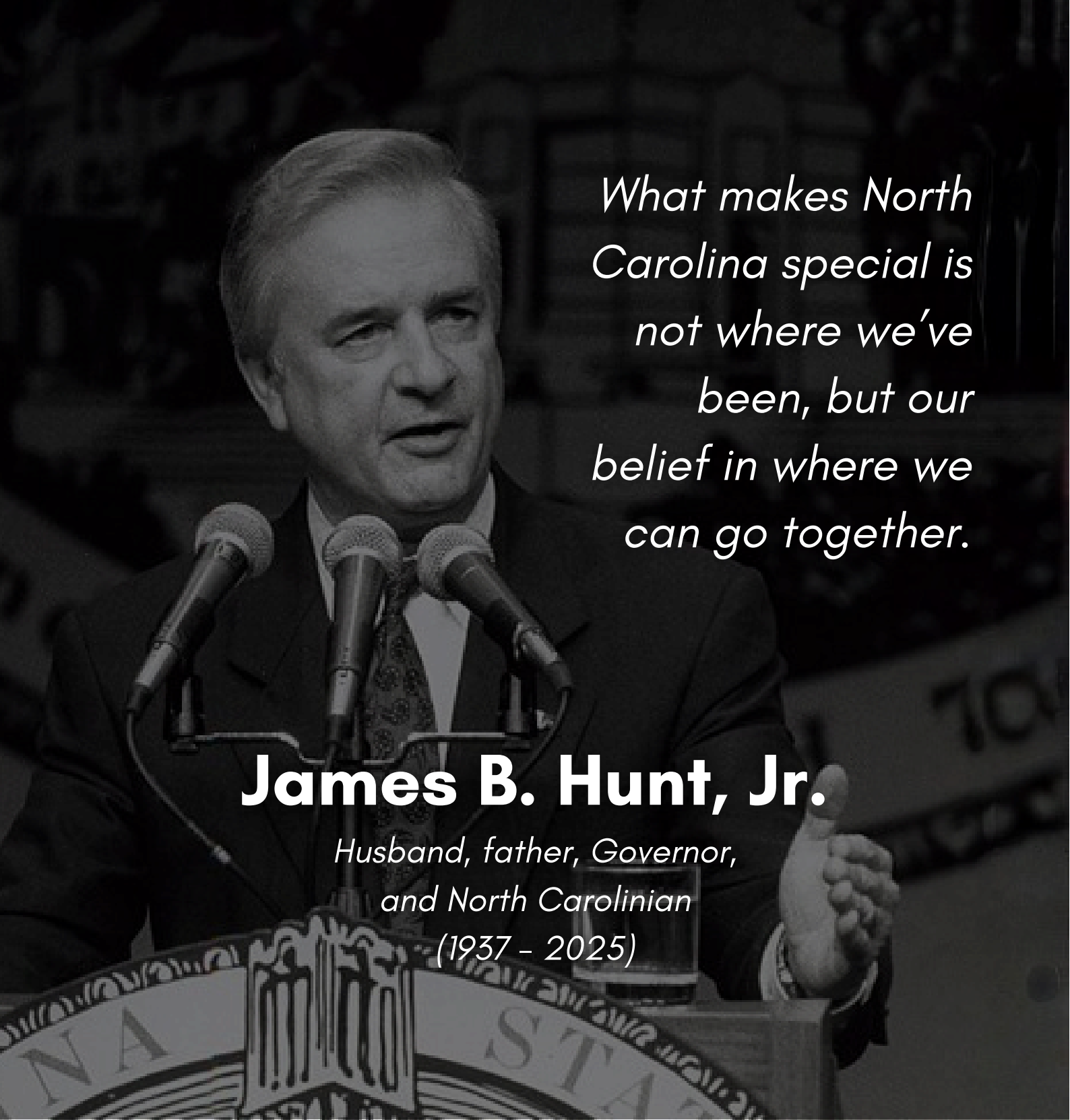




Carolina **FORWARD**

Annual Report 2025

A black and white photograph of James B. Hunt, Jr. speaking at a podium. He is wearing a suit and tie, and there are three microphones in front of him. The podium features the seal of the State of North Carolina. The background is dark and out of focus.

*What makes North
Carolina special is
not where we've
been, but our
belief in where we
can go together.*

James B. Hunt, Jr.

*Husband, father, Governor,
and North Carolinian
(1937 - 2025)*

Put your shoulder to the wheel.

In 2025, our nation grappled with unprecedented new challenges. In the midst of political, social and economic upheaval, Carolina Forward once again served as a voice of reason and clarity in North Carolina's public square. Persuading where we can, and clashing where we must, we proudly promoted the values of pluralism, liberal democracy and the rule of law in a world where all three are increasingly under assault.

To meet these challenges, the Carolina Forward team grew this year. We added three new full-time roles to our team to strengthen and accelerate our mission (you can read more about them below). Our new colleagues have already made significant impacts across the board.

This past year showed once again why Carolina Forward's service to North Carolina matters. Our team was a leading voice for pro-housing reform in the state legislature, building a bipartisan coalition pushing to make housing more affordable to North Carolinians. Even against steep odds in the pervasive partisan gerrymandering in our state legislature, Carolina Forward helped block harmful and unpopular policy like permitless carry and new restrictions on reproductive freedom.

Change begins in your own backyard. That's why, in 2025, Carolina Forward turned our attention to local and municipal elections. We cast a wide net, endorsing 28 candidates for local offices all across our state. From Sylva to New Bern, we supported thoughtful candidates with inclusive, smart and forward-looking governing philosophies that can help their communities grow. We're proud that 21 of our 28 endorsees, many of them first-time candidates, won their races.



Carolina Forward bases our work in a simple theory of change: we must inform and educate the people of North Carolina about their state government; highlight how our electoral choices impact our daily lives; and, where necessary, engage to drive tangible political impact. In each area, we are seeing success.

The challenges ahead are formidable. We operate in a state whose main political body is fundamentally illegitimate, and where representative democracy is systematically suppressed. The opponents of freedom in North Carolina are well organized, better funded, and deeply entrenched – for now.

But we have something they do not: smarter execution, dogged determination, and most importantly, the truth. We are winning the campaign for North Carolina's hearts and minds. At a moment in our nation when many unifying values that were once taken for granted are now up for debate, it is up to us to prove to North Carolinians that we truly are stronger united than apart; that *e pluribus unum* is not just a motto, but a philosophy to which we are called again.

And with the power of our supporters across this state, this is a fight we are going to win. Bet on it.

Always forward.

Blair Reeves
Founder, Chairman



2025 by the numbers...

Articles published **62**

NC zip codes of our supporters **391**
(51% of all!)

Municipal elections endorsed/won **21 / 28**

Pizza parties (statewide) **16**

THE TEAM

We began 2025 by hiring our first full-time Executive Director: Rebekah Whilden.

Carolina Forward began and grew as an all-volunteer project between friends. But our significant growth and statewide breadth finally called for full-time, professional management. Under Rebekah's leadership, Carolina Forward has continued to grow and make critical new strategic partnerships.

Besides Influence NC (see next page), our next major addition this year was Theo Nollert as Director of Policy. Theo's mission is to analyze policy at the state and local level and to work with policymakers on developing approaches suited to the challenges they face. In the General Assembly, he works closely with our Director of Government Relations, Nicole Quick. Outside of Jones Street, Theo leads our work with county and municipal leaders.



Rebekah Whilden
Executive Director



Nicole Quick
Director of
Government Relations



Hannah Preston
Founder and Director
of Influence NC



Theo Nollert
Director of Policy

INFLUENCE NC

The Carolina Forward Foundation and the Feinglos Fund came together to serve as the base of operations for **Influence NC**, founded and led by **Hannah Preston**.

Influence is a new and North Carolina focused approach to engaging and involving Gen-Z voters. Under Hannah's leadership, Influence NC has already trained and/or interviewed 25 elected leaders across the state on how to more effectively communicate on social media.



Working with a growing cadre of Gen-Z influencers, Hannah has been incredibly successful in not just content creation, but scaling its distribution across multiple new creators and topics.

In 2025, Influence NC engaged with more than 10 counties and collaborated with six colleges and universities. From its launch on October 1 to December 31, 2025, Influence NC generated over 6 million impressions. The Influence NC social media pages collectively gained more than 12,000 followers and partnered with organizations such as the NC Voter Project and Siembra NC.

CHANGE STARTS LOCALLY

This year, Carolina Forward's c4 arm endorsed 28 candidates for local office all around our state.

From Sylva to Charlotte, Mocksville to Graham, Greensboro to Holly Springs, Kannapolis, Wendell, Wilson, Burlington and more, these candidates offered voters an optimistic, thoughtful and inclusive future – and voters rewarded them for it. 21 of them won their races.

Going forward, we plan to make county and municipal-level elections a continuing feature of our work. Outside of elections, our new Director of Policy will work directly with local leaders to help promote local ideas and policies that can help improve residents' quality of life.

VICTORY



Carolina
FORWARD

TELLING CAROLINA'S STORY

(Right) The Carolina Forward Foundation doubled down on our partnership with The Hometown Holler, which has grown into one of North Carolina's top multi-platform independent media brands.

(Below) We partnered again with The Pink Vote, a voter registration and engagement project focused on mobilizing Black voters across Forsyth County.



(Right) The Foundation's latest major research project, "North Carolina's Next Chapter," explores and makes recommendations on how policymakers must invest to absorb the millions of new residents our state is projected to receive.



North Carolina's Next Chapter

Harnessing Growth and Shared Prosperity



CF/SOCIAL

Carolina Forward is active on nearly all major social media platforms. We have only one “golden metric,” and that is *Audience Reach*: the number of unique accounts (eg. actual people) who we reach. (It does not matter what we say if no one can hear it.) We have spent years painstakingly building a dedicated audience, and that work has paid off.

We now routinely reach an audience of several million people every month on our core accounts. The overwhelming majority of these are in North Carolina, about evenly split between men and women, and skew strongly toward Millennials and Gen-Z.

	Monthly average audience reach	Monthly average engaged audience
		
		
	2.3M	137k

Figures **only** include core Facebook, Instagram and Tiktok. Not tracked: X (Twitter), YouTube, Threads, Bluesky, LinkedIn



A key point is that Carolina Forward pays *nothing* for this distribution. Nearly 100% of our content distribution is free. Though we do occasionally spend money on boosting specific pieces of content, this is rare, and only in special circumstances (ex. locally specific content).

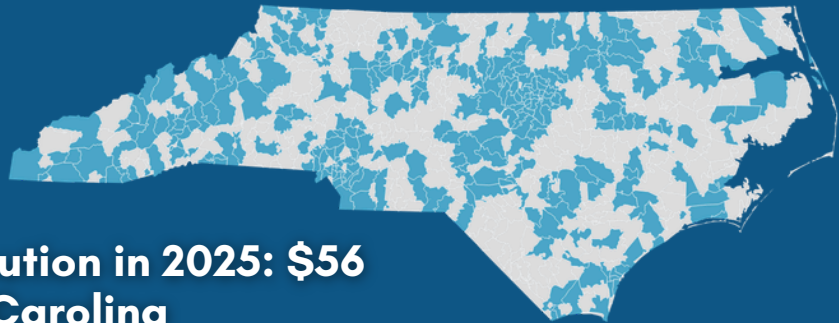
In general, almost all of our reach/engagement is organic. We’ve done this the old-fashioned way: by long and slow hard work. But that work has paid off. Our multi-platform audience, plus an email list now deep into six figures, allows us significant distribution power with very high cost leverage.

FINANCIAL UPDATE

One thing that makes Carolina Forward highly unusual is that we are a fully bootstrapped organization. Our first website's HTML was hand-coded. We did not have any paid staff at all for several years. We built brick by brick, earning our supporters' trust and gradually growing our base. We showed our impact, built this community, and went back to work.

This has engrained within the organization a philosophy of frugality, lean principles, and a bias towards working in the full light of public scrutiny.

Today, Carolina Forward enjoys the generous support of thousands of contributors every year who make our work possible.



- **Average contribution in 2025: \$56**
- **89% from North Carolina**
- **Represents 50% of all zip codes in North Carolina**

Between our 501(c)(3) Foundation arm and our c(4) political action arm, Carolina Forward is able to be maximally effective in fighting for a better and stronger North Carolina for everyone.

THE TEAM



Grayson Barnette
Board Member



Preston Blakely
Board Member



Justin King
Policy Fellow



Miles Kirkpatrick
Research Analyst



Nicole Quick
Government Relations



Blair Reeves
Chairman



Chris Suggs
Board Member



Ryan Watts
Board Member



Defend freedom in North Carolina

North Carolina, like America itself, is at a critical juncture in our history. Our people are asked to choose between competing visions for the future: one of shared prosperity, representation, and values-based public policy; or one of corrupt, insider-driven rule where the voters' voices are marginalized by special interests.

We are engaged in not just a competition of ideas, but one of fundamental values. We invite you to join us in this project. Every person counts.

Tax-deductible contributions to
the Carolina Forward Foundation
can be sent to:

Carolina Forward Foundation
P.O. Box 452
Carrboro, NC 27510

For major gifts, please contact
hello@carolinaforward.org

Carolina **FORWARD**

Carolina Forward is a think tank and policy organization dedicated to building a more just, democratic, and prosperous North Carolina.

CarolinaForward.org

