



SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: July 1, 2023.** 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 Achievement Awards

Let's Talk Albemarle Van: Pop-Ups and Participation

Albemarle County, VA

Executive Summary

Inclusion, accessibility, intention, trust, and creativity are key principles that guide our public engagement efforts. The “Let’s Talk Albemarle” van was designed to build relationships, increase community participation, and create a space for the exchange of information and ideas. Our vision for this project was to employ the practice of creative placemaking for community members to be civically engaged and be regularly invited into communities to create space for residents to share their perspectives and expertise in a street-level context. Let’s Talk Albemarle is an engagement tool that expands our capacity to listen, build trust, and increase public participation.

Designed to meet people where they are, the mobile field office is an innovative approach to providing public engagement opportunities in outdoor locations. The big, and unmistakable, yellow and white van “pops-up” in a variety of locations to share information, distribute materials, and host project-based community conversations and workshops. The van helps us increase connection with our community in an accessible, fun, and creative way.

Launched during the pandemic, the Let’s Talk Albemarle van was a key component of our engagement efforts. Starting with the drive-thru distribution of masks and community outreach kits, the van created a convenient and safe place for community members to receive information about County assistance efforts, CDC guidance, and supplies like masks and sanitizer.

The goals for this community engagement effort include:

- Conduct Outreach and Share Information
- Create Inclusive, Welcoming, and Delightful Opportunities to Engage
- Reduce Barriers to Participation
- Build Relationships with Community Members
- Foster New Collaboration & Partnership Opportunities

In Albemarle County, the Let's Talk Albemarle van has increased the visibility of local government around the county, increased the public's awareness and participation of local government projects and programs, and has helped us build relationships in new ways. Since its launch in April 2021, the van reached thousands of community members over 50 pop-ups in 30 locations, on a budget of \$100,000 (to acquire, upfit, and outfit the van).

Brief Overview

Reducing barriers to participation is essential for promoting equity, fostering community engagement, and building a more inclusive and vibrant society. Building relationships with community members is also crucial to foster new collaboration and partnership opportunities. This can lead to a more engaged and active citizenry, which can result in a stronger and more resilient community over time.

The Let's Talk Albemarle community engagement field office van seeks to define the Albemarle County approach to community engagement as inclusive, accessible, welcoming, and creative. Hosting "pops-up" in locations where people already are, such as gas stations, laundromats, and community festivals, the engagement team designs activities that are intentional and customized to each location and community.

Overall, the Let's Talk Albemarle project has successfully held over 50 pop-ups in more than 30 locations and met thousands of community members across Albemarle County since April 2021, demonstrating the desire to listen, collaborate, and trust in the community. Operating on a tight budget of \$100,000, the project has made community engagement accessible and inclusive.

Narrative

Inclusion, accessibility, intention, trust, and creativity are key principles that guide our public engagement efforts. The “Let’s Talk Albemarle” van was designed to build relationships, increase community participation, and create a space for the exchange of information and ideas. Our vision for this project was to employ the practice of creative placemaking to for community members to be civically engaged and be regularly invited into communities to create space for residents to share their perspectives and expertise in a street-level context. Let’s Talk Albemarle is an engagement tool that expands our capacity to listen, build trust, and increase public participation.

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Conduct Outreach and Share Information

		
<p><i>Launched during the pandemic, the van was an important tool used to distribute important information.</i></p>	<p><i>The engagement team invites staff and partner organizations to showcase flyers and information at pop-ups.</i></p>	<p><i>Outreach kits adorn the side of the van at a cultural festival.</i></p>

Knowing that not all community members subscribe to our communication channels like email newsletters and social media, we provide Community Outreach Kits that include relevant information and resources. Each pop-up event is an opportunity to share objective and clear information to build

community understanding about County projects and programs. Our engagement team actively seeks new and relevant flyers from project teams within the County and partner organizations.

Create Inclusive, Welcoming, and Delightful Opportunities to Engage

		
<p>Question of the day invites people to stop by. The question changes based on the pop-up purpose.</p>	<p>The playful “conversation dice” is also an option. Participants roll the dice to determine which question they get to answer.</p>	<p>Participants can chat with staff or write their answer on the van.</p>
		
<p>Community members writing their answers to the Question of the Day. Responses are recorded and shared with staff.</p>	<p>The van is equipped with auxiliary batteries to power a snow cone machine, speakers, and a WiFi hotspot</p>	<p>One response to the Question of the Day “What do you wish for the future of Albemarle County?”</p>




Meeting people where they are, in an unexpected and nontraditional format, can be a delightful customer experience. Some tactics we employ at pop-ups include:

- “Question of the Day” conversation prompt
 - The van wrap is designed to be a mobile workshop. The design is made up of large speech bubbles which provide space for community members to write their ideas or responses in

wet erase marker directly onto the van. This encourages others to participate and makes for a fun experience.

- Conversation Dice
 - Six-sided dice with dry erase sides enable us to create a game in which participants roll the dice, read the prompt that ends up on top, and then respond to that prompt – either verbally or writing directly on the van.
- Creative Placemaking
 - We know that responding to questionnaires is not the most exhilarating part of the day, so we liven the mood and draw attention to the work with snow cones and upbeat music. The van was designed with an eye-catching yellow and white wrap. We have an awning that pops out and green Astro-turf carpet to put out when we're on a paved surface.
 - Creates space for more diverse perspectives, new relationships, and new ideas. Provide opportunities for public engagement beyond the virtual and in-building.

Reduce Barriers to Participation

		
<i>Pop-up at a parking lot adjacent to bike route</i>	<i>Pop-up at a busy gas station</i>	<i>Pop-up at a summertime cultural festival</i>

Reducing barriers to participation is crucial because it promotes inclusivity and ensures that everyone has an equal opportunity to engage and contribute to their community. By removing obstacles that

prevent people from participating, we can create a more diverse and representative group of individuals who can bring their unique perspectives and experiences to the table. Albemarle County has a large geographic footprint of 726 square miles. The county is made up of 95% rural areas and 5% urbanized area. This physical distance presents challenges to participation.

The Let’s Talk Albemarle van equips us to reduce transportation and time barriers by visiting locations where people already are, like gas stations, laundromats, parks, farmers markets, and community festivals. The van is equipped with a WiFi router to enable visitors to connect to the internet. We reduce language barriers by offering translated materials and interpreters on site. We also design activities for kids that relate to the topic of the day so caregivers can participate while the kids have something to do.

Build Relationships with Community Members

		
<p><i>Pop-up to share ideas for a nearby recycling and waste service center</i></p>	<p><i>Pop-up to share ideas for a nearby transportation corridor</i></p>	<p><i>Pop-up in a park to share information about trail planning and host a trail clean-up</i></p>

Building relationships takes time. This project opens the door to new conversations and new relationships. Over time this will lead to greater efficiency and quality in project-based public engagement efforts.

Foster New Collaboration & Partnership Opportunities

If you happen upon a pop-up, you will encounter vibrant conversations. This is by design, and leads to invitations to collaborate, new community partnerships, and new ideas. Within the Albemarle County organization, the Let’s Talk Albemarle van is being recognized as a valuable tool to increase awareness

of, and community involvement in, local government projects. Since April 2021, the engagement team has collaborated with ten departments and several local organizations.

Costs

This engagement project operated on a tight budget of \$100,000 that included the Ford Transit van and customization, workshop materials (clipboards, markers, paper, one tablet, magnetized flyer holders for side of van, projector, speaker, screen, sandwich board, tables, chairs, astroturf floor covering), and *Let's Talk Albemarle* branded t-shirts for staff to wear and be easily identified by community members.

Reflections

Since April 2021 we have hosted over 50 pop-ups in more than 30 locations and met thousands of community members across Albemarle County. We have held project-based workshops, distributed flyers and community outreach kits, asked and answered questions, and learned from our community in ways we would not have been able to if we asked our community to come to the County Office Building. The visible presence we have out and about in the community has demonstrated our desire to listen, our trust in the community, and how local government values civic engagement.