



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: Montgomery County
Program Title: New River Valley Public Health Task Force
Program Category: Regional Collaboration

CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: Jennifer T. Harris
Title: Public Information Director
Department: Public Information
Telephone: 540-381-6887 Website: www.montva.com
Email: harrisjt@montgomerycountyva.gov

SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Angela Hill
Title: Assistant County Administrator
Signature: Angela Hill

Executive Summary:

Montgomery County has a history of collaborating with the two towns within the county – the towns of Blacksburg and Christiansburg. In addition, Montgomery County has solid relationships with the counties and city that surround it. These strong, collaborative relationships were further demonstrated throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

In March 2020, a group of community leaders to include public and private health officials, first responders, educational leaders, and local government representatives met to discuss the potential impact COVID-19 might have on the New River Valley (NRV). The initial meeting took place before the first positive case of COVID-19 had reached the New River Valley. It was then the New River Valley Public Health Task Force was formed. Since then, the Task Force meets on a weekly basis. These regular and consistent meetings have allowed the NRV community to prepare for and respond to COVID-19 in an extremely collaborative and consistent manner. In the initial discussions, several community organizations were identified and invited to participate in the Task Force.

Community partners on the task force include: New River Health District, New River Valley Community Services, local governments (Montgomery County, Town of Blacksburg, Town of Christiansburg, Pulaski County, Giles County, Floyd County, City of Radford), local hospitals (Carilion Clinic and HCA Healthcare), K-12 schools, Higher Ed Institutions (VT, Radford, NRCC and VCOM), VDEM, NRV Regional Jail, NRV Regional Commission, local first responders (police, fire, rescue).

At each Task Force meeting, a state of the community from the New River Health District, the localities, education, hospitals and mental health is provided. When issues are identified, the group is able to respond to them quickly and efficiently. Thanks to the Task Force, accessible testing sites and vaccination clinics have been a regular and consistent occurrence since the spring of 2020 in the NRV.

Brief Overview

The New River Valley region was able to respond appropriately and effectively to a global pandemic thanks to strong regional relationships. In March of 2020, before the first positive case of COVID-19 was identified in the New River Valley (NRV), a group of community leaders to include public and private health officials, first responders, educational leaders, and local government representatives met to discuss the potential impact COVID-19 might have on the NRV. It was then that the New River Valley Public Health Task Force was formed. Since then, the Task Force meets on a regular basis. These regular and consistent meetings allowed the NRV community to prepare for and respond to COVID-19 in an extremely collaborative and consistent manner. As a result, accessible testing sites and vaccination clinics have been a regular and consistent occurrence in the NRV since the spring of 2020.

Award Submission

In response to the worsening global COVID-19 pandemic and inevitable reach to the New River Valley, in March 2020, a group of community leaders led by Blacksburg Police Chief Anthony Wilson and the New River Health District Director Dr. Noelle Bissell that also included leaders from public and private health officials, first responders, public school leaders, higher educational leaders from Virginia Tech, VCOM, Radford University and New River Community College, and local government representatives met to discuss the potential impact COVID-19 might have on the New River Valley. The initial meeting took place before the first positive case of COVID-19 was discovered in the NRV. It was that initial meeting when the NRV Public Health Task Force was formed. The Task Force then met daily for many months and eventually began meeting three times per week. The consistent meetings have allowed the NRV community to prepare for and respond to COVID-19 in an extremely collaborative and consistent manner.

Regional community partners on the task force include: New River Health District, New River Valley Community Services, local governments (Montgomery County, Town of Blacksburg, Town of Christiansburg, Pulaski County, Giles County, Floyd County, City of Radford), local hospitals (Carilion Clinic and HCA Healthcare), K-12 schools, higher education institutions (Virginia Tech, VCOM, Radford University, New River Community College), VDEM, NRV Regional Jail, NRV Regional Commission, and multiple local first responder units (police, fire, rescue) from across the NRV.

The collaborative efforts of this regional Task Force are truly unique and was created to respond to a global pandemic hitting the NRV. Although organizations in the NRV are typically very collaborative, this is the first time such a group of leaders has joined efforts in this way, and it was the first such group to organize in Virginia.

At each Task Force meeting, members provide a state of the community from the New River Health District, the localities, education, hospitals and mental health. When issues are

identified, the group is able to respond to them. Infrastructure resulting from the volunteer efforts of those on the NRV Public Health Task Force include:

- Local NRV Vaccine Call Center (this is in addition to VDH Richmond and is held locally and staffed daily entirely of local NRV volunteers)
- Business Continuity Team
- K-12 & Higher Education School Liaison –reopening efforts for each institution
- Mass drive-thru COVID-19 testing sites in each locality
- Efficient vaccine clinic with the capacity to administer at least 1,200 vaccines each day
- The New River Health District also:
 - Created and continues to manage a COVID-19 call center to support the New River Valley community by answering questions, assessing personal risk factors, receiving complaints, and scheduling for testing and vaccinations.
 - Offered community testing for COVID-19 via drive-thru clinics, multiple times per week.
 - Maintained their relationship with Virginia Tech under the academic health department, utilizing support for COVID-19 response.
 - Expanded and better utilized their volunteer base, the Medical Reserve Corps.
 - Assisted the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute in transitioning from a research lab to a clinical lab to run COVID RT-PCR tests, including future preparations for saliva testing.
 - Collaborated with long-term care facilities for testing of residents and staff and assisted with management of COVID-19 cases and outbreaks.
 - Worked with Virginia Tech, Radford University, New River Community College, VCOM, and local public school systems on mitigation plans, exercises and containment strategies.
 - Facilitated testing of college student athletes and staff.
 - Worked with localities regarding mitigation and testing plans for staff, including first responders, public works, and recreation.

- Provided follow-up education and enforcement of Executive Orders regarding face coverings in public and worked with the Regional Commission's Business Continuity Team.

Testing efforts:

Through efforts of the New River Health District and the NRV Public Health Task Force, local testing sites were stood up very early in the pandemic, with the help of local volunteers. The Task Force secured testing supplies, testing locations, and organized volunteers to conduct testing, while simultaneously working with a regional testing lab to ensure testing results



would be available in a timely manner. Through the diligence of community volunteers associated with the Task Force, as of June 30, 2021, **196,084 COVID-19 PCR tests have been administered**, and 266,515 total tests (PCR, antigen and antibody tests) in the New River Health District.

Vaccination efforts:

As of June 30, volunteer vaccinators, who include local health care providers and medical program students and faculty from New River Community College, Radford University, Virginia Tech, and VCOM have **vaccinated 149,540 members of our communities**, with vaccination clinics being



held regularly each week. Unlike some paid contract clinics, the Task Force clinics are entirely made up of local (unpaid) volunteers. In addition to medical volunteer vaccinators, lots of non-medical volunteers also work each of these clinics to assist with registration and logistical efforts of the clinic that can serve up to 2,000 or more people per day, depending on the amount

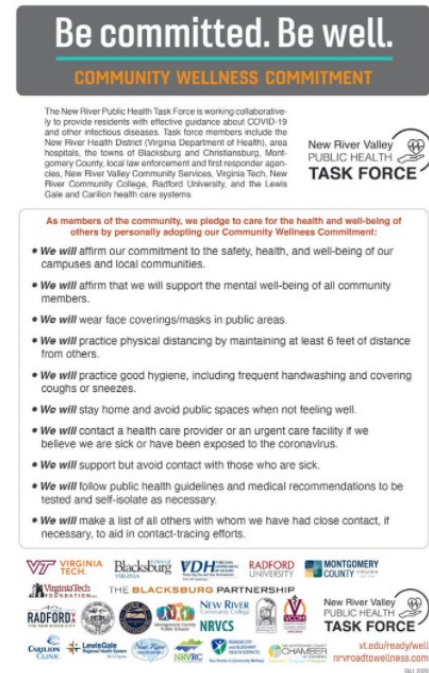
of vaccines distributed to the NRV weekly. Non-medical volunteers include many members of the general public who just want to help however they can; it also includes many college students from Radford University and Virginia Tech who want to give back to their local college communities as well. In addition to vaccination clinics, Task Force volunteers are also going out to vaccinate housebound citizens of the NRV who otherwise would not be able to travel to a clinic to receive their potentially lifesaving vaccine.

Business continuity efforts:

The New River Valley Business Continuity Team (BCT) assists businesses impacted by COVID-19. The team assists businesses with general questions and can help with positive on-site cases. The BCT delivers wrap-around services necessary for businesses to operate in the COVID environment. The BCT works in coordination with the New River Health District-Virginia Department of Health to provide employers with 24/7 technical assistance. Resources available include development of a business-specific continuity plan, public and employee messaging and education, facility cleaning, certification of best practices and coordination of on-site testing.

Public awareness and community communication efforts:

The NRV Public Health Task Force Communication Team stood up a volunteer group to create a public awareness campaign, “Be committed. Be well.,” a campaign based on the existing efforts at the time of Virginia Tech and Blacksburg that highlighted the collaborative efforts of NRV community leaders. The campaign included a Community Wellness Commitment that municipalities, educational institutions, businesses, and first responder units adopted and posted widely in public areas. The Wellness Commitment outlines 10 tenets that the community established to protect and support each other through the COVID-19 pandemic. The Wellness Commitment was announced in a press release, with eight NRV localities signing resolutions agreeing to the Wellness Commitment. The [nrvroadtowellness.com](https://www.nrvroadtowellness.com) website was identified as the hub (<https://www.nrvroadtowellness.com/be-committed-be-well>) for all content to include news and resources related to the NRV Public Health Task Force and the “Be committed. Be well.” campaign. The website is kept up-to-date with campaign messaging, graphics to download, video, and a dashboard, with the graphics and messaging including the Wellness Commitment, wear a mask, and stay six feet apart. The paid campaign marketing includes local transit ads inside and outside of the buses; campaign-branded face masks and ink pens that have been widely distributed throughout the community; yard signs, banners, and electronic signs throughout the community; and a video featuring community leaders promoting the tenets of the Wellness Commitment.



For example, every teal “Be committed. Be well.” face mask you see on a face (or on your face) in the NRV community is a direct effort of the Task Force’s work. All the work of this campaign came together through the volunteer efforts of local public relations and public information officers of Task Force partners. The group also started:

- Weekly updates from New River Health District Director Dr. Bissell. This is an opportunity for our local media partners to have direct access to Dr. Bissell, as she provides an update and then answers questions from the media.
- Frequent newsletter with COVID-19 updates and information for the community.



Outcomes:

The regional NRV Public Health Task Force and associated volunteers have been a shining example in Virginia of how to respond to a public health crisis. From the very beginning of this COVID-19 pandemic, the New River Valley Public Health Task Force was quietly planning behind the scenes to serve the New River Valley in terms of providing health care, testing, mental and physical health services, and now vaccinations to the NRV. Hospitals who typically work in competition worked alongside each other to serve patients and provided dozens of medically trained volunteer vaccinators and testers. Dozens of volunteers from agencies across the NRV have given their time daily to the work of the Task Force, and hundreds of volunteers have given of their time to ensure that those in the NRV were provided testing early and often and are still providing testing. These volunteers provide vaccines in a timely and manageable manner, not to mention the local call center staff/volunteers who help answer hundreds of questions and schedule thousands of vaccine appointments each week.

The work of the Task Force volunteer group and the hundreds of additional volunteers at the testing sites, the vaccination sites, and the call center (pictured here) has been invaluable to New River Valley communities.



While it is not possible to fully measure the whole impact of Task Force volunteers, it is reasonable to assume that the work these volunteers have done through community messaging, testing, and vaccinating has educated our valley, potentially prevented the spread of COVID-19, and has also potentially saved and will continue to save the lives of our own family, friends, and neighbors right here in the NRV and beyond.

The Task Force volunteers have inspired our communities to be vigilant, to “Be committed. Be well,” to get tested, to register for vaccines and to stay safe by abiding by physical distancing, mask wearing and hand washing. The Task Force message has inspired hundreds to volunteer at COVID-19 testing sites, ongoing mass vaccination clinics, and COVID-19 call centers. Each individual is working to inspire his/her/their community to get the health care they need, whether it be testing, vaccinations, mental or physical health care.

The Task Force has been lauded by state and local officials and community members for their effective and efficient response to the pandemic, including an editorial in the Roanoke Times by Larry Hincker, which said, “Putting in place effective COVID testing long before other regions and even administering business recovery plans under the New River Regional Commission, it’s been a model for dealing with the pandemic to other parts of the state.”

https://roanoke.com/opinion/columnists/hincker-dont-punish-the-successful/article_d3b531f6-5f57-11eb-a4fc-9f05ca46fa86.html.

The Task Force and COVID-19 testing, vaccine and call center volunteers have been working every day since before the pandemic hit the New River Valley to ensure that our citizens received the testing and health care they need in these historic times.