



## 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](#).

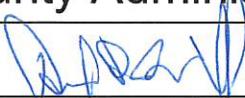
### PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: Roanoke County  
Program Title: Providing Services During a Global Pandemic  
Program Category: Communications and Customer Service

### CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: Amy Whittaker  
Title: Public Information Officer  
Department: Public Information  
Telephone: 540-772-2010 Website: www.roanokecountyva.gov  
Email: awhittaker@roanokecountyva.gov

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

Name: Dan O'Donnell  
Title: County Administrator  
Signature: 

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**BRIEF OVERVIEW**

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Roanoke County staff rose to the challenge of adapting to the circumstances and ensuring continuity of services for its citizens. Though many employees moved to work outside of their regular offices, others remained on-site to serve citizens. The administrative work of Roanoke County never paused throughout the pandemic. Staff found creative solutions to providing essential services to the community, and in the safest ways possible.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

COVID-19 brought about many challenges for local governments during 2020 and has continued into 2021. Following Governor Northam's declaration of a state of emergency in March 2020, the Roanoke County Board of Supervisors declared a local emergency. County Administration and Emergency Management staff immediately initiated its incident management plan to prepare for impacts to staff and disruptions in operations. With the safety and well-being of employees and citizens being top priority, the Administration closed facilities and sent non-essential staff home to tele-work, though the administrative work of Roanoke County never paused throughout the pandemic. Roanoke County adapted to new ways of doing business to ensure continuity of services for its citizens and began providing services remotely via email, telephone and by appointment. Staff also found creative solutions to serving citizens from permitting and development needs, to voting, paying taxes, providing social services assistance, and many more.

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**FULFILLING AWARDS CRITERIA/RESULTS**

**Innovative Solutions**

Roanoke County administrative offices and facilities closed to the public on March 23, 2020. Staff began providing services via email, telephone and by appointment. Staff quickly adapted to their changed work lives by finding creative solutions to ensure continuity of services for its citizens.

Development Services erected a 20-foot by 30-foot tent outside of the administrative offices to conduct business such as issuing permits, plan reviews, and performing inspections with contractors and homeowners. Their earlier launch of an online permitting application, CITYWORKS, proved to be a vital and efficient tool for business transactions to be conducted quickly over the Internet. Staff also provided an option for those who preferred to conduct business at the Administration Center by establishing secure lockers outside the building to pick up and drop off documents. These options for conducting business have continued to be widely used and will remain in place.

The Roanoke County Treasurer's office is located inside the Administration Center. Once the facility was closed, staff encouraged citizens to pay their taxes online or through a drop box in the parking lot. Knowing many citizens prefer to pay in-person, staff worked quickly to set up a remote satellite office for in-person payments at the main libraries, utilizing drive-thru windows normally used to drop off books. This was so popular for those citizens who preferred to conduct business without leaving their vehicles, that the Treasurer's office established in 2021 a separate satellite office/drive-thru at the County's main library for citizens' convenience.

With public access limited at the Administration Center, the Office of Elections was relocated to a former elementary school owned by Roanoke County in the Town of Vinton, to accommodate the volume of voters and services needed for the 2020 General Election. The facility offered staff more than double the space they previously had, as well as accessible parking and adequate space for social

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distancing. The Elections staff served an average of 550 walk-in voters each week. This facility was completely renovated and now serves as the permanent location for the Elections office. Staff also established satellite locations and drop boxes at other County facilities to provide voting options across the County's 250-square mile area.

Roanoke County's Department of Social Services (DSS) continued to serve its clients throughout the pandemic, utilizing their drive-thru window and online services. This was the only DSS in the state able to offer this level of service. Through the CARES Act funding received by the County, DSS was able to distribute more than \$307,000 directly to Roanoke County residents to assist with unpaid utilities, car payments, child care expenses, food, medical bills, and rent or mortgage payments.

Roanoke County's public libraries found new ways to interact with patrons by shifting to online and virtual programs. Staff expanded their E-books and audio books collections. Their popular programs, such as Storytime, Teen Drama Club, Trivia Nights, and Book Clubs were moved to online platforms, such as Zoom and social media. They also launched a program, "Let's Stay in Touch," to reach loyal patrons by phone who were isolated at home and wanted to talk someone. Staff also used social media to promote the library's database of services, social games, tutorials, and videos. The library also procured Hot Spots for patrons to check out at the Glenvar Library branch, located in a rural area of Roanoke County with limited Internet service, to help teachers and students finish out the school year. As restrictions eased, Library staff began providing curbside services for patrons returning books and checking out new ones. Library staff also utilized their 3D printers to create face shields for Roanoke County Fire & Rescue personnel.

The services provided by Parks and Recreation were adjusted to follow the restrictions of the pandemic. Green Ridge Recreation Center staff created a video library of more than 70 group exercise videos for

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those looking to stay healthy at home, and their personal trainers offered virtual training sessions for viewers. Staff also launched limited weekly camps to serve the children of working parents, including those of employees of Roanoke County and Roanoke County Public Schools. While the County's many playgrounds were closed to the public, the parks, trails and passive recreation spaces remained open and were used in abundance by families seeking outdoor activities.

From the beginning of the pandemic, Roanoke County's public safety staff remained agile as information about the virus evolved. With assistance from the Emergency Communications Center, a new procedure was created to screen calls to help streamline emergency responses. Communications officers now ask a series of questions and request, when practical, for callers to meet public safety personnel outdoors.

The County's Emergency Management staff worked diligently to obtain and deliver PPE, including masks, face shields, gloves, and gowns for Roanoke County departments. The staff also increased safety measures for employees while coordinating public outreach programs to assist with controlling the virus' spread in the community.

The employee health center, housed inside of the Administration Center, was immediately closed and staff began providing virtual appointments to ensure employees could still access services. A small building located next to the parking lot of the Administration Center was purchased and renovated utilizing CARES Act funding to permanently relocate the health center. The new facility also enabled Fire & Rescue personnel to set up a COVID-19 testing site for the County's 1,000 employees.

Roanoke County and the Town of Vinton established a \$1.2 million grant program using federal CARES Act funding to aid the community's small businesses feeling the effects of the pandemic. The program provided one-time grants of up to \$10,000 to small businesses affected by closures due to the virus. The first-come, first-served grants helped over 200 eligible businesses cover operational costs, pivot to new

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market conditions, deep clean their facilities, and more. Governor Northam awarded the County a \$20,000 Governor's Agriculture and Forestry Industries Development Fund grant to provide immediate aid to landowners and farmers impacted by COVID-19, while meeting the demand for herbal medicines such as goldenseal.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Roanoke County staff rose to the challenge of adapting to the circumstances and ensuring continuity of services for its citizens. The administrative work of Roanoke County never paused throughout the pandemic. Staff worked diligently to find creative solutions to providing essential services to the community, in the safest ways possible, while continuing to provide best-in-class service.

**Collaboration with Others**

As the pandemic reached our community, Roanoke County Administration and Emergency Management staff immediately initiated its incident management plan to prepare for impacts to staff and disruptions in operations. Roanoke County, in coordination with surrounding jurisdictions, took the precautionary measure of declaring a local emergency to request state and federal resources should they become necessary.

Staff coordinated with the local Virginia Department of Health district, Virginia Department of Emergency Management, and Roanoke County Schools to coordinate regional communications and response. Roanoke County administration also coordinated weekly conference calls with leaders from neighboring jurisdictions to discuss operations, impact of the virus in our communities and concerns. Those weekly meetings have continued into June 2021 and been beneficial in strengthening the collaboration and cooperation amongst the various agencies.

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The local Health Department director called upon the local governments to aid in their response to the pandemic. Roanoke County Fire & Rescue personnel assisted with coordinating vaccination of employees in five local governments, as well as organizing the initial vaccination clinic for public safety personnel. County communications staff assisted the Health Department with organizing weekly press briefings to keep the public informed of their activities and the spread of the virus in the community. Fire & Rescue staff has continued to assist Health Department staff with bringing the vaccine to home-bound residents in need.

Through the Bureau of Justice Assistance Coronavirus Emergency Supplemental Funding Program Solicitation, the Police Department received funds to purchase personal protective equipment (PPE) and sanitizing devices. The department created a decision matrix to provide guidance about when and what type of PPE to wear, based on the type of citizen contact. These measures have been used to reduce contracting or spreading coronavirus during in-person contacts.

These types of collaborations have resulted in strengthened relationships and new relationships, ensuring all agencies will be well-positioned to respond during the next crisis, as well as any time there is a need.



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PHOTOS





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