



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: Henrico County, Virginia

Program Title: Make It Your Business Competition Fosters Entrepreneurship

Program Category: Community Development, Economic Development and Land Use

CONTACT INFORMATION

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1. Summary

Henrico County Public Schools' "Make It Your Business" competition is a countywide contest featuring students from six of the division's middle schools. The competition was hosted by the entrepreneurship program at the Advanced Career Education Center at Hermitage, a school division specialty center. As a part of their Make It Your Business curriculum, students work in groups to create a mock business. For the competition, they create a product and marketing materials and create a video explaining their product's value. At the end of the semester, the students come together at the Advanced Career Education Center at Hermitage to present their projects to a group of judges. The students competed for awards in three categories: best overall business, best table presentation and best video presentation. The entries were judged by a panel of educators, specialists and local business owners.

Following the competition, the top three businesses in the best overall categories have the high school Marketing I classes create a marketing packet for the new businesses, featuring professional commercial and social media advertising and a new business tagline. These packages are also given to the businesses and are judged in a competition.

There are several goals for the program. HCPS wants to give middle school students a chance to compete against and meet students from across the school division with a shared interest in entrepreneurship. The division also seeks to expose students to possible high school classes as they meet with the high school marketing classes and are exposed to the entrepreneurship program. Finally, participating high school students get to help a student small business create marketing materials that can be used in a real-world situation.

2. The Problem or Need for the Program

The school division's ACE centers were asked to add entrepreneurship to their curriculums, and have an entire program dedicated to this area. The event's goal was to have middle school Make it Your Business classes create and present a product and then work with the high school marketing and entrepreneurship classes to make it professional, create a marketing plan, create a commercial and get feedback. Organizers also wanted to have middle school students sign up to take entrepreneurship at the Advanced Career Education Center at Hermitage in their junior year of high school.

3. Description of the Program

Program Objectives: The Make It Your Business competition aims to foster entrepreneurial skills, creativity and teamwork among middle school students. The primary objectives of the program were to:

- **Encourage innovation:** Inspire students to think creatively and develop unique business ideas.
- **Enhance business acumen:** Provide practical experience in business development, including product creation, marketing and presentation.
- **Develop teamwork and collaboration:** Promote effective teamwork and collaboration among students.
- **Improve communication skills:** Enhance students' ability to communicate their ideas clearly and persuasively.
- **Connect with the community:** Facilitate interactions between students and local business professionals, fostering a sense of community and mentorship.

Development and Implementation Timeframe: The Make It Your Business competition was structured to span an entire semester, providing ample time for students to develop their projects thoroughly. The development and implementation timeframe included five phases:

- **Initial planning:** Introduction to the competition, formation of student groups and brainstorming of business ideas.
- **Market Research and Product Development:** Conducting market research, developing product prototypes and refining business concepts.
- **Marketing and Branding:** Creating marketing materials, including logos, promotional content and video presentations.
- **Final Preparations:** Finalizing projects, rehearsing presentations and preparing for the competition.
- **Competition Day:** Presentation of projects at the Advanced Career Education Center at Hermitage specialty center, evaluation by judges and announcement of winners.

Clientele: The primary participants in the Make It Your Business competition are students from six HCPS middle schools. These students were in grade 7 and are enrolled in the Make It Your Business course at their respective schools. The course and competition are designed to be inclusive, encouraging participation from students with diverse backgrounds and varying levels of experience in business and entrepreneurship.

County's Role in Implementation: Henrico County Public Schools plays a crucial role in the implementation of the Make It Your Business competition. Key contributions include:

- **Funding and resources:** Providing financial support for materials, prizes and event logistics. This includes funding for product development supplies, marketing materials and awards for the winning teams.
- **Facilities:** Offering the Advanced Career Education Center at Hermitage as the venue for the competition, ensuring a professional and educational environment for the event.
- **Coordination and oversight:** Coordinating with participating schools, managing the competition timeline and overseeing the overall execution of the program.
- **Community engagement:** Facilitating connections among students and the local business owners, educators and specialists who serve as judges and mentors.

Contributions of other partners: The success of the Make It Your Business competition was also supported by various partners, including:

- **Local businesses:** Business owners and professionals contributed their expertise by serving as judges, serving as mentors and offering feedback to students. Their involvement helped bridge the gap between the classroom and the real world, offering valuable insights and inspiration.
- **Educators and specialists:** Teachers and specialists from the participating schools played a vital role in guiding students through the competition. They provide instruction, support and encouragement throughout the project development process.
- **Parents and guardians:** The support and involvement of parents and guardians are essential to the success of any program. They encourage their children, assist with project development and attend the competition to show their support.

- **Community organizations:** Various community organizations may offer additional resources, such as workshops, guest speakers and sponsorships, to enhance the learning experience for students.

Conclusion: The Make It Your Business competition is a comprehensive, effective program that equips middle school students with essential entrepreneurial skills and knowledge. By participating in the competition, students gain hands-on experience in business development, marketing and presentation, all while working collaboratively with their peers. The competition not only fosters creativity and innovation but also promotes a strong sense of community and connection with local business professionals.

Through the dedicated efforts of participating educators, local businesses and community partners, the Make It Your Business competition provides a valuable and enriching experience for all participants. This program prepares students for future success by instilling important life skills and inspiring the next generation of entrepreneurs.

4. Advancing Diversity, Equity and Inclusion: The Make It Your Business competition was designed to be inclusive and accessible to all middle school students who are enrolled in the MIYB course, regardless of their background or prior experience in entrepreneurship, by providing materials and supplies from teachers' general funds. The program connects students with local business owners, educators and specialists of diverse backgrounds who serve as mentors and judges.

Inclusive participation: The competition actively encourages participation from students of diverse racial, ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. By involving middle schools from

different parts of Henrico County, the event ensures a broad representation of the student population. This inclusivity helps break down barriers and provides equal opportunities for all students to engage in entrepreneurial activities.

Equitable access to resources: To ensure that all students have the necessary resources to participate, materials and supplies were provided by teachers' general funds for product development and marketing. This financial support helps students from lower income families participate fully without the burden of additional costs. The program also offers access to the technology and tools required to create marketing materials and video presentations, ensuring that all students can showcase their work effectively.

Culturally relevant curriculum: The entrepreneurship program at the Advanced Career Education Center at Hermitage incorporates a culturally relevant curriculum that reflects the diverse backgrounds of the students. This approach helps to create a more inclusive learning environment where students feel seen and valued. By integrating examples and case studies from various cultures and communities, the curriculum fosters a deeper understanding and appreciation of different perspectives.

Mentorship and community engagement: The program connects students with local business owners, educators and specialists who serve as mentors and judges. These mentors come from diverse backgrounds and bring a wealth of experience and knowledge to the competition. Their involvement provides students with role models who reflect their own identities and experiences, inspiring them to pursue their entrepreneurial goals. Additionally, the program encourages community engagement by involving parents, guardians and community organizations, creating a supportive network for the students.

Addressing disparities: By providing equitable access to entrepreneurial education and resources, the Make It Your Business competition helps address existing racial and socioeconomic disparities. The program empowers students from underrepresented and marginalized communities, helping give them the skills and confidence to succeed in the business world.

The Make It Your Business competition advances diversity and inclusion by promoting inclusive participation; equitable access to resources; culturally relevant curricula; mentorship; and community engagement. Through these efforts, the program addresses existing disparities and fosters a more diverse, equitable and inclusive environment for all students.

5. The Cost of the Program

Capital and operating costs in development and implementation: The Make It Your Business competition involved both capital and operating costs to ensure its successful development and implementation.

Capital costs:

- **Facilities and equipment:** The primary capital cost is the use of the Advanced Career Education Center at Hermitage for the final competition event. Additionally, division-purchased equipment such as computers, cameras and software was used for video production and creating marketing materials.
- **Materials and supplies:** Initial investment was necessary in materials for product development, including prototyped supplies, marketing materials and presentation

tools. This ensured that all student groups had access to the resources they needed to develop their projects.

Operating Costs:

- **Staffing and coordination:** The competition required dedicated staff to coordinate the competition, manage logistics and provide support to participating schools.
- **Event costs:** Operating costs also included expenses related to hosting the final competition event, such as catering, decorations and awards for the winning teams. These costs ensured a professional and celebratory atmosphere for the students.
- **Marketing and outreach:** Promoting the competition across Henrico County and engaging the community involved intangible marketing expenses. This included creating promotional materials, advertising the event and maintaining communication with participants and partners.

Costs to replicate elsewhere: Replicating the competition in other regions would involve similar capital and operating costs, with some variations based on local conditions and resources.

- **Facilities and equipment:** Securing a suitable venue and purchasing necessary equipment are key requirements. However, costs may vary depending on the availability and condition of local facilities. Partnering with local schools or community centers could help mitigate these expenses.
- **Materials and supplies:** The cost of materials for product development and marketing would depend on local prices and availability. Bulk purchasing and partnerships with local businesses could help reduce these costs.

- **Staffing and coordination:** Hiring dedicated staff to manage the competition is crucial. The number of staff members and their salaries will vary based on local labor costs and the scale of the competition. Training existing school staff members to take on additional responsibilities could also be a cost-effective approach.
- **Event costs:** Hosting the final event would incur similar expenses, but local partnerships and sponsorships could help offset these costs. Engaging local businesses and community organizations as sponsors could provide financial support and enhance community involvement.
- **Marketing and outreach:** Effective marketing and outreach are essential for the success of the competition. Using local media, social media platforms and community networks can help promote the event cost-effectively.

In summary, while the Make It Your Business competition involved minimal capital and operating costs, careful planning, local partnerships and community engagement are important to ensure the event's success. Replicating the competition in other regions would require adapting to local conditions and using available resources to create a similar experience for students.

6. The Results/Success of the Program

The Make It Your Business competition has demonstrated significant success in achieving its objectives and positively impacting participating students. The program's success can be measured through various outcome measures and specific examples that highlight its effectiveness. Specific examples:

- **Student achievement:** One notable example of the competition's success is the story of a group of students who developed an eco-friendly product made from recycled materials. Their innovative approach not only won them the Best Overall Business award but also attracted the attention of a few onlookers interested in sustainable products. This recognition provided the students with valuable networking opportunities and potential partnerships for future endeavors.
- **Skill development:** Another example was a group that created a unique educational app designed to help students with learning disabilities. Their project won the Best Video Presentation award and the students were invited to present their app at a local technology conference. This experience boosted their confidence and provided them with a platform to showcase their skills to a broader audience.
- **Community engagement:** The competition has also fostered strong community engagement. For instance, a group of students developed a community garden project aimed at promoting healthy eating and environmental awareness. Their project won the Best Table Presentation award. This collaboration not only benefited the students but may also have a wider positive impact on the community.

Outcome Measures

- **Increased participation:** The program has seen a steady increase in participation, which organizers hope will lead to more schools and students joining the competition. Course enrollment from 2023-24 to 2024-25 increased by 38% and course requests (to-date) for 2025-2026 have increased by 7.5%. This growth indicates the popularity of the course (and competition) and their ability to engage a diverse group of students.

- **Academic performance:** The hands-on experience and practical application of theoretical knowledge has enhanced students' understanding and retention of key concepts.
- **Skill development:** Surveys conducted among participants have shown significant improvements in various skills, including teamwork, problem-solving and public speaking. Students have expressed increased confidence in their abilities to develop and present business ideas.
- **Community impact:** The competition has strengthened ties between schools and the local business community. Employers and professionals who served as judges and mentors have provided valuable feedback and support to students, creating a network of resources that extends beyond the competition.
- **Long-term benefits:** Many students participate in the competition express a desire to pursue further education and careers in business and entrepreneurship. The program has helped inspire young entrepreneurs who are equipped with the skills and knowledge to succeed in the business world.

The Make It Your Business competition has achieved remarkable success in fostering entrepreneurial skills, creativity and community engagement among Henrico County Public Schools middle school students. The competition's positive impact is evident through examples of student achievement, skill development and community collaboration. The outcome measures demonstrate the program's effectiveness in increasing participation, improving academic performance and providing long-term benefits to students and the community.

7. Worthiness of Award

The Make It Your Business competition project is a worthy candidate for a VACO Achievement Award for its exceptional impact on middle school students and the broader community. The program stands out for its innovative approach to fostering entrepreneurial skills, creativity and teamwork among students. By providing hands-on, practical learning experiences, the competition equips students with business acumen and communication skills crucial for their future success.

Moreover, the program promotes a commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion by ensuring equitable access to resources and encouraging participation from students of diverse backgrounds. The strong community engagement, with local business owners and professionals serving as mentors and judges, further enriches the students' learning experience and strengthens community ties.

The tangible outcomes, such as increased student participation, improved academic performance and successful student projects, demonstrate the program's effectiveness and long-term benefits. The competition not only inspires the next generation of entrepreneurs but also contributes to a more inclusive and innovative entrepreneurial ecosystem. The program deserves recognition for its outstanding contributions to education and community development.

8. Supplemental Materials

Included in the linked Google folder - <https://tinyurl.com/2kbtautm>