



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: Gloucester

Program Title: Reaching a Different Audience via Video

Program Category: Communications

CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: Quinton Sheppard

Title: Director

Department: Community Engagement & Public Information

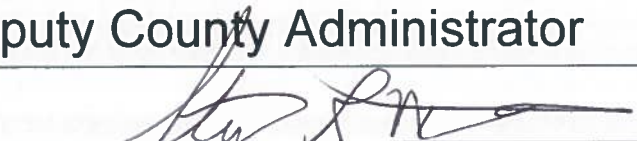
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SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Steve Wright

Title: Deputy County Administrator

Signature: 

Executive summary:

Gloucester County has long been dedicated to choosing the most effective ways to communicate with our residents. Over the past couple of decades, the County has created a Public Information team, adopted three cable television channels, created a quarterly magazine and fostered partnerships with print and broadcast media partners in the area.

However, lately, the medium that people are most likely to tune into is social media – and within the broad spectrum of social media, short videos have become dominant.

Gloucester's Community Engagement & Public Information Department has overhauled its media strategy to acknowledge these market trends. With patience, candid interviews and a healthy sense of humor, the department's videos have increased the reach of the County's social media accounts year after year, with 2025 on track to show our best metrics of all time. This low-cost, high-impact change in communications strategy could be easily adopted by other counties of a similar size.

Problem:

One of the greatest honors that comes with serving as Gloucester County's Community Engagement & Public Information Department is highlighting the hard work of our coworkers. In the local government world, there are many dedicated employees who have served our community for years, but who end up being "unsung heroes" when their jobs aren't well understood by the public.

The public information team here strives to pull back the curtain. Everyone benefits from greater transparency – the residents who pay taxes for government services, people who wish to use public services, and the employees who work diligently to provide those services.

With that mission, though, come communication challenges. Print and television platforms have fewer customers than they did a decade ago. Social media creates many excellent opportunities to share information, but at the same time, these platforms have been tailored to provide entertainment. Every post must compete for attention. If a Gloucester citizen goes online to scroll for cat videos, and a government PSA slides across their feed, it has to be engaging enough (within a split second) to grab their attention.

“The algorithm” looms large, as well. Typically, websites like Facebook, Instagram and YouTube employ an algorithm to try and keep users scrolling, which means that the system automatically prioritizes content that generates engagement. These systems are more likely to reward viral videos than they are to share posts lacking in “likes” or “comments.”

Some organizations sidestep the algorithm by paying for their messages to be broadcast to a wider audience (this is called “boosting” a post). However, Gloucester County aims to work on the most streamlined budget possible. The department’s posts are expected to reach our local audience without the aid of a paid boost.

Understanding these challenges, the CE&PI Department decided that we must be intentional about our mission. When we go to share the heartwarming stories and upcoming opportunities of the Gloucester County Government, we have to maintain our professional standards, but also format information in a way that adequately competes in the digital space.

Innovation and collaboration:

Starting in 2024, with the knowledge that videos performed better online than either text or photo posts, we started focusing heavily on short videos.

Instead of announcements, we could innovate to share the same information as a story. “We’re hiring on our Facilities team” could become an engaging, visual introduction to an existing employee who loves his job in facilities. Our local audience responds well when they can see the main characters, hear these public servants speak in their own words, and follow the journey from start to finish in less than three minutes.

After looking into trending government accounts like VDOT and the National Park Service, we also noticed that videos which incorporate (clean, situationally-appropriate) humor performed well. People are still surprised and tickled when government agencies show their “funny bone.” Even if the video’s main message doesn’t appeal to them, folks are more likely to share a video where their local government made them laugh, as a sort of social media “anomaly.” This, in turn, reaches their friends – and an audience that may not otherwise subscribe to the Gloucester County Government accounts.

An initiative like this requires collaboration between departments. Many of our employees are naturally camera-shy. The Community Engagement & Public Information team has to build relationships with these folks, and let them have a role in the editing process, before they’re comfortable speaking on camera for a public audience. Their input is crucial, because operating as a transparent government is only possible when all departments buy in to the mission.

The partnership with other departments is likewise crucial when your public information team is small. Gloucester County has two employees who focus primarily on this mission – a

manager (who has many supervisory responsibilities) and a media specialist. Typically, the media specialist is the person who goes out to collect videos and edit them, but with so many initiatives happening concurrently, she can't be in two places at once. It's extremely helpful for departments to be comfortable taking video on their phones and sending it in, when she's otherwise booked.

Dedicating to this type of innovation, and leaning into the spirit of collaboration, Gloucester County has produced dozens of high-quality videos, which have bolstered our presence on Facebook, YouTube and Instagram. The more people we regularly reach, the better our chances are of achieving communication goals.

Video name	Date shared	Department referenced	Tone	Cumulative views
<u>Where everybody (sort of) knows your name</u>	May 27, 2025	Library	Funny, nostalgic	5,325
<u>Community Engagement Coordinators bridge services with our schools</u>	April 1, 2025	Community Engagement & Public Information	Informative	8,951
<u>Gloucester County, Virginia State of the County 2024</u>	Feb. 27, 2025	Administration	Reflective	3,578
<u>Libby: Use your library card to get e-books, audiobooks on your Kindle</u>	Feb. 19, 2025	Library	Tutorial	3,607
<u>PR&T goes for Santa's Elf Handling Certification</u>	Dec. 6, 2024	Parks, Recreation & Tourism	Funny	2,500
<u>Building Inspection: Making Gloucester a safer, more welcoming County</u>	Dec. 3, 2024	Building Inspection	Unsung heroes	1,849
<u>How would different book genres enter the Gloucester Public Library?</u>	Nov. 25, 2024	Library	Funny	9,519
<u>You can Count On our Emergency Management Team</u>	Nov. 18, 2024	Emergency Management	Musical humor	3,540

We still always stop and watch when the Coleman Bridge opens	Oct. 9, 2024	General	Local pride	7,760
The Virginia Room: Check out this hidden gem at our Main Library	Sept. 6, 2024	Library	Informative	1,866
Gloucester Library Olympic Games	July 26, 2024	Library	Funny	5,472
People from all over will be at the library on Aug. 3 for Comix Con	July 23, 2024	Library	Funny	3,794
4-H summer camp: Fun for campers and counselors!	July 16, 2024	Agricultural Extension	Heartwarming	2,922
Animal Control earns another No-Kill Shelter Award	July 4, 2024	Animal Control	Unsung heroes	1,791
Planning & Zoning Ordinance hearing on July 11	July 2, 2024	Planning & Zoning	Informative	2,384
Gloucester Library Five-O	June 2, 2024	Library	Funny, nostalgic	3,989
Rain or shine, the rabies clinic goes on!	May 17, 2024	Animal Control	Informative	3,013
What is it like to work with Gloucester Facilities Management?	May 7, 2024	Facilities Management	Recruiting	1,735
What is it like to work with Gloucester Parks & Rec?	April 22, 2024	Parks, Recreation & Tourism	Recruiting	2,599
What does the Procurement Department do?	March 22, 2024	Finance	Informative	2,293
The presidential primaries are almost here	Feb. 12, 2024	Elections & Voter Registration	Informative	1,331
Woodville Rosenwald School soon to open to tourists	Feb. 1, 2024	Historic Resources	Informative	1,255

Project details and results:

This initiative to release more videos was a low-cost, high-impact change for the Gloucester County government. The Community Engagement & Public Information Department already had someone on staff who had the video editing experience necessary for the job.

Much of the cost was just assigning that staff member to spend time on these videos; but since the multimedia specialist's job is to "produce drafts of print and electronic media," it was well in-line with what the organization intended the salary to support.

In terms of equipment, these videos were filmed using one camera, which the department had previously purchased to take photos. It's not specifically graded for videography, and it's not the newest model on the market, but this quest was never about perfection. The team knew we needed to jump in, feet-first, and see if we could prove that the concept was worthwhile.

Here's the value of the materials we used for this endeavor:

- Canon EOS 70D camera body: approximately \$250
- EFS 18-135 mm lens: approximately \$500
- Comica wireless microphones: \$175
- Onn 67-inch tripod: \$38
- Adobe Premiere Pro: \$275 annually

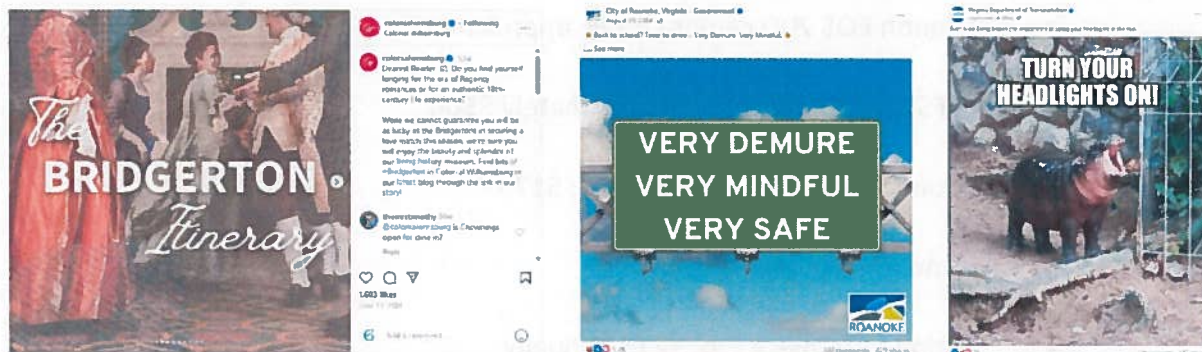
That comes to just over \$1,200 for the total package, with many materials carrying over for multiple years of use. We've made more than 250 videos with this setup since we first put it together.

We have several lessons to impart to any similar-sized government organizations that would aim to take up this initiative.

Firstly, there are some commonsense production decisions that can improve a video's likelihood of success. When you're interviewing a coworker, consider letting them speak in their

own words. Conversational language always comes across more trustworthy than a script, even if both versions of the video would be accurate.

It pays to specifically upload an engaging thumbnail photo, and write an entertaining caption. Incorporate b-roll, instead of having someone speak continuously in the video frame. Consider adding license-free background music to your video. Stay aware of social media trends, and see if they can be adopted for your needs. More than one major government account posted content that referenced the “very modest, very demure” TikTok trend in 2024, to their audience’s delight. Posts about the pygmy hippo Moo Deng made their way into local government content, and even posts referencing the Netflix show, “Bridgerton.”

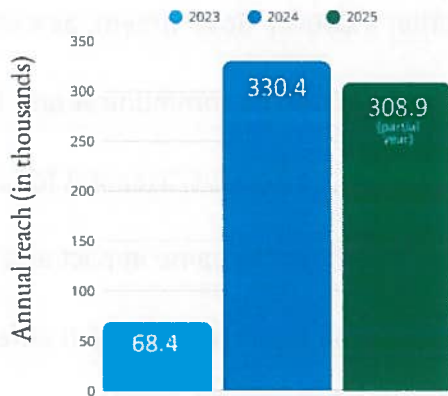


You can also get your video in front of more eyes, and spark that first wave of interest, by sharing it to community pages online. For example, we have several groups on Facebook designed to share the “Gloucester 411,” and since we know people in those groups are already interested in Gloucester news, we generate good results from sharing our videos there.

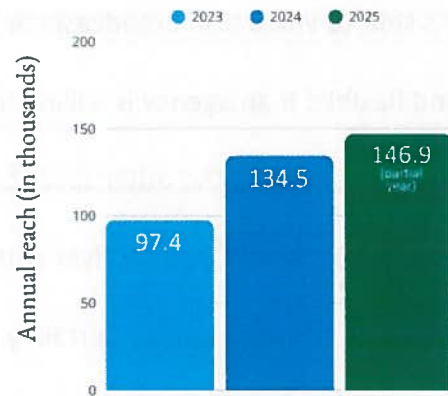
Finally, patience and consistency off. In some cases, the jump in statistics was immediate – but for our YouTube page, 2024’s numbers were actually more “steady” with the previous year than “surpassing.” It pays to stick with the plan. We’ve noticed that over time, as our initial videos gained traction and social media algorithms started to predict our videos could hold an

audience, our viewership gradually increased. So far in 2025, all of our social media statistics are on-track to comfortably outpace either of the past two years.

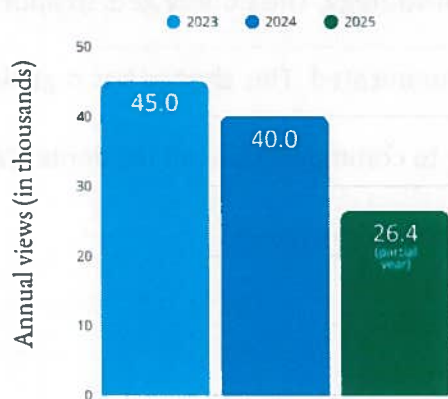
Gloucester County Facebook



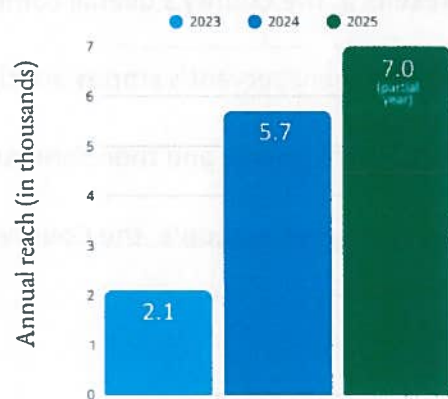
Gloucester Library Facebook



Gloucester County YouTube



Gloucester County Instagram



How this model could assist other counties:

If other counties share the goal of increasing the reach of their public messages, Gloucester would highly recommend giving a Public Information employee the permission and support to focus on short-form videos.

With proper video editing skills, even mediocre equipment can lead to dramatic results. Videos are the language people use to communicate in 2025, and they're relevant across

platforms. We're able to track the impact these additions have made on social media, but we also have posted many of these videos to our existing cable channels, and we have every reason to believe they're appreciated by our television audience.

This shift to video also broadcasts to the public that a County Government, as a whole, is modern and flexible. If an agency is willing to put time and skill into its communications, it lends a sense of legitimacy to all the other services offered. Think about an advertisement for a library event for teenagers: would a paper flyer with Comic Sans font have the same impact as a YouTube reel with trending audio? Certainly not. Not only would the mediums reach different audiences – they imply different levels of professionalism, in general.

In conclusion, Gloucester's shift to focus on short-form videos in 2024 has returned excellent results in the County's overall communication strategy. The County gets to appear modern. Government servant's stories are clearly communicated. This change has organically increased our reach online, and therefore our capacity to communicate with residents. With our messages reaching more people, the County's transparency is increased.