

West Virginia Healthy Kids and Families Coalition

Political and Social Climate in West Virginia. Over the last 2 generations, there's been a jobs exodus. The jobs that remain pay less, are harder to get, and harder to keep. Half our families don't make enough to make ends meet. More than half our kids qualify for free or reduced lunch. We rank last on many health lists. 40 years ago, 38% of workers were organized; today 13%. Last year, Republicans took over the state legislature for the first time in 82 years, and we face an open race for Governor in 2016. Some have given up on West Virginia because of our demographics (94% white, oldest and least educated state in the U.S.), but we have a proud tradition of sticking up for ourselves, and folks are ready to organize.

What we do. Building on over a decade of community organizing history and child advocacy, the WV Healthy Kids and Families Coalition and our partners launched a statewide organizing drive 3 years ago, called *Our Children, Our Future*. That campaign, featuring leadership from everyday people, has already nabbed 16 state policy victories - ranging from raising the minimum wage and expanding school breakfast programs to juvenile justice reform and child abuse prevention. Last year we launched a sister community development effort focused on knocking WV off the top of the worst health lists (visit trythiswv.com to learn more about our conference, how-to's, and \$82,000 mini-grant program). This year, we are starting a series of candidate trainings and a permanent canvass operation to increase our electoral power. There is something happening here, and we think West Virginia can be a place where intractable problems give way to innovative, people-driven solutions.

Growth Areas. Our aim is for everyday families to have governing power in our state, so we can ensure that every kid has a fair shot. To that end, we are always pursuing new opportunities to build strength. Here are 5 key growth areas for WVHKFC and our partners over the next 12-18 months:

1. **Forming a Tax Reform Coalition** – Republican leadership has set their sights on major tax reform in 2016, and we are building a coalition that includes early childhood advocates, small businesses, faith leaders, labor, seniors and others to make sure that kids and families are protected, including a push for Earned Income Tax Credit (an issue that we have already found support for among Republicans).
2. **Non-partisan Candidate Training** – We trained 104 candidates for office in 2015 through a series of non-partisan, day-long trainings co-sponsored by a wide range of labor, Secretary of State, environmental, and non-profit allies. We focused on under-represented candidates, especially women and low-income candidates.
3. **Integrated Voter Engagement** – This election cycle we are producing a voter guide, electoral workshops for our partners, and in-depth voter engagement programs for a handful of our partners – as well as 15 candidate forums across the state to educate voters on children's issues.
4. **Student Leadership** – We now have 6 full-fledged Our Children, Our Future Student Chapters in youth programs, high schools, and colleges -- with another 12 in the pipeline. Each chapter participates in statewide advocacy, organizes a community action project, and attends leadership trainings.
5. **Early Childhood issues and Parents as Mentors** – We have spent 2 years building momentum toward the possibility of winning large-scale early childhood investments at the state level (including pre-K for 3 year-olds and statewide in-home family education). We also have a parent leadership development pilot called Parents as Mentors that pays low-income parents and grandparents to work in local elementary classrooms and build leadership skills.
6. **Try This** (health and economic development) – We are growing a statewide coalition to knock WV off the top of the worst health lists (see more at trythiswv.com).

Budget and Current Funders. Our current funders include our partners and leaders (~30 percent, largely through fundraisers, registrations, and sponsorships), state government (~20 percent) and foundations (~50 percent, including mostly local foundations: *the Benedum Foundation, The Greater Kanawha Valley Foundation, the McDonough Foundation, the Generous Promise Grant, and the Babcock Foundation*). Our budget has grown from less than \$100,000 in 2012 to \$974,000 in 2016. The bulk of our funding pays for a terrific staff of 5 organizers, and we are proud that less than 7 percent of our costs go to overhead.

For more information, contact Director Stephen Smith (304.610.6512, stephen@ourfuturewv.org).