



SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: July 1, 2025.** Please include this submission form as the first page of your 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: Amherst County

Program Title: Amherst County Fair

Program Category: Customer Service & Community Outreach

CONTACT INFORMATION

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Name: Jeremy S. Bryant

Title: County Administrator

Signature: 



AMHERST COUNTY

VACo Achievement Award Submission 2025

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Amherst County Fair has become a tradition within the community; a space where people of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds gather to share in the cultures that make Amherst County a “Perfect Slice of Virginia”. This cherished event showcases the rich agricultural heritage of Amherst County and the diverse demographics that are the makeup of this beautiful part of the region. The Fair endeavors to educate individuals on the importance of agriculture to the success of the community. In order to do so, the Fair has gone to great lengths to ensure each individual is met within their means. The Amherst County Fair has become a beacon of hospitality, welcoming individuals from all around and from all walks of life to join in the fun and bask in the beauty that is Amherst County.

COMMUNITY NEED

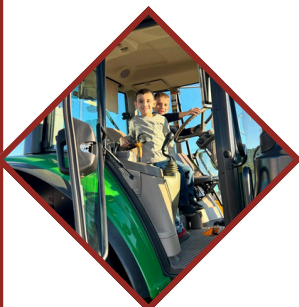
Amherst County is home to over 31,000 individuals and is nestled at the bottom of the Blue Ridge Mountains. The vast majority of the 479 square miles that make up Amherst County is rural area sprawling with farms, residential homes, National Forest, and tribal communities. The Madison Heights area rounds out the business corridor with a healthy mix of business and residential dwellings. With such a wide expanse of area with vastly different approaches to every-day life, there grew a disconnect between the different demographics that make Amherst County.



Each area began to see itself as a singular sect rather than a part of the whole of the County. With such a wide expanse, bringing the community together as a whole seemed like an insurmountable feat. While there are numerous privately held community events, Amherst County had not had a mass-produced community event since 1978 when its last County Fair was held. After a 40-year hiatus, the Amherst County Board of Supervisors was approached by various County organizations to bring the Amherst County Fair back to the community in 2018. It was the fervent hope that this would bridge the gap between the sects and instill a sense of unity within Amherst County once again.

IMPLEMENTATION

As the first conversations began about rebooting the Amherst County Fair, various steps were taken to ensure a successful event happened. It was decided that an outside individual would be hired to take on the role of Fair Director. The Fair Director collaborated with the Board of Supervisors, the Agriculture Committee, local businesses, and county staff for the planning and implementation of the re-inception year of 2018. Over the years, there have been several improvements made to streamline the process of production as well as to cut cost. Some of these improvements were to have the Agriculture Committee oversee the inner workings and final decisions of Fair matters, the creation of the Fair Committee to handle planning, coordination, and volunteerism, a partnership with the Extension Office, and replacing the third-party Fair Director with a dedicated Extension Agent.



It was imperative to establish a strong foundation for the smooth running of the event to secure its annual foothold within the community.

The County has been able to provide seed funding for the Fair but, with inflation costs and the growing demand for new attractions and programming, it became imperative for the Fair Committee to partner with local businesses and organizations. These partnerships have evolved over the years including sponsorships, in-kind donations, vendor space, and other miscellaneous contributions such as volunteers from local organizations, schools, and businesses looking to gain volunteer hours. Since the inception of the Fair, it has now become a co-hosted event between the County, the Extension Office, and a local College. The County over-see's the financial management of the event, the Extension Office over-see's the planning and development, while the local College provides the fairgrounds at a highly discounted rate to hold the event over a four-day period. It is through these partnerships that the Amherst County Fair has been able to provide a family friendly event from 2018 to present day, with the intention to continue this well into the future for generations to come.

COST & FUNDING

The Amherst County Board of Supervisors allocates funding within each fiscal year to seed that years Fair. That amount fluctuates based on the budgetary needs of the County but historically ranges between \$40,000-\$60,000 annually. The Fair does its' best to cut costs by maintaining as much of the administrative costs in-house through the use of county staffing, extension staffing, and volunteers.



Over the past several years the Fair has developed several sponsorship options that allow local businesses to leverage the growing attendance of the Fair to market their business. Through the procurement of a contract with a local reputable Midway company, the County also receives 25% of the net revenue from ride sales that take place. Since this event is a local event, the Fair has also opened vendor spaces to businesses to market and sell their products while at the event, those vendor fees vary based on size and number of days the vendor plans to be in attendance. Over the years the Fair has collected a minimal gate entry fee ranging between \$2-\$8. It is the ultimate goal of the Amherst County Fair to increase its revenue streams through the other mentioned avenues and eradicate the need for a gate-entry fee. The overall budgetary goal of the Fair is to become self-sufficient, minimizing any impact to the tax-paying citizens of the County.

INNOVATION

What makes the Amherst County Fair different from others is its unique attention to the eclectic demographic of its attendees. Those charged with the planning and development of the Fair takes great pride in noticing the beauty in each individual group that makes up the community as a whole and move to create a space for each. Two key words to sum up the overall experience of the Amherst County Fair are inclusivity and affordability. The Fair Committee recognizes that financial constraints play a large role in hindering families from connecting with the community.



It is of the utmost importance to not only have ride attractions, but also free programming available, as rides can become costly for some. Through partnerships with local organizations the Amherst County Fair is able to offer numerous free program opportunities for attendees with the purchase of their gate entry only. Free programming has included the sensory tent, bounce houses, face painting, live entertainment, historical and agricultural displays, along with games and competitions. Through volunteering a day, individuals are able to receive a single day gate-entry pass to come another day and enjoy the fair as an attendee. Gate Entry Fees are discounted on Thursdays and children under the age of 5 are free all four days of the event. Amherst County also works with local businesses and through social media to do giveaways of tickets leading up to the beginning of the event as well.

Considering this is a family friendly event, the needs of new parents are at the forefront. To ensure the safety and wellbeing of even the smallest of attendees, there are diaper changing spaces as well as breastfeeding spaces for new parents. Each individual is made to feel welcome and wanted at the Amherst County Fair and to see that is done, accommodations are made to create ease of attendance.

One of the truly innovative aspects of the Amherst County Fair is its attention to the details of the emotional, mental, and physical needs of its attendees. When preparing the grounds for the fair, the Public Works Department of Amherst County takes great care to ensure that the grounds are easily traversable by those in need of mobility aids and strollers.



There are numerous spaces for individuals to sit and shade tents provided throughout. The Amherst County Fair is one of three Fair's within the Commonwealth of Virginia to offer Sensory Safe Spaces for its attendees. These are spaces for individuals to calm an overstimulated nervous system through noise reduction, sensory play, and creative outlets. The Amherst County Sensory Tent offers a silent dance party, fidget toys, sensory sand, seek bottles, and more. For parents looking to learn more on the benefits of sensory play for their children, there is information provided along with workshops to teach children and adults how to make their own sensory play toys from items often found within their homes. All of these experiences come with no additional cost to families.

CONCLUSION

The Amherst County Fair has an annual attendance that averages roughly 8,000 individuals year over year. These individuals are local community members, neighboring community members, and those from out-of-state. Those responsible for the production of the Fair take great care in speaking with attendees to learn how to improve, grow, and retain attendance. Each year following the event, there is a survey publicly issued. With that feedback, the Fair Committee has made improvements to the entertainment offered, improved parking functions, increased free programming and more.



That feedback continues to be used each and every year to make adjustments, additions, and modifications to ensure a better experience the following year. While the reality is that there is always room for improvement, the Amherst County Fair accepts that challenge and looks to create something unlike any other Fair held within the Commonwealth of Virginia.

The Amherst County Fair serves as a token of appreciation to its community members for their dedication to the success of Amherst County. It is a beacon of hospitality, showcasing the welcoming spirit that is at the heart of each and every community member within it. While each area that makes the whole of Amherst County may be different in various aspects, together it is truly a Perfect Slice of Virginia, and the Amherst County Fair is the serving plate that slice is served on.

