



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:  _____

VACo award nomination 2022
Web Applications: Innovative Passport to Parks Information
Category: Parks and Recreation

Executive Summary

Life changed for everyone when COVID-19 struck in March 2020. With isolation orders in place, people reevaluated priorities. Many residents flocked to park sites with a desire for fresh air, exercise, activity, and a sense of comfort. Park use in Chesterfield County increased by almost one million visitors during this period. Many of these visitors were first-time park users. Staff quickly realized that additional methods of providing park information to the public would be helpful and necessary.

Chesterfield Parks and Recreation embarked on a process to create web applications to provide residents with a large amount of information in a concise manner, on an easy-to-use and accessible platform. So far three web applications have been created, completely internally, which furnish the public with resources on trails, public water access, and playgrounds.

Need for the Program

Prior to the development of the web applications, the public relied on the Parks and Recreation website as the main source of information about park facilities. The website contains information on park sites, addresses, amenities, and park maps. Once residents are in the parks, they must use on-site maps, when available, to reference park information.

With the tremendous increase in park use in 2020 and after, staff recognized the need for a mobile application that could provide focused park information in areas of great public interest and visitation. Thus, the development of a website application began.

Description

The first website application centered on the department's trails system. This was a natural choice based on the high level of trail use spurred by the COVID-19 pandemic. The product includes information on 28 sites with park maps, addresses and driving directions, trail information, photos, and virtual tours. The department's GIS Specialist, Stephanie Christmas, spent close to a year updating park sites and associated data in the GIS database, cataloging features of park trails through GPS collection, creating individual park maps, and compiling data/photos/media into a database. The website application was created using ArcGIS Online Storymaps. The [Trails System web application](#) was launched in October 2020.

The GIS Specialist collaborated with the Outdoor Recreation program staff to work on the next application for public water access. With two rivers flanking Chesterfield County, recreation activities on the water are prevalent. The department's water recreation experts weighed in on the development and helped structure the information. The application is organized by activity: Hand-Carry Launch sites, Power Boat Access sites, Fishing Access sites, and Trails Near Water. The application includes water safety information and other resources, such as links to tidal charts, to help provide a better experience. The Public Water Recreation Access application offers park maps, addresses and driving directions, boat and fishing access points, important water safety information, and photos. This [application](#) was launched in April 2021.

The [Playground Resource web application](#) was developed by the GIS Specialist in collaboration with her two young children. It's a quick resource to view and locate playgrounds within the county.

When schools shut down in the spring of 2020, county playgrounds were also closed. While adjusting to the many life changes brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Christmas children, ages 8 and 9, began going to the different parks with their mother, as she researched park sites for the [trails web application](#). Walking the trails became a regular activity for the family. The girls even became unofficial interns after assisting with many site visits to launch the trails web application and later the [public water access web application](#).

The idea to map the county's many playgrounds came after the girls eventually grew weary of exploring trails and water access locations.

"Show us where all the of the playgrounds are located," said Stephanie's 9-year-old. "Parks are only parks if they have a playground!" continued Stephanie's 8-year-old.

Once the playgrounds reopened to the public, work began to create the playground application, which included visiting all the playgrounds and testing the equipment. Since each park offers a different experience, the girls insisted the application include pictures, because "kids want to see what's there."

The [Playground Resource web application](#) launched in June 2021.

All three web applications were created using ArcGIS Online Storymaps and can be accessed via computer, tablet, or phone.

Costs

The costs associated with development of the web applications were minimal. The GIS Specialist handled the entire project. She conducted research, made site visits, took photos, organized the information, and uploaded the data into the ArcGIS Online Storymaps program. Since all work was accomplished in-house, the only expense was staff time.

Not purchasing a commercial product saved the county money, as well as time, by not working with a vendor to create the products and continually update the data as park amenities change.

Results/Success

Despite the challenges COVID-19 presented to many agencies, Chesterfield Parks and Recreation persevered and successfully served a significant number of park visitors over the past two years. Even with widespread hesitancy to visit public spaces, park visitation numbers have skyrocketed. From FY20 to FY21, Chesterfield's parks saw an increase of 965,378 visitors (totaling nearly 7 million), increasing over 16%. After the launch of the Trails application in October 2020, trail usage increased 35% through October 2021. Visits to site with water access increased 39% after the launch of the Water Access application.

Once launched and made public, views of the Trails application tallied a daily average of 42 views during the first three months. The Water Access application averaged 14 daily views and the Playground application averaged 13 daily views during the five months following their respective launches.

Media interest in the web applications was high. The GIS Specialist was interviewed by a local TV station and radio station. Coverage of the application launches appeared in newspapers, television, radio, and websites. The department promoted the resources on our website, in publications and newsletters, and on social media.

These innovative applications expanded public knowledge of park amenities and directly impacted attendance. In the face of the pandemic, Chesterfield Parks and Recreation was able to continue efficiently and effectively serving the community.

Worthiness of Award

With the arrival of COVID-19, public and private institutions faced unprecedented challenges. Chesterfield Parks and Recreation relied on the initiative and innovation of staff to create three web applications resulting in significant impact on public awareness and knowledge and ultimately park visitation. By harnessing the power of technology, park visitors can quickly access information on park amenities to enhance their overall experience. As evidenced by increased park attendance, these applications have been viewed and utilized by the public.

Utilizing the data and resources the department already held, Parks and Recreation developed innovative products without spending additional funds. The creation of these web applications, in-house, is a model for other localities to emulate. With an investment of staff time, expertise, and commitment, agencies can create similar resources to meet the needs of the community.

Chesterfield has plans for other park system applications in the future.

VACo award nomination 2022 – Supplemental Materials
Web Applications: Innovative Passport to Parks Information
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Media Coverage on Web Applications

TRAILS SYSTEM:

Chesterfield unveils new trail website with maps, virtual tours

<https://www.nbc12.com/2020/10/11/chesterfield-unveils-new-trail-website-with-maps-virtual-tours/>

Oct. 11, 2020

WRIC-8 interview with Stephanie Christmas, GIS Specialist, Oct. 2020

Trails web application, Chesterfield Observer, Oct. 14, 2020

WATER ACCESS:

Chesterfield unveils app for park maps, water access points, April 24, 2021

<https://www.nbc12.com/2021/04/24/chesterfield-unveils-app-park-maps-water-access-points/>

Interview on Water Access web application with VPM (Stephanie Christmas and Greg Velzy), May 3, 2021

Expanded hours at Historic Sites and Water Access web application, Chesterfield Observer, May 5, 2021 <https://www.chesterfieldobserver.com/pageview/viewer/2021-05-05#page=7>

Access To Waterways In Chesterfield County Just Got Easier, May 6, 2021

<https://vpm.org/news/articles/22164/access-to-waterways-in-chesterfield-county-just-got-easier>

PLAYGROUNDS:

[Two children help develop new Chesterfield Playground Resource StoryMap - YouTube](#)

Playground web application, NBC12, June 2021

Playground Web Application, Village News, June 30, 2021

Links to Web Applications

Trails: <https://arcg.is/0qXXHm>

Public water recreation access: <https://arcg.is/0PXD0f0>

Playgrounds: <https://arcg.is/1Xr9fW>