



## 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: Clarke County

Program Title: Clarke County - Reengaging, Reconnecting, and Educating

Program Category: Communications

### CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: Chris Boies

Title: County Administrator

Department: County Administration

Telephone: 540-955-5175 Website: www.clarkecounty.gov

Email: cboies@clarkecounty.gov

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

Name: Chris Boies

Title: County Administrator

Signature: Uboies

# Clarke County Board of Supervisors

---



**Berryville Voting District**  
**Douglas Shaffer**  
(540) 955-7158

**Millwood Voting District**  
**Terri T. Catlett-Vice Chair**  
(540) 837-2328

**Russell Voting District**  
**Doug Lawrence**  
(540) 955-2144

**Buckmarsh Voting District**  
**David S. Weiss – Chair**  
(540) 955-2151

**White Post Voting District**  
**Bev B. McKay**  
(540) 837-1331

**County Administrator**  
**Chris Boies**  
(540) 955-5175

## Clarke County—Reengaging, Reconnecting, and Educating

**Introduction**—Like many rural communities, Clarke County experienced a significant decrease in citizen engagement and participation during and following the COVID-19 global pandemic. County leadership feels strongly that a close connection between local government and the people it serves is vital in a democratic society. Clarke County sought to not only reengage and reconnect with citizens following a prolonged period of isolation for many, but also wanted to educate and inform citizens on how local government works. To achieve these goals, the County implemented a multi-year and multi-pronged strategic and coordinated approach to creating plentiful communication channels to educate and inform its citizens.

**Social Media**—We have created a strong following of almost 11,000 followers (our County population is only around 15,000) by producing high-quality and regular content such as our Pet-of-the-Week, Throwback Thursday, and Monthly Monday Myth Buster. This has created an audience and allowed us to push certain communication initiatives like our Zero Death campaign for a locally dangerous highway. We have also created some fun content to keep followers engaged, like our prison video, which had over 85,000 views. This communication channel is also vital for us during emergencies.

**E-News**—This monthly electronic email newsletter started in 2023 and has already grown to over 1,000 subscribers. High-quality articles and pictures provide an enjoyable reading experience while sharing important county news. The e-news also allows us to correct any misreporting by local media and increase transparency. Many articles contain direct links to the County website where more detailed information can be obtained, especially on in-depth topics like the County budget.

**Clarke County Citizen's Academy**—The ten-month cohort program spends one day a month learning about county departments and services. Participants get behind-the-scenes tours of the regional jail, regional landfill, water and sewer plants, 911 center, and other county facilities. Cohort members meet local elected and appointed officials, and learn about topics such as public education, public safety, public works, human services, finance, etc. Participation has grown every year; this past cohort had 24 participants. These citizens have become educated advocates in the community.

**Problem:** Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, Clarke County was struggling to effectively communicate with its citizens. Incorrect information and rumors were misinforming the public on key community issues and topics. A particularly controversial zoning application highlighted the need for the County to take a more proactive approach for communications. The COVID-19 pandemic also changed how citizens engaged with local elected and appointed officials. At the same time, readership in local print media continued to decline. It was clear to the County leadership that a single solution would not be sufficient to address the problem.

**Solution:** The County's first action in addressing the problem was the hiring of the County's first public information officer. This person helped create the necessary social media policies and communication strategies necessary to create a framework to move the County towards its goals of better engaging and educating the public. The initial goal for our social media was to create an audience by posting regular, interesting content with quality pictures and graphics. Some of the regular content includes our Pet-of-the-Week, Throwback Thursdays, and Monthly Myth Buster posts. We saw rapid increases in followers, going from virtually no social media presence in 2018 to over 11,000 followers today. Creating an audience allowed us to begin to push out important information to the public. This included basic public hearing and meeting information, but also included background information to inform citizens on important county topics such as Comprehensive Plan updates and annual budget approvals.

There is an important intergovernmental component with this strategy, as we regularly post important information for the towns of Boyce and Berryville, as they lack the resources to maintain a robust social media presence. As our audience has grown, we have been able to strategically use this communication channel to push out public awareness campaigns such as our Zero Death campaign for a particularly dangerous highway in our locality. In addition, just to keep our followers coming back, every once in a while, we will post something fun to both inform and entertain. The County recently purchased a former state prison property that will be developed into a small business park. To announce the property purchase, the County Administrator, Board of Supervisors Chair, and Industrial Development Authority Chair dressed up in inmate outfits and stood behind bars in the prison for the video production. The video had 87,904 views the last time we checked.

As we achieved strong social media results, we focused on how to reach folks who do not use social media. After some research, it was decided to develop a monthly e-newsletter. The e-newsletter contains short articles and updates on

various community topics. The format allows us to provide more detailed explanations on topics than typical content found on social media. Most articles also provide direct links to source documents on our County website, such as the Comprehensive Plan or County budget. We use an opt-in system where citizens can sign up for these updates and we have over one thousand subscribers in less than two years of offering the publication. Once again, high-quality pictures and graphics are used to create a pleasurable experience for the reader.

While social media and an e-newsletter are great ways to share information, we have found the best way to educate citizens is face-to-face contact. In the fall of 2021, we started the Clarke County Citizen's Academy. This cohort program meets all day on one Friday a month from September through June. Citizens complete a one-page application form to apply and selections are made in August. The program is run by County Administration and the only associated costs are lunches provided by the County. We start the course with a Local Government 101 session to explain how local government works, how towns and counties work together, and we have a local elected officials panel discussion. Some of the favorite field trips that follow the opening session include the water and sewer plants, regional landfill, regional jail, 911-dispatch center, and the courts. We cover topics like public works, law enforcement, judicial, education, finance/budget, voter registration, human services, public safety, planning/zoning, and parks/recreation throughout the year. We also include the two towns and different aspects of state government to create a better understanding of intergovernmental relations. During the sessions, cohort members get to meet and converse with different elected and appointed officials. The final session allows participants to share their thoughts on what they would do if they were running the county.

**Replication:** The components of our communications strategies can easily be replicated by other localities. Our social media framework would work for almost any county in the Commonwealth, as we all provide similar services. The e-newsletter is published through a vendor product that we carefully vetted and has a universal framework that would be appropriate for localities of all sizes. The citizen's academy format could be slightly tweaked to cover the relevant topics in any community and we have had requests from other localities for our program syllabus.

**Results:** We have experienced very positive results from our communication efforts. One of the more meaningful impacts is when we see citizens correct other citizens on social media because we have created an educated public. Citizens regularly communicate to County staff that they appreciate the information we share and the multiple channels available. Below are some quotes from citizens who participated in this past year's citizens academy:

*“The Academy is a brilliant means of introducing the citizenry to the services available, how the county works and the very capable professionals who keep all of it running. Everyone we met genuinely cares about doing the job well and right. I’ve always liked living in Clarke, but after attending the Academy, I’m very proud to say this is my home.”*

*“We are very fortunate to live in Clarke County where the administration takes pride in services being provided. They want citizens to know and understand the scope, complexities, and policies associated with those services. In addition to wanting citizens to know about services, they also want to get feedback and suggestions for improvement. Moreover, participating in the Citizen’s Academy was a unique opportunity to get to know the principals involved in the Clarke County government, the department heads, school principals, facility managers, and other administrators responsible for providing essential services.”*

*“Citizen’s academy opened a window into the inner workings of the county better than anything else I’ve seen”.*

Attachments:

Screenshots of social media

Examples of e-newsletter

Citizen Academy Program schedule