



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: Botetourt County
Program Title: Getting to Know BOCO
Program Category: Communications

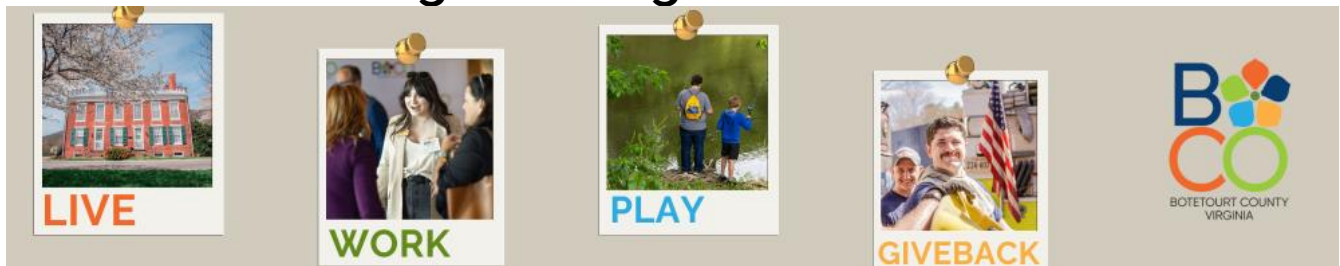
CONTACT INFORMATION

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SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Gary Larrowe
Title: County Administrator
Signature:

Botetourt County – Humanizing Local Government through “Getting to Know BOCO”



Executive Summary:

Botetourt County is a rural county located in southwestern Virginia. The county is 548 square miles and is home to approximately 33,500 residents. Botetourt County has always believed that a well-informed community is an empowered one. In 2024, we took another big step toward building trust and transparency with our residents through an initiative we call [“Getting to Know BOCO.”](#)

The heartbeat behind this fun, approachable campaign and initiative introduces residents to the departments, programs, and people who make our county government run. We also had the goal of simplifying complex government terms. We really tried to pull back the curtain on what our teams do and how local government works, whether it's maintaining our parks, preparing for emergencies, planning for growth, or keeping roads clear. The goal is simple: make local government more visible, understandable, and human.

COUNTY ADMINISTRATION
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"It's all about the people."

Whether you have lived in the county all your life, decided to relocate, or you are coming home to BOCO, our dedicated team is here to help you!

Whether it's starting a business, registering your kiddos for rec sports, finding the perfect library program or staying in the know about what's happening in the county, we are here to help!

Get to know BOCO!
www.botetourtva.gov



The idea for ["Getting to Know BOCO"](#) really started to take shape during our [2024 State of the County Address](#), where we used the theme to spotlight the people and services that make Botetourt County tick. That same theme helped guide the tone and structure of our [2023 Annual Report](#), laying a strong foundation for what came next. Print ads were even circulated in local publications highlighting the people that keep BOCO moving!



In August 2024, we rolled out a soft-launch called "Ask Us August", where we invited residents to send in real questions and then let our in-house experts answer them. The answers became a series of fun and informative [YouTube Shorts titled](#)

["Ask the Expert."](#) We then changed it to ASK BOCO.

By September, we were ready to go bigger. We launched a dedicated webpage, rolled out a social media campaign, all aimed at keeping the momentum going and inviting more people to truly "Get to Know BOCO." This initiative fits perfectly into Botetourt's wider communications



strategy, launched back in 2021, a strategy built on the idea that residents shouldn't just hear what the government is doing, but really understand what local government does on a daily basis.

The Problem We Wanted to Solve

Local government can feel invisible until something goes wrong, and when misinformation or the dreaded disinformation starts swirling, it's often because people just don't know where to go for facts. After the successful launch of [BOCO Facts 4 U](#) and our Board meeting livestreams in 2023 and early 2024, we started thinking: What if we went beyond correcting the record and focused on *preventing* confusion before it starts? We realized that many of our residents had no idea what various departments do or who to talk to. This knowledge gap not only fed frustration but also made it harder for us to serve our community well. "Getting to Know BOCO" was born out of this need: a creative, proactive way to educate, connect, and even entertain.

The Approach – Friendly, Focused, and Accessible

We didn't want to reinvent the wheel or require a big budget. Instead, we leaned into what we already had:

- A strong Communications Team
- Great working relationships with our departments
- Technology investments made during the pandemic (Zoom + Crestron systems)
- A growing social media presence and community email/text list



We began producing short, engaging videos that focused on asking the experts, highlighting a different department or function. The format was casual and welcoming. No stuffy scripts or long explanations, just genuine conversations with the people doing the work. These videos were prompted by taking direct questions from the community. After production, videos were uploaded to YouTube and our county website. We also took this a step further and launched our "Getting to Know BOCO" digital monthly newsletter. Our website also got a fresh look for this initiative leaning into promoting Botetourt County as a great place to live, work, play and give back. All of the design work, marketing and video production was done in-house with no need for outside production companies or expensive software.

Persons and Organizations Involved:

The **Office of Communications** led the charge, working side by side with:

- Department heads willing to share their stories
- Board of Supervisors and Administration, which fully supported the transparency effort

Everyone pitched in, not because they had to, but because they saw the value in building a stronger connection with our residents.

Beneficiaries of the Program:

The biggest winners? Our residents. They now have:

- A better understanding of what their local government does
- Familiar faces and names to associate with services



- A monthly digital newsletter
- Quick, easy access to reliable information
- A reason to be engaged rather than frustrated

But it didn't stop there. Businesses, potential residents, and visitors have also benefited. Getting to Know BOCO offers a friendly, authentic look at how Botetourt works and what makes it a great place to live, work, play, and giveback. And internally? County staff felt seen and appreciated, which was one of our main goals – to humanize those that work in local government. They are also a part of the community and we wanted to shine a spotlight on that fact.

What Made It Special

"Getting to Know BOCO" stands out because it's:

- Low-cost but high-impact
- Fully replicable for any size locality
- Personable — not polished to perfection, but *real*
- Integrated into an existing communications strategy (website, livestreams, rumor control)
- Built for trust — by being proactive instead of reactive

It's not just about promoting services but it's about putting people behind the programs, and building a county where residents feel informed, empowered, and proud.

Results – What We've Seen So Far

Since launching in early 2024, "Getting to Know BOCO" has already made an impression:



- 5,000+ views across all videos
- 20% increase in website visits to featured departments
- Resident surveys show a 25% increase in "trust in county communications"
- [345 subscribers to our digital newsletter with a 62% open rate](#)

Feedback from residents includes:

- "These videos are great — I had no idea what the Economic Development office actually did until I watched this."
- "It's nice to see real people explaining things in plain English."
- We've even received questions and topic suggestions for future episodes — a sure sign that the series is engaging its audience.

Replication:

Can Other Localities Do This? Absolutely. If your locality has:

- A smartphone
- Basic editing tools (we use free or low-cost options)
- A curious, communicative staff

... then you can build a series just like this. We're happy to share scripts, ideas, templates, outreach tips even editing tools we've used. The key is to keep it simple, genuine, and consistent. Don't aim for perfection, aim for connection, and to humanize the dedicated men and women that serve in local government.



Conclusion:

"Getting to Know BOCO" is more than a video series, social media campaign or webpage. It's a window into how our county works, and why it matters. We are also proud to announce that Getting to Know BOCO has received a Silver Summit Award from the Blue Ridge Public Relations Society. This was an honor because it was judged and selected by a group of our peers in another state, showing that we are on the right track when it comes to effective and intentional community engagement.

In today's world of fast-spreading rumors and civic disengagement, we're proud to be building something different: a community where people know who we are, what we do, and how they can be part of it. Botetourt County will continue building on this success because we believe transparency is a service, too. Find out more at www.botetourtva.gov/gettingtoknowboco