



## 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: County of Henrico  
Program Title: Advancing Technology in Public Meetings  
Program Category: Information Technology

### CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: Victoria Davis  
Title: Public Relations Specialist  
Department: Public Relations  
Telephone: 804-501-4933 Website: www.henrico.us  
Email: dav127@henrico.us

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

Name: Brandon Hinton  
Title: Deputy County Manager for Administration  
Signature: 

## **Program Overview**

The year 2020 posed a lot of changes and challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Our lives were abruptly altered, daily activities were adjusted, and technology engagement was an all-time high and necessary tool. The pandemic and executive order by Governor Ralph Northam resulted in multiple closures and denial of public access in large gatherings. As a result, Henrico County General Government was impacted by this. The Board of Supervisors (BOS) had to find a way to continue business to keep the County operating with public meetings.

The public meetings included work sessions and Board of Supervisor meetings, which were open to the public for residents to attend and engage when necessary. To adhere to the COVID-19 restrictions, staff from the BOS Administration, Public Relations, and Information Technology departments found an innovative way to host virtual BOS meetings with citizen participation and virtual presentations by implementing Cisco Webex.

This allows public participation and for our BOS and County Manager to continue to provide transparency to our community and our residents without any interruption in business.

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

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic public interaction was limited at the Henrico County Administration building. All public meetings, community meetings, and special events were cancelled. The Board of Supervisors meetings were always livestreamed but did not allow the opportunity for residents or staff to participate remotely. Prior to the executive order, our meetings were open to the public for engagement, individuals were allowed to attend and speak on issues concerning their neighborhood, attend for recognitions and appointments, speak with County leadership and County staff presented project papers that needed approval to the Board of

Supervisors and the County Manager. Using Webex as our primary platform for meetings, we were still able to operate in a safe but effective manner.

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

No one could have ever imagined when we began 2020, a pandemic would hit. In the world of technology, there were many ways meetings were being held but no one ever thought you would have to completely rely on meetings to be held virtually, but this is where we ended up. Many localities opted to go completely virtual and not meet in-person and use other forms of meeting such as Zoom, Skype, or Microsoft Teams. Our County Board of Supervisors continued to meet in-person but did it in a safe way that our staff and residents could still participate. Using Cisco Webex as our primary virtual platform we protected the residents and our County from being hacked and we maintained total control of the content and the feed. Our team works tediously before each meeting to set up and make sure audio and visual capabilities are working for everyone. We also made sure County staff felt comfortable before each meeting by setting up a time to test with them and their presentations or any information they had prior to the meeting. The team worked long hours before and after meeting discussing the areas of success and opportunities of improvement to be prepared for the next public meeting. We worked tirelessly to ensure the services we were providing to the residents and the staff of Henrico County was done in the most efficient way possible each and every time.

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

The objective of incorporating Webex into all the Board of Supervisor (BOS) meetings was to create transparency between the BOS, County Manager, all employees, and residents of Henrico County.

The Development was based around configuration in the Webex Administration console, teaching, and testing for the host. Beginning in March 2020, we were asked to create a process that allowed for transparent participation while still adhering to the guidelines that have been in place for years regarding signing up to speak, time limits, presentations etc. With these requirements, we started using Webex and the County Board Room equipment to make this happen.

We minimize panelists by having only 4-5 'people' on as a panelist. These 'people' include the lectern computer, the control room, a meeting host, and 1-2 additional alternate hosts. Alternate hosts are used to help answer questions and chat with attendees. Cameras are used by the control room to give a broad view of the BOS members or give a narrow view of the speaker, whether they are at the lectern or on the dais.

For special presentations, we move staff or special guests from the attendee role to a panelist role in Webex to have video access and control of unmuting and muting their microphone during their time to speak. Once they complete their presentation, we move them back to an attendee in the meeting. The general public who signed up to speak, join as an attendee, are unmuted for the item they want to speak on and then muted back. Having this capability allows the host to maintain control of the meeting. For safety reasons, the County had to adapt and ways to connect with all residents, those technology savvy and those not so much. The County Manager states "Establishing and enhancing our connections with the community is an integral part of what we do in Henrico County." As a local government focused on customer service, we must always understand and be aligned with the needs of our community and be able to meet them in an efficient and fiscally sound way. In the realm of customer service our team started to send the

conference call number and access and code to those who cannot access the meeting from a computer. This way they were still engaged and could hear the County updates and reports.

With the success of these meetings, we were asked to extend our knowledge to other public meetings. These meetings included Special Meetings on a Civilian Review Board, Joint Sessions with the Henrico County School Board located in the Henrico Training Center, Agency Head Staff Meeting at Glen Allen High School, Pre-Board Meeting with Agency Heads and Key Officials and performing 25 oaths of office for incoming board and commission members. Each of these meetings were conducted virtually and have unique requirements. With the various meetings and locations, the team had to purchase a 'traveling kit' that allows us to adapt to each site. We have audio cables, an audio interface, audio mixers, microphones, webcams, a projector and portable screen, a PA system, and more in the kit. The use of this equipment is essential to create a great Webex experience for all who are involved.

We have also teamed with an audio/video consultant to host the 2021 BOS Retreat on Webex at the Richmond Raceway. Concrete walls, concrete floors, 20'+ ceilings, a huge building, and the constant white noise from the HVAC system created a challenging venue for us. By using the consultant, we were able to minimize all echoing and created multiple video feeds for the participants to engage.

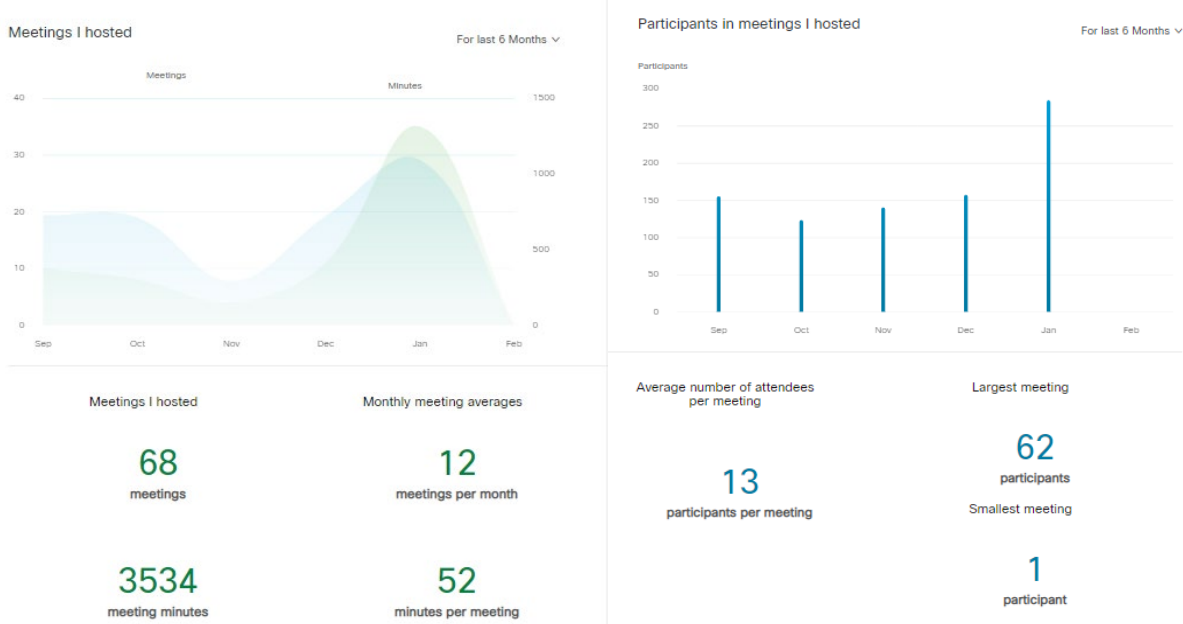
The County announces all public meetings through social media platforms (Facebook and Twitter), the County website ([www.henrico.us](http://www.henrico.us)), mobile app notifications and by contacting local media networks. The web address and detailed instructions are provided to the public a week prior to the meeting.

## **Financing and Staffing**

The County had already budgeted and paid for the Webex subscription. Once the team started to use Webex for the Board of Supervisors, the Department of Information Technology started expanding ways to use it within other departments. Our team began testing and looking at streaming our Special Meetings and Board meetings via Webex while keeping our capital and operating costs minimal. We were successful at doing so until we started expanding the locations of the meetings. We decided to purchase a BOS travel kit that allows us to have the equipment compatible and operable for any County facility to successfully host a Webex meeting no matter the venue. The travel kit consisted of audio cables, an audio interface, audio mixers, microphones, webcams, a projector and portable screen, a PA system, and more totaling \$4,750.

## **Program Results**

Despite its many challenges, 2020 was truly a remarkable year for Team Henrico. With the determination and support of County leadership, we were able to incorporate another way of accessibility to Henrico County residents through the use of technology. The graphs below are examples of how the use of Webex has been successful. They show a six-month timeframe that demonstrates the number of meetings, the number of meeting minutes, and participants. As you can see, January was a heavy use for Webex for the BOS. With just the BOS Retreat during a Friday and Saturday event, we had well over 200 participants attend. This included County employees, media, and residents. Residents were able to join the Webex meeting from a computer, laptop, iPad, or even phone. We have taken deliberate steps to ensure that County business and public engagement continued without missing a beat.



**Brief Summary**

Technology is everchanging and evolving to fit the needs of everyday responsibilities. To adhere to the COVID-19 restrictions, staff from the BOS Administration, Public Relations, and Information Technology departments found an innovative way to host virtual BOS meetings with citizen participation and virtual presentations by implementing Cisco Webex.

This allows public participation and for our BOS and County Manager to continue to provide transparency to our community and our residents without any interruption in business.

Without a doubt, 2020 has been an unusual year. Much of our work has focused on strengthening the connections that make Henrico such a wonderful place to live, work and play. These connections continue to show how dedicated we are to providing the best customer service using multiple ways of public engagement.