



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: Orange County
Program Title: Youth-Driven Smoke Makes You Broke Campaign
Program Category: Health & Human Services

CONTACT INFORMATION

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SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Stephanie Straub
Title: Assistant County Administrator
Signature: Stephanie Straub

2025 VACo Achievement Award Nomination; Category: Health & Human Services
Nominee: Youth-Driven *Smoke Makes You Broke* Campaign**Executive Summary:**

Orange County's Youth Council is a unique avenue for young residents to learn more about, and become directly involved in, local government. Coordinated and facilitated by our Office on Youth (OOY), members of the Council advocate to staff and the Orange County Board of Supervisors regarding issues they feel are important or pressing for the youth of Orange County. Recently, the rising popularity of vaping has made the issue of youth tobacco use one of particular interest to Youth Council members.

To that end, they've coordinated with staff facilitators in the Office on Youth to participate in efforts like Truth Initiative's "This is Quitting," to clean up tobacco litter from local streets, and to write letters to legislators supporting harsher penalties for those selling tobacco products to underage customers. Last year, they launched a new, direct approach aimed at preventing underage tobacco use before the item was purchased.

"Smoke Makes You Broke" drew inspiration from the ABC's Sticker Shock program, but leveraged original, youth-crafted messaging and graphics to better resonate with the target audience. With help from staff, members sought permission to place the stickers and window clings directly on entrances to stores that sell tobacco products, and even on display cases holding the products themselves. Through this public-private partnership, they created visual reminders, and warnings, of the potential health and legal ramifications of youth tobacco use. Just as important, involving our young people and guiding them through the proper ways of championing a cause important to them has helped

create a generation of involved citizens that are invested in the community and the wellbeing of its residents.

Main Nomination:

Youth involvement in local government can often bring contagious energy and fresh insights. Orange County's Youth Council helps leverage such perspectives for the betterment of the community while introducing young people to the world of government. The Council is comprised of youth in grades 6 through 12. Following an application process, they are appointed to represent the youth population and to advise the Orange County Youth Commission and the Office on Youth (OOY) regarding the needs of youth in Orange County. To connect members with the roles and levels of government, they engage with local town councils and the Orange County Board of Supervisors, annually visit and talk with state legislators, and biennially venture to Washington, D.C. to interact with federal elected officials. To make a direct impact at home, the Youth Council chooses to undertake projects each year to support our community.

Over recent years, one of the main focuses of the Youth Council has occurred at the intersection of governmental exposure and community service - youth tobacco use prevention. Students participating in the Youth Council were very passionate about this issue. At meetings, they regularly described the unpleasant experience of finding a school bathroom filled with the smoke and smells associated with vaping. Many would travel well out of their way to avoid using one



Figure 1: The Youth Council regularly engages in service projects, like this road cleanup with a particular focus on tobacco litter removal.

of the restrooms more popularly used for vaping. Members lamented the negative health effects that would impact the tobacco user as well as those around them.

The problem wasn't just anecdotal. A 2019 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) conducted by the Orange County Public School System (the most recent year the survey was conducted) indicated

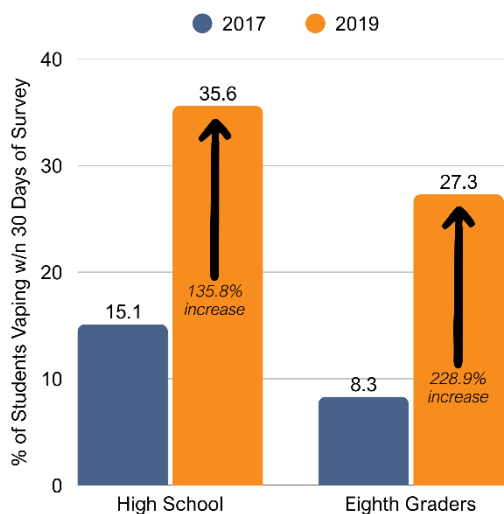


Figure 2: Youth Risk Behavior Surveys conducted in 2017 and 2019 indicated an alarming increase in youth vaping at Orange County schools.

that 35.6% of 10th and 12th grade students reported using electronic vaping devices within 30 days of the survey. While alarming by itself, that figure was even more concerning because it represented a 135.8% increase compared to just two years earlier (per the 2017 YRBS). Even more shocking, data from eighth graders indicated a 228.9% increase in the same time frame (8.3% to 27.3%)! Wishing to get a better understanding of the problem's scope, our student members

had the idea of engaging with the Orange County High School's

School Resource Officers. During those discussions, our Youth Council students learned that 40-50 vape pens were confiscated at the High School during the 2023-24 school year, and that (unfortunately) was a conservative estimate.

With the problem well-established, our Youth Council brainstormed ways to address the challenge. Their approach has been multifaceted and often supported through Virginia Foundation for Healthy Youth (VFHY) funding. In prior years, they had met with, and wrote letters to, state legislators. In these interactions, they advocated harsher penalties to be levied against those who sell tobacco to underage users. Working through the Office on Youth, a contract was established to utilize and publicize Truth Initiative's *This is Quitting* material to help those wishing to end the cycle of tobacco use. Council members even partnered with Orange County Litter Control to personally conduct

cleanups in the towns of Orange and Gordonsville, during which they separated and quantified litter originating from tobacco products. Drawing inspiration from Virginia ABC's *Sticker Shock* and Henrico County's *Too Smart to Start* programs, the Youth Council decided to take a more direct approach to youth tobacco use prevention by addressing the problem where it begins.

To accomplish this goal, our students went to work designing graphics and messaging that would resonate with their peers. Office on Youth Director Alisha Vines explained why this was important. "As adults, we're always looking for the best ways to get the message across to the kids, but this met the kids where they are," she said. Students chose a starkly contrasting, highly visible pink and green color scheme

to make the stickers and clings extremely noticeable. Part of their motivation for this "bright" idea was to directly counteract the historical use of colorful and flashy advertising by tobacco companies marketing to

underage buyers. Messaging on the materials was centered around two main points. The first focused on the negative health effects of tobacco and nicotine use of any kind. Represented by a skull holding a cigarette in its mouth and a play on the word "nicotine," which replaced "tine" with "teen" and then crossed it out, the message was abundantly clear, these products can kill. The second point zeroed in on the potential cost associated with breaking the law, which directly connected with the overall name of the campaign, *Smoke Makes You **Broke***. With text reading, "BEFORE YOU BUY, Did you know? It is illegal to purchase vapes and tobacco for people under 21. Fines up to \$500," these stickers and window clings warned both underage purchasers, as well as those of age intending to buy for underage users, that doing so would cause serious impacts to their wallets.



"WE'RE ALWAYS LOOKING FOR THE BEST WAYS TO GET THE MESSAGE ACROSS TO THE KIDS. THIS MET THE KIDS WHERE THEY ARE." – ALISHA VINES, OOO DIRECTOR.



Figure 3: A *Smoke Makes You Broke* window cling at a location selling tobacco.

The next logical step was placing these stickers and window clings in front of potential tobacco purchasers. Accomplishing this would require the cooperation of shop owners, which was anticipated to be a potential obstacle. While it did prove challenging, with the help of OOO staff, the Youth Council was able to secure a foothold in the eastern end of Orange County with the cooperation of three locations. Edward's Store was especially

willing to help. "Anything we can do to educate the youth on the adverse effects of vaping and tobacco use is our civic duty to do," said Adam Bryington of Edwards Store. In fact, the success with Edward's Store is being considered for use as a positive case study to help overcome reluctance among other store owners, particularly in the towns of Orange and Gordonsville, where tobacco-selling establishments are within a much more walkable distance than at the eastern end of Orange County. By demonstrating how the program did not adversely impact Edward's business, but may have helped them prevent harmful impacts to teens, it is hoped that the Youth Council can expand the program for

even greater impact going forward.

"ANYTHING WE CAN DO TO EDUCATE THE YOUTH ON THE ADVERSE EFFECTS OF VAPING AND TOBACCO USE IS OUR CIVIC DUTY TO DO." – ADAM BRYINGTON, EDWARD'S STORE

Results from the Youth Council and Office on Youth's *Smoke Makes You Broke* campaign are inherently difficult to quantify. Unfortunately, there's no way to objectively know how many potential purchasers

were deterred by the messaging, but the effort was still very much worth it. The importance of directly involving young citizens in this process cannot be overstated. Youth Council members witnessed firsthand how government interactions can effect positive change, and how achieving a goal will often require coordination between departments, with elected officials, cooperation with other localities, and

fostering partnership with private businesses. The goal of youth tobacco use reduction also benefits from a dedicated corps of engaged young people, made even more motivated through their personal efforts in this program. Change is often made at a person-to-person level, and our Youth Council members are now well-informed and positioned to serve as positive influences among their peers.

The successes of this program could be applied in most localities. Those without a Youth Council could as easily enlist the help of any student-led organization. Letting them take the lead in many aspects of the program is advisable. It helps create buy-in, provides new perspectives, and helps create the next generation of community-minded citizens (and perhaps public servants)! In much the same way that we consulted with Henrico, the Orange County Office on Youth would be glad to help other localities make a similar program work in their area.



Figure 4: A Youth Council member places a Smoke Makes You Broke window cling at a retailer.