



## 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: Visualizing Transparency: A Collaborative Approach to the Montgomery County - MCPS Budget Process

Program Category: Communications & Community Outreach

### CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: Jennifer T. Harris

Title: Public Relations and Community Engagement Director

Department: Public Relations and Community Engagement

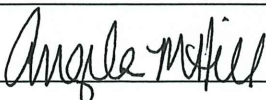
Telephone: 540-381-6887 Website: montva.com

Email: harrisjt@montgomerycountyva.gov

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

Name: Angela M. Hill

Title: County Administrator

Signature: 

## **VACo Award Submission | Montgomery County**

### **Visualizing Transparency: A Collaborative Approach to the Montgomery County–MCPS Budget**

#### **Award Category: Communications & Community Outreach**

Montgomery County and Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) identified a need to improve communication, transparency, and collaboration within the annual budget process. Historically, the process involved multiple steps, timelines, and decision points that were not always easily understood by citizens or elected officials. This complexity created challenges in clearly conveying how funding decisions were developed and aligned between the County and MCPS.

To address this, County and MCPS staff partnered to enhance understanding of the budget process and develop a clear, visual representation of the workflow. The result was a comprehensive, user-friendly graphic illustrating key phases, responsibilities, and interactions between the two organizations throughout the budget cycle. In addition, a concise, one-page document highlighting the proposed collaborative budget was created.

The graphic was presented to the public, the Board of Supervisors, and the School Board by senior County and MCPS financial leadership during a joint meeting. It was also incorporated into both organizations' websites and included in the 305-page annual budget document, ensuring broad accessibility for elected officials, stakeholders, and citizens. This tool has improved understanding of the budget process, enhanced transparency, and strengthened coordination between governing bodies.

The one-page budget highlights document was similarly presented at a subsequent joint meeting. It provides a clear snapshot of how the proposed budget allocates resources across County functions, offering an accessible overview for the public and decision-makers alike.

## **Problem, Challenge, or Situation**

The Montgomery County Board of Supervisors is responsible for developing an annual budget that reflects community priorities, operational needs, and fiscal constraints, with public education identified as a key priority. This process requires coordination among multiple entities, including County staff, Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) staff, the Board of Supervisors, and the School Board.

However, the budget development process is complex, involving multiple stages, timelines, public hearings, and decision points. While staff and elected officials are deeply engaged in this work, the process has not always been easily understood by all stakeholders—particularly citizens seeking insight into how decisions are made and how County and MCPS budgets align.

This complexity created challenges in communication and transparency. Elected officials needed a clearer way to visualize the full process, while citizens needed more accessible information to understand how public funds are planned and allocated.

The challenge, therefore, was to simplify and clearly communicate a detailed, multi-step budget process without sacrificing accuracy, while also strengthening collaboration between County and MCPS staff. The development of both a comprehensive budget process graphic and a one-page summary of proposed budget highlights addressed this shared goal.

## **Program Implementation**

To address these challenges, Montgomery County and Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) staff worked collaboratively to review and streamline the annual budget development process. The effort focused on identifying key phases, aligning timelines, and clarifying roles and responsibilities across both organizations.

Through this partnership, the teams developed a visual representation of the budget process and the proposed budget allocation. The graphic presents complex information in a clear, intuitive format, outlining the sequence of events, key decision points, and interactions between the County and MCPS.

The development process required close coordination across departments, including senior financial leadership from both organizations, management and budget staff, administration, and public relations and community engagement professionals. Together, they ensured the graphic and accompanying budget highlights document were comprehensive, accurate, and accessible to a wide audience.

Once finalized, the visual was integrated across multiple platforms to maximize impact. It was added to both the County and MCPS websites and included in the County's 305-page annual budget document, as well as the budget document produced by MCPS. This ensured that elected officials, staff and citizens could reference a consistent and easily understood representation of the process and proposed budget.

Beyond the final products, the initiative strengthened internal alignment by establishing a shared understanding of the budget workflow across organizations.

### **Innovation, Collaboration, and Model for Other Localities**

This initiative reflects a strong combination of innovation, collaboration and practical application. Innovation is demonstrated through the use of visual tools to simplify and communicate a traditionally complex government process. By translating detailed procedural information into a clear, accessible graphic, Montgomery County made the budget process more understandable to a broad audience. The one-page budget highlights document further enhances

accessibility by providing a concise snapshot of how proposed funding is allocated across key functional areas.

Collaboration was central to the program's success. The partnership between Montgomery County and MCPS staff ensured the final products accurately reflected the priorities and timelines of both organizations. This joint effort strengthened existing working relationships and improved coordination throughout the budget process.

This approach can be adapted and incorporated at other localities. Local governments and school divisions can adopt similar strategies to improve transparency and public understanding of their budget processes. Because the initiative relied on existing staff and widely available design tools, it represents a cost-effective solution that can be adapted to a variety of organizational structures and community needs.

### **Financing and Staffing**

The project was completed using existing staff and resources, with no additional costs incurred.

County and MCPS staff contributed their time and expertise as part of their regular responsibilities. Key contributors included senior financial leadership, management and budget professionals who ensured the accuracy of the process, and public relations and community engagement staff who supported the design and presentation of the visual materials.

By leveraging existing capabilities and fostering cross-departmental collaboration, Montgomery County implemented a high-impact initiative in a cost-effective manner.

## **Results**

The development and implementation of the budget process graphic and proposed budget highlights document have produced meaningful improvements in communication, transparency, and collaboration.

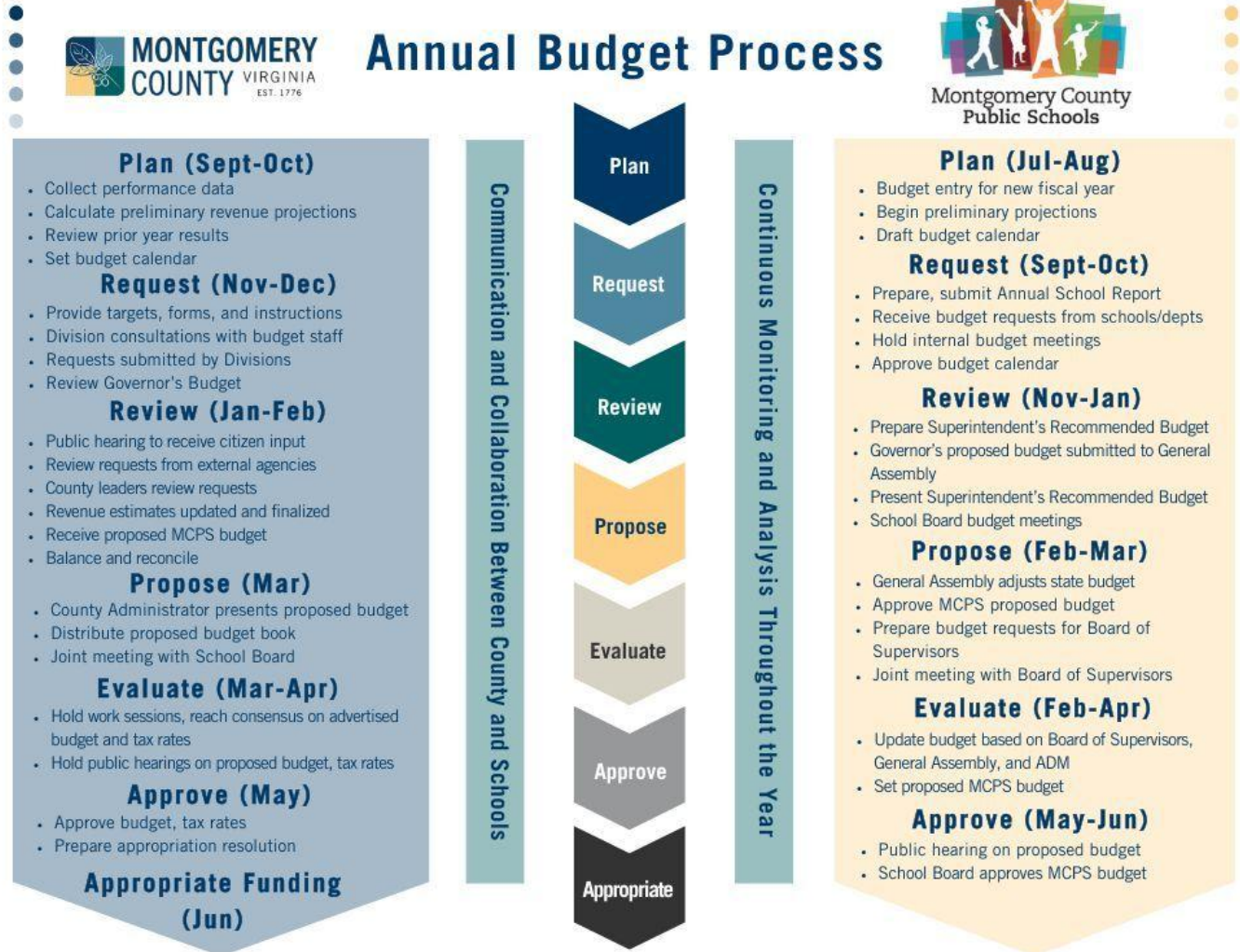
Elected officials now have a clearer understanding of the full budget development process, supporting more informed decision-making and discussion. The visual serves as a shared reference point for both the Board of Supervisors and the School Board, enhancing alignment and coordination.

For citizens, these tools provide an accessible opportunity to understand how County and MCPS budgets are developed and connected. This increased transparency helps build trust and encourages greater public engagement in the budgeting process.

Internally, the collaboration required to develop these materials further strengthened relationships between County and MCPS staff and reinforced a shared understanding of roles, timelines and budget development.

Overall, this initiative demonstrates how simple, well-designed communication tools can significantly enhance understanding of complex government processes. Montgomery County's approach offers a practical and effective model for improving budget transparency and intergovernmental collaboration.

## Annual Budget Process Graphic

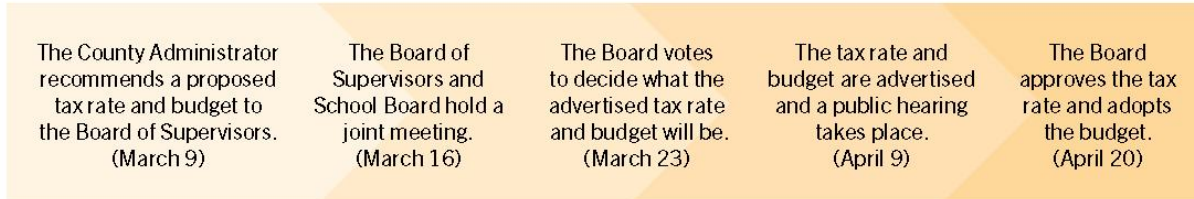


Linked on both Montgomery County and Montgomery County Public School websites:

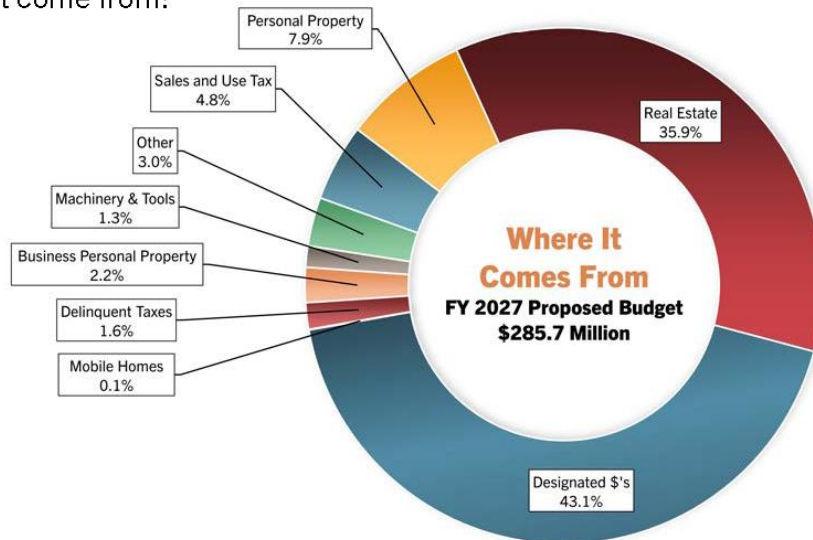
Montgomery County: <https://montva.com/budget>

Montgomery County Public Schools: <https://www.mcps.org/page/finance>

**BUDGET PROCESS** How does it work?

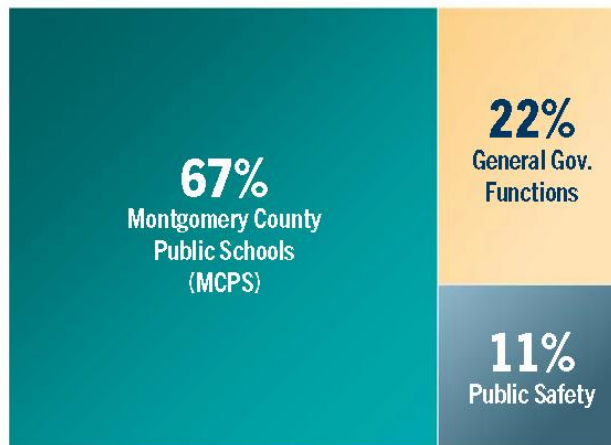


Where does it come from?

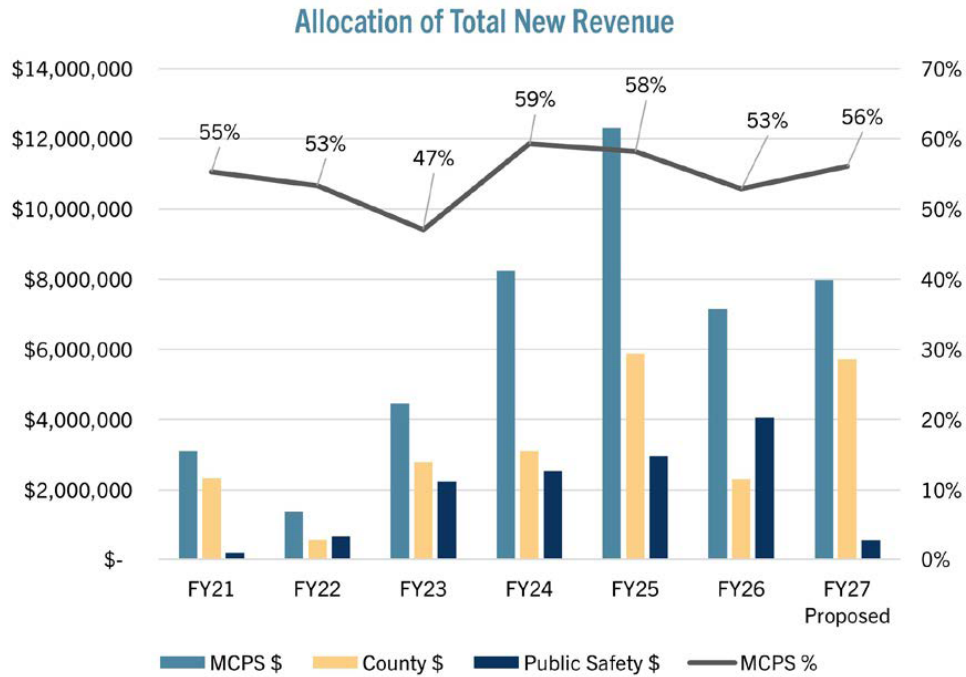


Where does it go?

- Montgomery County Public Schools
- General Gov. Functions
- Public Safety



# BUDGET INVESTMENT AREAS



**MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS: 67%**

- \$160.8 million – School Operating Fund
- \$19.7 million – School Debt Service
- \$7.0 million – School Nutrition Fund
- \$3.2 million – School Capital Fund

**PUBLIC SAFETY: 11%**

- \$22.3 million – Sheriff’s Office including \$5.6 million allocated for Western Virginia Regional Jail Authority
- \$5.5 million – Fire and EMS Department
- \$1.6 million – Volunteer Fire and Rescue Agencies
- \$1.1 million – Animal Care and Adoption Center

**GENERAL COUNTY FUNCTIONS: 22%**

- \$16.6 million – General Government Administration
- \$3.5 million – Judicial Administration
- \$10.1 million – General Services
- \$11.1 million – Health and Welfare
- \$4.7 million – Parks, Recreation, Cultural
- \$4.3 million – Community Development
- \$3.6 million – Other Agencies
- \$5.1 million – County Debt Service
- \$5.1 million – County Capital Fund
- \$0.4 million – Economic Develop. Authority (EDA)

See complete budget details in the County’s “Proposed Fiscal Year 2027 Budget,” available online at [montva.com/budget](http://montva.com/budget) and at the following locations:

- County Government Center
- Blacksburg Municipal Building
- Christiansburg Municipal Building
- Local Libraries
- Blacksburg Community Center
- Christiansburg Recreation Center