Hillel Echo-Hawk (Pawnee/Athabaskan) shares her perspective on foraging for wild edibles at a symposium on food sovereignty presented by the University of Virginia in partnership with Virginia Humanities in November 2018.

Photo by Ézé Amos
IN THE EARLY 1970s, Congress mandated the creation and support of Virginia Humanities and fifty-five other humanities councils across the country. We believed then, as we do now, that for democracy to thrive the humanities must be a core component of public life.

For almost half a century we have worked with Virginians to live up to that idea. Thanks to dedicated public and private partnerships we have become one of the largest and most diversely funded of the state councils, reaching tens of millions of people through our wide range of programs.

We produce radio and podcasts, a book festival, and an online encyclopedia. We host fellows and distribute grants. We highlight, support, and preserve folk traditions as well as Indian and African American heritage. We create digital and print media, and we also work directly in communities and with teachers in classrooms.

Our aim is to tell the stories of all Virginians and to find ways to help people tell their own stories. We want to connect Virginians with their history and culture and, in doing that, bring us all a bit closer together.

This work isn’t new. We’ve been connecting people through stories ever since we were founded in 1974. But our Commonwealth looks different now than it did then. And that means our work has to change too.

TOWARD THAT END, we have created a new strategic plan. It unifies our work around three important themes that will connect our programs, guide our partnerships, and help us make the humanities part of the daily life of all Virginians.

COVER
Amos Paul Kennedy Jr. demonstrates printing techniques during a screening of the documentary Proceed and Be Bold! at Light House Studio’s Vinegar Hill Theatre in Charlottesville in November 2018.

Photo by Pat Jarrett
EQUITY & DEMOCRACY

EVERYONE IS DIFFERENT, and we seek to understand—and celebrate—those differences. But it has also become increasingly difficult for us all to come together around a set of shared beliefs.

We’ll use our programming to create opportunities for civic dialogue and the exchange of experiences and perspectives. Whether this means bringing people together for a traditional meal, a book discussion, or a film screening, we will provide welcoming spaces for Virginians to explore ideas that matter today, and get to know one another during the process. Even when we don’t agree, we hope these experiences will help us make meaningful connections with each other.

TOP
Dr. Beverly D. Tatum, author of Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? And Other Conversations About Race, and April Woodward discuss the racial barriers that divide people in Hampton Roads. More than 800 people participated in the public forum in Chesapeake, VA, the inaugural event in the “Beneath the Surface” series presented by Virginia Humanities and the Hampton Roads Community Foundation in May 2019.

Photo by Pat Jarrett

ABOVE
Khizr Khan, author of An American Family, greets a fan following a discussion of his experience as an immigrant, our rights as Americans, and the legacy of democracy at Virginia Humanities’ Virginia Festival of the Book in March 2018.

Photo by Pat Jarrett

RIGHT
Public conversations are an integral part of every Virginia Humanities event. This photo is from the question and answer session following a November 2017 presentation by civil rights icon Ruby Sales about the future of civil rights activism.

Photo by Stephanie Gross
AMPLIFYING VIRGINIA’S STORIES

A TEACHER RECENTLY TOLD US, "Stories change lives." We agree. That’s why we’ll continue to support and build programming around the stories of all Virginians.

For us this means exploring the experiences of communities traditionally left out of mainstream historical narratives—including oral histories, for example, or mapping sites related to the history of African Americans. We’ll tell these stories through radio and digital programming that reach far beyond our state limits. At the same time, through targeted grant-making, we’ll help Virginia’s communities tell their own stories.

TOP RIGHT
Virginia’s Legendary Ingramettes and Sherman Holmes perform soul, blues, and gospel music at a synagogue in Novi Sad, Serbia to a full crowd, part of a cultural exchange tour throughout Serbia and Bulgaria produced by Virginia Humanities’ Virginia Folklife Program in May 2019.

Photo by Pat Jarrett

BOTTOM RIGHT
Margot Lee Shetterly, author of Hidden Figures, speaks at the Virginia Festival of the Book with Dava Sobel and Kelsey Johnson. Shetterly received a grant from Virginia Humanities to support her early research into the lives of Virginia’s “human computers.” Her book went on to become a New York Times Best Seller and the premise for the blockbuster film of the same name.

Photo by Peter Hedlund
ABOVE
Dancers at a Cambodian New Year celebration in 2017 wear costumes designed by Socheata Ung, Master of Cambodian costumes. Ung and his apprentice Lena Ouk were participants in our Virginia Folklife Apprenticeship Program.

Photo by Pat Jarrett

RIGHT
Kelley Libby records James Oker Eskridge, Mayor of Tangier Island, on a boat ride with Virginia Humanities Fellow Earl Swift for an episode of our With Good Reason radio show. Swift spent more than a year documenting the unique culture of Tangier, a remote island in the middle of the Chesapeake Bay that is threatened by rising sea levels, for his book Chesapeake Requiem.

Photo by Peter Hedlund
CULTURES IN TRANSITION

The world is changing, and those changes don’t affect everyone the same.

We’ll focus on understanding the challenges experienced by Virginians in the face of significant economic, environmental, and technological change.

What do the fishermen of Tangier Island have to say about sea level rise, or the residents of Southwest Virginia about the decline of coal? How is our state changing, and what does that mean for Virginia’s future? Our commitment to folklife, history, and scholarship will help Virginians understand who we are and where we’re headed.
2020–2023 STRATEGIC GOALS

In addition to using these themes to better focus, understand, and communicate the work of Virginia Humanities, we’ve also established four major strategic goals to shape how we do our work.

1. Identify and help document under-told and lesser-known stories in Virginia.

2. Seek and engage Virginians outside of Virginia Humanities’ traditional and core audiences.

3. Create a new organizational structure at Virginia Humanities that makes us more cohesive, responsive, and efficient across programs.

4. Achieve significant increases in individual, corporate, and philanthropic contributions.
HELP US SHAPE VIRGINIA’S FUTURE

The work of Virginia Humanities deepens our thinking, connects our communities, and enriches our lives. Every year we provide students from underrepresented communities with opportunities to meet authors and develop a love of reading. And we provide authors with opportunities to share their work and conduct research for new projects.

We initiate conversations about the complex meanings of our history and heritage. We showcase and help preserve the Commonwealth’s diverse folklife traditions. And, of course, we share stories.

By doing this with integrity and inclusivity and making that work accessible to everyone, Virginia Humanities has become one of the most important sources for understanding Virginia and its people. This is how we help shape Virginia’s future.

For more than forty-five years, we have developed a balanced and sustainable funding model that draws on state, federal, corporate, foundation, and individual support. Now is the time to improve our organizational stability, relevance to all Virginians, and flexibility to respond to needs and opportunities across the state.

Your investment will make this possible.

For more information about investing in Virginia Humanities, visit VirginiaHumanities.org/support or call 434-924-3296.