



## 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: Roanoke

Program Title: Community Strategic Plan

Program Category: Community/Economic Development

### CONTACT INFORMATION

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### SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Thomas C. Gates

Title: County Administrator

Signature: 

## **Community Strategic Plan**

Category – Community and Economic Development

### **Executive Summary/Brief Overview**

In the fall of 2015, the Roanoke County Board of Supervisors approved moving forward with development of a Community Strategic Plan to craft a five-year plan for the improvement of County services and facilities. Over the next several months, citizens and community members came together with the Board of Supervisors to create the plan. A December 2015 Citizen Telephone Survey asked citizens about the most important strategic issues facing the County over the next five years, along with rating the importance and quality of public services the County currently offers.

Using the results from the survey, the Board of Supervisors created a Vision Statement at its January 2016 retreat to help guide the planning process. This Vision Statement was used as the core of a comprehensive Community Strategic Plan that engaged the voices of concerned citizens from across the County during a 10-week process of focus groups and community meetings. The goal was to create a realistic and actionable plan for improving the community, with measureable goals that could be communicated back to citizens each year.

The final Community Strategic Plan was formally adopted by the Board of Supervisors at its August 9, 2016 meeting. The first annual report detailing the County's progress was issued in November 2017. A follow-up survey was conducted in December 2017 to measure citizen satisfaction in the County's services and programs within the Community Strategic Plan's first year.

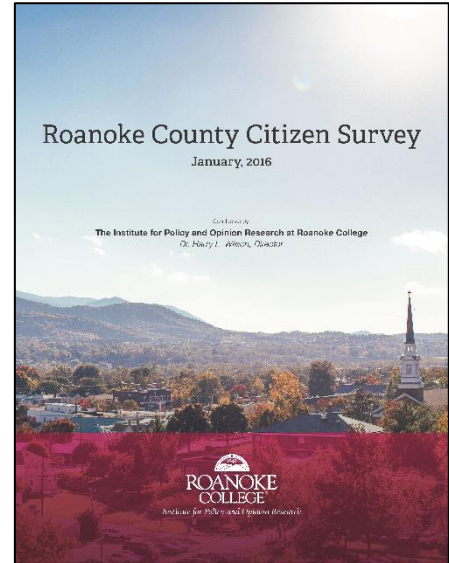
## **PROBLEM/CHALLENGE**

Roanoke County’s leadership sought a way to solicit meaningful and broad community dialog about the priorities of the County’s citizens beyond the public comments at Board Meetings and at a larger scope and scale of typical project-based community meetings. Comments at Board Meetings and project-based community meetings are generally focused on a single issue or current project. County leaders also sought a way to foster community thinking about the County’s future direction in a strategic manner while creating significant measures for success and progress toward an envisioned goal.

The greatest task in creating the Community Strategic Plan was the development of the public engagement framework to help citizens think broadly about the overarching challenges faced by the County now and in the next few years. For example, instead of focusing on specific neighborhood issues like potholes, leaders wanted citizens to think about larger issues such as regional Transportation planning to reduce congestion, and how best to provide transportation alternatives within the region and beyond the Roanoke Valley to help sustain economic development for the greater good of everyone.

## PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

In the fall of 2015, Roanoke County commissioned Roanoke College’s Institute for Policy and Opinion Research to perform a random citizen's telephone survey. More than 600 survey participants were polled for this statistically valid survey. The survey questions included what Roanoke County citizens think are the most important strategic issues facing the County over the next five years, along with rating the importance and quality of public services the



County currently offers. For more information about the survey process and to view the 2016 Citizen Survey Report, please visit <https://www.roanokecountyva.gov/cspsurvey>.

The Board of Supervisors reviewed the survey results at its January 30, 2016 retreat and used this information to decide on specific areas of focus for Roanoke County's Community Strategic Plan. After reviewing the results of the telephone survey, the Board of Supervisors created a Vision Statement to help guide the strategic planning process.

This Vision Statement also reflects the desires expressed in the community-wide survey:

**Vision Statement:**

Roanoke County is a vibrant, innovative, and scenic community that values its citizens, heritage, and quality of life.

The Board also determined six broad topics to be addressed by community Focus Groups throughout the Spring of 2016. The Board's approved focus area topics for the Community Strategic Plan were:

- Community Health and Well-Being,
- Economic Development,
- Education,
- Public Safety,
- Quality of Life,
- Transportation.

### **Public Engagement Campaign/Focus Groups**

The Public Engagement campaign was a 10-week series of Focus Group meetings, with a single topic (Community Health and Well-Being, Economic Development, Education, Public Safety, Transportation, and Quality of Life) assigned to each one of the six groups.

To encourage public participation in the process and recruit community members into this public engagement effort, the campaign was promoted in local news media, across the County's various social media outlets, and supported through some paid advertising on Facebook. Along with the general public, other partner stakeholder agencies (e.g. Visit Virginia's Blue Ridge tourism agency, Roanoke Regional Chamber of Commerce, Economic Development Authority, etc.) in the region were also invited to attend the Focus Groups, adding another layer of collaboration throughout a very public planning process.

Each Focus Group meeting rotated to various locations across Roanoke County to provide all citizens an opportunity to participate. Each Topic group met for a total of four times as follows:

Meeting #1 – Development of the top three Goals to Support the Board-assigned Topic (e.g. Economic Development, Transportation, Education, Quality of Life, etc...)

Meeting #2 – Development of the top 3 Objective Tasks to meet the Goals established in Meeting #1.

Meeting #3 – Prioritize the Objective Tasks from Meeting #2 into an actionable plan to support the assigned Topic.

Meeting #4 – All Focus Group participants were brought together to review the goals and objectives of each topic-based group. Participants and the public-at-large were encouraged to further comment on the final compiled work of the Focus Groups before the plan was submitted to the Board of Supervisors for review and approval.

Instructions for each Focus Group included a review of **SMART** Principles to guide Focus Group discussions and idea generation at each meeting:

**Sustainable** - Can the goals and objectives be maintained over time?

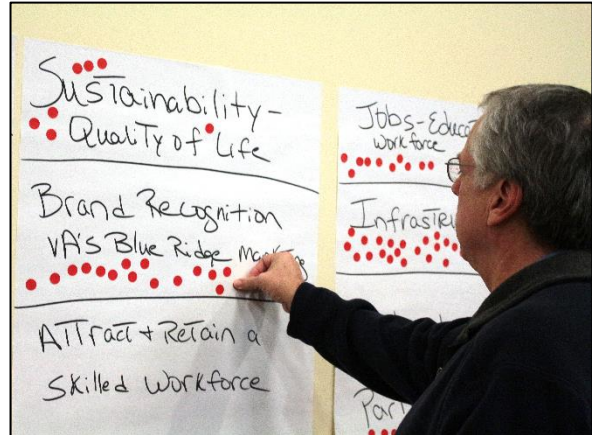
**Measureable** - Can performance toward the goals be measured?

**Actionable** - Is it within the authority of the governing body?

**Realistic** - Is it feasible, economically and politically?

**Timebound** - Can it be achieved in a reasonable timeframe?

During each Focus Group meeting, flip charts were used to record the ideas of participants. While each session may have generated several ideas, at the end of each meeting participants were given three “sticky dots” to place on the flip charts next to the ideas that meant the most



to them. The most popular ideas advanced by consensus to the next meeting. Notes from each meeting were publicly posted to the County’s website along with the staff presentations from each meeting. Although the top ideas from each session advanced to the final plan, ALL ideas from the public were retained for future reference on the County’s website.

For a complete schedule of Topics, Meeting Dates and Locations, Presentations, and Meeting Notes from each round of Focus Group meetings, please visit

<https://www.roanokecountyva.gov/cspfocust>.

### **Staff Steering Committee and Developing Strategic Initiatives**

A staff Steering Committee comprised of representation from nearly every department was appointed to consolidate all the citizen input into a cohesive set of Strategic Initiatives that would align with the Vision Statement and also to serve as the plan’s eventual organization. The seven Strategic Initiatives are:

- Connect Roanoke County to the World
- Position Roanoke County for Future Economic Growth
- Promote Neighborhood Connections
- Ensure Citizen Safety

- Be A Caring and Inclusive Community
- Promote Lifelong Learning
- Keep Roanoke County Healthy, Clean and Beautiful

### **Online Efforts**

After each stage of Focus Group meetings, Notes and Presentations were posted to <https://www.roanokecountyva.gov/cspfocust>. This allowed citizens who may have missed the first or second meetings to catch up and review previous progress of each group.

In addition to the public comment process and Focus Group meetings, Roanoke County staff presented the draft plan results via its website. Staff also solicited comments on the draft plan on the County's various social media platforms and through an online comment form hosted on the website.

### **Board of Supervisors Adoption of the Final Plan**

Roanoke County staff consolidated the work of all Focus Group participants into a cohesive Community Strategic Plan document. The 32-page document provides details about the broad Goals and specific Objective Tasks developed by each group to support the six initial Topics assigned by the Board of Supervisors. As a result, the seven Strategic Initiatives were identified that would align with the Vision Statement.

The final Community Strategic Plan adopted by the Board of Supervisors called for implementing the plan's goals "in light of the vision and strategic direction provided by the community through the civic engagement process." The plan also called for aligning County department performance measures with the initiatives outlined in the adopted plan. The Board



of Supervisors adopted the final Community Strategic Plan at the August 8, 2016 meeting. View the final Community Strategic Plan document at <https://www.roanokecountyva.gov/csp>.

## **IMPLEMENTATION (FINANCING AND STAFF)**

### **Citizen Satisfaction Telephone Surveys**

The largest single expense was commissioning the two Citizen Satisfaction Telephone Surveys conducted by Roanoke College's Institute for Policy and Opinion Research. The first telephone survey was conducted in December 2015, with results presented to the Board of Supervisors in January 2016. This initial survey asked citizens to rank the services and programs they thought were most important, and also asked citizens to identify what they thought were the most pressing strategic issues facing the County. The results from the first telephone survey led the Board of Supervisors in creating the Vision Statement and broad Focus Group topics for citizen engagement. The first telephone survey cost \$11,100.

A second Citizen Satisfaction Telephone Survey was commissioned in December 2017, to measure citizens' reactions to progress made by the County in implementing the objectives outlined in the adopted Community Strategic Plan. The second telephone survey cost \$12,200.

### **Publicity to Promote Focus Group Participation/Public Comment**

Besides in-house publicity generated through the County's website and free promotion by local news media, the County invested \$1,074 in Facebook advertising to promote attendance and participation in its 10-week Focus Group process and to promote community meetings and public comment before the plan's final adoption. The costs of the advertising campaign reflect Facebook ads placed weekly and in rotation for five months, from February 2016 through June

2016. Flyers promoting participation were also distributed to homes via Roanoke County students.

### Focus Group Sessions

Focus Group sessions were held at various public facilities across the County. Light refreshments, white boards, markers, and “sticky dots” for public engagement/prioritizing exercises were a minimal additional cost.

### Printed Materials

- 1) A 16-page document that consolidated the results of every Focus Group was produced for the April 2016 community meeting series where the overall collection of topics, goals and objectives were relayed back to the plan’s participants. 200 copies were produced for \$440.



- 2) The final 32-page Community Strategic Plan was printed as well after adoption by the Board of Supervisors on August 9, 2016. Fifty copies were produced for \$250 and a PDF of the final document was also posted to the County’s website at [www.roanokecountyva.gov/csp](http://www.roanokecountyva.gov/csp).
- 3) A 20-page Community Strategic Plan Annual Report was printed in November 2017 to report back to citizens on progress made toward the Strategic Initiatives outlined in the approved plan. The 2017 Annual Report Document was distributed to more than 200

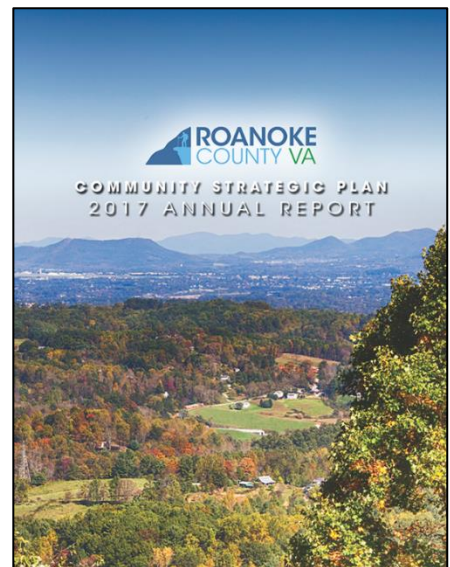
attendees at the 2017 State of the County Address in November 2017. A total of 500 copies were produced for \$1,120 and the final document has been posted to the County's website at [www.roanokecountyva.gov/csp](http://www.roanokecountyva.gov/csp).

### **Staff Facilitators**

Staff from several Roanoke County departments served as staff moderators, or meeting facilitators during the Focus Group and Public Comment portions of the planning process. Staff teams were assigned to various Focus Group topics and trained as moderators before the Focus Groups began. Assigned staff also followed the Focus Group topic (e.g. Economic Development, or Transportation) for multiple public sessions, and at various locations during the 10-week public engagement period. This staff presence helped build confidence in the citizen participants and helped provide continuity of note-taking and moderation from one meeting to the next over the duration of the public engagement process.

## **RESULTS AND FOLLOW-UP**

The greatest result of the plan was creating a guiding document that married the Board of Supervisors' vision of what our community should look like with the desires of the citizens. While it may not be possible to fulfill every citizen wish within budget constraints, the Community Strategic Plan gives Roanoke County's administrative departments a guiding document to help frame the daily work of staff against a measurement of citizen desires for improvement.



For more concrete results of the plan, including the regional Broadband project, new Roanoke County branding, redevelopment plans, transportation initiatives, and public safety achievements, please see the Community Strategic Plan 2017 Annual Report at <https://www.roanokecountyva.gov/csp>.

Another fortunate outcome has been the willingness of citizens to engage in other community-based planning exercises. On the heels of the Community Strategic Plan, Roanoke County staff led a multi-month community plan to help guide the redevelopment of the Route 419 corridor in Roanoke County. The success of the “419 Town Center” plan has led Planning division staff to develop a comprehensive campaign that includes communities in other parts of the County.

## **INNOVATION**

The most innovative part of the Community Strategic Plan process was the coordinated and inter-departmental effort of recruiting stakeholders and citizen participants into a multi-month campaign to focus on the larger issues affecting our shared community. Bringing citizens together with Roanoke County leaders and staff, along with representatives from other regional agencies, helped create a transparent and open environment to debate issues and publicly brainstorm opportunities and solutions for the County’s most pressing matters.

## **COLLABORATION**

The Community Strategic Plan is the result of a large collaborative effort between Roanoke County’s government, its citizens, and its partner agencies. The 10-week public engagement process included public ideas and debate, consensus building and priority-setting moderated by Roanoke County staff representing a wide array of experience, age and expertise.

As many of the final plan’s initiatives overlap each other (i.e. Economic Development and Quality of Life), the plan also called for more inter-departmental collaboration to achieve the community’s desires.

Coordination among various departments also allowed staff to leverage resources, including e-mail newsletters to keep people engaged and informed throughout the process, staff facilitators for public Focus Group sessions, reservation of County and non-County facilities for public meetings, and various materials and supplies needed for a successful campaign.

## **MODEL FOR OTHER MUNICIPALITIES**

While the specific steps for Roanoke County’s program development are outlined above, other localities may be able to duplicate the efforts in a cost effective manner by:

- Asking citizens to prioritize and rank current government services (survey, etc.),
- Asking citizens to identify the larger issues faced by the community,
- Drafting a statement of what the community envisions itself to be, and how it wants to be seen by others,
- Determining the top four, five or six overarching topics for public discussion,
- Hosting community meetings to establish the goals necessary to meet the community’s vision,
- Recording the community’s goals and ideas (objective tasks) needed to reach those goals,
- Having the community prioritize its ideas, using the popular “sticky dots,” online survey tools or other means to gather consensus,
- Consolidating the prioritized tasks, goals and topics into a cohesive plan and schedule an annual review of progress toward achieving the community’s desires,
- Accepting community feedback and append or alter the plan as desired after the progress is reviewed.