



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: Montgomery County

Program Title: Montgomery County Fire and EMS Teen Academy: Building the Next Generation of First Responders

Program Category: Criminal Justice & Public Safety

CONTACT INFORMATION

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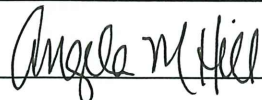
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SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Angela M. Hill

Title: County Administrator

Signature: 

VACo Award Submission | Montgomery County

Montgomery County Fire and EMS-MCPS Teen First Responders Academy: Building the Next Generation of First Responders

Award Category: Criminal Justice and Public Safety

Executive Summary

Montgomery County Fire and EMS, in partnership with Montgomery County Public Schools, launched the MCPS Teen First Responders Academy in fall 2025 to address a critical workforce challenge: recruiting and retaining the next generation of fire and emergency medical services personnel, particularly volunteers. At the same time, the program responds to a broader need to connect high school students with meaningful career pathways and community service opportunities.

The MCPS Teen First Responders Academy provides high school students with hands-on exposure to emergency services, including firefighting, emergency medical response, and incident management. Through interactive sessions led by experienced Fire and EMS personnel, students gain real-world insight into the responsibilities, skills, and teamwork required of first responders.

The program is built on a strong collaborative partnership between public safety and education. Montgomery County Public Schools supports student outreach and coordination, while Fire and EMS staff develop and deliver curriculum using existing facilities and equipment. Early results show increased student awareness of public safety careers, stronger community connections, and growing interest in volunteer service.

Problem, Challenge, or Situation

Montgomery County, like many communities, faces an ongoing challenge in recruiting and retaining qualified fire and EMS personnel. Volunteer responders play a critical role in emergency response, yet sustaining volunteer participation requires continuous outreach and engagement.

At the same time, high school students often have limited exposure to careers in public safety. Without early awareness or direct experience, students may overlook fire and EMS as viable and rewarding career paths or opportunities for community service.

This gap presented both a workforce development challenge and a community engagement opportunity. Montgomery County recognized the need to proactively build a pipeline of future responders while also strengthening connections between public safety agencies and the community.

The challenge, therefore, was to create a program that could effectively introduce students to emergency services in an engaging and meaningful way, while also supporting long-term recruitment and volunteerism. Addressing this need required a collaborative, innovative approach that aligned educational opportunities with public safety workforce goals.

Program Implementation

The MCPS Teen First Responders Academy was launched in fall 2025 through a collaborative partnership between Montgomery County Fire and EMS and Montgomery

County Public Schools. The program was designed to provide high school students with a comprehensive, hands-on introduction to emergency services.

Planning efforts focused on shared goals: increasing student awareness of fire and EMS careers, fostering community engagement, and building a pipeline for future recruitment. Fire and EMS staff worked closely with school administrators to promote the program and identify interested students.

The academy curriculum was developed and delivered by Fire and EMS personnel, ensuring that content was both accurate and grounded in real-world experience. Sessions covered key topics such as firefighting techniques, emergency medical services, and incident management. Students participated in hands-on demonstrations and interactive activities that simulated real-life scenarios, allowing them to better understand the demands and rewards of the profession.

The program was conducted at a county-owned Fire and EMS training facility, providing students with access to professional-grade equipment and environments. Direct interaction with first responders allowed participants to ask questions, build relationships, and gain insight into daily operations.

Collaboration was central to implementation. The Montgomery County Public Schools provided essential support in student outreach and coordination, while Fire and EMS staff led instruction and program delivery. This partnership ensured the program was both educationally meaningful and operationally relevant.

Innovation, Collaboration, and Model for Other Localities

The MCPS Teen First Responders Academy represents an innovative approach to addressing workforce development and community engagement through a single, integrated program. Innovation is demonstrated through the program's immersive, hands-on learning model. Rather than relying on traditional career presentations, the academy places students directly in simulated emergency scenarios, making the experience engaging, practical and memorable.

Collaboration is a defining feature of the program. The partnership between Montgomery County Fire and EMS and Montgomery County Public Schools enables the County to reach students in a structured environment while aligning educational experiences with workforce needs. This interagency cooperation maximizes impact while minimizing costs.

By leveraging existing personnel, facilities and partnerships, other communities can implement similar programs without significant financial investment. The model demonstrates how local governments can proactively address workforce shortages while strengthening community relationships and promoting civic engagement.

Financing and Staffing

The MCPS Teen First Responders Academy was implemented with minimal direct costs by utilizing existing resources and personnel. Montgomery County Fire and EMS staff volunteered their time to develop and deliver the curriculum, eliminating the need for additional staffing expenditures.

Program activities were conducted using existing facilities, equipment and training materials, including a county-owned Fire and EMS training center. Montgomery County Public Schools contributed through student outreach and program coordination.

This approach highlights the effectiveness of leveraging internal assets and partnerships to deliver impactful programming without requiring significant new funding. The program demonstrates that meaningful workforce development initiatives can be achieved through strategic collaboration and resource sharing.

Results

The MCPS Teen First Responders Academy has produced strong early results, benefiting both participants and the broader community. Students gained a deeper understanding of fire and EMS operations, including the skills, training and commitment required to serve as a first responder.

Participant feedback indicates increased awareness of public safety careers and a greater appreciation for the role of Fire and EMS personnel. The hands-on, interactive format made these careers more accessible and engaging, inspiring interest among students who may not have previously considered this path.

The program also strengthened connections between Montgomery County Fire and EMS and the community. By engaging students and their families, the academy fosters trust, awareness, and long-term relationships with local public safety agencies.

Importantly, the MCPS Teen First Responders Academy supports ongoing recruitment efforts by introducing students to volunteer opportunities within Montgomery County's fire and rescue system. As participation grows, the program is expected to contribute to a more sustainable pipeline of future first responders.

Link to MCPS Teen First Responders Academy video created by Montgomery County

Public Relations and Community Engagement staff members:

<https://www.facebook.com/share/v/1ERWPI5FXZ/>

Text with post:

Montgomery County Fire-EMS Department recently held a Teen Academy for high school students. With topics ranging from Incident Management to Firefighting to Emergency Medical Services, the academy provided them with an understanding of first responder roles and so much more. Take a look!

Due to the success of the Teen Academy, MCFEMS is planning to host future learning opportunities for county students.

Link to MCPS Teen First Responders Academy video created by Montgomery County

Public School staff members:

<https://www.facebook.com/share/r/1E1ka6AhL1/>

Text with post:

Students from CHS are learning about potential careers through the Montgomery County Teen First Responder Program. This program is giving students hands-on experiences and teaching students about the importance of our first responders.

#WeAreMCPS

MCPS Teen First Responders Academy Graduation Invitation:

YOU'RE INVITED!
MCPS TEEN FIRST RESPONDERS ACADEMY CELEBRATION



MCFEMS TRAINING GROUNDS
1636 Merrimac Rd,
Blacksburg, VA 24060

TUESDAY
November 18, 2026
12:00 PM - 2:00 PM

Montgomery County Public Schools

MONTGOMERY COUNTY
FIRE-EMS

Montgomery County students get hands-on experience learning firefighting

WDBJ, October 21, 2025, by Lindsey Cook

<https://www.wdbj7.com/2025/10/21/montgomery-county-students-get-hands-on-experience-learning-firefighting/>

Text from WDBJ news story:

Students in Montgomery County are getting the chance to learn what it takes to be a firefighter through a new training academy.

For Christiansburg High School juniors Caleb Crotty and Hunter Blount, getting involved with the academy was an easy decision.

Although the friends have some time before graduating, they know exactly what they want to do after crossing the stage.

“One of my very-close people that I’ve always looked up to, he died of cancer. And I’ve always wanted to be a firefighter ever since,” said Crotty.

“My dad’s grandpa was the Chief at Christiansburg a long time ago... A few of my dad’s buddies, they’re big firefighters, and I think it’s pretty cool,” added Blount.

Now, they’re getting a head-start on that career.

Crotty and Blount are part of the new First Responder EMS academy through Montgomery County Public Schools and Montgomery County Fire and EMS.

The five-day academy is spread over three months and gives students a chance to go beyond the classroom to learn what it takes to be a firefighter.

“If a student does not have a family member who works in fire or EMS, a lot of times they don’t know what career pathways are out there,” said Megan Atkinson, the Administrator for

Career and Technical Education at Montgomery County Public Schools. By providing this experience through the schools.. They're getting to learn through their educational experience."

Through the academy, students are learning everything from basic 911 operations to putting out flames.

Montgomery County Fire and EMS Chief Michael Geary said the future generation of firefighters are needed now, more than ever.

"Involvement in public safety definitely isn't what it used to be, and especially on our volunteer side," said Chief Geary. "The end goal of this is that we can get some of these students out, get them excited for it, and hopefully have them fill our career and volunteer ranks in the future."

Trainees like Blount can't wait to join.

"I think it's cool that you can just learn from an earlier age and get more hands-on experience. So when time comes and you're able to be in that position or role, you actually know what you're doing and people can trust you instead of not knowing what you're doing," he said.

At the end of the academy, Montgomery County Fire EMS also sponsors students with their certificates in first aid, CPR and stop the bleed.

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