



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: County of Henrico
Program Title: Parent-Child Computer Work and Play Stations
Program Category: Customer Service

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Program Overview

When planning the new Fairfield Area Library in Henrico, Virginia, Henrico County Public Library (HCPL) received input from community members of all ages who expressed a desire for the new library to support young people and families learning. At the same time, Library Director Barbara Weedman had seen throughout her career caregivers of small children struggling to use public computers with their little ones in tow. To enhance the family-friendliness of the new library, Ms. Weedman shared her idea for a computer station set next to a comfortable play enclosure with the design team, and worked with designer Shannon Wray from Quinn Evans architects, and then with TMC Furniture, to create a custom solution. The resulting Computer Work + Play Stations are durable, easy to clean, and appropriate for caregivers and their infants and toddlers. The design went viral on social media in October 2019 after the Fairfield Library opened to the public, and then again on national and international news media in January 2022 as the design struck a chord with parents struggling to balance work with childcare during the pandemic. Computer Work and Play Stations make the library more accessible for caregivers of small children.

Problem/Challenge/Situation Faced by Locality

The new Fairfield Area Library in Henrico, VA was designed beginning in 2017, and opened to the public in October 2019. The library and architects held community input sessions for Seniors, Teens, Parents with Small Children, and general community members to express their needs for the building design. In session after session, regardless of participants' age, people expressed a strong need for the library to support young people and families learning, particularly families with children of various ages who may visit the library together. The Library Director and team saw this as an opportunity to develop a solution to a problem many people experience or witness in public libraries: how to use a computer when you have a small child with you. A trip to the library can involve engaging in learning and work for all family members. A parent may attend Storytime

with their toddler, and then need to get some computer work done. Library staff wanted to provide furniture that could support parents of small children to help them get work done at the library.

How Program Fulfilled Awards Criteria

Computer Work and Play Stations at Henrico County Public Library are a first-of-their-kind solution to a common problem parents and caregivers experience at the library: trying to use the computer to do work while accompanied by a young child. Conceptualized by Library Director Barbara Weedman in response to community demand and a career's worth of experience, collaborators HCPL, Quinn Evans, and TMC Furniture created a custom solution that has met with worldwide acclaim. To the Library, however, the local impact of the workstations in helping caregivers use the library has been the most important metric of the design's value. On opening day of the new Fairfield Library, a woman who attended the celebration with her young child intuitively sat down at the workstation, placed her infant in the adjacent carrel, and got to work. Another woman who frequently uses the Work and Play Stations was interviewed by both the *Washington Post* and the local CBS news station in January 2022 and said, "Thank God for the library." She described to the *Washington Post* how she was using the computer to design business cards for a business she was starting selling handmade, natural body scrubs, and used the Work and Play Stations regularly on visits to the library with her baby. The *New York Times* said that what HCPL had achieved with this design was "a beautiful thing." HCPL is proud to have innovated this concept for public libraries and is hopeful that it will inspire libraries across the state, the country, and beyond.

How Program Was Carried Out

Computer Work and Play Stations were conceptualized by Library Director Barbara Weedman during the design planning phase for the new Fairfield Area Library. Community input sessions

were held beginning in September 2017, and targeted input sessions were announced specifically for Seniors, families with young children, teens, and adult library users. In these sessions, architects asked attendees about how they used the existing Fairfield Library, in order to understand how to design an improved new facility. Participants were also asked about ways the older facility fell short in meeting their needs. Again and again, in all sessions, participants of all ages expressed their desire that the new library would support young people learning. They shared their hopes and needs for the new library building. It was clear that supporting young people and families would need to be integral to the building's design.

At the same time, Library Director Barbara Weedman had been hoping to propose a solution to a problem she had seen throughout her career in public libraries: how caregivers can use public computers with their little ones in tow. When it became clear that the community placed the utmost priority on supporting children and families' use of the library, Ms. Weedman was further motivated to share her concept with the architects for an adult-sized computer desk located in the children's area of the library with an adjacent, comfortable play enclosure. She discussed the idea at planning meetings and designer Shannon Wray of Quinn Evans Architects sought a furniture-build solution.

The designer reached out to TMC Furniture, a Michigan-based manufacturer of custom and retail wood furniture solutions, about the idea. Together the group designed the Computer Work and Play Stations, made from wood with rounded edges and a durable finish, featuring a vinyl cushion at the base of the enclosure and developmentally appropriate interactive panels surrounding, and colored with plant-based and nontoxic dyes. The carrels were made to be easily wiped down and sanitized, and to withstand frequent in depth cleanings. The Library's Youth Services Coordinator advised on the selection and content of the interactive play panels, which were designed to

support early literacy skills and inclusivity. He suggested the addition of low-height inset mirrors to encourage tummy time for infants.

The new Fairfield Area Library opened in October 2019 and, on opening day in the midst of the celebration, a mother with an infant sat down at a Work and Play Station to use the computer and placed her baby in the carrel without having received any direction from staff. The design was immediately intuitive. Someone snapped a photo of this moment and shared it on social media, where it quickly went viral on mother and parenting blogs and Facebook pages. The initial viral post about Computer Work and Play stations garnered approximately 23,000 likes, 2000 comments, and 12,000 shares. The intuitive design and popularity of the new, family-friendly library building resulted in a slow and steady growth in usage for the Work and Play Stations.

The Work and Play Stations again went viral in January 2022 after Ali Faruk, Policy Director for Families Forward Virginia, tweeted a photo of the workstations, saying he had never seen anything like them before. "A new public library in my area has these work stations for caregivers with babies! Maybe these are common in other places but I've never seen anything like this before," Faruk tweeted. As of this writing, the original tweet has 242,000 likes, 31,000 retweets, and over 1000 comments. The design was covered by local outlets Channel 6, 8, and 12 and the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, as well as national and international outlets *Newsweek*, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, *Buzzfeed*, *Fox News Digital*, *Curbed*, *Book Riot*, *The Independent (UK)*, *Vanity Fair Italy*, CBS This Morning, Good Morning America, *Motherly*, *Fatherly*, and *Black Enterprise*. The design tapped into parents' experiences during the pandemic struggling to balance childcare and work. The furniture company has seen inquiries about purchasing the retail version of this custom product from as far away as Japan and the Netherlands. Library systems

all over the world were tagged in tweets from their patrons asking them to offer a similar arrangement.

Financing and Staffing

The Computer Work and Play Stations at Fairfield Library were custom designed as part of the overall furniture and design budget of the new Fairfield Library in Henrico, VA. The library was a \$29 million new build of a 44,000 square foot facility approved by a majority of voters in a 2016 County Bond Referendum. While HCPL had these custom built as part of the funded furniture package for a new library building, other municipalities can purchase these units retail from TMC Furniture starting at \$19,000.

Program Results

The Work and Play Stations were devised to solve a problem for caregivers in a pre-pandemic world, and the need for this type of supportive solution has only grown in our community and across the globe over the last two years. The stations have grown in popularity and gained international acclaim at a time when parents are experiencing increased pressures around both work and childcare. Locally, the Fairfield community has historically used public computers heavily, and the pandemic has likely increased the needs for public computing: life has moved online in many ways, childcare is harder to come by, and many families are financially stressed. During the pandemic, people may have needed to cut the internet bill, file for benefits, work on resumes, or start a new business. For this reason, the Work and Play Stations developed an international following after a tweet went viral, and this innovative, inclusive design and others inspired by it may soon spread across the globe.

Brief Summary

Computer Work and Play Stations at the Fairfield Area Library, part of Henrico County Public Library in Henrico, VA, help caregivers of small children use computers at the library while accompanied by a young child. The stations consist of an adult-sized computer desk next to a comfortable play enclosure constructed of wood with rounded edges, durable finishes, a vinyl cushion at the base, and interactive educational panels on the inside. They were made to be easily and frequently wiped down and deep cleaned. The design is immediately intuitive to caregivers, and went viral in 2019 in the parenting blogosphere, and again on national and international news media in 2022 as the pandemic placed additional pressure on parents around work and childcare. Because families should not have to arrange childcare in order to use the library, Computer Work and Play Stations make it possible for caregivers with small children to do computer work at the library with ease. The stations are an innovative, first-of-its-kind solution conceptualized by HCPL Director Barbara Weedman and designed in collaboration with Quinn Evans architects and TMC Furniture. Locally, the workstations meet an expressed community need to support children and families learning, and use of the stations has been strong. After the viral social and news media events, interest in Computer Work and Play Stations at HCPL has spread across the country and the world.