



# ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS



## 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 Tourism & Business Marketing Summit  
Program Category: Community Development, Economic Development & Land Use

### CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: Liz Barber  
Title: Director  
Department: Economic Development and Tourism  
Telephone: 540-658-8681 Website: gostaffordva.com  
Email: lbarber@staffordcountyva.gov

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

Name: Donna S. Krauss  
Title: Deputy County Administrator  
Signature: 

## **Title: The Power of a Pin: Celebrating Service, Strengthening Culture**

### Executive Summary

Disney was the source of an idea to both engage and delight the employees of Stafford County Government in Virginia. Visitors to Disney World or Disneyland enjoy buying and trading pins sporting characters from Disney movies. Stafford decided to implement a similar program using the County's mascots, a blue heron named Blu and his friends. A limited number of pins, affordable tokens of appreciation, were created for different County events. Pins were created with the logo for themes for the annual employee awards event. A special pin was made for employees who were also veterans for Veterans Day. Stafford won a fundraising contest for the local United Way and a Top Dog pin was given to employees. Another employee event, the Food Truck Frenzy, featured a food truck-shaped pin. Again, the number of pins was limited. Employees loved the pins, claiming them quickly at the beginning of events. People wear the pins on their lanyards. Stafford even gave employees small corkboards to display their pins. The pins were an inexpensive morale booster and a great way to engage employees and encourage them to engage with one another.

### The Problem

Local government is often limited in how it can show its appreciation for its employees. Revenues come from tax dollars and Stafford County prides itself on being an outstanding steward of public monies. Expressing appreciation for employees, especially during economic swings in our country, can be challenging. The question became how Stafford could bring

enthusiasm and fellowship to its employees while showing recognition at a sustainable cost.

The other problem was how to encourage team culture with this effort.

### Program Implementation

Community Engagement staff coordinated with County Administration on its vision for engaging employees. Deputy County Administrator Donna Krauss wanted something fun that was both sustainable and could be ongoing. She wanted to tie the efforts to annual employee initiatives, including the Just Serve Employee Awards and a special food truck picnic in the fall. Employees receive small favors at the Just Serve Awards, and it was decided that a pin would be the perfect token to commemorate the occasion. As staff enjoyed visiting Disney and collecting and trading commemorative pins, the idea arose of creating limited-edition pins to mark various initiatives.

Community Engagement began by testing the popularity of the pins at the Just Serve Awards in 2024. The theme was County Fair. Community Engagement's graphic designer created three pins based on the theme – a star that said "Just Serve," a pin featuring a tent you might find at a fair and a pin featuring Blu, Stafford County's mascot. Pins were distributed randomly at each place setting at the event, which included around 200 people. A lanyard was also included. The goal was for people to trade pins if they wanted.

The pins were a great success, receiving many positive accolades from employees. Word spread to those who were not there and people started asking for the limited pins that were left over. This led to expanding the pin program to other initiatives that did not involve the awards show. Stafford created a special pin for employees who served in the military to be handed out on

Veterans Day. A pin was created for a special United Way Employee Fundraising award Stafford received. The annual food truck event features a pin shaped like a food truck, with a different color every year. Some employees come to the event to get the pin.

The program revolves around eye-catching, original designs specific to Stafford and limited numbers, creating demand and a buzz. Pins are advertised before events and initiatives and they have really been successful at drawing employees. People arrive early to events to make sure they get a pin. The program even expanded to include a special corkboard for displaying pins. The board was used as a favor at the Just Serve Awards.

#### Cost and Funding

A Community Engagement specialist in the Community Engagement department designs the pins. The number of pins determines the cost. It cost around \$850 for custom pins for one of the employee award events. Typically, the specialist designs them and orders them from online companies like 4Imprint. It is important to allow for enough lead time for production.

#### Results and Impact

Employees enthusiastically embraced the pin program. Previously, employee attendance had lagged at events specifically designed for them. The pins created a buzz, a sense of excitement and attendance has greatly increased.

Again, people arrive early to events to secure a limited-edition pin. They are visible throughout County government, on lanyards and corkboards. It is a great advertisement to new employees who may be unaware of events, but ask questions when they see the pins.

It takes some of the stress out of planning events in that there is already an established “favor” for employees, and a new pin needs to be designed.

The pins themselves are keepsakes and great reminders for employees of fun events and appreciation. Some of the extra pins featuring the County mascot are also used for residents' goodie bags on occasion.

### Innovation

Stafford County took an idea that worked for a corporation to engage its customers and adapted it into a recognition and appreciation program for local government employees. Again, most localities have limited funds for engaging employees beyond salaries and are used to doing “more with less.” This program had a low cost point but big returns.

1. The idea was new to Stafford County, and the County was not aware of anyone else who had instituted a complete pin program.
2. The program created meaningful, attractive visuals for Stafford employees out of otherwise routine events.
3. It reinvigorated and rebranded the existing programs and how the County engages its employees. The County now brands each event or initiative with recognizable issues that help employees recall achievements at a glance from a pin.