



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: County of York
Program Title: Popular Annual Financial Report
Program Category: Communications & Community Outreach

CONTACT INFORMATION

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SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

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Signature:



2026 VACo Achievement Awards Submission

Program: York County PAFR

Category: Communication & Community Outreach

Executive Summary

York County recognizes that while the Annual Comprehensive Financial Report (ACFR) meets legal transparency requirements, its technical nature can make it difficult for residents to understand how public resources are managed. To improve accessibility and strengthen public trust, the County launched its first Popular Annual Financial Report (PAFR) for FY2024. The PAFR provides a clear, visually engaging overview of where County revenue comes from, how it is spent, and the overall financial condition of the government. Finance and Public Affairs staff work together to identify key metrics, craft understandable explanations, and design charts and visuals that enhance clarity. The PAFR also includes context such as strategic priorities, local economic highlights, and a “Year In Review” section to show citizens the real impact of their tax dollars.

York County developed a replicable model for producing the PAFR using existing staff expertise and cost-effective printing support. This collaborative approach ensures accuracy, consistency with the ACFR and Budget, and an engaging product for residents. The results have been significant: the PAFR has improved transparency, strengthened public engagement, and enhanced internal understanding of County finances. By investing in a concise, approachable report, the County helps citizens become better informed and more connected to their local government—supporting a stronger foundation of trust and shared responsibility for York County’s future.



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The Challenge

Local governments play a critical role in managing public resources and delivering essential services such as public safety, infrastructure, education, and community development. Because these services are funded primarily through taxpayer dollars, transparency and accountability are fundamental responsibilities of local officials. After each fiscal year, the County is required to have its finances audited and produce formal financial statements in the form of an Annual Comprehensive Financial Report, often abbreviated to ACFR. While the ACFR is published and made available to the public, it is a lengthy, incredibly technical and detailed document, and readers without accounting expertise may either not understand the document at all or arrive at incorrect conclusions. Simply publishing the ACFR fulfils the requirement to make the County's financial statements public, but the cumbersome, technical nature of the document can act as a barrier and deterrent that keeps the average citizen from even a general understanding of the County's finances.

Implementation/Collaboration

One increasingly effective tool for removing that barrier is the Popular Annual Financial Report (PAFR). The PAFR is an important tool that allows a locality to improve communication with citizens, enhance trust, and promote financial literacy among the public. The PAFR is a simplified, visually engaging summary of a government's financial



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activities, designed to be easily understood by citizens who may not have technical accounting knowledge. York County began preparing the PAFR with fiscal year ended June 30, 2024, and is continuing the annual preparation of the document. York County's primary goal with the PAFR is to translate complex financial data into clear, concise information that answers citizens' most important questions: Where does the money come from? Where does the money go? Is the local government financially healthy? Careful planning, collaboration, and a strong commitment to transparency are all needed to make the PAFR an effective tool. While the PAFR cannot be finalized until the County's annual financial audit is completed and the ACFR is prepared, some work on the PAFR can be done concurrently with the more complex document. Staff in the County's Finance department identified the key metrics and figures to be included in the PAFR. This required careful review and evaluation of the metrics chosen to ensure that the narrative and theme of the comprehensive report remained intact while also ensuring the PAFR remained accessible and easy to understand for the average citizen. Ultimately, the Finance staff included an overview of the Board of Supervisors' Strategic Priorities and the Funding Cycle that together guide the formation of the County budget, followed by a brief snapshot of the local economy and culture. These sections provide helpful context for the financial information that follows. Governmental Expenses and Revenues begin the financial section and are followed by an overview of the County's Net Position. Then, the PAFR discusses Capital Assets and Long Term Debt before covering the County's General Fund Revenue, Expenses, and Fund



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Balance. It then ends with a Year In Review section highlighting several of the activities and initiatives the County accomplished through the year. This section helps answer the question, “what am I buying when I pay my taxes?” and highlights some of the work accomplished by dedicated County staff.

While the main framework of the PAFR remains the same from year to year, Finance staff review these metrics and additional features in the document every year to ensure that clarity, brevity, and ease of access are balanced with accuracy and cohesion. For example, though the PAFR is intended for mass consumption, it still deals with technical subject matter, and an understanding of certain technical terms, like Unassigned Fund Balance, and Net Position, is required. To facilitate this understanding, each of the financial sections are accompanied by graphs and charts, as well as definitions, which help readers visualize and more fully understand the data being discussed.

Once the data and metrics are decided, Finance staff and Public Affairs staff work together to compile this data into a cohesive, visually engaging document. Our Graphic Design Specialist creates a color palette and theme that carries through all the financial documents published for the year: the Budget, the ACFR, and the PAFR. This color palette and theme is used throughout the document to make the graphs, charts, and tables in the PAFR engaging as well as maintain the narrative of the larger ACFR and Budget documents. The PAFR really is an abbreviated retelling of the same story from the ACFR and a



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continuation of the same story from the Budget. Once the content and format of the PAFR are finalized and approved, the County contracts with a printing company to produce high-quality, magazine-style booklets that are distributed to all the branches of the York County Public Library, the front office of County Administration and other County buildings, and town halls and other public meetings.

Model for Replication

This model for adding a PAFR to a county's collection of financial documents using existing resources and staff, and reasonable engagement with outside vendors can be adapted to be effective in any locality. Since the primary content of the document is derived from the ACFR which localities are required to produce, the main challenge lies in selecting which information to include and presenting it in a way that is engaging and clear for the average citizen who may not have accounting expertise. We used our Finance staff to generate and select the data to include, and our Public Affairs staff to compile the document and make it engaging. For this publication it was more efficient to engage an outside printer to produce the physical booklets at a cost of \$250 for 175 copies. The County has the capability to produce the copies in-house if needed, and other localities could certainly print their copies in-house as well, depending on what makes the most sense in each locality's context.



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Results

Preparing a Popular Annual Financial Report is a meaningful undertaking for any locality. While the process presents challenges related to organizational readiness, information selection, and data accuracy, the benefits are significant. The PAFR has enhanced transparency, promoted civic engagement, improved internal understanding, and strengthened public trust. By investing the time and resources needed to produce a clear, accurate, and engaging report, York County has taken an important step toward more open and accountable governance. With access to an easy-to-understand document describing the County's financial activities, citizens become better informed about their government's finances and operations, and the foundation for constructive dialogue and shared responsibility for the community's future is strengthened.