



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 Government
Program Title: " Stafford Cares " Program Becomes Vehicle for County to Support the Community
Program Category: Health and Human Services

CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: Shannon Eubanks
Title: Community Engagement Manager
Department: Community Engagement
Telephone: 540-658-4893 Website: www.staffordcountyva.gov
Email: seubanks@staffordcountyva.gov

SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Donna Krauss
Title: Deputy County Administrator
Signature: *Donna S. Krauss*

Title: "Stafford Cares" Program Becomes Vehicle for County to Support the Community

Challenge Faced

The Coronavirus epidemic impacted residents in Stafford County, Virginia, and across the world in ways that no one could have predicted. Stafford wanted to go above and beyond existing services because the community's needs were so extraordinary. The national lockdown decimated the service industry and the workers who populate it. Paychecks were impacted, and an emotional toll was taken as people were isolated at home. Stafford needed to find a way to help alleviate the suffering of its residents and businesses.

This nomination offered an innovative way to help multiple groups affected financially by COVID: restaurants, needy people and those struggling with mental health. Stafford came up with a way to benefit both restaurants, their employees and SNAP recipients by using a grant to purchase gift cards to give to the needy. This program had never been done before. But this was the time to inject cash into restaurants when they most needed it and to help those hungry.

The Stafford Cares program also promoted intergovernmental cooperation because the County Government worked with the local Rappahannock Area Community Services Board to alert residents to access mental health access. Increased suicides prompted this action during COVID and a desire to reach people quickly where the suicides seemed to be happening.

In these efforts, Stafford created an umbrella program for an unlimited and diverse array of programs to show the public that the County cares. These programs would be easy to replicate, especially during a crisis like COVID.

Description of the Program

"Supporting Restaurants and Families in Need

The first initiative of the Stafford Cares program was "Supporting Restaurants and Families in Need." Stafford's Board of Supervisors wanted to help local restaurants and their employees, all severely impacted financially by the virus. Simultaneously, the virus is compounding the troubles of people already experiencing food insecurity. With the board's support, the Economic Development Department devised an innovative idea to help both restaurants and the needy. They secured a nearly \$800,000 Community Development Block Grant to fund "Supporting Restaurants and Families in Need." Stafford County restaurants were asked to apply online with Stafford's Economic Development Department. Economic Development will purchase gift cards from restaurants upwards of \$7,500 from Stafford restaurants.

In turn, the Department of Social Services distributed the gift cards to households currently participating in the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program, also known as SNAP. Stafford was able to support 50 restaurants and over 3,500 SNAP recipients. Each recipient received two gift cards of \$97.63 to a local restaurant. It generated around \$14,645 in revenue for each restaurant. The program helped restaurants supplement the SNAP recipients' food budgets and gave them new experiences during the pandemic.

Mental Health Resource Signs and Window Clings

The next effort of the program was to address the impact on mental health in the County. Unfortunately, there was an uptick in suicides as the pandemic progressed, some in County

parks. The County wanted to ensure people knew help was available and how to reach it easily. Stafford partnered with the Rappahannock Area Community Services Board (RACSB) to promote better mental health. Signs were designed that featured the phone number for the RACSB's 24-hour, seven-day-a-week crisis line. The signs read, "You are not alone. Help is Here," and featured the Stafford Cares logo.

Signs were posted in Stafford's parks and County facilities parking lots. Additionally, window clings were created with similar information. The clings were sent to 350 Stafford businesses with requests to post them in a visible location. The plan is to make the crisis number as visible as possible.

The program is overseen by Stafford's Deputy County Administrator, who oversees the County's Human Services Department and its Office of Community Engagement. The Deputy is very engaged with mental health support organizations and has the staff resources to create frameworks for new efforts. Direct mail, social media, press releases, signage and videos are all used to disseminate the Stafford Care mission.

Health professionals agree that they are only seeing initial mental health impacts of the pandemic and believe the pandemic and lockdown will affect people in different ways for years to come. Stafford intends to continue using the Stafford Cares program to meet community needs as they are identified, emphasizing mental health.

The next big push will be for residents to be "Good Neighbors" and to use their connections and relationships to extend Stafford's ability to support wellness in the community.

Advancing Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

One lesson of the pandemic was that COVID disproportionately impacted people of color and the economically insecure. Each initiative of the Stafford Cares program is designed with those community segments in mind.

The Cost of the Program

Supporting Restaurants and Families in Need – Stafford secured a nearly \$800,000 Community Development Block Grant to fund the program. They purchased gift cards in amounts upwards of \$7,500 from restaurants. There were two distributions of cards to families in the amounts of \$75 each.

Mental Health Resource Signs and Window Clings – 350 10" X 10" vinyl window clings were ordered at the cost of \$2.75 each, or \$962.50 total. Another \$1,000 was spent on mailing the clings. The metal signs distributed on county property were \$18 each, and the posts for the signs were \$25. Forty signs were ordered for a total of \$1,720.

The Results/Success of the Program

There were many notes of appreciation to Social Services from recipients. "I greatly appreciate Stafford's generosity." "This is a great idea and VERY much appreciated. Thank you so much." "Thank you very much. You all are the best for this!" On average, the cards generated \$14,465 for restaurants when people were not eating out during the pandemic and restaurants were struggling. It helped restaurants meet their obligations during a trying time.

As for the "You are not alone" signs, it is hard to measure the outcome of that effort as information on calls is confidential. However, Stafford's position is that if one person's life was saved by knowing there is help, that makes the program's cost worthwhile. That was the goal – to get the helpline phone number out to the public. Suicide statistics for the County reduced by 30% from 27 in 2020 to 19 in 2021. So far this year, there has been one suicide to date. And while one suicide is one too many, at least the numbers are tracking in the right direction.

Worthiness of Award

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted everyone in the United States. Stafford County saw the community struggling in 2020 and wanted residents to know that the County was more than just a government authority. The Board of Supervisors and staff wanted to do more to address the two major problems caused by the pandemic – mental health struggles and economic struggles. The County went above and beyond when it was not required or expected. In doing so, the County discovered a new avenue of showing its care for the community in the Stafford Cares program. This system could be used regularly to address problems not specific to its daily business. Stafford County is worthy of the award for its actions to elevate its community during a time of great need. Stafford is deserving of an award for demonstrating a framework other counties can follow. By using funding creatively and innovatively to meet needs, the County is worthy of an award.

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

Executive Summary

Local governments participate in "table-top" exercises or drills to keep skills sharp and prepare for emergencies. No training or experience up to this point could prepare anyone for a worldwide pandemic like the Coronavirus. The Coronavirus pandemic impacted literally every one of Stafford County, Virginia's 156,000 residents. Recognizing the virus may be present in the indeterminate future, Stafford established the "Stafford Cares" program to continue meeting the community's needs. The new program began with a desire to disseminate CARES Act funding. Initially, the County worked with restaurants hurting because of lockdowns to buy gift cards to give to lower-income families who needed supplemental food. As time passed, professionals started to note the mental toll on residents. The County expanded the program to partner with a mental health organization to post signs on county property and businesses to advertise a helpline phone number. Plans are in the works for using the Stafford Cares brand and program to call for residents to be "good neighbors" and reach out to family, friends and neighbors to ensure they are okay. The brand is recognizable, and residents will know Stafford is continuing its efforts to support and care for the community every time it is used.

Brief Overview of the Program

During COVID, local restaurants struggled financially, which trickled down to their employees. At the same time, many SNAP recipients were experiencing more food instability than usual. Stafford devised a "Stafford Cares" plan to use grant money to purchase gift cards from restaurants, inject much-needed cash into them, and give the gift cards to SNAP recipients.

Stafford also noticed an uptick in suicides, particularly on County property. The County partnered with its local community services board to post signs making people aware of a 24-7 crisis hotline. Stafford plans on using the "Stafford Cares" efforts as an umbrella for future efforts to assist the community with immediate needs – mentally and physically.