



## 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: Greene County  
Program Title: Employee Cross-Training Program  
Program Category: Organizational Development

### CONTACT INFORMATION

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

Name: Cathy Schafrik  
Title: County Administrator  
Signature: 



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**2026 VACO Achievement Award Submission**  
**Locality: Greene County**  
**Program: Water & Sewer Employee Cross-Training Program**

**Executive Summary:**

Greene County is a small, rural community bordering Shenandoah National Park. It is a county in transition from a rural farming community to a hybrid rural/suburban one. The population has grown by 41% since 2000 to more than 21,500 residents, straining the county's infrastructure. The Water and Sewer Department was created in 2023 to manage the utilities after acquisition from the Rapidan Service Authority. In less than three years, we have addressed a host of needed repair and upgrade work, won an award, and trained almost entirely new staff. The development of the cross-training program was necessitated by the need for trained individuals to operate the utilities 24 hours per day, seven days a week. There is a shortage of people who have the correct certifications and when people are out sick or switch jobs, we face a shortage of qualified workers to operate. This program expands our pool while assisting employees receive qualifications to benefit their careers.

**Background:**

Greene County is a small county in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. We are just north of Charlottesville with easy access to both Washington, D.C., and Richmond. Our staff is small, with 20 positions, but law requires staff to possess very specific technical skills including water treatment licenses, wastewater treatment licenses, utility line repair proficiency, and bookkeeping skills, to name a few. The need for proper staffing is compounded by the small size of the local labor market. (In fact, over half of our technical staff commute more than 45 minutes one-way each day.)

Per Virginia State Department of Health (VDH) and Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) regulations, water and wastewater treatment plants must have licensed operators and managers whose license level is equal to or higher than the system's classification. Operators must meet education, experience and exam requirements set by the Department of Professional and

Occupational Regulation (DPOR). Licenses require biennial renewal with continuing professional education (CPE) hours.

Virginia uses a six-class certification system for water treatment operators, with Class 1 being the highest level and Class 4 the lowest for municipal systems. Greene County’s water treatment plant is classified by the State as Class 2, requiring a Class 2 Water Treatment Operators. Our wastewater treatment plants are classified as Class 3, requiring a Class 3 Wastewater Treatment Operator.

Here are our total license level counts for our current ten treatment plant employees. Note the significant upgrade in levels due to dedicated focus and our allowing cross-training between the plants to Class 2. We are projecting that even more employees advance by June 1 of this year.

Classification	Current County employees as of 10-1-25	As of 4-1-26	As of 6-1-26 (forecast)
<p><b>Class 4 – Entry-Level Treatment Operator</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Often considered the starting point for full-scale treatment plant operators</li> <li>• May include filtration, chemical feed, and disinfection processes</li> <li>• Operators at this level can work independently on many systems</li> <li>• May operate Class 4 system</li> </ul>	2	0	1
<p><b>Class 3 – Intermediate Treatment Operator</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More advanced water treatment systems</li> <li>• Operators may serve as lead operators or shift supervisors</li> <li>• Requires more experience and deeper technical knowledge</li> <li>• May operate Class 3 through Class 4 systems</li> </ul>	7	4	5

<p><b>Class 2 – Advanced / Journeyman Operator</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Handles complex treatment processes</li> <li>• Often employed at larger municipal systems</li> <li>• Increased responsibility for optimization, troubleshooting, and compliance</li> <li>• May operate Class 2 through Class 6 systems</li> </ul>	1	7	5
<p><b>Class 1 – Senior / Chief Water Treatment Operator</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Highest level of certification in Virginia</li> <li>• Required for large, complex systems, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Plants serving 50,000+ people</li> <li>○ Plants with 5.0 MGD or higher capacity</li> <li>○ Systems using conventional surface water treatment or advanced filtration</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Often required for operators in responsible charge (ORC) or supervisory roles</li> <li>• May operate any classified waterworks in Virginia</li> </ul>	2	2	4

Greene County fought to leave the service authority for several years and was given one day's notice that it would be taking over the system completely in June 2023. While the County was

aware of the challenges the takeover would bring, and hired people prior to that date, it was still a shock when it happened. Within one day, there was a large water main break to tackle in the Town of Stanardsville. Our staff jumped right in to tackle it all.

Staffing levels greatly affect our ability to provide these necessary services. For example, a single vacancy at the wastewater treatment plant results in a 25% reduction in staff and requires up to 25% more hours from the rest of our plant staff. This innate difficulty was particularly an issue when six water plant operators – including two managers – left their positions within a few weeks last summer.

Most importantly, jobs at our water and wastewater treatment plants require not only experience in water and wastewater treatment and corresponding state licenses, but hands-on training working *in our specific* plants. In other words, no operator – no matter how experienced elsewhere – can come aboard and handle a shift by themselves without two weeks of training specific to our plant.

### **Our Program:**

This program helped cover a staff shortage in the water treatment plant. By improving collaboration between the water treatment and wastewater treatment plants, we have developed a proactive synergy between several skills in different technical trades. The program also provides succession planning for our small organization, as well as career development for our dedicated staff team members.

There are a lot of transferable skills between a water treatment operator and a wastewater plant operator. The educational background is similar with an expectation that the employee has knowledge of basic chemistry and testing, knowledge of the operation and purpose of equipment such as pumps, valves and motors, plus preventative and corrective maintenance concepts (though the industry training is very specific to either water or wastewater including regulations for each). Both operators are skilled in monitoring and analysis, maintenance and troubleshooting, documentation and communication, and technology and math. Both disciplines require attention to detail and accuracy, problem solving and analytical thinking, ability to learn and apply technical information, ability to work in all weather and plant environments, behavioral and professional abilities (such as being reliable, able to stay calm in an emergency, willingness to work shifts, weekends) AND regulatory and ethical responsibilities (commitment to public health protection).

Our new program has helped to build an organizational culture that encourages knowledge sharing and team building. By breaking down barriers between two corners of the org chart, we've built a single larger team dedicated to the same goals. Those who advanced with additional skills got a bump in pay after passing the exam for the next license level. We will continue to rotate employees to keep skills current.

The cross-training effort includes job shadowing, hands-on practice, documentation of vital processes, and joint training sessions from consultants and equipment manufacturers. In a period of six months, we built a team second to none and greatly improved team morale. This was a way to deal with a staff shortage in one particular area and support individual employee goals without making employees work excessive hours and becoming burned out.

To meet these challenges and provide additional benefits, we implemented a very active voluntary cross-training program. In the last six months, the Greene County Water and Sewer Department has cross trained more than half our employees in completely different roles, on an entirely voluntary basis. Our goal is to have every employee engage in work outside of their core training.

For example:

Wastewater Plant Operators	<i>worked as</i>	Water Plant Operators
Water Plant Operators	<i>worked as</i>	Wastewater Plant Operators
Wastewater Plant Supervisor	<i>worked as</i>	Water Plant Operator
Wastewater Plant Operator	<i>worked as</i>	Wastewater Plant Supervisor
Field Maintenance Worker	<i>worked as</i>	Wastewater Plant Operator
Field Maintenance Workers	<i>worked as</i>	Office Customer Service Agents
Customer Service /Bookkeeper	<i>worked as</i>	Field Maintenance Worker
Customer Service /Bookkeeper	<i>worked as</i>	Wastewater Plant Operator

Note that these voluntary engagements have been intensive hands-on training, not just short tours or “photo opportunities.” In fact, in most cases, the employee finished the temporary assignment by working at the job without supervision while building hours toward additional state treatment licenses.

In addition to our treatment plant operators earning upgrades in license levels – and becoming more valuable employees – through cross training between our treatment plants, we’ve encouraged employees in other areas to pursue take advantage of the program. So, office employees working at the plants and on our distribution/collection systems as well as Plant operators learning how to work shifts in the business office has resulted in many benefits for everyone.

### **Financing, Staffing and Replication:**

There is no cost to the employees to participate in the training. The department picks up the cost of both study materials and testing. The program was designed by in-house staff utilizing what is on the state certification testing. This type of program does not have to be only for utilities. Any similar department can trade employees for cross training, offering additional employees who can tackle an issue that arises. This is especially necessary in small governments such as Greene County.

### **Results of the Program:**

Just a quick glimpse at our great teams at the wastewater and water treatment plants: In the past six months, our ten staff members have earned a total of nine state license level upgrades . . . and six more are anticipated in the next month or two.

Put another way, seven out of ten treatment plant employees have improved their license levels in this short time. Several have reached these multiple goals by taking advantage of our cross-training between the water and wastewater plants.

Benefits of the program include:

- Covers emergency staff shortages in essential positions.
- Enhances redundancy and flexibility in assignments.
- Increases career advancement opportunities, especially for management positions.
- Provides hours toward state licenses.
- Enhances “cross-pollination” of ideas between positions.
- Increases number of quality control “eyes on the job” for each division.
- Improves understanding of all aspects of our customers’ experiences.
- Creates employees’ broader understanding of the entire department’s mission.
- Decreases personal ennui on the job.
- Develops more professional pride.