



SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: July 1, 2021.** Please include this submission form with the 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: _____

Program Title: _____

Program Category: _____

CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: _____

Title: _____

Department: _____

Telephone: _____ Website: _____

Email: _____

SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: _____

Title: _____

Signature: _____ 

Executive Summary:

The Chesterfield County Public Library Learning Pod program is a rapid, iterative response to the post-COVID virtual school learning environment. When government facilities were forced to shut down in 2020 as a result of COVID-19, the library system was not in an immediate position to deliver materials, services, or spaces to the learning community in a safe and effective manner; a particularly hard blow for the community given the library's central role as learning and community center. Staff quickly rallied to develop and implement an innovative way to monitor, regulate and manage access to our physical spaces, driven by the need for community members to access learning spaces, technology, and assistance. This need was particularly immediate for our residents who did not have access to learning-friendly environments, technology, and Wi-Fi, and given the school system's Fall 2020 shift to all-virtual learning. With confirmed COVID-19 cases in the county correlating highly with areas of low reading achievement, learning loss hits already struggling communities hardest. We anticipated the need for access to learning spaces and technology to mitigate this effect. Library staff embraced the role of essential personnel, with all ten library branches opening meeting spaces to safely accommodate grassroots learning pods, offering teachers and families a new model for student learning using library technology, safe spaces, and staff expertise. Data-driven analytics of projected staffing needs, combined with meticulous evaluation of the service, allowed for timely innovation and nimble adjustment to the offering. To date, we've scheduled almost 12,000 hours of meetings (over 489 days) for over 1,400 students, educators, and those working virtually per week. We are tracking increased library card applications, volume of use, and both staff and customer feedback. Usage has broadened to learning of all kinds – workforce development, community-based learning and sharing initiatives, and adult learning including ESL and literacy trainings. Even as circumstances change and restrictions are modified, the service remains popular with educators, students, and teleworkers alike, and will continue in a post-COVID world.

The problem or need for the program:

When COVID-19 caused our schools and facilities to shut down abruptly, the library system was not in an immediate position to deliver materials, services, or spaces to the learning community in a safe and effective manner. Libraries of today are community spaces, and this often means in-person service through use of spaces, print collections, meeting and gathering spaces, and one-on-one real time assistance. When COVID-19 forced an immediate shut-down of our buildings, safety protocols were not immediately available, much was still unknown about the virus and how it was transmitted, and staff and the public experienced high levels of fear and concern about communal spaces. Staff quickly rallied to develop and implement an innovative way to monitor, regulate and manage access to our physical spaces, driven by the need for community members to access learning spaces, technology, and assistance. When schooling went all virtual, caregivers were left trying to figure out how to best assure their children's education in a whole new environment. As part of the learning community, we were already aware of the concept of learning slides (e.g., during the summer), and anticipated that a similar phenomenon would occur during this time period. We quickly saw a trend towards grassroots learning pods – small groups of families creating their own learning communities, thereby limiting exposure, and minimizing risk. By talking with the community, we learned that these grassroots groups often needed assistance – structured spaces, high-speed Internet for multiple devices, access to learning print materials and in-person troubleshooting assistance. This was particularly true for some of our residents who did not have reliable high-speed Internet or other learning support networks.

How the Program was carried out:

A learning pod is a reservable space designated specifically for learning and access to the tools needed for learning, especially in a COVID world – technology, WIFI, quiet learning or instructional space, print and digital resources, and assistance using these tools. When the library buildings were closed, in September 2020 we were able to open them up on a reservation basis specifically for this use. We mapped out the spaces with a cross-departmental team to include Risk Management, General Services, IT, and library management. The team ensured social distancing and safety protocols were met, and prioritized safety and compliance in creating these crucial learning spaces. This mapping was critical to assure both staff and the public that the library was a safe place, even while most other public spaces were still limiting or denying access to their meeting space.

With confirmed COVID-19 cases in the county correlating highly with areas of low reading achievement, learning loss hits already struggling communities hardest. We anticipated the need for access to learning spaces and technology to mitigate this effect. By creating working groups across library divisions and putting all hands-on deck, staff were strategically deployed systemwide to launch a new, relevant service in record time.

When COVID-19 first began impacting operations, all county departments, including the library, began to furlough part-time staff due to the anticipated drop in service levels and economic uncertainties. The library was hit hard, having to furlough 70% of staff. The new learning pods service helped the library to solidify its status as an essential service, increase services to the community, and justify the return of much of the workforce to active duty. In just four weeks, we rehired and recruited trained staff to work safely, while quickly creating robust marketing along with safety and usage policies. Data-driven analytics of projected staffing needs, combined with meticulous evaluation of the service, allowed for timely innovation and nimble adjustment to the offering.

We modified our existing spaces reservation software for this purpose, and began scheduling staff expanded hours to accommodate learning needs. Local middle schools largely start class around 7:30 a.m. and students and teachers would need set up time, so pods were open starting at 7 a.m. The service is so popular, we continue to offer it to some degree even as we began opening branches limited hours (early and later if requested.) A neighboring school system announced early in the school year that it would remain virtual for the entire year. Teachers quickly reserved spaces through the end of the school year, as these learning pods were there only viable way of conducting class.

Key uses

- Virtual learning –Teachers, home-grown learning pods, adult students.
- Teleworkers –needing a secure, fast reliable connection (e.g., for Zoom and MS Teams calls) or to be in quiet places because their children were at home participating in virtual schooling
- Noteworthy and interesting topics in addition to school and study–bar exam, ESL, girl scouts, speech therapy, occupational therapy.

All ten library branches opened to safely accommodate grassroots learning pods needing library technology, safe spaces, and staff expertise, offering teachers and families a new model for student learning. Data-driven analytics of projected staffing needs, combined with meticulous evaluation of the service, allowed for timely innovation and agile adjustment to the offering.

Rapidly developing this new service has solidified and expanded our previous commitment to innovation, iteration, and customer-driven services. The speed needed to get this service up and running meant we did not have all the answers before implementation. We talked to the community, looked at our data, and started the service bare bones, with a commitment to constant data collection,

analysis and iteration of the service depending on customer reaction and usage patterns. For example – instead of blocking off possible reservations during days the library is ordinarily closed, we kept the reservation system open to gauge interest during those holiday times. Only after determining that the actual demand was very low, did we make the decision to proceed with normal holiday closures and give our staff time off. In this way, we are letting the customer truly drive the service.

We set up evaluation parameters before we started the program and allowed these to inform the program development. We committed to frequent assessment so we could rapidly adjust to changing needs and usage patterns.

We learned to lean heavily on technology and collaborative tools to reach as much of the library organization as possible and maximize our communication and messaging – traditional hierarchies are too time-consuming and leave room for misinterpretation when time is short and consistency is key.

With regards to data collection, we knew that it was of tantamount importance in tracking interest. However, we took this opportunity to develop a finer sense of data collection. Instead of collecting data for its own sake, as is typical, we strategically identified which data we needed to try to inform concrete decision points. In this project, for instance, opening hours were an important decision point, so we constantly evaluated the booking times.

Some of our communities rely on our spaces, technology, and access, and in some cases libraries and library programs may be the only learning support they receive. With schools closed, this became even more important as an equalizer. Current scholarship continues to show the unequal effect of the COVID-19 pandemic, where the most vulnerable students and families have been hit the hardest – in disease, loss of life, economic impacts, and learning opportunities. For example, McKinsey & Company's study which showed that COVID-19 compounds racial disparities in learning and access ("COVID-19 and learning loss—disparities grow and students need help"; Dorn et al.;

<https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-and-social-sector/our-insights/covid-19-and-learning-loss-disparities-grow-and-students-need-help#>), and our own internal analyses in Chesterfield County have shown correlation between areas in our community with historically low reading scores, and incidence of sickness and loss of life associated with COVID-19. This pandemic has disproportionately affected low socio-economic communities and has created greater barriers for those already facing barriers.

Cost:

Costs for this service were minimal, as the service was achieved through reassignment of existing staff and spaces. Existing spaces reservation software was adapted to accurately reflect the new hours/spaces layout. The majority of the publicity was digital via website, social media, email distribution list, and the media. Costs as follows:

\$200 - \$50 x 4 videos on Oct. 20, 2020 for Facebook ads

Results/Success

Learning pods have been a demonstrated and objective success. We've scheduled almost **12,000** hours of meetings (over **489** days) for over 1,400 unique students, educators, and those working virtually. We are tracking increased library card applications, volume of use, staff, and customer feedback, and continue to use analytics to guide the evolution of the service.

Public feedback has been exceptional, with 98% of users surveyed saying they'd use the service again, and 99% saying that they were more effective at the library than they would have been from home. Further, when asked about the implementation of social distancing protocols, 97% of survey respondents rated the service as "safe" or "very safe".

The volume metrics of our users show that the pods program is meeting demand, day in and day out. CCPL has seen door counts increase by some 6,000 individuals, directly because of the comings and

goings of these dedicated learners and workers. On average, during normal operations, over 50 pods groups meet in a given week, representing over 150 unique students, teachers, and workers. Meetings have occurred across branches, and across hours, with almost 1,500 meetings requiring CCPL staff to open the building early or keep it open later than regular hours. The service remains popular, even as some students and teachers return to the physical classroom.

By being flexible and responsive to community need, the program has enabled students to learn, teachers to teach, and workers to work safely. It has provided an invaluable lifeline to some members of the public for whom access to technology, space, and quiet are otherwise unavailable. We've seen the service used by the community for a wide variety of uses – running the gamut from Girl Scout meetings, to occupational and speech therapy, to sitting for interviews. We see a dedicated group of users who use us highly regularly, including teachers that use the service almost daily and some users who use us infrequently, but for a highly specific need. Groups have been as small as single individuals, all the way to groups of 25+ people, using large meeting rooms to spread out and maintain social distance.

The service is already award-winning, with the Urban Libraries Council awarding CCPL honorable mention for the Organizational Change and Strategic Management Innovation Award (behind Calgary Public Library, widely recognized as one of the best and most well-funded library systems in North America). More importantly, CCPL takes tremendous pride in the language our community members have used in describing the learning pods program, and how it made the difference for them. One community member described being back in the library for learning pods as “coming home.”

In conclusion, CCPL has launched a desperately needed service, one that has filled obvious gaps in access to technology, spaces, and other resources. This innovative program, implemented with a tight turnaround, has shown significant and sustained popularity and overwhelming community support.

CCPL's commitment to putting the community first in everything that we do has resulted in the success of students, teachers, workers, and others. When others faltered or hesitated, CCPL recognized the urgent need and in four weeks, built a service from the ground up; a service that has continued to pay dividends and help level the playing field for all of Chesterfield County.

Brief overview of the program:

The Chesterfield County Public Library Learning Pod program is a rapid, iterative response to the post-COVID virtual school learning environment. All ten library branches opened meeting spaces to safely accommodate grassroots learning pods, offering teachers and families a new model for student learning using library technology, safe spaces, and staff expertise. Data-driven analytics of projected staffing needs, combined with meticulous evaluation of the service, allowed for timely innovation and nimble adjustment to the offering. To date, we've scheduled almost 12,000 hours of meetings (over 489 days) for over 1,400 students, educators, and those working virtually per week. We are tracking increased library card applications, volume of use, and both staff and customer feedback. Usage has broadened to learning of all kinds – workforce development, community-based learning and sharing initiatives, and adult learning including ESL and literacy trainings. Even as circumstances change and restrictions are modified, the service remains popular with educators, students, and teleworkers alike, and will continue in a post-COVID world.

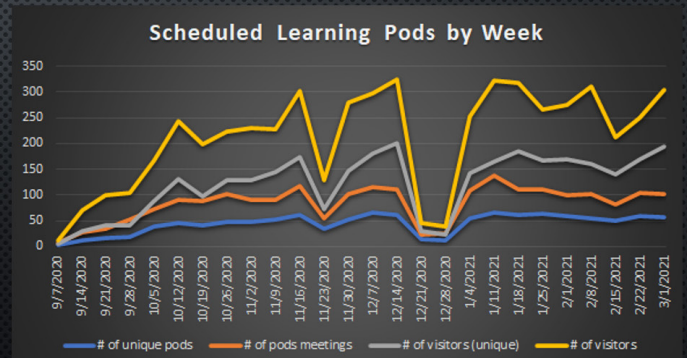
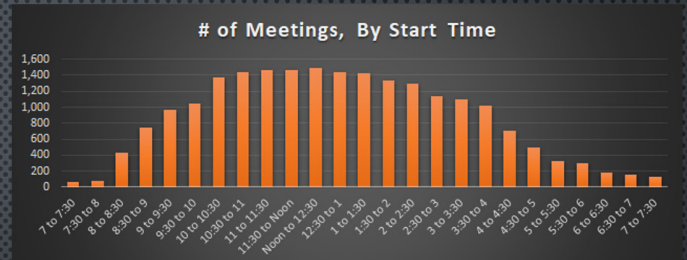
Supplemental Mats

CCPL Learning Pod Data

LEARNING PODS

IN SUPPORT OF SCHOOLS AND TELEWORKING, LEARNING PODS HELPED FILL THE GAP.

- OVER **2,700 MEETINGS** SCHEDULED, REPRESENTING **10.7K HOURS OF LEARNING AND TELEWORKING (ALMOST 450 DAYS)**.
- ON AVERAGE, HOSTED OVER 75 MEETINGS A WEEK, REPRESENTING 150 UNIQUE CITIZENS / WEEK.
- **EXPANDED HOURS** — SUPPORTED ALMOST 1,400 MEETINGS THAT STARTED BEFORE OR ENDED OUTSIDE REGULAR HOURS OF OPERATION.



"Before COVID, I visited several times per week to complete paperwork for my job, as I struggle to be productive when I work from home.

The introduction of learning pods is a tremendous help for me- quarantine has not improved my ability to focus at home.

Coming back here felt like coming home, and made my day brighter. The staff were extremely friendly and helpful (as always), and went above and beyond to make sure I had everything I needed.

- anonymous survey response

"Coming to the learning pods at the library and being able to get out of the house everyday has given me more of a

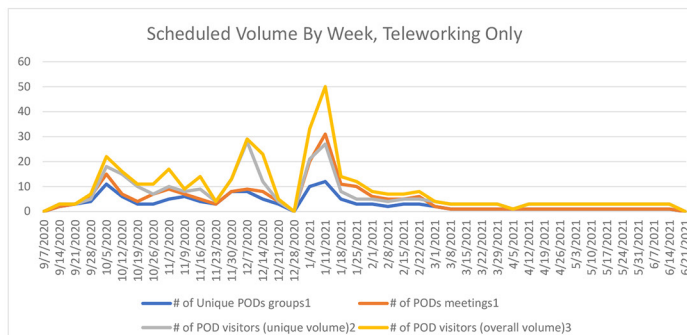
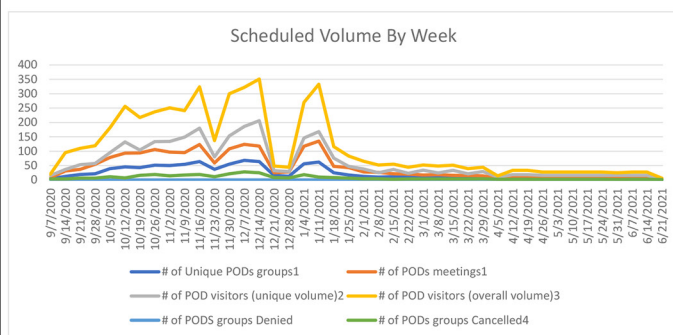
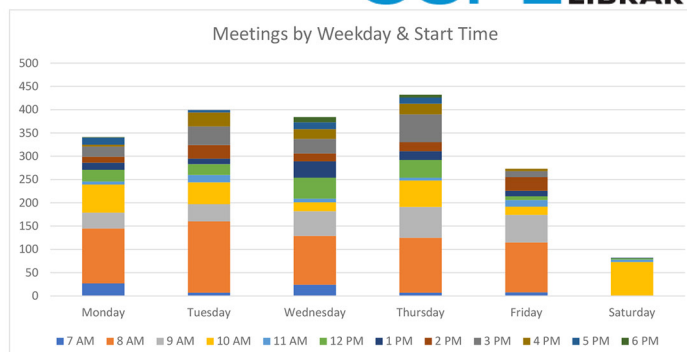
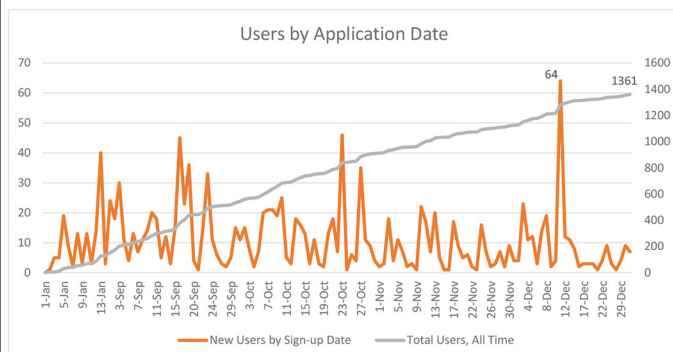
structure and more of a **routine**

that has been missing lately due to the pandemic."

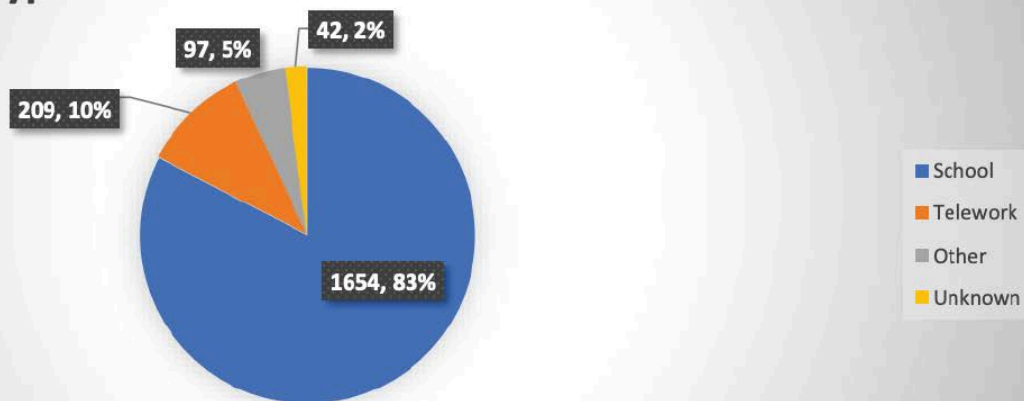
-Caroline R.
high school student

CCPL Learning Pod Data

Summary, Learning Pods Volume (All Branches)
Through 1/11/2020, v1



Meetings by Type



CCPL Pod Local Media Coverage

Sept. 1, 2020

wric.com/news/local-news/chesterfield-county/chesterfield-county-public-library-creates-virtual-learning-and-telework-spaces/

Chesterfield County Public Library creates virtual learning and telework spaces



Sept. 4, 2020

wtvr.com/news/back-to-school/chesterfield-county-public-library-offering-learning-pods-for-virtual-learning

Sept. 20, 2020

wric.com/news/local-news/chesterfield-county/chesterfield-county-public-library-adds-learning-pod-spaces/

CCPL Learning Pod Social Media





LEARNING PODS



Spaces will be available for reservation from 7 a.m.-3 p.m., Monday-Friday, and 10 a.m.-2 p.m. on Saturdays.

CCPL Learning Pods

In support of families with school age children, Chesterfield County Public Library is providing virtual learning spaces for students, families and teleworkers. CCPL is committed to being a partner in supporting learning for all, especially as schools and families adapt to this new learning environment. Providing quiet spaces for individual learning, larger spaces for group learning, and additional wireless access are just some of many ways CCPL can help support the learning experience.

Spaces will be available for reservation from 7 a.m.-3 p.m., Monday-Friday, and 10 a.m.-2 p.m. on Saturdays. Hours will be expanded into the evening starting in October.

Learning spaces will be available at all ten locations (even locations that are still closed to the public). Services will vary by location, depending on whether the location is open to the public. Curbside service will continue to be offered at all 10 branches.

Who may want to use this space:

- Parents and children who need more reliable wifi for virtual learning or need a learning space outside the home.
- Groups of parents who would like to form small virtual learning pods made up of neighborhood children so they can learn together in a small group, but need an appropriate learning space and/or broadband access for multiple devices.
- Teleworkers who need a more reliable wifi connection or who need a quiet space to work.
- Tutors working with students who are unable to meet elsewhere.
- College students enrolled in virtual learning.
- Adult literacy students.
- Homeschooling groups or other small learning groups who need space to accommodate up to 12 people for more active, in-person learning.

You can begin placing your reservations on Sept. 1 for spaces that will be available starting Sept. 8. All spaces will include seating and free wifi. Additional amenities may include tables, whiteboards, access to power outlets and enclosed rooms for group learning or collaboration.

Visit library.chesterfield.gov/learningpods for more information on how to get started or call 804-751-CCPL (2275).

