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**Introduction**

In 2035 – what will human progress, human need and social services be in Virginia? What implications does that have for shared community goals? What policies or recommendations may be needed over the years ahead? And what implications does it have for today’s strategies for public and private human service providers and community partners?

On December 5, 2019, the Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) and the Institute for Alternative Futures (IAF) hosted a “scenario workshop” to discuss these questions and “step into” the alternative futures represented by three Virginia Social Services 2035 scenarios. 27 participants from various state agencies, community and academic organizations and service providers from across the state gathered at the VCU Health Hub.

The Virginia scenarios had been developed with input from a team of national advisors, 10 other state and local scenario efforts, and within the state from relevant forecasts and research as well as interviews with more than 30 state experts and social service leaders. The resulting Virginia Social Services 2035 Scenarios offer a tool for the state social services community to explore opportunities and threats, to imagine preferred futures, and to assess the implications of these futures for current social service goals and strategies.

Virginia was chosen as one of 11 state and local efforts of the Human Progress and Human Services 2035 project because of the recognized leadership of the Department of Social Services’ in the social/human services field.

These Virginia scenarios and the Scenario Workshop are a part of the Human Progress and Human Services 2035 project, supported by The Kresge Foundation. This report identifies highlights from the Scenario Workshop, including key recommendations, scenario likelihood and preferability, and conclusions.
Implications for Current Goals and Strategies

After the scenarios were presented – and participants were given the opportunity to share their insights, comments and questions – the full group separated into three teams. Each team was assigned one of the three scenarios (1. Expectable, 2. Challenging or 3. Visionary) and given the opportunity to “step into” that future, considering how successful Virginia’s goals and strategies would be and develop short-term and long-term recommendations. Presented here are highlights from each of the three scenario groups.

Scenario 1: Modest and Uneven Progress

In your scenario will the current human service goals and strategies be successful? What changes or additions would be needed in your scenario?

- Virginia needs to start with a philosophy and culture change as a foundation that can then lead to these ‘big idea’ innovations identified in the goals and strategies, and beyond.
- Success will require a combination of broad strategies, such as human-centered design, and making sure the basics are met such as housing and transportation.
- A racial equity healing framework is needed, particularly as the needs of urban and rural areas across the state evolve.
- Virginia needs to enhance emergency services in preparation for climate change impacts.

Recommendations for the near term and long term

- Virginia social services needs to develop a communication strategy which makes all activities and objectives easily understandable.
- Holistic assessments should be done to allow for personalized benefits and partner with community organizations to help meet all needs
- Pursue being proactive, rather than reactive
- Assess where the services of DSS end and leverage external collaboration to bridge services to needs.
- Integrate services and remove the stigma around receiving social services
- Invest more in the social service workforce

Scenario 2: Uphill Both Ways

In your scenario will the current human service goals and strategies be successful? What changes or additions would be needed in your scenario?

- No, they cannot be successful as there are too many challenges in the scenario.
- Resources should focus on social determinants, such as housing and food.
• Social services can use automation as an advantage with resource cuts.
• Streamline services for greater impact, integrate data and increase effectiveness.
• Government has to increase collaboration with NGOs, philanthropic organizations and private sector.
• However, this challenging zone holds an opportunity to do things differently.
• Expand volunteer base and tap into people coming together.

**Near term Recommendations**

• Secure greater tax treatments and coach more workers to secure their 401Ks in preparation for the future.
• Integrate systems and increase intersectionality of services.
• Be intentional that automation of social services work is approachable and usable to all recipients of services, including older populations
• Embrace preventative strategies and use data analytics to customize services.
• Use caseworkers to coach clients on work skills and their workforce strategies
• Reduce spending on criminal justice
• Focus on disconnected youth and focus on what can be done in the neighborhood or the home to advance pre-K preparedness.
• Use abandoned properties for community gardens.
• Prioritize low income application of 3D printing, e.g. 3D printed houses.
• Expand volunteer base
• Eliminate duplication of services.
• Redistribute money as TANF moves to a block grant.

**Long term Recommendations**

• Engage more across the state to have a significant political change.
• Reduce competition between rural and urban communities for resources and bridge isolated communities.
• Leverage technology to increase efficiency of the existing system and find practices for maximum impact.
• Simplify services.
• Earned income tax credit remains in this scenario – leverage this for the greatest impact on poverty.
Scenario 3: The Triumphant Commonwealth

In your scenario will the current social service goals and strategies be successful? What changes or additions would be needed in your scenario?

The following additions are needed:

- More accessible, integrated and related data across divisions and agencies
- Establish a data governance model
- Foster a major cultural shift towards greater emphasis on racial equity
- Stronger partnerships with businesses and other community serving organizations (include providing support and capacity building)
- Increase investment in workforce education
- Be sure to tailor strategies specific to rural communities, and address the following needs:
  - High speed internet
  - Increased public transportation
  - Expanded educational opportunities, including with community colleges
  - Improve infrastructure particularly road connectivity

Near term Recommendations

- Increase grassroots efforts to create a connected community. Involve local businesses, nonprofits, local organizations and customers in leading the effort.
- VDSS should provide more supports to DSS agencies to increase prevention programs with a focus on the working poor
- Increase greater collaboration, specifically idea sharing, between VDSS and local DSS
- Examine the state (VDSS) and local (DSS) governance structure
- Greater use of the Strengths Based Perspective across local and state DSS
- Develop community-based goals that require collaboration with other state agencies, businesses, non-profits and community serving organizations. Goals may include:
  - Expand early childhood education access for all (VDOE and VDSS)
  - Expand equity in education for all
  - Update curriculum to include basic life skills and vocational/tech training across the board (VDOE)
  - Create more jobs and expand job training for the underserved
- Co-location of services (DSS office with dental and medical services)
- Create policies that promote measurable success

Long term Recommendations

- Shift from Whole Family to Whole Community framework (VDSS)
- Include a vision to enhance servicing an older population (Adult Services)
• Create a strategic plan with identified ownership to ensure action. This includes realigning resources (VDSS)
• Revamp substance use services and place a greater significance on Sex Trafficking and Immigration (VDSS)
• Organizational Development will provide continuous, strategic workforce develop improvements within VDSS (workforce preparation, skill development, career development and planning)
• Review and make edits to the Welfare Stipend Program to allow greater flexibility, including for career “switchers.”

Likelihood and Preferability of the Scenarios

The workshop participants were asked to consider both the likelihood and the preferability of each scenario. After each scenario was presented, a poll was conducted, and results were revealed in the afternoon. Each participant judged the three scenarios’ likelihood and preferability with a value from 0 to 100; 0 represented not likely or not preferable at all, and 100 represented complete likelihood or preferability. The scenarios were not to be considered as mutually exclusive sets, so the sum of values in each column could exceed 100. Presented in the table below are the average values.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>Likelihood</th>
<th>Preferability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scenario 1: Modest and Uneven Progress</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario 2: Uphill Both Ways</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario 3: The Triumphant Commonwealth</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The participants found Scenario 1 to be relatively likely and the most likely of the three, which reflects the intended construction of this expectable scenario; however, Scenario 1 is not the most preferable. Scenarios 3 is significantly more preferable but perceived as less likely.

One lesson from looking at these results is the risk of reinforcing a suboptimal future. Scenario 1 represents the type of forecasts that are often used in strategic planning, particularly in assessing the opportunities and threats the community faces (the O & T of a classic SWOT analysis). But Scenario 1 is not as preferable as either Scenario 3. Communities are at risk of reinforcing the expectable future by not considering more preferable possibilities.
Robust Recommendations for Social Services in Virginia

After participants presented on each of the scenarios, recommendations which were ‘robust’ – meaning, those that worked across two or more scenarios – were identified.

Robust recommendations:

- Investment in workforce, both the broad workforce and the social services workforce
- Greater use of data and data integration
- More collaboration between and across agencies and organizations
- Involve the customer of social services directly in problem solving
- Prioritize prevention; move from being proactive rather than reactive
- Pursue equitable job training

Then, from the robust recommendations, participants identified “key recommendations”, or those considered the most interesting or important.

Key recommendations:

- The need to reframe how we look at and deliver services, to be more truly empowering and align services to needs
- Better early child development
- Prevention – shift the agency away from being reactionary
- Foster a network of community mentors
- Meet clients where they figuratively are, without judgement, and help them identify where they want to go in life and then how to get there
- Stories from social services must be told to help remove stigma, increase compassion and increase support for services
- Foster a Mindshift- from oneness to humankind; from the superficial to the spiritual; from certainty to curiosity; from debate to discussion
- Ensure there is diversity in all decision making and planning.

Conclusion

To conclude the Workshop, participants were encouraged to continue to aspire and monitor their aspirations. Participants were reminded that the vision is a Commonwealth in which individuals and families have access to adequate, affordable, high-quality human/social services that enable them to be the best they can. This exercise of stepping into alternative futures has served to provide a long-term view, makes service deliverers more flexible in dealing with the likely challenges and opportunities, enable VDSS to be more strategic and increases our ability to create our vision.