



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: Connect with County Leaders Podcast

Program Category: Communications & Community Outreach

CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: Tony Castrilli

Title: Director

Department: Office of Public Affairs

Telephone: 703-324-3189 Website: <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/cableconsumer/channel-16/connect-with-county-leaders-black-history-month-series>

Email: Anthony.Castrilli@fairfaxcounty.gov

SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Bryan Hill

Title: County Executive

Signature: 
DocuSigned by:
Bryan Hill
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VACo Achievement Awards Program Submission

Program Title: ‘Connect with County Leaders’ Podcast: Black History Month Series

County: Fairfax

Category: Communications & Community Outreach

Executive Summary

Fairfax County’s “Connect with County Leaders” podcast Black History Month series is a model of innovative, equity-focused public engagement. Developed as a special four-episode edition of the county’s monthly podcast, the series honored Black History Month by elevating the voices of distinguished leaders whose service, entrepreneurship, and community investment shape Fairfax County and the region. This series reflects Fairfax County’s One Fairfax Policy — the county’s commitment to promote fairness and justice and intentionally consider equity when delivering programs and services.

Produced through close collaboration between the Office of the County Executive, Cable and Consumer Services, and the Office of Public Affairs (OPA), this initiative marked the podcast’s first-ever shift from a monthly cadence to weekly releases. This cross-functional team completed a single day of production with accelerated post-production and coordinated multimedia distribution, demonstrating a replicable and low-cost model for high-volume public communication.

The series featured Phyllis Randall, Kendrick Ashton, Vanessa Blair Lewis, and Earl Stafford Sr., whose candid conversations addressed leadership, resilience, and community impact across government, business, education, and philanthropy.

Engagement was strong: 900+ listens and watches (YouTube and SoundCloud), 23,700

organic social media views, and 1,450 NewsCenter article views, all without paid promotion.

By celebrating Black leadership as a living, ongoing story, the series strengthened transparency, deepened community connection, and advanced Fairfax County's commitment to inclusive and representative storytelling. It stands as a clear example of cross-agency excellence, cost efficiency, and civic impact that counties across Virginia can replicate.

The 'Connect with County Leaders' Podcast

Fairfax County launched the "Connect with County Leaders" podcast in 2023 to give residents an accessible way to connect directly with local leaders who are shaping the community. Hosted by Fairfax County Executive Bryan Hill, each episode features candid conversations with leaders about their work, mission, and impact across the county. Guests share their journeys, discuss their goals, challenges, and contributions to the region. By intentionally featuring leaders from diverse backgrounds, the podcast aligns with the county's [One Fairfax Policy](#) — a commitment to promote fairness, justice, and equity that ensures residents have the opportunity to participate in the region's economic vitality, contribute to its readiness for the future, and connect to its assets and resources. Since its debut, the monthly podcast has featured 33 county leaders across 36 episodes. Guests have represented the diversity of the region — from the CEO of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority and the president and CEO of Inova Health System to the Fairfax County Public Schools superintendent, collegiate basketball coaches, county

supervisors, and department directors. Like the county and residents they serve, leaders reflect a wide range of backgrounds and experiences.

“Connect with County Leaders” is a multi-agency initiative led by Fairfax County's Office of the County Executive, Cable and Consumer Services, and the Office of Public Affairs (OPA). Each agency plays a distinct role. The Office of the County Executive selects guests, develops interview topics, and conducts the interview. Cable and Consumer Services handles recording, filming, editing, and production, and OPA manages digital distribution and promotion.

New episodes are released monthly across multiple platforms, including Fairfax County’s [Channel 16](#), [Apple Podcasts](#), [SoundCloud](#), and [YouTube](#). To complement each release, OPA publishes a highlights article on the county's news hub, [NewsCenter](#), with links to both the audio and video versions. The article is then shared across the county's main [social media channels](#) — LinkedIn, X, Threads, Bluesky, and Facebook. The podcast is also featured as the lead story in a [daily email newsletter](#) that goes out to 8,800 subscribers.

Black History Month Series

Each February, Fairfax County’s Board of Supervisors formally recognizes Black History Month with [an official proclamation](#). This year, the Black History Month theme, “A Century of Black History Commemorations: Promote, Protect, Preserve,” was a call to action to preserve the history and memory of Black life in Fairfax County. The proclamation affirms Fairfax County’s commitment to honoring Black History by recognizing and uplifting

individuals whose leadership, service, and advocacy have made a lasting impact on our community.

To honor this proclamation and in alignment with One Fairfax, “Connect with County Leaders” launched a special [Black History Month series](#). Departing from the typical monthly schedule, one episode was published per week, totaling four episodes. Each guest sat down with the county executive to reflect on their experiences of being a Black leader, innovator, risk-taker, and role model, detailing how they overcame barriers and are leading the way for future generations. By elevating Black voices, the series strengthened the county’s connection to its community by presenting Black leadership not as history, but as an ongoing story — one that reflects the county's commitment to inclusion and representation. Guest Phyllis Randall, chair-at-large for the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors, summed up the goal of the series perfectly during her conversation when she said:

“I owe two groups of people,” she said. “The people that came before me, who fought the fights that I don't have to fight. But also, the women and people who will be coming after me. You never go through a door and then close it behind you. You open that door wider and invite as many people in as you can.”

‘Connect with County Leaders’ Black History Month Series Guests and Episodes

- **Phyllis Randall** - The chair-at-large for the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors discussed her background and influence in local, regional, and state-level government.

- [Podcast episode](#)
 - [NewsCenter article](#)
- **Kendrick Ashton** - Co-founder of the St. James Group, a sports and wellness complex in Springfield. Ashton discussed leadership, entrepreneurship, and the role of public-private partnerships in expanding opportunity.
 - [Podcast episode](#)
 - [NewsCenter article](#)
- **Vanessa Blair-Lewis** - George Mason University's women's basketball coach. Blair-Lewis talked about her leadership approach and the future of women's college basketball at George Mason University.
 - [Podcast episode](#)
 - [NewsCenter article](#)
- **Earl Stafford Sr.** - Founder of The Stafford Foundation and former chairman and CEO of Unitech. Stafford Sr. discussed entrepreneurship, faith-driven leadership, and what it means to reinvest success back into the community.
 - [Podcast episode](#)
 - [NewsCenter article](#)

Multi-Agency Coordination

Close cross-agency coordination was essential to produce four episodes within an accelerated time frame. All episodes were filmed in a single day in December 2025, which made the usually straightforward pre-production process more complex. OPA and the county executive collaborated to identify county leaders whose work reflects long-term vision, resilience, and community impact. Once guests were confirmed, tailored scripts and questions were developed for each conversation. Cable and Consumer Services handled recording, filming, and editing. The interviews started in the morning with Loudoun County Chair-at-Large Phyllis Randall and George Mason University Women's Basketball Coach Vanessa Blair-Lewis, followed by the St. James Sports Group Co-Founder Kendrick Ashton and The Stafford Foundation Founder Earl Stafford Sr. Coordinating the schedules of four guests in addition to county staff was no small task, but seamless collaboration between the three agencies made the day a success.

In post-production, edited episodes were approved internally and by the county executive before being sent to Cable and Consumer Services engineers to get the shows on Channel 16 and its [live video stream](#). Edited files were then sent to OPA for distribution across digital platforms. Each episode was accompanied by a NewsCenter article highlighting the guest's leadership, their role in local government, and how their work contributes to the greater public good. Once the article was live on NewsCenter, the articles were promoted through a series of organic posts across LinkedIn, X, Threads, Bluesky and Facebook.

Replicable Model

Producing four episodes in one month was a new and challenging experience, but the combined expertise of each agency made it possible. Departments replicated the usual

“Connect with County Leaders” process, which proved to be effective even at a greater volume. The series is a testament that strong multi-agency collaboration is the foundation of any successful project, regardless of scale.

The effort also demonstrated that podcasts are an efficient, low-cost way to produce high-volume content. Local governments can easily replicate this model by clearly defining roles, maintaining strong cross-department coordination, and building a team committed to a shared goal. Internally, the Black History Month series schedule now serves as a model that Cable and Consumer Services plans to use as they move toward a more frequent and regular production of the podcast. Beyond logistics, the series strengthened transparency, deepened community connection, and advanced Fairfax County's commitment to inclusive storytelling.

Financing and Performance

The “Connect with County Leaders” podcast is produced entirely by Fairfax County staff. Guests appear voluntarily and without pay, creating a genuine exchange between leaders sharing their stories and residents gaining insight into the people who serve their community. The county doesn't pay to promote podcasts on digital platforms, and every view and listen is earned organically.

Between February and March 15, the Black History Month podcast series generated strong engagement across platforms. Episodes received over 900 watches and listens on YouTube and SoundCloud. Social media posts linking to the accompanying articles reached 23,700 views. The articles received 1,450 views on [fairfaxcounty.gov](https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov). Each watch,

listen, and view represents a community member who engaged with the series.

Distributing the series in various forms across multiple platforms ensured it reached residents wherever they were.

Conclusion

The “Connect with County Leaders” Black History Month series was more than a podcast.

It honored One Fairfax and Fairfax County’s commitment to fairness, justice, and equity.

By elevating Black voices and spotlighting leaders who are actively shaping the community, the series celebrated Black History not only as a reflection of the past but as an ongoing story. The series also showcased the power of multi-agency collaboration.

Despite a more complex structure, each department proved they could successfully deliver when working toward a shared goal. The “Connect with County Leaders” Black History Month series highlighted how leaders overcame barriers and are leading the way for future generations. Their stories of resilience, vision, and community investment will continue to resonate with residents long after Black History Month ends.