



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: BRANDY L KOSSEB

The Franklin County Public Library Reimagines Its Role in Community Health

Executive Summary

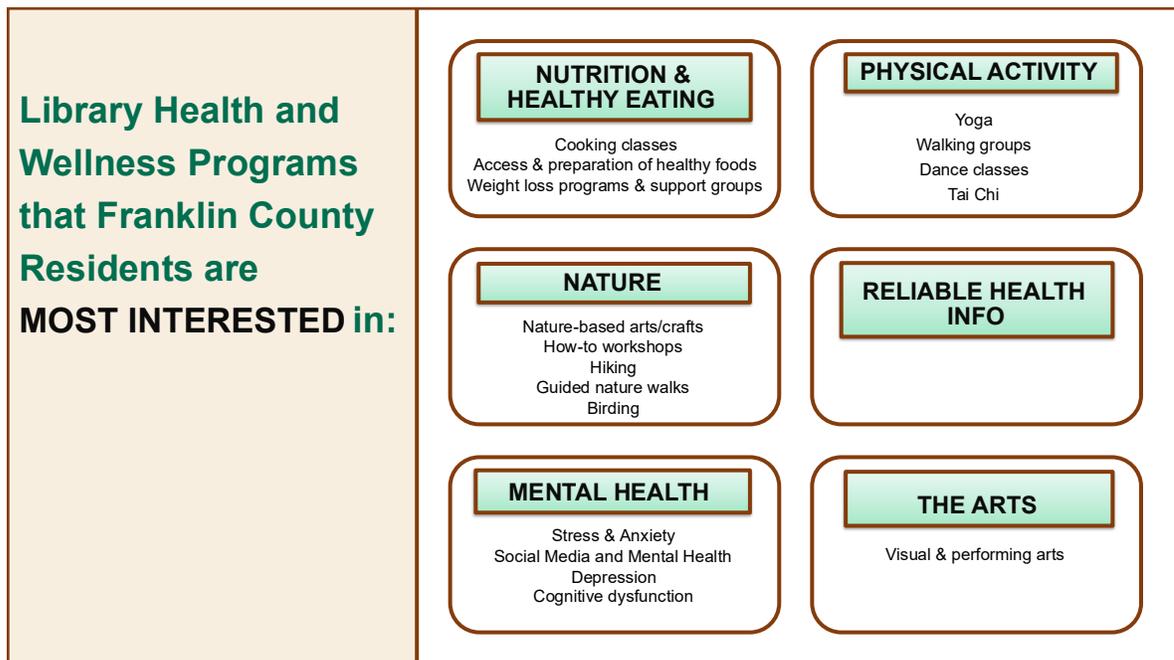
Public libraries across the globe are increasingly involved in efforts to promote health in their communities. Emerging research highlights how libraries are evolving from their traditional role of providing access to books to becoming key partners in community health. In 2023-2024, the Franklin County Public Library (FCPL) conducted a research study on how to become a more effective and strategic partner in promoting health in Franklin County, which has high rates of chronic disease, among other health-related challenges. The library's goal was to understand how to support a healthier community and deliver relevant and impactful programs and resources. Motivated by the principle "never guess when you can ask," the FCPL collected data from county residents and other community sources, and in 2024 continuously through 2025, has used the data to respond to the community's health needs. To ensure sustained involvement in community health promotion, the FCPL has embedded health-related programs in its strategic plan for 2025-2029. This application focuses on the library's implementation programs in 2024 through the present. Highlights include installing privacy pods for telehealth and other internet-dependent activities, expanding lifelong learning programs in health-promoting subjects such as healthy cooking and eating, scaling up stress-management programs, and helping increase food security among all ages. The library has partnered with community organizations in this work, including Carilion Clinic, Virginia Cooperative Extension, and Feeding Southwest Virginia. It is using the results of the research study as a blueprint for reimagining its role in community health.

Program Description

Public libraries in the U.S. and across the globe are increasingly participating in efforts to promote health in their communities. Emerging research highlights how public libraries are evolving from their traditional role of providing access to books to becoming key partners in community health promotion. Participating in community health efforts in Franklin County is not new for the Franklin County Public Library (FCPL). Over the years, the library has hosted ad hoc events such as blood drives, flu shot clinics, and blood pressure screenings. While worthwhile, these one-off events were not strategically designed to mitigate the community's persistent and high rates of obesity, hypertension, diabetes, physical inactivity, and stress. The FCPL wanted to determine how to be a more effective and strategic partner in promoting community health in Franklin County and helping address key drivers of the county's chronic disease rates, such as how to prepare healthy foods, support people in their readiness to change, and increase physical activity. To find out, the library began a multi-phase program with data collection and needs assessment in 2023-2024 and program implementation and continuous operation in 2024 through the present. The program and concrete actions are embedded in FCPL's strategic plan through 2029.

The FCPL assembled a research team to conduct the study pro bono. The team was comprised of library personnel, a retired public health researcher from Franklin County, and public health faculty and students from Virginia Tech. The non-profit Friends of the FCPL awarded stipends to the students and helped pay the study's administrative expenses. FCPL personnel were heavily involved in designing the research questions to ground them in appreciative inquiry and to enable the library to gather relevant information to inform its strategic decisions about its role in community health.

The study, *The Role of the Franklin County Public Library in Promoting Community Health*, collected data from county residents, community stakeholders, and library leadership and staff. It revealed strong support for the FCPL to become a partner in community health. Community stakeholders perceived the library as an asset-rich and trusted organization, primed to participate in community health and even, in some instances, positioned to fill gaps in health promotion. In addition, county residents expressed interest in the following:



In 2024 and ongoing to the present, the FCPL began applying findings from the study and implementing projects. At a macro level, library personnel now participate in the Franklin County Community Health Assessment (CHA)—a triennial process for identifying strengths and barriers that impact community health—and in Healthy Franklin County, the coalition charged with developing and carrying out strategies based off the CHA findings. The library’s other implementation projects include:

- Designing and delivering health and wellness programs that align with the interests of county residents. These have included a custom-made, 6-week healthy eating and weight management series taught by a registered dietician.
- Installing privacy pods for telehealth and other internet-dependent activities.
- Partnering with Carilion Clinic to host the 8-week series Full Plate Living® combined with gentle exercises and breathing techniques; a 6-week Creative Expression Stress Management series; and a 6-week series on eating healthy on a budget (this series is underway at the time of this application).
- Scaling up lifelong learning programs for ages 18 and older in arts and crafts. Known to convey numerous health benefits, from stress relief to brain health, library staff have organized and sometimes even taught creative expression offerings. As of June 30, 2025, staff had taught 12 classes reaching 115 people and outside instructors had taught 40 classes reaching 324 people.
- Partnering with Feeding Southwest Virginia to deliver services to address food insecurity, including lunch for children and youth during the summer and distribution of free produce during healthy eating classes for adults.
- Providing Penworthy's Stay Sharp™ kits for check-out, which were developed with input from a leading Alzheimer's association and provide programming activities for aging adults and others with special needs.
- Assembling and providing "Try-It" kits for check-out that enable the public to dip their toes in a variety of health, wellness and activity-related pastimes, including pickle ball, juggling, disc golf, birding, and various forms of crafting. The kits enable people to try out new activities and develop habits for a healthy life.

- Introducing a quarterly gardening series with Franklin County Master Gardeners with classes on growing your own food.
- Delivering custom-made classes that spotlight the joy of cooking using local foods and swapping out processed ingredients with healthier ones.
- Partnering with Virginia Cooperative Extension/4-H on a series for teens on cooking skills and healthy eating.

Whereas local health-based agencies and organizations sometimes struggle to engage the public in health programs, the library is consistently filling its classes to capacity in part to its reputation as a trusted organization that embodies a safe, welcoming, and neutral environment. Franklin County residents and library patrons can perhaps speak best about the FCPL's impact on their health and wellness behaviors. Following are several of their testimonies (edited for clarity and length):

- *In these classes I learned that we are on a health journey and with time, change will take place. I learned about becoming fit for life.*
- *I changed my mindset to being more positive concerning my overall health. Instead of 'don't do this, don't do that,' I learned what I can do.*
- *I'm recovering from Long COVID. These classes helped me push through my fatigue and push through the days I don't want to move or make good food choices.*
- *I would recommend these classes to family and friends because they are low stress and not preachy.*
- *I signed up for this series because I'm very discouraged with my weight and trying to lose weight. The classes helped me understand how to make small changes at a time and build healthy habits.*

Public libraries across the U.S. are reinventing themselves. In the article, “21st Century Libraries: Changing from the Ground Up,” Dennis Pierce notes, “Even before the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted lives around the world, public libraries were undergoing dramatic changes. ... No longer just repositories of information, libraries have morphed into full-service community centers that aim to meet a wide variety of civic and social needs.” Thanks to the community health study and the subsequent implementation of new programs and partnerships, the FCPL has reimagined itself as a key partner in helping our community be a healthier one.

Concluding Notes

The FCPL’s study methods, data collection instruments, research protocols, and lifelong learning program designs can be readily shared with public libraries and health departments from other Virginia counties. In addition, Virginia county personnel can learn about the FCPL study design and research methodology at the following article published by the *American Journal of Health Education*: “A Collaboration Between a Public Library and Health Educators to Promote Community Health”:

<https://www.tandfonline.com/eprint/UBYGUFXXNPSXX9X7YBN9J/full?target=10.1080/19325037.2025.2453131>

Text for VACo Press Release

The Franklin County Public Library (FCPL) in Franklin County, Va. has implemented a broad array of community health programs to meet the health needs of its community and help address the county's high rates of chronic disease.

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