



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: Prince William County

Program Title: Seals on Wheels

Program Category: Criminal Justice & Public Safety; Customer Service; Information Technology; Organizational Development; Regional Collaboration

CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: Jacqueline C. Smith

Title: Clerk of the Circuit Court

Department: Clerk of the Circuit Court

Telephone: 703-792-4787 Website: www.pwcva.gov/department/circuit-court

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SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Christopher J. Shorter

Title: County Executive

Signature: 



Circuit Court Clerk

Prince William, Manassas & Manassas Park

9311 Lee Avenue, Third Floor, Manassas, Virginia 20110

www.pwcva.gov/department/circuit-court

(703) 792-6015 circuitcourt@pwcgov.org

Jacqueline C. Smith, Circuit Court Clerk

Kristina L. Gleason, Chief Deputy Clerk

June 26, 2023

Sent Via Email

Gage Harter

Director of Communications

Virginia Association of Counties

gharter@vaco.org

Re: Application for Virginia Association of Counties Achievement Awards

Dear Mr. Harter:

Please find attached hereto our application for the 2023 Virginia Association of Counties Achievement Awards including a Submission Form, Entry, Executive Summary and Brief Overview. Thank you for your consideration. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any questions.

Sincerely yours,

Jacqueline C. Smith
Clerk of the Circuit Court

THE CHALLENGE

Prince William County is big. The Circuit Court Clerk's Office serves as the gatekeeper to the exercise of basic Constitutional rights for more than 550,000 residents spread over 361 square miles. These rights include owning property, getting married, carrying a gun, and more. In Prince William County, 61% of the working population commute an average of 40 minutes per day to work in and around Washington, DC.

The Clerk's Office is located in the geographic center of the jurisdiction, far from the two main commuter arteries in the region, and the Judicial Center in which we operate is only open during weekday working hours. This means that residents who wanted to exercise their basic rights needed to take time away from work and/or travel a considerable time and distance to do so, as the Code of Virginia frequently requires in-person application. This impact was particularly profound for residents who work on an hourly wage or who do not own a vehicle. For these members of the community, every hour away from work impacts their ability to support their families. If they need to utilize public transportation, residents must spend up to 3 hours travelling each way, making a visit to the Judicial Center a full day affair.

Due to the foregoing, a large portion of the population was not afforded equal access to justice. With nearly insurmountable challenges in accessing the Judicial Center, a significant number of our constituents were deprived of their rights guaranteed by the constitution.

OUR SOLUTION

We bring the Judicial Center to you. On August 20, 2022, the Clerk of the Circuit Court launched *Seals on Wheels*, a first of its kind mobile clerk's office. *Seals on Wheels* is a fully operational clerk's office on wheels with four customer service stations. Every function performed by the Clerk's Office in the Judicial Center can be performed utilizing *Seals on Wheels*.

Seals on Wheels started by visiting community events across the county on Saturdays providing services to our constituents to the extent allowed by the Code of Virginia and also distributing free gun locks. With a great reception from the community and hundreds of residents served in a matter of weeks, we expanded the program to add a monthly event, twice monthly in busier seasons, held in various magisterial districts.

We have pulled together a cohort of seventeen (17) county agencies who work with us during each event. These agencies attend our events and share their own outreach displays, information, and activities. This allows us to promote all the great services and activities the county government offers to our residents without requiring each agency to organize multiple events. We also host a charitable activity for our events each month. For example, we hosted a food drive in June and we are hosting a backpack drive in July. These charitable activities are geared towards the needs of the communities we visit that month and the proceeds are kept within those communities.

By bringing the Judicial Center to our residents on a schedule convenient to them, we have closed a significant gap in access to justice in our community.

UNEXPECTED BENEFITS

We provide security in uncertain times. The primary objective of *Seals on Wheels* is to provide equal access to justice to our underserved communities. However, we have capitalized on the unexpected benefit of a fully operational response unit in case of disaster. Using her experiences as a relief attorney in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, the Clerk has worked to anticipate the needs of the community in such a situation.

For example, to receive federal relief funding in the case of a natural disaster, residents require documents to prove ownership of their property. *Seals on Wheels* can be deployed within hours to provide these documents to anyone who needs them. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has proposed a partnership with our office to create a plan that would allow other jurisdictions

to replicate our program. In the meantime, Seals on Wheels is available for loan to other jurisdictions within the Commonwealth.

HOW WE DO IT

At no cost to the County or the taxpayer. The project is funded by the Clerk's Technology Trust Fund maintained by the State Compensation Board. All Circuit Court Clerks in the Commonwealth have access to these funds upon application. Utilizing this funding makes it possible to replicate this program in jurisdictions across the Commonwealth.

We started small, participating in existing community events with a computer and a folding table. We used the events to analyze which services were most in demand, where these services were in demand, and to simultaneously develop relationships with other county agencies looking to widen their community outreach. Once we understood specific needs, we made our grant application and began investment in building out the mobile office vehicle. Upon completion of the vehicle build out, with solid relationships in our agency cohort, we were ready to launch our dedicated "service fairs".

Since August 20, 2022, we have assisted hundreds Prince William County Residents with marriage licenses, gun permits, record copies and more. We have also distributed 159 free gun locks and promoted our local government services and support with our neighbors. These numbers reinforce the need for these services in various parts of our community outside regular business hours. By bringing the Judicial Center to our residents on a schedule convenient to them, we have closed a significant gap in access to justice in our community.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Circuit Court Clerk's Office serves as the gatekeeper to the exercise of basic Constitutional rights. These rights include owning property, getting married, carrying a gun, and more. In Prince William County, 61% of the working population commute an average of 40 minutes per day to work outside of the county. Residents who want to exercise their basic rights at the Judicial Center must take time away from work and/or travel a considerable time and distance to do so, as the Code of Virginia frequently requires in-person application. For residents earning an hourly wage, every hour away from work impacts their ability to support their families. For residents who utilize public transportation, the trip to the Judicial Center takes up to 3 hours each way. Due to the foregoing, a large portion of the population was not afforded equal access to justice. With nearly insurmountable challenges in accessing the Judicial Center, a significant number of our constituents were deprived of their rights guaranteed by the constitution.

On August 20, 2022, the Clerk of the Circuit Court launched *Seals on Wheels*, a first of its kind mobile clerk's office. *Seals on Wheels* is a fully operational clerk's office on wheels with four (4) customer service stations. Every function performed by the Clerk's Office in the Judicial Center can be performed utilizing *Seals on Wheels*. *Seals on Wheels* visits communities across the county on Saturdays providing services to our constituents to the extent allowed by the Code of Virginia. We distribute free gun locks, issue marriage licenses, process gun permit applications, provide copies of deeds and other records, and more. We have brought together a cohort of seventeen (17) county agencies who work with us during each event and host multiple charitable activities to benefit the community we are visiting that month. The program provides the added benefit of being on location in case of a natural disaster allowing partnership with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). By bringing the Judicial Center to our residents on their schedule and when they need us most, we have closed a significant gap in access to justice in our community.

BRIEF OVERVIEW

On August 20, 2022, Jacqueline C. Smith, Clerk of the Circuit Court for Prince William County, launched *Seals on Wheels*, a first of its kind mobile clerk's office. *Seals on Wheels* is a fully operational clerk's office on wheels with four (4) customer service stations. Every function performed by the Clerk's Office in the Judicial Center can be performed utilizing *Seals on Wheels*. *Seals on Wheels* visits communities across the county on Saturdays providing services to our constituents to the extent allowed by the Code of Virginia. We distribute free gun locks, issue marriage licenses, process gun permit applications, provide copies of deeds and other records, and more. We have brought together a cohort of seventeen (17) county agencies who work with us during each event and host multiple charitable activities to benefit the community we are visiting that month. The program provides the added benefit of being on location in case of a natural disaster allowing partnership with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

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Seals on Wheels

Bridging a Gap in Access to Justice
in Prince William County

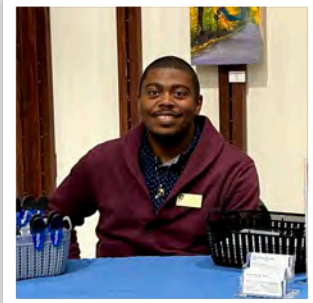
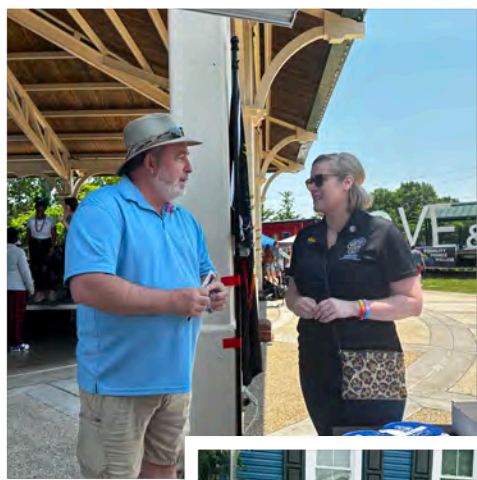


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I finally changed my name thanks to Seals on Wheels! I've been wanting to do this for a while. I'm so thankful I didn't have to take a day off from work to do this —thank you!



Seals on Wheels was able to help us get our marriage license and finalize the legal side of our marriage. Timing is really hard with our schedules- this has been really helpful. We can't thank you enough!

Contact:



CircuitCourt@pwcgov.org



www.pwcva.gov/department/circuit-court