pandemic, are seeing an increased need of their services. Particularly in the South, where there is a deep, fractured history of poverty connected to structural racism and failed policies that disconnect opportunities for a strengthened economy for the most vulnerable, more people are facing tough economic times. School budgets are constantly being cut, the expansion of Medicaid for those who need it and safety nets are weakened while the burden on nonprofits to rapidly respond to unpredictable circumstances is an undue expectation.



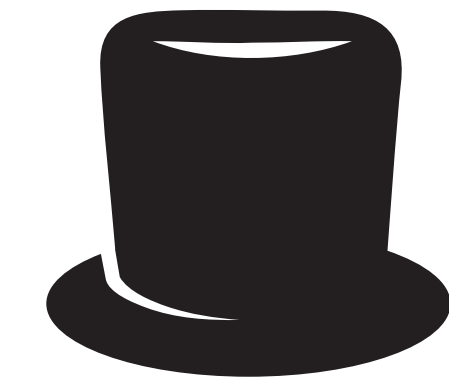
Organizations with parallel missions compete for the same funds

It is a common theme for organizations who have similar missions to compete for funds that support their work. This creates unintentional territory over the work and rivalry. This comparison of work does not foster an environment of collaboration, unity or support.



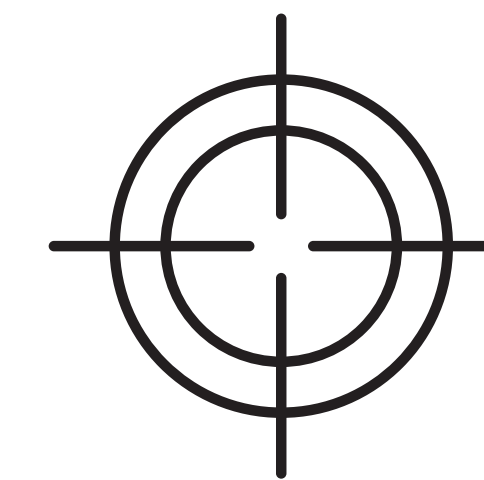
Decreased demand on mission

Even the most successful nonprofits could find themselves in a position to maintain their relevancy as the needs of target populations change. Once the organization successfully meets the need, the demand may decrease which pressures nonprofits to scale back or re-imagine its mission and programs.



Developing “Jacks/Jills-of-all-trades”

Nonprofit leaders and their staff wear many hats and could be deemed as “Jacks/Jills-of-all-trades” and “Masters-of-none.” It is important to identify where in your program you may need someone who has dedicated knowledge in a particular area of focus to support the overall success of the organization.



Losing sight of the mission in order to raise more funds

Some organizations who either struggle with raising funds or who are constantly seeking new funding opportunities may fall victim to misaligning their mission and purpose to meet the mission and purpose of a funder. To use more colloquial phrasing, the organization may fall victim to selling whatever the donor or funder is buying.

CONTENT ADAPTED FROM: [HTTPS://WWW.UNIT4.COM/BLOG/8-CHALLENGES-FOR-NONPROFIT-ORGANIZATIONS](https://www.unit4.com/blog/8-challenges-for-nonprofit-organizations)

WHAT OUR RESPONDENTS ARE SAYING ABOUT THEIR FUNDING AND CAPACITY

COMMUNITY DRIVEN

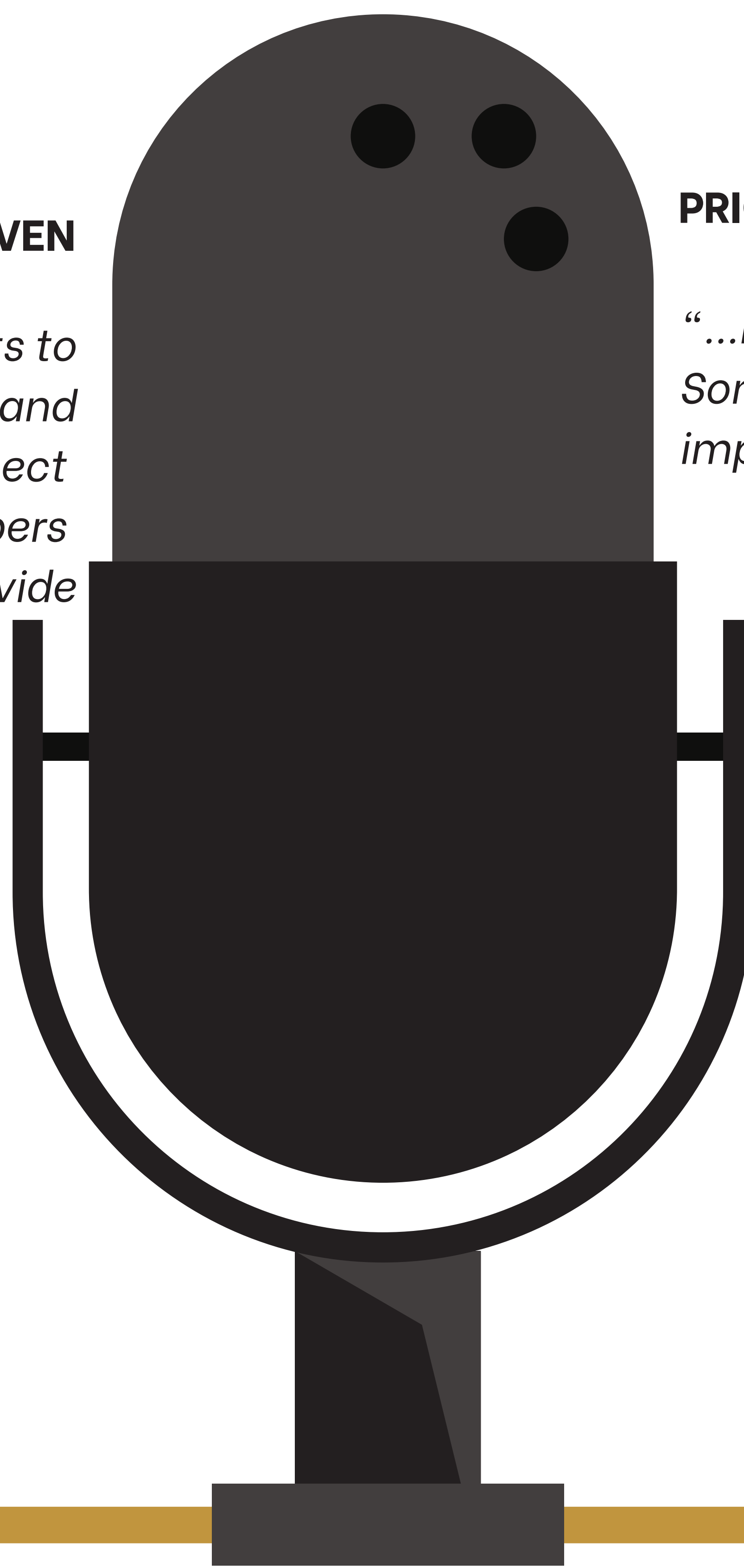
“We do with what we have. We hold events to bring community members out to engage and empower them about how to connect with other community members and stress concerns and provide information; and they then understand the importance of things such as census or GOTV. We find it is important to pay adult and teen volunteers so they can spend the dollars in the community.”

– Florida SouthStrong Partner

PRIORITIZING THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE

“...Funding then becomes an issue... Sometimes people understand the importance of trauma informed healing practices and the importance of community building but aren't willing to invest in it.”

– Georgia SouthStrong Partner



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUCCESS:

Given what we know, there are intentional ways each group can encourage, support and cross-develop each other to strengthen our shared goals for a more unified South. Below are some recommendations gathered from our Civic Engagement Team as well as other Partners:

SHARE RESOURCES

In our space, information is currency and opportunities pass at the speed of light. The SouthStrong network will only build more power and momentum if we utilize our connections wisely. Right now, there is a growing list of nonprofit and policy organizations, grassroots leaders, activists and scholars who have committed to developing a shared blueprint for a stronger Southern region – together. Peruse the list, expand your reach and identify groups who could use the access you may have to unique groups and opportunities so they may take advantage of them as well. By removing the territorial nature of hoarding contacts, resources and information, we strengthen the work and impact of others who in turn will continue the cycle. As one of our partners put it, “We want to grow the buffet, not fight over the pie.”

PARTNER

Coalition building and partnering across state lines has never been easier due to COVID-19. The organizing space is now virtual and that opens opportunities to introduce new constituencies to your work and shows a signal of unity that you are not alone in the issues that plague the South and our populations.

EXPAND A PEER'S NETWORK

Introduce an organization with an aligned mission to a donor circle, donor, table or foundation with whom you have a good relationship. We've already identified the power of relationships, however, there is even more power when donors can see how your work crosses state lines and that you are as committed to progress in other jurisdictions than your own.

PLAN TOGETHER

Although states may be different in their operation, there is value in coming together on a shared goal or identifying a policy issue shared amongst states for planning. Showing a united front on hot-button issues sounds the alarm to local, state and national leadership that the issue is serious and is one that has built momentum across state lines.

BLACK-LED GIVING

If you are a Black-led organization, have you taken advantage of the recent giving efforts directed toward Black-led organizations?

NO
42.31%

YES
57.69%

Partners from Black-led organizations expressed the frustration of disparate giving trends from donors, foundations and other grantees of financial resources even during the recent uptick of giving to Black-led and Black population serving organizations. The bar graph to the left shows that Black-led SouthStrong organizations are taking advantage of recent giving efforts directed toward their organizations, however, securing such funds is a different story. In open-ended responses, partners identified the inequity in giving to Black-led organizations by size and reach. Smaller organizations and/or those that serve more rural areas are often overlooked or aren't granted the requested funds to stay afloat. Although noble, the giving efforts are still tied to dated program measurements and reporting requirements that smaller groups do not have the capacity to meet. Groups such as these deserve the ability to serve their populations most impacted and alternative methods of reporting and support should be considered.

WHAT OUR RESPONDENTS ARE SAYING ABOUT THEIR **BLACK-LED** FUNDING AND CAPACITY

EQUITY ISN'T EQUAL

“Black-led often means Black-led in the major metropolitan areas, not rural or small town USA. We often get overlooked and under funded just as the clients we serve. We have received assistance, but very minimal compared to what has been done in large Metro areas and with major corporations. The resources never reach those in true need.”

– Georgia SouthStrong Partner

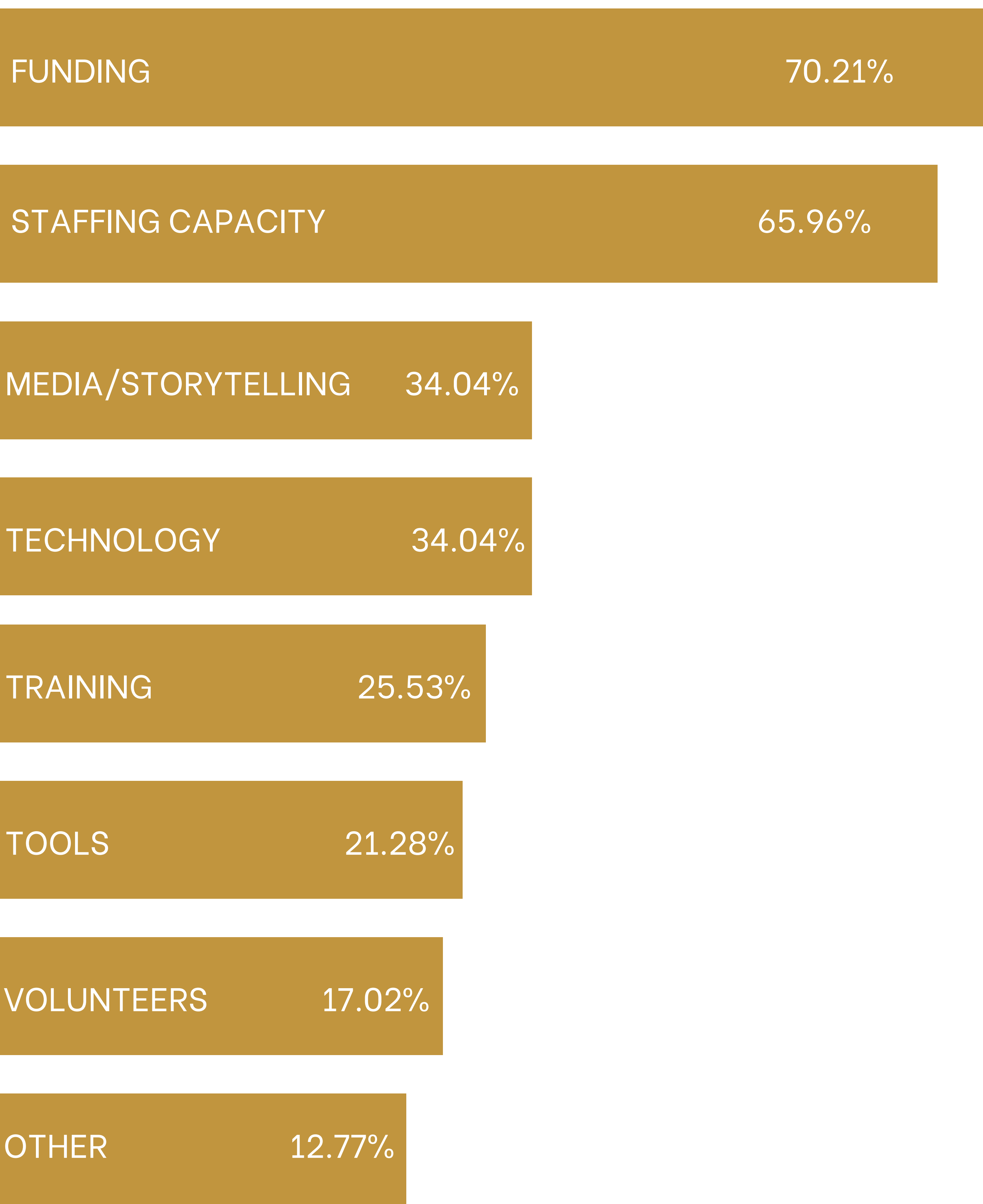
BELIEVING IN BLACK

“...One agency offered a range of money, gave us 1/3 (10,000) of what we asked for (30,000). They offered a separate grant, with wide range award (5,000 – 50,000). They denied our request however we called and they will let us reapply. 2 years ago another grant offering tried to deny us however emailed them asking for a list of other black organizations they gave to. They ended up giving us the money requested. Sometimes, we suspect our name makes people feel suspect.”

– Florida SouthStrong Partner

IDENTIFIED PROGRAM GAPS

“We needed to figure out how to move to socially distant and virtual, but not leave out people who did not have reliable internet access.” – Virginia SouthStrong Partner



The bar graph to the left highlights identified program gaps from SouthStrong partners. There is no surprise that funding (70.21%) and staff capacity (65.96%) are at the top of this list. However, tied at 34.04% are technology and media/storytelling gaps. SouthStrong partners who serve such diverse communities are still burdened by the juggling act of active fundraising, stretching existing resources with staff who already wear so many hats while attempting to tell the story of their transformational work (often without a dedicated communications staff). In addition to the unintended deprioritization of storytelling work, technology gaps also exist for partners who must keep up with an ever-changing industry of new services and products that help make serving populations in the most accessible and efficient way possible. Not only is this a challenge for the organizations who serve these populations, but the populations themselves may not have the ability to meet the advances in technology, particularly in the era of COVID-19. Rural communities, low-income households and individuals with limited proficiency of technology now become an “invisible” population in any organization’s attempt to carry out their outreach efforts during a time where in-person organizing is limited.

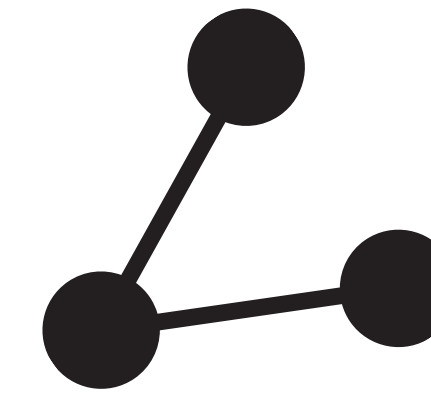
Any organization (small or large) can fall victim to ineffective storytelling while managing the consistent job of fundraising and program execution. Below, we outline ways you can capture your supporters' attention, share more information and get them more involved with your inspiring work:



Tell Your Story with Intention

Be intentional about which stories you choose to tell and how you will tell them. What is the goal of the story? What is it attempting to convey? Think carefully about what you are seeking to accomplish. Is your story intended to persuade, motivate or influence a particular action? Common storytelling goals:

- Fundraising
- Growing your membership base
- Education
- Improving conversion or traffic to your website or social media
- Raising awareness
- Thank you to donors, members and/or supporters



Connect the Dots

Make connections to your work for your reader so they are connected to your cause. Highlight how donor support impacts the lives of your population, or how you define your theory of change.



Empathy is the Key

The best stories are those that make us feel something. They give the reader empathy and research has shown that emotions evoked actually triggers a chemical reaction in the brain that promotes prosocial behavior². For nonprofits and those engaged in social change work, the work itself is emotional and inspiring, so stories must hit the readers in an emotional way. Your story should include the following components in order to pull at readers' heartstrings:

- **Vocabulary**

Don't skip the emotional tense of your story. If you're telling someone's story, ask your subject to talk about *how* they felt alongside the facts.

- **Engage the Senses**

Connecting details for all five senses (sight, sound, smell, taste and touch) helps the readers fully immerse themselves into the story as if they are also experiencing it as well.

- **Who's the Protagonist?**

Readers will more easily connect with a single person rather than a group. Be sure to focus on your subject's experience. This allows your reader an opportunity to root someone on and more closely identify with them.

- **The "Hero's Journey"**

Arrange your story in a creative and engaging way. Much like the "[Hero's Journey](#)" developed in some of Hollywood's most popular films, this structure provides an interesting roadmap to include your subject's origin story, the adversity they faced and the road to reclaiming their power.



Diversify your Storytelling Platforms

Now more than ever, your online and digital presence is where supporters, donors and interested parties can find you and learn more about your work. Aside from your website, a strong social media presence is the easiest way to tell compelling stories at little to no cost. Not only are you able to share compelling stories, but the right platform allows your organization to set your stake as experts in your area of advocacy, promote your program through posts and digital ads and share your visual brand identity. Remember, only pick social media sites that are the perfect fit for your organization. The goal here is to maintain engagement and content there, so if you have low capacity and can only maintain 1-2 social media platforms, choose a platform where your constituents engage most.

Social Media Platforms to Consider:



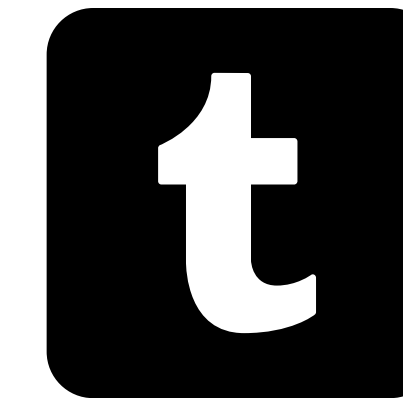
Facebook



Instagram



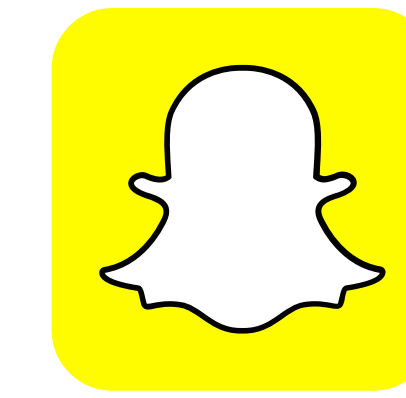
Twitter



Tumblr



TikTok



Snapchat



LinkedIn



Youtube



Nextdoor



What's App



Messenger



Pinterest



Twitch

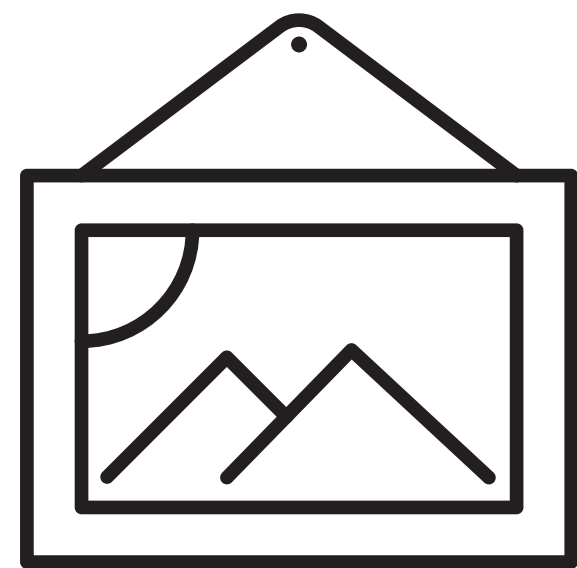
Learn more about the most popular social media platforms by clicking [here](#).



Plan for the Future

The best part about having an online and digital presence is the ability to plan future content for release. This tactic is helpful for small teams who wear multiple hats (although this tactic is helpful for large teams with communications departments as well).

Calendar out social media posts, visual content, themes and key dates that are important to your organization and to your target population. If you have the capacity to set your calendar a month out, that's great! If not, always attempt to calendar your content one week in advance.



Visuals, Visuals, Visuals!

Photos, videos, infographics and images boost your story's impact and has great benefits:

- **Make it Memorable** – Visual aids help readers remember the accompanying content. When you hear information, you may remember about 10% of what you learned three days later. Add an image and that percentage jumps to 65%³.
- **Visual Aids Help Build Your Brand** – Visual elements unique to your brand like logos, colors and typography establish your organization's brand making your content more instantly recognizable so you can stand out. Visual elements also validates your organization as a trusted, professional source for your focus area(s). If you have not developed a brand story, it is highly recommended you invest in developing that for your organization. You heard it here, first.



Utilize the Media...Often

[Medium](#), a free online publishing platform, allows you to read and publish original content for a variety of different interests and industries. Unique content and articles published often helps others learn more about your work and possibly develop loyalty to reading your story. Find ways to stay in the news by sharing good content, whether it is local news or national. Pitching stories, writing op-eds, articles, letters to the editor, hosting media roundtables and sharing press releases are all great ways to generate new and evolving content.



Enlist Help

Don't have the budget or capacity to develop your storytelling and messaging? That's ok! There are free to low cost options available to social justice leaders, groups and organizations. Consider offering a paid internship or fellowship program that gives a young person or student an opportunity to put what they learn in school into practice with your organization. Additionally, Greg Kaufmann who leads SEAP's media/narrative change work is a trusted resource who can help support your efforts.

Greg may be reached via the information below:

SOUTHSTRONG RESOURCE PARTNER:

GREG KAUFMANN

SEAP MEDIA/NARRATIVE CHANGE
WORK: GREGOKAUF@MAC.COM

If you are interested in enlisting Greg to help support your work, consider the following questions:

Are there ways SouthStrong can help you with your media work from a capacity perspective? For example, providing editorial support for articles, drafting tweets and other social media, providing talking points or messaging on key issues, or any other areas of need?

When you think of the media's coverage of the issues you care about in the South, what are they missing? What needs to be covered a lot more and/or a lot better?

SECTION 4: MEETING THE COMMUNITY'S NEEDS

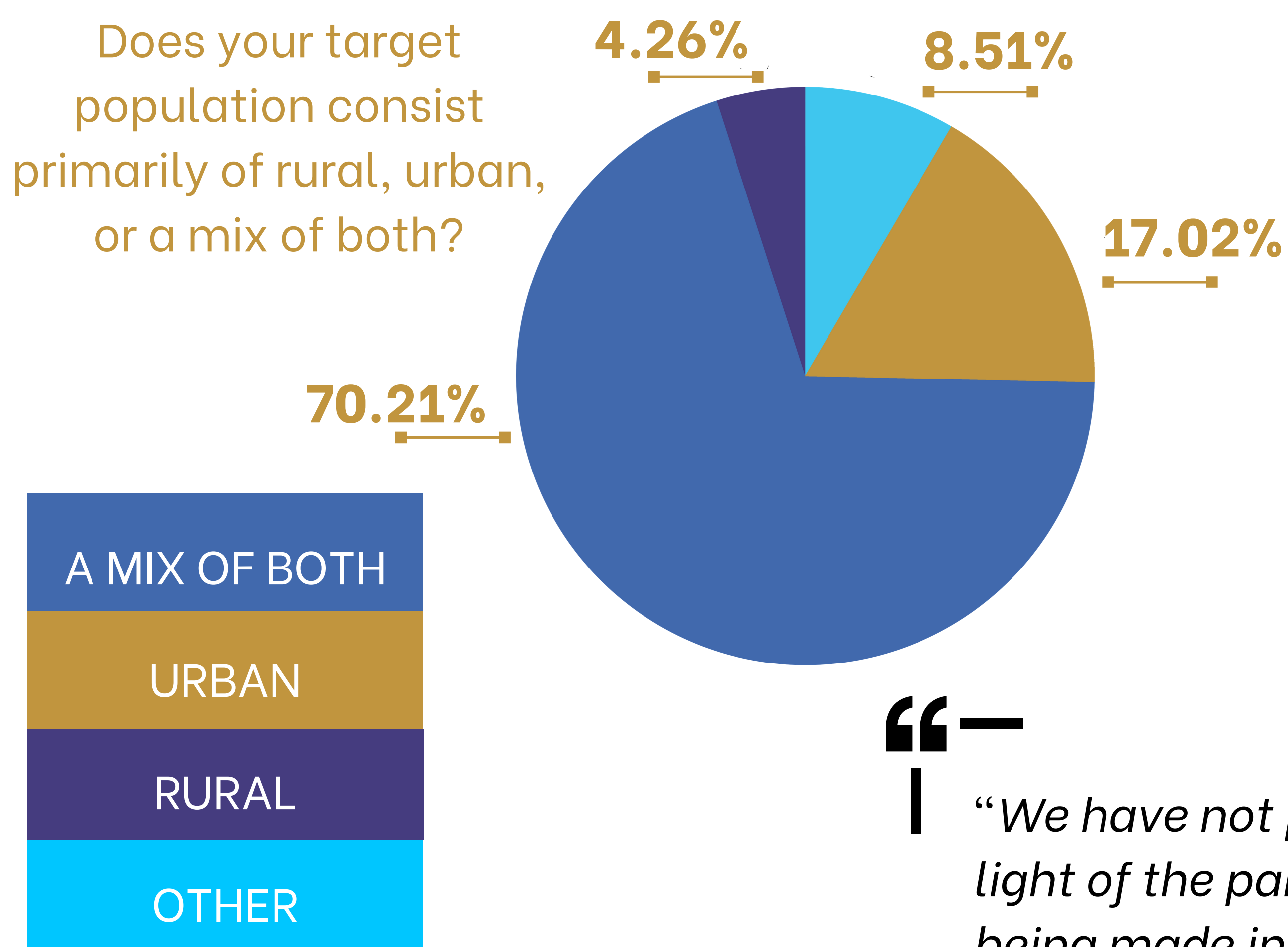
“We pivoted our mission because we think the needs of the community and our relationship with them is more important than our mission.” – North Carolina SouthStrong Partner

SouthStrong partners have positioned themselves to answer the call to a diverse population of identities and needs. Even prior to the pandemic, groups were steadfast in developing and providing educational resources, advocacy efforts around socio-political issues and/or were directly servicing the needs of their target population. The most common community needs we identified based on SouthStrong respondents included:

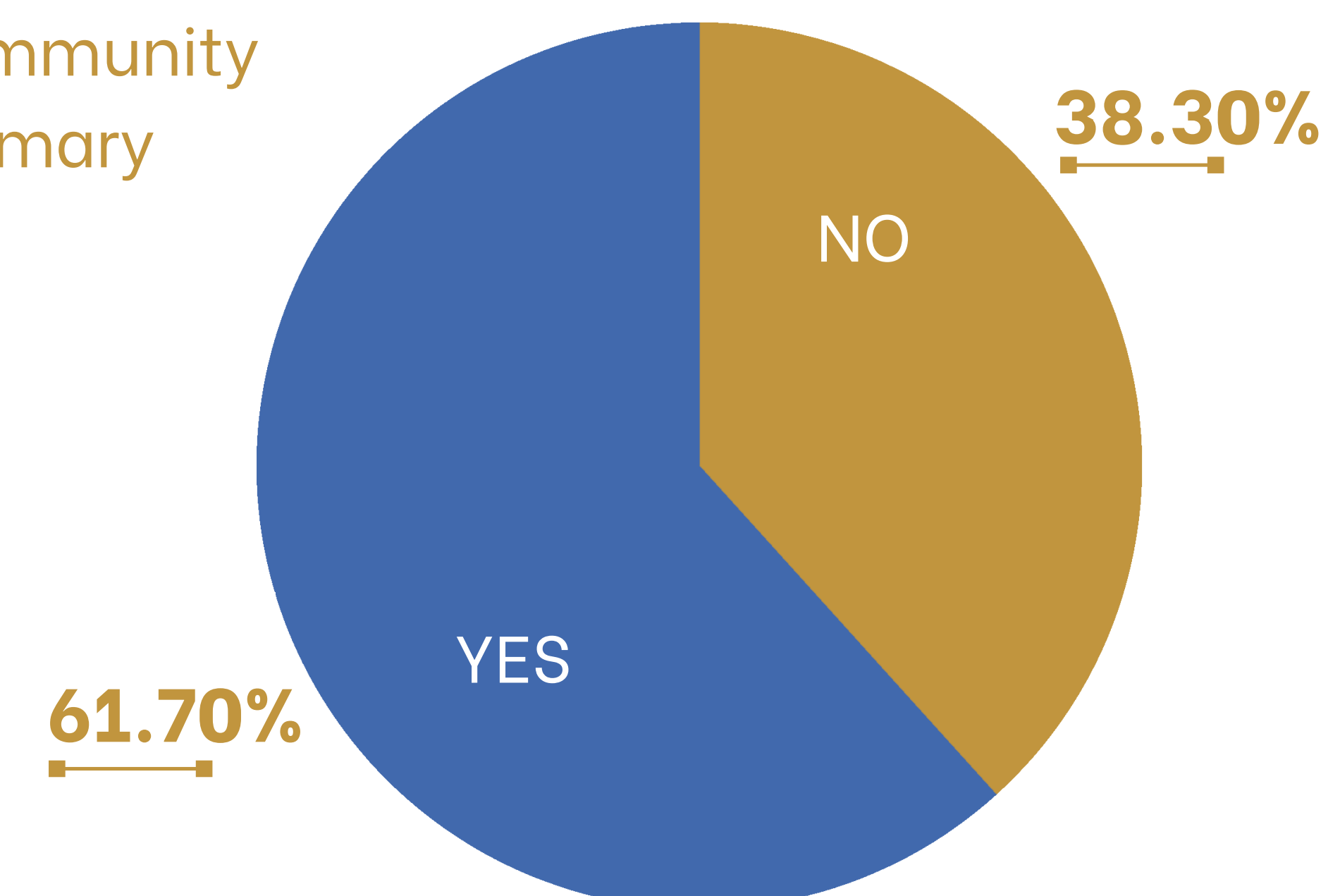
COMMON THEMES IN ADVOCACY

- Cash Bail Assistance
- Voter Education
- Community Forums (Digital)
- Resources for Economic Relief
- Immigrant Justice
- Economic Justice
- Community Building
- Quality and Affordable Healthcare Access
- Quality and Affordable Childcare Access

In response to the pandemic, organizations took action by shifting their approaches towards increased disparities, such as access to quality internet access in both urban and rural communities and overlooked barriers such as language accessibility for non-English speaking persons and immigrant communities.



Does any of your target population belong to an immigrant community or is English not their primary language?



“—

“We have not previously translated our publications, but in light of the pandemic and how quickly policy changes are being made in programs like SNAP, TANF, Medicaid, Unemployment, WIC, etc. we need to be better equipped to produce our information in different languages.”

— Florida SouthStrong Partner

”

Majority (70.21%) of SouthStrong partners responded that their target population represents a mix of both rural and urban dwellers. Secondly, 61.70% support a large swath of populations belonging to an immigrant community or where English is not their primary language. In open-ended responses, some SouthStrong partners shared that they have had to manipulate their engagement approaches when servicing both rural and urban communities. While both demographics require an established foundation of trust, it is important to highlight that in rural communities genuine relationship building is critical.

Despite COVID-19 related effects, organizations reported little to zero interference in their ability to stay true to their mission. Some groups, however, noted they realized the need to prioritize a more human-centered approach to their work in order to achieve their mission during the pandemic and beyond.

Survey responses from SouthStrong partners detail the dynamic ways in which groups stuck to their purpose and shifted from normal operations into rapid response relief status, such as transforming the purpose of an online resource database or utilizing volunteers that would normally be in the field to engage in mask making as a direct response to PPE needs.

Here is an example of innovation in action, offered by one of our partners:

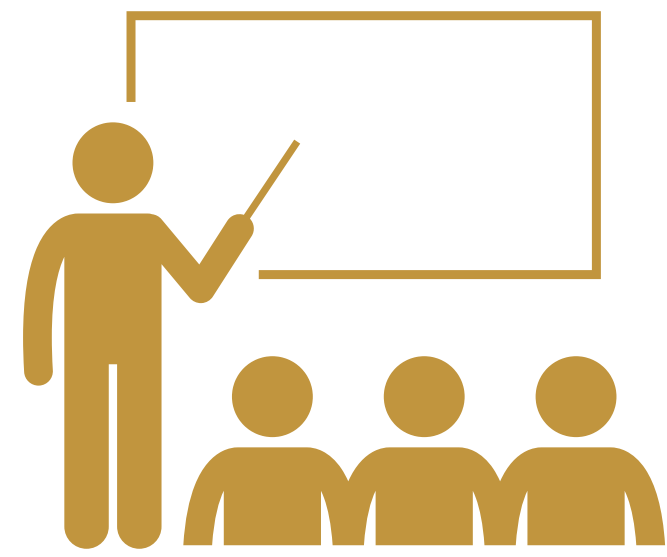
“

“Our main program was about community engagement in the community development process. We were going through a Strategic Doing process that flipped the strategic planning process on its head by asking citizens what they want to see in their community that is immediately actionable by them. The goal was that the program would be a catalyst for community-led change in the community. Engaging the community and having that interpersonal interaction with them and setting up spaces for individuals within the community to get to know each other was very important.”

- Arkansas SouthStrong Partner

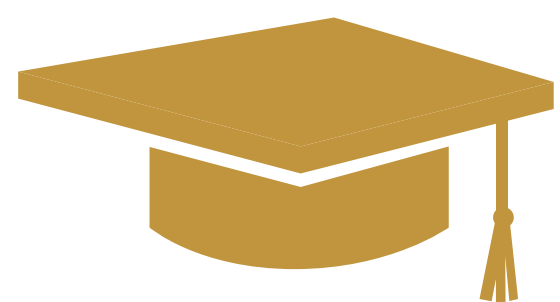
”

BELOW, WE IDENTIFY A FEW WAYS WE CAN CONTINUE TO MEET THE NEEDS OF OUR COMMUNITY...TOGETHER.



Peer-to-Peer Training: SouthStrong partners share a kindred goal in their work, but sometimes a new innovation or approach may yield more success for their program. A success story must be told and widely shared with other groups who may find difficulty in their approach on the same issue. Peer-to-Peer training allows leadership and staff of organizations to train other organizational leadership and their staff on best practices, approaches, innovations and considerations.

*Offered by Deborah Scott,
Georgia STAND-UP, Georgia SouthStrong Partner*



Continuing Education: Due to the rapidly changing nature of our work, it is important to stay abreast of any and all new developments in organizing, new theories, approaches, advocacy, policy recommendations and compliance updates. So, stay trained and informed. Seek opportunities for new insights and updates for your area of focus. The more informed we are as teams within our organizational structures, the more well-equipped we are for the ever-changing landscape of our work, because you are the expert, aren't you?



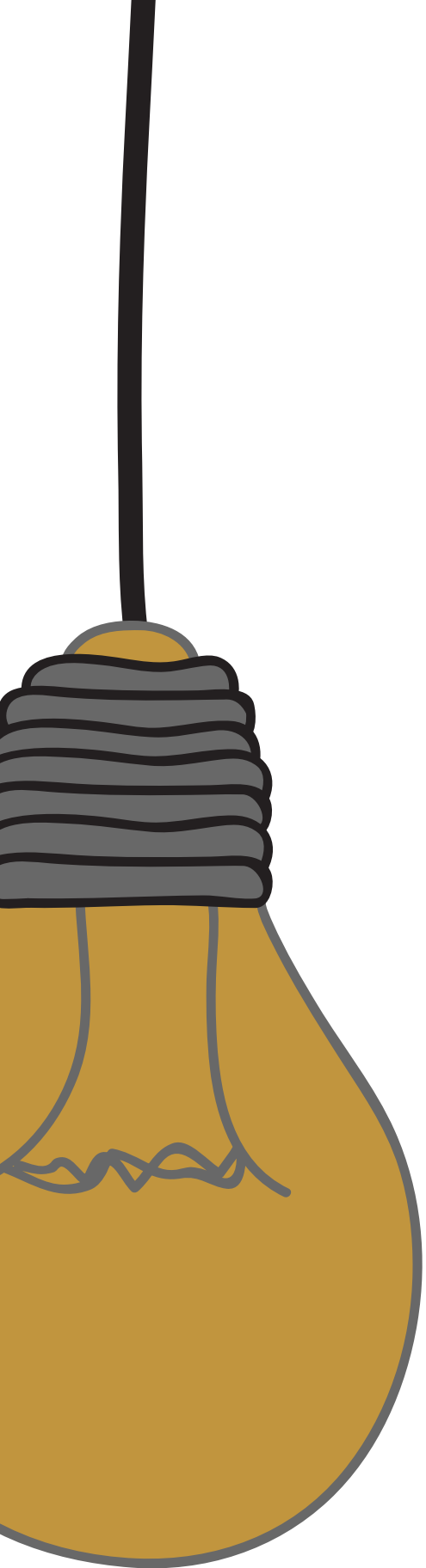
Hire a Lawyer!: We repeat, “hire a lawyer!” Our work isn’t easy and we are often under attack and intense scrutiny because of our great impact. Whether you have hired a firm, have a lawyer on retainer or on an as-needed basis, please be sure to have a lawyer readily available who specializes in nonprofit work to offer your organization guidance on necessary paperwork that needs to be filed, potential litigation, advice or even a quick inquiry.



Community Mapping: Advocacy efforts are only effective if they are in direct alignment with the needs of your targeted communities. Dedicate time to stay abreast of the changes happening within the communities you serve through community mapping. Benefits of mapping include an organization’s ability to survey data around community needs, available resources, and discover common themes to engage in community asset building with other local stakeholders



Hire an Accountant!: We repeat, “hire an accountant!” Nonprofits are like any other business that handles cash flow, payroll and paperwork and it is important for your organization to invest in professional accounting services. Unless your organization has an in-house Chief Financial Officer or accounting department, many smaller nonprofit organizations assign such tasks to untrained staff or volunteers. If your budget allows, this is an important line item for which to invest that could keep you out of the IRS office in the future.



PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN ACTION

Who is Paths to Peace?

Paths to Peace consists of Trauma Informed Yoga Educators and Healing Artists who offer programs and trainings in peace and nonviolence, restorative justice and community building. They collaborate with individuals, communities and organizations impacted by various forms of social and environmental oppression, as it is their belief that all oppressions are connected.

What is Unique About Paths to Peace Civic Engagement?

As activists and organizers are supporting diverse marginalized communities, their work often takes precedence over them taking care of their mental health and community members may not identify with the benefits of trauma informed movements and arts. There are and will continue to be “invisible” effects of COVID-19 and Paths to Peace is currently working to create a Policy Memo on inequities and policy solutions regarding Mental Health, Trauma and Racial Violence.

How Did Paths to Peace Pivot Their Civic Engagement Approach During the Pandemic?

In the wake of the global public health crisis, when Paths to Peace offers demonstrations or are invited to speak to various audiences, they make it a point to interweave the trauma of the global pandemic and racial violence and bring awareness to both issues and the traumatic impacts of them. They provide specialized programming for racial healing through the body; as well as programming that focuses on injustices and oppressions that people face personally through their work, within their community or in society.

The above information was shared through the SouthStrong Civic Engagement Survey and via the Paths to Peace website.

MINDFULNESS TO ADVANCE ADVOCACY WORK

PATHS TO PEACE,
GEORGIA SOUTHSTRONG PARTNER

http://  WWW.PATHSTOPEACE.ORG

SECTION 5: OVERCOMING BARRIERS THROUGH COMMUNITY AND RELATIONSHIP MAINTENANCE

“Our partnerships have been strengthened since the pandemic. We are relying on each other more than ever.”

– Arkansas SouthStrong Partner

Fighting the good fight up against insurmountable odds is nothing new for NGO and grassroots organizations, COVID-19 is simply the most recent barrier. Despite any setback, in response to the pandemic, more than 60% of SouthStrong surveyed groups reported that they have formed new partnerships to meet the needs of their base.

Experienced organizers champion the idea of stakeholder coalition building as an effective strategy to meet the diverse and intersecting needs of at-risk populations and marginalized communities. Banding together however, does require commitment to philosophical beliefs and practices that emphasize transformation over transaction. Through coalition work, partners activate potential power towards setting honest intentions in transforming the inner agency of all partner organizations involved and the communities they serve.

Relationship Maintenance

When convening with the Civic Engagement working group, a key point was made in reference to community building whether it be through peer coaching or by making sure your efforts benefit future generations – the goal is to sustain reputation, work and relationships over time.

“

Advocating on the Intersectionality of Race

“We have prioritized race equity in proactive state policy campaigns, have advocated for better data collection and public information around the impacts of COVID-19 on Black residents, and have worked to form stronger partnerships and deeper connections with Black led organizations”

– West Virginia SouthStrong Partner

”

“

Issue Mobilization

“We always try to partner with other grassroots organizations. Currently 24 of our organizations have come together to hold meetings with the Mayor, Sheriff and State Attorney’s Office with regard to body camera footage and the budget.”

– Florida SouthStrong Partner

”

RECOMMENDATIONS



Internal Assessments & Audits: Assessments and audits are vital to the growth of any organization and should be conducted to see where an organization is and helps determine where they want to be in the future. This is the perfect place to ask other SouthStrong partners how they approach certain buckets of work or administrative governance.



Asset-Based Community Building: Continuing from the asset mapping recommendation in section 4, in tandem with your own internal assessments and audits, you now have clarity on ways to meet your community's diverse needs both as an organization and in partnership with like-minded stakeholders. Identify, recruit and convene issue stakeholders including diverse thought leaders, elected leaders and influencers to understand more of the support and resources they may be willing to provide. You should recruit and convene often with stakeholders and they should be identified and brought in because of their skills, expertise, network reach, access to power and ability to enhance your organization's reach and worth. Be sure to include your stakeholders in legislative planning, special programs and development as well.

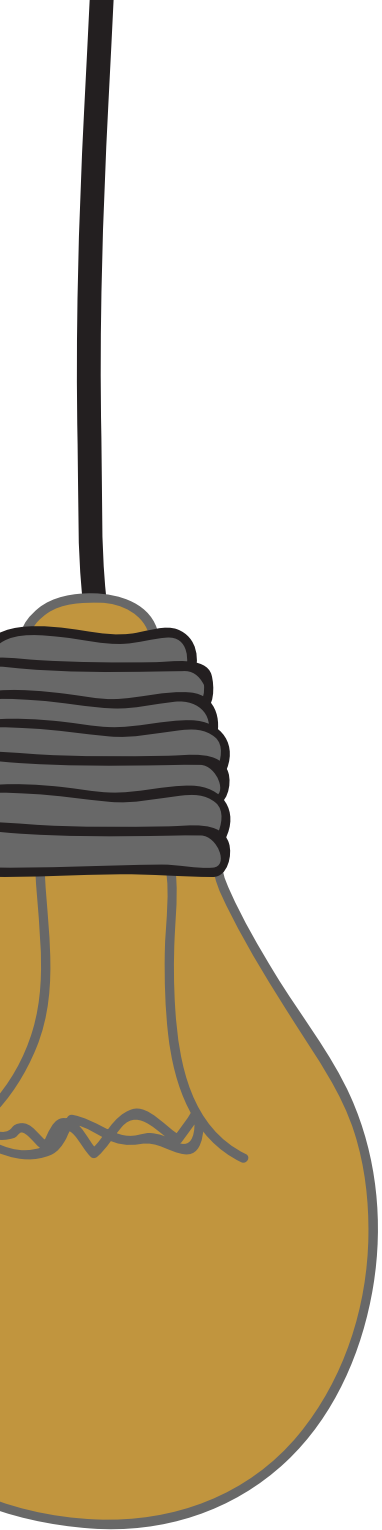


Targeted Events: Host events with messaging that is simple and specific to your mission or target population. Events should be thoughtful and event participants should leave informed, inspired and better acquainted with the mission of your organization.



Synchronized Messaging: Committing to a small local network, regional coalition, or national initiative holds the potential for your organization to amplify your messaging when intersecting issues affect the population(s) you serve. The effectiveness of your messaging tactics places pressure on political leaders to pay attention and take swift action.

CONTENT ADAPTED FROM: [HTTPS://WWW.UNIT4.COM/BLOG/8-CHALLENGES-FOR-NONPROFIT-ORGANIZATIONS](https://www.unit4.com/blog/8-challenges-for-nonprofit-organizations)

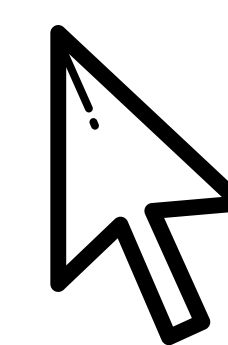


PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN ACTION

MISSISSIPPI LOW INCOME CHILD CARE INITIATIVE (MLICCI)

http://



WWW.MSCHILDCARE.ORG

Who is MLICCI?

MLICCI is a statewide non-profit advocacy organization working to strengthen Mississippi's child care assistance program, improve women's economic security by achieving gender and racial equity in the workforce and make the safety net work for women.

What is Unique About MLICCI's Civic Engagement Approach?

Prior to the pandemic MLICCI was steadfast in coalition building to support their overall mission. They organized a Child Care Leadership Team (CCLT) comprised of child care providers, to identify and advance the most critically needed reforms in the state's Child Care Payment Program (CCPP). The group hosts programming for other providers and parents, and provides training to effectively engage and educate state leaders on the need to improve the subsidy program and make it work for families. It is important to note that MLICCI engages stakeholders on different levels, advocacy for funding is targeted towards the state legislature, while policy decisions that shape the CCPP – like who is eligible, what parents have to do to apply / reapply, and how much providers are reimbursed – are made by the state's Department of Human Services (MDHS).

One of their very early responses to the impact of COVID-19 involved getting funds and PPE out to state child care providers so that they would be able to continue operations. Additionally, they collaborated with MDHS agency heads to provide educational webinars for those same providers to receive information on unemployment staff eligibility, operations recommendations for reopening, and any regulatory changes.

During the 2020 Presidential election cycle, while the pandemic affected their ability to hold in-person meetings with parents, MLICCI launched the Non-Partisan Voting Project to help register people to vote and educate them about their voting rights. The Voting Project is non-partisan and supported by a team of interns from Tougaloo College and Jackson State University (both HBCUs), as well as a support team from MLICCI, One Voice Mississippi, Black Voters Matter Fund and MS State Representative Zakiya Summers (68th District). 124 centers agreed to participate, and 4,175 Voter Registration Applications were mailed to the participating child care centers with a stamped envelope.

This information was shared at the approval of Carol Burnett, Executive Director of MLICCI



**"OUR STATE'S
RESPONSE HAS BEEN
PRETTY INEFFECTIVE.
SO SAFETY IS A
CONCERN"**

- NORTH CAROLINA SOUTHSTRONG PARTNER

SECTION 6: STATE REOPENING & ACCOUNTABILITY WORK

“Arkansas did not have a moratorium on evictions nor has it provided assistance to renters during the pandemic. The state has reopened schools. We have organized and participated in campaign in response to those issues.” – Arkansas SouthStrong Partner

How has your state’s response to the pandemic affected your civic engagement efforts?

23.40% SLIGHTLY

23.40% MODERATELY

21.28% EXTREMELY

17.02% NOT AT ALL

14.89% VERY

Topline to Consider:

Community nonprofits who are used to operating on shoestring budgets with limited staff are unfortunately used to doing a lot with a little.

Communities of color and low-income communities have paid the ultimate price as it relates to many state’s reopening in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis, particularly in the South. These communities have been disproportionately affected and our national, state and local leaders have a responsibility to ensure that the needs of these communities address immediate and long standing educational, economic and healthcare outcomes. While these themes are not new, they have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis. When asked if our partners’ state’s response affected their civic engagement efforts, there were not significant effects to civic engagement work. This revelation tells us that our partners have become accustomed to operating on shoestring budgets with limited staff and resources and that the introduction of a global health crisis, didn’t largely affect the approach to their work.

SEAP and its SouthStrong partners are committed to an equitable and people-first response to economic recovery and encourage local, state and national leaders to focus on building a more equitable future while bringing attention to how race, class and gender intersect social and economic policy in states across the South.

The National Governors Association, in a review of their policy memo, outlines policy approaches a few states' governors and executive leadership have launched in their state's reopening that address the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on communities of color. Below are common themes and approaches taken by Southern states and their leadership:

1. Collecting and disaggregating data to track and address disparities in COVID-19 related testing, hospitalization, death and recovery among different racial and ethnic groups;

- **Mississippi** reports deaths by both underlying condition and race. The data reveal significant racial disparities.

2. Creating a health equity response team, task force or other coordinating body to inform COVID-19 policies and direct resources to communities of color;

- On April 10, Governor John Bel Edwards of **Louisiana** announced the creation of the COVID-19 Health Equity Task Force. The task force included local universities, research institutions and state agencies. Its immediate steps were to disseminate information about COVID-19 safety and prevention to impacted communities, provide the medical community with best practices and protocols on treating communities with health disparities, ensure testing availability and ease of access for all communities and work to create a state Dashboard on Health Equity. On April 24, the Governor also made \$500,000 from the Governor's COVID-19 Response Fund available to the Louisiana COVID-19 Health Equity Taskforce to examine causes and possible solutions for the high rate of deaths from COVID-19 within the state's Black community. The funding will be used to conduct research, develop awareness campaigns and assess the status of the state's pandemic response as it affects vulnerable populations.



3. Partnering with communities of color through community leaders and organizations and collaboratively addressing policies, programming and resources needed in hard-hit communities;

- **South Carolina's** Department of Healthcare and Environmental Control has recorded public service messages on the pandemic delivered by local black leaders, such as Congressman James Clyburn and the state's chief epidemiologist, Dr. Linda Bell.
- **Tennessee** has partnered with Meharry Medical College, a historically Black medical school in Nashville, to operate several of its testing sites. As the state has ramped up its contact tracing efforts, authorities are also ensuring that phone calls to residents in hard-hit communities of color come from trusted community organizations, such as Meharry.

4. Prioritizing communities of color when allocating COVID-19 testing resources (and treatments and vaccines when available), addressing barriers to testing and care and employing culturally informed engagement and contact tracing approaches;

- In **Florida**, Miami Dade County and University of Miami partnered for a serologic surveillance study. The initiative partnered with local firefighters and EMS to conduct the testing and located the sites at libraries in order to increase trust with the community.

5. Developing state COVID-19 recovery plans that account for the pandemic's disproportionate economic and health impacts on communities of color; and

- (No Southern state highlighted in the NGA policy memo)

6. Ensuring workplace protections for essential workers, particularly for industries that employ many people of color and linking people of color to job training and other employment supports.

- (No COVID-19 specific programs listed in Southern states)

As states stay nimble in their approach to the COVID-19 crisis and as more developments and information becomes available, there is much more to be done to consider the influence of the intersection of economic and social conditions toward racial and ethnic health disparities that are more prevalent in communities of color, particularly Black communities, than among Whites, especially in the South.

HELPFUL RESOURCES:

THE COVID TRACKING PROJECT - RACIAL DATA DASHBOARD [HTTPS://COVIDTRACKING.COM/RACE/DASHBOARD](https://COVIDTRACKING.COM/RACE/DASHBOARD)

CDC: COVID-19 IN RACIAL AND ETHNIC MINORITY GROUPS: [HTTPS://WWW.CDC.GOV/CORONAVIRUS/2019-NCOV/NEED-EXTRA-PRECAUTIONS/RACIAL-ETHNIC-MINORITIES.HTML](https://WWW.CDC.GOV/CORONAVIRUS/2019-NCOV/NEED-EXTRA-PRECAUTIONS/RACIAL-ETHNIC-MINORITIES.HTML)

[HTTPS://WWW.NGA.ORG/MEMOS/IMPACT-COVID-19-COMMUNITIES-OF-COLOR/](https://WWW.NGA.ORG/MEMOS/IMPACT-COVID-19-COMMUNITIES-OF-COLOR/)



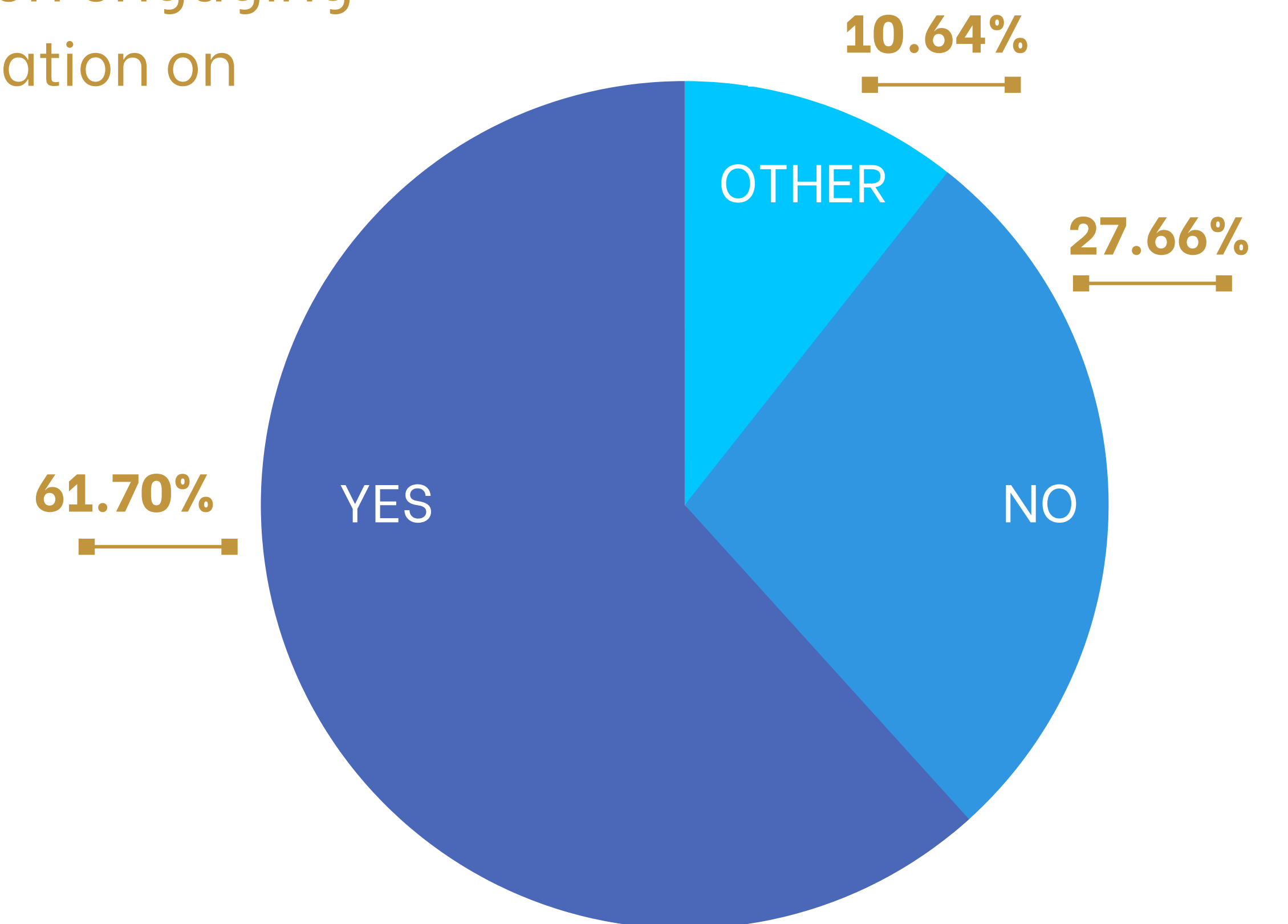
"ACROSS THE SOUTH, WE HAVE LOCAL LEADERS DEDICATED TO IMPROVING THE LIVES OF THOSE AROUND US, AND OUR GOAL IS TO CALL UPON THAT COMMON BOND AND SUPPORT THIS TRANSFORMATIVE WORK THROUGH THE SOUTHERN ECONOMIC ADVANCEMENT PROJECT."

- SEAP FOUNDER AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, STACEY ABRAMS

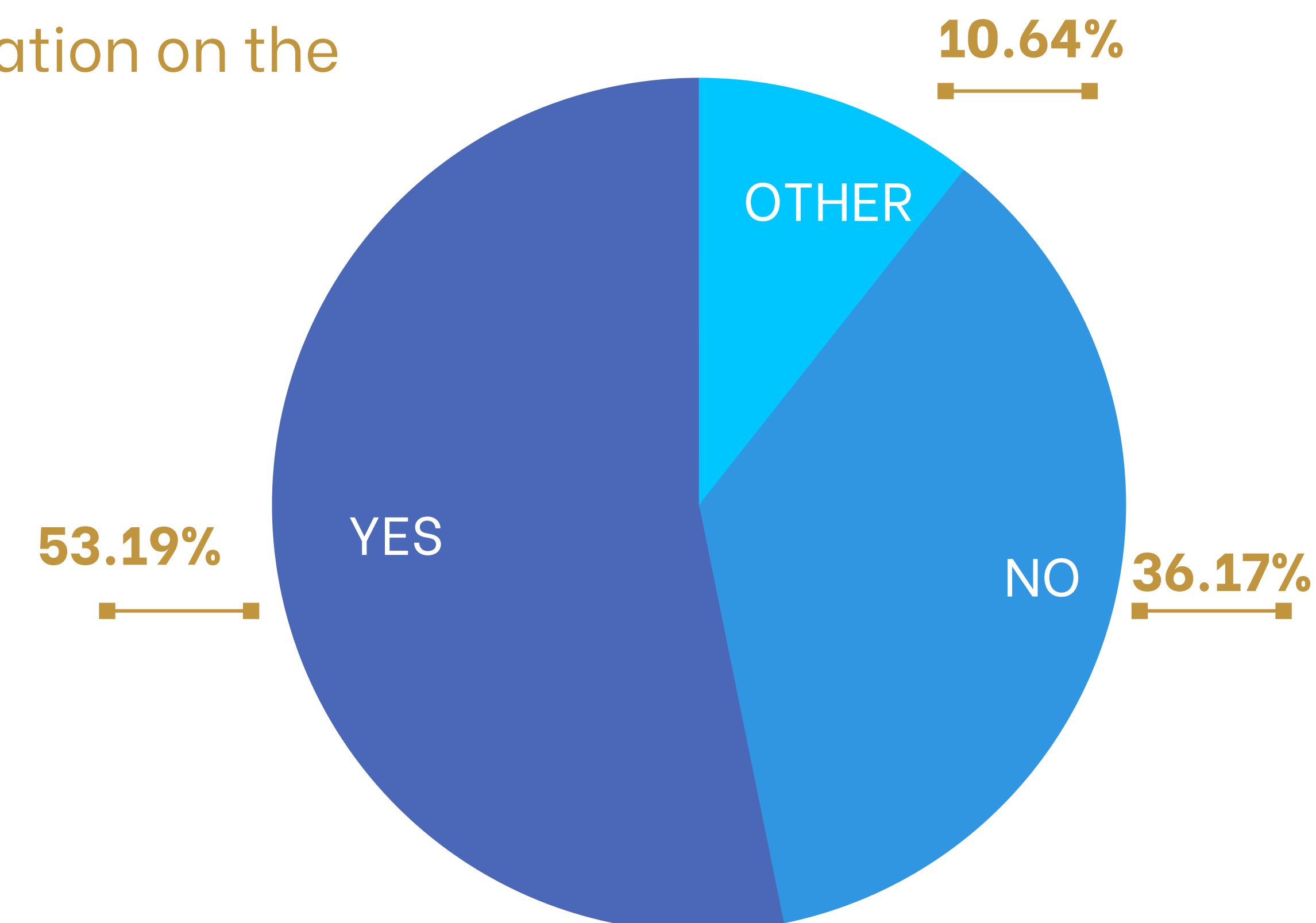
CENSUS AND VOTER ENGAGEMENT

Civic engagement comes full circle when mobilization efforts are embedded into programs on the issues that affect our populations collectively. Voter engagement and Census work, both of which are important to Southern constituents where voter suppression and disenfranchisement runs rampant and hard-to-count communities are higher, is an added layer of education to share with target populations. As the charts to the right reflect, a majority of the 47 respondents do include voter engagement and Census work into their programs. However, staff and program capacity coupled with limited resources impact the ability to add an additional layer of program work to the already heavy load organizations bear while meeting increased population needs.

Is your organization engaging your target population on voting?



Is your organization engaging your target population on the Census?



CENSUS AND VOTER ENGAGEMENT

VOTER EDUCATION 90.62%

VOTER REGISTRATION 62.50%

VOTER MOBILIZATION 56.25%

VOTER PERSUASION 25.00%

OTHER 12.50%



During the 2020 Election cycle, one of the most important elections in recent history, we wanted to dig deeper on what type of voter engagement SouthStrong respondents advocate for. Over 90% of respondents push voter education to the diverse communities they serve followed by voter registration (62.5%), voter mobilization (over 56%) and voter persuasion (25%). With so much uncertainty around the safety and security of the voting process and the COVID-19 crisis introducing vote-by-mail (VBM) options to registered voters who are unfamiliar with the process, voter education during the 2020 election was top priority.



“

“State provides confusing information about covid-19 and voting.”

– Alabama SouthStrong Partner

”

Within the areas you serve, are there specific obstacles or barriers to voting your target population experience?



Still on the topic of voting, in an open-ended question, we asked SouthStrong partners about the specific barriers to voting their target population experiences. The word cloud above highlights the common words and themes shared amongst respondents. “Vote” and “disenfranchisement” followed by “absentee ballots,” “mail,” “lack,” and other words along the theme of suppression are more prevalent than others. The uncertainty of voting during the COVID-19 pandemic, has created a deep lack of voter confidence and faith due to the inconsistencies states, particularly in the South, targeted to low-income, Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC). The COVID-19 crisis with the added layer of a politically intense election cycle, has organizations on high alert and tuning into the evolving ways party establishment leaders and extremist groups are attempting to suppress the votes of historically oppressed people.

As we look past Election Day, organizations must develop safe and innovative ways to hold new and existing elected officeholders accountable for the direction they are leading their community, state and nation. A strong accountability program, particularly during the legislative period when local and state officials regularly meet (whether through board or council meetings or during your state’s legislative session), can make a huge impact in ensuring community members know you’re actively speaking up for them. Accountability programs should be seen as a continuation of work from election season and be as well-funded as typical “Get-Out-The-Vote” activities are. Remember, true civic engagement is year-round. Below, we outline ways you can develop or enhance your own accountability programs by being an effective tattletale:

BE A TATTLETALE

Yes, we said it, tell on elected bad actors by going straight to management – the voters. Whatever tactic you choose is up to you, but ensure you share the information swiftly, widely and often. Whether that’s through COVID-19 safe canvassing, social media, email blasts, robocalls, mail or any other method. This is where you and your team can get creative and have fun tattling.



Clog the Lines

An effective tactic is to clog the airways. Have your supporters use social media, email, snail mail or via telephone to show strength in numbers for or against a measure. **Believe us, they’ll pay attention.** Be sure to include folks in the district who will be directly affected in your efforts.



Peer-to-Peer (P2P) Texting

Texting is a quick and easy way to connect with constituents in your target area and there are a lot of apps and programs that can help you get information to them directly. Staff or volunteers can help you with your texting operation by loading a list of targets, sending a text and communicating via text! Whether you have some need-to-know information to share or a simple reminder, a text helps you share your information fast. It is always a good idea to use a phone number that is from the area and utilize language in your script that is authentic to the area that sounds relatable and real. This strategy is more effective in more rural areas whose residents are less likely to use a smartphone.

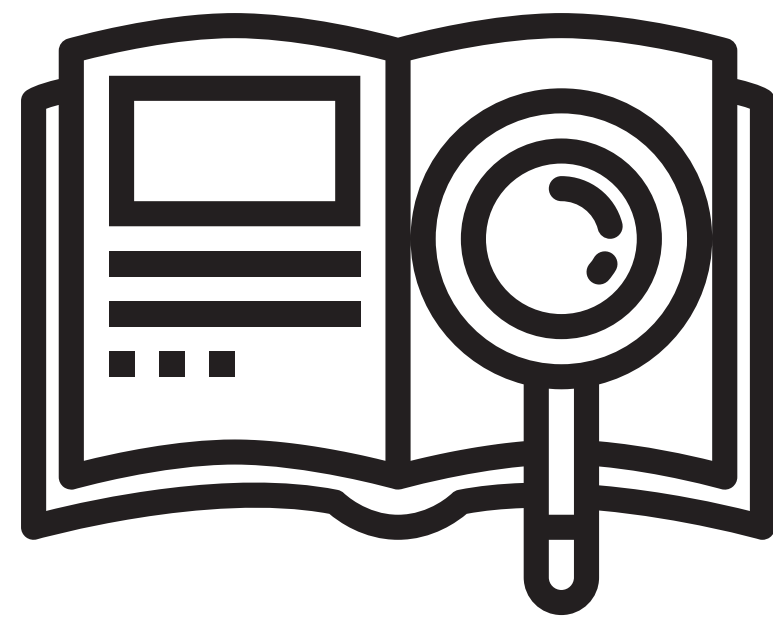


Make Phone Calls by Phone Banking

Phone calls are a more personal way to connect with your targeted population. Although texting is great, any opportunity to host a live conversation with a constituent is preferred. Phone banking is the means by which a team of staff or volunteers call through a list of targeted phone numbers and follow a prewritten script in hopes to gather data from the constituent. Although virtual phone banking already existed, since the COVID-19 public health crisis, the virtual platform has been made more popular and more reliable phone numbers are available. Traditionally, phone banking has a lower response rate since many Americans do not answer unknown phone numbers, which is why having a local phone number representative to the area is important. Organizations also use a predictive dialer system (which substantially reduces the time spent hand dialing) during phone banks, which connects callers to constituents once they answer the line.

Note: Always be sure to check with your organization’s lawyers on the limitations of your nonprofit organization’s program activity.

WAYS TO BE AN EFFECTIVE TATTLETALE:



Research & Poll

Do your research on what people in a particular area think about an issue through administering a professional poll (through a polling firm) or conduct your own poll, deep canvassing or focus groups. Have the facts and opinions of real people to back up your argument and share with the appropriate elected leaders.

RECOMMENDATION IN ACTION

The Georgia Budget & Policy Institute (GBPI), Georgia's budget, tax and policy nonprofit think tank, partnered with 9to5, Faith in Public Life and Small Business Majority to administer a poll in October 2020 to Georgians to gauge their sentiments on public policies that put people first. The poll included increasing funding for critical programs and services like education and healthcare, as well as re-evaluating the billions of dollars in tax breaks Georgia gives out to corporations every year. The results of their poll showed Georgians want the state to invest in people and policies that help every community in the state thrive. Learn more about GBPI and their poll [here](#).



Reports & Scorecards

Grade and compare your elected officials on the issues most important to your organization and those you serve by drafting a report or scorecard. These types of guides give constituents the scoop on policy decisions from a trusted messenger – YOU! This will also support your organizations efforts when strategizing on how and what to engage certain officials on. These can be mailed or digital.

Note: Always be sure to check with your organization's lawyers on the limitations of your nonprofit organization's program activity.

WAYS TO BE AN EFFECTIVE TATTLETALE:



Patch-Through Calling Programs

Advocates and activists alike are likely to have more difficulty getting to local, state and federal elected officials in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Patch-through calling programs are an effective advocacy tool because they connect constituents to an officials' office directly on a particular issue or concern. Patch-through calls work by sending the call to constituents with a live representative (often from your organization) describing the issue or concern and ask if the constituent would like to be connected, or "patched," through to the office to share their concern with someone from the legislator's staff directly. Patch-through calls can also be used to connect impacted constituents or those in need of a service to a service provider directly.

Safe, Socially Distant Canvassing

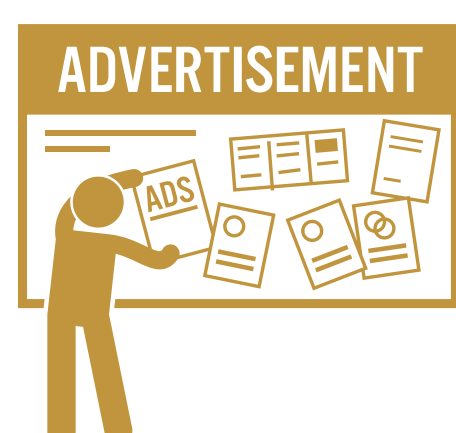
Face-to-face conversations will remain the #1 way to connect with constituents, which is often achieved through door-to-door canvassing. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, canvassing is more difficult to ensure the safety of staff, volunteers and constituents. However, in some cases, canvassing is still the most effective way to connect with constituents around a pressing issue and you may decide to move forward with a safe, socially distant canvass program. Deciding to canvass in 2020 and beyond should be part of a thoughtful, comprehensive plan that incorporates public health information, modified hiring and human resources practices, and recommended safety protocols. Recognize that opportunities to canvass may be limited and state and local orders will change over time, which means that a given state or county could prohibit canvassing at any time. The pieces of your canvassing plan should be fluid, revisited often and nimble enough to pivot to other modes of program as developments change.

Public health data shows that people of color, particularly Black people, experience higher death rates than state and national averages and canvassers are often recruited from these same communities. To mitigate brand risk, organizations should consider the potential impacts of canvassing programs and the potential unintended disproportionate harm to communities of color and historically racially marginalized constituents. We ask that you seek legal counsel on any planned or potential canvass activity, and refer to your state and local COVID-19 recommended and mandated safety protocols.

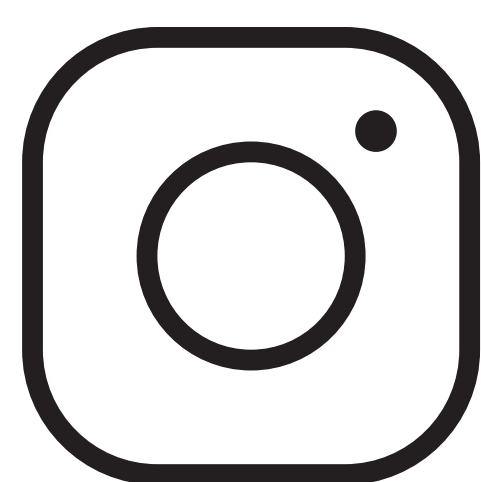
Note: Always be sure to check with your organization's lawyers on the limitations of your nonprofit organization's program activity.

Utilize Social Media

Now, more than ever, people are tuned into social media and use it as their primary source for news, updates, entertainment and to connect to their family, friends and colleagues since in-person connectivity is limited due to COVID-19. Right now, with such a captive audience, it is wise to utilize the power of social media to amplify your message and use it as an organizing tool to connect with your target population. Try creative ways to connect with lobby days online with elected officials, hosting a Twitter Town Hall meeting on a topic, or hosting a “live” event on other popular social media platforms like Instagram with an influencer or celebrity. Your engagement can increase if you utilize a few unique, low cost tricks of the trade as outlined below:



Sponsored Ads: Sponsored ads are low cost ways to engage with users who are outside of your network. This increases your reach to others and introduces them to your organization and mission.



Use Instagram Stories Stickers: A great way to interact with your audience when using Instagram is using Instagram stories stickers. Stickers include the “Question” sticker, the “Quiz” sticker, the “Countdown” sticker (perfect for launches), or the “Poll.” Have fun with your content and utilize stickers!



Go Live!: Allow your followers and audience to tap into the “now” of what your organization is up to by going live! Your audience will be notified once you go live and can engage with you through the chat function.



Test Your Content and Engagement: Great content you’ve seen online was likely developed through experimentation. Test your posting times, content and engagement activity with your audience and see what works. Top social media platforms have analytics that provides data for business accounts on your engagement. For example, if your audience is working mothers, you might find that they engage more in the evening after work.



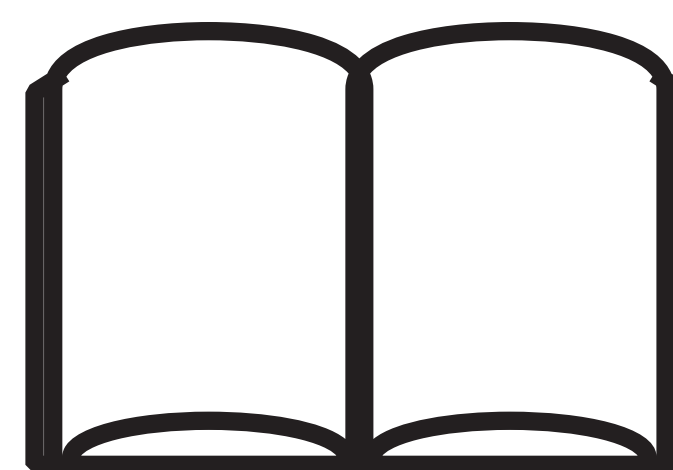
Create Content People Want to Save: “Savable content” is content your audience will want to revisit at a later time. Posts with multiple pictures or photos that offer tips or a good story would be considered good “saveable content.” Think about what would be important to your audience and the value it will add to their everyday.



Have Fun!: Add an element of fun to your content. Memes or fun and funny content breaks up the regular content and adds an element of personality to your audience’s timeline.



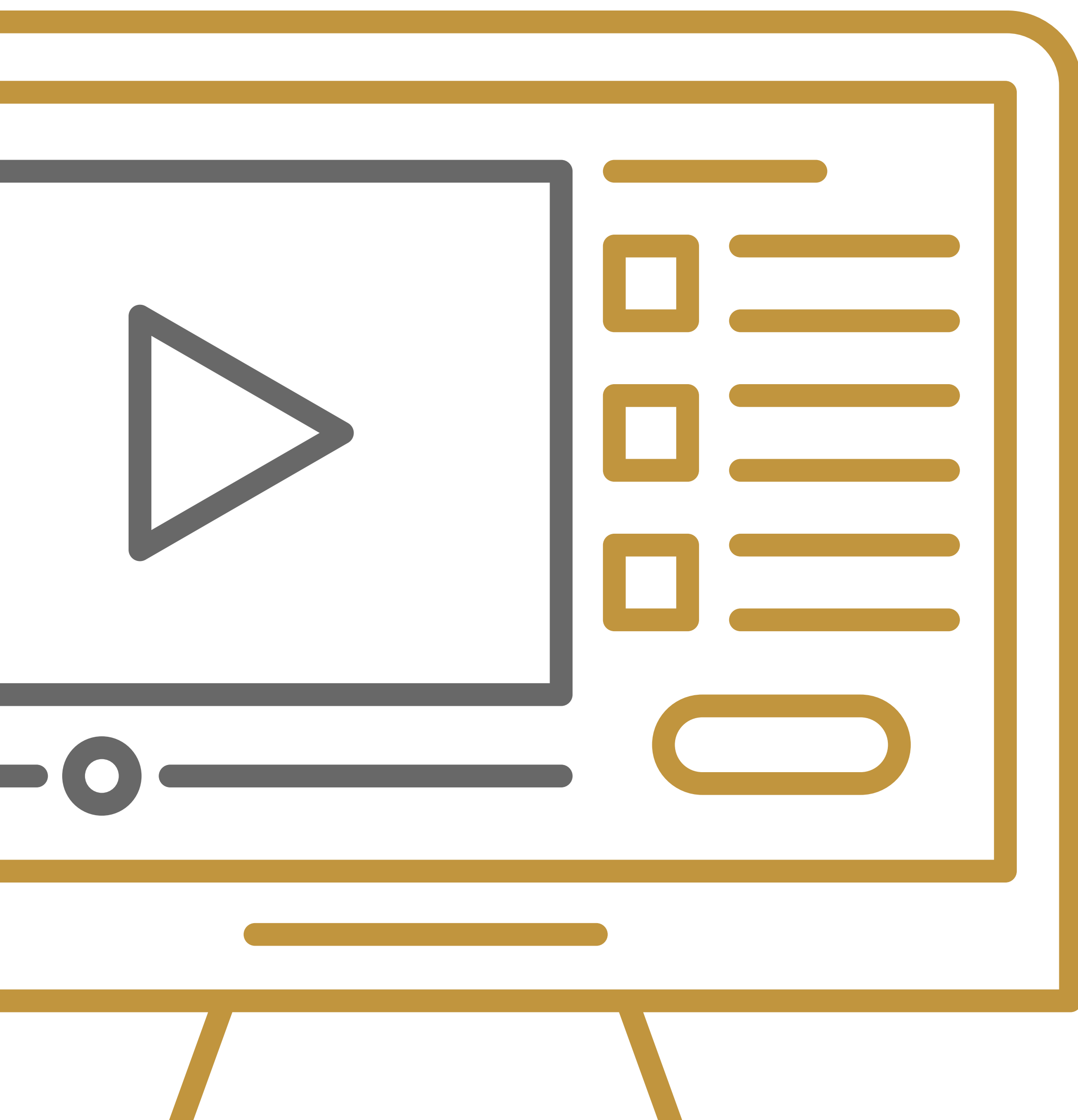
Be Authentic: Show real content about your team and your work. Celebrate wins and give your audience some behind the scenes footage around how your team pulls off some of your incredible work.



Write a Book: No, don't literally write a book, but you can write a longer caption or post. That's right. Don't be afraid to draft longer posts. Turns out, longer posts get more engagement and are considered in algorithms as "time dedicated to post." According to [Fohr](#), the average caption length has more than doubled since 2016, and posts with longer captions got the most engagement.



Give People the Numbers: People love data and data-driven information is the trend. People love knowing what data sets help inform their day-to-day. If you administered a poll or have a unique data set that is interesting to your issue and mission, share it!



Post More Videos!: When you incorporate video content into your strategy, you are almost guaranteed to increase engagement. Videos do not have to be professional quality and edited by top film editors, but it can be simple as point-and-shoot content. If you want to explore more creative options, consider cartoons and moving graphics that share information.

Note: Always be sure to check with your organization's lawyers on the limitations of your nonprofit organization's program activity.

CONTENT DERIVED FROM: [HTTPS://LATER.COM/BLOG/HOW-TO-INCREASE-INSTAGRAM-ENGAGEMENT/](https://later.com/blog/how-to-increase-instagram-engagement/)

WAYS TO BE AN EFFECTIVE TATTLETALE:

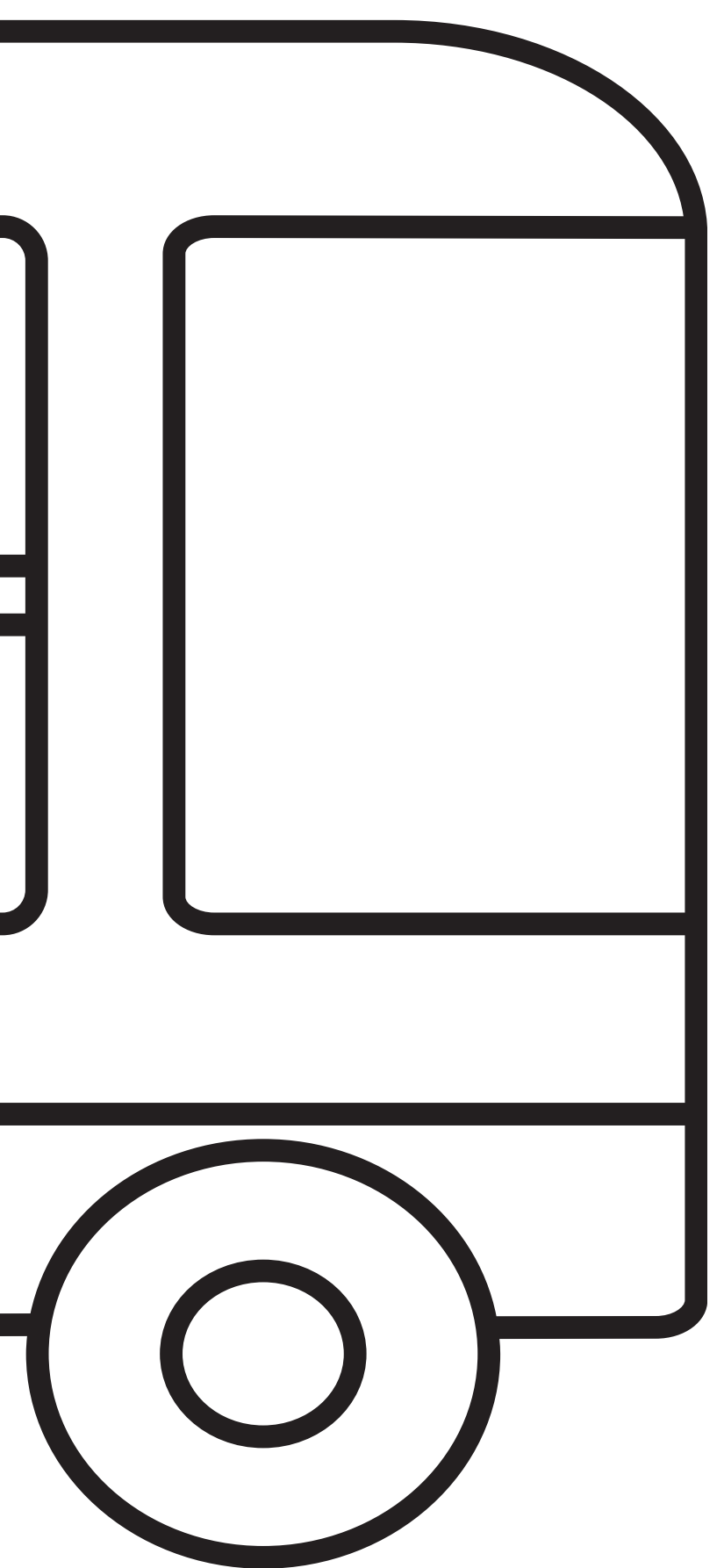
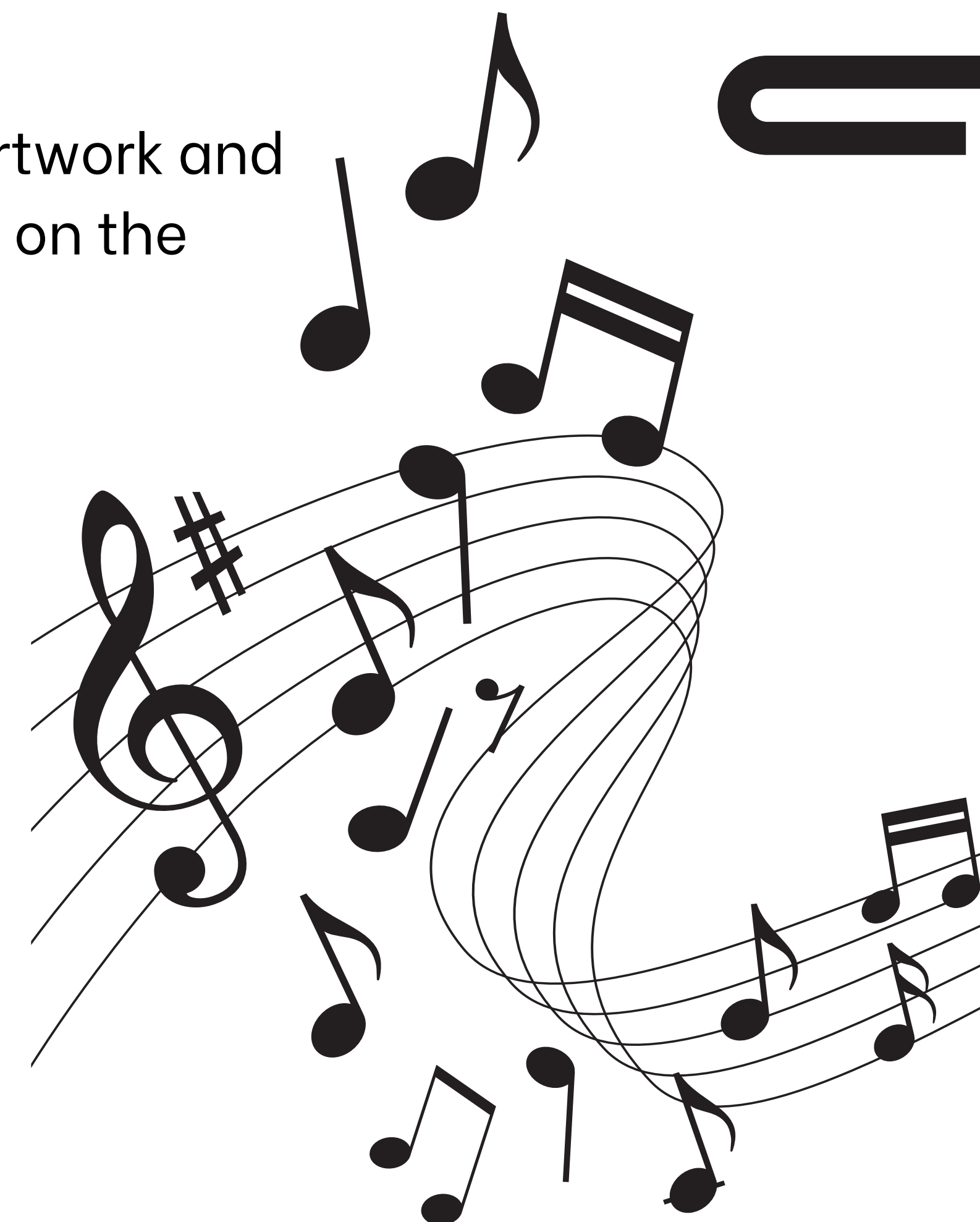
Experiential Marketing and the Power of Art and Music

Your marketing strategy should include creative ways of evoking emotions that empower your community base and motivate issue stakeholders to act. When individuals tap into experiences that serve as a form of education or mimic the experiences of those affected by the issues for which you are advocating, this increases the chance that they will take immediate action whether it be through donations or signing up to volunteer and remember your organization and brand. Amplify your organization's messaging through COVID-19 safe experiences such as:

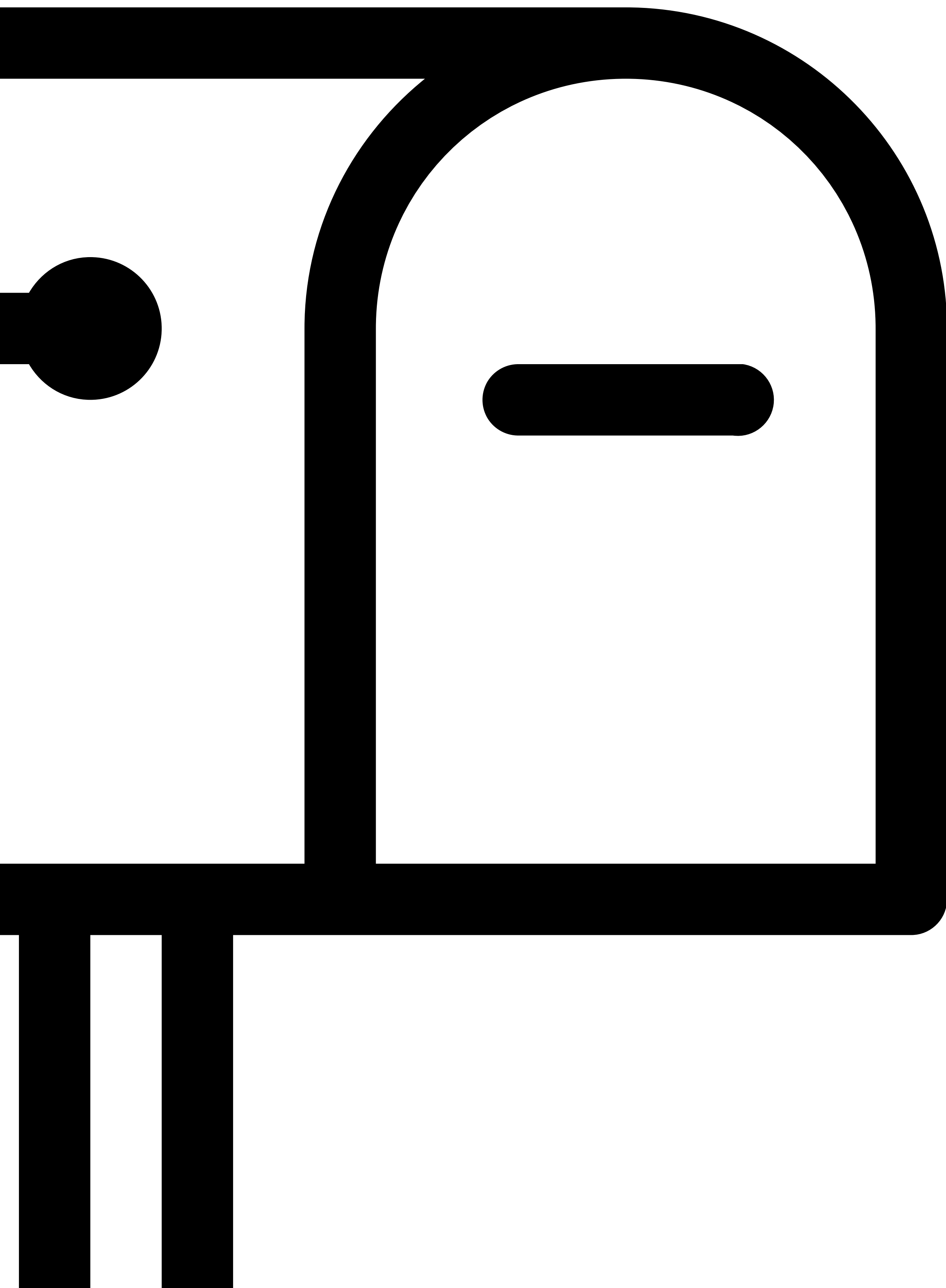
Neighborhood tours: With proper notice to community members, walkable tours to showcase where the communities you represent and serve are great ways for potential donors and volunteers to feel even more connected to your work and an added visual element for them to understand why it is important.

- **Bus tours:** Whether you want to or not, it's kind of hard to ignore a van or bus with vivid artwork and messaging wrapped around it. Bus tours bring attention to your message whether you're on the road to a destination or parked and passing out physical materials.
- **Take a Selfie:** People love to show their support for causes with a photo. At your next event be sure to have an area that clearly displays your organizations name or current cause you're advocating for, and direct people to post with the appropriate mentions and tags to amplify your message.
- **Partner with local artists:** As a visually stimulated society, artwork such as murals and installations have become common forms of activism and advocacy. Local artists and musicians are always looking for ways to get their names out there and what better way than your cause! You can even partner with various local artists to hold fundraising auctions for pieces that are centered around your organization's overall mission.

Note: Always be sure to check with your organization's lawyers on the limitations of your nonprofit organization's program activity.



WAYS TO BE AN EFFECTIVE TATTLETALE:



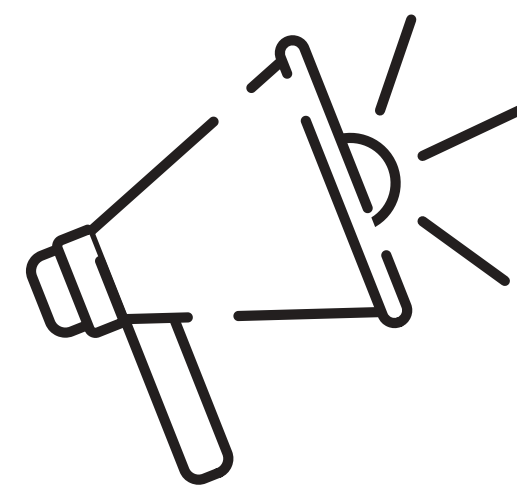
Direct Mail

In the wake of the COVID-19 public health crisis, for the safety and overall wellness of our communities, more people are spending time at home, which means they are more tuned into what is being sent to their homes. You have a captive audience here, so use that to your advantage. Direct mail refers to the physical mail that is delivered into your constituents' mailboxes in a particular area. Mail can be targeted (to specific demographics) or saturated (sent to all households within a targeted radius). Direct mail is a great way to share pertinent information with constituents. You can even have a little fun with your targeting by selecting birthdays, pet owners or holidays (like sending mail to mothers on Mother's Day). You can even target based on age, family size, other socio-economic identifiers or ZIP code. Depending on the firm you use and universe size, mail could be a cost effective way to send good information to a particular area or community in a short amount of time. Legislative session (both state and federal) as well as local official meeting calendars provide the perfect opportunity to keep the community informed. When it's time to keep constituents informed on policy issues that most directly affects them, try using direct mail as an option.

Note: Always be sure to check with your organization's lawyers on the limitations of your nonprofit organization's program activity.

TACTICS TO CONSIDER:

Brief your elected officials on your issues (Educate and Relate)



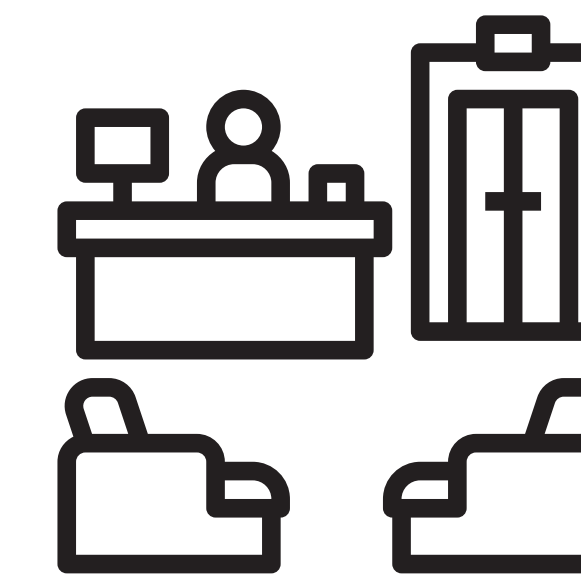
As the expert on your issue(s), you hold unique power that an elected official doesn't. Elected officials do not enter into their elected positions because they are experts, but for their individual experience and ability to build strong coalitions. Introduce your organization to the newly-elected (or re-elected) public officials serving your community—including Members of Congress, state legislators, and county commissioners. It would be wise to schedule these meetings as soon as possible post-election. Lean into your work and host a virtual meeting with elected officials to brief them on what your issues are, why you advocate for them and how they impact the community. Most importantly, outline how their decisions as lawmakers affect the people within your constituency.



Designate staff

Since there are a variety of legislative offices at all levels of government, specific staff members should be assigned to maintaining communication with local, state and federal officials and their staff. Their staff are usually tasked with tracking legislation that affects your community base, and communicating these efforts to your base. Maintaining an open line of communication will allow for clear communication and relationship building between your organization, those you serve and your elected officeholders.

“Get someone to carry your water“ (Lobbying)



Many companies and organizations lobby elected officials during legislative convenings and have dedicated staff hired to do so. Nurture, develop, and enlist the support of elected officials at all levels of government that represent the communities you serve. Ask officials to champion a policy issue. Remember, you and your team are the experts and you can play an active role in the development of key legislation alongside the sponsoring legislator(s) to move your issue from idea to law. In some states, regular citizens can register to be a lobbyist at a nominal fee. You can even host a “Lobby Day” at the local level or at your State Capitol. Given current COVID-19 precautions and local and state mandates, these practices may be prohibited until further notice or moved to a virtual space.



There's Power in Numbers

There is strength and power in numbers. Show yours when bad practices or policies are gaining momentum or to advocate on an issue by recruiting your supporters and others in the general public who care. Be sure to practice safe and socially distant practices (whether you are planning a protest or other event).

Note: Always be sure to check with your organization's lawyers on the limitations of your nonprofit organization's program activity.

SECTION 7: RESOURCES

For more information about SEAP or the SouthStrong recovery campaign, please visit www.theseap.org and www.southstrong.org. For information related to resources available for your nonprofit organization, please use Bolder Advocacy's Resource Library by visiting www.bolderadvocacy.org/resource-library.

SOURCES

¹ [HTTPS://WWW.CENSUS.GOV/POPCLOCK/DATA_TABLES.PHP?COMPONENT=GROWTH](https://www.census.gov/popclock/data_tables.php?component=growth)
[HTTPS://WWW.CENSUS.GOV/PROD/CEN2010/BRIEFS/C2010BR-01.PDF](https://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-01.pdf)

² [HTTPS://WWW.NCBI.NLM.NIH.GOV/PMC/ARTICLES/PMC4445577/](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4445577/)

³ [HTTP://WWW.BRAINRULES.NET/VISION](http://www.brainrules.net/vision)

SOUTHSTRONG

PEOPLE FIRST. EQUITY CENTERED