



APPLICATION FORM

All applications must include the following information. Separate applications must be submitted for each eligible program. **Deadline: June 1, 2018.** Please include this application form with electronic entry. If you do not receive an email confirming receipt of your entry within 3 days of submission, please contact [Gage Harter](#).

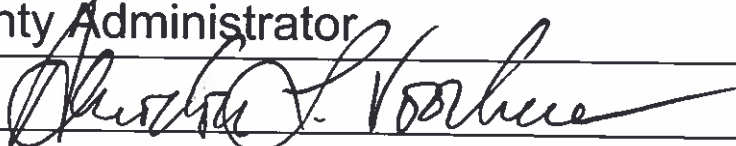
PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: Powhatan County
Program Title: EDA: Forward Progress
Program Category: Community & Economic Development or Organizational Development

CONTACT INFORMATION

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SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Ted Voorhees
Title: County Administrator
Signature: 

Nomination for 2018 VACo Achievement Award

This application is submitted on behalf of the Powhatan Economic Development Authority and the Powhatan Board of Supervisors, sharing the results of several years' worth of visioning, planning and ultimately implementing a focused economic development strategy. While their actions touch on several program categories that are evaluated for the Achievement Award (Communications, Information Technology, Community and Economic Development, Organizational Development and Regional Collaboration), the results are most visible in Community & Economic Development and Organizational Development.

BACKGROUND

In July 2014, the Powhatan County Board of Supervisors defined its *2030 Vision for the Community*, including a commitment to an "attainable quality of life" and "rural character" for its residents. The Vision was reinforced by the Board's adoption of broad goals that outlined seven primary areas of focus, including development of a "strong, robust and diverse economy". The Vision and Goals formed the foundation of the "*Economic Development Strategic Plan*" which was developed by Bowman Consulting and Spectrum Growth Solutions. This Plan provided a roadmap for Powhatan County to achieve its goal for a strong economy. It identified ways in which the County could strengthen its business tax base and employment opportunities. The Strategic Plan formed the basis for the *2017 EDA Forward Progress* plan of principal steps to validate and launch a sustainable economic development program.

DESCRIPTION OF POWHATAN COUNTY

Originally settled by French Huguenots in the early 1700s, Powhatan County was created by The Virginia General Assembly in 1777. The County was named in honor of the Indian Chief Powhatan, father of Pocahontas. Located in Virginia's Central Piedmont between the Appomattox and James Rivers, Powhatan is 20 miles west of Richmond. Distinctly rural to the west and featuring suburban development along its eastern boundaries, Powhatan is home to unique businesses including PIEtech (a Richmond "Best Place to Work" winner 2017, 2018 Top 65 Workplaces in Richmond); SanAir Technologies (2017 Governor's Economic Gardening grant recipient, 2018 Top 65 Workplaces in Richmond, Eagle Teleservices (call center for Michelin Tire); Rapid Manufacturing (fabrication, clients include Target and Dick's Sporting Goods); and The Mill at Fine Creek (microbrewery, lodging and destination event venue).

Challenge

The County being part of the greater metro Richmond region, is experiencing continued growth. That growth, if addressed by a comprehensive economic development program, can help grow the commercial tax base, which otherwise has traditionally been almost exclusively born by residential taxes. Implementing a sustained economic development approach becomes the County's proactive method to achieve its vision of a "strong, robust and diverse economy". With little prior focus on Economic Development in the county, the existing businesses have little interaction with county staff or leadership. This left the local government disconnected from its business community. The demand for outreach is in great need, which was a main

focus for the County going forward. Another issue of concern was a cohesive marketing and branding of the community.

In the *2017 EDA Forward Progress* effort, the EDA, funded by the County Board of Supervisors, completed a series of fundamental steps to launch its program. These steps had defined outcomes, are transferrable, and created opportunities for stakeholder engagement.

The RiverLink Group was engaged to assist the EDA to implement three priorities with an end goal of a holistic, and sustainable, economic development function. These priorities were:

Branding, Messaging & Website Development; Business Retention & Expansion; and Leadership and Stakeholder Learning. These priorities relate directly to the Achievement Award elements:

the program was innovative, can be replicated in other localities, and included partnering and collaborating with other local governments, private enterprises and state agencies.

Branding, internal and external messaging, and website development.

- i. *Developed a customized brand and logo for the EDA.* The brand is shown on the letterhead of this application; it was designed and adopted through a creative process of dialogue with the EDA and various stakeholders. Colors were ultimately tied to development potential of the various sub-regions of the County; and assets such as rivers and primary highways were incorporated into the logo. The design was ultimately adopted by the Board of Supervisors to be utilized with other public-facing County departments. *(VACorelevance: leveraged community involvement; created secondary benefits).*

- ii. *Developed and are in process of launching the Powhatan economic development website.* The site was developed through interactive branding sessions conducted both in person and by web sessions. *(VACo relevance: innovative processes; leveraged community involvement; transferrable and scalable).*
- iii. *Developed the Powhatan elevator pitch.* Conducted through a series of question and answer surveys and dialogue with county leaders and civic stakeholders, each message was also validated through identification of "proof points" that can be referenced when County leaders utilize the pitch. Based on stakeholder comments, the identification of "proof points" created new knowledge and new pride in the community. *(VACo relevance: leveraged community involvement; transferrable and scalable; created secondary benefits).*
- iv. *Trained selected County officials including staff,* about the economic development vision, brand and elevator pitch. Through a facilitated workshop session, key leadership within the County, who could be expected to interact with business clients, were trained in the importance of consistency in messaging when engaging with potential business clients. *(VACo relevance: leveraged community involvement; transferrable and scalable)*

Business Retention & Expansion Program.

- i. Identified, developed corporate intelligence, and conducted outreach to the top 30 employers in the County, using a uniquely-developed proprietary survey instrument that engaged the corporate executives in strategic discussions. The purpose of the outreach – which had not occurred in over 4 years – was to validate target sectors,

understand the perception of Powhatan's business climate, and understand growth strategies for these companies. As a result of the outreach, three potential business expansions were uncovered – these had been unknown to the County prior to the outreach. In addition, county staff heard consistently from these primary employers that barriers to their growth included lack of business-level broadband service, and lack of affordable housing for their employees or new recruits to the area. Validation of these issues gives the County staff the opportunity to affirm actions that other departments in the County can undertake to address these conditions. *(VACo relevance: assessed measurable results; transferrable and scalable; and created secondary benefits).*

- ii. Designed a sustained and modernized business retention & expansion (BRE) program that, will result in stronger support for existing businesses and in the future, will also advance the County's business attraction strategy and its business formation potential. The 2017 corporate outreach confirmed that Powhatan's primary businesses had survived and adapted from the last major national recession; by adapting, the County's BRE program needed to include more integrated forms of support. The program as developed goes beyond intersecting with existing businesses each 12-18 months; it intersects and communicates with dynamic businesses as many times as possible each year through a new multi-layered framework that goes well beyond the annual survey. *(VACo relevance: transferrable and scalable; leverages community involvement; incorporate innovative processes; will create secondary benefits).*

iii. Conducted training sessions on the importance of BRE as an economic development strategy. During the 2017 *Forward Progress* implementation, one stakeholder-facilitated workshop was held for officials from elected bodies, education, Chamber of Commerce, businesses, and civic organizations; in addition, a webinar format was used to further inform the EDA leadership about the program recommendations.

(VACo relevance: transferrable and scalable; leverages community involvement; creates secondary benefits).

Continuing Education.

The Economic Development Authority met monthly during 2017, and ultimately spent over 500 combined man-hours in developing and implementing the *Forward Progress* plan. At its monthly meetings, the EDA heard from relevant partners in the Virginia economic development operational system. This was particularly important because Powhatan County is not a member of any regional economic development organization, and has spent limited time developing the necessary relationships with state and regional partners which can impact the way that Powhatan County achieves its economic development goals. Through 2017, the Powhatan EDA learned more about relevant topics from speakers of note as listed below. *(VACo relevance: transferrable and scalable; leverages community involvement; creates secondary benefits; contains innovative processes):*

- *ED Fundamentals Past, Present and Future:* Greg Wingfield, VCU
- *Workforce & Talent System Alignment, State and Regional:* Elizabeth Creamer, Governor's Workforce Advisor; and Brian Davis, Capital Region Workforce Partnership

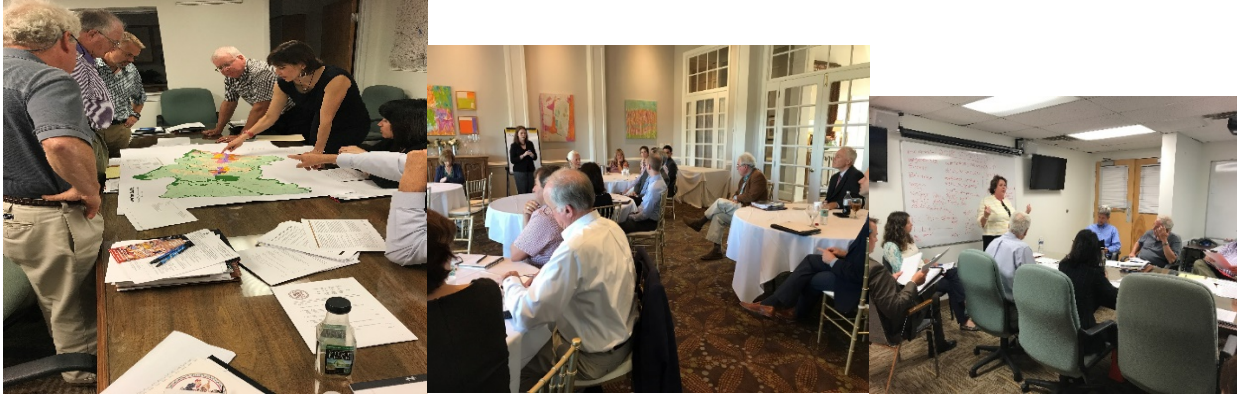
- *Workforce & Talent System Alignment, Local and Regional:* Wes Smith, Community College Workforce Alliance; and Dr. Tracie Omohundro, Powhatan County Public Schools
- *Ag-business as an Economic Development Strategy:* Sandra Tanner, Virginia Tourism Corporation; Stephen Versen, Virginia Department of Agriculture; and Rachel Grosse, Virginia Tech Extension
- *Real Estate Strategies to Support the ED Vision:* Kent Hill, Dominion; and Joe Hines, The Timmons Group
- *Best Practices of an EDA:* Greg Hitchen, City of Waynesboro; and Matt Leonard, Halifax County IDA
- *The Commonwealth's Approach to Economic Development:* Stephen Moret, Virginia Economic Development Partnership

Over the 2017 timeframe, the Powhatan leaders involved in this program included: Hon. John Watkins, EDA Chairman; Daniel Jones, EDA Vice-Chairman; Timothy Benusa, EDA Member; Clyde Robert "Bob" Gibson, EDA member; Russell Holland, Jr. (EDA Board Member); Gary Nester (EDA Board Member, retired); Phil Sherman (EDA Board Member, retired); Matt Schiefer (EDA Board Member); Andrea Weber (EDA Board Member); Pat Weiler County Administrator (through March 2017); Ted Voorhees, County Administrator (subsequent to April 2017); Bret Schardein, Assistant County Administrator; Ramona Carter, Director of Public Works; Kerri Delaney, Executive Assistant; Brigid Paciello, Communications. In addition, over 50 civic leaders were involved in three stakeholder sessions.

Continuing Results

The County is moving forward with a significant investment in its economic development function based on the recommendations of Forward Progress. The position of Assistant County Administrator was created, with its major charge being economic development as well as creating and hiring a full-time Economic Development Program Manager to focus on selected elements of the program including business retention/expansion and communications.

The beginning results of *Forward Progress* have been shown through the previously mentioned local business meetings, where repeated barriers were discovered as well as unknown expansion plans. These discoveries are a small part to the beginning of the BRE programs goals. Other measurable results include the county joining Richmond Regional Tourism to implement a number of its tourism marketing functions. The county also held a successful tourism workshop that was put on by the Virginia Tourism Corporation, where forty three local tourism stakeholders and businesses came together for a day of communication and visioning for the county. This successful workshop provided insight to the local visions of the current businesses and promoted cross-reference marketing efforts. The input from the workshop is now being incorporated into a tourism plan, which will outline steps the County can take to strengthen and grow its tourism industry, and better link it with existing businesses.



In summary, the Powhatan EDA *Forward Progress* program is a strong candidate for the VACO Achievement award due to the holistic, and yet targeted, approach that was taken by the EDA to create a foundation for a sustainable economic development effort in the County. These steps may appear to be fundamental blocking and tackling; however, it's the strength of the combined commitment by many parties over a year that has created a solid foundation from which the program can continue. The EDA members were dedicated to full involvement in the steps that were taken; the staff leadership was consistent in both leading the effort and in guiding the elected and appointed leadership. The implementation was inclusive, resulting in a more educated and enthusiastic group of civic stakeholders as well as business leaders. The results were and continue to be measurable towards a prosperous economic development future in Powhatan County.

Executive Summary

Powhatan County has developed the **Forward Progress** economic development program to be implemented as a means of planning the future of the county with the growing demands of the Richmond metropolitan areas. This plan was developed in collaboration by the Powhatan EDA, Powhatan staff, and citizens while being facilitated by The RiverLink Group. Beginning in 2017, this collaborative group identified areas of concentration for the County that would address the growing demands. Those priorities were: *Branding, Messaging and Website Development; Business Retention & Expansion; and Leadership and Stakeholder Learning.*

The EDA, staff and The RiverLink Group spent over 500 combined man hours developing and creating this plan for economic progress in the County. During this time, they have held workshops on the plan, had monthly meetings and created and hired two County positions for implementing this program. They have dedicated special funds and interest towards the programs goals. Through the beginning phases of the program, the County has already uncovered areas of opportunity. Unknown expansion plans of local businesses and barriers to growth were discovered in just the first few visits to local businesses. Powhatan County has a vibrant base of businesses that are unique to the area and with promotion will prosper.

The program is designed to foster the rural culture of Powhatan County as well as focus the development pressures into growth that is beneficial to both current and future citizens. The program has already been a success while in its early stages through well attended Tourism Workshops to the anticipated report of the program to the local Powhatan Chamber. **Forward Progress** is set to be a monumental evolution in Powhatan County and in the state of Virginia.

Brief Overview

Powhatan County has developed the new economic development focused program

Forward Progress. This program was initiated in 2017 by the Powhatan EDA, Powhatan staff and The RiverLink Group. The goal of the program was to develop a plan to address the ever growing needs of the county in terms of economic development. The program goals were to address different areas that would promote future growth of the county while still maintaining the rural culture of the County and harboring great relations with existing businesses.

The actors involved in the program spent over 500 collaborative hours through meetings and workshops to develop specific priorities. Priorities of the programs were: *Branding, Messaging and Website Development; Business Retention & Expansion; and Leadership and Stakeholder Learning.* To implement these initiatives, the County has created and hired two positions to carry out this program and has dedicated funds to help achieve these goals. The program has already seen success in its early stages with success tourism workshops and highly anticipated and attended Powhatan Chamber meetings to learn about the program.