



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: Trailblazers Wall

Program Category: Customer Service

CONTACT INFORMATION

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SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

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Title: Deputy County Manager for Administration

Signature: 

Program Overview

The Trailblazers Wall at the Fairfield Area Library in Henrico, Virginia is an inclusive, dynamic digital history wall that showcases biographies of individuals whose lives and work had major impacts on the county, the state, and the nation. Inspired by the Supervisor of the Fairfield District, content for the wall was selected by a committee of community members knowledgeable about local history, with the goal of inspiring paths in life for young people of the Fairfield District.

The resulting wall highlights many people of color and women whose historical narratives have been submerged, and demonstrates how community engagement can lead to more inclusive and valuable services in public libraries. Public response and usage patterns show that the inclusive historical display has deeply resonated with the community, and that local history has a natural home in public libraries.

Problem/Challenge/Situation Faced by Locality

The new Fairfield Area Library was built after approval of a majority of Henrico residents in a bond referendum on the ballot during the November 2016 election. The Fairfield District of Henrico County has historically been home to a large number of African American residents, a large number of middle- and working-class residents, and an above-average number of persons experiencing poverty. The library provides essential services like public computing and internet access, early literacy education, support for students, career skill-building, and cultural activities to people from a wide variety of backgrounds. The new facility and all of its amenities needed to meet the needs of this community. Planning for the Fairfield Area Library began in 2017. Early in the planning process, the Supervisor of the Fairfield District requested that history be highlighted in the new library that would tell the story of local and national Trailblazers, with the goal of inspiring residents, particularly young people, on their paths in life. The Library was faced with a

challenge to create an inclusive history of the region and state that would appeal to the public in the Fairfield District and beyond. In order to fulfill this task, county employees worked with the community, and sought engaged residents to advise the creation of the Trailblazers Wall.

How Program Fulfilled Awards Criteria

The Trailblazers Wall uses cutting edge technology to tell stories from Henrico County history spanning four hundred years. Selected through community engagement and a democratic committee process, the wall displays biographies intended to inspire members of the community toward their path in life, while shedding light on important but traditionally marginalized historical narratives. The Trailblazers Wall is for the community and of the community. The Wall's presence in a public library ensures that community engagement with these narratives will remain accessible. While the county achieved cost savings through mounting hardware on an existing wall and repurposing existing Content Management System software, members of the public volunteered their labor to research and select the historical content, saving the county hundreds of staff work hours. The Trailblazers Wall demonstrates that community engagement can decrease cost while adding value to public services. Through an interdepartmental effort in Henrico County, and the dedicated work of the volunteer Trailblazers Committee, the Trailblazers Wall displays more than history: it demonstrates that community engagement leads to more inclusive services, and that public libraries are perfect settings to make hidden histories accessible.

How Program Was Carried Out

In early meetings about the design of the new Fairfield Library, the Supervisor emphasized that public libraries are unique spaces for learning, in which the philosophies of rival intellectuals W.E.B. DuBois and Booker T. Washington can both be supported. While DuBois was a proponent

of academic learning as a means toward black advancement, Washington espoused the virtues of learning skilled trades. Toward this end, county staff were instructed to thoroughly engage the community in planning the library's design, and to create a variety of learning spaces and experiences in the new library. The Trailblazers Wall would need to be planned with community members, and should uplift both DuBois and Washington's models of advancement.

Planning for the Trailblazers Wall began in October 2018 with a meeting between the multimedia firm Second Story, Library Administrators and Information Technology staff, and the Recreation Manager for History from the county's Department of Recreation and Parks. The wall would consist of five portrait-oriented panel displays mounted in a continuous row on a wall in the new library's open lobby area. There would be an additional, smaller panel with a touch screen mounted on a podium that users could interact with to select which story to display on the five-panel wall, and to explore additional information. The Library had worked with Second Story in 2014-15 to create a display at the Libbie Mill Library, the Heritage Wall, and therefore could slightly modify the existing web-based Content Management System instead of developing a new system, at a considerable cost savings. Staff continued to meet monthly with Second Story to ensure the hardware and software were in place, while community members were recruited to advise the historical content to display on the wall.

The Recreation Manager for History recruited an engaged and knowledgeable group of community advisors called the Trailblazers Committee that began meeting monthly in December 2018. Members included a consultant and former Art educator, a historical interpreter and actor, a former Virginia Cooperative Extension educator, a former employee of the Virginia Department of Education, and a retired elementary school principal who was also the first African-American "Christmas Mother," or spokeswoman for the County's longstanding annual holiday charity drive.

Academic learning and skilled trades were reflected in the careers and expertise of the committee members. County employees attended as well, including Henrico County Public Library's Community Relations Coordinator, staff from the History division of the County Department of Recreation and Parks, the Principal of Henrico County Public Schools Virginia Randolph Education Center, and a teacher from Henrico County Public Schools.

The Eastern Henrico Recreation Center in the Fairfield District, across the street from the site of the new Library, had hosted an exhibit called *Trailblazers* featuring local, prominent African American Henricoans through history. Some members of the Trailblazers Committee had advised that exhibit, and some had served on a committee to commemorate Henrico County's 400th Anniversary. The committee members drew upon their knowledge of local history, previous committee service, and motivation to present diversity in local history in order to come up with content for the new digital history wall. The committee also understood the request from the Supervisor that the Trailblazers Wall should inspire paths in life for young people, and that it should value academic learning and skilled trades equally. With inclusion, inspiration, and vocational variety in mind, the committee first decided that it would feature biographies of individuals who made significant contributions through success in a variety of fields. Committee meetings consisted of spirited discussions of people who should be featured on the wall, as well as professions that should be represented. A long list of names was generated, and the challenge soon became how to whittle it down.

Twelve categories were proposed through discussion and consensus-building within the group. These categories eventually became the "stories" visitors could experience on the wall: Freedom Fighters, Education, Sciences, Landowners, Performing Arts, Visual Arts, Writers, Journalists, Community Leaders, Entrepreneurs, Politicians, and Athletes. Once established, names were

assigned to these categories and vigorously debated. Committee members brought in their own research to the sessions to support and advocate for their favorites to be included. The Recreation Manager for History, Library Community Relations Coordinator, and Principal of Virginia Randolph school provided supplemental knowledge or guidance whenever asked. The committee meetings were driven by the community members, and were as democratic as the public library for which they planned.

With the new library slated to open in October 2019, the committee had a deadline of early April to make final selections for the wall. Each category would have one flagship biography that would play across the five panels of the display, with two supporting biographies that a viewer could select on the touch-screen, podium-mounted driver if they wished to dig deeper. Priorities were set by the committee for inclusion on the wall and driver: the best candidates would be racially diverse, local to Henrico or Virginia, and a mix of historic and living persons. The majority of persons selected were people of color, approximately half women, mostly from Henrico County. All selections were from Virginia, and many were little-known but significant historical actors. Final selections were made through a committee-wide vote.

Recreation Manager for History and her staff took the final selected names and researched their biographies to create text and find multimedia materials for the display, including scans of primary source documents and original photographs. The Library Community Relations Coordinator reviewed the draft text to ensure the use of inclusive language.

As the library's opening date approached, Second Story and Library IT collaborated to install and upload content to the wall. The committee members and library staff collaborated to invite identified living Trailblazers and descendants of Trailblazers to the opening ceremony. On

opening day, over 2500 community members saw the new library and the new wall for the first time. Trailblazers and their descendants were honored in the remarks of local officials, and the Recreation Manager for History and her staff distributed special ribbons to them. Crowds gathered around the Trailblazers Wall, with families and friends congregating to learn about local history and to see their ancestor, relative, friend, elected representative, or neighbor recognized. At the opening ceremony, the histories of the people on the wall were both live on the screen and brought to life through the Trailblazers' presence and the presence of their descendants.

Financing and Staffing

The digital display's hardware and software represented a significant investment of resources. However, cost savings were achieved in several ways. Firstly, the five panels were mounted to a wall, so no additional structure needed to be built or designed in order to hold them. Secondly, the Content Management System, an online software for uploading and managing media for the wall, was not created from scratch, but slightly modified from a previous project. The biggest cost savings came from the use of a volunteer committee to plan and select the content; this reduced the number of staff work hours needed to research candidates for the wall and undertake a selection process. Community engagement had a significant cost-reduction impact on the project, while simultaneously increasing the value of the Trailblazers Wall for library users.

While the cost of the hardware and software may not be accessible to all municipalities, the process of developing content for the historical display could serve as a model for library systems seeking to create history programs or exhibits. In addition, this project could be scaled to fit a municipality's budget. The key to the Trailblazers Wall's success was the community planning committee, and community-generated content could be displayed in a print-based, wall-mounted exhibit, or on a single panel screen running a PowerPoint slideshow, depending on funds

available. Engaging dedicated and knowledgeable volunteers to serve on a committee resulted in a higher quality product that used considerably less staff time than if County staff had undertaken the process internally. Committee members researched and vetted candidates, voted on selections for the wall, and researched living descendants of those selected in order to invite them to the library's grand opening. This amounts to hundreds of hours of time that county staff could devote to other duties. In return for their efforts, committee members saw a museum-quality display come to life that reflects shared values of diversity, inclusion, and representation.

Expenditure for the Fairfield Trailblazers Wall totaled approximately \$210,000. The application cost to develop the five panel kiosk was negotiated down to \$138,900. The hardware costs were \$70,720, including onsite hot spare replacements for servers, AV panels, and other key hardware.

The Kiosk podium was constructed as part of the library building's construction budget. County staff leveraged the core application developed for a previous project, the Heritage Wall at Libbie Mill Library, which saved significant cost. At the same time, Library IT staff worked with the vendor to modify the base code to provide functionality enhancements, and upgraded the core server hardware to refresh it, as it was aging out. Annual service costs will include staff time and repairs, and will be undertaken as needed. The Library will be billed for actual hours used. Estimated costs will be under \$10,000. The core hardware will need to be refreshed in five years.

Program Results

From the new Fairfield Library's opening on October 6 through the end of 2019, over 1600 members of the public engaged with the wall. This number does not capture the complete count of persons who experienced the wall, as groups and families are commonly seen gathered around the wall at Fairfield Library. The wall was intended to inspire young people in a predominantly

African American and working- to middle-class neighborhood on their paths in life. Due to the efforts of the Trailblazers Committee to be inclusive and representative of community history, the wall features mostly African-American biographies, and an even distribution of men and women. Some of these historical figures are little-known, but significant. For example, Isabella Virginia Sykes Atkins was a free, landowning African-American from the Antebellum Era through Reconstruction whose story is featured on the wall. Although she had adult sons living with her, the 1880 census shows the land and farm were registered in her name. Historical narratives of powerful, landowning, and entrepreneurial black women are uncommon in the mainstream, but on the Trailblazers Wall, inspiring stories like Atkins' are given prominence. Because the library relied on the historical expertise and values of community members to select which stories to feature, the history and values of the community are evident on the wall.

Brief Summary

The Trailblazers Wall at the new Fairfield Library, part of the Henrico County Public Library system, is a dynamic digital history wall that displays community history using an interactive, museum-quality interface. Not only do the stories on the wall reflect local history in a geographic sense, but they were selected and produced through a committee consisting of local residents. The community engagement process undertaken by Henrico County Libraries and the Department of Recreation and Parks was an effective interdepartmental partnership that created a more meaningful end product as a result of community input. In addition to the community engagement in the committee's planning process, the Library and Department of Recreation and Parks collaborated to recognize Trailblazers and their descendants at the opening of the new Fairfield Library, when the wall was debuted for the first time.

Libraries are community centers, and the Trailblazers Wall shows a deep dedication to the local community, its shared history, and shared values. While a dynamic digital interface like the one used to tell these stories at Fairfield Library may not be accessible to all library systems, a community history project like the Trailblazers Wall can be scaled down or up according to the resources of the library system. The Trailblazers Wall shows that local histories can engage and resonate with communities, and that public libraries are excellent venues for ensuring local history is accessible. Community engagement with local public history projects ensures inclusivity, lifts up underrepresented historical narratives, and demonstrates a locality's commitment to their citizens.

The text of the letter:

General Prosser, Gabriel was appointed Captain at first mentioned in the Constitution and afterwards when he was elected it was a matter of course was appointed General. That they were to kill Mr. Justice, Mr. Bishop, and all the magistrates, and then proceed to Richmond where they would take the treasury, and divide the money amongst his soldiers. After which, he would bring his army to the city and proceed to Richmond. However, as he was a brave man, he would be sure to stand by his men. That of the soldiers, perhaps a great many of them were not with him, but he would be sure to stand by his men. That of the soldiers, perhaps a great many of them were not with him, but he would be sure to stand by his men. That of the soldiers, perhaps a great many of them were not with him, but he would be sure to stand by his men.

FREEDOM FIGHTERS

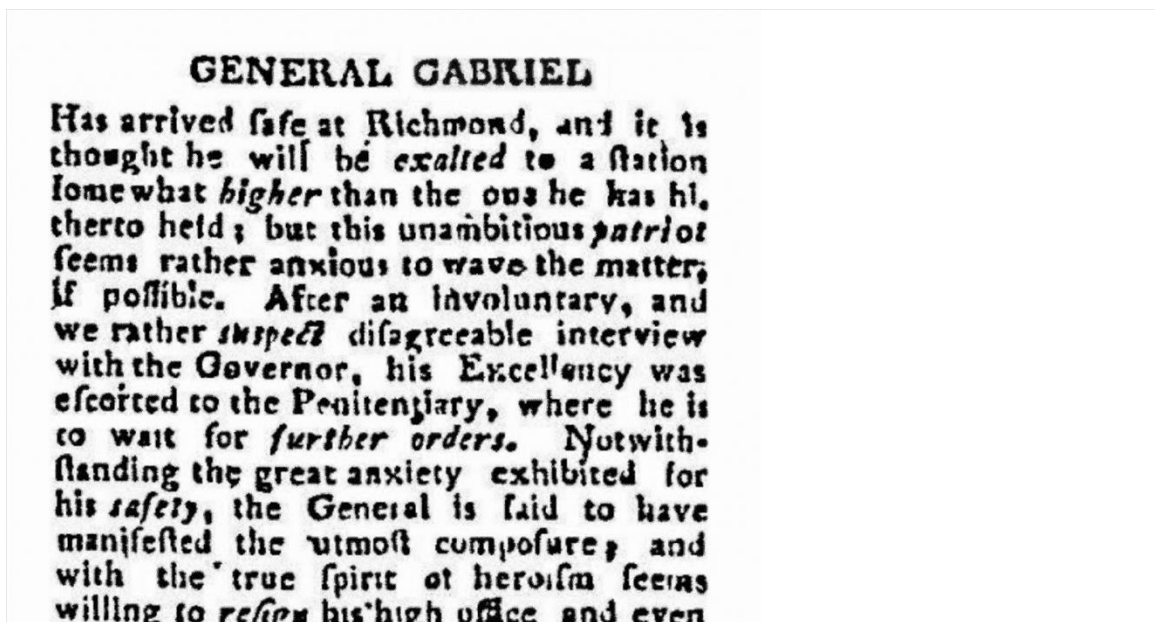
In 2007, 207 years after Gabriel's execution, Governor Tim Kaine pardoned him. Kaine said, "I recognize Gabriel Prosser for his courage and devotion to the fundamental Virginia values of freedom and equality, and I am pleased to restore officially his good name."

GENERAL GABRIEL

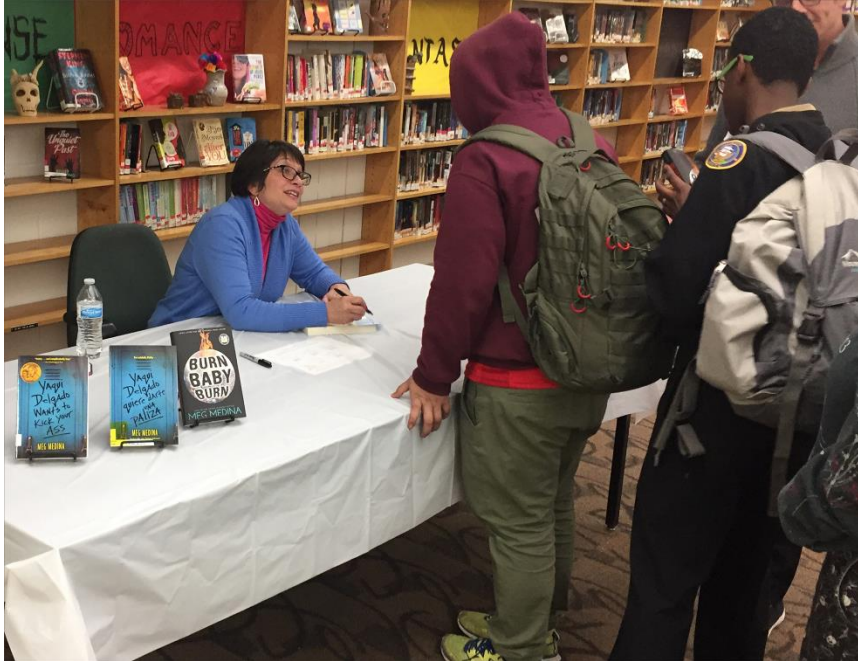
Has arrived safe at Richmond, and he is thought he will be exalted to a station somewhat higher than the one he has hitherto held; but this ambitious patriot seems rather anxious to waive the matter, if possible. After an involuntary, and we rather suspect disgraceful interview with the Governor, his Excellency was escorted to the Penitentiary, where he is to wait for further orders. Notwithstanding the great anxiety exhibited for his safety, the General is said to have manifested the utmost composure, and with the true spirit of heroism seems willing to resign his high office and even his life, rather than grievously offend the enquirers of the Governor, which may endanger the necks of his dark satellites.



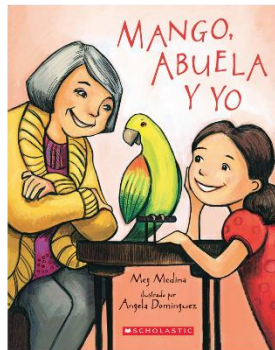
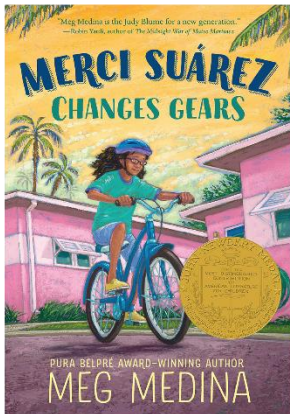
Living Trailblazers and descendants of Trailblazers featured in the display gather around the wall on opening day of the new Fairfield Library.



A scanned primary source document in the Freedom Fighters story on the Trailblazers Wall that features Gabriel, leader of Gabriel's rebellion.



An image of Newbery Award-winning author, inclusive youth literature advocate, and Henrico Resident Meg Medina, who is the featured biography for the Writers category on the Trailblazers Wall.



Ms. Medina's book covers are featured on the wall in both English and Spanish versions.