



## 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: Hanover County

Program Title: Hear In Hanover Podcast

Program Category: Communications & Community Outreach

### CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: Kristin Smith Dunlop

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

Name: John A. Budesky

Title: County Administrator

Signature: 

## **VACo Achievement Award Entry — Hear In Hanover Podcast**

### **Executive Summary**

In May 2024, Hanover County launched the “Hear In Hanover” podcast as an innovative, cost-effective solution to expand community outreach, increase transparency and meet residents where they are. Developed by the Communications and Community Engagement team following its formation in 2023, the podcast delivers timely, engaging and informative content in both audio and video formats. By transforming an existing conference room into a functional podcast studio using in-house resources and cross-departmental collaboration, the County minimized costs while maximizing impact.

The podcast features a wide range of topics — from critical public information and government operations to human-interest stories that highlight the community. Notable episodes include a discussion on the Richmond Regional Water Crisis, which garnered more than 21,000 views, as well as episodes on election security, public safety and local viral moments. The program has strengthened trust, improved accessibility to information and created a replicable model for other localities seeking to modernize communication efforts.

Through innovation, collaboration and measurable results, “Hear In Hanover” exemplifies how local governments can effectively connect with their communities in a rapidly evolving media landscape.

### **Program Narrative**

Problem?Challenge.or.Situation

In 2023, Hanover County recognized a growing need to modernize its communication strategies to better serve an evolving and increasing digital audience. Traditional communication methods — such as news releases, newsletters and static website content — remained valuable but were unable to fully engage residents who consume information across a variety of platforms and formats.

County leadership, including County Administrator John A. Budesky, identified an opportunity to strengthen transparency, improve accessibility to information and foster deeper connections with residents. The challenge was to create a platform that could deliver timely, accurate and engaging content while remaining cost-effective and sustainable.

Additionally, the County sought to address a broader challenge faced by many local governments: how to communicate complex topics — such as public utilities, budgeting and election security — in a way that is both understandable and engaging. There was also a need to humanize local government by sharing the stories of the people who serve the community and the residents who make Hanover County a great place to live, work and play.

To meet these challenges, the Communications and Community Engagement team developed an innovative solution: a County-produced podcast that combines education, information and storytelling in a dynamic, accessible format.

Innovative.Solution

The “Hear In Hanover” podcast launched on May 1, 2024, as a modern communication tool designed to inform, engage and connect with residents. What sets this program apart is its dual-format approach, offering both audio and video versions of each episode. The video format incorporates multiple camera angles, creating a dynamic and professional viewing experience that elevates a standard interview setup.

Innovation was also evident in the program’s development. Rather than investing in an expensive studio buildout, the team transformed an existing conference room into a flexible podcast studio. This space can be quickly converted for recording and returned to its original use, maximizing efficiency.

The studio itself reflects a collaborative and creative approach. Hanover County Parks and Recreation designed and produced custom wall panels that function as a professional backdrop, while General Services painted the space in the County’s signature blue to reinforce branding. The podcast logo was also incorporated into the design, creating a polished and recognizable visual identity.

The content strategy further demonstrates innovation. Episodes are intentionally designed to be educational, informational and entertaining, ensuring broad appeal. Topics are selected based on community relevance, timeliness and resident interest, allowing the podcast to serve as both a proactive and responsive communication tool.

#### Partnerships and Collaboration

The success of “Hear In Hanover” is rooted in strong internal collaboration across multiple County departments.

The Communications and Community Engagement team led the initiative, overseeing planning, production, hosting and distribution. Parks and Recreation contributed by producing custom visual elements for the studio. General Services supported the physical transformation of the space, ensuring it met both functional and aesthetic needs.

Subject matter experts from across the County regularly participate as guests, providing accurate and in-depth information directly to residents. This includes leadership, department directors and staff who bring valuable perspectives to each episode.

The collaborative nature of the podcast not only reduced costs but also fostered a sense of shared ownership and pride among staff, further strengthening the County's internal culture.

### **Program Implementation**

The development of the podcast involved several key phases:

- **Strategic Planning:** The Communications and Community Engagement team conducted research on industry best practices, analyzed successful government and private-sector podcasts, and identified the most cost-effective equipment and production methods.
- **Studio Development:** Using existing space and resources, the team created a functional and visually appealing recording environment. This included audio equipment, cameras, lighting and branded backdrops.

- **Content Development:** Episodes are carefully planned to align with County priorities, seasonal initiatives and community interests. The team also remains flexible to address timely topics as they arise.
- **Production and Distribution:** Each episode is recorded, edited and distributed across multiple platforms, including YouTube for video content and podcast platforms for audio listeners. This multi-channel approach ensures maximum accessibility.
- **Staffing for the program** is managed within the existing Communications and Community Engagement team, making it a sustainable initiative without the need for additional personnel.

## Financing

One of the most notable aspects of the “Hear In Hanover” podcast is its cost-effective implementation. By leveraging existing staff, repurposing County space and utilizing in-house expertise, the program avoided significant capital expenses.

Audio equipment was carefully selected to balance quality and affordability, ensuring a professional final product without exceeding budget constraints. Contributions from Parks and Recreation and General Services further reduced costs by eliminating the need for external vendors.

This approach demonstrates that high-quality communication initiatives can be achieved without substantial financial investment, making the program highly replicable for other localities.

## Program Results

Since its launch, “Hear In Hanover” has delivered measurable success in expanding the County’s outreach and engagement.

The podcast has reached a wide audience across multiple platforms, with several standout episodes demonstrating its impact:

- A [timely episode addressing the Richmond Regional Water Crisis](#), featuring the County Administrator and Director of Public Utilities, received more than 21,000 views on YouTube. This episode provided critical information following a period of heightened public interest and concern.
- [“Trashed Panda,”](#) an episode featuring the Animal Protection Officer involved in an international viral moment, attracted nearly 5,000 views, showcasing the program’s ability to connect with audiences outside of Hanover County.
- [“Behind the Ballot,”](#) an episode focused on election security and processes, received more than 3,700 views, helping to educate residents and build trust in local elections.

Beyond these high-performing episodes, the podcast consistently delivers value through a diverse range of topics, including budget breakdowns, event previews and State of the County highlights. It also showcases community stories, such as [local nonprofit initiatives](#), [historical reflections](#) and [milestone celebrations](#).

The program has enhanced transparency by providing direct access to County leadership and subject matter experts, improved public understanding of complex topics and strengthened community trust.

### **Model for Other Localities**

“Hear In Hanover” serves as a scalable and replicable model for other local governments seeking to modernize their communication strategies.

Key elements that make this program transferable include:

- Cost-effective design using existing resources and staff
- Flexible studio setup that maximizes space utilization
- Cross-departmental collaboration to enhance quality and reduce costs
- Multi-platform distribution to reach diverse audiences
- A balanced content strategy that combines information, education and storytelling

By demonstrating that impactful communication does not require significant financial investment, Hanover County provides a practical roadmap for other localities to follow.

### **Conclusion**

The “Hear In Hanover” podcast represents a forward-thinking approach to government communication. By embracing innovation, fostering collaboration and prioritizing community connection, Hanover County has created a program that not only informs but also engages and inspires its residents.

As communication trends continue to evolve, “Hear In Hanover” positions the County as a leader in transparency and outreach, ensuring residents remain informed, connected and engaged.