



Strengthening Virginia's Families



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Why now?

- Economic landscape has contributed to an increased demand for core public services
- Changes in demographics
- Family structure is a major indicator of poverty
- Family structure has a direct impact on various short-term and long-term outcomes for children

The Practice Shift

VDSS is developing a system-wide approach to strengthening all families that focuses on:

- 1. Reducing non-marital births**
- 2. Connecting and reconnecting fathers with their children**
- 3. Encouraging the formation and maintenance of safe, stable, intact, two-parent families.**

This includes:

- Capitalizing on opportunities to strengthen the family at every point of client contact
- A holistic approach that looks beyond clients as individuals and focuses on strengthening the family unit
- Alignment of policies, programs, and resources with the guiding principles and values of VDSS

Outcomes Measures

Through the implementation of this initiative, VDSS will:

Reduce Non-marital Births

- Decrease the non-marital birth rate
- Decrease subsequent non-marital births
- Decrease the pregnancy rate for teens after entering foster care

Connect & Reconnect Fathers with their Children

- Increase the amount of contact fathers have with their children
- Increase the percentage of biological fathers who have co-parenting arrangements with mothers
- Increase the percentage of noncustodial fathers who provide financial support
- Increase the engagement of fathers for children in foster care

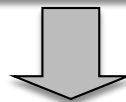
Encourage the Maintenance & Formation of Two-Parent Families

- Increase the percentage of adults age 25 to 54 who are married
- Increase the percentage of men and women who remain in a safe and stable first marriage
- Increase the percentage of children living with their own married parents

Process Overview

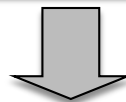
Critical Areas of Focus

- Reduce non-marital births
- Connect and reconnect fathers with their children
- Encourage the formation and maintenance of safe, stable, intact, two-parent families

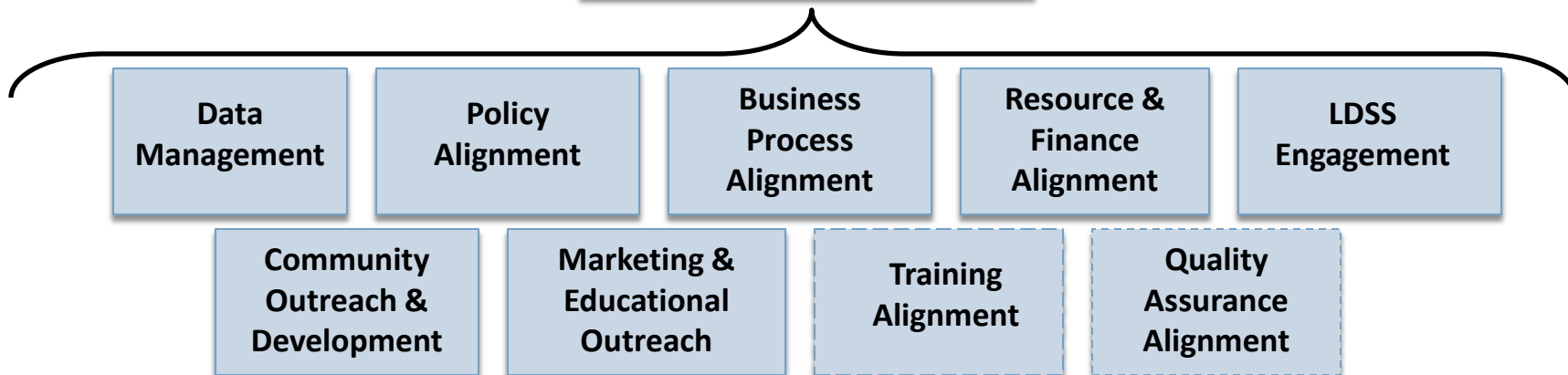


Strengthening Families Steering Committee

- Oversee the development of strategies to address the critical areas of focus
- Strategically coordinate and manage the key strategies required to advance the initiative



Practice Model Development



Accomplishments to Date

- Developed a VDSS Practice Model and staffed several cross-functional workgroups
- Began to align all grants and contracts with initiative goals
- Issued state grant with Promoting Safe and Stable Families funds to support local programming efforts
- Applied for ACF's Pathways to Responsible Fatherhood Grant and the Community-Centered Healthy Marriage and Relationship Grant
- Conducted four community meetings around the Commonwealth during summer 2011
- Co-hosted the 2011 Northeast Family Strengthening Conference in partnership with ACF
- Developed PSA on responsible fatherhood
- Issued RFP for community engagement and outreach and a marketing campaign

Plans Ahead

- Continue cross-functional workgroups
- Issue two contracts to provide research, community outreach and engagement, and marketing
- Conduct targeted outreach with the faith community through focus groups, forums, and training institutes
- Implement asset development strategies across various divisions and programs
- Pursue waiver opportunities
- Develop local engagement strategy to pilot best practices with a cohort of LDSS and community partners through the Innovators for Success Council

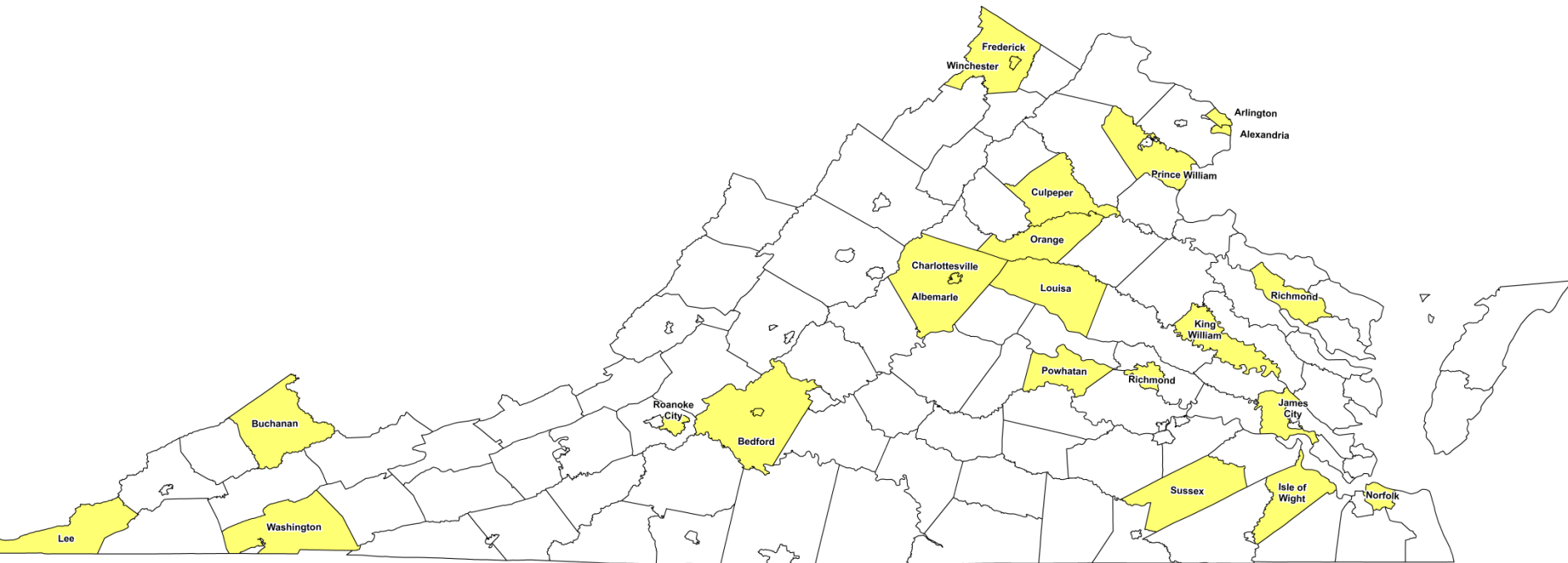
Innovators for Success Purpose



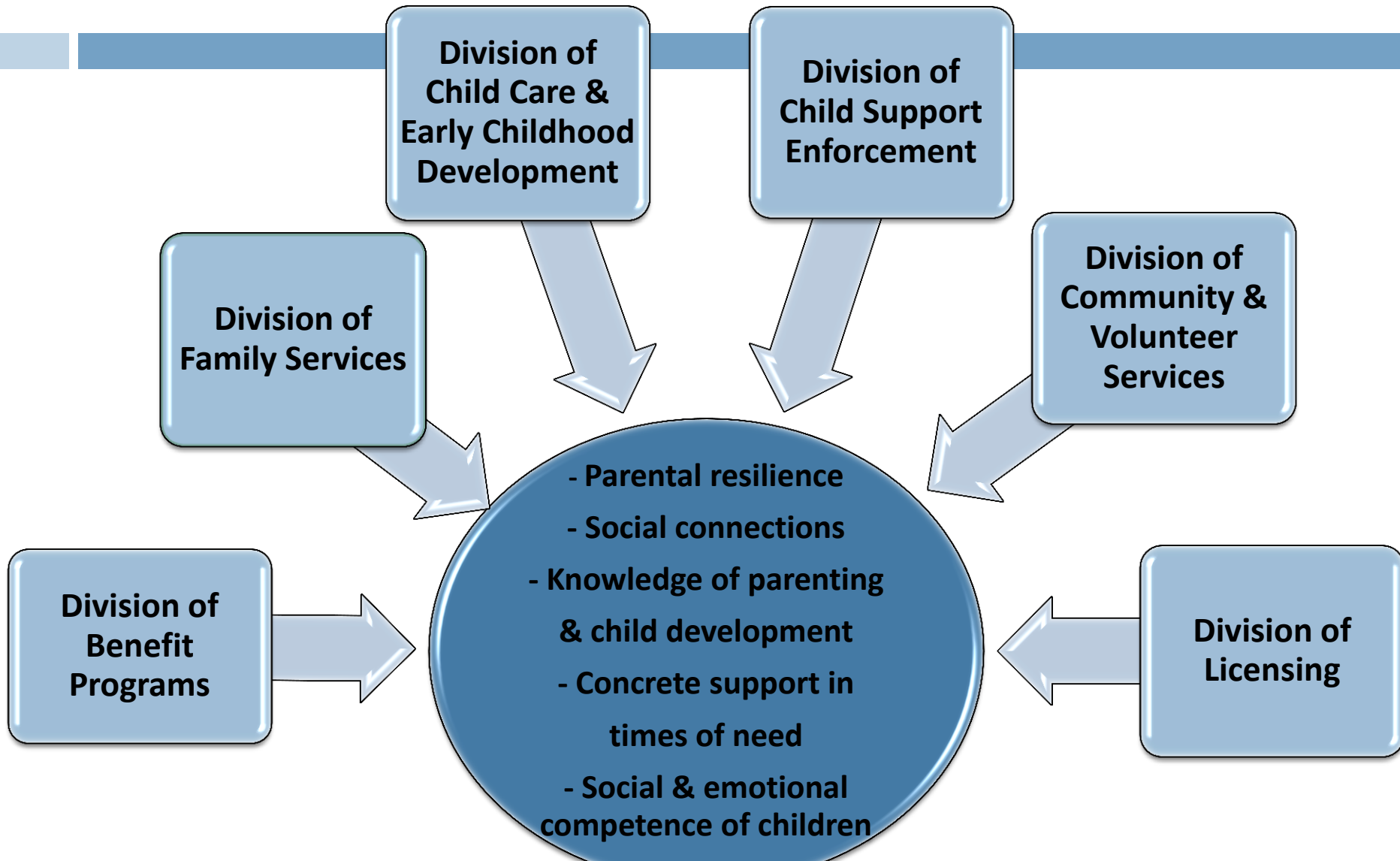
Innovators for Success Council

- Albemarle
- Alexandria
- Arlington
- Bedford
- Buchanan
- Charlottesville
- Culpeper
- Frederick
- Isle of Wight
- James City
- King William
- Lee
- Louisa
- Norfolk
- Orange
- Powhatan
- Prince William
- Richmond City
- Richmond County
- Roanoke City
- Sussex
- Washington
- Winchester

VDSS Strengthening Families Initiative Innovators for Success Council



Framework: Utilizing 5 Protective Factors



Implications for Practice

- **Imagine** if VDSS could:
 - Develop and mandate father engagement skills training for social workers
 - Integrate healthy marriage and relationship skills education into the paternity establishment process at birthing hospitals
 - Require father information to be a mandatory field in OASIS
 - Disseminate information on the value of healthy relationships, birth spacing, good parenting practices etc. through child support district offices
 - Integrate financial education measures and information into child care providers' service planning process with families
 - Expand pregnancy prevention programs and the dissemination of healthy marriage and relationship information for pre-teens and teens in middle and high schools in partnership with local school districts and DOE
 - Conduct community outreach with institutions of higher education to develop curricula that highlights trend data on poverty, family structure, fatherhood engagement, etc.
 - Develop family engagement policy specific to incarcerated parents and family violence

Strengthening Families Initiative

Examples of Activities to Support on a Local Level

Healthy Marriage & Relationships

- Marriage and relationship skills education
- Marriage preparation programs
- Premarital counseling
- Marriage counseling and mediation
- Information dissemination about the benefits of marriage and healthy relationships
- Marriage mentoring programs that use married couples as role models and mentors in at-risk communities
- Divorce education and reduction programs, including mediation and counseling
- Education on controlling, reducing, and eliminating aggressive behavior, particularly in the context of marriage

Responsible Parenting

- Skills-based parenting education
- Information dissemination about good parenting practices and the benefit of two-parent involvement in the life of a child
- Counseling, mentoring, and mediation
- Encouraging child support payments
- Information dissemination regarding knowledge of parenting and child development and social and emotional competence of children
- Information dissemination on the causes of domestic violence and child abuse

Economic Stability

- Job searches and employment training
- Subsidized employment, job enhancement, job retention, and educational or career advancement education and services
- Dissemination of employment materials
- Financial planning education and seminars
- Counseling and mentoring related to household management, budgeting, banking, financial transactions, and home maintenance
- Information dissemination regarding asset development and Individual Development Accounts

Responsible Fatherhood

- Activities to promote **healthy marriage and relationships**
- Activities to support **responsible parenting**
- Activities to support **economic stability**

“If young people finish high school, get a job, and get married before they have children, they have a 2% chance of falling into poverty.”

- Brookings economists Ron Haskins and Isabel Sawhill

For more information, visit
www.vastrengtheningfamilies.com