



## 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: Roanoke County

Program Title: Roanoke County Placemaking Program

Program Category: Community Development, Economic Development, & Land Use

### CONTACT INFORMATION

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

Name: Richard L. Caywood, P.E.

Title: County Administrator

Signature: 

2026 VACo Achievement Award Submission  
Community Development, Economic Development, & Land Use  
Roanoke County Planning Department  
**Roanoke County Placemaking Program**

## **Executive Summary**

Roanoke County developed and implemented a comprehensive Placemaking Program that integrates branding, wayfinding, public art, and environmental design into a unified strategy to “make space a place.”

Roanoke County’s Placemaking Program has transformed how the community defines and experiences places around the County by addressing gaps in identity and public space activation. As growth and tourism increases, the County has recognized the need for a cohesive visual identity, clearer wayfinding, and more engaging, community-centered destinations.

Placemaking redefines traditional planning efforts and aims to prioritize human experience, energizing spaces through intentional design, social connection, and community-driven activity. By aligning both the physical framework of a place and the lived experiences within it, placemaking delivers more vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable outcomes that directly reflect the needs and identity of the community it serves.

The County has responded to recommendations outlined in the Comprehensive Plan (Roanoke County 200 Plan) with a strategy that integrates branding, wayfinding, and public art. A coordinated signage system now establishes a consistent identity across gateways and key destinations, while signature features such as “hiker” signs and the LOVEworks installation at Explore Park create recognizable landmarks that incorporate the County’s new branding efforts.

Built through strong regional partnerships and cross-departmental collaboration, the program has been implemented in phases using in-house expertise, grants, and local partnerships to maximize impact while minimizing cost. The result is a more connected, visually distinct, and welcoming Roanoke County. The program has improved wayfinding, strengthened community pride, and enhanced tourism. Its scalable, cost-effective approach offers a clear model for other local governments seeking impactful placemaking solutions.

## **Problem, Challenge, or Situation Faced by the Locality**

Roanoke County faced a growing need to strengthen its identity, improve wayfinding, and enhance the overall sense of place across its diverse and geographically dispersed communities. As tourism increased and development expanded, many key gateways, corridors, and activity centers lacked consistent branding, clear navigation, and visually engaging public spaces.

This created challenges for both residents and visitors, including difficulty locating major destinations, limited recognition of entry points into the County, and a lack of distinctive features that foster community pride and identity. Additionally, prior to recent efforts, the County did not have a unified visual system to reflect its rebranding initiative, resulting in inconsistent signage and missed opportunities to reinforce a recognizable identity. The County also identified underutilized public spaces—such as libraries, parks, and streetscapes—that could be enhanced through public art, landscaping, and design. At the same time, there was a desire to increase community engagement, particularly by creating opportunities for residents of all ages to contribute to visible, lasting improvements in their community.

Finally, environmental priorities, including increasing tree canopy and improving water quality, presented an opportunity to integrate sustainability into placemaking efforts through community events such as Arbor Day.

## **How the Program Fulfilled the Awards Criteria**

### ***Innovation***

The placemaking program is innovative in its multi-layered and scalable approach that combines several key elements. The County has implemented a coordinated, cohesive wayfinding and gateway signage network that was developed using the County's new branding, including primary and secondary gateway signs, activity center identifiers, and destination-based wayfinding signage. These elements create a consistent visual language across the County while improving navigation and reinforcing identity. Signature placemaking features have been developed including unique installations such as the County's

“hiker” signs and the custom-designed LOVEworks metal sign at Explore Park that serve as recognizable landmarks that celebrate local character and tourism. The program incorporates murals and artistic elements into public infrastructure, particularly at libraries and community spaces. A community-driven design contest engaged residents across multiple age groups, allowing them to directly contribute to public art installations. Tree planting and landscape enhancements at gateways, parks, libraries, and along corridors improve aesthetics while advancing environmental goals related to water quality and canopy coverage.

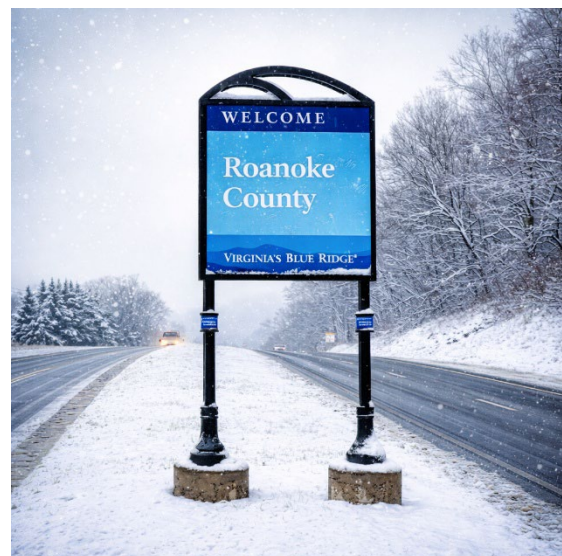


*“Hiker” gateway sign with Virginia’s Blue Ridge branding on Thompson Memorial Drive*

What makes this program particularly innovative is its ability to blend planning, tourism, art, infrastructure, and environmental stewardship into a single, coordinated initiative that is both highly visible and deeply community oriented.

### ***Partnership or Collaboration***

The success of Roanoke County’s Placemaking Program is rooted in strong partnerships across multiple sectors. The County collaborated with regional and local governments, including neighboring jurisdictions such as the City of Roanoke, Town of Vinton, City of Salem, and surrounding counties, to coordinate gateway signage and ensure consistency across boundaries. Partnership with Visit Virginia’s Blue Ridge (VBR) strengthened tourism alignment and branding at key entry points, enhancing the region’s overall visitor experience. VBR developed a wayfinding plan in 2018 that included wayfinding and gateway signage for the



*Virginia’s Blue Ridge gateway sign at the City of Roanoke line on Route 220*

region. Roanoke County has signed memorandums with the City of Salem and the City of Roanoke to install gateway signage. Between 2022 and 2026, 16 gateway signs have been installed marking entrances to Roanoke County and the Town of Vinton.

The program also leveraged local private-sector partnerships, including fabrication work by LiftArc Studios, a regional metal fabricator that produced the County’s LOVEworks installation and other branded infrastructure elements such as bike racks. Educational collaboration played a key role, with the student intern for LiftArc Studios from the Burton Center for Arts and Technology contributing to the fabrication process, providing hands-on workforce development experience.



*Roanoke County LOVEworks installation at Explore Park*

Internally, the initiative required coordination across multiple County departments, including Planning, Public Libraries, Parks, Recreation & Tourism, and leadership from the Board of Supervisors. Community engagement was central to the program, particularly through public art design contests that invited participation from children, teens, and adults.

### ***Model for Other Localities***

Roanoke County’s Placemaking Program serves as a highly replicable model for other local governments seeking to enhance community identity and livability. The program’s modular structure allows jurisdictions of varying sizes and budgets to implement components incrementally, whether starting with signage, public art, or landscaping.

There are several key elements that make the program adaptable. Standardized signage and branding create consistency while remaining easy to replicate. The model scales to match available resources, making it workable for communities of different sizes and capacities. Grant funding supports public art and environmental elements, and partnerships with tourism organizations, local artists, and educational institutions deepen community engagement. By combining relatively low-cost, high-visibility

improvements with long-term planning goals, the program demonstrates how local governments can create meaningful impact without requiring large-scale capital investments.

### **How the Program Was Carried Out**

The Placemaking Program was implemented through a phased and adaptable approach led by the County’s Planning Department. Roanoke County staff developed design standards and branding guidelines to ensure consistency across all elements, from signage to public art. Signage installations were prioritized at major gateways and high-traffic corridors, with a mix of large primary signs and smaller secondary signs strategically placed based on roadway type and visibility. Four hiker blade signs have been installed at major corridors entering Roanoke County to replace existing signage that lacked the updated branding. Wayfinding signage is being expanded incrementally based on the VBR Regional Wayfinding & Signage Plan to guide residents and visitors to major destinations. One wayfinding sign for the Carvins Cove Natural Reserve has been installed on Williamson Road in Roanoke County near the Botetourt County line. The VBR Regional Wayfinding & Signage Plan has also guided the installation of 16 Virginia’s Blue Ridge-branded gateway signs for Roanoke County and the Town of Vinton. An additional gateway sign will be installed on Route 419 at the City of Roanoke line when the diverging Diamond Interchange (DDI) project is completed in the coming years. Planning and design of the Virginia’s Blue Ridge gateway and wayfinding signage was funded by VBR, while installation was funded by the localities.

The Roanoke County Zoning Ordinance was amended to exempt public art from signage regulations, allowing murals to be completed in the County without need for a sign permit. Public art projects were implemented through a combination of staff coordination, artist partnerships, and community



*Storm drain mural at South County Library*

engagement initiatives. In summer 2025, the Planning Department collaborated with Roanoke County Public Libraries to hold design competitions for murals, which brought in 46 submissions from Roanoke

County residents. These designs have been incorporated into murals that have been completed by local artists on storm drains at libraries in Roanoke County and the Town of Vinton.

Landscape improvements, including tree planting, were supported in part by external funding sources such as the Virginia Trees for Clean Water Grant Program, allowing the County to advance environmental goals while minimizing local financial burden. Roanoke County holds an annual Arbor Day event around planting the trees that could be planted through the Virginia Trees for Clean Water Grant Program. In 2025, 10 trees were planted at Glenvar Elementary School for



*Arbor Day 2025 at Glenvar Elementary School*

the annual Arbor Day event. The next tree plantings and streetscape improvements for 2026 are planned for the Mount Pleasant Library.

The Placemaking Program emphasizes cost-efficiency and utilization of in-house design capabilities when possible. Implementation of the Placemaking Program can be phased over time and leverages partnerships with other entities and grants to supplement funding for projects. Local fabrication and workforce participation is incorporated to stimulate economic development and support of locally-owned businesses.

### **Program Results**

The Placemaking Program has enhanced identity and branding. The County now has a cohesive and recognizable visual identity implemented across gateways and public spaces. Gateway and wayfinding signage allows residents and visitors to benefit from clearer navigation to key destinations, improving overall user experience and tourism accessibility. Public art initiatives and design contests have actively involved residents of all ages, fostering a sense of ownership and pride in the community. Signature installations such as the LOVEworks sculpture and gateway signage enhance the County's appeal as a destination within Virginia's Blue Ridge region. Expanded tree planting efforts contribute to improved

water quality, increased canopy coverage, and continued recognition as a Tree City USA community. Libraries, parks, and activity centers have been transformed into more vibrant, engaging, and visually appealing community assets through the efforts and implementation of the Roanoke County Placemaking Program.