



Virginia Association of Counties ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS



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: Second Chances: Changing the Lives of Former Inmates

Program Category: Organizational Development

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Program Overview

Henrico County's Sheriff's Department founded ORBIT (Opiate Recovery Based on Intensive Tracking) to help eliminate drug abuse – a key factor in criminal recidivism. Another crucial dynamic in keeping people out of jail is providing them with the skills, confidence, and know-how to seek and acquire reliable and fulfilling work. Doing so may reduce the chances of recidivism and create the structure, stability, and income to help prior ORBIT participants lead productive lives.

The Employment and Compensation Services (ECS) Division of Human Resources (HR) collaborated with the Sheriff's Department to provide ten ORBIT participants with the tools required to seek and hold steady jobs, such as: creating resumes; matching skills with job vacancies; mock interviews; submitting job applications; and providing individualized feedback to each participant.

The results are resounding and powerful. Six out of ten have already been hired and their supervisors state that they outshined other applicants. In addition, several have received praise for excelling at their jobs, with commendation for their hard work and dedication. The next group of participants has already been selected to participate in the Second Chances Program. Second Chances' astounding success makes clear the profound impact that local government can have on human lives.

Problem/Challenge/Situation Faced by Locality

Criminal recidivism, whether in Henrico County or elsewhere, is driven by several much studied and predictable factors. ORBIT's focus on opiate addiction deals with one such aspect of repeat criminality. Lack of employment opportunity is another substantial factor in a country where more

than one in four released felons do not have a job. Focusing on gainful employment achieves two significant goals: keeping people out of jail and providing the job market with new, effective employees.

Many inmates have the skills and know-how necessary to excel in myriad fields. Before their respective arrests, they were equipment operators, landscapers, truck drivers, mechanics, farm workers or any other number of occupations that – if just given the proper guidance and belief – they could hold once more. By building their confidence, sharpening their skill-sets, focusing on their areas of competency, and helping them believe in their ability to capture a second chance and make the most of it, everyone wins: Henrico County, our taxpayers, prospective employers, and the ORBIT participants themselves.

How Program Fulfilled Awards Criteria

Founded by Henrico County's Sheriff Department, ORBIT is a comprehensive program for opiate addicted inmates who receive jail sentences for charges related to larceny and possession of narcotics. The program provides extensive treatment to help inmates of 18 months to three years overcome their addiction so that they can re-enter society.

Another crucial element to being able to re-enter society and subsequently stay out of jail is gainful employment, and Henrico's Second Chances program was launched to add this element of critical support to inmates participating in ORBIT.

In April 2019, ECS staff from Human Resources and the Sheriff Department's ORBIT Senior Project Manager met to determine whether they could support ORBIT participants by providing instruction in resume preparation, interviewing, and assistance in gaining paid employment once

on work release. The first step was ECS meeting with a handful of ORBIT participants to gain first-hand knowledge of their situations.

It was during this powerful meeting that the plan for Second Chances solidified. Each participant's story was fascinating and seemed to have a common thread: they were all addicts who wanted a better life and who yearned to turn their lives around. They all hoped that by working hard they could achieve a positive new start in life. The ECS team hoped they could add the valuable, and previously missing, element of job search skills so these ORBIT participants could rejoin the workforce.

How Program Was Carried Out

Second Chances launched with ten select ORBIT members, an ECS Analyst, and ORBIT's Senior Project Manager. The first few meetings were to establish trust and rapport as well as to get the ORBIT members thinking about their abilities and about how their skills could help them break the cycle in which they found themselves. When first asked about their work experience, the room became very quiet. Finally, one member spoke up about his work as a steam fitter, and then another hesitantly shared that he was a mechanic, and finally another spoke of his customer service skills. The conversation became animated. It was exciting to witness this change, and to be able to share with participants that their experiences and skills could benefit County agencies as well as other businesses.

With each subsequent meeting, the ECS team challenged ORBIT participants to rethink their skillsets and understand that they did not need to start from scratch. When the ORBIT Senior Project Manager and the ECS Analyst saw how hard the participants worked and how eager they were to learn, it became clear that this collaboration was working. Having the ORBIT members

speaking candidly about themselves, not judging them for their past indiscretions, and providing encouragement throughout helped establish the trust and rapport necessary for them to become open and encouraged about their potential.

Second Chances included a series of workshops that could be tweaked, if necessary, to meet the needs of the members.

- In the first workshop, a major concern of the ORBIT participants revolved around how to deal with their felony records when applying for work. Instructors spoke about addressing this issue honestly while not giving too much detail about the charge(s). Participants were encouraged to focus on the future and to make it known during an interview that although they made mistakes, they had learned from the experience(s) and from being in the ORBIT program. Amazingly, they quickly embraced the idea of turning something so negative into something more positive and did a wonderful job of articulating this in subsequent mock interviews.
- Participants were given the homework of getting onto a computer to set up a “profile” and job application on Henrico’s job site. They seemed reluctant at first but assisted one another and all created job profiles that they tweaked as they got used to the system and to using a computer (which they had not done in many months/years.) They appeared both encouraged and excited, anticipating what might be next for them.
- In the second workshop the conversation was even more animated during a discussion about resume building. Participants asked how to phrase various experiences and what type of resume might be most appropriate for different jobs. The felony charge concern arose again,

and once more the discussion revolved around staying positive. Participants were beginning to feel more confident and it showed in their demeanor as they conducted peer reviews of one another's resumes and adjusted their own. The instructors were further establishing rapport and trust and the participants were beginning to believe in themselves. Participants reviewed 'real' interview questions and volunteered potential answers, and then debriefed with the group. It made for some lively conversation. Rejoining the workforce was beginning to feel real to them.

- After the second workshop, instructors and participants kept in touch via email and sometimes a phone call or visit to ask questions about applications, resumes, and how to market themselves further. The Second Chances collaborative team realized the program was really beginning to take hold.
- The next workshop consisted of mock interviews, with ECS Analysts meeting with each ORBIT participant individually. According to one Analyst who had not met with the Second Chances group before, participants were more prepared and more articulate than many other job seekers she had interviewed in the past. All ECS analysts agreed that Second Chances participants did a wonderful job not only of answering the questions but also in addressing their felony charges in a concise and positive manner. Participants had come so far in such a short time span that it was remarkable and heartwarming to witness. They all felt that they had done a good job in their mock interviews. Staff handed out interview evaluation forms for them to review and they openly embraced any feedback offered.

- The fourth and final workshop consisted of a group recap and review of how each participant felt about their mock interviews. They spoke candidly with ECS and with one another and made plans for their next steps.

After the workshops were complete, many applied for competitive positions both within and outside of Henrico County government. The initial collaborative goal of Second Chances had been to get the ORBIT participants to a point of readiness for seeking employment in a competitive job market. This goal was met and surpassed!

Financing and Staffing

There was no capital cost incurred in the development of the program. The operating costs consisted of only staff time. Workshop presenters and mock interview recruiters are salaried employees who can walk to the site where the ORBIT participants are housed, so no resources for traveling were needed. There were no material costs associated with the program.

Program Results

The results of the Second Chances program are significant, and speak for themselves:

- Six of the ten participants have already been hired – an astounding hire rate considering that the original program goal was to simply create readiness for applying for jobs.
- Some are not yet eligible for work release and cannot currently apply for jobs. They are actively reviewing applications, building resumes, and exploring job sites to discover positions that fit their skills and experiences once they are able to apply.

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- Hiring managers and recruiters report that Second Chances participants are among the most highly qualified and impressive applicants, giving skilled interviews and answering questions with poise.
- Second Chances graduates have applied for and secured some of the County's most difficult to fill positions, which is a win for the County and a win for the participants.
- All County departments that have hired Second Chances graduates have been pleased with the results, commending these new employees for their strong job performance:
 - ✓ One supervisor shared, "He is doing a wonderful job, and the team is very impressed with his work ethic."
 - ✓ Another stated, "He's a great employee! I gave him my expectations and he just took off! He's productive and genuine. He gets things done. He's a great example of how things can turn around. I expect that he'll move up quickly."
 - ✓ One Second Chances graduate has been so embraced by his new workplace that the mechanic group he works with helped him purchase a toolbox at a low cost.
 - ✓ Yet another has been credited with having the most expertise and strongest work ethic on his work crew.
- Hiring Second Chances graduates reduces the chances that they will return to jail, saving taxpayer dollars and even adding to the tax base through their employment.
- Graduates working in the Department of Public Utilities can move up in the ranks by obtaining their driver's license and CDL permits. Once these are in place, the County will pay for them to be trained as CDL drivers, furthering their job success and career outlook.
- One Second Chances graduate said, "Working with HR gave me confidence. I learned that I had valuable skills I never realized I had before." Another shared, "This job has given me a

future and that's something that I haven't had for a long time." This is priceless and speaks volumes to the difference this program has already made in such a short time.

Brief Summary

Imagine the impact of helping previous addicts and inmates not just re-enter society, but do so with a secured job that brings dignity; with coworkers who provide social support, encouragement, and human connection; and with a reliable schedule that provides stability and routine to reinforce these individuals in their fresh start. Contrast that with someone who has been through drug rehabilitation and subsequently re-enters society with no employment and no structure to prop up their recent and sometimes-fragile victory over drugs. Which scenario is more likely to keep people out of jail for good? And which has the greater promise of changing people's lives in profound and sustainable ways? And which has the opportunity to be a double win for the former addicts and the community?

Second Chances started with a desire to provide information and encouragement to a population that deserves a second chance. The initial collaboration between the Sheriff's Office and Human Resources has grown into a flourishing partnership, and their belief in this program has spread to others within the County. Hiring managers have eagerly jumped on board, and former ORBIT participants are thriving in the workplace. This excitement underlies Henrico's core belief that everyone has unique and marketable skills that can help them positively contribute to society, and that people deserve second chances.

As the Senior Project Manager in ORBIT points out, "too often, we confuse 'recovery' with simply staying clean. However, recovery comes with a host of other issues – not least among them regaining self-worth and achieving once-unattainable goals." Second Chances goes a long way

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toward helping participants reclaim their sense of dignity and self-worth, and gives them something that few experience while incarcerated: hope. Add support, skill-building, laughter, trust, growing confidence, job offers, and permanent employment, and this program is priceless. Best yet, the process is free and can easily be replicated in other localities across the country.