



## APPLICATION FORM

All applications must include the following information. Separate applications must be submitted for each eligible program. **Deadline: June 1, 2020.** 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:** County of Henrico

**Program Title:** Queens UNITED

**Program Category:** Community and Economic Development

### CONTACT INFORMATION

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

**Name:** Brandon Hinton

**Title:** Deputy County Manager for Administration

**Signature:** 

## **Program Overview**

“Queens UNITED” is a program designed to foster a positive and loving environment for teen girls. UNITED is an acronym for Unity, Nobility, Integrity, Trustworthiness, Education and Destiny. We began in February 2017 at Huguenot High School with a small group of girls who have since grown in numbers and spirit. The program is now run primarily from the campus of Henrico County Public Schools’ Academy at Virginia Randolph, but still includes students we work with at Huguenot High School. Queens UNITED seeks to educate, strengthen and empower girls by cultivating self-awareness and accountability, positive relationships, educational and personal goal-setting, leadership and community service opportunities, and sisterhood. Our overarching goal is to ensure that students are successful and have the necessary tools to excel. To that end, we work closely with the girls’ parents, guardians and communities, because we understand that it takes a village to create an atmosphere that nurtures success.

This program has proven to be impactful and encourages girls to be successful. Queens UNITED has gone from one group of 11 students to three different groups, each comprised of more than 20 students. The students have expressed how much the program has helped them with communication, organization and planning. Most of the students who have been mentored through the program have gone on to either a community college or a four-year university.

We are currently working on expanding our program to other Henrico County schools and schools in the City of Richmond. We aim to continue to support the young ladies we build relationships with, as well as their parents, guardians, and communities.

### **Problem/Challenge/Situation Faced by Locality**

Statistics show that only 54% of students in low socioeconomic communities attempt to enter a post-secondary education program. Also, statistics show that the dropout rate is much higher for students in these communities. One of the commonalities is that students in these environments aren't offered the same programming and resources as students in more affluent places. This is why Queens UNITED was formed. As described earlier, Queens UNITED serves as a safe haven for female students and as a means to encourage and promote success. The program began in February 2017, during Black History Month. We expected that by the end of the month, we would go back to our regularly scheduled program; however, at the end of the month, students pleaded with us to continue the program. They cited the program's assistance in helping them work through issues they confronted. With that, we kept the program going and never looked back.

### **How Program Fulfilled Awards Criteria**

Queens UNITED can serve as a model for other localities for encouraging students' success. The program can jump-start the futures of students. In Queens UNITED, we instill the idea of intrinsic motivation and show our students how to attain their goals as well as be active in their communities. Queens UNITED is worthy of a VACo award because we have taken what others said was impossible and risen to every occasion. We have repeatedly been told everything that our students can't do, but our students have shown us everything they can do — and more. They do this not because they are begged to, or because we offer to shower them with snacks. They rise to the occasion because they are given an opportunity to taste success — to see it, and most importantly, to feel it. Queens UNITED is evidence that, when a fire is finally lit, it's hard to dim its light.

### **How Program Was Carried Out**

The main objective of Queens UNITED is to offer female students an opportunity to discover themselves, discover opportunities in their communities, and to discover their passions and interests. Through this discovery they can better guide their destinies. There is no application process for the program; students are typically referred to us by a school staff member. Once they are a part of the group there are certain criteria they must follow to remain in the program. "Queens UNITED" is the name of the mentoring program developed by an HCPS teacher. It was created through funds from HCPS's "Henrico HEROES" grant program.

We begin by delving into what being a "Queen" looks like, and then focus on being united. The program starts with a two-month-long course in etiquette, effective communication and goal setting. We refer to this initial course as the "Queens in Training Process." This part of the program is crucial to the development of what we are trying to foster. The Queens training process allows for the facilitators and mentors to better gauge the students' potential and willingness to strive to improve. This process determines whether the program will be a good fit for a student or not. On average, nine of 10 girls will go on to complete the full program and obtain its benefits. Once students have finished the first wave of the program, the curriculum moves into the "UNITED" part of the program.

UNITED is an acronym for Unity, Nobility, Integrity, Trustworthiness, Education and Destiny. This acronym guides the program's curriculum. Each strand has a set curriculum that must be followed before the next strand can be started. Each standard has several subtopics that the girls write about, discuss in groups, engage in community conversations, and produce a final project to show what they have mastered. They show they can apply the standard to their daily lives and reach excellence. Each standard takes about a month to complete and can be completed in the allotted

time frame. Currently, our meetings are held on Fridays. The program begins in September and runs for the school year, with our closing activity the first week of June. As Queens UNITED continues to grow, we will continue to subscribe to the three fundamental beliefs that led us to create and develop the idea.

1. Provides a necessary outlet to improve low-income communities.
2. Cultivates the minds of young ladies and helps them understand that limits should not be their stopping point, but their growth point to reach the next level; and
3. Embraces parental and community engagement as the key to success.

Our clientele is eclectic, as we work with students from various communities, educational paths and interests. We also value the fact that our mentors also come from an array of backgrounds. This diversity helps with the comfortability of the students and also helps bring out nuances in the group. Queens UNITED is an appropriate and realistic option for all students. Queens UNITED is such an amazing program because of the diversity it boasts. At the Academy at Virginia Randolph, the group consists of young ladies from all ethnic backgrounds who have truly forged a sisterhood. Queens UNITED is for any student who needs a friend or mentor, and more importantly, for students who need words of encouragement to understand that they can accomplish anything they put their minds to.

Henrico County Public Schools is involved by facilitating several aspects of the program: community partnerships, strategic planning, and a monetary stipend. The partnership that Queens UNITED has with Henrico County Public Schools is crucial to the success of the program. Through this partnership, we have been able to expose students to different cultures, as well as introduce them to community members who can help them after graduation in a plethora of fields. The partnership has helped to amplify the success rate of Queens UNITED and provide students with an extra layer of support. Henrico Schools also helps with the implementation of the strict timeline.

This timeline is broken down into months and helps to keep the facilitators, mentors and mentees on track.

We also work with women around Henrico County to ensure that all of our girls' needs are met. Community partners come to our school on a biweekly basis to check in on their students. The mentors sit in on their classes, provide constructive feedback, and most importantly, create safe spaces in which all students feel comfortable. As we continue to grow and move forward in our development, we want to further our partnership with our community partners and charge them to be more visible in the communities of the students and also in the schools. We are considering the possibility of a monthly rally where young ladies are surrounded by successful women and hear discussion on a relevant topic.

### **Financing and Staffing**

The program can be completed without a lot of funding, but to be effective there are costs involved. We meet after school once a week for two hours and provide a snack and juice for all students who attend. We were able to get the students involved with creating fundraisers to raise additional funds, and we also created a signature program for Mother's Day that brought in revenue for the group. Since moving our base from Huguenot to the Academy at Virginia Randolph, we have been allotted operating funds.

The operating costs of the program at the Academy at Virginia Randolph is \$3,000 to \$4,000, dollars depending on the activities. One of our largest expenses is extracurricular activities (team-building exercises, college visits, etc.). We also provide food for most meetings. We have a monthly activity that includes a "bigger ticket item," such as an outing or lunch for students in the

program. Everything else is moderate in price. Due to our student population, we strive to keep out-of-pocket costs to nothing to ensure that all students have the opportunity to participate.

If this program were to be implemented elsewhere, it could be done one of two ways: the first would involve collecting a club fee of \$10 and then holding fundraisers throughout the school year. The second option would be to gain a monetary allotment or grant from a school, school division or other institution and stay on budget. Each year Queens UNITED gets a grant from Henrico Schools' "Henrico HEROES" mentoring program. For the 2019-20 school year the grant was for \$2,687. We also use fundraisers to pay for the program. We have held talent shows, dances and bake sales, and sold "candygrams." We also held a movie night where we showed a movie in the auditorium and sold snacks (popcorn, candy and nachos). The beauty of the Queens UNITED program is that it requires limited funds and still proves relevant for students.

### **Program Results**

This program has proven to be impactful and encourages girls to be successful. When Queens UNITED first began, we did not expect it to gain the recognition that it has. We went from one group of 11 students to three different groups, each comprised of more than 20 students. The students have expressed how much the program has helped them with communication, organization and planning. Most of the students who have been mentored through the program have gone on to either a community college or a four-year university.

All of the students who have graduated and moved on still keep in touch, sharing their accomplishments and identifying areas in their lives where they could stand to improve. They often say how the program helped to change the trajectories of their lives. There are several things that we look for when deciding how impactful the program is, and what needs to be done

to make it better. One is school absenteeism. Students in the program tend to improve their school attendance and miss fewer days of school per month. This is huge, as absenteeism plagues secondary schools. Another thing we focus on is showing students a model of success. When students see what success looks like, they have a better idea of how to create it for themselves. Our goal is to groom life-ready students.

Another way we gauge the effectiveness of the program is a decrease in disciplinary actions. Sometimes the young ladies we work with have a hard time staying out of trouble, so we stress the importance of carrying themselves like Queens. We also work hard to foster a sisterly environment so that there can be checks and balances, and all the students feel part of a safe environment. We teach the students that their “attitudes can precede them,” and they should always try to give the best parts of themselves. In the Queens program, we sometimes adjust our “Queens in Training” activities to help their classmates who may be having bad days and need their crowns adjusted.

### **Brief Summary**

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Queens United  
Supplemental Material

