



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

Established in 2021 in response to social isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic, Spread the Love was created to foster connection between community members and older adults living in long-term care facilities. The initiative invites residents of all ages to create Valentine's Day cards with messages of kindness and encouragement for distribution throughout long-term care communities. Since its launch, more than 25,000 cards have been shared across Henrico County and neighboring localities.

Spread the Love is part of Outreach & Engagement's Henrico EngAGE initiative, which promotes healthy ageing and supports older adults, caregivers, and families. The campaign has grown into a meaningful, intergenerational effort, with participation from early childhood programs, students, and local artists. Together, these contributions reflect Henrico County's commitment to strengthening community connections and ensuring older adults feel valued, supported, and included.

Problem/Challenge/Situation Faced by Locality

Spread the Love was created in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, a time when social distancing intensified feelings of loneliness and isolation, especially for older adults living in long-term care communities. Many residents experienced a sudden loss of connection to family, friends, and the broader community. While initially designed as a pandemic response, the campaign continued after demonstrating meaningful and lasting impact on both the older adults who received Valentine's Day cards and the community members who created them.

In 2023, U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy identified social isolation and loneliness as an

epidemic in the United States, noting that nearly one-third of older adults report feeling lonely. These feelings are often highlighted by older adults who describe feeling disconnected once they transition into long-term care settings.

Spread the Love directly addresses this ongoing need by fostering connection, belonging, and intergenerational engagement. The program aligns with Henrico's Outreach & Engagement vision: Henrico is a community where everyone is thriving. The program reinforces that older adults remain valued, visible members of the community.

How The Program Fulfilled Award Criteria

Spread the Love is a countywide initiative that increases civic engagement by inviting residents of all ages to participate directly in the work of Henrico Outreach & Engagement. This program transforms a simple, familiar activity, creating a Valentine's Day card, into a meaningful public health and community-building intervention that addresses social isolation among older adults.

This campaign is innovative in its low-cost design, leveraging existing infrastructure and the use of volunteers, making it easily replicable. Spread the Love also offers an accessible intergenerational connection. By engaging schools, civic and faith-based groups, families, and older adults themselves, the program fosters empathy and positive social feelings with minimal effort from participants. The campaign is simply a win-win.

How The Program Was Carried Out

The objective of Spread the Love is to foster community connection between Henrico residents and older adults living in long-term care communities, while helping to reduce feelings of loneliness and social isolation among seniors.

Established in early 2021 in Henrico County, Spread the Love held its first card distribution in February 2021. The campaign is implemented annually and follows a consistent, well-established timeline. Planning begins in late September for the upcoming Valentine's Day season. Outreach is conducted through the Advocate for the Aging's EngAGE newsletter, social media, the Henrico County website, and local media outlets to encourage community participation.

Community members are invited to create Valentine's Day cards containing kind, generic messages. Cards are collected from January 5 through February 6 at four drop-off locations: the Western and Eastern Government Centers, the Eastern Henrico Recreation Center, and the Public Safety Building. Deadline flexibility is built into the process to account for inclement weather. Since 2021, more than 25,000 cards have been contributed by a wide range of participants, including preschool and K–12 students, sororities, library patrons, local artists, faith-based organizations, and community groups. These partnerships are central to the success of the campaign.

Approximately two weeks before Valentine's Day, participating long-term care communities are contacted to confirm interest and distribution needs. Since 2025, trained community volunteers have assisted with screening and packaging the cards two days before delivery, a process that takes approximately four hours. Card distribution is carried out countywide by staff from Henrico Outreach & Engagement and the Henrico Division of Fire CARE Team. Activity departments and administrative staff within long-term care communities then distribute the cards directly to residents, ensuring the messages reach those they are intended to support.

Financing and Staffing

The outreach, coordination, and implementation of this well-established campaign require approximately 27 staff hours annually. Direct operating costs are minimal and limited to employee salary and travel associated with card distribution, either through mileage reimbursement or the use of county vehicles.

Significant in-kind support helps keep program costs low. Overhead costs include the use of county facilities as card drop-off locations, county space for organizing and packaging Valentine's Day cards, and county vehicles for distribution. Community volunteers contribute additional in-kind support by assisting with card screening and packaging, further reducing staffing needs.

Replication of the Spread the Love campaign in a new setting would require approximately 35 staff hours, accounting for the development of marketing materials, coordination with local government partners to host drop-off locations and publicize the campaign, communication with participating long-term care communities, and overall program implementation. Travel costs would also be incurred for distribution to long-term care communities, either through mileage reimbursement or use of a county vehicle.

Program Results

In 2026, 4,078 residents of long-term care communities in Henrico County received Valentine's Day Cards through the Spread the Love campaign. Community members across Henrico County and beyond (some as far as Texas!) created over 6,000 cards, demonstrating broad and enthusiastic engagement. Thanks to the generosity of community members, this campaign

extended to neighbors in Hanover County, where over 350 cards were delivered to residents of Long-Term Care communities.

Administrators and activity staff at participating facilities consistently express appreciation for the program, sharing that residents look forward to receiving the cards each Valentine's Day and feel uplifted by the messages of kindness. Following the 2024 delivery, one resident shared that receiving a card reminded her she had not been forgotten, and that she still felt seen and valued by her community.

Beyond its impact on older adults, Spread the Love strengthens community empathy and connection. Card-makers of all ages report meaningful personal experiences through participation, offering feedback such as:

- "I look forward to this activity every year."
- "Just the best campaign. Thanks for doing this."
- "I've been having fun with this project."
- "The Spread the Love initiative is such a wonderful way for our students to feel empathy for their community."

Together, these outcomes demonstrate Spread the Love's dual impact: reducing isolation among older adults while fostering compassion, connection, and civic engagement across the Community.

Executive Summary of Program

Spread the Love, established in 2021, is an annual initiative that strengthens connections

between Henrico residents and older adults living in long-term care (LTC) facilities. The program invites community members to create Valentine's Day cards with positive messages, which are later distributed to seniors in Henrico. Loneliness and social isolation are prominent among older adults, and this program helps seniors feel seen, valued, and connected while reducing loneliness and social isolation.

Each winter, cards are collected county-wide. Volunteers then organize and package cards to be distributed to participating LTCs in Henrico. County employees distribute cards across the community before the holiday. LTC staff then share the cards with residents on Valentine's Day.

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