



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: Storyline
Program Category: Customer Service

CONTACT INFORMATION

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SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Brandon Hinton
Title: Deputy County Manager for Administration
Signature: 

Program Overview

Storyline is an on-demand storytime service offering families recorded stories over the phone. Geared toward preschool and early elementary age children and their families, Storyline debuts a new story each week that can be shared offline. The service arose when the pandemic required libraries to invent new ways to deliver early literacy experiences for their communities. Youth Services, Outreach, and Information Technology staff collaborated to create Storyline. Where virtual storytimes require an internet connection, likely in an indoor setting, and a device with good video playback in order to be effective, Storyline requires none of those things—just a phone—thereby reducing barriers to access. The program has been popular, averaging around 100 callers per month.

Problem/Challenge/Situation Faced by Locality

Reading aloud is an important ingredient in early literacy. Just like learning to read and sound out words, children of all ages need exposure to lots of stories in order to strengthen what experts call their visual imagery. Being able to visualize the action with the mind's eye is a skill that takes practice, and listening to read-alouds is key to building this important ability. The benefit does not end there: developing visual imagery, in turn, helps build reading comprehension, a critical part of early learning and lifelong academic success.

During the pandemic, the library's usual avenues for providing early literacy experiences for families, including opportunities to practice visual imagery, were interrupted. As promoting reading is foundational to the library's mission, librarians quickly and urgently pivoted to provide remote services. Virtual Storytimes were soon implemented over Facebook Live. While these storytimes reached a large audience, they did not include patrons who do not have internet at home, who were on the go without wifi, whose schedules did not match up with program offerings,

or who could not otherwise access video storytimes broadcast over social media. For these patrons, librarians needed to use a more accessible technology to provide remote story read-alouds. The concept for Storyline developed from this need, and Youth Services, Outreach, and Information Technology staff at HCPL started working together to debut the new service.

How Program Fulfilled Awards Criteria

Storyline is a cost-effective way for libraries to provide a convenient, on-demand storytime for busy families who cannot access in-person or virtual programs. The service makes opportunities to build early literacy skills like visual imagery more equitable by using commonly accessible technology and through 24/7 availability. It is also simply fun. Whatever the motivation that drives a user to call Storyline, once they are there, it is an undeniably joyful thing to listen to a story and share that experience with someone you care about. Storyline users are huddling around phones set to speaker, sitting on their parent's lap, listening together. Building those early, positive associations with reading is a big part of building literacy in young people and creating lifelong readers. The program uses technology that all libraries already have, and is a simple and cost-effective way to provide equitable and joyful early literacy experiences to children and families. Library systems across the state could replicate Storyline as a low-cost, convenient offering for busy families with young children.

How Program Was Carried Out

Henrico County's Youth Services and Outreach departments were inspired by the pandemic and the problem of access to virtual library services to create Storyline, an on-demand, phone-in storytime service with the goal of providing ways to hear stories read aloud, remotely. The Youth Services Coordinator and Outreach Manager worked with the head of Information Technology at HCPL to record stories on a voicemail line.

The head of IT leveraged existing technology resources, utilizing the library's Cisco VOIP phone system to create a dedicated phone line with voicemail inboxes, which works just like a regular Library phone line. Instead of playing a recorded message with options to press a key and transfer a caller to various departments, Storyline uses the same technology to play a recorded story for callers. Voice mailboxes allow staff to easily update stories by dialing in and recording and re-recording a book read aloud. Additional recordings can be made available by changing the initial recorded greeting to offer story choices by dialing one or two and so on for the caller to select different stories. This option was utilized in October 2020 and 2021 for a special, weekly "spooky story" offering in addition to the regular Storytime weekly selections, and in April 2021 a poem was offered for National Poetry Month.

When a user calls the dedicated Storyline, they first hear a recorded greeting:

Welcome to Storyline, a service of the Henrico County Public Library. Press 1 to hear our story of the week. [Press 2 to hear

The service debuted at the end of September 2020, and line two initially featured a spooky story offered through Halloween. Beginning in November, the line offered just one recorded story. Library staff plans to eventually offer a Spanish language story each month.

The week before a story is set to go up, staff members dial in, follow the prompts of the voicemail system, and record the story. The recorded stories are updated every Wednesday. Staff choose titles that can be read in their entirety in a few minutes and enter them into a spreadsheet to plan their selections in advance. Storyline was promoted heavily through the library's usual avenues, with prominent placement on the library's most-visited web pages, digital slides on all electronic bulletin boards across the system, print posters and flyers, a blog post, and social media. The social media campaign included an e-newsletter mailing to over 4000 subscribers, announcement

posts debuting the service, and weekly posts to publicize the latest story. Outreach to promote Storyline included a visit to the Richmond Area Literacy Council's Virtual Family Literacy Night, and presence at other family and elementary school-oriented events.

The promotional announcement contained the following text:

Check out our new, on-demand storytime service, Storyline! Storyline offers recorded stories over the phone, and is geared toward preschool and early elementary children and their families. For people looking for an opportunity to share stories offline, we're offering new stories each week.

It's easy to connect with Storyline. Just call (804) 501-1946 from any telephone (long-distance rates may apply). The stories are usually 5 minutes or less, and a new story will debut every Wednesday morning at 10 am. Storyline provides a shared educational experience and opportunity for families to connect anywhere, from the campfire to the couch.

In 2021, Storyline averaged about 100 calls per month.

Financing and Staffing

There is no cost to produce Storyline apart from staff time. The program used existing voicemail technology on an existing phone line, and uses existing books from the library's collection. HCPL determined that this program was educational/fair use of these books, and the temporary nature of the recordings' availability bolstered that understanding. For this reason, it was not needed to secure permissions or licensing for the selected titles. Municipalities seeking to replicate the program may wish to consult their legal advisors. Staff from different libraries within the HCPL system select, record, and upload stories on a rotating basis, and the process is not time-consuming. After selecting their story, staff simply follow the voicemail setup prompts and read the story a couple of times until they have a recording they feel good about.

Program Results

Storyline quickly built a steady following, with nearly 100 callers per month on average in 2021. The most successful month was April 2021, National Poetry Month, which offered an extra recorded poem in addition to a recorded story each week and had 170 callers. The program has achieved all of its objectives, making listening to stories more convenient and accessible to Henrico families.

Brief Summary

Storyline is a low-cost, innovative solution to creating accessible early literacy experiences for young people and families who require or desire remote library services. Henrico County Public Library Outreach, Youth Services, and IT staff collaborated to create a phone-in, on-demand storytime service when library buildings temporarily closed to the public during the pandemic. New stories are added each week, and the service averages about 100 callers/month. As virtual library programs remain popular, and the convenience of remote access library service has appeal for busy families, Storyline has continued to be a popular offering, and even inspired the Library of Virginia to create a similar service. Library staff leveraged common technology, the library's voicemail service, to create Storyline. The service allows young people and their families to have shared, joyful early literacy-building experiences whenever and wherever it is convenient for them, without need for a computer or internet connection.