



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: Chesterfield County

Program Title: Community Conversations

Program Category: Customer Service & Community Outreach

CONTACT INFORMATION

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SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Dave Goode

Title: Director, Constituent and Media Services

Signature: 

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2025 NACo Achievement Awards
Chesterfield County Program Nomination
Constituent and Media Services-Community Conversations

ABSTRACT OF THE PROGRAM

Members of the Chesterfield County Board of Supervisors work hard to engage with and keep residents informed about what is being prioritized and accomplished in their respective districts. Recognizing residents' desire to be informed and elected officials' desire to engage with residents about opportunities and challenges that exist within their communities, "Community Conversations" launched in October 2022. The meetings are limited to 30 participants, which allows for more in-depth conversations than what can be achieved in larger meetings.

Despite the county's use of more tools than ever before to engage residents, constituents still desired opportunities to engage in longform conversation with their local elected officials. Likewise, elected leaders recognized they were hearing from constituents about issues important to them oftentimes too late in processes to have appreciable impact on decision-making or outcomes. Community Conversations have provided elected leaders an effective and proactive way to engage with residents.

THE NEED FOR THE PROGRAM

Constituents expressed a lack of awareness about activity occurring in their magisterial districts and the county as whole. They were concerned about not learning about zoning cases and other community changes until after those cases were approved or changes were being implemented. Despite being more connected than ever, constituents still felt like their opportunities to learn and provide input on local issues were lacking. Local leaders were hearing from frustrated constituents and sought a better way to engage more effectively on a range of issues. At the encouragement of Bermuda District Supervisor Jim Ingle, the Constituent and Media Services Department set out to create a public forum in which residents could share their perspectives and ask questions in a casual and conversational manner. This enabled board members and their constituents time to share thoughts and ideas tailored to the real needs of the community and address concerns and possible solutions together.

PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

Members of the Chesterfield County Board of Supervisors work hard to keep residents informed about what is being prioritized and accomplished in their respective districts. Recognizing that residents enjoy hearing about projects underway, "Community Conversations" was launched in October 2022, where board members could share important project updates, upcoming events, and other county highlights.

The meetings, limited to 30 pre-registered participants, allow more in-depth conversations that are difficult to achieve with larger groups. Residents may submit topics of interest beforehand, which provide starting points for the conversations. Based on topics presented in advance, Constituent and Media Services staff work with board members to research topics and/or determine what subject matter experts to invite, at the board member's discretion. Two community conversations are scheduled, one

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during the evening and one during the afternoon, enabling citizens to select which timeframe works best for them. Factors considered when selecting a venue for the community conversations include accessibility, parking, and adequate, private meeting space to accommodate attendees. Locations familiar to community members are often chosen, which has contributed to growing attendance.

Community engagement has the potential to transform quality of life for constituents. Hearing directly from community members helps elected officials decide what to prioritize. Gaining insight from constituents about specific needs, requests, grievances, or challenges help guide local elected officials on the most pressing issues and concerns of their constituents. Building such a direct line of communication between elected leaders and community members grows transparency, accountability and trust. These meetings not only encourage constituents to engage in the community but also to bond and build morale with other residents.

Technology has the potential to increase civic participation by providing more accessible platforms for engagement, but not all community members have equal access to digital resources, which can lead to a gap in engagement opportunities. Community Conversations helps fill that gap. Overall, Community Conversations play a crucial role in encouraging civic participation and provide assurance that different segments of the population are being heard and considered in the decision-making process.

THE COST OF THE PROGRAM

Aside from the current salaries paid to the board members and county staff who plan and support the conversations, there are no additional costs or tax dollars used to provide Community Conversations.

THE RESULTS/SUCCESS OF THE PROGRAM

Community Conversations have experienced an increase in attendance and interest. Members of the public have repeatedly expressed an appreciation to the board members for holding the meetings. Attendees have commented that they feel a greater sense of community cohesion between one another as well as between the local government and the community because of the meetings. Based on feedback received, the meetings have also been extended from 90 minutes to two hours, to allow greater discussion.

INNOVATION/WORTHINESS OF AWARD

Community Conversations is worthy of an award because it can easily be replicated in any locality that wants to improve trust and transparency in government and disseminate information to community members in a way that complements the many other forms of citizen engagement that occur via social media, other technology, and traditional topic-specific townhall meetings. Constituents want and deserve to know exactly what is going on in their community and local government so they can weigh in, express their opinions, and hold their local leaders accountable.