



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: _____

Program Title: _____

Program Category: _____

CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: _____

Title: _____

Department: _____

Telephone: _____ Website: _____

Email: _____

SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: _____

Title: _____

Signature: Monica Smith-Callahan

Program Overview

In November 2022, Varina Area Library launched its Fine Motor Skills Stations in response to a growing developmental concern regarding preschool and early elementary children.

Inspired by a presentation shared at the Virginia Library Association Conference titled *Pre-K Skill Builders*, staff learned that kindergarten teachers in Loudoun County Public Library reported significant gaps in children's fine motor development, particularly with cutting, buttoning, and pencil grip. Recognizing the similar need in Henrico County, staff in Henrico's Varina Library transformed that insight into action.

One of the children's librarians at Henrico County's Varina Library created the first station, designing promotional materials and encouraging staff collaboration. Drawing on her background as an educator, another children's librarian expanded the concept, designing engaging, developmentally appropriate activities that rotate seasonally. What began as a single handmade felt taco kit has grown into two highly utilized stations strategically located within the department.

The Fine Motor Skills Stations provide free, accessible, daily opportunities for children ages three to six to strengthen hand muscles, improve coordination, and build readiness skills essential for early literacy and long-term academic success. To date, it has been used more than 1,000 times.

Problem/Challenge/Situation Faced by Locality

Varina Library's staff have observed a noticeable shift in how young children interact with materials, especially post COVID-19. While many children can navigate tablets and smartphones with swipe motions, they increasingly struggle with foundational hand skills such as holding pencils, manipulating scissors, fastening buttons, and using a computer mouse.

The prevalence of touch-screen technology has reduced opportunities for children to develop the small muscle control necessary for writing and other academic tasks. As a former elementary principal and teacher, one of the children's librarians noted that rising kindergarteners often lacked proper pencil and scissor grip strength. Another children's librarian similarly observed that children had difficulty operating desktop computer mice, an essential skill in many school environments.

At the same time, public library spaces must remain safe for children of all ages. Materials that might traditionally support fine motor development such as small buttons or scissors pose choking or injury risks in an open, mixed-age environment. The challenge was clear: how could the library create developmentally meaningful, safe, and self-directed activities accessible to all families?

How The Program Fulfilled Award Criteria

The Fine Motor Skills Stations represent innovative passive programming that directly addresses an emerging educational gap. Rather than adding staff-intensive classes, the Varina Library embedded skill-building into the everyday library experience. By placing stations near the Children's Reference Desk and department entrance, the program integrates seamlessly into regular visits and storytime attendance.

The initiative grew from professional collaboration and knowledge-sharing across localities. Insights shared through the Virginia Library Association and research conducted by Loudoun County Public Library informed Varina's localized response. Within the branch, collaboration among staff sustained and expanded the effort.

The model is easily replicable. Using low-cost, readily available, and choke-resistant materials such as paint stirrers, clothespins, oversized pom poms, popsicle sticks, large pencil grips, and bagged LEGO challenges, libraries of any size can implement similar stations. Activities rotate seasonally to maintain engagement, ensuring continued community interest without significant financial investment.

How The Program Was Carried Out

Fine motor skills involve the development of the small muscles in children's hands, which are critical for writing, self-care tasks, and early literacy development. The Fine Motor Skills

Stations were designed specifically for children ages three to six and focus on strengthening hand muscles and improving hand-eye coordination.

Safety and accessibility guided implementation. Because the Children's Department serves infants through elementary-aged youth, staff selected materials that minimize choking hazards while still promoting dexterity. Traditional tools such as scissors and small manipulatives were replaced with oversized, durable alternatives. For example, large pencil grips were introduced to encourage proper finger positioning, and oversized pom poms provided durability and safety.

Activities rotate seasonally to maintain interest. The original felt taco kit required children to pinch and place toppings, strengthening finger muscles. As enthusiasm grew, a second station with visually appealing, interactive elements was created.

The stations are used daily, particularly following storytimes when children gravitate toward hands-on play. Their proximity to the Reference Desk allows staff to monitor use while informally engaging caregivers in conversations about school readiness and child development.

Complementary initiatives extend the impact. Monthly Take and Make kits allow families to continue practicing fine motor skills at home. Many families choose to complete these crafts in-house, using cutting, coloring, and assembly under caregiver supervision.

Additionally, in-house LEGO challenges provide structured building activities using pre-bagged sets. Children construct creations that are displayed for a month behind the

Children's Reference Desk. The display fosters pride, creativity, and continued dexterity practice. These passive programs provide hours of meaningful engagement while reinforcing educational development.

Financing and Staffing

The Fine Motor Skills Stations were developed with minimal financial investment, demonstrating responsible stewardship of county resources. Staff utilized existing supplies wherever possible and supplemented materials with low-cost purchases such as oversized pencil grips and durable manipulatives.

Because the stations function as passive programming, they require limited ongoing staffing. Children's staff monitor usage as part of routine Reference Desk duties. Seasonal rotation and display maintenance are incorporated into regular workflow, ensuring sustainability without additional personnel costs.

This cost-effective approach allows the program to deliver measurable educational impact while remaining fiscally responsible and scalable.

Program Results

The Fine Motor Skills Stations have demonstrated sustained and measurable community engagement:

- May 2025: 240 uses
- August 2025: 280 uses

- November 2025: 180 uses
- February 2026: Data collection in progress

Both stations are used daily, with peak activity following storytimes. Verbal feedback from parents has been overwhelmingly positive, and one pediatrician specifically commended the library for offering developmentally appropriate activities that support fine motor growth.

Children frequently return to use the stations and proudly share LEGO display creations with family members. The combination of daily in-library engagement, take-home kits, and display opportunities reinforces skill development beyond a single visit.

The Fine Motor Skills Stations have become an integral part of the Children's Department, strengthening school readiness, supporting caregivers, and demonstrating how libraries can proactively help counties respond to evolving developmental needs.

Executive Summary of Program

The Fine Motor Skills Stations at Henrico Library's Varina location were launched in November 2022 in response to documented concerns about declining fine motor development among preschool and kindergarten-aged children. Inspired by professional learning shared through the Virginia Library Association and research conducted by Loudoun County Public Library, staff implemented an innovative, low-cost solution embedded within daily library operations.

The stations provide free, self-directed activities designed for children ages three to six to strengthen hand muscles, improve coordination, and build early literacy readiness. Using safe, oversized, and choke-resistant materials, the program balances developmental benefit with public-space safety requirements. Activities rotate seasonally to maintain engagement.

With consistent daily use and monthly counts reaching as high as 280 interactions, the stations have become a valued resource for families. Positive feedback from parents and healthcare professionals underscores the program's relevance and impact. The library has documented more than 1,000 uses.

Cost-effective, collaborative, and easily replicable, the Fine Motor Skills Stations demonstrate how local libraries can respond creatively to emerging educational challenges while supporting lifelong learning and school readiness.

Images of Some of the Fine Motor Skills Stations

Left to right: Taco Building invites participants to pinch the toppings to add to the taco; **Letter Matching** encourages participants to grip the letter clothespin and match it to the letter on the snowman; **Skiing Path** station promotes pinching a pom-pom and tracing the matching color path.

