



ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS



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: Fairfax County

Program Title: Fairfax CORE (Connecting Opportunities and Resources for Entrepreneurs)

Program Category: Community Development, Economic Development, & Land Use

CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: Scott Sizer

Title: Deputy Director, Economic Initiatives

Department: Department of Economic Initiatives (DEI)

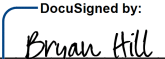
Telephone: 703-324-2581 Website: https://fairfaxcore.com/

Email: Scott.Sizer@fairfaxcounty.gov

SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Bryan Hill

Title: County Executive

Signature: 

Executive Summary

The Fairfax CORE (Connecting Opportunities and Resources for Entrepreneurs) platform is a vital resource for business support and growth in Fairfax County. The platform was created to fix the problem of "fragmented support" by giving the county's over 40,000 small businesses a one-stop website to connect to the needed information at the ideal time. Fairfax CORE connects users to over 120 resource partners across multiple localities, offering tailored resources and guidance on critical needs like securing permits, navigating local regulations, and accessing capital. Fairfax CORE is augmented through consistent and active outreach efforts. Since its launch three years ago, the platform's popularity has surged. Page views have climbed by 38% year-over-year, and the number of new users has jumped by 66%, demonstrating it is a resource for local business owners.

Additionally, Fairfax CORE provides personalized assistance which has proved valuable and popular. A monthly entrepreneur help desk opportunity provides direct assistance and one-on-one guidance and is consistently at capacity. This dual approach of comprehensive asynchronous digital resources and personalized assistance ensures entrepreneurs receive both immediate answers and strategic support for long-term success.

Problem, challenge, or situation faced by the locality

Small businesses and entrepreneurs often face significant barriers to accessing the resources necessary for growth and sustainability. Historically, business support services

for small businesses in Fairfax County were fragmented across multiple agencies, departments, and external organizations - these created inefficiencies, confusion, frustration, and missed opportunities for businesses seeking assistance.

Entrepreneurs struggled to identify the appropriate point of contact for services such as licensing, permitting, financing, workforce development, and technical assistance. Additionally, limited coordination among service providers resulted either in duplication of efforts or gaps in service delivery. These issues were exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic, when timely access to accurate information and resources became critical. Another challenge in Fairfax County comes from its strength as being a diverse community as over 40% of Fairfax County residents speak a language other than English and may require translation services to access county services.

Fairfax County recognized the need for a comprehensive, integrated solution that could simplify access to services, improve coordination among stakeholders, and enhance the overall business support ecosystem. By embracing technology, the County shifted to a more responsive, data-driven strategy to better serve the evolving needs of the local economy.

Award Criteria

Innovative Solution

What makes Fairfax CORE truly innovative is its ability to integrate systems, information, and stakeholders into a cohesive, user-centered platform. Rather than

requiring businesses to navigate a complex web of agencies and organizations, Fairfax CORE brings these resources together in a streamlined and accessible format. Using a One-Stop Shop model, Fairfax CORE de-silos services that businesses are looking for (e.g., permitting, licensing, and taxes). It provides a single "digital front door", guiding users to an integrated network of over 120 local, state, federal, and non-profit partners.

The platform leverages data analytics to understand user trends, track engagement, and inform continuous improvement and critical decision-making. This data-driven approach allows the Department of Economic Initiatives to refine services and adapt to emerging needs. This is critical input informing the Fairfax CORE platform, and other County-offered business support services and programming, to remain responsive, relevant, and impactful.

Promoting Intergovernmental Cooperation

Fairfax CORE serves as a digital "liaison" between different levels of government and between county agencies. By integrating programs across county departments and agencies, the platform ensures a "no wrong door" policy for the end user. Instead of a business owner receiving differing information from different departments, Fairfax CORE streamlines complex processes like permitting, licensing, and local tax compliance through a unified information flow.

Recognizing that the economy has no boundaries, Fairfax CORE successfully consolidated data from incorporated towns (Clifton and Vienna) and independent cities (Fairfax and Falls Church) within the county geography. This intergovernmental alignment allows a user to identify specific registration and tax requirements unique to their exact jurisdiction. This coordination is further amplified through strategic partnerships with the Fairfax County Economic Development Authority (EDA) and the regional Chamber of Commerce network, ensuring synchronized regional marketing efforts and local resource delivery.

The platform serves as a seamless government resource pipeline by incorporating resources from the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), the Virginia Small Business Development Center (SBDC), and SCORE. By mapping these state and federal programs to local needs, Fairfax CORE ensures that federal funding opportunities and state regulatory guidance are immediately accessible to the local entrepreneur. This alignment maximizes the impact of these programs by ensuring they reach the businesses they were intended to help.

Innovative Approach and Customization

While Fairfax CORE draws inspiration from existing resource hubs and digital platforms, it differentiates service delivery through customization and integration. The program is uniquely tailored to the needs of Fairfax County's diverse business community, incorporating local priorities, industry strengths, and economic goals.

Innovative features include:

- **Comprehensive Integration:** Fairfax CORE connects users with services and opportunities dynamically and interactively.
- **User-Centered Design:** The platform is designed with the end user in mind, ensuring accessibility and ease of use. Fairfax CORE can be translated into 58 different languages, ensuring the county's entrepreneurial base can access services.
- **Cross-Sector Collaboration:** The program goes beyond government-led initiatives by fully integrating private and nonprofit partners.
- **Continuous Improvement:** Ongoing evaluation and feedback mechanisms allow the platform to evolve and remain relevant.

This combination of innovation and customization ensures that Fairfax CORE meets current needs and adapts to future challenges.

Procurement and Staffing

The county implemented the program through a competitive procurement process, which resulted in the selection of SourceLink as the platform host. Implementation of the platform cost \$88,400, with ongoing operations supported by annual renewal fees of \$17,125. The staffing structure distributes responsibilities across three roles: a junior staff member manages daily operations at 100% time, a division manager provides oversight at 75% time, and a marketing coordinator supports outreach at 20% time. These combined

resources allowed the county to launch a centralized digital infrastructure that connects constituents with essential services while maintaining a total workforce commitment of 1.95 full-time equivalents.

Providing a Model for Others

Fairfax CORE serves as a scalable, technology framework for the provision of services. The platform anchors local government as an orchestrator, demonstrating how a centralized portal can serve multiple independent jurisdictions while respecting unique regulatory environments. Its modular architecture allows any jurisdiction to identify its own network of local non-profits, chambers, and agencies and integrate them into a unified database without the prohibitive costs of custom-coded software. By utilizing flexible, web-based tools such as automated translation and integrated calendars, Fairfax CORE offers a streamlined solution for eliminating service duplication and reducing administrative overhead, while improving service delivery. This model provides a strategy for other local governments to foster intergovernmental data sharing and provide a cohesive, inclusive experience for their diverse business community

Program Results

Since its launch, Fairfax CORE has produced clear, data-driven results demonstrating its value to the business community. The Department of Economic Initiatives monitors engagement to ensure the platform remains responsive to the county's 40,000+ small businesses. Key outcomes include:

- **Improved Access to Resources:** The platform increased from 685 page views at launch in March 2024 to 110,593 page views to date. This increase demonstrates the successful adoption of Fairfax CORE as the primary starting point for entrepreneurs.
- **Workforce and Skill Development:** The platform has promoted over 1,250 events, hosted by over 50 resource partners and local organizations. In centralizing these workshops and networking opportunities, the platform has lowered the barrier to entry for professional development within the county.
- **Increased Operational Efficiency:** Centralization of information has reduced duplication of effort among service providers and streamlined the client experience. Since launch, Fairfax CORE has had 829 total direct client interactions, engaging 579 unique clients, while the Resource Navigator module has processed 498 total referrals and connected businesses to 79 different resource partners.
- **Enhanced Engagement:** The platform has increased participation in partner-led workshops, training programs, and networking events. Existing programs and specialized county services have benefited from higher visibility and easier access through the Fairfax CORE platform.
- **CORE in the Community:** Through this monthly series, the CORE team provides in-person, one-on-one guidance on navigating the Fairfax CORE platform and County programs. Community pop-ups and onsite business support sessions are often sold-out events.

- **Communication and Retention:** The Fairfax CORE newsletter has grown to a subscription base of 5,400 recipients and shares timely updates, resource announcements, and business insights. The platform's new blog feature has become a reliable source of real-time updates, policy changes, and trend analysis, generating increasing engagement month over month.

The success of Fairfax CORE has resulted in increased user engagement, active participation from resource partners, and positive feedback from the business community. These measurable outcomes demonstrate the platform's effectiveness in addressing long-standing fragmentation in business support services and its value as a scalable model for other jurisdictions.

Website: [Fairfax County Free Small Business Help - Fairfax CORE](https://fairfaxcore.com/)

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