



# 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: Drone as First Responder (DFR)

Program Category: Criminal Justice & Public Safety

### CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: Major Hudson Bull

Title: Commander, Real Time Crime Center

Department: Fairfax County Police Department

Telephone: 703-277-2067 Website: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: Hudson.Bull@fairfaxcounty.gov

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

Name: Bryan Hill

Title: County Executive

Signature:  \_\_\_\_\_  
DocuSigned by:  
Bryan Hill  
5CFC69274C2440E...

## **Drone as First Responder**

### **Executive Summary**

Fairfax County Police Department (FCPD) implemented a Drone as First Responder (DFR) program to transform emergency response by providing rapid aerial situational awareness before the arrival of ground units. Integrated with the County's Real Time Crime Center, drones are deployed immediately upon dispatch, often arriving on scene within two minutes and before officers in approximately 70% of incidents.

This innovative approach enhances public safety by improving decision-making, reducing risk to officers, and enabling more effective and informed responses. Operating within the complex and highly regulated airspace of the National Capital Region, Fairfax County is among the first jurisdictions in the region to successfully deploy a DFR program under these constraints. The program demonstrates a scalable, technology-driven model that strengthens emergency response capabilities while improving outcomes for both residents and first responders.

### **The Challenge**

Public safety agencies are increasingly expected to respond quickly and effectively to a wide range of incidents while ensuring the safety of both residents and first responders. Traditional response models rely primarily on ground-based units, which can be delayed by traffic, distance, and limited visibility upon arrival. In a geographically large and densely populated jurisdiction like Fairfax County, these limitations can delay critical situational awareness – making it more difficult to assess risks, allocate resources appropriately, and

ensure officer safety. Responding officers often arrive on scene with incomplete information, increasing uncertainty and potential danger.

Additionally, operating within the National Capital Region presents unique challenges due to restricted and highly regulated airspace, limiting the ability to deploy aerial technologies without significant coordination and regulatory approval. These challenges highlighted the need for a faster, safer, and more informed approach to emergency response.

### **Program Description & Implementation**

DFR program was implemented to provide immediate aerial intelligence during emergency incidents, improving response effectiveness and safety. Upon dispatch, drones are launched to the scene of an incident, providing real-time video and situational data to the Real Time Crime Center and responding units. This capability allows decision-makers to assess conditions before officers arrive, enabling more informed tactical decisions.

The program is fully integrated with existing public safety infrastructure, including the Real Time Crime Center, and operates in coordination with fire and rescue services to support unified response efforts. Implementation required extensive planning, testing, and coordination, particularly given the restricted airspace of the National Capital Region. Fairfax County worked closely with federal partners, including aviation authorities, to secure necessary approvals and ensure safe and compliant operations.

The result is a seamless, technology-enabled response model that enhances, not replaces, traditional policing methods.

## **Award Criteria**

The Drone as First Responder program represents a significant innovation in public safety, redefining how emergency response is delivered by introducing aerial first response capabilities into routine operations. Rather than relying solely on ground-based units, Fairfax County has implemented a proactive approach that provides immediate situational awareness through drone deployment, fundamentally improving how incidents are assessed and managed.

The innovation of the program lies in its ability to deliver real-time intelligence within minutes of dispatch. By arriving on scene ahead of officers in a majority of cases, drones provide critical visual information that enhances decision-making, reduces uncertainty, and improves the safety of both responders and the public. This shift from reactive to informed response represents a meaningful advancement in public safety operations.

The success of the program is grounded in strong collaboration across multiple entities. Fairfax County worked closely with federal aviation partners to operate within one of the most complex and restricted airspaces in the country, as well as with internal public safety partners to integrate the program into existing workflows. Coordination with the Real Time Crime Center and other emergency response agencies ensures that information is shared effectively and used to support coordinated decision-making.

Equally important, the DFR program provides a clear and replicable model for other jurisdictions. While airspace restrictions may vary, the core framework, including rapid drone deployment, integration with centralized command centers, and alignment with existing response protocols, can be adapted to meet local needs. Fairfax County's approach demonstrates how local governments can successfully implement advanced technologies to enhance service delivery without requiring a complete overhaul of existing systems.

Through this combination of innovation, collaboration, and practical application, the DFR program establishes a forward-looking model for modern public safety that can be scaled and implemented by counties across the country.

## **Results**

The Drone as First Responder program has significantly improved Fairfax County's emergency response capabilities by providing faster, more informed, and safer incident management. Drones now routinely arrive on scene in under two minutes and ahead of responding officers in approximately 70% of incidents, allowing critical information to be gathered and assessed before ground units arrive.

This early situational awareness enables more effective decision-making, including identifying potential threats, assessing scene conditions, and determining appropriate resource deployment. As a result, officers are better prepared when arriving on scene, reducing risk and improving overall response outcomes. The program has also enhanced

coordination across public safety agencies by providing real-time video and data through the Real Time Crime Center, supporting a more unified and informed response.

Overall, the DFR program has strengthened Fairfax County's ability to respond quickly and effectively to emergencies while improving safety for both first responders and the community. These improvements have strengthened operational performance while also enhancing working conditions for staff, who are now better positioned to handle complex emergencies rather than routine inquiries. Most importantly, the program has advanced equity in service delivery by ensuring that residents with limited English proficiency can access emergency services without delay.