



*Celebrating*  
5  
*Years*

## **OUR STORY: THEN, NOW & TO COME**

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### **SOUTHERN ECONOMIC ADVANCEMENT PROJECT**

Together, Progress is Possible



# THANK YOU

As the Southern Economic Advancement Project (SEAP) commemorates its fifth anniversary, we stand at a pivotal juncture, reflecting on a journey marked by profound commitment, resilience, and collective action. Since our inception, SEAP has been steadfast in its mission to elevate economic security, healthcare access, and environmental justice across the South.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to our partners, funders, and supporters for their unwavering commitment and generosity over the past five years. Your belief in our mission has been instrumental in our journey, enabling us to make significant strides in our 12 focus states. Thank you for standing with us as we continue to strive for a more equitable and prosperous future for all. Your support fuels our progress and amplifies our impact.

This five-year report is not just a recount of our achievements but a testament to the strength of our partnerships, the depth of our impact, and the enduring promise of our shared vision for a more equitable and prosperous South. Together, we have navigated challenges, celebrated victories, and laid the groundwork for future endeavors. As we look ahead, our resolve is only strengthened by the accomplishments and lessons of the past five years, driving us toward new heights of advocacy and empowerment across the South.

*-The SEAP Team*



# 2019-20

## *Chapter One*

The SEAP was founded in 2019 by Stacey Abrams to address gaps in state and local policy research across the South, focusing on economic security and equity. SEAP's mission is to amplify the efforts of existing organizations and networks working towards a more equitable future by considering how race, class, and gender intersect social and economic policies in the South. The organization, which operates in 12 Southern states, embarked on a listening tour in 2019, engaging with over 60 organizations, including statewide policy and advocacy organizations, local direct service organizations, grassroots groups, and national think tanks, to understand the top economic security challenges and solutions in communities throughout Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, and North Carolina.

The findings from these listening sessions highlighted several critical challenges to economic prosperity, such as transportation barriers, racial and income inequality, housing issues, lack of civic voice, healthcare accessibility, and education system challenges. Specific rural and small-town challenges were also identified, including employment issues, sewage and environmental concerns, population loss, lack of investment, and the stigma facing rural communities.

Organizations serving and advocating for vulnerable populations expressed the need for better resources, collaboration, and coordination. They highlighted communication challenges, especially in translating policy advocacy into the Southern context and bridging rural-urban divides. The need for new voices and talent in leadership and advocacy was also a concern, along with the necessity for more comprehensive research and data to inform policy and advocacy efforts.

SEAP's response to these findings includes basing its research agenda on the feedback from the listening sessions, expanding capacity-building and network-building services, offering microgrants for organizations to engage in policy, providing policy support to harness data, and connecting Southern leaders to training and leadership development opportunities. This initiative demonstrates SEAP's commitment to building economic power through listening, understanding, and acting on Southern communities' complex challenges. This listening tour laid the groundwork for the work to come for SEAP.

# A WORD FROM OUR PARTNERS

*Our partnership with SEAP went well beyond the work we did together. Though we have been listening to households using Fresh EBT through surveys for years, SEAP helped inspire and launch an entirely new way to share that information more widely. SEAP worked with partners to elevate that work to new audiences like media, advocates, and policymakers across the South. And also designed beautiful, accessible reports and new ways to share the findings and motivate action. But also, this work inspired new partnerships, so we were able to implement similar projects in other parts of the country.”*

**Stacy Taylor, Propel**

SEAP's investment helped connect our regional early childhood advocates ...

*SEAP's investment helped connect our regional early childhood advocates with the data and analysis expertise of the NC Budget and Tax Center to provide a long-overdue fiscal analysis of the inequities of our state's reimbursement rates for the child care subsidy program. Our joint report helped elevate our regional advocate's concerns into state-level policy conversations. We're thrilled that this partnership report will be updated to support a broad-based early childhood policy ask in 2021. We're incredibly grateful for SEAP's support.*

**Greg Borom, Child Advocate in Buncombe County, NC**

**Georgia ACT is grateful for the funds received from the SEAP microgrant.**

*Georgia ACT is grateful for the funds received from the SEAP microgrant. We were able to increase our engagement, especially in rural Georgia, by 80% through a total revamp of our website, upgraded hardware, virtual meeting platforms, and expanded social media mechanisms. This resulted in new partnerships with numerous groups and municipalities (outside of Atlanta) on the census, nonpartisan voter engagement, personal protective equipment kit distribution to rural communities, virtual affordable housing conferences, and intake for households seeking rental assistance due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Thank you, SEAP, for helping Georgia ACT to build, support, and inform our statewide network to advance equitable housing and community development.*

**Bambie Hayes-Brown, Housing Coalition Leader in Georgia**

# 2020-21

## Chapter Two

### Key Initiatives and Campaigns

- In response to the pandemic, SEAP launched the South Strong campaign with more than 185 Southern organizations, movement leaders, and scholars. It focuses on an equitable recovery and strengthens partner efforts in policy, civic engagement, and narrative building.
- SEAP's microgrant program assisted a housing coalition in Georgia in reaching rural partners, a policy organization in Alabama in undertaking racial justice work, a nonprofit advocacy organization in Alabama in expanding into environmental justice, a policy team in Mississippi in examining financial services for returning citizens, and a youth-led project in Tennessee to aid immigrant families in the pandemic.

### Community Empowerment and Engagement

- SEAP crafted a *Civic Engagement Guide* to empower organizations and individuals and ensure that policymakers uphold the principles of the South Strong statement.
- SEAP coordinated the acquisition and delivery of 42,000 lbs of shelf-stable food to food banks in Southwest Georgia, Central Alabama, and Northwest Florida for 800,000 servings of food.

### Partnerships and Collaborations

- SEAP collaborated with Propel, the technology company behind FreshEBT, to survey food-insecure users across 12 states. This effort resulted in a comprehensive report and a collection of quotes highlighting the perspectives and experiences of over 2,300 SNAP participants in the South during the pandemic. Additionally, SEAP partnered with state-level organizations to bolster advocacy work by distributing tailored reports for the states of Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, and Tennessee.

### Research & Reports

- Published in June 2020, the *State and Local Decarbonization Policies for the South* report, authored by Mark Paul, Ph., and Leak Stokes, addresses the problem of climate change; the two authors explored how Southern states' policymakers would most benefit from taking action on the ever-growing problem.
- The *Bridging the Transportation Gap: How Nonprofits & Local Governments are Tackling Transportation Challenges* was authored by Ray Khalfani, MPA, in February 2020. Khalfani outlines the vitalness of addressing the transportation gap with the Southern communities.

### Success Stories

- SEAP coordinated multiple events for Black farmers to build networks and spread awareness of resources, culminating in the Justice for Black Farmers Webinar with Senator Cory Booker, Congressman David Scott, and Stacey Abrams. The webinar, which saw more than 1000 participants, was developed in partnership with the Black Belt Justice Center and featured the stories of three female Black farmers, along with remarks from Booker, Scott, and Abrams.

*[Click here to Read 2020's Full Report](#)*

# A WORD FROM OUR PARTNERS

*SEAP entered our lives in a way that felt tailored to our needs, which is rare for a small nonprofit of our caliber. It is the unique way that they center race equity and build organizational capacity that literally sets them apart from how many coalitions are formed. More specifically, SEAP uses an approach that, by design, is shaped, led, and driven by the minorities and women who are actually in the field doing the hard work. That demographic rarely receives support that is molded to meet the unique needs, in particular, of Black, female-led nonprofit leaders in the South. SEAP understands how that demographic is not only fighting for the rights of the marginalized, but they are also living those experiences as well.*

**Lenice Emanuel, Nonprofit Leader in South Alabama**

**SEAP entered our lives in a way that felt tailored to our needs...**

*SEAP has amazing expertise on the vast array of federal grant opportunities and works so nimbly with organizations to identify those funding opportunities that are a good fit and available now.*

**Dr. Allison Plyer, Chief Demographer, The Data Center**

**SEAP has amazing expertise on the vast array of federal grant opportunities ...**

# 2021-22

## Chapter Three

### Key Initiatives and Campaigns

- SEAP launched the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Toolkit as part of the South Strong initiative, providing crucial resources for Southern communities to manage ARP relief funds equitably. The toolkit, endorsed by various organizations, offers guidance on equitable funding allocation, promotes community engagement, and tracks equity and spending.

### Community Empowerment and Engagement

- SEAP, Deep Center, and the Roosevelt Network co-hosted the *Youth Voice, Story, and Power Summit*, which connected youth across the Southern Black Belt to learn about policy and legislative change. Students participated in a half-day event focused on knowledge and resource building to fuel their use of personal experiences to engage in policy and advocacy.
- In September 2021, Data for Progress, in collaboration with the SEAP and Groundwork Collaborative, surveyed 2,222 registered voters in Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia to understand their needs better and amplify their voices.

### Partnerships and Collaborations

- In March 2021, SEAP partnered with Fair Count and the Kaiser Family Foundation to launch *#CountMeIn*, an initiative to increase vaccination access and awareness across the South, particularly among Black, Latinx, and Native American populations. SEAP's contributions included creating the Georgia Vaccination Sites Dashboard, distributing microgrants, and facilitating a Spanish-language tele-town hall.

### Research & Reports

- SEAP unveiled [a report introducing the Community-Centered Employment](#) model, advocating for a more equitable and just employment system in response to the economic disparities exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- SEAP, Fair Count, and the National Conference on Citizenship published the first *Pandemic to Prosperity* report to examine data documenting the state of the South during the pandemic. The partnership included quarterly reports and webinars featuring White House speakers, state-level data officers, and experts from the Data Center.

### Success Stories

- New Orleans, LA, and East Point, GA, adopted SEAP's ARP Model Resolution, which prioritizes and commits city leaders to allocating and using ARP funds for initiatives that drive sustainable and equitable recovery.

[Read 2021's Full Report](#)

# A WORD FROM OUR PARTNERS

Working with SEAP helped us ground our ideas in successful models from across the South..

*The mission of SOWEGA Rising is to mobilize people and resources to improve the quality of life, well-being and political power of marginalized Southwest Georgians. Partners like SEAP are critical to our mission because of initiatives like "Our Dollars, Our Dreams", which ensures that transformational resources and specialists can come to rural areas of Georgia to help shape the future of these communities. Rural communities, particularly marginalized communities of color, desperately need significant and equitable investment if they are to sustain for future generations. Accessing federal dollars will allow us to realize our vision of the Rural Innovation and Social Equity (RISE) Center, which will be a space for leaders of the next generation to create innovative solutions that will solve tomorrow's problems of climate, energy, environment, health and food access for rural Georgia. Through the "Our Dollars, Our Dreams" initiative, SEAP is providing the support and technical assistance needed to support this exciting endeavor and SOWEGA Rising is truly grateful to be selected for this initiative.*

**Sherrell Byrd, Founder and Executive Director, SOWEGA Rising**

*Working with SEAP helped us ground our ideas in successful models from across the South and build partnerships with peers in other Cities. Their policy analysis and reporting have been a bedrock for our framework and enabled us to do the messy, complicated work of collective impact. Our partnership has deepened the engagement of our government partners and helped our collaboration to ground our recommendations.*

**Nellie Catzen, Executive Director  
Committee for a Better New Orleans**

Partners like SEAP are critical to our mission





# 2022-23

## Chapter Four

### **Key Initiatives and Campaigns**

- SEAP collaborated in hosting a summit focused on the Southeast Crescent Regional Commission, aiming to tackle persistent poverty across Southern counties through strategic regional development and planning. This initiative represents a targeted effort to catalyze long-term, sustainable growth and equity within these communities.
- SEAP developed tools like the *Federal Grant Finder*, which streamlines the search for federal discretionary grants and enhances accessibility for governments and nonprofits.

### **Community Empowerment and Engagement**

- SEAP hosted several webinars on key topics such as Medicaid unwinding and the strategic use of ARP funds, reaching over 2,500 elected officials and community members to promote awareness of equity and engagement.

### **Partnerships and Collaborations**

- SEAP partnered with Deep Center in Savannah, GA, to assist in story collection for their youth fines and fees advocacy work. SEAP surveyed the Propel Provider's app to gather stories about the impact of youth fines and fees on families across Georgia. Additionally, SEAP connected Deep Center and Berkeley Law Policy Advocacy Clinic to advance this effort.

### **Research & Reports**

- SEAP's report, *Engagement & Equity First: Opportunities and Challenges for Federal Funding Implementation*, offered insights from over 50 stakeholders on equitable community engagement and federal funding challenges.
- In 2022, SEAP collected information on 172 cities and presented its ARP Local Funds Tracker to ICMA, Local Progress, National Council of Nonprofits, North Carolina ARP Cohort, RouteFifty, North Carolina Conservation Network, and other organizations.

### **Success Stories**

- SEAP provided the Student Basic Needs Coalition (SBNC) with a microgrant to expand its chapter network and advance the agenda of ensuring all students have an equitable college experience that leads to graduation. SBNC grew from 1 state to 15. In October 2022, the Tennessee Chapter's HB 1669/SB 1825 policy was passed, requiring the Tennessee Higher Education Commission's executive director to reduce food insecurity at public universities. Their policy was also recognized for the Ten For Tennessee award.

# A WORD FROM OUR PARTNERS

*We were thrilled to work with SEAP on the American Rescue Plan Toolkit: ARP in Action for the Disability Community. Through that partnership, we were able to show policymakers and stakeholders the ways in which ARP funding has been used to improve access and rights for disabled people across the South. This document helped us build some relationships with elected officials and government staff at both the state and local level, and it helped us share some ideas for municipal funding investments with a few local communities we work in. We really credit the team at SEAP for developing this great toolkit and bringing us on as a partner to help develop and promote it to our community. Broadly, we see SEAP as the leaders in progressive policy in the South and have learned so much from them as we've built out our own policy team. They have positioned themselves as connectors and conveners and have built strong relationships that have brought about transformative change in our region. We look forward to partnering with SEAP again and continuing to learn from them in the years to come.*

**Dom Kelly, Founder, New Disabled South**

“  
We really credit the team at SEAP for developing this great toolkit and bringing us on as a partner to help develop and promote it to our community.”

*As a first-generation Vietnamese-American living in the South, I understand that there is a lot of work to be done here. SEAP is the organization that has the means and drive to create that change. To me, SEAP means hope for a more equitable and promising future. SEAP is the glimmer of hope that the South needs.*

**Jon Huynh, Former SEAP Intern**

# 2023-24

## Chapter Five

### Key Initiatives and Campaigns

- SEAP launched the *Our Dollars, Our Dream* campaign, a strategic initiative to empower Southern communities to take ownership of public dollars, designed to provide practical support, including research on equity-focused strategies, assistance securing funds, and a platform for sharing best practices among partners.
- SEAP is thrilled to reengage the South Strong network this year through our *South Strong Policy Entrepreneur Program*. This program is a specialized virtual training initiative conducted twice a quarter to empower participants in policy-making and advocacy.

### Community Empowerment and Engagement

- SEAP co-hosted a webinar on the Federal Budget with national partners at The Center for Law and Social Policy, the Congressional Progressive Caucus Center, and ProsperUS. A panel of experts defined appropriations buzzwords and explained the connection between federal, state, and local budgets.
- SEAP conducted a survey to invite the voices of food-insecure families across LA, SC, and TN to the table regarding spending decisions. SEAP partnered with Propel to promote the survey to food-insecure families, garnering over 1,600 responses.

### Partnerships and Collaborations

- In December 2023, SEAP, in partnership with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services and the Georgia Legal Services Program, hosted a critical teletown hall conducted in Spanish to address the pressing issue of Medicaid Unwinding in Georgia, focusing on its impact on children's coverage. This event, drawing nearly 4,700 participants, highlighted Georgia's alarming rank as the third-worst state for disenrolling children from Medicaid.

### Research & Reports

- SEAP authored *Organizing for Federal Funds: Case Studies from Southern Organizers*. It tells how eight organizations initiated educating and organizing their communities to advocate for equitable allocation and implementation of the ARP State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funding.

### Success Stories

- In January 2023, SEAP's Executive Director, Sarah Beth Gehl, was invited to Washington, DC, to provide input into the US Treasury and the White House American Rescue Plan Team's Catalyzing an Equitable Economic Recovery meeting.
- In 2023, with SEAP's help, a new rule was introduced to make lending to Black farmers fairer and more transparent. This began with SEAP's efforts in 2019 to engage Black farmers in discussions. In 2022, SEAP supported a push for the government to consider race and ethnicity in loan data. This led to a change requiring lenders to collect this information for agricultural loans, a step forward in ensuring equity in lending.

[Read 2023's Full Report](#)

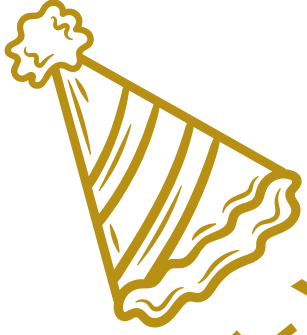
# SUPPORT OUR MISSION

*By supporting SEAP you're championing a cause that shines a light on the South—a region too often overlooked. Our commitment, as our mission states, is to break down barriers to economic security, healthcare, and environmental justice.*

*Your donation is **a powerful statement of belief** in a future where these issues are addressed head-on, ensuring that every community in the South can thrive, especially those historically underserved. Join us in creating a stronger South.*

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FIVE-YEAR ANNIVERSARY



SEAP

