



## 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: Stafford County

Program Title: Color-Coded Wayfinding System Enables Easier Navigation for Patrons on Stafford Government Campus

Program Category: Customer Service

### CONTACT INFORMATION

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

Name: Donna Krauss

Title: Deputy County Administrator

Signature: Donna S. Krauss

## **Title: Color-Coded Wayfinding System Enables Easier Navigation for Patrons on Stafford Government Campus**

### Challenge Faced

Stafford County Government has a large, sprawling campus where visitors can struggle to find offices. There was no central map, and the primary way for visitors to find directions was to speak with a volunteer or staff member. During the COVID-19 pandemic, it became increasingly clear that more information needed to be provided to patrons to abide by social distancing mandates and make doing business easier with Stafford.

This program meets several criteria for selection. Stafford's Community Engagement Office created a color-coded wayfinding system that was innovative in promoting efficiency in a visitor's steps in a building while limiting exposure to other visitors and employees. Instead of stopping at the front and having a lengthy exchange with an employee or getting lost and having needless exposure in a department visitors did not need, the wayfinding system helped them quickly find their direction and destination on their own. We cooperated with our state and local courts system to provide color-coded directional arrows outside, and a "You Are Here" map. This approach helped everyone. Lastly, this is an easy, inexpensive model that other governments can emulate. The bonus is that it works well.

### Description of the Program

Stafford County's Government campus is comprised of: the Chichester Building, which houses the Commonwealth Attorney's Office and Victim/Witness Assistance; the George L. Gordon, Jr., Government Center, home of most of the non-public safety departments; and the Stafford

Courthouse, a building with three courts, District, Circuit and Juvenile and Domestic Relations.

Two large parking lots serve all these buildings in a row.

When visitors exit the parking lots or public transportation, they are faced with three buildings.

The Chichester Building and the Government Center have signs when you get close. The courthouse is situated with its sign facing away from the parking lot, so understandably, visitors got confused.

Most people would enter the lobby of the Government Center and ask a volunteer or Citizen's Assistance staff member where they needed to go. Visitors often get lost only to return to the lobby to ask for help again. There were signs inside the buildings, but there was no uniform or consistent look to them – various signs had been implemented as needs changed over the years.

Social distancing was still needed once the building re-opened after the COVID-19 shutdown.

Having visitors ask for directions repeatedly suddenly became a health issue. Citizen's

Assistance (CA) is the office that oversees Stafford's many volunteers and operates as the

County's "front porch" when it comes to greeting visitors. CA is directed by the Office of

Community Engagement (CE), Stafford's communications hub and the office that facilitates the

County's branding. Staff members from both offices put their heads together to develop a

solution to more efficiently guide visitors to their destinations while limiting exposure.

They were inspired by the color-coded directional arrows found on the floors of hallways in

elementary schools. They decided it would be simpler for patrons to follow color-coded decals

on the floor than to be given verbal directions to a location. They designated colors to the most

commonly visited offices and departments and worked with a local sign company to develop decals and wall signs. The decal arrows were placed every few feet on the floors of the Government Center, even running up stairwells.

They also designed big interpretive signs, like the ones you find detailing history at parks, that show a campus map. The map incorporates the colors of the departments and locations and includes a "You Are Here" to help visitors orient themselves. Additionally, spray paint was used to create color-coded arrows on the sidewalks on the campus.

Now, patrons can simply check the main signs out front and follow the appropriate colors to their destination or check with the volunteers in the lobby. You can often hear a volunteer tell a visitor to "follow the orange arrows" up the stairs to the Treasurer's Office or go back outside and follow the maroon arrows on the sidewalk to the courthouse. Before, directions consisted of "go down this hallway, turn right, look for the sign, etc."

The program can be modified as needed. We can easily replace decals or signs. We can add more signs as things change or new offices are added or built. We are constantly assessing it to see that it continues to meet the needs of our patrons.

#### Expanding and Advancing Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

While our signs and maps are all in English, colors are universal. If a visitor knows the name of their destination and the color assigned to it, they can follow the colors to the location. Our Citizens Assistance Office has a translating service to discern where people need to go and point them to the corresponding color.

### The Cost of the Program

The total cost of the signage was \$12,652.50. That included indoor and outdoor decals, indoor and outdoor signs, floor decals, installation and special removal/cleanup tools for the decals. The County was fortunate that the wayfinding program met the guidelines for funding by the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act). We were able to fund it fully with CARES Act money.

### The Results/Success of the Program

Citizens Assistance has seen a 30 percent decrease in in-person office visits. After the wayfinding initiative was launched, they also had a 40 percent decrease in wayfinding inquiries. In essence, the program cut down on the number of people who needed assistance in finding their destinations, a clear indicator that people are utilizing the maps, arrows and decals and finding their endpoint more efficiently.

### Worthiness of Award

Stafford County had a problem – visitors were struggling to find destinations on the Government campus in a timely, efficient way. Buildings and offices were not clearly marked. As well, we have visitors who speak multiple languages. We devised a creative idea to guide visitors by using colors no matter what language they speak. It significantly improved the experience for visitors and made it easier for them to do business with us. It filled the gap for needed directions, and the results were measurable – fewer people ask for directions, and people are commonly spotted using the big campus maps outside. We were responsible for the

funding of this program by accessing the CARES Act funding and not incurring repeat expenses for the County. For all these reasons, this program is a prime example of a NACo Achievement Award, one that other localities would easily replicate.

### Supplemental Materials

Click here to read a press release about the signs and to watch a video with details:

[https://staffordcountyva.gov/news\\_detail\\_T5\\_R424.php](https://staffordcountyva.gov/news_detail_T5_R424.php)

### Executive Summary

Patrons visiting the Stafford County Government campus are confronted with multiple buildings housing more than 20 departments, courts and public safety offices. Before COVID, most visitors stopped by the volunteer desk in the lobby or the Citizens Assistance Office to ask for directions. Typically, a few destinations were the most requested, like the courts and the Treasurer's Office. During COVID, it became more urgent to facilitate visitors directly to their destination and limit interaction with staff and volunteers. Stafford's Office of Community Engagement and the Citizen's Assistance Office worked together to devise a series of color-coded signs on the walls and floors to better direct visitors. The color-coded signs were tied to two large "You Are Here" maps, like the interpretive signs you see at parks, near the entrance to the Government Center and the courts. The signs were super successful, reducing the numbers of lost patrons and helping them arrive on time to appointments, especially to court. The system was fairly inexpensive to design and would be easy to replicate. Most importantly, it had a big impact on assisting visitors.

## **Brief Overview of the Program**

Elementary school-like colored directional arrows solved Stafford's problem of minimizing visitor contact during COVID while helping visitors conduct business quickly and efficiently. Decals were placed along the floors in different colors for the most visited departments in Stafford's Government Center. Outside, arrows were painted on sidewalks to help direct visitors.

Two large interpretive "You Are Here" maps of the campus were also placed at the main entry points from the parking lot. Visitors could plan their route before entering the building and follow the colored decals, like a yellow brick road. This effort was a tremendous aid during COVID, speeding visitors along and limiting exposure. After COVID, it was super helpful in lessening visitor confusion and frustration.