

PRESS RELEASE



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BEST ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

SMYTH COUNTY | Smyth County Grow | [Read Submission](#)

In response to critical housing shortages, Smyth County embarked on a pioneering initiative using the County's American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to create a mechanism to build a stronger, more sustainable community. The Smyth County Board of Supervisors allocated \$3,000,000 to establish a groundbreaking 0% interest revolving, loan fund in partnership with the Mount Rogers Planning District Commission. This initiative aimed to catalyze the construction of approximately 100 new homes, addressing immediate housing needs while laying the foundation for sustainable community development. Under the leadership of Smyth County Board of Supervisors and in collaboration with the County's community-led ARPA Committee and the Mount Rogers Planning District Commission, the program will administer the funds through a structured revolving loan mechanism. This approach incentivizes developers and landowners to invest in housing projects, ensuring a continual replenishment of funds as homes are built and sold. Such a strategy not only accelerates housing construction but also generates a sustainable funding stream for future community development initiatives. The program's structured financing model ensures a lasting impact, positioning Smyth County as a model for effective rural development strategies. With its comprehensive approach and ambitious goals, Smyth Grow stands poised to achieve lasting generational impact and deserves recognition for its visionary leadership in community development.

BEST SMALL COUNTY ACHIEVEMENT (50,000 or less population)

FLOYD COUNTY | Floyd County Scattered Site Housing Rehab | [Read Submission](#)

Widespread housing rehab needs in rural Floyd County are beginning to be met through a broad and deep collaboration. Houses are rehabbed or replaced to insure they are safe, warm, and dry. Moreover, partners are providing energy efficiency upgrades, private water and septic upgrades, financial counseling, plus flower, shrubs, and tree plantings. Fifteen homes are being rehabbed or replaced at present, but the reach is greater as others are receiving more assistance now, too, thanks to developing partnerships. Floyd is now underway with another planning grant that will help streamline the intake and rehab process and prepare another CDBG Scattered-Site Housing Rehab construction application for submission later in 2024. Determination, creativity, collaboration with experienced partners, and patience have been key to success. The participation of a Board of Supervisor's member on the project management team and another Board member on the Project Oversight Board has also been helpful in keeping the full Board informed and excited. Floyd County thinks this path is replicable in any rural county in Virginia that is dedicated to improving housing, has a committed volunteer base, and is willing to work collaboratively.

BEST LARGE COUNTY ACHIEVEMENT

MONTGOMERY COUNTY | Sensory Museum | [Read Submission](#)

To meet the needs of patrons with disabilities, the Montgomery-Floyd Regional Library launched a Sensory Museum in 2023. The Sensory Museum program is typically held after hours in the library's community room, but it has also been successful during regular operating hours. To best accommodate the needs of the participants, the lights are dimmed to reduce overstimulation from fluorescent lights and calming music is played while utilizing the overhead projector with visually stimulating images. Around the room, patrons can visit stations

containing different tactile or visual sensory experiences such as water beads, rice bins, Zen gardens, kinetic sand, glow painting with black lights, fiber optic and plasma ball lamps, water painting, and a sensory light projector in a tent that shines calming patterns and colors of light onto the canopy of the tent. Occasionally, local therapy dogs participate in the program as well. As they leave, the Sensory Museum program participants may choose a fidget toy as a tool to use in stressful or overwhelming situations. Patrons of all ages have enjoyed this program, remarking that it has been very helpful for their neurodivergent teens and selves. No matter the age, sensory play can bring out a playful side in someone and help them unwind. Due to the positive response to the Sensory Museum, it has been implemented on a semi-regular basis throughout all branches of the MFRL system.

ACHIEVEMENT AWARD WINNERS

ALBEMARLE COUNTY | Human Services Alternative Response Team (HART) Program | [Read Submission](#)

Recognizing that mental health incidents were increasing year-over-year, Albemarle County began rethinking its response approach to behavioral health emergencies to better serve the community. While first responders receive Crisis Intervention Training (CIT) to learn strategies to assist community members in crisis with empathy and understanding, the amount of time spent on these calls for service was taxing on Albemarle County's public safety departments. Albemarle County looked at the data and the needs of the community and formed the Human Services Alternative Response Team, or HART. HART is a multi-disciplinary team managed by the Department of Human Services in close collaboration with the police and fire rescue departments. HART is not a service that residents can directly request or call; team members proactively stay informed on behavioral health calls and initiate a response and follow-up when necessary. This response model offers an opportunity for law enforcement, behavioral health providers, and emergency services personnel to work together to respond and provide crisis support and to followup with connection to services and navigation. In its first six months of deployment, HART responded to nearly 150 individuals in varying states of behavioral crisis. The majority of those calls for service involved multiple follow-up contacts. As of June 2024, the team has

served 379 individuals in the community, 331 of which were suffering from a mental health crisis and another 48 struggling with substance use. This data underscores just how important this new team is to respond to the needs of Albemarle County.

AMHERST COUNTY | Amherst County Burn Building | [Read Submission](#)

The story of the Amherst County's new training facility for live fire training is a testament to the community's dedication and collaboration for enhancing fire safety and preparedness. Overall, the Amherst County training facility stands as a shining example of community collaboration and proactive investment in public safety infrastructure.

ARLINGTON COUNTY | Regional Fair Housing Plan | [Read Submission](#)

The Virginia counties of Arlington, Fairfax, Loudoun, and Prince William and the City of Alexandria joined forces with their peer jurisdictions in the District of Columbia and Maryland to develop the Metropolitan Washington Regional Fair Housing Plan to deliver on the promise of the Fair Housing Act. Persistent patterns of segregation and unequal access to opportunity, while evident at the County level, are more clearly understood by looking at these issues from a regional perspective. This is the first Regional Fair Housing Plan for the metropolitan Washington region in over 25 years and participating jurisdictions committed to a shared set of goals to further fair housing across the region. These goals aim to increase the supply of affordable housing, reform zoning and land use policies, prevent the displacement of vulnerable populations, increase homeownership, protect individuals' housing rights, reduce housing barriers for persons with disabilities, and expand access and affordability of public transportation. The project team engaged with more than 1,200 agencies, groups, and individuals between July 2021 and March 2022 to ensure issues and concerns throughout the region were addressed in the plan. In September 2023, the plan received full approval by all participating jurisdictions. Since the plan's creation, Arlington reformed its zoning to allow for missing middle housing and expanded housing protections to include source of funds; Fairfax County enacted zoning reforms to enable Accessory Living Units and created an Affordable

Housing Preservation Policy; Loudoun County established a set aside of one-half penny of tax revenue for attainable housing and conveyed a county-owned property to a nonprofit for the development attainable housing; and Prince William County established an Affordable Housing Office and committed to providing \$21 million to promote the construction of affordable housing units.

ARLINGTON COUNTY | Vision Zero Program | [Read Submission](#)

Vision Zero is an internationally recognized strategy to eliminate all traffic fatalities and severe injuries while increasing safe, healthy, and equitable mobility for all. In May 2021, the Arlington County Board adopted a five-year Vision Zero Action Plan proposing 90+ action items to improve safety in key target areas and establishing tracking measures to evaluate progress. Arlington's Vision Zero program is an exemplary initiative because of its commitment to fostering community-wide partnerships, equitable and data-driven decision making, and innovation that can be replicated in other localities.

BOTETOURT COUNTY | Setting the Record Straight–BOCO Facts 4 U | [Read Submission](#)

Botetourt County is a rural county located in southwestern Virginia. The county is 548 square miles and is home to approximately 33,500 residents. Communicating effectively and accurately with a diverse population has become a challenge. Local governments play a crucial role in tackling false news, and it's essential for maintaining trust and the well-being of the community. When false news spreads, it can cause panic, spread misinformation about local events, and erode trust in public institutions. Since local governments are closest to the people, they can quickly and effectively address and correct misinformation. By sharing accurate information and keeping communication open, they can prevent the negative impacts of false news, like confusion and division. This proactive approach helps create a well-informed, resilient community that can confidently rely on its local leaders for truthful information.

CHESTERFIELD COUNTY | Enhancing Access to Citizens | [Read Submission](#)

Chesterfield County Community Engagement and Resources in partnership with the Social Services and Economic Development departments through the Workforce Development Committee that also consist of Human Resources, Mental Health, Chesterfield County Public Schools, and local community colleges developed the Learn and Explore with Possibilities (L.E.A.P) program. The program identified gaps in workforce development that can be addressed through programming and wrap around service needs. In 2023, the L.E.A.P program offered workshops that focused on workforce development for young adults, the childcare industry, and our Latino population.

CHESTERFIELD COUNTY | I Never Thought It Would Be Me | [Read Submission](#)

Overdose is the number one cause of death for youth under the age of 25 and in 2023 we estimate that 112,000 people died from overdose and another 48,180 a day from suicide. “I Never Thought It’d Be Me”, part of the Chesterfield County Jail’s Inmate Community Outreach Initiative is a powerful prevention tool aimed at educating youth. 61.2 million people used illicit drugs last year, one in five teens struggle with depression and 75% of those report severe impairment. Only 20% of the people suffering from mental illness or substance use disorder get any kind of help. The best use of our resources is upstream. “I Never Thought I’d Be Me” is an upstream effort with real people, real stories. Our data shows it is impacting students. This program is offered at no cost to the school or community and reaches a diverse group of students across Central Virginia, responding to the cost barriers that often limit access for economically challenged areas. Our team represents a diverse group of individuals consisting of staff and inmates who incorporate a message using real people with real stories to educate youth about the choices they are making. As one student reported, “my first take away was that people in jail or addicts are just real normal people that got put in a crappy situation. I realized that they have a past, they have a story.” The cost of the program is minimal, but the impact is mighty, and any jurisdiction can use its internal resources and model our program. Every life matters and prevention is a vital tool in saving lives. Our motto, one lost is one too many.

CHESTERFIELD COUNTY | Secondary Traumatic Stress Breakthrough Series | [Read Submission](#)

In 2023, Chesterfield County Human Services Division partnered with the University of Kentucky Center for Trauma and Children, to engage in the University's Secondary Stress Breakthrough Series Collaborative (STS-BSC). The goals for the program included: Increasing the capacity of our organization to address STS; Increasing the capacity of our organization to plan and implement improvements that promote staff wellness and resiliency; and Reducing risk of exposure to situations and events that result in STS. Over a 9-month period, departments across the County engaged in baseline data collection assessments to gauge our level of STS, developed actions plans for areas that showed growth needs, participated in learning sessions to expose leaders to a greater understanding of STS, and engaging them in problem-solving that recognized the unique strengths and needs within Chesterfield. Teams from participating departments participated in learning sessions which equipped them with strategies that could be deployed to better support staff who are exposed to and affected by secondary traumatic stress. A post assessment was administered at the end of the collaborative series demonstrating measurable change and setting the path for continued development and deployment of resiliency strategies. All participating departments showed decreases in staff levels of STS and burnout and implemented resiliency strategies that continue to be deployed to all staff today.

CHESTERFIELD COUNTY | Student Equity with College Access Tools | [Read Submission](#)

Chesterfield County Public Schools through a partnership with the College Board began offering the PSAT and SAT during the school day for all eighth through eleventh graders in Fall of 2019. During the first year of implementation approximately 24600 students were eligible to take the PSAT and SAT in their school settings. This allowed students to participate in a setting where they are comfortable without the barriers of transportation or costs. The multiple years of test information allows schools to support students with our strategic plan metric of increasing the number of students who take Advanced Placement, Dual Enrollment or International Baccalaureate courses prior to graduation.

CHESTERFIELD COUNTY | Workplace Violence Prevention and Intervention Program | [Read Submission](#)

Chesterfield County's Workplace Violence Prevention and Intervention program is award worthy because it exemplifies the statement "nothing is more important than the safety and security of our employees". Using current established industry standards, it provides the concerned employee a place to express their safety and security concerns confidentially. The program stresses that those concerns will not be ignored and will be addressed professionally and with the well-being of all parties in mind. Security cameras, duress alarms, and intrusion alarm are all reactive measures in place to increase security and assist with the response once a dangerous situation presents itself. The Chesterfield County Workplace Violence Prevention and Intervention Program focuses on the pre-incident indicators to intervene in a potential violent situation before the actual violence presents itself. This increases the potential for positive outcomes that do not include punitive action and reduces the overall risk of injury to those impacted.

DINWIDDIE COUNTY | Spring Sports Facility Project | [Read Submission](#)

Dinwiddie County High School lacked adequate facilities for spring sports. Baseball, softball and tennis (boys and girls) had nowhere to change before practice or games; the only restroom facilities for softball and tennis were port-a-johns, which were not ADA compliant; and restrooms for baseball fans were on the back of a dilapidated shed that also housed a make-shift concession stand. There was no concession stand for softball and tennis. Construction of a brand new facility for softball and tennis, and renovation of the shed for baseball came with a price tag of \$1.5m. An interdisciplinary team that included Dinwiddie County government, Dinwiddie County Public Schools, the Dinwiddie Lady Generals Softball Booster Club, Inc., the Dinwiddie Baseball Dugout Boosters, Inc., parents, and local businesses worked together to devise a creative and cost-effective way to bring this much-needed project to fruition. The non-profit booster clubs took the lead and were able to accept donated labor and materials, along with monetary contributions from the County and public school system. In the end, the \$1.5m facility, cost a total of \$458,000... a savings of more than \$1m. In addition to two beautiful facilities that will support Dinwiddie High School

spring sports for decades to come, this project brought the community together toward a common goal, generating investment and pride in the result.

FRANKLIN COUNTY | Off-Grid Solar Backup Radio Site | [Read Submission](#)

The County of Franklin proudly submits the innovative Boones Mill Radio/Solar Site Project for the 2024 VACo Awards. This project not only addresses a critical emergency services communication gap through a novel use of solar power and analog repeaters but also exemplifies unparalleled intergovernmental and public-private cooperation. The Town of Boones Mill, and immediately surrounding areas of Franklin County present a unique geographic challenge in radio coverage. Terrain challenges and a deep valley has presented coverage challenges for emergency services radio utilization. Prior attempts to correct this issue fell short, and a long-term definitive solution (an additional radio tower/site) is two or more years away, due in part to historic preservation requirements near the town of Boones **Mill**. A team comprised of County Staff, volunteer Firefighters, Sheriff's Office Deputies, a local electric contractor, and the Town of Boones **Mill** staff formed to discuss an innovative solution. Together, this team identified funding sources, repurposed town property, and together, erected an off-grid solar repeater site at a town water tank, positioned ideally, on a hill above the town. The project implemented an analog repeater that serves the town and immediate surrounding area. The site utilizes a different radio channel to patch responders, including fire, EMS, Sherrif, and police into dispatch. While not perfect, this gives responders the option to switch to the Boones Mill channel and communicate critical information when they lose reception on primary channels. The total project expenditure was kept to under \$10,000, with a notable amount of donated or reused material and labor.

GLOUCESTER COUNTY | Modernizing the Beehive | [Read Submission](#)

Gloucester County boasts 288 square miles of some of the most breathtaking natural landscape on the Chesapeake Bay. However, the spacious natural beauty of the County has also, historically, posed challenges in the realm of

communicating with citizens who choose to live a more rural lifestyle. Even in 2024, some residents don't have access to reliable internet. For decades, Gloucester County has mailed out a print publication called "The Beehive" to every household on a quarterly basis. The pamphlet – formatted on newsprint and distributed by the local newspaper – used to be a reliable way to get Parks and Recreation offerings, tax deadlines, election updates and mosquito control information to Gloucester's residents, along with other important news. As the digital era progressed, many people started throwing out The Beehive without ever opening it. The pamphlet looked and felt like junk mail, and that's how people treated it. In 2023, the Community Engagement & Public Information Department decided to revamp the publication. Staff members crafted a glossy, full-colored magazine with the same information. The magazine is primarily a digital product, but we do print a limited number of copies for people who cannot access it online. By employing a strong digital marketing strategy, the County reinforced its new brand, increased Beehive readership, established quantifiable analytics and cut taxpayer costs associated with the publication by \$21,000 per year.

HANOVER COUNTY | DASH Specialized Transportation | [Read Submission](#)

Hanover DASH is a specialized transportation service, coordinated by Hanover County Department of Community Resources, for County residents aged 65 or older and/or persons who have a physical, cognitive, emotional, visual, or other disability, either permanent or temporary. The program was launched in 2019, made possible by Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation's 5310 grant funds to include a county match. The service contracts with UZURV, an adaptive transportation network company and utilizes on demand ride sharing, medical sedan and wheelchair van services to provide an affordable (\$5.00 one-way ride) individualized alternative transportation option to prequalified users. The hours of operation are Sunday- Saturday 6 a.m. - 6 p.m. Service destinations include trips to all Hanover County government buildings, medical appointments, and personal business, such as grocery shopping, banking, employment and attending social and recreational programs. Registered riders can travel anywhere within the county as well as 7-miles outside the county line. The service area also includes specialized medical facilities within neighboring localities

beyond the 7-mile buffer, including the local Veteran's Administration medical facility, in Richmond, VA and the medical facilities at Stoney Point.

HANOVER COUNTY | Hiring in Hanover, VA App | [Read Submission](#)

As businesses pivoted to adjust to new working conditions created by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Hanover County Economic Development's outreach efforts quickly uncovered the need for a local job board to assist local businesses and job seekers. In July 2020, Hanover County Economic Development staff created the Hiring in Hanover, VA App using the Glide Apps platform to satisfy the numerous requests from Hanover-based businesses. The web-based app is a tool that Hanover County can use to engage businesses and broadcast their career information. Anyone can access the app from any device – mobile, tablet, or desktop, and the app can be shared as a simple web link or QR code. Job seekers have a free and easy way to access information regarding potential employment in Hanover County by company name, industry, and/or job title. The app has been well received by the business community, and the businesses are appreciative of the efforts and exposure of their employment needs through the department's monthly newsletter and featured employer posts on social media. Hanover County Economic Development continues to explore more options for app enhancements and broader marketing opportunities. Since its inception in July 2020, the app has received more than 8,700 views. In September 2023, the Hiring in Hanover, VA App received the International Economic Development Council (IEDC) Gold Award for Excellence in Economic Development in the digital media category. The App was once again recognized by the Virginia Economic Developers Association with a VEDA G.O.A.T. award on November 30, 2023.

HENRICO COUNTY | Becoming Kings | [Read Submission](#)

Becoming Kings is a program designed to advance the exposure, experiences and engagement needs of young African American male students. From the stance of equity, diversity and inclusion, our goal is to provide more opportunities for students than they might otherwise receive. The program advocates for students by creating space for them in different job markets they may have little to no knowledge of. A field trip to Richmond International Airport allowed them to

meet with aero-engineers and question them about their education, upward movement in the career field and earnings. By providing hands-on experiences like these, students can begin to bridge the gap of different career fields and expand their palette of what is possible in their futures. The program also offers field trips to colleges and universities to expand students' views of campus living, what it takes academically to achieve acceptance letters and financial requirements to attend these colleges and universities. These onsite experiences help them to broaden their horizons and give upper education consideration. Despite the socioeconomic issues that participating students may face, the program ensures that they all have equal access to everything the program offers. Also, to ensure that the program advances the narrative of diversity, equity and inclusion, a great deal of time is spent on students' mental development and capacity. The department takes a great deal of time to build strength and confidence in that area as well as in the area of emotional intelligence. The program stresses that emotional intelligence plays a crucial role in relationships that students may encounter. The Becoming Kings Henrico County, Virginia Page 7 program strives to provide them with the ability to adequately express themselves in spaces that traditionally view them simply in a negative context because of negative imagery and stereotypes in the media and other social outlets. The lasting impact is a culture of positivity, belonging and empowerment that will carry these young men into the future and inform the generations that follow them.

HENRICO COUNTY | Generative AI Initiative: Preparing for a New Digital Age | [Read Submission](#)

Henrico County Public Schools is embracing the integration of generative A.I. in education. The school division's goal is to enhance teaching and learning while preparing students for an A.I. driven future. To achieve this aim, HCPS has developed a comprehensive plan to personalize learning, enhance creativity, foster critical thinking and optimize organizational efficiency. Henrico Schools are guided by the International Society for Technology in Education standards and the Virginia Department of Education's Digital Learning Integration Standards of Learning, which focus on enhancing digital literacy, promoting responsible digital citizenship and encouraging deeper learning through this plan. This alignment ensured that our initiative was guided by globally recognized and locally relevant frameworks, focusing on empowering students and educators to integrate and use technology in the evolving education

landscape. The initiative also sought to establish a culture of data governance and ethical A.I. use, enabling enhanced productivity through generative A.I. tools. HCPS engaged with cross functional committees, outside consultants and experts on generative A.I. in education to develop a vision and plan that addressed gaps in learning and equity and acted as a model for other counties.

HENRICO COUNTY | Hyper Local Student Led Service Learning **| [Read Submission](#)**

The Freeman Project is a student-led organization created to better the learning environment at Douglas Freeman High School in Henrico County, Virginia. Members meet every other day during school hours to work on activities requested by school faculty or created by students individually. The students work together as a team on many projects, big and small. Every student enrolled can incorporate their ideas and creativity while brainstorming different projects. Teachers and faculty often request help with tasks within their classrooms. The focus is on integrating 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.

HENRICO COUNTY | Teen Summit RVA | [Read Submission](#)

Teen Summit RVA is the first of its kind annual leadership summit designed by teens for teens. Teen Summit RVA was created to amplify youth voices against violence and to address wellness and wellbeing. Students exchange ideas on leadership pathways for positive change in the Richmond region. The inaugural event took place on Saturday, March 23, 2023, at the Greater Richmond Convention Center. A diverse group of 298 high school students from the Richmond region engaged in interactive experiences addressing various topics students selected – from arts and entertainment to gun violence and safety to drugs, mental health, and culture to equity within their school district and community. Students had the opportunity to share their lived experiences with experts during thought-provoking conversations. Teens also explored careers and summer job opportunities at the InspireYouth@Work Career and Resource Fair. The event provided a model for an annual series of youth meetings to lift teen voices as they elevate issues concerning their generation. Teen Summit RVA

is a collaboration between Henrico County, Chesterfield County, and the City of Richmond with sponsorship from the Capital Region Workforce Partnership and the Community Foundation for a greater Richmond.

ISLE OF WIGHT COUNTY | R.I.S.E. Program | [Read Submission](#)

R.I.S.E. (Resilient-Independent-Social-Empowerment) is a therapeutic recreation day program for adults with disabilities. Community input and a review of existing programs helped Isle of Wight County Parks and Recreation Department realize a need for year-round adult with disabilities programming. As a result, R.I.S.E., which operates every Friday at Nike Park in Carrollton, Virginia was developed. The program's goal is to promote socialization, increase independent living skills, and participate in recreational activities. It is a group setting that offers an excellent opportunity to join a community with common goals and abilities. R.I.S.E. includes group activities, arts and crafts, pop-up field trips, physical activities, outdoor exploration, and a wide variety of workshops. The success of R.I.S.E. has made it an integral part of the Parks and Recreation Department's inclusion programming. Adult inclusion programming serves two primary goals. First is to provide the opportunity for adults of Parks and Recreation programs, who exhibit the need for therapeutic intervention, the opportunity to overcome any program barriers and continue participation. Second is to educate Department staff on how to effectively work with participants who have varying disabilities. These goals assist residents of Isle of Wight County and neighboring localities with safe and effective adults with disabilities program participation. R.I.S.E. has become a successful addition to the department's inclusion programming plan.

KING AND QUEEN COUNTY | Countywide Broadband Access | [Read Submission](#)

Rural communities across the Commonwealth are faced with the challenge of providing internet access to their citizens. King and Queen County was no different, but in 2019 the County partnered with RiverStreet Networks for an ambitious fiber build project to bring advanced broadband network services to residential and commercial customers. The King and Queen County Fiber-to-the-Home Project represented a monumental undertaking that made King and Queen County a leader in the Commonwealth. We believe that King and Queen

County is the first county in Virginia to undergo a comprehensive fiber build covering the entire locality. The now-complete initiative guarantees that every resident and business in the County has access to the RiverStreet system to obtain fiber internet comparable to that of major urban areas. Covering approximately 575 route miles of fiber, top-of-the-line broadband internet service is enjoyed by over 30% of homes and businesses in rural King and Queen. The completion of this county-wide fiber network expansion represents a significant boost to the economic and educational development of King and Queen County and positions the County, and its businesses and citizens, for unlimited future opportunities. With fast and reliable internet access, local businesses can thrive, students can access digital resources for educational opportunities, and residents can easily access telehealth services.

LANCASTER COUNTY | Lancaster 2035 | [Read Submission](#)

Like many rural areas across the Commonwealth and the United States, Lancaster County must grapple with the extraordinary challenges and pressures brought on by an increasingly uncertain future. With limited staff capacity and revenue, the county must be deliberate and methodical in addressing a multitude of critical challenges. As such, the Lancaster County Board of Supervisors established the Citizens Business Relations Advisory Committee (CBRAC) in 2019 to ensure a thriving future for the county. This committee of government and business leaders focuses on retaining our workforce, creating a business-friendly environment, and balancing rural character with planned progress. Their Lancaster 2035 Strategic Plan addresses the risks of unregulated growth, aiming to enhance residents' quality of life through infrastructure improvements, business development and workforce expansion. Recognizing that boosting our working-age population requires long-term initiatives like affordable housing and new economic opportunities, CBRAC opted for a long-range plan versus a typical five-year plan. The Lancaster 2035 strategy aims to increase the percentage of working-age individuals by 20% by 2035 while maintaining the existing workforce, requiring an increase of 1,000 individuals of the workforce-aged population. The Lancaster 2035 Plan outlines six interconnected strategies with clear initiatives, costs, resources, and outcomes. By prioritizing and implementing these strategies, we can secure a prosperous future for Lancaster County. The Lancaster 2035 Strategic Plan was approved by the Lancaster Board of Supervisors and the CBRAC was permanently established to implement the plan and update it annually as progress is made. Lancaster County citizens are

engaged as volunteer stakeholders in the plan's implementation and citizens are updated on the ongoing progress of these initiatives. Still, the effectiveness of these plans will largely depend on the community's support for area businesses and schools and working together for positive change.

LOUDOUN COUNTY | Launch Loudoun | [Read Submission](#)

Loudoun County Economic Development's signature program, Launch Loudoun, is a dynamic initiative aimed at empowering entrepreneurs, fostering innovation, and driving economic growth within the county. The primary goal of the program is to provide comprehensive support and resources to companies in all stages of development, helping them navigate the challenges of starting and scaling a business while also positioning Loudoun County as a hub for entrepreneurship and innovation. To accomplish this goal, Launch Loudoun offers a wide range of programs, services, and resources tailored to the needs of small businesses owners. These include mentorship and coaching, access to capital and funding opportunities, networking events, educational workshops, and incubator space. By providing a holistic ecosystem of support, Launch Loudoun aims to accelerate the growth and success of startups, ultimately contributing to job creation, investment attraction, and economic diversification within the county. Launch Loudoun leverages strategic partnerships with local businesses, academic institutions, investors, and community partners to expand its reach and impact. By collaborating with key stakeholders, the program taps into additional expertise, resources, and networks to better serve the needs of entrepreneurs. Overall, Launch Loudoun is dedicated to fostering a vibrant and inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem in Loudoun County, where startups can Start, Scale, and Soar. Through its comprehensive approach to supporting early-stage companies and its emphasis on collaboration and partnership, Launch Loudoun plays a vital role in driving economic development and fostering a culture of innovation within the community.

LOUISA COUNTY | Louisa Unified, Collaborative Community Communications | [Read Submission](#)

Imagine you are waiting in the lobby of a Parks and Recreation building as your son takes his karate class. You look up to the information screen and see the content changing from details on the summer reading program at the library to a

picture of your lost dog with a number for the animal shelter. Relieved you now know where to find your pet, you continue to watch and notice an alert is scrolling along the bottom of the screen notifying you of a road closure near your neighborhood. Armed with the knowledge that you should take an alternate path home, your son's class ends, and you grab a copy of the county newsletter as you make your way to the car. This scenario is now realistic in Louisa County. The considerable restructuring of our public facing communications in 2023 caters to how the citizens interact with the county, in-person and online. Staff developed its new communications process in the summer of 2023 with the goals of 1.) providing more unified information and 2.) reaching more citizens despite the challenges associated with limited area access to broadband and a limited promotional budget. Staff thoughtfully crafted new ways to leverage its existing web-based design software, streaming platform for meetings, and older TVs recently retired from Parks, Recreation & Tourism and dispatch. Employing these elements already on-hand, the new efficient and remarkably inexpensive approach begins with a monthly newsletter that offers a compilation of updates from across county departments and government partners. The process then extends to include meeting videos, social media and in-building displays. Ultimately, the approach: 1) streamlined staff efforts; 2) enabled seamless collaboration with outside entities; 3) vastly enhanced information available to our citizens; and 4) dramatically increased transparency and awareness. The results have been significant – engagement has increased, and the public has been complimentary of the effort.

ORANGE COUNTY | Facility Maintenance Staff Education | [Read Submission](#)

Continuing education is a key component of the training and professional development programs of many organizations. This is certainly true in Orange County; however, we have taken an additional step by leveraging state and local partnerships to make training accessible for a wider range of staff and local v-tech professionals. Often, training programs are created with office workers in mind. Unfortunately, when it comes to the trade skills employed by buildings and grounds staff, logistics challenges often limit opportunities. As a result, most organizations of our size offer few additional training opportunities for these employees. Administration addressed this problem by partnering with Germanna Community College's Center for Workforce and Community Education. Together, we crafted an innovative opportunity for our team to study

in the NCCER Facility Maintenance Apprenticeship program. As a workforce development initiative, great effort has been taken to remove participation obstacles. Classes are often held at our offices with flexible time benefits, real-world experience applies towards class requirements, employees can participate without personal expense, and incentives reward class completion. Orange County has benefited from this program by enjoying a more motivated and skilled workforce, increasing retention in a competitive labor market. Deeper skillsets have allowed us to be more selective about which jobs require an outside vendor, creating meaningful and long-term cost savings.

ORANGE COUNTY | Plastic Film Recycling | [Read Submission](#)

Citizens are often ready and willing to recycle waste rather than add it to landfill facilities. Obstacles to recycling usually stem from a lack of convenient avenues or a commodity's low recycle value rather than apathy. Orange County makes a strong effort to provide accessible, practical, and meaningful recycling opportunities to our residents. Examples include provision of five distinct single-stream recycling locations throughout the county, hosting of annual electronics recycling events, and more recently, the creation of recycling programs for traditionally difficult-to-recycle items such as plastic film. Plastic film is pervasive. Grocery bags, bubble wrap, pallet wrap, produce and bread bags, and shipping envelopes are all examples of plastic films that residents regularly interact with. That being the case, there was a strong desire to properly dispose of the film. Unfortunately, it could not be accepted in our single-stream recycling containers. Visits to our primary recycling vendor's facility made clear how plastic film would "gum up the works" of their sorting and processing equipment. A solution was found by participating in the NexTrex Recycling Challenge program. Enrolling in this program gave us the disposal avenue we had been lacking. With that in place, effective communication and convenient placement have driven a turnout so successful that we must stagger deliveries of the plastic film collected at our facilities! We received our first composite bench from the program last fall and are ready to take delivery of another.

PITTSYLVANIA COUNTY | Downtown Chow-Down | [Read Submission](#)

We had to come up with a catchy name for this event since it had expanded beyond our employees. We brainstormed many different names but when someone said Downtown Chow-Down, we knew that was it! And it has been one of the best events that the County has facilitated, and one that we will continue during our summer months due to popular demand. It's not just about the food, even though food does bring people together. It's the opportunities that are borne out of this event that have lasting impacts; relationship building, collaboration between departments, citizens, and businesses, fostering good will with our citizens and giving them a chance to participate side by side with our staff so they can get to know us a little better and may even call us by name when they see us again! The fun, the fellowship, getting to spend time together over some good food during lunch, putting our phones away and having a conversation with each other, creating memories and taking photos ... it's all part of Downtown Chow-Down!

POWHATAN COUNTY | Powhatan County Public Schools Locally Developed Geography Curriculum & Local History Unit | [Read Submission](#)

The 2023-2024 school year was one of transition for our history course progression in Powhatan County Public Schools. The challenge for us was moving our Virginia Studies course down a grade level to alleviate the testing burden on our 5th grade teachers and students. This transition was successful; however it left a gap in our instructional program for fifth grade. The solution: design an in-house geography. Our K-12 History and Social Studies Specialist embraced the challenge of charting this new course, and as a result, Powhatan County Public Schools now has a robust and engaging locally developed curriculum with a strong focus on local history that sparks pride in our town, honors our past, celebrates our future, and inspires our posterity. Historically, geographic education often overlooks local contexts, leaving students disconnected from the land they inhabit. This curriculum bridges that gap by immersing students in the history and geography of Powhatan County. Our local history unit aims to promote understanding of Powhatan County's rich history with an emphasis on how geographic features served as barriers for early settlers, yet praises their resilience as they developed creative solutions to address the challenges faced

when interacting with the environment. Additionally, it acknowledges the original inhabitants of the land called Powhatan County, who were the Monacan people, and challenges students to ponder why our county's founders would choose Powhatan when naming the county (despite having no evidence to show that Chief Powhatan ever stepped foot in this region of Virginia). Students gain a holistic understanding of the county's development and its impact on its people.

PRINCE EDWARD COUNTY | See Us S.M.I.L.E. | [Read Submission](#)

Careers in Social Services can be emotionally demanding. Maintaining high morale is crucial for sustaining resilience and preventing burnout among employees. The S.M.I.L.E. (*Strengthening Morale by Including Literally Everyone*) Committee of the Prince Edward County Department of Social Services helps our agency prioritize employee morale and retention, which better positions us to weather uncertainties and adapt to evolving challenges. By investing in a supportive work environment and employee acknowledgement program, we believe our organization can cultivate a loyal and motivated workforce capable of meeting the diverse needs of our clients. The S.M.I.L.E. Committee is focused on the well-being of employees and the fostering of a positive work environment where individuals feel valued and motivated. This positivity translates into enhanced productivity and a stronger commitment to the agency's mission. Additionally, employee retention helps ensure continuity of service provision and fosters trust within the communities we serve. The S.M.I.L.E. Committee works to build relationships, understanding and trust amongst agency employees. By retaining our skilled employees, we can capitalize on their expertise, thereby improving service effectiveness and efficiency. Moreover, reducing turnover minimizes recruitment and training costs, reallocating resources towards enhancing client outcomes and program development.

PRINCE GEORGE COUNTY | Capitol Region Military Alliance | [Read Submission](#)

Due to the leadership of the County and collaboration and involvement in CaRMAs project management meeting formats and collaboration tools, CaRMA has been successful in facilitating impactful collaboration across the region with growing interest and support. CaRMA does not hold networking meetings; we

hold working group meetings. Collaboration and networking take place because of working together. All meeting invitees are there due to their expertise or position, ability, and willingness to support the project. Meetings start with a ten-minute intro, a review of the agenda, and a new member introduction. Members pay for their own meals and multiple working groups meet at different tables to discuss the projects. Only five meetings have resulted in three grant submissions and a large community meeting. CaRMA has held five working group meetings, with all but one meeting held in a business space donated free of cost to CaRMA (Hopewell Chamber Organized the meeting spaces and donation) and has, as a result, submitted three grant applications to support projects that benefit both the military and the community. All of the success of CaRMA to date is due to the collaboration and contribution of many people and organizations.

PRINCE WILLIAM COUNTY | Firefighter Cadet Program | [Read Submission](#)

In 2019 Prince William County Department of Fire & Rescue (DFR) entered into an agreement with Prince William County Schools (PWCS) to launch the Firefighter Cadet program for eleventh and twelfth grade high school students. The program was fully funded for the Fiscal Year 2020 budget by the Prince William County Board of Supervisors and provides the Virginia Department of Fire Programs (VDFP) Firefighter 1, CPR, and Hazardous Materials Operations certifications. The inaugural class coincided with the COVID pandemic which resulted in schedule changes and outright cancellation of in-person classes. Because of the restrictions, and the length in which they were in place, the Cadet program did not get off to a good start. Over the course of the next two school years, as restrictions were lifted, DFR support for the program was minimal as Public Safety was reeling from the effects of the pandemic on staffing levels throughout County fire stations. In January of 2023 the DFR made staffing changes at the Public Safety Training Center (PSTC) and the Cadet program began to gain traction. To date, we just graduated sixteen Cadets with the class of 2024, three of whom have been offered full-time employment with the DFR and are currently attending our career Recruit school. The class of 2025 is slated to begin on August 12, 2024, with twenty students and we are happy to announce they will be receiving VDFP Firefighter II. PWCS and DFR are actively working towards making this a two-year program offering Emergency Medical Technician – National Registry (EMT-NR) as early as the class of 2026.

PRINCE WILLIAM COUNTY | Historic Thoroughfare | [Read Submission](#)

The Prince William County Department of Parks and Recreation's Office of Historic Preservation (OHP) created the online exhibit Historic Thoroughfare about a historic African American community founded in the post-Civil War era, to both educate the public as well as to increase public access to and awareness of this site.¹ Thoroughfare is a small community in western Prince William County which has recently been the site of contested area amid the pressures of development. To address public concerns, in 2021 the Prince William Board of County Supervisors created a new historic park and dedicated funding to the research and interpretation of this community. OHP staff published Historic Thoroughfare in May 2023 as a culmination of a multidisciplinary project that included archaeology and archival research as well as the collection of oral histories from community members. By working closely with the Prince William County Planning Office, another local county agency, as well as County GIS staff, OHP staff created an ArcGIS StoryMap for this online exhibit. This StoryMap includes historic overlay maps, archival research, and a digital tour of Thoroughfare that incorporates audio clips from many of the oral histories. OHP staff also worked closely with the Thoroughfare community to edit and revise the exhibit before publishing the StoryMap. Historic Thoroughfare is utilized as a way to increase public awareness about the rich history of this small Prince William County community. While in the future Thoroughfare Historic Park will be a physical destination for visitors, at present the creation of this park is months away. This exhibit grants online access to sites that are not publicly accessible, allowing visitors to experience the community before on-site interpretation is available.

PULASKI COUNTY | Outdoor Fitness Court | [Read Submission](#)

The Pulaski County Outdoor Fitness Court is an exemplary community resource that addresses local health and wellness needs, providing a much-needed fitness solution and fostering community engagement. Faced with rising obesity rates, sedentary lifestyles, and limited access to affordable fitness facilities, Pulaski County saw the necessity for accessible, versatile, and engaging fitness options, especially in the absence of an indoor recreation facility. The Fitness Court was a key feature of the 2023 initiative launched by the National Fitness Campaign (NFC), a nationwide wellness

consulting firm. NFC partners with municipalities and schools to plan, build, and fund Healthy Communities, and has been pivotal in combating the obesity epidemic across the country. Pulaski County was awarded a \$25,000 grant from NFC, supplemented by additional funding from the Pulaski County Board of Supervisors, to bring this project to life. Opened on October 5, 2023, at Randolph Park, the world-class outdoor gym allows users to leverage their own body weight across seven workout stations, catering to adults aged 14 and older of all fitness levels. The Fitness Court is supported by a free mobile app, offering guided workouts and enhancing the overall user experience. The Fitness Court has become a central community hub, encouraging daily use and hosting group fitness classes organized by the Parks and Recreation Department. These classes accommodate various skill levels, promoting inclusivity and fostering a sense of community. The court's accessibility and free use have eliminated financial barriers to exercise, leading to noticeable health improvements among residents, including weight management, cardiovascular fitness, and overall well-being. Additionally, the Fitness Court has served as an educational platform for fitness classes, workshops, and health events, empowering residents with knowledge on exercise techniques and nutrition. The increased foot traffic has positively impacted local businesses, contributing to the local economy. In summary, the Pulaski County Outdoor Fitness Court has successfully addressed public health challenges, improved individual health outcomes, strengthened community ties, and enhanced residents' quality of life. It stands as a testament to the power of community-driven solutions and deserves recognition for its significant contributions.

ROANOKE COUNTY | Town of Vinton Stormwater Outfall
Management Application | [Read Submission](#)

The Town of Vinton's Stormwater and Outfall Management Application solution, created in cooperation with Roanoke County's Information Technology GIS Team, effectively allows the Town's field personnel to move away from time-consuming paper document entry to a dynamic FieldMaps application using web services to collect data. This innovative application was created using the Esri ArcGIS for Enterprise platform and ArcGIS Online services for the customized web template and local proprietary information. Using a cellular-connected tablet or phone to access web services makes field data collection easier, faster, and more accurate.

ROCKINGHAM COUNTY | Development Tracker | [Read Submission](#)

To better serve the public, Rockingham County launched a new resource to track development activity occurring throughout the County. The Development Tracker application tracks rezoning and special use permit requests under review and approved, site plans under review and approved, building permits under review, projects under construction, and recently completed building projects. The application is user-friendly and easy to navigate, providing the public with a clear vision of the County's development pipeline. The purpose of the Development Tracker is to assist the public in staying informed, involved, and engaged in their community's development. In 2023, Rockingham County received 31 rezoning requests; 35 special use permit requests; over 65 site plans that were reviewed by County staff and outside agencies; and almost 2,000 commercial and residential permits were issued through the building division. The Development Tracker is located at www.rockinghamcountyva.gov.

SCOTT COUNTY | S.C.O.T.T. Service Program | [Read Submission](#)

Scott County's S.C.O.T.T. Service Program is a collaborative effort between Scott County and Duffield Regional Jail. The program serves as an alternative to incarceration, by removing the inmate from the jail and placing them in the work program. The participants are identified through a rigorous process, including a review of their current charges, a thorough assessment into their prior criminal history and a willingness to commit to restrictions set forth by the court along with a punitive obligation. The program has been in place since 2019 when the first participant entered the program. The program coordinators oversee the participants by coordinating their community service, helping them meet educational milestones and gain practical workforce instruction. This encourages the participants to gain self-confidence, decrease recidivism and develop sober living skillsets. Not only is the program successful on a personal basis, but the county is also able to realize the program value based on the jail costs to the county each year. Over the course of the program, the county has seen a 30% decrease in costs.

SHENANDOAH COUNTY | Parks & Recreation Wellness Activity Center (WAC) | [Read Submission](#)

Responding to the abrupt closure of a well-respected and popular health center the Shenandoah County Board of Supervisors was simultaneously able to acquire and reopen a health and wellness facility as well as add much-needed programming space for the parks and recreation department. Using a collaboration between a regional health center, a private real estate investor, and the county was able to pivot into the uncharted waters of owning and operating a 20,000-square-foot modern health and wellness facility. Using the prior operator's membership data, operating expenses, etc., the county was able to provide a business case eliminating any requisite general fund commitments (e.g., tax increases) to operate the facility. With a remaining, unencumbered \$2.4 million in ARPA funding was able to utilize the balance to make the nearly \$2.9 million acquisition. In addition, recognizing that for a decade the county's parks and recreation department had operated without any official, dedicated programming space the acquisition of a wellness center with thousands of square feet of multi-purpose rooms and studios permitted the county to significantly improve the quality and experience of departmental programming. The acquisition and opening of the Shenandoah County Wellness and Activities Center has exceeded expectations and is a testament to forward-thinking and proactive decision-making by the county and its elected leadership.

SMYTH COUNTY | Smyth Promise | [Read Submission](#)

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 longterm prosperity and resilience of Smyth County as a whole.

STAFFORD COUNTY | R-Board Compost Outreach Program | [Read Submission](#)

Stafford County's Rappahannock Regional Solid Waste Management Board (R-Board) compost outreach program educates residents on proper composting techniques and increases the number of households composting in the City of Fredericksburg and Stafford County. The compost program offers composting classes and mini Compost-a-Thon events that include education provided by a Master Gardener. Participants receive an introduction to backyard composting and ask the Master Gardener questions. Complimentary compost bins and starter kits are distributed. The compost outreach program gives participants the information and tools to begin successfully composting at their homes and diverts food and yard waste from the landfill.

STAFFORD COUNTY | The Utilities Department Develops a Superhero "Captain Clog" to Educate the Public | [Read Submission](#)

The Stafford County Utilities Department initially created a superhero theme for the annual FOG (fats, oils, and grease) campaign to increase awareness about how residents can help protect the sanitary sewer system. The main character, Captain Clog, was used on billboards, social media posts, and videos for the FOG campaign. Since then, he has become a vehicle to communicate various awareness and outreach topics.

SUSSEX COUNTY | Jackson's Walking Trail and Dog Play Area | [Read Submission](#)

Sussex County has limited public recreational facilities and no formal parks and recreation program, while considered one of the unhealthiest and fiscally stressed counties in Virginia. The county maintains an approximate 40-acre closed sanitary landfill site in the central part of the county, and staff decided to utilize this property for a walking trail around its perimeter. Modeled on a similar walking trail in a park in the City of Waynesboro, Jackson's Walking Trail, approximately 1 mile in length and 7 feet in width utilizes a mowed path with no other needed physical improvements and was completed with no additional cost to the county nor requiring any additional staffing. The walking trail is located adjacent to the county's animal shelter and has become a great enhancement for the facility and resulted in a successful "Walk the Shelter" monthly event.

YORK COUNTY | Friendly Visitor Volunteer Program Aids Aging Population | [Read Submission](#)

The goal of the friendly visitor program is to reduce the social isolation of adults 60 and older, enhance the quality of life and connection to social and community supports, and build a positive, trusting relationship with our Volunteers. The friendly visitor program will also enhance the services and capabilities of York-Poquoson Department of Social Services (YPDSS) by utilizing the skills and talents of volunteers. The goals were to supplement, extend, and enhance the services and activities of York-Poquoson Social Services. To involve the community in activities related to the indigent and elderly population of York County and the City of Poquoson. And to promote and recognize volunteerism in Virginia.

VACo exists to support county officials and to effectively represent, promote and protect the interests of counties to better serve the people of Virginia.

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