

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](#).

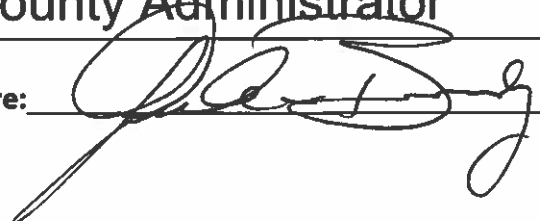
PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: Hanover
Program Title: Engage Hanover: Empowering Community Voice in Local Government
Program Category: Communications

CONTACT INFORMATION

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SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: John A. Budesky
Title: County Administrator
Signature: 

Program title: Engage Hanover: Empowering Community Voice in Local Government



Executive Summary

Hanover County launched [Engage Hanover](#) to strengthen communication between local government and the residents it serves. As community expectations for transparency, accessibility and engagement have evolved, so has the County's approach to public input. While traditional tools, including public meetings, surveys and social media, are effective, they often limit who can participate.

Engage Hanover addresses this challenge by providing a centralized two-way communication channel with its residents. Citizens can learn about County initiatives, explore project details and provide feedback that helps shape local policies and priorities. With features like comprehensive surveys, visual timelines and project-specific updates, the site encourages participation at a time and place convenient for the user.

Citizen engagement is essential to building a more informed and involved public, giving residents the opportunity and tools to share concerns and ideas on key initiatives. This

input helps Hanover County make more informed policy decisions and improve outcomes by reflecting the community's shared perspectives.

Engage Hanover's centralized online system for engagement improves collaboration and builds public trust, ensuring more voices are included in the decision-making process.

Whether someone wants to weigh in on a parks project, learn about upcoming road improvements or help guide community planning efforts, this platform is available 24/7, allowing users to contribute in real time.

The decision to create Engage Hanover through PublicInput — a company that provides engagement software for local and state governments — reflects Hanover's commitment to being transparent, responsive and inclusive. Engage Hanover is more than a website — it's a digital town square where community input and participation helps shape decisions.

Problem/Challenge

For years, Hanover has relied on traditional outreach tools, including public meetings, social media, newsletters and news releases, to share information and invite feedback.

While effective in many ways, these channels have limitations. Public meetings often attract only a small, highly engaged group of participants. Social media comment threads can be inaccurate or off-topic, and not all residents are aware of or able to attend in-person meetings.

Hanover County leaders also recognized a growing public expectation for more convenient and interactive communication, especially digital tools that allow residents to share feedback from anywhere. With important community decisions on the horizon and strong

public interest in planning, infrastructure, parks and services, the need for a centralized platform to gather informed input became clear.

Getting residents involved is key to shaping policies that truly reflect the community's priorities. Without broad input, there's a risk that decisions won't fully take people's perspectives into account. Hanover needed a better way to build trust and make it easier for residents to share their thoughts on local issues.

Engage Hanover's online platform has created a more accessible, two-way communication channel between the County and the community.

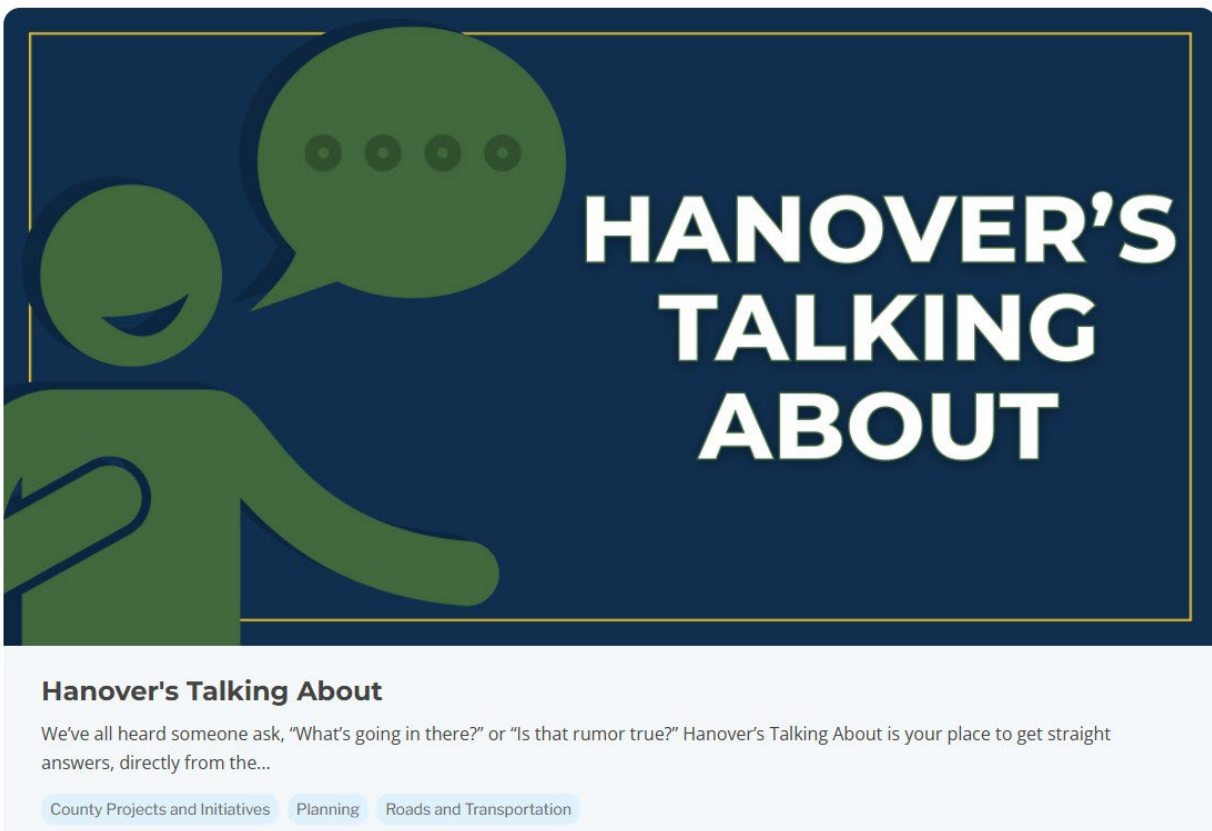
Program Description/Execution

[Engage Hanover](#) is a dynamic online platform created to make public participation easier, more accessible and more meaningful. It offers residents a one-stop hub to learn about County projects and initiatives, share their input, and stay up to date on important issues and events happening in the community.

The platform offers several simple ways for residents to get involved — submitting feedback online, sending an email or leaving a quick voicemail message. It also helps County staff stay connected with meeting attendees, making it easier to track engagement and follow up with those who want to stay informed.

- Residents can register for meetings through Engage Hanover
- Staff can upload paper sign-in from meetings
- Attendees can sign in digitally at the meeting, directly through Engage Hanover.

Each project page includes detailed information, visual timelines and updates that help residents understand the status of a project and how it has evolved. For complex initiatives, projects can be grouped into stages, allowing users to see the full arc of planning, community input and implementation. Residents can also subscribe to receive alerts when new updates are posted for projects that interest them.



The platform also includes an appealing feature that Hanover's County Administrator had long sought to offer residents: [Hanover's Talking About](#). This tool allows residents to submit questions about things they're seeing or hearing in the community. County staff respond privately — either by email or within the user's portal — and if the question is of broader interest, it can be posted publicly on the project page as part of a growing list of Frequently

Asked Questions. Many of the questions submitted so far relate to new construction around the County, such as what's being built at a particular site. Others are more general, like "Why are there so many car washes in Hanover?"

Engage Hanover also benefits the County by helping staff to collect useful demographic information, see which projects are getting the most interest and learn where engaged residents live in relation to those projects. These insights make it easier to tailor outreach efforts and connect more effectively with the community.

Together, all of these features make Engage Hanover a powerful tool for connecting residents with their local government and shaping informed decisions that align with what the community cares about.

Financing and Staffing

Shelby Walker, a communications coordinator on Hanover's four-member Communications and Community Engagement team, manages the day-to-day content and overall coordination of the Engage Hanover platform. She works closely with a representative from PublicInput — the company behind the engagement software used by state and local governments across the country — to keep the site running smoothly.

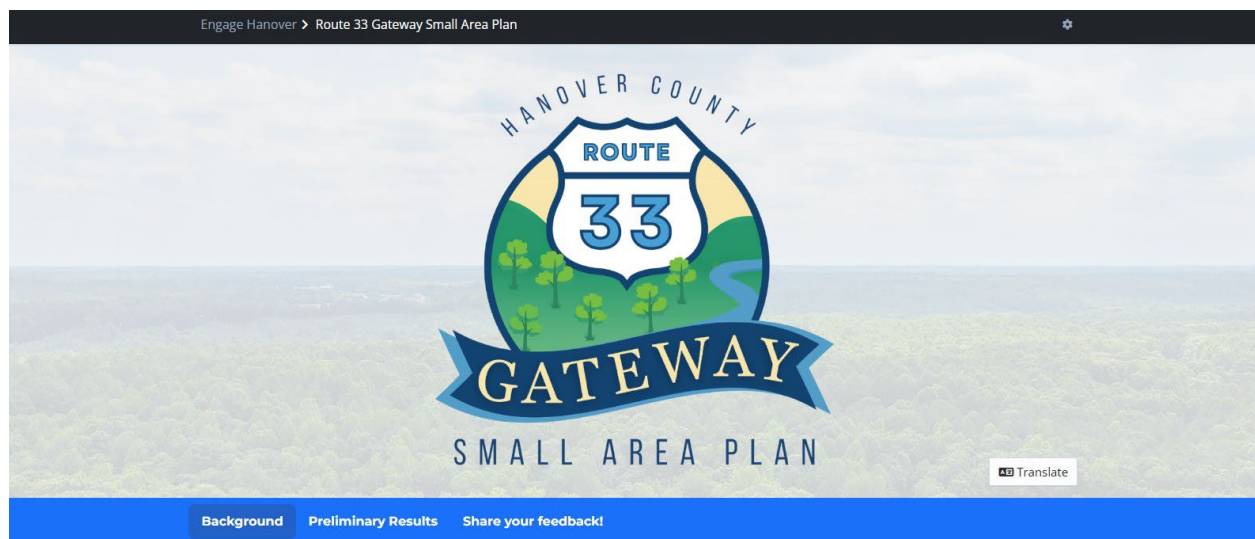
Staff from other departments, including Planning and Public Works, also use the platform to promote upcoming projects and connect with residents in new ways.

The County's annual cost for the Engage Hanover platform and PublicInput staff support and guidance is \$25,600.

Program Results/Success

Planning for Engage Hanover began in spring 2024, and by July, three members of Hanover’s Communications and Community Engagement team had completed training provided by PublicInput. Soon after, the County launched its first project on the site: a public hearing seeking input on potential future uses for a shuttered cannery.

The [cannery project](#) served as an ideal pilot, allowing the team to promote the initiative through social media and the *Here in Hanover* e-newsletter while showcasing how the new platform could centralize updates and public feedback. That page alone attracted 656 views, 149 participants, 428 survey responses, 78 comments, and 86 subscribers.



Route 33 Gateway Small Area Plan

Hanover County is currently working with residents, businesses, landowners and other community members to create a long-term vision for the U.S. Route 33 corridor between the Chickahominy River and Winns Church Road.

Since its official launch in April 2025, Engage Hanover has quickly become a trusted source for residents to stay informed and share their input. One standout example is the [Route 33 Gateway Small Area Plan](#) project page, which promoted a May 12 public workshop and an upcoming Planning Commission hearing. By late June, it had drawn 4,301 views, 311 participants, 7,712 responses, 580 comments, and 257 subscribers.

Platform-wide metrics from April through late June highlight Engage Hanover's strong performance:

- 1,558 participants
- 12,267 responses
- 1,150 comments
- 909 new contacts
- 758 meeting attendees
- 495 emails sent by Communications and Community Engagement

Email open rates have ranged from 70% to 94% — a remarkably high engagement rate.

In just a few months, Engage Hanover has transformed the way the County connects with and empowers its residents, laying the foundation for stronger community engagement for years to come.