



SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: July 1, 2024.** 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: Smyth County
Program Title: Smyth Promise
Program Category: Community & Economic Development

CONTACT INFORMATION

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SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Shawn M. Utt
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SMYTH PROMISE: Empowering Future Generations through Education

Background of Identified Problem

The Smyth County Promise program represents a transformative initiative aimed at addressing the educational and workforce development needs of Smyth County, Virginia. Developed through a collaborative effort between the Smyth County Board of Supervisors, the Smyth County Community Foundation, Virginia Highlands Community College (VHCC), and Wytheville Community College (WCC), this innovative scholarship program is designed to provide tuition-free access to higher education for local high school graduates.

Smyth County faces significant challenges related to post-secondary education and workforce development. Many students, particularly in rural areas, lack access to affordable higher education and technical training programs essential for meeting the demands of the modern workforce. The Smyth County Promise program directly addresses these challenges by offering a "last-dollar" scholarship, covering tuition costs not met by other financial aid sources, thereby eliminating financial barriers to post-secondary education.

Program Category

Community & Economic Development



Smyth County Board of Supervisors
Ph. (276) 783-3298 | Fax (276) 783-9314 | www.smythcounty.org

Executive Summary

Starting with the class of 2023, graduates from any Smyth County public, private, or home school are eligible for the Smyth County Promise scholarship. The program is applicable at VHCC and WCC for up to six consecutive semesters, depending on the student's course of study. To qualify, students must complete a straightforward three-step process: apply for college enrollment, submit a FAFSA application, and complete the scholarship application with their chosen community college.

The impact of the Smyth County Promise program is profound. By facilitating easier access to education and training, the program empowers students to pursue careers in diverse fields, from healthcare to skilled trades. This initiative not only enhances individual career prospects but also strengthens Smyth County's workforce and economic vitality. Additionally, the program emphasizes community engagement through a requirement of 10 volunteer hours per semester, fostering civic responsibility among scholarship recipients. Leadership from VHCC, WCC, and local officials including the Smyth County Board of Supervisors, Smyth County School Board and the Smyth County Community Foundation have expressed enthusiastic support for the program. They recognize its role in advancing educational attainment and workforce readiness within the county, aligning with broader goals of improving health, wellness, and education.

The Smyth County Promise program stands as a testament to the commitment of local stakeholders to invest in the future of Smyth County's youth. By providing financial support and removing barriers to higher education, the program ensures that every high school graduate in Smyth County can achieve their academic and career aspirations. This initiative not only transforms individual lives but also contributes to the long-term prosperity and resilience of Smyth County as a whole.



Award Criteria

Innovative Solution to Promote Higher Education Access

Smyth County and the collaborative partners who brought the Smyth Promise program to life, understand the importance of a skilled and ready workforce in our community. Access to continuing education beyond high school is increasingly essential in addressing the demand for skilled trade labor, a sector crucial to economic growth and infrastructure development. Statistics underscore this urgency, revealing a significant shortage of skilled workers in industries such as construction, manufacturing, and healthcare. Despite this demand, many students face barriers due to limited funding programs available for college or post-secondary education. This lack of financial support often discourages prospective students from pursuing vocational training or technical programs that could lead to fulfilling careers in high-demand fields. By expanding access to funding and educational opportunities, we can bridge this gap, empower more individuals to acquire specialized skills and meet the evolving needs of industries vital to our economy's prosperity.

The Smyth County Board of Supervisors, Smyth County Community Foundation, and the educational partners truly understand that education is not just a personal investment but also a communal one, as it cultivates a skilled and knowledgeable workforce that drives economic growth and innovation. By offering tuition assistance, communities enable individuals from diverse backgrounds to pursue higher education or technical training, regardless of their financial circumstances. This support fosters upward mobility, reduces economic disparities, and enhances the overall quality of life within the community. Moreover, educated individuals are more likely to contribute positively to society, whether through civic engagement, entrepreneurship, or professional expertise, thereby enriching the fabric of the community. Ultimately, Smyth Promise serves as a catalyst for long-term prosperity and social equity, ensuring that talent and potential are not limited by financial constraints.

This initiative represents a pivotal investment in the future of our youth, ensuring they have access to essential skills, certifications, and degrees critical for career success and community prosperity.



Promoting Intergovernmental Cooperation

The Smyth County Promise exemplifies effective collaboration between local government, community foundations, and educational institutions. By partnering with VHCC and WCC, Smyth County leverages state and local resources to maximize educational opportunities. This partnership not only addresses workforce development needs but also fosters a supportive environment where educational attainment is prioritized and accessible to all graduates, regardless of their financial background.

Firstly, the Smyth County Promise program, administered through partnerships with Virginia Highlands Community College (VHCC) and Wytheville Community College (WCC), demonstrates effective cooperation between local educational institutions and state-level community colleges. This collaboration ensures that eligible students in Smyth County receive the necessary financial assistance and academic support to pursue higher education.

In addition to the partnerships mentioned above, further programs have been established out of the creation of the Smyth Promise initiative. The *Teachers for Tomorrow* program, born out of a brainstorming with the Smyth County School Superintendent exemplifies a collaborative effort that promotes intergovernmental and inter-agency cooperation to address critical needs in education. At its core, *Teachers for Tomorrow* builds upon the foundation laid by the Smyth Promise program, which itself involves partnerships between local, state, and educational entities.

Building on this framework, *Teachers for Tomorrow* extends cooperation to local school districts, state education departments, and federal entities involved in education policy and funding. The program engages local school systems to identify talented students interested in becoming future educators and provides them with targeted mentorship and coursework. This collaboration with local schools ensures that the program meets the specific needs of the community and prepares aspiring teachers to excel in local educational settings.

Providing a Model for Others

The Smyth Promise offers a replicable model for other localities seeking to enhance higher education access and workforce development. The streamlined application process, which includes enrollment at VHCC or WCC, completion of the FAFSA, and scholarship application, ensures simplicity and accessibility for



students and families. By integrating community service requirements, the program not only supports educational goals but also instills civic engagement among future leaders.

Local governments nationwide can adapt and implement similar "last-dollar" scholarship programs to support their youth, boost educational attainment rates, and strengthen the local workforce. The Smyth County Promise serves as a blueprint for innovative educational initiatives that prioritize equity, opportunity, and long-term economic vitality.

Innovative Approach and Customization

While inspired by successful scholarship models elsewhere, the Smyth County Promise is tailored to meet the specific needs and aspirations of Smyth County's students and workforce. By customizing the program to cover tuition gaps and require community service, Smyth County ensures that the initiative not only addresses immediate educational needs but also cultivates a culture of giving back and community involvement among its graduates. This innovative approach positions Smyth County as a leader in educational equity and economic development, setting a standard for impactful local governance nationwide.

Smyth Promise represents a visionary investment in the educational future of our youth and the economic prosperity of our community. By fostering collaboration, removing financial barriers, and promoting civic engagement, Smyth County sets a precedent for transformative educational initiatives that empower students and strengthen communities.

Program Description (the following is a summary extracted from the program marketing materials)

Smyth Promise Scholarship provides full tuition and fees, to Virginia Highlands Community College OR Wytheville Community College, for all qualified residents who graduate from Smyth County Public Schools or attended home school, or private schools in Smyth County, as a "last dollar" scholarship that is applied after all other scholarships, financial aid, and grants are awarded. Requirements for the program are listed below.

Eligibility:

- Open to all graduating Smyth County Public School students, as well as graduates from Smyth County private schools or home schools.



- Students must have been residents of Smyth County for the last two years prior to high school graduation.

Scholarship Details:

- Covers tuition and fees for five of six consecutive semesters at VHCC or WCC, starting from the Summer or Fall semester immediately after high school graduation.
- Recipients can enroll in degree or workforce programs at the colleges.

Academic Requirements:

- Maintain a minimum GPA of 2.0 to receive funding for the second year.

Community Service Requirement:

- Complete 10 hours of community service per semester at approved agencies (list of approved agencies provided).

Application Process:

- Apply to VHCC or WCC and fulfill all admission requirements.
- Complete the Federal Student Aid Form (FAFSA).
- Submit VHCC or WCC's Scholarship Application (applies to the Smyth Promise Scholarship and other scholarships).
- Register for classes at VHCC or WCC.

Program Results

The Smyth Promise program has had a significant impact on the educational opportunities for Smyth County students, providing over 80 scholarships to pursue higher education in the first year. This initiative aimed to reduce financial barriers and encourage local students to pursue their academic goals without the burden of tuition costs, thus promoting educational equity within the community.

In parallel, the *Teachers for Tomorrow* program represents a strategic expansion and evolution of the Smyth Promise initiative. This new program, a collaboration between Smyth County Schools, local community colleges (Wytheville Community College and Virginia Highlands Community College), and Emory & Henry College, specifically targets students interested in becoming educators. It addresses the critical need



for qualified teachers within Smyth County by providing a streamlined pathway from high school to a teaching career.

Key Features of Teachers for Tomorrow (the following is a summary extracted from the program marketing materials)

1. ***Financial Support:*** Students graduating from Smyth County Schools receive free tuition at community colleges (Wytheville and Virginia Highlands) through the Smyth County Promise Scholarship. Emory & Henry College offers reduced tuition of \$7,500 per year for the final two years of their bachelor's degree in teaching.
2. ***Structured Pathway:*** The program is structured as a 1+1+2 model:
 - Year 1: Dual-enrollment classes during senior year of high school and community college coursework (tuition-free).
 - Years 2 and 3: Community college coursework covered by the Smyth Promise Scholarship.
 - Years 3 and 4: Completion of bachelor's degree at Emory & Henry College with reduced tuition (\$15,000 total for both years).
3. ***Educational Partnerships:*** Collaboration between educational institutions (Smyth County Schools, community colleges, and Emory & Henry College) ensures a seamless educational pathway, integrating classroom learning with practical teaching experience within Smyth County Schools.
4. ***Community Impact:*** The program not only addresses the financial barriers to education but also fosters a local pipeline of well-trained educators who are likely to remain in the community, thereby contributing to the long-term educational and social development of Smyth County.



Conclusion

The Smyth Promise program exemplifies proactive community engagement and collaboration among educational stakeholders to enhance educational opportunities and workforce readiness within Smyth County. It serves as a model for leveraging local resources and partnerships to create sustainable pathways to higher education and professional success for students.



#SMYTHSTRONG

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