



APPLICATION FORM

All applications must include the following information. Separate applications must be submitted for each eligible program. **Deadline: June 2, 2017.** Please include this application form with electronic entry.

PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: Louisa County

Program Title: Community Strong Program

Program Category: Communications / Public Relations

CONTACT INFORMATION

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Title: County Administrator

Department: Administration

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SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

Name: Christian R. Goodwin

Title: County Administrator

Signature: 



THE COUNTY OF LOUISA

2017 Virginia Association of Counties - Achievement Award Submission

COMMUNITY STRONG PROGRAM

A partnership for awareness between the Sheriff's Office, Parks and Recreation, NAACP, Towns and Town police, State Police, public schools, and the media.

OVERVIEW

Given the recent challenges law enforcement has faced in so many communities across the nation, Louisa County knew our community would benefit from an effort to build trust, promote integrity, and provide transparency regarding issues facing our community. The Community Strong program was developed in response, and the effort has been a success. We invite other localities to learn from our efforts and consider the development of similar programs in their communities.



Figure 1 - Community Strong Partners

Introduction

Louisa faces the same concerns as many localities in the Commonwealth, including opioid abuse, gang issues, and relations between the community and various law enforcement agencies. The County is



fortunate to have capable personnel, effective planning, and a proactive stance on these issues, and Community Strong is another step in our positive efforts.

Community Strong is intended to provide an open, honest dialogue which addresses cultural diversity within Louisa, and how the community and agencies can work together to bridge gaps. The program provides an opportunity for people to ask questions and voice concerns in a calm, conversational environment. This advance understanding decreases the potential for escalation in “real-life” situations, and provides the opportunity for all involve to discuss what is important to them as we work together.

The mission statement for Community Strong is below.

Community Strong will ensure that a trusting relationship between the community of Louisa County and law enforcement is maintained. This will be done by addressing and responding to topics that are related to diversity within the community, in addition to discussing both present and potential concerns amongst law enforcement and citizens.

We will foster continuous opportunities for the community to engage in open and honest dialogue with local and state law enforcement agencies. Conversely, emphasis will be placed on the importance of cultivating awareness on what both can do together to further build upon this foundation for the development of stronger relations.

This program is unique in its nature as it allows both citizens and law enforcement to discuss apparent and potential similarities and differences related to specific topics, issues and/or concerns in a safe and suitable environment.

Partnerships, Implementation, and Staffing

The Louisa County Sheriff’s Office partnered with County Parks and Recreation, public schools, the Virginia State Police, the NAACP, towns and town police, and the media to set discuss topics and implement the program. Advance marketing included social media, press releases, email, in-person networking, and other avenues. Roughly 100 citizens attended the first event in October 2016, and topics included cultural diversity, working together, ongoing dialogue and communication, and building bridges. The second event was held in March 2017, and topics included gang awareness and traffic stop procedures.



Figure 2 – Louisa NAACP President Greg Jones speaks at a Community Strong event

Results

An event survey was drafted and distributed amongst attendees to determine what areas of the program they believed were either effective or ineffective. Participants rated each question by a scale ranging from 1 – 5 (poor, fair, good, very good and excellent).

The survey allowed participants to provide their overall rating of the program including the topics and issues presented, the location, timeliness and schedule of the event and the extent to which the program as a whole met their expectations. Additionally, participants were provided an opportunity to suggest how the program could be improved, what topics they would like to have included in the next event and by what form of advertisement they heard about the program.

Based upon the total number of survey submissions:

- 92.5% believed that overall the event was either very good or excellent.



- 87% believed that the topics and issues presented were either very good or excellent
- 92.5% believed that the location of the event was either very good or excellent
- 95% believed the timeliness and schedule of the event was either very good or excellent
- 95% believed that the event met their expectations

CONCLUSION

Like all communities, Louisa needed a viable, sustainable method for communicating and sharing ideas to bridge divides in our community. Community Strong has met that need and will continue to do so. The program brings together community leaders with concerned citizens and agencies, and allows ideas and challenges to be considered in an environment which facilitates calm, respectful discussion and solutions. The framework for the program (advertising, participants, format, etc.) allows it to be held repeatedly on different issues as often as necessary.

By all indications, the Louisa County Community Strong Program has been a resounding success and continues to facilitate positive relations in our community.