



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

The Special Events Unit brings together Police and Fire personnel into one integrated team responsible for reviewing, coordinating, and managing special events to ensure public safety at all events within Henrico County. This unit employs a centralized model to facilitate comprehensive planning, situational awareness, and collaboration with county agencies and external stakeholders.

Henrico County created the Special Events Unit to unify the planning, coordination, and public safety oversight of all special events held within the county. As attendance at local events continued to grow, ranging from Recreation and Parks events of up to 25,000 residents to major NASCAR events drawing as many as 45,000 attendees, the logistical challenges and safety concerns necessitated a unified and coordinated approach. Larger crowds require more comprehensive planning, increased security resources, and efficient deployment of emergency services to ensure public safety. The previously deployed decentralized approach was inadequate for effectively managing these expanded needs.

The opening of the Henrico Sports and Events Center further increased the frequency and complexity of events by attracting large crowds and necessitating simultaneous deployments of police, fire, and county resources. This venue has quickly become a focal point for high-attendance events and the constant influx of visitors to the county, while overlapping other events within the county have only continued to amplify the demand for meticulous coordination and real-time situational awareness.

Problem/Challenge/Situation Faced by Locality

Prior to the creation of the Special Events Unit, events in the County were received, reviewed, and managed independently by each department. For instance, Police may receive information about a marathon without realizing the same information had not been communicated to Fire. This resulted in a reactive approach to public safety, leading to safety concerns and staffing shortages. This created challenges in maintaining a common operating picture, leading to gaps in consistent oversight, ineffective staffing levels, and strain on the county's 911 system. As the number and size of events increased, the lack of coordination resulted in an increased risk that an event could be inadequately reviewed or that multiple large-scale events could compete for the same public safety resources.

Additionally, with the continued growth of destination venues, such as the Henrico Sports and Event Center, these challenges were compounded. Introducing a location with recurring, high-attendance events required extensive coordination between police, fire, and other County entities. Without a single point of accountability, the County lacked a comprehensive operational picture of special events occurring on any given day. For example, on peak weekends, a multi-day volleyball tournament at the Henrico Sports & Events Center could draw thousands of attendees while a large-scale concert at Richmond Raceway was simultaneously underway, with regional tournaments such as Jefferson Cup occurring across multiple County athletic complexes. Each event required traffic control plans, public safety staffing, and contingency planning; however, there was no single coordination point tracking cumulative attendance, overlapping road impacts, staffing

commitments, or real-time operational concerns. This could have negatively impacted emergency response.

How the Program Fulfilled Award Criteria

The Special Events Unit represents an innovative shift from a department-specific review process to a joint public safety operational model. By consolidating responsibility into one unit, Henrico County has been able to significantly improve coordination, reduce duplication of effort, and enhance public safety planning. This program promotes strong interdepartmental and intergovernmental collaboration. Police and Fire work side by side within the unit, while also partnering closely with Recreation and Parks, the Sports and Entertainment Authority, and other county departments. This structure ensures that all stakeholders are engaged early in the planning process.

The Special Events Unit provides a scalable and replicable model for other localities experiencing growth in event attendance and venue development. Counties with limited staffing resources can adapt this approach to improve coordination, accountability, and operational effectiveness.

How the Program Was Carried Out

The Special Events Unit evolved in response to increasing event volume and operational risk. Initially, planning responsibilities were distributed across departments. A single Fire representative within the Office of Emergency Management and Workplace Safety (EMWS) supported a limited number of events, while a Police officer assisted with

planning in addition to full-time operational duties. Events were managed case-by-case without centralized coordination.

As venue development accelerated and event activity increased by approximately 1,200 percent, Fire and Police recognized the need for a unified structure. Police assigned a temporary officer dedicated to special events, and Fire assigned a Fire Lieutenant outside of EMWS to partner in the effort. Operating with a shared common operating picture, they aligned planning processes and improved interdepartmental coordination.

After one year of sustained growth and demonstrated effectiveness, temporary roles transitioned to permanent positions. Police established a full-time officer position, Fire added a firefighter to support planning and operations, and a Police Captain was later assigned to provide supervisory oversight and executive-level integration. The unit now consists of a Firefighter, Fire Lieutenant, Police Officer, and Police Captain. This phased development reflects a deliberate, data-driven approach that scaled staffing with operational demand.

All special events are routed through the unit for centralized review, coordination, and approval. The unit evaluates event scope, attendance, location, historical trends, traffic impact, and resource needs to determine appropriate staffing and safeguards. This standardized process ensures consistent, risk-based planning for events ranging from community gatherings to large regional functions.

For qualifying events, the unit develops a formal Tactical Action Plan distributed to all impacted County agencies. The plan outlines objectives, command structure, staffing, traffic management, emergency access, EMS staging, communications, contingency planning, and key contacts. This ensures all stakeholders operate from a shared framework with clearly defined roles.

Serving as the central point of contact for event organizers and County agencies, the unit ensures appropriate public safety oversight before any event proceeds. Early guidance reduces last-minute adjustments, while regular coordination enhances situational awareness across concurrent events. Since implementation, the unit has reduced short-notice staffing conflicts, improved resource alignment, and strengthened response coordination during high-attendance events, resulting in more predictable operations and stronger public safety outcomes.

Financing and Staffing

The Special Events Unit was created using existing county resources and staffing allocations. By leveraging existing personnel and reorganizing responsibilities, the county was able to implement the program with minimal cost while significantly improving operational efficiency. The unit consists of a Firefighter, Fire Lieutenant, Police Officer, and Police Captain.

Program Results

Since its implementation, the Special Events Unit has improved the county's ability to manage a growing number of complex and overlapping events. The centralized process has reduced the likelihood of events being overlooked, enhanced staffing accuracy, and strengthened collaboration between Police, Fire, and other county entities. The county now maintains a clearer operational picture of events, resulting in improved public safety readiness and more effective use of county resources.

Executive Summary of Program

Henrico County has experienced significant growth in the number and size of special events, ranging from large community gatherings and 5k runs in county parks to major NASCAR events and recurring tournaments at the Henrico Sports and Events Center. This increase highlighted the need for a coordinated and comprehensive approach to special event planning and public safety oversight.

In response, the county established the Special Events Unit, a joint Police and Fire public safety unit responsible for managing all special events through a centralized process. The unit ensures consistent review, appropriate staffing, and effective collaboration with other county departments, including Recreation and Parks and the Sports and Entertainment Authority. The unit was implemented using existing resources and now serves as an innovative, cost-effective model that other local governments can adapt to meet their own growing special event demands.

By consolidating responsibilities into one unit, Henrico County has effectively improved situational awareness, reduced operational gaps, and strengthened interdepartmental cooperation. Which in turn has resulted in safer, more impactful events that continue to increase tourism, boost local businesses, and foster a stronger sense of community among residents.