



## 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

Program Title: Special Interest Club

Program Category: Health & Human Services

### CONTACT INFORMATION

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### SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

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Title: Deputy County Manager for Community Affairs

Signature:

## **Program Overview**

Everyone loves clubs – special interest activities that allow a person to enjoy a hobby, an area of interest or learn new things. In day programs for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, this choice is often limited to what is offered and many do not take individual interests into consideration. Many day programs offer different activities but often become stale. It is hard to come up with new ideas every day to engage people, many of whom can't vocalize their preferences or are given opportunities to discover what they really like. And many are in the day program most of the day, with little opportunity for truly encountering others in their communities who share those interests.

Henrico Area Mental Health & Developmental Services Hermitage Enterprises has developed a program enhancement that allows each person who attends to have a choice in activities and to develop clubs that interest them. Clubs last for three months, at the end of that time, individuals can choose the same club or a different club, with new clubs being developed each quarter. These choices allow for developing current and new interests, building social relationships with others who like the same things and helping them move forward to enjoying activities that might allow them to participate in a community club. Many clubs include a community outing in their activities.

## **Problem/Challenge/Situation Faced by Locality**

The Hermitage Enterprises Day program was established in 1984, with sheltered work as its primary emphasis. In 2023, Henrico discontinued the use of the Department of Labor certification section 14c, which allowed paying subminimum wages. With this discontinuation,

the program was at a crossroads, as were many day programs. Questions such as, what should we do every day that would bring value to the lives of individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities? What types of activities would engage individuals? This change presented us with this challenge and the idea of the clubs was born.

This loss of center-based work offered an opportunity to enhance the activities within the day program. It allowed us to innovate and to bring our person-centered values into realistic skill building for the individuals who attend the program. Values espoused by the Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services include self-advocacy and providing person-centered activities within the group setting. The club idea utilized these values, including giving the individuals themselves a choice of what they do when in the program. The clubs were a major enhancement to the program activities, incorporating choice, independent decision making, and preparing individuals with relationship and other life skills they could use in other parts of their life.

### **How The Program Fulfilled Award Criteria**

This club model is unique to most day services programs. Many day programs offer a variety of activities to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. However, most of these programs develop ideas and implement choice by offering limited pre-organized activities determined by staff. Individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities often have limited choices in what they do and in what is offered.

This club model uses the choices of individuals first. It allows individuals who don't often have a voice to design the types of activities they want to do, based on the interests they have. Staff follow their lead, both in the ideas of which clubs, but also in the activities within those clubs. Staff lead, guide and assist, but it is the individuals who determine the activities.

Clubs also use real community settings to teach and open up avenues for relationships and partnerships. One club learned about the local libraries and every other meeting included a visit to a library to see activities in person. This has led to many relationships with libraries and more long-term volunteers' sites. Another club learning about art, has reached out to local Art galleries and artists, and has been offered to display our art work in their gallery for the month of June, 2025.

Results show more engagement of both staff and individual. There is an increase in self-advocacy on the part of individuals. The model enhances the experiences of the individuals, builds self-confidence and self-advocacy skills and demonstrates that they have real choice. This learning carries over into other aspects of their lives, both in types of activities they enjoy in the community and in learning to speak up for themselves. Building this sense of independence allows them to feel more empowered, and better able to make good life choices.

The model also builds staff engagement by tapping into their skills and abilities in a way that allows them to teach and mentor, rather than someone who must always be in charge with all the answers. There is evidence that engaged staff stay with their jobs.

### **How The Program Was Carried Out**

The objective was to create special interest groups or "clubs" for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities receiving day services at Hermitage Enterprises to enhance their experiences while at the day program. Individuals were asked for suggestions of interests they had and/or would like to learn about. Because not all individuals were able to independently come up with ideas, groups discussed ideas and used resources for ideas from local Recreation and Parks catalogs, and classes available in the community.

Staff compiled these suggestions onto one list of approximately 60 ideas. Every individual in the program was then asked to review the list and pick their top five choices. The master list was narrowed down to the 20 most popular ideas.

Since it was equally important to ensure staff had the skills, knowledge, and interests to develop and lead the club, all program staff were asked to review the list and choose one or more of the ideas they would be interested in leading. This dual approach was important to creating a win-win situation for both individuals receiving services and staff providing services. Engaged staff would be more productive and creative, thus ensuring better engagement of the individuals.

Once the staff finalized the list of clubs based on interest level, everyone in the program had the opportunity to sign up for the club they were most interested in. Eight different clubs were piloted over the first three months. Individuals in services immediately showed a lot of interest in the clubs and let staff know how much they enjoyed them and looked forward to each club meeting.

Since it was clear that clubs needed to become more consistently scheduled, each club began meeting every other week for three months. Staff had the opportunity to continue with the club they initially started or select something new from the list the individuals suggested. Individuals were able to choose a new club with each new session of clubs.

The second model used seemed more popular for individuals and staff. Clubs have continued to meet weekly or every other week for three months at a time. Individuals choose their club for each three month session. Some people have remained in the same club since clubs started and many others have tried several different clubs.

## **Financing and Staffing**

This program occurred within a structured day services program. Staff costs, transportation costs and building costs are integral parts of the program. Existing staff were used, with the ratio being two to three staff assigned to each club with no more than 10 individuals in each club session. This allows staff to support each other in developing ideas and enough staff to provide assistance that the individuals need based on their personal needs. The budget was developed and clubs used program funds for the supplies needed. We averaged between \$50 and \$150 per club. For example, the art club had to purchase art supplies so that it was more expensive than the vocal club, who did not have any expenses. The overall budget for the clubs is anticipated to be no more than \$2,000 for all clubs for a year.

## **Program Results**

The result of the program has been incredible, individuals receiving services look forward to their club meetings and talk about their clubs frequently. During an audit by Home and Community Based Services individuals were interviewed about the services they receive at Hermitage Enterprises and asked what their favorite things to do are. Almost every individual interviewed listed their club as one of their favorite things to do. Several individuals have asked for their club to be a part of their individual annual service plans.

The clubs have also contributed to a culture shift for staff. Staff from different parts of the program are now working in collaboration with each other; the ideas are being shared and have generated even more ideas. Staff report they are more engaged and enthusiastic about teaching areas where they also have an interest. The shift has also resulted in a more structured and organized plan of activities that has allowed consistency for the individuals.

Highlights from just a few of the clubs show the success these have become. The Art Club was one of the original clubs and continued through each club session. This club has partnered with the county's Tuckahoe Library to display their art. This club is also working with the Glen Allen Cultural Arts Center for an art display this summer.

All clubs created displays for Hermitage Enterprises 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration in November 2024, to highlight what they have been doing. Individuals were excited to contribute to these displays and show off their clubs to visitors. The Ribbon Dance and Vocal Music clubs performed during the celebration and were highlighted on Henrico County's social media coverage of the event.

Several clubs hosted events for not just the individuals who signed up for the club but for the whole building. This gave individuals an opportunity to try something they may not have tried before. Examples include ribbon dancing exhibitions, line dancing classes, a Day of the Dead celebration on November 1, sponsored by the culture club, and caroling and sing-alongs by the Vocal club.

It was observed that several individuals who are usually content with sitting and watching got up and joined in. Others took recipes they learned in cooking class to their families to try out. The Marvel club group made posters of their favorite superhero. Disney club members picked movies to watch.

## **Executive Summary**

Everyone loves clubs – special interest activities that allow a person to enjoy a hobby, an area of interest or learn new things. Henrico Area Mental Health & Developmental Services has developed a program enhancement that allows each person who attends their Hermitage Enterprises Day Services program for individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities to have a choice in activities and to develop clubs that interest them.

In day programs for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, this choice is often limited to what is offered and many do not take individual interests into consideration. Hermitage decided to take a step to integrate the ideas of the individuals to enhance their experience and allow opportunities for a growth in their skills.

In September 2023, the idea for holding regular clubs was developed. Individuals who attended the program were an integral part of the development and implementation. They helped come up with the ideas and make choices each quarter for what clubs continue or are started. Six to eight clubs meet at least every 2 weeks and meet for at least 3 months. Some clubs continue and others end, based on the choice of individuals. Many clubs include a community encounter in their activities. The choices made with the clubs allow for developing current and new interests, building social relationships with others who like the same things and helping them move forward to enjoying activities they might find outside of their day program.

The results of implementing the clubs have been amazing for both staff and individuals who attend the day program; results have indicated better enjoyment in day-to-day activities, and more self-advocacy and a sense that their voices are heard by those who attend. Staff indicate more satisfaction in their jobs due to their interest in the activities. And there is evidence of a more values-based, person-centered and community interactive Day Service program.

