



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: Pulaski County
Program Title: Public Safety Sensory Emergency Kits
Program Category: Criminal Justice & Public Safety

CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: Erika Tolbert
Title: Director of Tourism
Department: Tourism
Telephone: 5402503218 Website: www.pulaskicounty.org
Email: etolbert@pulaskicounty.org

SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Jonathan D. Sweet
Title: County Administrator
Signature: 

Executive Summary
Pulaski County, Virginia
Sensory Emergency Kit Initiative – Pulaski County Department of Public Safety

Pulaski County’s Department of Public Safety has implemented a forward-thinking, inclusive program aimed at improving emergency medical services for individuals with sensory processing challenges. The **Sensory Emergency Kit Initiative** equips EMS crews with specialized tools—such as noise-canceling headphones, fidget toys, visual communication aids, and more—that help reduce patient stress and improve communication during emergency response.

This low-cost, high-impact project enhances the county’s ability to respond compassionately and effectively to patients of all ages with autism, dementia, PTSD, or other sensory sensitivities.

The kits were developed through a combination of departmental initiative and strong community support, including donated items and outreach efforts. As one of only two localities in the New River Valley to adopt this approach, Pulaski County is leading by example in providing inclusive, patient-centered emergency care.

The initiative is already making a difference in the field, with first responders reporting reduced patient anxiety and improved interaction. Pulaski County’s sensory kit program represents a scalable model for other counties and exemplifies the power of small, intentional changes to create meaningful community impact.

Pulaski County Public Safety Department Launches Sensory Emergency Kits to Support Inclusive EMS Response

Overview

The Pulaski County Department of Public Safety has implemented an innovative program that introduces sensory emergency kits into EMS operations to better serve individuals with sensory processing sensitivities during emergency medical response. The initiative reflects Pulaski County's dedication to inclusive care, community collaboration, and continued innovation in public safety and emergency services.

Project Description

Launched in August 2024, the sensory emergency kit initiative equips ambulances and EMS personnel with specialized tools to help reduce sensory overload during high-stress emergency situations. Each kit includes a variety of tactile, visual, and auditory calming items: squeeze balls, toy animals, fidget toys, sunglasses, noise-canceling headphones, a dry-erase board, visual pain scales, and communication tools for nonverbal patients. These broad-spectrum kits are designed for use with pediatric, adult, or geriatric patients—demonstrating a



comprehensive, inclusive approach to emergency care.

Problem Addressed

During medical emergencies, especially those involving individuals with autism, dementia, PTSD, or other sensory-related challenges, traditional EMS environments can be overwhelming.

Loud sirens, bright lights, physical touch, and medical interventions can trigger distress or impede communication. Recognizing these barriers, Pulaski County EMS identified a critical need to create a more supportive and patient-centered experience during emergency calls.

Innovation

Pulaski County is now only the second locality in the New River Valley to introduce sensory kits as part of its EMS protocol. This initiative is a low-cost, high-impact innovation that enhances communication, reduces anxiety, and promotes trust between patients and first responders. By incorporating these kits into routine EMS care, Pulaski County is taking a proactive and compassionate step toward inclusive emergency service.

Community Collaboration and Support

The development and launch of the sensory kit program was made possible through a blend of departmental initiative and community support. Several items were donated by caring community members and local organizations, while additional supplies were purchased directly by the Department of Public Safety—demonstrating both fiscal responsibility and grassroots commitment. The program exemplifies how small investments and strong community ties can result in meaningful systemic improvements.

Impact and Outcomes

Although still in its early stages, the sensory emergency kits have already been successfully deployed in real-world EMS calls. First responders reported improved communication and reduced patient anxiety when the kits were used. Anecdotal feedback from patients,



families, and EMS personnel reinforces the effectiveness and importance of the kits. The initiative has also increased awareness and training within the department regarding sensory-sensitive practices, making it an internal culture shift as much as a public service enhancement.

Scalability and Replication

This program is highly replicable and scalable for other rural counties seeking to enhance their EMS services with limited resources. The materials used are low-cost, easily sourced, and adaptable to different communities and demographics. Pulaski County's program can serve as a model for regional collaboration or expansion through mutual aid agreements, interdepartmental partnerships, and training opportunities.

Conclusion

Pulaski County's sensory emergency kit initiative exemplifies the spirit of the VACo Achievement Awards by addressing a real and growing community need through innovative, compassionate, and community-supported public service. It is a forward-thinking approach to emergency response that not only meets patients where they are but also fosters a more inclusive and equitable system for all.