



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: Prince George County
Program Title: Prince George County Annual Back to School Fair
Program Category: Health & Human Services

CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: Shel Bolyard-Douglas, LCSW
Title: Director
Department: Prince George Social Services
Telephone: 804-862-5272 Website: _____
Email: sdouglas@princegeorgecountyva.gov

SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Jeffrey D. Stoke
Title: Deputy County Administrator
Signature: 

Overview/ Summary of the Problem

The Prince George County Annual Back to School Fair is a community wide “Family Fun Night” held each year on the 4th Thursday in August. The event celebrates the winding down of summer and is a collaborative partnership between county agencies, the school division, and community organizations with the goal of helping families prepare for the new year. There are three components to the Prince George County Annual Back to School Fair: a school supply give –away, a community resource fair, and family entertainment.

First, County Social Services leads a school supply drive throughout the summer in order to be able to distribute school supplies to school aged children attending the fair. Next, community organizations, local businesses, local churches, scouting and other youth and recreational programs set up booths and give away materials and fun items as part of a community resource fair for families. Then finally, family friendly entertainment is provided at no cost for the evening in the form of music, bouncy houses, children’s games, exploration of emergency vehicles, exploring a school bus for new students and parents, free haircuts, and free food. The goal of the Fair is not just to provide school supplies but to strengthen families by reminding them of the activities and resources we have in our community available to support them. The Fair is also a great place for families to come to have fun together before life gets a little more stressful. The fair is free and open to all county residents.

Problem or Need for the Program

The start of a school year brings added stressors for area families. New school clothes, school supplies, new family’s routines, after school activities, getting to and from school, safe and available child care- all add to a parent’s concerns for their children. Funding in local school divisions has diminished over the years to provide extra supplies within the classroom. The supply list seems to grow for many students making it a difficult choice between the needed items and the desired items that they would prefer from the limited family resources. More and more families were seeking support from Social

Services for these basic supplies. However, as in most localities, no funding is available for material support for educational items in a social service budget.

At the same time, we were looking for an opportunity to provide more information to families on available resources within the community. We believed that if families could identify the recreational opportunities for their children, locate a local church or faith based program, become familiar with the local library resources, identify and access health and wellness resources, speak with local family friendly businesses, and speak with local government agencies – they would be more engaged in utilizing those resources and seeking out additional resources if help was needed.

Description of the Program

A collaborative partnership was developed consisting of:

- Prince George Social Services
- Police Department Community Policing Unit
- County General Services
- Parks & Recreation
- Fire & EMS
- School Board Administration staff
- Crater Health District staff
- Members of the Prince George Rotary Club
- Members of the Prince George Woman's Club

The partnership developed a plan to implement the three- pronged approach for the Prince George County Annual Back to School Fair. A community festival just before school starts seemed to be the prime time to engage families. Draw families out with the free school supplies, provide them with critical community information, and encourage them to have fun together in our community park. The event date is set for the 4th Thursday in August each year from 4 pm until 7 pm.

1. The School Supply Drive/ Distribution would be led by Social Services. This task consists of:

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- Fundraising and seeking grants for supplies,
- Collections of monetary and material donations
- Purchasing supplies with donated funds and grant funds
- Packing and distribution of supplies

The School Supplies would be distributed to school children attending the fair. Student's self-identified their school for tracking purposes. Home schoolers and students attending private school within the community were deemed eligible and were tracked in each of those categories. Any undistributed supplies would be divvied up between the local schools for a beginning cache of supplies available to the classroom teachers in case of need. The park's large pavilion was designated for the distribution on the day of the event.

Advertising for the supplies and monetary donations begins in the spring and continues all summer. Grant applications are submitted for small mini grants to local Foundations for monetary support. Requests for contributions are sent to area churches, businesses, and civic organizations. Bulk supplies and bags are ordered with monetary donations to fill any gaps and delivered to the agency. Donated supplies from the community are logged in by the agency and sorted.

A community packing night is organized the Monday prior to the event. Advertising for Volunteers is requested throughout the county from student group who need community volunteer hours to civic groups, etc. Student volunteers help sort and organize the supplies in assembly line fashion to prepare for the packing night. Two assembly lines are created to pack for elementary ages and upper school ages. When the volunteers arrive, they are signed in and given directions on what goes in each bag. Packing night is always a lively scene. Roughly 60 % of the bags packed will be for elementary students and 40% will be for upper aged students. The bags are stored until the day of the event when they will be transported to the pavilion by the General Services staff.

Distribution of the bags is completed by Social Services staff and Woman's Club volunteers. Students must be present to receive a bag of school supplies. Students are asked to self-identify their

school or school program. Students receive a stamp on the back of their hand to indicate they have received their bag of supplies from the pavilion.

2. It was agreed that the Resource Fair component of the event would be open to all family oriented businesses and organizations. The park's shaded area adjacent to the pavilion becomes the perfect spot for 10X10 spaces to be marked off for a Resource Fair. The Woman's Club representative takes the lead on mapping out the resource fair, coordinating the participants, and managing the site during the event.

Notices are sent to local family oriented businesses, civic groups, youth recreation and scouting programs, child care providers, churches, and the government offices regarding the resource fair. There is no fee assessed to participate in the fair. However, each fair participant is asked to provide some sort of give-away at their booth (i.e. Pencils, erasers, glue sticks, rulers, etc.). This creates an incentive for families to visit the resource booths and creates an opportunity for the resource to be creative with their giveaways.

Participants must register for their space in advance. They must provide the primary contact information, type of resource, and expected giveaway.

Each booth must be manned at all times. Electricity in the park is limited. Each space is clearly marked by General Service's staff by 10 am on the morning of the fair. Each organization must provide their own pop up tent, table, or chairs to fill their booth area or whatever displays they desire. The County is not responsible for providing the table and chairs for the participants.

Typical resource participation has included local banks and credit unions, youth sports programs, boys and girls scout programs, Domestic Violence resources, Office on Youth resources, Adult Continuing education, Triad and other Senior resources, home health and in-home health resources, family support services, medical and mental health services, beauty and barber schools, and the full array of government agencies- registrar, treasurer, Emergency Management/LEPC, Health Dept., Social

Services, Library, Parks and Recreation, Police Dept., Sheriff's Office, Fire Services, and animal adoption services.

The local barber school has begun providing free haircuts which has been very popular. The local faith community has taken the opportunity to use the resource fair to provide information on their child care programs, youth groups, and family support services. Children's ID card are made on site by the staff from the Commonwealth Attorney's Office.

The Fair has become one of the prime opportunities to provide public education to families for groups like TRIAD and the Local Emergency Planning Committee. Several families have signed up for citizen classes like our CERT (Citizen Emergency Response Training) because of the outreach efforts during the fair. The Health District has used the event for a training exercise for its Medical Emergency Reserve Corp personnel to gain experience in large group response incidents.

A large portion of the Fair is dedicated to providing families information on school services (transportation, food, student support, vocational, guidance, parent resource center, Special Education). We have a significant military population since we have Fort Lee entirely within our jurisdiction. This means we often have families moving in over the summer who may not be as familiar with the various schools. We have local families who may not have easy access to school staff due to transportation or other issues. The fair creates one more opportunity for families to engage school staff and ask those questions before the school year begins.

We are now experiencing an average of 55- 60 participants in the fair each year.

General Services provides trash receptacles and helps with clean up in the resource fair area following the event. Members of the Prince George Rotary Club participate as volunteers for the day to assist with coordination of the participants and logistics.

3. The Family Fun portion of the day is structured around the belief that families need to play together and have fun together.

The Woman's Club representative and an administrative assistant from Social Services coordinate this portion of the Fair. The High school Marching Band has kicked off the entertainment for the last three years. This not only gives the band an opportunity to make their first public appearance of the season, but brings families to the park for the event. The entire entourage accompanies the band-flags, majorettes, and dance squads. Local praise bands and the 4H music program also provide music for the afternoon and evening at no cost keeping the music family friendly.

Children's games and bouncy houses are set up on the playing fields and manned by youth and volunteers. This is coordinated by the Parks and Recreation staff and representatives of our local Destination Church team. All activities are free. The Police department and Sheriff's Office assist in directing traffic into the park. Access into the park is pedestrian only after 3:30 pm for safety purposes. An officer is stationed at the park entrance to divert cars to the designated parking lots. Parking is located in the adjacent courthouse complex. The community policing unit takes charge of planning for the flow of the access and traffic management as they do for all public events of this nature.

Hot dogs, water, snow cones, and popcorn have been given away during the fair. All food items are donated and prepared by a local food truck or by the local volunteer fire personnel. Bar-B-Q Bliss, a local caterer has offered their food truck and services each year to cook and serve the hot dogs for the fair as part of their way of giving back to the community. Food is advertised as available free until it is gone. Water is donated by Container First, our local waste management company and the Virginia American Water Company. The school system provided their cooling truck to assist with keeping the donated water cold in advance of the 4 pm start time.

The Animal Adoption Pet trailer is set up for families to find their new fur family member. Volunteers will show the adoptable dogs throughout the fair to encourage families to come visit the adoption trailer. A new school bus is set up for first time kindergarteners and their family to explore before it shows up in their rural driveway. This has been a fan favorite with families as it seems to diminish anxiety on both the part of children and parents.

Emergency vehicles also provide a great exploration opportunity for children of all ages and their parents. Children climbing on fire trucks, trying on turnout gear, exploring an ambulance, looking at the police boat with their parents, meeting the police therapy dog, and meeting the police bike patrol officers – all create fun and positive community interactions with our emergency first responders.

Financing and Staffing

The Back to School Fair is a free and open to the public. It is operated by volunteers and agency staff. All costs related to any individual agency's personnel are absorbed by that agency.

Grant requests for small community grants are submitted to local community Foundations to support the Fair. Grant funding typically amounts to \$3,000 each year to cover the printing costs for flyers / posters and draw-string backpacks for the school supply giveaways. Letters requesting contributions of school supplies and monetary donations are sent to area churches, civic organizations, and business. These contributions create the basis for what is available for the school supply giveaway. What comes in, gets distributed. Monetary donations are used to bulk purchase items to fill in the gaps for donated items. There is no budget within the Social Service annual budget to purchase the school supplies that will be given away. Donations of hot dogs, water, and other event supplies are solicited for fair and provided by the generous business community. All donors are recognized at the fair and afterwards for their contribution.

The total expenditures for these items amounted to approximately \$ 7500 each year in addition to the donation school supplies that the agency receives. There are eight Social Service staff who are utilized for registration of resource fair participants and keeping track of the organization of the fair. There are twenty Social Service staff who work various task assignments before, during and after the fair.

Each collaborative partner agency also has staff dedicated to assignments in advance of the fair and on the day of the fair. Many of those tasks are described in the section above. On the day of the fair there are approximately 50 staff and volunteers from the partnering agencies working together during the three hour event to create the smooth operation for the participants and manage any issues that arise.

Results of the Program

Over 4,101 students have participated in the school supplies distribution at the Prince George County Back to School Fairs. Each year, donations of supplies and money continue to allow us to be able to provide a drawstring back pack with basic supplies. It is not everything a child needs for school but it is a nice supplement. A supply listing has been attached. Each student self identifies their school when they receive their backpack at the fair. This utilization measure is used to gauge the success of the program each year and over the course of years. We are able to see how many students from each school participate, how many elementary versus upper grade levels, versus home schooled or “other school placement” students participated. These statistics are reported out in a post-event briefing to the Board of Supervisors and to the School Board each year.

The Department of Social Services has noted a marked decline in calls related to inadequate school supplies for children just prior to the start of the school year.

The Community Resource Fair participation level remains steady with 55-60 agencies and organizations participating each year. Agencies and organizations represent all sectors of the community including local government, leisure, civic, sports, and faith based. The level of resource participation is also reported to the Boards in the post-event reporting each year.

Family Fun Night can only be measured by report or by observation. You have to look at the faces of the participants. It seems to be working. You can look at the numbers each year. It is one of the largest public events held in the community. The community policing unit estimate that roughly 2500-3000 citizens turn out each year for the Fair during this short three hour event. We call that a success. Tracking attendance at a community festival is difficult. The police estimate is reported to the Boards in the post-event briefing each year.

Award Criteria

Preparing for the new school year seemed to be adding to the stressors for families in our community. We wanted to come together to support our families. So many programs today have stringent

eligibility criteria or qualifications to participate. We wanted to come up with something fun with no strings attached. We knew we have resources in our community that families could benefit from if they only knew about them or only knew how to access them. How could we get that information to them? How could we connect those resources with our families?

Why not have a fun festival at the end of the summer, on one of the hottest evenings of the year, to celebrate the end of summer and the upcoming school year. We could have an “Annual Back to School Fair” in Scott Park right beside the Library. It’s a perfect location. The library has all its terrific resources we could tap into and introduce families to. The park has the playground and the pavilion space, the ball fields and plenty of parking. The tree shaded space would be perfect for a resource fair area.

But we have no money for a festival. We don’t have the people to pull this off. We can ask the community to support our families with donations. We can request some mini grants through the local foundations if we need to. We can ask the churches and the business for contributions.

But who has time to organize this. We have enough on our plate as it is. If we pull together a committee with someone from each department, I bet it won’t take as much time as you think. We can ask the Rotary Club and the Woman’s Club to be our volunteers and help. It will work.

And it did.. The Fair’s success is in the commitment from each of the partner agency and volunteer organizations that dedicate their time, energy, and expertise to the project. The fair is a resource for the families that shows the commitment that our county has for our youngest citizens. Prince George has developed a model that other localities can replicate easily within their own communities by pulling together and sharing the load.

Press Release/ Brochure Summary

PRINCE GEORGE, VA- Prince George County, Virginia. Prince George County supports families by having fun and preparing for a new school year with the Annual Back to School Fair. The Prince George County Annual Back to School Fair is a community wide “Family Fun Night” held each year on the 4th Thursday in August. The event celebrates the winding down of summer and is a

collaborative partnership between county agencies, the school division, and community organizations with the goal of helping families prepare for the new year. There are three components to the Prince George County Annual Back to School Fair: a school supply give –away, a community resource fair, and family entertainment.

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Pictures from prior Prince George County Back to School Fairs



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Prince George County, Virginia



Community Wide Planning Partnership and Volunteer Organizations:

Prince George County Department of Social Services

Prince George County Public Schools

Prince George County Library, Appomattox Regional Library System

Prince George County Department of Parks and Recreation

Prince George County Police Department, Community Policing Unit

Prince George County Fire and Emergency Managements Services

Prince George County General Services

Crater Health District

Prince George Woman's Club

Rotary Club of Prince George County

Unity Baptist Church

Destination Church

Program Category: Health and Human Services

Submitted By: Shel Bolyard-Douglas, LCSW, Director, Prince George Social Services