



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: Roanoke County
Program Title: Reinvigorating the County-Wide Social Media Approach
Program Category: Communications & Community Outreach

CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: Em Poertner
Title: Social Media Manager
Department: Public Information
Telephone: 540-613-3479 Website: roanokecountyva.gov
Email: epoertner@roanokecountyva.gov

SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Richard L. Caywood, P.E.
Title: County Administrator
Signature: 



Reinvigorating the County-Wide Social Media Approach

Executive Summary

Roanoke County has a mix of social media accounts representing the county government, parks, libraries and public safety departments. Over the past year, the Public Information Office (PIO) implemented a new social media strategic plan to get more staff involved in telling the story of Roanoke County through social media.

These efforts include monthly creative meetings where staff share successes and brainstorm video ideas, weekly catchups so PIO knows what will be featured on each account, and better tracking of social media account metrics with Sprout Social.

Over the first year of the new strategic plan (March 2025-February 2026) we saw a 66% increase in impressions year-over-year, a 68% increase in engagements year-over-year, and a net audience growth of 28,594 across all county social media accounts.

Challenged Faced

Roanoke County had 29 social media accounts across a multitude of departments:

- Facebook (11) – Official County, Parks and Recreation (with four additional accounts for specific parks or community centers), Library, Planning, Economic Development, Police, Fire & Rescue, and Emergency Communications
- Instagram (6) – Official County, Parks and Recreation, Library, Police, Fire & Rescue, and Emergency Communications

Reinvigorating the County-Wide Social Media Approach

Category: Communications & Community Outreach

Roanoke County Public Information Office



- Twitter (7) – Official County, Parks and Recreation, Explore Park, Library, Police, Fire & Rescue, and Emergency Communications
- YouTube (3) – Official County, Parks and Recreation and Library
- LinkedIn (2) – Official County and Economic Development

While many of the people who managed those accounts were part of the county's branding and marketing group, there was never specific focus to the content we produce. County Administration wanted to organize regular communications about what is being shared and how we can utilize all of our accounts to promote the work of the county. This also gave us the opportunity to make sure that there was a consistent voice across our accounts.

With input from a consultant at CiviSocial, the Public Information Office took the lead on reinvigorating the social media strategy and forming a team of staff that could tell the story of Roanoke County. PIO wanted to make sure that staff not only had the tools needed to create content for social media, but had a forum to discuss issues and trends as well as generate ideas.

Fulfilling Award Criteria

Innovation and Collaboration

Roanoke County's social media approach is effective and innovative because it gives the storytelling power to the employees who are doing the work that we're trying to highlight. While the Public Information Office helps our departments with external communication, they don't always know what's happening day-to-day. By identifying people within departments to help with social media and giving them the tools and training they need, we're able to better represent the county's operations.

Reinvigorating the County-Wide Social Media Approach

Category: Communications & Community Outreach

Roanoke County Public Information Office



Our monthly in-person meetings reinforce this strategy by giving our staff a forum to share what's working, the trends they're seeing and participate in activities to brainstorm video ideas to highlight all the departments within the county. Activities like department "speed dating" and brainwriting also allow us to find ways for departments to collaborate on making videos.

While we still have our cable access station partner for more in-depth features, our reinvigorated social media approach allows us to showcase what it's like to work for the county and highlight different services in a more engaging way.

We culminated the first year of our new social media strategy by hosting an awards ceremony to celebrate the work all our staff does on social media. Award categories include best acting, most viral, and best showcase of county staff. With administration and much of our Board of Supervisors present, who aren't as active on social media, this event highlighted how this new strategy engages staff and spreads the Roanoke County story throughout the community.

Model for Other Counties

Roanoke County's new social media approach is easily replicable by other localities. The keys to starting are simple:

- identify individuals in various departments that can help tell the county's story
- hold monthly meetings with a focus on generating engaging videos
- provide staff with the resources they need to film and edit (county-provided phones and free video editing software like Canva or Instagram Edits is enough to get started)

Once a group is in place and the content starts flowing, finding an analytics tool that works for the locality is the next step. Using the built in Meta Business Suite is a good starting option.

Reinvigorating the County-Wide Social Media Approach

Category: Communications & Community Outreach

Roanoke County Public Information Office



Program Implementation

In March of 2025, Roanoke County adopted its Social Media Strategic Plan. This was developed in partnership with CiviSocial, which also provided training for our Board of Supervisors on dos and don'ts of social media.

The new social media strategy centered around short-form videos that tell the county's story created by the people who know those stories the best – our staff.

The first part of the plan was pairing down on social media accounts. Roanoke County sunset all of its Twitter accounts so staff could focus on platforms with better followings and engagement. We also sunset several accounts that didn't have anyone actively managing them and consolidated unused YouTube pages.

A key aspect of the strategy was to include a wider range of employees from departments across the county in the creation of content for social media. Through help from department heads, we identified staff who could help tell their department's story. The Public Information Office created a monthly in-person creative team meeting with three objectives:

- share success stories on content that worked well that month
- brainstorm ideas for social media videos through various activities
- discuss trends and issues we see related to social media

We felt it was important to bring the people creating content all into a room together. This helps us ensure consistency, but more importantly it meant we had a regularly scheduled time to discuss social media, learn from each other and find ways to collaborate across departments.

To track our social media pages, we began using Sprout Social. We primarily bought this software for the analytical tools but also use it to manage the county's content calendar and schedule

Reinvigorating the County-Wide Social Media Approach

Category: Communications & Community Outreach

Roanoke County Public Information Office



posts. The county's Social Media Manager creates monthly reports for senior leadership on how county accounts are performing and what the top posts were that month.

Cost and Funding

The social media strategy has been carried out entirely by existing staff positions. Most of the content is filmed on county-owned cell phones which is estimated at \$540 a year in service fees per phone. We also invested in some small equipment to improve the quality of videos including a small tripod (\$24) and lavalier microphones (\$40). Our Social Media Manager also uses the Adobe Suite, costing \$780 annually.

In this process we purchased a Sprout Social subscription for the county Social Media Manager and Parks, Recreation and Tourism Marketing Manager to use. This helps them schedule posts and track analytics. For two users, Sprout is \$4,800 annually. All active county social media accounts are tracked through Sprout.

The county also utilizes Roanoke Valley Television, the regional cable access station for more traditional spotlights for YouTube. This asset pre-existed the new social media approach. The County's portion of RVTV's operation budget is funded through the Virginia Communications Sales and Use Tax Revenue and EG fees communications providers. The RVTV budget amount paid by each locality is based on US Census Population Data for each partner government.

Results and Impact

We implemented our new social media strategy in March 2025 and the results year-over-year (YoY) speak volumes to the work of our team. Across the county accounts we saw:

- 23,121,771 impressions, a 66.2% increase YoY

Reinvigorating the County-Wide Social Media Approach

Category: Communications & Community Outreach

Roanoke County Public Information Office



- 1,162,008 engagements, a 68.4% increase YoY
- a new audience growth of 28,594, a 157.7% increase YoY

One of our channels that grew the largest proportionally was Fire & Rescue, which saw its Instagram account more than double in following in the first year (from 1,735 in March 2025 to 4,921 in February 2026.) The Facebook account grew by 9,604 followers in the same time frame. Prior to the change, the Facebook and Instagram accounts were used sparingly to share photos from fires, so local media outlets could use them in articles. While the accounts are still used for that purpose, they also are used to highlight the fire station life and create fun, engaging content for fire safety. Social media has also become a major recruiting tool for Fire & Rescue.

The main county Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn also saw good growth in the first year of the new strategy. On Facebook, the county had a strong following in March 2025 with 14,772 followers, but the rate of new followers was slowing. During the first year of the new social strategy we gained 1,693 new Facebook followers, representing a 139.8% increase year over year. The Instagram following nearly doubled in the first year, going from 1,307 followers to 2,516. Following the trend across all accounts, impressions, engagements and the engagement rate were all up compared to the previous year.

A large part of our success on LinkedIn was handing that platform over to Human Resources to manage. They were able to implement a posting strategy that focused on highlighting employees and open positions within the county, while being able to mix in videos created by other departments highlighting events, county services and news. LinkedIn grew from 1,620 followers to 2,392. LinkedIn represents a valuable tool in recruiting talent and being seen by the greater business community.

Reinvigorating the County-Wide Social Media Approach

Category: Communications & Community Outreach

Roanoke County Public Information Office



Creating more engaging content helps us share the story of Roanoke County so our citizens are more engaged. Growing the following across our accounts means that more of our citizens are seeing information that may impact them like holiday trash schedules, winter weather closures and community meetings.