

APPLICATION FORM

All applications must include the following information. Separate applications must be submitted for each eligible program. **Deadline: June 3, 2019.** 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: James City
Program Title: Improving Customer Service with a Volunteer Campground Host Program
Program Category: Customer Service

CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: John H. Carnifax, Jr.
Title: Director
Department: Parks & Recreation
Telephone: 757-259-5361 Website: jamescitycountyva.gov/recreation
Email: John.Carnifax@jamescitycountyva.gov

SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Jason Purse
Title: Assistant County Administrator
Signature: 



2019 VACo Achievement Award Nomination
“Improving Customer Service with a Volunteer Campground Host Program”

Executive Summary

A recurring challenge and common complaint about the operation of Chickahominy Riverfront Park’s (CRP) 120-site campground has been the absence of a staff presence during the overnight hours, ranging from 12 to 15 hours. Due to budget limitations, there has never been an on-site point of contact for campers to address noise/behavior complaints, restroom cleanliness, security or other issues of concern to patrons after park staff leave for the day.

In an effort to improve the level and quality of customer service after-hours at CRP, the Volunteer Campground Host Program was initiated to provide overnight coverage during the busiest camping months. As a model for other agencies to use, the basic concept of the program provides a free campsite to the hosts in exchange for their work during a three-month term of service.

The presence of an overnight point-of-contact proved to be a highly successful endeavor for all involved but, ultimately, and as we hoped, our campground customers benefitted the most! They enjoyed: cleaner and sufficiently stocked bathhouses; help with after-hours’ check-in and locating their assigned campsite; a mediator to address quiet hour/other violations; reporting of/responding to maintenance and repair issues; and, overall, a good neighbor to assist them with information and any other needs they had. Campers were very pleased with the program and appreciated having the hosts available to them, while staff gained important information about issues occurring overnight and were able to address them more efficiently and effectively.

Overview

A recurring challenge and common complaint about the operation of Chickahominy Riverfront Park's (CRP) 120-site campground has been the absence of a staff presence during the overnight hours, lacking coverage for 15 hours Monday-Thursday, and 12 hours Friday-Sunday. Due to budget limitations, there has never been an on-site point of contact for campers to address noise/behavior complaints, restroom cleanliness, security or other issues of concern to patrons after park staff leave for the day.

In an effort to improve the level and quality of customer service after-hours at CRP, staff researched the possibility of offering a volunteer campground host program as a way to provide a higher level of service to the campers without requiring an increase in the operating budget. Staff research found that these types of programs can be easily customized to whatever situation you are trying to address, and learned that hosts can perform a wide array of duties, depending on the needs of the campground operation, provide a sense of security with their presence, be available to address issues of concern and assist in emergencies, and supplement paid staff resources, all to the benefit of the customers.

The objectives of the program James City County developed were: to reduce the number of after-hours' complaints related to noise violations and maintenance issues and have on-site assistance when there were violations; improve the customers experience by extending bathhouse checks and cleaning later into the evening; and, improve the customers experience by providing campers with a consistent point of contact and assistance when checking in after-hours.

The presence of an overnight point-of-contact proved to be a highly successful endeavor for all involved but, ultimately, and as we hoped, our campground customers benefitted the most! They enjoyed cleaner and sufficiently stocked bathhouses, help with after-hours' check-in and locating their assigned campsite, a mediator to address quiet hour/other violations, reporting of/responding to maintenance and repair issues, and, overall, a good neighbor to assist them with

information and any other needs they had. Campers were very pleased with the program and appreciated having the hosts available to them, while staff gained important information about issues occurring overnight and were able to address them efficiently and effectively. This is a program that could be implemented by and benefit other Parks and Recreation agencies looking to supplement staff resources without increasing their operating budget, or if they have experienced a budget reduction.

Need for the Program (Problem, Challenge or Situation)

Since 1980, James City County's population has been one of the fastest-growing in Virginia, and this is a trend that is projected to continue into the future. Consequently, County government has faced many issues trying to keep pace with rapid population growth. Providing and maintaining quality County parks and recreational services the population has come to enjoy has been one of these issues.

James City County began offering parks and recreational services to its citizens in 1980. Since then, the parks and recreation system has grown to include 17 parks on almost 1,600 acres, with approximately 3,700,000 park visitors and over 200,000 program participants.

In December 2001, James City County purchased the 139.42-acre, privately owned CRP property as part of its long-term planning strategy to develop a County waterfront park in this geographical area. The former Powhatan Campgrounds site offered public access to Gordon Creek and the Chickahominy River, as well as a campground, outdoor pool, driving range and other recreational amenities. The County began operating the site as a public park in 2002. Since then, many site improvements have been made and, as a result of those efforts and the park's prime location, it has become one of the most popular recreational facilities in the County and region.

Due to competing budget demands, the County has never approved funding for on-site staffing during the overnight hours for the campground, which is lacking daily coverage for 15

hours Monday-Thursday, and 12 hours Friday-Sunday. As a result, the absence of overnight staffing has become the primary reason for ongoing complaints and issues brought to the attention of park staff from campers. In some instances, conflicts that could have been addressed by a staff person, rose to the law enforcement level, because the parties involved felt they had no other recourse.

In July 2006, a Park Ranger program was started with the goal of providing a safe and positive experience for citizens and visitors using James City County parks. Rangers work collaboratively with park staff and police officers to improve enforcement of County ordinances and regulations in parks. However, the Park Ranger staff is also limited, with only two full-time and two part-time rangers to cover a seven-day work schedule of 8 a.m. to 11 p.m. Given the number of parks and the geographical size (144 square miles) of the County they are required to cover, it's not always possible for them to be at CRP on a regular schedule or at a specific time. While beneficial, the current Ranger operation cannot provide the consistent on-site coverage to adequately address the recurring overnight issues at the campground.

Program Implementation

Research:

In order to try to provide an effective solution for this situation, staff became interested in researching what are generally referred to as work camper programs that are used at some campgrounds around the country. Staff goals were to develop a program that would meet the needs of their camping customers, be operated within the existing budget, and comply with current County Code restrictions, which mandate a maximum 90-day campground stay.

What they found was that work campers were being used to fulfill a variety of roles. In some cases, work campers were used to fill a traditional park attendant role, including performing cash handling and check-in duties. Others had after-hours duties and remained on call. Many campgrounds sought couples for work campers, and while this was not a mandatory requirement

for the CRP program, it was included in the selection criteria in order to have some flexibility and recruit the largest pool of applicants possible. While the roles performed by the work campers varied greatly in the programs studied, the CRP program that was developed appeared to be within the reasonable expectations for most of the programs researched. Encouraged by their findings and program outline, staff proceeded to put the details of the program together.

Program Details:

The 2018 summer season was selected to operate this program, in order to provide coverage during the months with the highest campground attendance and the most popular holidays that occur during the camping season (Memorial Day, Independence Day and/or Labor Day). This time frame also met the County Code restrictions for a maximum stay of 90 days.

An RV site was chosen that would be easily visible and identifiable for campground customers needing assistance from the hosts.

Responsibilities for each party were determined as listed below, and the Campground Hosts were responsible for performing the following duties (after 5 p.m. on Wed./Thu./Sun; and after 8 p.m. on Fri./Sat.):

- Serve as an on-call point of contact for campers throughout the night;
- Direct campers who checked in after-hours to their campsites;
- Respond to noise violations;
- Check, clean and stock bathhouses at 9 p.m. each evening;
- Perform a walkthrough of the campground at 10 p.m. to ensure quiet-hour rules were being followed.

In return for performing these duties, James City County Parks & Recreation would provide the Campground Hosts with the following:

- A full hookup RV site for the duration of the program, at no cost;

- All necessary training to perform volunteer responsibilities;
- A cell phone to be used for contacting Dispatch when necessary, and to receive calls from campers.

Recruiting/Selection:

The Campground Host position was advertised on the County website and social media pages, and flyers were posted at CRP. A sample of the advertisement conducted for the program from the County’s social media page is shown below.



An application was linked to the County website, and an advertisement was posted on the employment page. A total of six people applied, with three being interviewed. The selected candidate was chosen based on experience in similar volunteer or paid positions, availability, possession of an RV in suitable condition with current tags, inspections, and insurance documents, and a successful reference/background check.

Due to the time involved with interviewing and dates of availability for the selected candidates, the Campground Host couple was on-site from June 16-September 13, 2018.

Training:

Prior to performing job duties, the Campground Hosts received a thorough orientation and training from the Park Coordinator, covering material from the following information sources:

- James City County Volunteer Manual;
- Chickahominy Riverfront Park Operations Manual;
- James City County Code Section 16;
- James City County Parks & Recreation Policies and Procedures;
- On-site training with a tour of CRP and instructions on cleaning procedures; and,
- Protocols for what agency/person should be called under various circumstances

Program Cost/Staffing:

No additional operating budget funding was needed to implement this program. Using a cost/benefit projection, it was determined that there was a positive cost/benefit to the Volunteer Campground Host program. Those calculations are as follows:

Loss of Potential Revenue:

Monthly rate of campsite x 3 months = \$1,875.00

Monetary Value of Volunteer Campground Host:

Reduction of existing evening shifts* (156 hrs. x \$11.87/hr.)	\$1,851.72
Volunteer hours** (97.5 hrs. x \$27.50***)	\$2,681.25
Total Gross Value:	\$4,532.97
Minus Potential Revenue Loss	-\$1,875.00
Net Value:	\$2,657.97

*staff hours were reduced to eliminate double coverage

**excludes hours for on-call availability overnight

****Independent Sector's* 2018 Virginia Average Hourly Rate for Volunteer Hours

Program Results:

Staff Feedback

Overall, staff members within the Parks Division felt the program was successful and beneficial in many ways, but most importantly, to our customers. Reviewing records from the

previous five-year period (2013-2017), there were an average of 3.2 incident reports per year filed during the same operational period of the 2018 campground host program (June 16-September 13). By comparison, the host filed 9 incident reports on issues occurring after-hours. Although there was an increase in the number of reported incidents, staff thought this was a positive result of the program, since it provided a clearer and more informative picture of what actually takes place at CRP after staff shifts end for the day.

The Chief Park Ranger indicated that he and his staff made fewer calls to CRP to address noise complaints because the campground host was able to intervene successfully before having to involve law enforcement. He also commented that the Campground Host helped campers who were checking in after-hours to find the correct campsite – an issue that had been a problem in the past, especially when the campground was at high capacity. This greatly reduced conflicts and confusion about campsite assignments between campers.

The Park Operations Coordinator received fewer complaints about bathroom cleanliness in the evening hours; heard positive comments from campers about having an on-site point of contact for questions/issues; found out that people were stealing firewood from the vendor's storage box; and, that speeding in the park was more of an issue than previously thought.

Campground Host Exit Interview

Overall, the Campground Hosts thought the program was received very well, operated smoothly and should continue in the future. Their feedback made note of the following:

- Campers were responsive and respectful to their requests to observe quiet hours when they heard noise and/or when they received noise complaints from other campers.
- Cleaning and checking the bathhouses later in the evening was helpful as they frequently needed maintenance attention after campers used them prior to going to bed for the evening. Nighttime bathhouse checks also revealed lights that were burned out and, on one occasion, some illicit behavior taking place.
- Many people were assisted with after-hours check-in and campsite location since they had forgotten what spot they reserved. Staff response to provide the hosts with a list of

campsite reservations and posting the same at the office was most helpful in reducing the confusion caused by this situation. They also assigned spots to campers who arrived after-hours without reservations.

- Speeding was a regular issue and, although there are speed bumps on the roadways, more should be done to maintain the speed limit. Speeding was a safety concern for children in the campground, and Campground Hosts witnessed a couple of near-misses between vehicles/pedestrians. (They found that most speeders were younger drivers who were associated with the Boat Club facility in CRP.)
- They caught people stealing firewood on two different occasions and had reason to suspect that some toilet paper was stolen from a supply closet.
- Several electrical issues were investigated concerning the power pedestals for campers. Those that could not be fixed were reported to staff to resolve, and a list of lights that were not working on several power pedestals was also provided.
- Many inquiries/concerns were addressed about hurricane evacuation procedures when the early track of Hurricane Florence was initially expected to have a major adverse weather effect on the area.
- Questions were answered about setting up and operating RVs from people who were new to this type of camping.
- A small community of homeless people were observed regularly using the parking lot near the pool overnight; Campground Hosts reported it to park staff for information purposes and response, if necessary.
- They found CRP staff were very supportive of their requests and appreciated their responses to issues they brought to their attention. Most concerns brought to staff were addressed in a timely manner.
- They recommended that the Campground Host operation be provided from Memorial Day to Labor Day weekend in order to provide the most benefit to campers using CRP.
- Suggested that the CRP computer system needs to be improved (an acknowledged infrastructure need already identified by County staff at this location). They would have liked to view campground check-ins in real time in order to assist campers after-hours.
- Although their initial work schedule was set as Tuesday-Saturday, with Sunday and Monday off, they found that they “worked” every day because campers would contact them for assistance since they were on-site and accessible. They did not mind the “off-days” contact and accepted it as part of being the CRP host.

Taking in consideration all of the financial information and feedback we received about this program, we found it a successful, affordable and sustainable way to provide quality customer service to our campground patrons. For 2019, this program has been expanded by securing two

sets of volunteer hosts in order to extend after-hours coverage beyond the 90-day maximum allowable campground stay by County Code. The pairs of hosts are scheduled consecutively, which enables this valuable service to be provided throughout the busiest months of the camping season.

Awards Criteria Fulfillment – (Partnering and A Model for Other Localities)

The Volunteer Campground Host program fulfills the awards criteria by partnering with private citizen volunteers to provide a service that positively impacts campground customers, the operation of CRP and park staff. It resolved a long-standing issue that existed at CRP, and improved the level and quality of customer service without increasing the budget. It is a model that could be replicated by other localities that have the responsibility of operating a campground without sufficient staff coverage, or if they desire to increase their customer service capabilities.

