



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: _____

Program Title: _____

Program Category: _____

CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: _____

Title: _____

Department: _____

Telephone: _____ Website: _____

Email: _____

SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: _____

Title: _____

Signature: _____


2025 VACo Achievement Award Entry

State of the County Live Podcast

ABSTRACT OF THE PROGRAM:

Chesterfield County's Constituent and Media Services Department (CMS) recharged a somewhat outdated end-of-year staple in 2024, the latest example of breaking out of its more traditional roots.

In an effort to better deliver the information in the annual State of the County (SOTC) address, CMS revamped the entire approach and paired it with a live production of the county's podcast, Behind the Mic (BTM), to give people a more interesting, more insightful experience.

After working for months to put the event together—with various elements aligning including set design, audio and video production, as well as the host and panelists being prepared for the filming—the county delivered its SOTC in front of several hundred Chesterfield Chamber of Commerce guests on Dec. 11, 2024.

Delivering SOTC via a live recording of BTM was unlike anything the county (or anyone in the region) had done. The podcast, which featured both the new police chief and interim school superintendent for a fireside chat as well as several other leaders, including the county administrator, as part of a first-of-its-kind conversation, was a rousing success and gave SOTC a longer shelf life across multiple mediums.

NEED AND CONTEXT

Every year, many localities throughout the Commonwealth present their annual “state of the county” or “state of the government” address to stakeholders. Chesterfield is no different, presenting its annual SOTC presentation every December to the Chesterfield Chamber of Commerce. Historically, this address is a 45-minute presentation by the county administrator with dozens and dozens of slides that are packed full of important information that pertains, in some way, shape, or form, to all aspects of Chesterfield’s citizenry.

At the same time, Chesterfield County is home to more than 360,000 residents and the number of those residents who subscribe to local newspapers or ingest traditional media continues to dwindle, especially as the county’s lone local newspaper has shut down and the region’s daily paper continues to downsize. Regardless of the demographic, residents are more likely than ever to get their information from other sources if they get it at all.

So, against that backdrop, Chesterfield looked to reimagine the way the SOTC was presented in 2024 to meet residents where they are in how they get their information. In addition to the presentation to the Chamber, we utilized the format of county’s podcast to allow the information from the SOTC to reach a larger and different audience.

This format was chosen because in the past three years, Chesterfield’s podcast has thrived and become a go-to resource for the department regardless of public relations campaign or messaging objectives. Applying that success to the SOTC address seemed like an intriguing pairing and proved to be successful.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROGRAM

Staff from county administration and CMS began the process of designing what would ultimately become the new SOTC live podcast recording in early fall ahead of the December 2024 event. For weeks, a group of nearly two dozen staffers collaborated on it.

For weeks leading up to the event, a working group led by the Communications and Media Division and made up of nearly two dozen county staff collaborated on the program. The group needed to determine not just the information key to the community in recapping 2024 but also the best voices to share that information as part of a live video podcast production.

The plan ultimately consisted of three segments: An initial fireside chat that included both the new police chief and the then interim superintendent of schools, followed by a splash video of highlights from the year followed by a four-person panel to discuss important topics that would close out the hour-long recording.

Deliberate thought and planning went into how best to frame the conversation, to make it not only engaging but also informative. Because Chesterfield recently hired its new chief of police and was about to officially make the interim superintendent permanent, we felt it would be best to have multiple conversations with different voices on different topics all within the same program.

The fireside chat focused on their perspectives of both “new” leaders as they became the new faces of their respective groups, capturing their points of view on how they would lead organization where they had existing long tenures. This portion of the program accounted for 10-15 minutes.

When choosing the four members of the SOTC panel, intentional prep work went into the topics the panelists would discuss and how to interweave the conversation such that it was natural and informative without being a boring set of slides. We knew we wanted a group that reflected

Chesterfield's diversity and spoke to the varied themes of transparency, accessibility, engagement, and continued progress on county initiatives.

As the leader of the organization and the traditional source of delivery for the SOTC, the county administrator would be one important voice. Due to the number of transportation projects and planning initiatives, the deputy county administrator for community development was a natural choice, too. With the continued focus on engaging small business within the county, the procurement director was also a desired participant. The final panelist was the county's digital media coordinator, who could speak to the complexity local governments face in reaching citizens. Given the different levels of experience, the different parts of the organization each panelist touched and their respective personalities, this was a compelling and engaging foursome to help deliver the 2024 SOTC "address."

To transition between the two conversations, a 2024 highlight video was created by the Communications and Media Divisions' video team that included clips showing various groundbreakings, ribbon cuttings, and other county programs and economic development announcements from throughout the year. A piece of the traditional SOTC, the highlight video allowed for even more county accomplishments and news to be highlighted while also serving as a great transition between the fireside chat and panel discussion.

In addition to picking those on stage and the topics they would discuss, careful consideration was also given to the way things would look and feel. Set design was an important piece of the puzzle due to the visual component of the video recording as well as the intent to use this year's SOTC in a variety of different ways. The county's graphic design team was tasked with developing an eye-catching backdrop that would give the SOTC its own intimate, accessible feeling. We wanted the set design to make those in the audience and those watching feel a sense of inclusion as if you were part of the conversation that was happening as opposed to a presentation you were watching.

The podcast host not only prepped all of the participants but planned out the flow of the conversation, the staging, and how to make it entertaining, as well as informative.

In the past, the county administrator would deliver the SOTC to the Chesterfield Chamber and then have to recreate it several times for different groups and speaking engagements, as it became a road show of sorts for county staff to deliver across the five magisterial districts.

That's why it was so essential that from the early discussion stages, the planning team considered the many ways in which the video podcast could be used into the future. To accomplish this, the Communications and Media Division's video staff was tasked with how best to film this live podcast to allow the final product to then be repackaged for a variety of county channels and messaging needs. Because it was filmed, several planning meetings were held beforehand in addition to a dry run to make sure everyone was prepared.

All told, roughly 200 people were in attendance for the first-ever live podcast recording, but it reached a far greater audience using the podcast format.

THE COST OF THE PROGRAM

Even with the new, innovative approach to delivering the SOTC, Chesterfield kept the needs of the community square in mind by keeping the cost minimal.

Because we used an already established product in Chesterfield BTM to deliver the information, the majority of the would-be cost was staff time. The one investment we had to make was to purchase the backdrop to give the live video podcast the look and feel we wanted. Without a doubt, it showed the true effectiveness of the new engagement tools and has many in the community hoping the new format is here to stay. Additionally, we are able to repurpose the backdrop for future Chesterfield BTM video podcast episodes.

Staff Time	Staff time from all relevant departments is given at no charge
Audio/Video Equipment	No additional cost as already have the equipment
Backdrop	\$1,468.87
Promotion/Media Relations	\$0, all earned media
Total	\$1,468.87

THE RESULTS/SUCCESS OF THE PROGRAM

This new, innovative approach was a successful team effort. Following the event, many in attendance gave positive feedback on the new format as well as the information discussed. We heard attendees found it informative and engaging and those in the audience enjoyed feeling a part of something.

To date, the video podcast has more than 300 views on YouTube and its audio counterpart has another hundred. It did particularly well on social, too: Across 24 published posts, there were 15,044 impressions, 640 engagements, and 390 link clicks related to the SOTC, all organic.

Presenting the SOTC as a live video podcast helped BTM gain even more notoriety and fans.

While already successful compared to other government podcasts, Chesterfield was able to reach a much larger audience and increase the shelf life of SOTC. Additionally, several Chesterfield Chamber members inquired on how to be featured on a future BTM episode.

Including the heads of not just the county government but both the local police department and

school system allowed for dynamic conversations to occur all in one place, being captured on the same microphones and packaged together.

It's another example of the way the podcast has become an indispensable tool for how Chesterfield not only shares information but also shines a light on interesting, underserved stories throughout the community.

Highlights include:

- Held initial meetings, defined responsibilities, planned out the process
- Took inventory of existing equipment and what would be needed for a live production
- Planned out the potential backdrop needs associated with on-location filming
- Planned out potential topics and workshopped conversational options while determining the best sources of information to include on the panel
- Designed advertisements and promotional material for the event
- Did a walk thru to give participants a sense of what the recording would look like
- Recorded the SOTC episode in front of more than 200 audience members, with participants that included the county administrator, the chief of police, the superintendent of schools, a deputy county administrator, the director of procurement, a social media coordinator.

The success was evident in the room and the level of interest and degree of positive feedback thereafter resulted in the potential for such a live event becoming a staple of the SOTC in the future.

The podcast episode is posted across every major platform and the video version lives on the county's YouTube page. Both formats are also available on the website at chesterfield.gov/podcast.

INNOVATION

This year's SOTC and the process of turning it into a live video podcast has redefined what an annual address can look and feel like in our community. The intimate nature of the medium lends itself to connecting people across the county, which in a locality of this geographic size is no small feat. The way the department harnessed that potential with this year's SOTC opens the door for growth beyond being just a one-time opportunity for the organization to pass along information on all that transpired in the course of a calendar year.

It's part of a greater picture where Chesterfield continues to meet the informational needs of its residents by going in-depth in ways traditional media simply never could or would, especially considering today's media realities in central Virginia. Through this program, the department has produced a more compelling offering as seen by staff, the administration, the county's Board of Supervisors, and members of the community in exponential ways.

It's another first for the county, to use a mixed-medium production like Chesterfield BTM to help share the county's annual address, to excel at being both entertaining and yet also informative. The live video podcast of the SOTC makes the value proposition clear to all who interact with it regardless of the way in which they choose to experience the address. Both the visual and audio versions of the show achieve the same standard and speak to their respective audiences well. The mixed-medium flavor being applied to the SOTC allowed it to thrive in ways heretofore unachievable.

The success of the live video podcast version of the SOTC is a testament to the way the organization has followed through on the vision and iteration of advancing its messaging

opportunities and best serving the residents of Chesterfield, underscoring why it is worthy of a 2025 VACo Achievement Award.

SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIALS

[Behind the Mic Episode 103: Chesterfield state of the County 2024 \(Live!\)](#)

[Full Video: Chesterfield Annual State of the County Address](#)

[Chesterfield's Annual State of the County Address Highlights](#)