



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: James City County

Program Title: Good Morning Social Media Campaign

Program Category: Communications

CONTACT INFORMATION

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Title: Communications Manager

Department: County Administration

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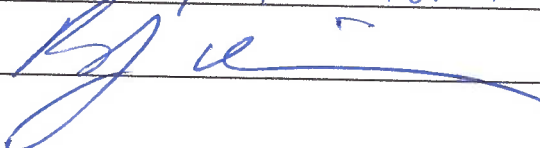
Website: jamescitycountyva.gov

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SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: BRADLEY J. RINEHIMER

Title: Asst. County Administrator

Signature: 



James City County- Good Morning Social Media Campaign

2021 VACo Achievement Awards Submission

Communications

Executive Summary

James City County's Communications Division, which is responsible for coordinating public information during emergencies, recognized the need to change the tone of its daily messages during the COVID-19 pandemic. At the onset of the pandemic, information was rapidly evolving, and the tone of public messaging reflected the seriousness of the emergency. However, it soon became clear that this public health emergency would be a long-term crisis, and the novelty and uncertainty of the situation may impact mental health.

Under these circumstances, the County introduced a new social media campaign that was designed to complement the official pandemic updates. The campaign was launched on Facebook and featured a series of Good Morning posts accompanied by a colorful graphic that was meant to provide words of encouragement during a very challenging time. The Good Morning posts included commentary on the weather, helpful suggestions for passing the time while the Governor's stay-at-home order was in place and friendly reminders about how to slow the spread of COVID-19. The posts also included resources such as mental health and domestic violence hotline, and they often ended with words of encouragement, like "we will get through this together, JCC".

The humorous and conversational tone of the messages often reiterated public health updates. The campaign generated very positive engagement with the audience on social media. Readers liked, shared, and commented on the posts and expressed appreciation for the optimistic messages during a difficult time.

Program Summary

James City County's Communications Division recognized the need to change the tone of its daily public information messaging during the COVID-19 pandemic. As it became clear the pandemic would be a long-term crisis, the County introduced a new social media campaign that was designed to complement its official public health updates. The campaign was launched on Facebook and featured a series of Good Morning posts accompanied by a colorful graphic with the goal of sharing words of encouragement during a very challenging time.

The Good Morning social media campaign was humorous and conversational in tone, serving as an uplifting complement to the County's official COVID-19 messaging. The Good Morning Facebook posts included commentary on the weather, fun facts, and friendly reminders about how to slow the spread of COVID-19. The posts also included resources such as mental health and domestic violence hotline and usually ended with words of encouragement, like "we will get through this together, JCC". The campaign generated very positive engagement with the audience on social media. Readers liked, shared, and commented on the posts and expressed appreciation for the optimistic messages during a difficult time.

The Challenge

As with most localities, the greatest challenge facing James City County in 2020 was the global COVID-19 pandemic. In the early days of the crisis, information was all at once scarce, confusing, overwhelming and frightening. Once it became clear that we were facing a protracted state of emergency, we realized that we needed to revise our social media messaging by changing the tone of our emergency messaging.

During a typical emergency situation, such as a hurricane, the County's Communications Division

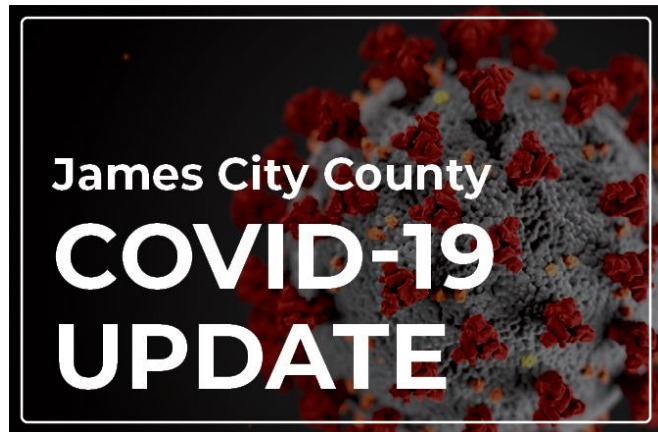


activates an Emergency Public Information Team to coordinate information and disseminate updates to the public through various outlets. We temporarily suspend the posting of non-emergency-related social media content and use an eye-catching graphic to draw viewers' attention to the latest news.

These alerts feature items such as road closures, weather updates and facility closures.

Initially, we took a similar approach with the COVID-19 pandemic. We temporarily suspended non-COVID posts and used a graphic that featured the ubiquitous black and red virus particle to alert readers to the latest pandemic news and updates. In the early days of the County's COVID response, public messaging quickly shifted from quelling rumors that there were local cases of infection to

announcing facility closings and declaring of a local state of emergency. The situation was rapidly evolving, and every day brought waves of new- sometimes confusing, sometimes conflicting- information. Social distancing was a new concept for the general public, and the effectiveness of face coverings was still being



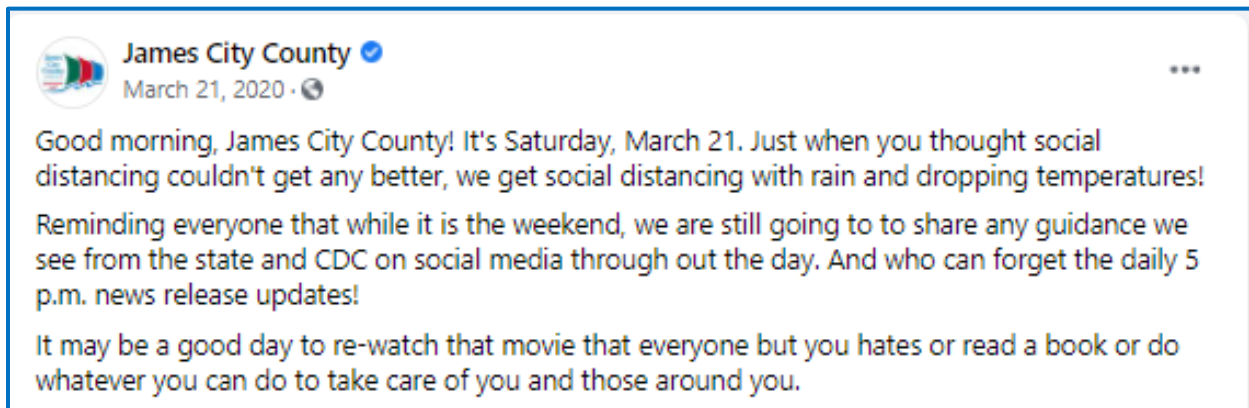
debated. Families were grappling with childcare needs resulting from school closings and the potential economic stress of indefinite business closures.

Eventually, it became clear that the timeline for this crisis would not be finite like a winter storm or hurricane. Recognizing that the crisis was likely to continue for many weeks or more, we sought to

change the tone of our emergency communications to help mitigate some of the fear and anxiety in our community.

The Solution

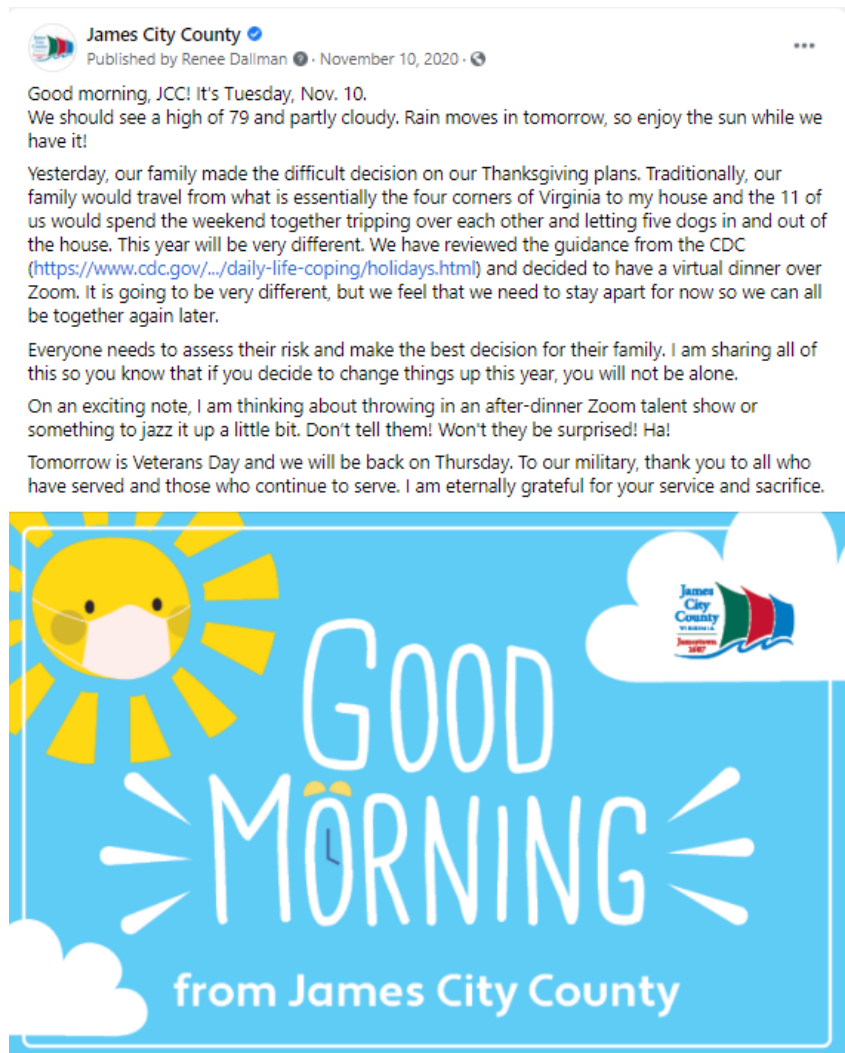
The Good Morning series debuted on James City County's Facebook page on March 21, 2021. Our goal was to find an innovative way to break through the ominous stream of information about the COVID-19 pandemic with some words of encouragement and empathy.



Unlike our typical emergency messages, which are very formal in tone, the Good Morning message was conversational, offering upbeat take on the dreary weather, a friendly reminder about the County's official daily COVID-19 updates and a helpful suggestion for redirecting nervous energy. On March 30, the Governor of Virginia issued a stay-at-home order. The Good Morning posts continued. Authored by our Public Information Officer, the early posts usually featured a comment about the weather, reminders or updates based on recent CDC guidance, and ideas about how to stay busy at home. Some posts invited readers to engage; we invited birthday shout-outs, asked for artwork submissions, and encouraged readers to share their favorite jokes.

The Good Morning campaign evolved over time as the pandemic continued. Most messages ended with a declaration that “we’ve got this, JCC” or “we will get through this together”. The messages included a reminder for community members to take care of themselves and each other, and we offered resources for managing mental health. On April 14, we introduced a new graphic, created by our Graphic Designer, to reflect the spirit of optimism and encouragement during a challenging time. In contrast with the gloomy black and red virus graphic, the new image was bright and cheerful, featuring a sun wearing a face mask. The eye-catching artwork was local and specific, and the content of the messages was personal and engaging, written by our Public Information Officer, who was the voice of this campaign.

One notable example occurred near the Thanksgiving holiday. At that time, the CDC was recommending that families avoid gathering with anyone from outside the household to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. This guidance was upsetting to many people, and there was fierce debate taking place on social media. In our November 10 Good Morning post on Facebook, our Public Information Officer shared her



family's decision and gently encouraged others to consider the CDC's guidance when making the decision for their families.

The Results

James City County published 186 Good Morning posts on Facebook, and the engagement for those posts remains consistently high. Readers regularly reacted, commented and shared the posts. Many expressed appreciation for the optimistic tone of the posts during a difficult time. The campaign was also helpful for staff morale; during an ongoing crisis, it was helpful to be able to focus on something positive that generated uplifting conversations with our citizens.

Engaging with our community in this way also may have helped to generate public trust, build rapport with citizens, and ultimately combat some of the misinformation and negativity that was common in public discourse during the pandemic. The light-hearted nature of the posts also made it easier to couch public health messages that may have otherwise felt overwhelming, stressful or frightening, such as social distancing reminders and mental health resources.



Laura Hardcastle Treese

I am enjoying the friendly daily 'check in'! Thank you for taking the time to keep us informed in such a wonderful way!



Steven San Miguel

Optimism and positive outlook goes a long ways! We will weather this storm as we have many others. Blessed to be in a caring community. Thanks JCC

Like · Reply · Message · 1y





Donna Speranza Nebgen
You start my day with a smile...thank you!!



Edna Barrow Hoogewind
Appreciate the updates. Love living in JCC!

Like · Reply · Message · 1y



Terry Glisson Martin
Booked up traveling today 😊😊
Love my Mornings with JCC and Coffee of course!

Like · Reply · Message · 1y



Debbie Walden
Thank you for positive and humorous update each morning! It helps!

Like · Reply · Message · 1y



Dorothy Barat
Thank you so much for all your wonderful, positive messages. You brightened my mornings and I looked forward to reading the posts each day. Good luck. We will miss you. Thanks again .

Like · Reply · Message · 1y



A Model for Other Localities

James City County's Good Morning social media campaign is an innovative program that can serve as a model for other localities. The program requires few material resources, and while it takes staff time, it can have the added benefit of boosting staff morale during a challenging time. The following recommendations are based on lessons learned through our experience in James City County.

1. **Tone.** The upbeat and conversational tone of the Good Morning social media campaign was appropriate after a prolonged period of emergency messaging. If deployed prematurely, such a campaign could undercut the seriousness of important public messages. By personalizing the messages, we were able to connect with citizens and emphasize the message that we were all navigating this difficult situation together as a community.
2. **Content.** Most good morning posts began with commentary about the weather, family-friendly jokes, fun facts such as “this day in history”, or silly observances like National Hot Dog Day. This was followed by public health reminders and other COVID updates. Sometimes we included non-pandemic news, such as reminders to complete the 2020 Census. The posts generally concluded with a list of pandemic-related resources, a notification to stay tuned to our official pandemic updates, and a reminder that we will get through this together.
3. **Engagement.** The Good Morning posts regularly generated conversation and positive reactions on Facebook. One strategy for boosting engagement was inviting the public to participate by asking people to name their favorite foods, inviting them to share pictures, exchanging family-friendly jokes, or asking people to request birthday or anniversary shout-outs. It was an effective way to help take people’s minds off the ominous news surrounding the pandemic while also following up with a friendly public health reminder, such as “mask up, JCC!”
4. **Graphics.** The colorful graphic was an important part of setting the positive tone for the Good Morning social media campaign. It was helpful to use a single graphic for the campaign because readers eventually recognized it and looked for it each morning on their Facebook timelines.
5. **Timing.** The Good Morning posts appeared around 8 a.m. each day as a complement to the County’s official daily COVID-19 Update, which was a press release that was published at 5 p.m. The evening update included COVID-19 case counts, the latest public health guidance, information about County services and other important resources. During especially difficult

periods in the pandemic, our Public Information Officer found it helpful to compose the good morning posts on the preceding evening, rather than drafting the messages in the morning.

6. Schedule. The first Good Morning post appeared on a Saturday, as we were communicating with the public seven days a week in the early stages of the pandemic. After several weeks, however, we announced that the morning messages would be taking weekends off. Similarly, we temporarily suspended the messages when the case counts decreased in late summer and at the end of the year around the holidays. These breaks were important to maximize the impact of the messages and to provide staff with an opportunity to regroup.

While we hope to never face a crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic again, we believe that James City County's Good Morning social media campaign had a real positive impact on our community and that we can carry forward some of the lessons for future public emergencies.