



## SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: July 1, 2022.** 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: \_\_\_\_\_  


## **Virginia Association of Counties Achievement Award Application**

### **Chesterfield County, Virginia—Chesterfield County Public Library (CCPL)**

#### **Executive Summary and Overview**

Beginning in March 2021, Chesterfield County Public Library began a popular, ongoing series of early literacy trails at libraries and county parks. Residents were invited to explore these outdoor experiences, which were offered for two to three weeks at a time and were curated specifically for families with young children. While initially designed to meet a need for outdoor enrichment during the Covid-19 pandemic, these trails have proved so popular and engaging that they continue as a robust part of current and future program offerings.

Librarians work across branches and county departments to create a variety of unique experiences, each grounded in one of the five Basics, or five ways to help children under five thrive and grow. Some trails encourage parents to read picture book stories aloud as they unfold, sign by sign. With others, participants seek fairy houses, counting and discussing items found along the way. Some take the format of a live-action “I Spy,” encouraging participants to find a variety of natural phenomenon and discuss the environment around them. New for summer 2022 is an ocean-themed scavenger hunt trail designed to rotate through several library branches, created to support the Summer Learning Program theme “Oceans of Possibilities” (and held indoors to be inclusive of visitors who are sensitive to the heat).

## Problem

In the second year of the pandemic, learning loss in preschool children was quantifiable. According to the University of Michigan's "Historic Crisis, Historic Opportunity: Using Evidence to Mitigate the Effects of the Covid-19 Crisis on Young Children and Early Care and Education Programs" (Weland et al, 2021), "Across nearly all studies that addressed it, ECE [early childhood education] enrollment fell dramatically during the crisis, well beyond the period of the initial shutdown in spring 2020 and across the full early childhood age span (0-8). These declines represent substantial loss of learning opportunities for young children...In Virginia, there were drops of 20% in preschool enrollment and 13% in kindergarten enrollment." Even library story time—a central early literacy service which libraries provide to the community—ceased to be held in person. Though CCPL librarians pivoted to virtual story time, access to online experiences is a privilege not every family can afford.

The need to offer accessible, real-world early learning experiences drawn from evidence-based practice led CCPL staff to develop a series of early literacy trails, grounding each one in one of the five Basics. These are: Maximize Love, Manage Stress; Talk, Sing, and Point; Count, Group, and Compare; Read and Discuss Stories; and Explore Through Movement and Play. According to *The Science Behind the Basics Principles*, 2020, the Basics are "distilled from scientific literature by the Achievement Gap Initiative at Harvard University." This report highlights how these principles "are broad in coverage of key concepts, easily understandable, and appealing to [the] target audiences of parents, caregivers, and the frontline professionals they rely upon for advice and support." Further, these principles are "strongly grounded in a body of research literature" which "establishes that families' everyday routines...matter fundamental to early brain development. Many of the practices that embody the principles are things that caregivers do already, but not as intentionally as they might if they understood the potential impacts."

It is this need to educate and inform families on how their everyday habits and routines are so impactful to their children's brain development that makes the Early Literacy Trails an initiative that CCPL has continued, even as the pandemic has faded into the background of our daily lives. The mobility and flexibility afforded by a series of trails that can pop-up relatively quickly and be rotated from site to site means that librarians can be nimble in their response to community celebrations, shifts in season, and any occasion in which families and young children might gather outdoors. It also allows the trails to be an added benefit to routine library visits when set up at branches, enticing children and caregivers to linger and participate and learn.

### **Program Innovation and Description**

Early literacy trails embody several formats. Some follow the lead of the story walk movement, in which picture book pages are mounted on weatherproof signage and spaced at intervals along a walkway. Alongside the story, families are prompted to engage in Basics like "Talk, Sing, and Point" or "Explore Through Movement and Play," connecting story elements and learning principles. Other trails expand the popular trend of enhancing gardens or landscapes with a tiny fairy house into entire fairy worlds. Staff members and interested patrons donate tiny scenes related to the seasons, popular characters, and children's literature. These are made as weatherproof as possible, spaced at intervals, and accessible day and night during the trail dates. Various prompts encourage visitors to "Count, Group, and Compare" details in all the scenes. Other trails build on the popularity of the game "I Spy" and welcome children to search for specific details on signs crowded with imagery and to "Talk, Sing, and Point" with their caregivers. New for summer of 2022, the fairy trails move indoors and take on a scavenger hunt format, encouraging visitors who are sensitive to the heat to enjoy the trails inside air-conditioned facilities.

Several stand-out trails have involved collaboration with other county departments. During the pandemic, CCPL worked with the Chesterfield County Fire Department and Emergency Medical Services to augment some of the fire safety training children would have ordinarily received during school visits. With classroom speakers off the table to minimize community spread, children and families came to the fall 2021 Fire Safety Trail to read a book about fire safety, learn fire safety tips, meet a firefighter, and pet Clover the Fire Dog. For the county's inaugural celebration of Juneteenth in 2021, CCPL worked with several county parks to set up and maintain Juneteenth Trails featuring picture books that spread awareness and fostered respect for an often overlooked milestone in American history. Another Juneteenth trail is planned for 2022 at the Ettrick-Matoaca Library branch.

The following is a snapshot of trails offered for summer of 2022:

<b>Trail type:</b>	<b>"Basic" highlighted:</b>	<b>Activity:</b>	<b>Trail dates and location:</b>
Story Walk of <u>Lola Plants a Garden</u> by Anna McQuinn	Talk, Sing, and Point	Engagement questions on story elements are enhanced with poetry and a song	June 1- June 30  Central Library
Story Walk of <u>Juneteenth for Maizie</u> by Floyd Cooper	Read and Discuss Stories	Picture book encourages awareness and discussion of an important milestone in African American history.	June 6- June 25  Ettrick-Matoaca Library
Story Walk of <u>A House for a Mouse</u> (written by CCPL staff)	Talk, Sing, and Point	Caregivers read aloud rhyming text about a mouse's perfect house and favorite pastime, reading.	June 10- June 25  Bon Air Library
Fins and Fairies Scavenger Hunt Trail	Count, Group, and Compare	How many ocean creatures can you find? Can you name them all? Prompts encourage number sense and spatial relationships.	June 11-25 (Meadowdale Library) July 12-16 (Bon Air Library) July 23-August 6 (Enon Library)
Patriotic Story Walk of <u>Blue Sky, White Stars</u> by Sarvinder Naberhaus	Explore Through Movement and Play	Prompts encourage movement with American flags to wave.	June 27-July 10  LaPrade Library

## **Cost of the Program**

The early literacy trails break down into two types: fairy trails and sign-based trails. Fairy trail components are donated by staff and community members, including children. Setting up and taking down trails involves staff time. Staff also work between fairy trails to clean, repair, and refresh bits and pieces, as all elements are re-used.

Staff time snapshot for one fairy trail:

- Staff time to collect and organize trail donations: 6 hours
- Staff time to design Basics connection: 2 hours
- Two staff to set up trail: 3 hours
- Two staff to remove trail: 2 hours
- Repair-refresh and cleaning of trail elements between trails: 4 hours

All other early literacy trails consist of signage displaying stories, I Spy challenges, etc. Human resources were required for planning, design, take-down and set-up.

Staff time snapshot for one sign-based trail:

- Planning time (in-person/Teams meetings): 2 hours
- Design per individual trail: 10 hours
- Two staff to set up trail: 2 hours
- Two staff to remove trail: 1 hour
- Repair of damaged signs: 1 hour

## Early Literacy Trails

Marketing and production per item cost

ITEM	QTY	PRICE Each
Printed coroplast 24 x 18 yard signs + stakes	01	\$9
Vinyl banner, per foot	01	\$16.25
Blank coroplast 24 x 18 yard signs + stakes	01	\$3
Book page, laminated 10 mil laminate	01	\$1.25
Program rack card (3 ups)	01	\$.09
Velcro adhesive tape, 26ft roll, white	01	\$8
Banner pole, 6' metal u (need 3)	01	\$20
The 5 Basics tie in cards, 12" x 4", laminated	1 set	\$8.94
Welcome Title sign, 8.5 x 11, laminated	01	\$1.48
Engagement blocks, 14" x 4, laminate	01	\$1.49
Page number blocks, 14" x 2.25", laminated	01	\$1.25

## **Program Results**

Social media likes and shares give a window into the popularity of the trails with the community. Posts about current and upcoming trails receive some of the most likes and engagements of all CCPL's posts on Facebook and Instagram. The following is a selection of community feedback.

The April 2021 fairy trail was publicized with a Facebook post gathering 112 likes, 42 shares, and 20 comments. The October 2021 fairy trail was publicized with two Instagram posts, with a combined reach of 788 and 915 favorable impressions. Facebook publicity gathered a further 19 comments, 34 shares, and 106 likes. Here are some of the many Facebook comments from the community:

- We just went! It was so sweet! Definitely check it out.
- It's absolutely adorable. My 2 year old loved it.
- They were wonderful. Thank you for sharing them and encouraging families outdoors.
- It was beautiful...My kids loved it...Thank you CCPL.
- We visited...No kids, just my husband and I!
- Love the fairy trails!

The May 2021 Rockwood Park Story Walk of "Over in the Forest: Come and Take a Peak" by Marianne Berkes included a collaborative kick-off event on May 14, 2021 with both CCPL and Chesterfield Parks and Recreation Staff. Families enjoyed the trail, met the LaPrade Library mascot puppet Froggy, and took home a small animal finger puppet. More than 90 people visited the trail between 10:30 a.m. and noon that day. On Facebook, the posts publicizing the trail and kick-off event gathered 46 likes, 17 shares, and 11 comments.

Other comments on Early Literacy Trail social media posts include:

- My little ones are looking forward to it!
- We had such a great time walking the trail yesterday! We're going to try and check out some of the other locations this month!
- My son's going to be so excited!
- Excellent job! We really enjoyed it!
- Love that they're offering outside activities.



When the pandemic made typical indoor avenues for early academic and social/emotional learning inaccessible- from early childhood programs to play groups to typical library story times- library staff moved quickly to create alternate, outdoor learning opportunities. Library staff also worked to connect each trail to one of the five Basics, ensuring evidence-based early learning components infused each trail experience. Further, this project represents a significant amount of collaboration across county departments. CCPL worked with Chesterfield County Parks and Recreation to greenlight trails set up at Rockwood, Matoaca, Midlothian Mines, and Bensley parks. Central to these collaborations was the series of Juneteenth story walks, which represented a nimble response to Virginia's official recognition of the holiday for the first time on June 19, 2021. CCPL also coordinated with the Chesterfield County Fire Department and Emergency Medical Services to create the Fire Safety Trail, allowing families and children to experience the annual fire safety education typically disseminated through firefighter visits to schools. Altogether, the early literacy trail initiative represents a unique innovation in service for the Chesterfield County Public Library during an unprecedented time in history.



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CHESTERFIELD  
COUNTY PUBLIC  
LIBRARY

Días y Días/Days and Days  
by Ginger Foglesong Guy

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This StoryWalk's® featured Basic is  
**Read and Discuss Stories**  
From infancy, frequent and interactive  
book reading is associated with  
cognitive and language development.

Visit [noobasics.org](http://noobasics.org) for more information about strategies to support early learning and brain development.



