



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: Stafford County

Program Title: Stafford Legacy Program

Program Category: Community Development, Economic Development & Land Use

CONTACT INFORMATION

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SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

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Title: Deputy County Administrator

Signature: DKrauss



Virginia Association of Counties

2026 Achievement Award Submission

Project Title: Stafford Legacy Business Recognition Program

Program Overview

The Stafford County Legacy Business Recognition Program is a strategic, community-focused initiative aimed at supporting local businesses, enhancing retention efforts, and celebrating the contributions that shape Stafford County’s economic vitality and identity. The program recognizes businesses at every stage, honoring organizations of all sizes and industries that strengthen the local economy.

Through this initiative, Stafford County Economic Development acknowledges a wide range of businesses, including those that are women-owned, veteran-owned, minority-owned, and military spouse-owned. The program also marks important milestones from grand openings to decades of success and celebrates Proud Stafford businesses that help make the County an attractive place to live, work, and visit. Honorees receive a custom Legacy sticker and digital badge, promotion through department marketing channels, and an invitation to Stafford’s annual Economic Development Authority Business Appreciation Reception. Businesses celebrating milestone anniversaries such as 5, 10, 20, 30, and 50 years are formally recognized during the event and presented with a commemorative plaque by a member of the Stafford County Board of Supervisors.

Beyond recognition, the program serves as a proactive approach to business engagement and long-term retention. Each participating business is invited to connect one-on-one with the Business Development Manager specializing in Business Retention & Expansion and Small Business Development. These conversations provide Stafford businesses with an opportunity to discuss goals, identify growth potential, and connect with available resources. By combining celebration with meaningful support, the



program fosters strong relationships, builds community pride, and supports the continued growth and resilience of Stafford County's business community.

The Challenge

A key challenge this program addressed was the disconnect between local businesses and available resources. While many businesses are aware that an Economic Development office exists, far fewer understand the full scope of services, tools, and opportunities it can provide. As a result, valuable resources such as funding opportunities, educational programs, and strategic guidance often go underutilized simply because businesses are unaware they exist or are unsure how to access them.

The Legacy Program was designed to close that gap by creating a more approachable and engaging entry point for businesses to connect with Stafford County's Economic Development team. Rather than relying solely on traditional outreach methods, the program offers a more organic way to initiate conversations and build trust through recognition. By celebrating businesses first, the County opens the door to deeper engagement, including Business Retention and Expansion visits focused on understanding each business's unique goals and challenges.

Through these relationships, the Economic Development office is better positioned to connect businesses with resources through one-on-one meetings, targeted communications, and ongoing touchpoints like newsletters. Just as importantly, the program helps remove the perception that economic development is complex or intimidating. Instead, it reinforces the office as a supportive, accessible partner invested in the success of the local business community.

Innovation



This initiative reflects a forward-thinking approach to economic and community development by positioning business recognition as a gateway to meaningful engagement, rather than a standalone or purely ceremonial effort. While traditional business retention strategies are often reactive, the program takes a proactive approach by establishing positive connections with businesses at every stage of their lifecycle.

At an organizational level, the program intentionally aligns recognition with the County's Business Retention & Expansion and Small Business Development initiatives. Each participating business is invited to engage one-on-one with the Business Development Manager to discuss goals, explore growth opportunities, and identify available resources. From a technical standpoint, the program incorporates targeted outreach and data tracking to support ongoing communication and measure engagement, while digital badges provide businesses with a trusted, locally recognized asset that can be displayed across websites, email signatures, and social media to reinforce credibility and community connection. Financially, the program is designed to be efficient, scalable, and sustainable by utilizing existing staff and resources. By combining recognition, visibility, and direct support, the program offers a modern and replicable model for strengthening local economic resilience.

Collaboration

This program is rooted in collaboration, bringing together public-sector leadership and private-sector participation to create a broader, more meaningful economic impact. While the program is led by the County's Economic Development & Tourism team, its success is driven by the active involvement of local businesses and entrepreneurs who choose to participate, promote their recognition, and engage with the initiative.



This collaboration is most visible through participating businesses, which play a key role in expanding the program’s reach by serving as advocates within the community. By displaying Legacy stickers in their storefronts, incorporating digital badges into their websites and email signatures, and showcasing their recognition in day-to-day operations, businesses help amplify the program’s visibility. Some businesses have extended this visibility further by requesting materials to brand fleets or multiple locations. This organic, peer-driven promotion strengthens the message while encouraging local support and patronage.

Collaboration is further strengthened through a partnership with Stafford's Economic Development Authority (EDA), which plays a key role in recognizing milestone businesses each year. Businesses celebrating significant anniversaries are honored at Stafford's annual Business Appreciation Reception, where they are formally presented with an award by their elected official on the Stafford County Board of Supervisors.

The program also aligns with existing County initiatives and partnerships, including Small Business Saturday, targeted business outreach efforts, and community events, to maximize participation and reduce duplication of effort. Additionally, one-on-one meetings between participating businesses and the Business Retention & Expansion Business Development Manager provide a direct line for communication, allowing the County to better understand business needs and connect them with relevant resources.

By combining County leadership, the support of the EDA, voluntary business participation, and coordinated outreach efforts, the program exemplifies a collaborative model that builds strong partnerships and supports long-term economic resilience.



Implementation

This program was launched in March 2025 through a strategic, multi-channel rollout designed to maximize awareness and participation. It began with a large-scale direct mail campaign, reaching 18,735 businesses across the County. Addresses were compiled from multiple verified sources, including the Commissioner of Revenue business registry, the active State Corporation Commission (SCC) database, and inquiries from the Virginia Department of Small Business and Supplier Diversity (SBSD). This approach ensured broad and inclusive outreach.

Following the initial launch, the program has been promoted through a variety of channels, including social media, email newsletters, one-on-one business meetings, and in-person engagement opportunities. A dedicated landing page serves as the central hub for program information and registration. All branding and graphic design were created in-house, and printing was completed primarily through a local vendor, reinforcing the commitment to supporting the local economy.

The program is managed by a Business Development Manager, with support from the Economic Development team during its development and ongoing promotion. Once a business enrolls, participation is verified through direct communication, and recognition materials are distributed by mail. All participating businesses are tracked within the department's CRM system, allowing for streamlined communication, ongoing engagement, and long-term relationship management. This approach has enabled the program to scale efficiently while maintaining a high level of personalized outreach.

In the program's second year, efforts will focus on introducing new businesses to the initiative, building on first-year success and ensuring they are connected to available resources from the outset. A renewed



outreach campaign will also target businesses not yet signed up, further expanding participation in the program across the business community.

Results

In its first year, the Legacy Program has engaged 318 businesses, demonstrating strong participation and immediate impact across the local business community. More importantly, the program has successfully transformed initial recognition into ongoing engagement, creating meaningful connections between businesses and the Economic Development team.

One of the most notable outcomes has been a significant increase in Business Retention & Expansion (BR&E) visits and one-on-one meetings. By establishing early, positive touchpoints through the program, businesses have become more open to sharing their goals, challenges, and successes. This program created the opportunity to complete over 25 meetings with local businesses, increasing transparency and allowing the County to more effectively support business growth, resulting in assistance with multiple expansion projects and stronger alignment with business needs.

The program has also generated numerous workforce development connections, helping bridge the gap between local businesses and talent resources. As businesses become more engaged, they are better positioned to take advantage of opportunities and programs that support hiring, training, and long-term workforce sustainability.

Additionally, businesses participating in the program are now integrated into regular department communications. This has led to increased awareness and utilization of available resources, as well as



higher participation in programs such as quarterly educational sessions and networking events. As engagement grows, so does interaction between businesses and the Economic Development office.

Executive Summary

The Stafford County Legacy Business Recognition Program demonstrates the impact of a proactive, relationship-driven approach to business retention. Rather than waiting for challenges to arise, the program emphasizes early engagement and consistent connection, using recognition as a starting point to build trust and open lines of communication. This approach has strengthened relationships between the business community and County government, allowed for earlier insight into business needs, and increased participation in additional economic development programs and resources.

The initiative has reinforced Stafford County's commitment to fostering a supportive, business-friendly environment that values entrepreneurship, longevity, and local investment. Participating businesses benefit from increased visibility, improved awareness of available resources, and a stronger sense of connection to the community. At the same time, Stafford County has established a streamlined and scalable model for ongoing engagement that delivers meaningful results without requiring significant additional funding or staffing.

By prioritizing long-term relationship-building and consistent outreach, the program has created lasting value for both businesses and the community. It encourages continued investment, strengthens the overall business ecosystem, and provides a practical, replicable framework for other communities seeking to enhance retention efforts, build community pride, and support sustainable economic growth.