



## SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: Tuesday, April 7, 2026.** Please include this submission form as the first page of your electronic entry. Contact Gage Harter with any questions.

### PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: Chesterfield County

Program Title: El Librotazo - The Big Book Party

Program Category: Communication & Community Outreach

### CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: Juan Santacoloma

Title: Multicultural Engagement Resource Specialist

Department: Division of Communications and Community Engagement

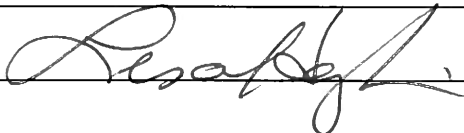
Telephone: (804) 348-8071 Website: <https://www.oneccps.org/>

Email: Juan\_Santacoloma@ccpsnet.net

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

Name: Lisa High

Title: Chesterfield Co Public Schools Deputy Superintendent

Signature: 

El Librotazo - The Big Book Party  
(Communications and Community Outreach Category)

**Executive Summary:**

El Librotazo – The Big Book Party is a family literacy celebration where children from birth through high school select several free books to build their home libraries and enjoy reading-focused activities together. The program’s purpose is to promote a culture of reading, reduce barriers to access to books, and engage families in joyful, bilingual literacy experiences. Outcomes include increased independent reading, stronger home-school connections, and greater equity in access to high-interest books for students of all ages and language backgrounds.

**Problem or need addressed by the program:**

Regarding the county’s legal obligation, public school divisions in Virginia must provide a system of free public schools and take steps to meet state literacy standards, but there is no specific statutory requirement to host book-giveaway festivals or to supply free take-home books through an event like El Librotazo. Instead, supporting such initiatives falls within the county’s discretionary authority to promote public education, use local funds for community programs, and pursue innovative strategies to improve literacy outcomes, equity, and family engagement. In that sense, El Librotazo is not legally mandated, but it is a proactive, legally permissible way for the county and its partners to advance their educational mission and address documented literacy and access needs in the community.

**Program Description:**

From organizer and partner materials, the 2025 event is described as the second annual Big Book Party, serving “over 3,500 students” and families from “every zip code” in Chesterfield

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County, indicating broad, county-wide reach and growth compared with the first year. Children from birth through high school were able to select and keep five brand-new books each, in multiple languages and genres, which means the event likely placed tens of thousands of new books into home libraries in a single evening (for example, 3,500 students × 5 books ≈ 17,500 books).

Social posts from elected officials and community partners emphasize that the fairgrounds were full, that the event was free to attend, and that families enjoyed food, music, and activities in addition to the book giveaway, highlighting strong community engagement and a festive, welcoming atmosphere. Organizers also continue to frame El Librotazo as a strategy to build “literacy-rich homes” and to support summer reading, suggesting that success is measured not only in attendance and books distributed, but in the visibility of reading, access to books in families’ home languages, and strengthened relationships between schools, the county, and community sponsors.

**Program Cost:**

El Librotazo operates as a cost-efficient, partnership-driven initiative with minimal capital investment and clearly defined operating expenses. The total program cost for the most recent event was **\$46,406.01**.

The largest operating expense was book acquisition, totaling **\$36,633.25**, reflecting the program’s core objective of building home libraries for children. Additional programmatic expenses included literacy-related activities (\$3,348.59), tote bags for families to transport books (\$1,347.10), event T-shirts (\$1,195.38), food for attendees (\$1,487.50), volunteer support, including a pizza dinner (\$322.19), and a literacy demonstration presenter (\$250.00).

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Event experience costs included a DJ/photographer (\$792.00), misting cooling fans to ensure participant comfort (\$855.00), and miscellaneous supplies such as envelopes, folders, and labels (\$175.00).

Capital costs are negligible because the event uses existing school division facilities and infrastructure. No permanent equipment purchases or construction costs are required, making the initiative highly replicable for other counties.

Funding is intentionally diversified. In the most recent year, approximately \$19,000 was secured through corporate and community sponsorships. Additional support was provided through Title IV federal grant funds and local division funding that covered essential logistics. This blended funding model reduces the burden on local tax dollars while ensuring sustainability.

A county seeking to replicate this initiative should anticipate annual costs of \$40,000–\$50,000, depending on scale, with book purchases accounting for approximately 75–80% of total expenses. The model demonstrates how strategic local investment, when paired with community partnerships, can generate high-impact literacy outcomes while efficiently using public resources.

**Results/Success of the Program:**

El Librotazo – The Big Book Party is a countywide literacy celebration designed to build home libraries and make reading a joyful, culturally responsive experience for all Chesterfield County children, from birth through high school. The program’s core objective is to place multiple, high-interest books directly into the hands of students—especially multilingual, low-income, and

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historically underserved families—while strengthening family engagement and affirming students' languages and cultures.

In 2025, the second annual event supported over 3,500 students, each able to select and keep five brand-new books, in multiple languages and genres. This means the program placed an estimated 17,500+ books directly into students' homes in a single evening, significantly increasing access to choice-based reading materials for children from birth through high school. The event is intentionally free, with no cost for admission, books, activities, or food, removing financial barriers for low-income and multilingual families.

Planning for El Librotazo began several months prior to its first event and has now become an annual initiative, with a recurring cycle of development (partner recruitment, fundraising, book selection and ordering, volunteer coordination, communications) followed by implementation at a large, in-person summer event. Each year's event functions both as a capstone to months of preparation and as the launch of students' summer and at-home reading.

The primary clientele are Chesterfield County Public Schools students and their families, across all grade levels and zip codes, as well as younger siblings who are future students. The program intentionally reaches multilingual households and communities that may have limited access to transportation, bookstores, and public libraries, by convening everyone in one large, festive, centrally located venue.

The county, through its public school division and relevant departments, plays the lead role in conceiving, coordinating, and implementing El Librotazo. This includes identifying needs, setting literacy goals, securing or stewarding local funds, organizing logistics at the fairgrounds or similar sites, overseeing communications, and ensuring equitable access for families.

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Other partners are essential to the program's scope and impact. The Chesterfield Education Foundation and other nonprofit partners help raise funds, recruit volunteers, and underwrite the purchase of new books. Community organizations, local businesses, cultural groups, and media partners contribute sponsorships, in-kind donations (such as food, entertainment, and services), outreach to specific language communities, and event-day programming. State and federal education funds that support literacy and family engagement may also be braided, where allowable, to complement private donations and local resources. Together, these partnerships allow the county to deliver a large-scale, celebratory literacy program that would not be possible with public resources alone.

Qualitative feedback reinforces these quantitative results. Social posts from partners describe having "the privilege of attending" a celebration of "literacy and learning," and community members highlight how joyful and festive the environment is for families. Families are able to interact with more than 20 community groups, enjoy cultural performances, and see public safety and school vehicles up close, strengthening trust and connections with county agencies. Together, these data points and stories show that El Librotazo is effectively advancing its objectives: putting books into children's hands, affirming bilingual and multicultural identities, and deepening family and community engagement around reading.

**Worthiness of Award:**

El Librotazo – The Big Book Party is innovative because it reimagines a book giveaway as a large-scale, bilingual, community festival that simultaneously advances literacy, equity, and family engagement. It moves beyond transactional distribution of books and creates a culturally affirming celebration where reading is associated with joy, identity, and community pride.

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The program is uniquely effective in several ways. First, it directly tackles the home-book gap by placing multiple, high-interest books into the hands of every participating child, from birth through high school, in a single evening. Second, it centers multilingual families by intentionally offering books, performances, and communication in more than one language, rather than treating bilingualism as an add-on. Third, it convenes schools, county agencies, nonprofits, and private partners in one shared space, turning a literacy initiative into a whole-community effort that builds trust and visibility for public services.

El Librotazo deserves recognition as a 2026 Achievement Award winner because it demonstrates how a county can use a relatively simple concept—giving away books—to deliver outsized, measurable benefits. It increases access to print at home, strengthens family–school relationships, showcases community partners, and models how to embed equity and cultural responsiveness into a universal offering. The program is replicable for other jurisdictions, yet clearly tailored to Chesterfield’s diverse community. Its combination of clear outcomes (thousands of children served, tens of thousands of books distributed), cross-sector collaboration, and joyful, multilingual design exemplifies the innovation, effectiveness, and public value that the Achievement Awards are meant to honor.

**Supplemental Materials:**

[HERE](#) is a PDF with photos