



SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: Friday, April 3, 2026.** Please include this submission form as the first page of your electronic entry. Contact [Gage Harter](#) with any questions.


PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: Dinwiddie
Program Title: Dinwiddie Emerging Leaders Academy (DELA)
Program Category: Education & Parks and Recreation

CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: Marie Grant
Title: Director of Intergovernmental Relations
Department: Administration
Telephone: 804-469-4500 Website: www.dinwiddieva.us
Email: mgrant@dinwiddieva.us

SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: W. Kevin Massengill
Title: County Administrator
Signature: 

PROBLEM, CHALLENGE or SITUATION:

Dinwiddie County is a rural community that, like many, faces the need to cultivate informed, engaged, and prepared future leaders who understand the structure and function of government. Even though they are required to take a Government class in the 12th grade, many high school students have limited exposure to local and state government operations, processes, and career opportunities in public service. Without focused opportunities for engagement, students are less likely to have the knowledge, confidence, or interest required for meaningful participation and leadership in their communities.

AWARDS CRITERIA/IMPLEMENTATION/FINANCING/STAFFING:

The Dinwiddie Emerging Leaders Academy (DELA) was established in 2024 to address this gap by providing high school juniors and seniors with structured, hands-on learning experiences that deepen their understanding and appreciation of government, civic responsibility, and leadership. Through direct interaction with local and state officials, educational programming, and experiential learning opportunities, DELA equips students with the knowledge and skills needed to become informed citizens. Ideally, these students will leave the program feeling a stronger investment in the Dinwiddie community, which will result in their desire to stay here after high school and/or return to live and raise their families in Dinwiddie after college.

The Dinwiddie Emerging Leaders Academy (DELA) is coordinated and facilitated by Dinwiddie County's Workforce Development Manager, Ms. Yannette Nicholas. DELA is an innovative program, implemented through a structured, competitive, process designed to identify, and develop future community leaders. The program begins with a rigorous application process.

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Dinwiddie Emerging Leaders Academy (DELA)
Application Narrative**

Students must demonstrate good academic standing, positive attendance and behavior, the recommendation of a teacher, and a short video submission outlining their interest, expectations, and commitment. Rising seniors who participated in DELA as a junior are not required to submit a video, instead, they are interviewed by the County Administrator and asked to respond to questions regarding their experience, commitment and desire to continue participation in their senior year. Second year participation is not guaranteed. A review panel selects a cohort of 12 students each year and works to balance the numbers of junior and seniors.

Operating from October through April, DELA begins with a formal orientation for both students and parents led by the County Administrator. During this initial session expectations and goals are clearly established. Participants are held to professional standards, including a dress code that fosters confidence and unity. The program is delivered through monthly sessions, each centered on key leadership and life skills such as public speaking, financial literacy, business etiquette, career readiness, and interpersonal development.

What makes DELA unique is its blend of classroom-style learning, experiential opportunities, and real-world exposure to government operations. Students are required to attend a meeting of the Board of Supervisors, as well as a session of the Dinwiddie Citizens Academy. They participate in hands-on learning through field trips and activities such as touring the Virginia General Assembly, where they meet with state elected officials and observe the legislative process in action. Students complete voter registration training, and participate in a variety of leadership workshops and expos. DELA emphasizes civic responsibility through required community service;

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which includes volunteering at local events, supporting civic organizations, and assisting election officials at voting precincts during elections.

The program culminates with a closing ceremony where participants are celebrated by County leaders. Each participant receives a monetary stipend upon successful completion, recognizing both their commitment and the opportunity cost of participation. Through this focused and comprehensive model, DELA effectively equips students with the knowledge, skills, and motivation to become engaged citizens and future leaders.

The total annual cost of the Dinwiddie Emerging Leaders Academy (DELA) is approximately \$20,000. This investment supports a comprehensive experience for participating students and ensures that financial barriers do not limit access. Program costs include orientation and closing ceremonies; monthly training sessions; and experiential field trips, with expenses covering admission, transportation, and meals (as needed).

In addition, funding provides professional DELA uniforms consisting of a blazer, button-down shirt, and casual polo, to promote a sense of pride, unity, and professionalism among participants. Seniors are also awarded graduation cords to recognize their successful completion of the program during high school commencement ceremonies. Supplemental materials, including folders, pens, notebooks, and certificates, are also included to support students engagement and program delivery.

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Dinwiddie Emerging Leaders Academy (DELA)
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Through this modest but impactful investment, DELA delivers a meaningful leadership development experience that equips students with the knowledge, confidence, and civic awareness necessary to become engaged citizens and future community leaders.

The Dinwiddie Emerging Leaders Academy (DELA) is both innovative and unique in its focused, hands-on approach to civic education and leadership development. Rather than relying solely on traditional classroom instruction, DELA immerses students in real-world experiences that bring government and public service to life. Students engage directly with local and state officials, observe government in action, and take part in experiential learning opportunities. This exposure takes the mystery out of government operations and creates meaningful connections between students and community leaders.

The program is especially effective because it targets students at a pivotal stage where their career interests are developing, and their civic identities are being formed. By combining leadership development, civic engagement, and career exploration, DELA not only increases knowledge but also builds confidence, critical thinking, and a sense of responsibility to public service. DELA provides students in rural Dinwiddie County opportunities that they may not otherwise have, creating a diverse and locally rooted pipeline of future leaders. DELA's blend of education, exposure, and engagement makes it a powerful model for preparing the next generation of leaders who will contribute meaningfully to the communities where they choose to settle and raise their families - ideally, Dinwiddie County.

DELA is deserving of an Achievement Award from the Virginia Association of Counties because it demonstrates measurable impact, innovation, and long-term value to the community. The

**2026 VACo Achievement Award
Dinwiddie Emerging Leaders Academy (DELA)
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program enhances students' level of participation in, and their understanding of, local government. It inspires and motivates students to take a more active role in their community.

Now in its second cohort, the Dinwiddie Emerging Leaders Academy (DELA) is already demonstrating meaningful and measurable impact on participating students. Through structured exposure to local and state government, leadership development, and hands-on learning experiences, students are gaining a deeper understanding of civic processes and the importance of being actively engaged in their community.

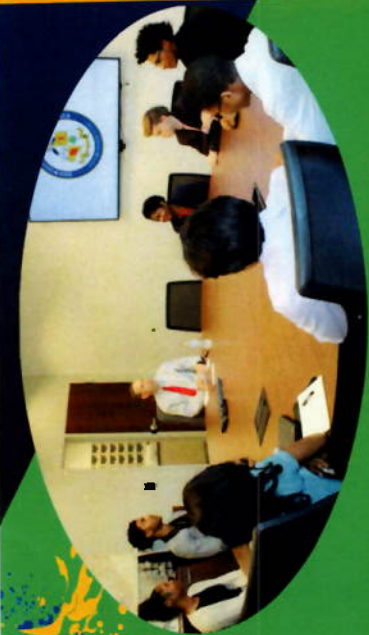
Participants in DELA have shown increased confidence, improved communication skills, and an increased interest in public service and community leadership. The program has created a pipeline of informed, motivated young leaders who are better equipped to contribute to the future of Dinwiddie County. Students leave the program with not only expanded knowledge, but also a stronger sense of civic responsibility and connection to their community.

The success and promise of DELA have already garnered recognition beyond the local level. The program was formally recognized on the floor of the Virginia Senate by Senator Lashrecse Aird, demonstrating its value as an innovative model for youth engagement and leadership development across the Commonwealth.

As DELA continues to grow, its long-term impact will be reflected in increased civic participation, stronger community ties, and the cultivation of future leaders who are committed to living, working, and serving in Dinwiddie County, thereby aligning with the County's vision of being "... a community in which to spend a lifetime."

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The Dinwiddie Emerging Leaders Academy (DELA) is a leadership development initiative designed to equip high school juniors and seniors with the knowledge, skills, and experiences necessary to become informed, engaged, and effective leaders. Through a structured program that blends classroom learning with real-world exposure, participants gain insight into leadership principles, civic responsibility, and the functions of local and state government. DELA provides meaningful opportunities for students to interact with public officials, community leaders, and industry professionals, while also participating in education trips that broaden their understanding of government and public service. By fostering critical thinking, collaboration, and a commitment to community involvement, the DELA's goal is to cultivate the next generation of leaders prepared to make a positive impact in Dinwiddie County and beyond.



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

If you have any questions regarding the application process or the program in general, please feel free to contact Ms. Yannette Nicholas (info listed below).



CONTACT INFORMATION

Yannette Nicholas
Workforce Development Manager
(804) 469-4500 opt. 1 ext. 2154
ynicholas@dinwiddieva.us
dinwiddiewd@gmail.com
<https://discoverdinwiddie.com/workforce>



“Equipping Today’s Youth to Lead Tomorrow’s Workforce.”

Established 2024

MAIN PURPOSE

The purpose of this academy is to enhance the skills and knowledge of high school juniors and seniors in the areas of leadership, community and civic engagement, and government through exposure, informational, and opportunities, educational trips, and insight.

MISSION

To build a **LEGACY** by providing students with the skills, trainings, and experiences that will enhance their mindset by participation in activities

focused on:

- Leadership**
- Engagement**
- Government**
- Advancement**
- Community and**
- Youth involvement**

MINDSET

Any participant of this program is expected to embody these characteristics:

- **STEWARDSHIP**
- **TRANSFORMATIVE**
- **RESILIENT**
- **INFLUENTIAL**
- **VISIONARY**
- **EMPOWERING**

HOW TO APPLY...

Students can apply to be in the program by completing an application. The application can be picked up from the Dinwiddie High School guidance office or the Workforce Development Office located at the Government Building.

Student Qualifications:

- Must be in the 11th or 12th grade
- Must be in good academic, attendance, and behavior standings
- Must have one letter of recommendation from a teacher
- Must submit a video expressing reasons for participation, including personal expectations, and personal contribution level. The video should not exceed five minutes (*not required for second year students).

Application Period: September 14th through September 25th, 2026

Interviews: September 30th through October 2nd, 2026

Acceptance Announcement: October 7th, 2026

Duration of the program: October 13th, 2025, through May 14, 2027

BENEFITS OF THE PROGRAM

This program will allow students to be exposed to different meetings and places that they may not normally be privy to or able to attend. It will also allow them to directly engage with leaders in the community and surrounding areas.

Student Opportunities:

- Mentorship
- Field Trips
- Community involvement
- Learning how local government works
- Development of a community impact project
- Increased aptitude in the local economy and the roles and responsibilities of local, state and federal government

Each student who completes the Dinwiddie Emerging Leaders Academy (DELA) will be awarded a stipend at the conclusion of the program.





Dinwiddie Emerging Leaders Academy Application

Application Date Grade Level GPA Area of Interest (Please number 1st, 2nd, and 3rd)

			<input type="checkbox"/> Leadership <input type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Community
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Personal Information

Full Name:		DoB:	Age:
Address:		State:	Zip Code:
City/Town:			
Phone:	Email:	Year of Graduation:	
Do you have access to reliable transportation:		<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes

School Clubs

Name	Office/Positon	# of years active

Sports

Type: (ie. Football)	Position	Practice Dates	Times

Extra Curricular Activities

Activity	Office/Position	Practice/Meeting Dates	Times

Please have the teacher who is writing your letter of recommendation (LOR) to email it to the Workforce Development Manager. The application needs to be turned in at the Workforce Development Office located at the Government Building (14010 Boydton Plank Road Dinwiddie, VA 23841) and email your video to the Workforce Developme Manager at ynicholas@dinwiddieva.us

Application September 18, 2025 by 3:00 P.M.

Video Due: September 19, 2025 by 3:00 P.M.

Letter of Recommendation (LOR) Due: September 19, 2025

DELA Sessions, Events, Community Service Activities and Field Trips

Dinwiddie Government Day – (Government)

Dinwiddie School Board session – (Government/Leadership)

County Administrator Expectations – (Government/Leadership)

Dinwiddie Citizen’s Academy Meeting – (Government/Leadership)

Virginia General Assembly – (Government/Leadership)

Dinwiddie Teen Expo – (Leadership)

Leadership Training – (Leadership)

Small Business Expo – (Leadership)

Public Speaking Session – (Leadership)

Financial Money Management Session – (Leadership)

Professional Business Etiquette – (Leadership)

Human Resources: Preparing for the Career of Your Choice - Leadership

Understanding Personalities and Diversities and why they Matter in Relationships (Leadership)

Crater Health District Teen Talk – (Leadership/Community Engagement)

Cameron Foundation Field Trip – (Leadership/Community Engagement)

John Randolph Session – (Leadership/Community Engagement)

Dinwiddie Kiwanis Shrimp Feast – (Community Engagement)

Dinwiddie Ruritan Club Shrimp Feast – (Community Engagement)

National Day of Prayer – (Community Engagement)

Dinwiddie County Fair – (Community Engagement)

Dinwiddie Boys Basketball Concessions – (Community Engagement)

Christmas Sharing Volunteer Opportunity – (Community Engagement)

Voter Registration Training – (Civic Engagement)

Voter Registration Polls – (Civic Engagement)

Moc Trial – (Government, Leadership, Community & Civic Engagement)

Mentorship Mix and Mingle – (Government, Leadership, Community Engagement)

How to Interview – (Government, Leadership, Community & Civic Engagement)

DELA Closeout Program – (Government, Leadership, Community & Civic Engagement)