

Policy Pathways and VCU Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs co-sponsor Summer Academy

Training Future Leaders in Policy Leadership and Public Service

RICHMOND, VA, UNITED STATES, June 20, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- "At the Wilder School, we believe public service matters. We also believe that young people have an important role to play in shaping stronger, more equitable communities and a more thoughtful future. The decision to spend part of their summer exploring public policy, leadership, and civic engagement reflects a curiosity and commitment that we deeply value." — Susan T. Gooden, Dean of the [L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs](#)

[Policy Pathways](#) and the Virginia Commonwealth University L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs will kick off the 2026 session of the [Summer Academy for Policy Leadership and Public Service](#) on Monday, June 22, 2026. The summer program runs through Friday, July 3, 2026, and offers both online and in person enrollment options.

Dr. D. Pulane Lucas, President and CEO of Policy Pathways, shared: "We are delighted to welcome a dynamic group of bright, talented, determined, and goal-oriented young leaders from across the country to the 2026 session of the Summer Academy for Policy Leadership and Public Service. Each Summer Academy participant has demonstrated a commitment to gaining knowledge, building confidence, and bolstering the courage to give voice to the issues that matter most to them and their communities. They give us hope for a more humane, just, and equitable society. We are grateful for their presence in the 2026 Summer Academy cohort!"



FREE EVENT & OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

SUMMER ACADEMY

FOR POLICY LEADERSHIP AND PUBLIC SERVICE

2026 OPENING DAY

MONDAY, JUNE 22, 2026

OPENING CEREMONY • 1-2PM ET
KEYNOTE SPEAKER DR. AHKINYALA COBB-ABDULLAH
Director of Academic and Outreach Programs and an Associate Professor of Ecology at Virginia State University

PUBLIC POLICY FORUM • 2-4PM ET
ENERGY POLICY IN VIRGINIA

DR. AHKINYALA COBB-ABDULLAH
KEYNOTE SPEAKER

HON. DESTINY L. BOLLING
MODERATOR
Virginia House of Delegates Representative, District 30, Member, Commission on Electric Utility Regulation

JONATHAN WARD
PANELIST
Government Affairs Representative, Newport News Shipbuilding

MORGAN WHAYLAND
PANELIST
Director of Governmental and Public Affairs, Virginia Natural Gas

JAKE WISEMAN
PANELIST
Economic Development Market Specialist, Dominion Energy

IN-PERSON
VCU HIBBS HALL, ROOM 403
900 PARK AVENUE
RICHMOND, VA

ONLINE
[HTTPS://TINYURL.COM/CERX13XA](https://tinyurl.com/CERX13XA)
MEETING ID#: 897 2971 3310
PASSCODE: SA#2026

VCU
L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs

PRESENTED BY POLICY PATHWAYS AT THE VCU WILDER SCHOOL
SUPPORTED BY THE VIRGINIA NATURAL GAS FOUNDATION

Policy Pathways 2026 Summer Academy for Policy Leadership and Public Service Opening Day Flyer

Opening Day events will be held Monday, June 22, 2026, at Virginia Commonwealth University, Hibbs Lecture Hall, Room 403 (900 Park Ave, Richmond, VA 23284) or online at <https://tinyurl.com/CERXH3XA> (Meeting ID#: 897 2971 3310 Passcode: SA#2026). The welcome ceremony starts at 1:00 PM with greetings from James W. Dyke, Jr., Sr. Advisor, State Government Relations, McGuireWoods Consulting LLC, and former Commonwealth of Virginia Secretary of Education under former Virginia Gov. L. Douglas Wilder. The keynote speech will be delivered by Dr. Ahkinyala Cobb-Abdullah, Director of Academic and Outreach Programs and an

Associate Professor of Ecology at Virginia State University. The Public Policy Forum entitled: "Economic/Regional Development and Energy Policy in Virginia," will be held from 2 – 4 p.m. The Hon. Destiny L Bolling, Virginia House of Delegates Representative (District 80), and Member of

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Policy Pathways develops the knowledge, skills, and abilities of youth and young adults who desire to excel in policy studies and public administration and seek public policy leadership positions.”

D. Pulane Lucas, MBA, MTS, PhD

the Commission on Electric Utility Regulation, will serve as the Forum's Moderator. Three distinguished panelists will join her:

- Jonathan Ward, Government Affairs Representative, Newport News Shipbuilding
- Morgan Whyland, Director of Governmental and Public Affairs, Virginia Natural Gas
- Jake Wiseman, Economic Development Market Specialist, Dominion Energy

These opening day events are free and open to the public.



Summer Academy 2024 participants present their Capstone project on The Right to Breathe: Policy Analysis of Coal Dust Impacts & Solutions in Hampton Roads, VA.

Twenty of the nation's top high school and college students and recent college graduates will engage with and learn from a diverse group of distinguished academicians, decision makers, advocates, and speakers who will teach on a variety of public policy and administration subjects throughout the two-week academy. Program participants will have an opportunity to enhance their research, problem solving, leadership, analytical and communications skills through engagement with their peers and faculty mentors, examining various subject matter areas including but limited to, economics, policy formulation, public administration, advocacy, law,

statistics, research methodology and international affairs.

The students participating in the Academy will also study a broad array of significant public policy issues that affect local communities, national communities and global communities including: energy policy, public health, criminal justice reform, environmental policy, housing and education policy, social justice, immigration, and economic development.



Summer Academy 2024 graduates gather with Wilder School Dean Susan Gooden, Chandler Holeman and alumna and Policy Pathways CEO Dr. Pulane Lucas, Ph.D. '13. (Front row left to right) Credit: Stafford Armstead C it/Create One

Capstone projects for Summer 2026 will focus on:

1. Policy Implications of Human Trafficking Awareness Education in Virginia High Schools. The Office of Henrico County's Commonwealth's Attorney: The Hon. Shannon Taylor. Capstone Site Lead: Corey M. Nicholson, Assistant Commonwealth's Attorney
2. Bridging the Gap: Barriers to Study Abroad Participation for First-Generation College Students. Policy Pathways, Inc. Capstone Site Lead: Verlisha Brandon, Capstone Project Coordinator
3. The Impact of Agriculture on Rural Communities in Ghana. Divine Kids Academy, Jukwa, Ghana. Capstone Site Lead: Kwame Appiah-Kubi, Founder
4. Uncounted National: Building the Infrastructure for Civilian-Led Reporting on In-Custody Deaths. Policy Pathways, Inc. Capstone Site Lead: Logan Sowers, Uncounted National, Coordinator, Administrative Operations

Capstone projects allow program participants to collaborate in teams to explore real-world issues. Capstone site representatives are experts in their fields who help program participants focus on relevant issues and think critically and creatively to identify solutions to the public problems and policies that impact daily life.

Participants will present their Capstone projects during the Summer Academy Closing Ceremony on Friday, July 3, 2026. The Capstone showcase will give participants the opportunity to speak publicly about policy issues and highlight their research, policy analysis, and recommendations for addressing complex public policy challenges.

Generous contributions from the Virginia Natural Gas Foundation, Richmond Public Schools (RPS), the Richmond Memorial Health Foundation (RMHF), and Safety Bound/Ending Jail Deaths

Fellowship Program, as well as charitable donations from individual donors, support the work of the Summer Academy for Policy Leadership and Public Service.

For more information about Policy Pathways and the Summer Academy for Policy Leadership and Public Service, please visit: policypathways.org or contact us at (866) 465-6671 or info@policypathways.org.

Janah Cartwright, Communications Specialist
Policy Pathways, Inc.
+1 866-465-6671
info@policypathways.org

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