



## 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: County of Henrico  
Program Title: The Freeman Project: Student Leadership Through Service  
Program Category: Health and Human Services

### 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**

The Freeman Project is a student-led organization created in the fall of 2016 to better the learning environment at Douglas Southall Freeman High School in Henrico County Public Schools in Henrico County, Virginia. Members meet every other day during school hours to work on projects that have been requested by school faculty or created by students individually. As a team, the students work together on many projects, big and small. Every student enrolled has the ability to incorporate their ideas and creativity while brainstorming different projects. Teachers and faculty often request help with projects within their classrooms. The focus is to blend meaningful community involvement into the classroom environment. Service learning provides opportunities for students to become leaders in their school and implement their passions into projects to benefit their community.

## **Problem/Challenge/Situation Faced by Locality**

This project started eight years ago as a need arose as a volunteer service for small projects such as trash cleanup and minor teacher requests. However, it quickly grew in support and influence, and in no time, it became a legitimate service-based class known as the “Freeman Project.” This student-led project began to tackle a range of problems at Douglas Freeman High School. As time passed, participants still handled day-to-day responsibilities but also took on more complicated projects. The Freeman Project created all the raised flower beds and the learning garden in the front of the school. More recently, participants took out a section of lockers and transformed the space into a community bookshelf to provide the library with extra space for donated books. In a school, there’s always a need for additional assistance and a way to support the community. That’s what the Freeman Project is about – lending a hand and bettering our school community.

## **How Program Fulfilled Awards Criteria**

The framework for the Freeman Project enables students to become leaders within their classroom, school community and beyond. This unique style of service learning complements the commonwealth of Virginia’s high-quality work-based learning component. This project uses a wide variety of learning skills, including planning, implementation, negotiation with businesses, presentations and skills students need to become successful after high school. The Freeman Project incorporates the four major learning styles: visual, auditory, reading/writing and kinesthetic learning. Combining so many learning styles opens the project to all students, enabling students to thrive mentally and physically.

### **How Program Was Carried Out**

The Freeman Project is dedicated to improving the school and community through volunteer service. The Freeman Project's motto is "Inspire, Improve, Connect," highlighting the key values and objectives of the program. Every other day at Douglas Freeman High School, 25-30 students meet for a class period to work on various projects around the school. Through the course of the school year, each member will accumulate more than 100 hours of community service.

The project was founded to give students an opportunity to serve their school and community while allowing them to implement their own creative perspectives and ideas. In addition to providing students with opportunities, the Freeman Project helps alleviate school faculty burdens, for example, after discovering that teachers rarely had the chance to empty their recycling bins in every classroom and office in the school. Teachers frequently enlist Freeman Project members to help with tasks, such as organizing phone extensions for teachers, sorting through and conducting inventory on closets, art and construction projects and moving furniture. The Freeman project recognized the heavy load of responsibility on teachers and faculty members to accomplish a healthy and exciting learning environment; this project relieves teachers of concerns when possible.

The Freeman Project primarily focuses on improving the physical learning environment of the school. This includes repairing, renovating and creating different aspects of the school. Members of the organization frequently participate in groundskeeping activities, including repairing windscreens on our sports fields, maintaining gardens and weeding paths around the school. Students have also helped clean trophy cases and pick up trash in and around the school. Such activities are left undone by faculty members or done too rarely due to a lack of time.

The Freeman Project particularly excels at its ability to identify problems or opportunities for improvement, then innovate and execute creative solutions to them. Students have completed many project ideas conceived, planned and then executed entirely by the group. For example, past students created war memorials for former Douglas Freeman students killed while serving in the military. Freeman Project students used their woodworking skills to create benches, shelves and bus boards for the school.

The program has also done work outside of Douglas Freeman— part of the "connect" in the club's motto. Students baked and delivered cookies to a retirement home during the COVID-19

pandemic. The club has also reached out to other schools, installing basketball nets at Maybeury Elementary School and cleaning up the playground at Tuckahoe Elementary School, both feeder schools to Douglas Freeman High School.

### **Financing and Staffing**

This project is entirely self-funded, relying on donors for supplies or materials. The program has no essential operating costs and has funded every project with its own funds. The Freeman Project primarily provides labor and uses existing supplies when possible. Tools, building materials and art supplies have been either gifted to the Freeman Project or purchased with donations. Community partners, such as Luck Stone, aid in supplying the Freeman Project with 14 tons of crushed stone. When possible, the Freeman Project participants reuse supplies around the school — for example, salvaging wood from unused pallets. The program has run fundraisers, such as selling shirts and spirit nights at local restaurants to help fund projects. One of the most successful fundraisers has been building an outdoor classroom, for which over \$10,000 has been raised. Freeman Project members plan to partner with local landscaping businesses, the HCPS career and technical education programs, Advanced Career Education Center students and Douglas Freeman students who wish to learn more about the construction and trade industries. Through partnerships and fundraising efforts, all projects are completed at no cost to the school.

### **Program Results**

In its eight years of service, the Freeman Project has successfully established a respected reputation for its work. Teachers frequently reach out for assistance and request projects from club members. Students have built strong relationships with teachers and faculty members through their service in the Freeman Project, strengthening their connection to the community. Members regularly add to the large portfolio of projects the program has built. Projects like the Veterans and War Memorial, the school's learning garden and the upkeep of many projects around the school are evidence of the Freeman Project's impact. Incorporating Advanced Career Education students into the Freeman Project will allow cross-curricular teaching and learning.

### **Brief Summary**

The Freeman Project has become incredibly successful because of its commitment to community involvement, service learning and positive impact. The "Inspire, Improve, Connect" motto isn't just catchy wordplay, but instead a direct guideline for the impact that these students have on the school community and beyond. The students are able to address problems from the smallest

scale to ones much larger, and students involved in the Freeman Project are learning tangible skills that are difficult to attain when not in a service-based setting. The physical tasks are valuable on their own, but the Freeman Project takes this type of learning to another level when considering the collaboration and strategy involved in taking these many projects to fruition, whether that's working with local companies, collaborating with ACE Center students, or raising tens of thousands of dollars for whatever mission comes next. The Freeman Project has become core to Douglas S. Freeman High School and can serve as a blueprint for service learning at HCPS and beyond.

## The Freeman Project: Student Leadership Through Service Supplemental Material

Please view our Outdoor Classroom Presentation, shared with businesses and boards for support of the project:

[https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1LJEYr\\_XkN5BBM31msbAenWRRqbRMIP80Q17faJp04Gc/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1LJEYr_XkN5BBM31msbAenWRRqbRMIP80Q17faJp04Gc/edit?usp=sharing)



