

# PRESS RELEASE



Visit [VACo's Achievement Award website](#) to view all entries in their complete format.

## **BEST ACHIEVEMENT AWARD**

**PRINCE WILLIAM COUNTY** | Human Rights Student Leadership Council | [Read Submission](#)

When the Prince William County Human Rights Commission and staff discovered an opportunity to support our local school system, they were eager to create the Prince William County Human Rights Student Leadership Council (HRSLC). The Council was designed to engage students in community leadership development opportunities and to participate in dialogues on diversity and understanding an appreciation of the cultural differences of others. Students interact with local, state, and federal human rights professionals in government, community leaders within our region, as well as students from various cultures and social groups. Participation in the Human Rights Student Leadership Council creates a connection between our students and their community, and it impacts their overall success in school as well as productive citizenship.

## **BEST SMALL COUNTY ACHIEVEMENT (50,000 or less population)**

**DINWIDDIE COUNTY** | Dinwiddie County Faith-Based Initiative | [Read Submission](#)

The Dinwiddie County Board of Supervisors, Dinwiddie County School Board, and both administrations recognize that the health and vitality of our community extends beyond the scope of government and schools. In order to achieve the maximum level of success for all citizens, we must work collectively with each component of the community. County leaders

moved outside the walls of traditional offices and classrooms, to create a unique partnership with the County's faith community. The Dinwiddie County Faith Based Initiative was established in 2018 and has created a variety of opportunities for better communication and service to all citizens of Dinwiddie County.

## **BEST LARGE COUNTY ACHIEVEMENT**

### **CHESTERFIELD COUNTY | Access On Demand | [Read Submission](#)**

Access On Demand began May 1, 2019, offering same day, door-to-door, direct-to-destination service. Registered county residents who either have a disability, live in a low-income household, or who are age 60+ can travel anywhere in the county with just two hours' notice, Monday-Friday, 5:30 a.m.-7:30 p.m. or Saturdays, 7:30 a.m.-7:30 p.m. For those who need a ride to work or a medical appointment, service is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. In addition to Chesterfield County, travel is available to Petersburg, Colonial Heights, Ft. Lee, Hopewell, Richmond and parts of Henrico County. The cost is \$6 per car for a one-way trip. Fares are paid via debit/credit card as well as one vendor accepting cash. The remainder of the cost is covered by the county. The county contracts with four qualified providers, offering different niches to meet the needs of its riders. Access On Demand was created as an enhancement to a service that Chesterfield County was already providing, Access Chesterfield. Access Chesterfield is a shared ride service which requires riders to book service by 2 p.m. the day before their trip and serves the same riders who are eligible for Access On Demand. Since its inception, the program has provided over 23,500 trips. Estimates for FY20 indicate a 25% increase in trips over FY19.

## **ACHIEVEMENT AWARD WINNERS**

### **AUGUSTA COUNTY | Pre-Charge Diversion and Litter Control Program | [Read Submission](#)**

The litter control program is a community service program run directly out of the Augusta County Commonwealth's Attorney's Office. Unlike established community service programs, this program does not just work

with court ordered community service workers. In a first-in-Virginia effort, the litter control program gives non-violent, first-time offenders a chance to perform community service before they have been arrested. If these first-time offenders complete their community service, they will not be arrested or charged. This one-time offer gives these offenders a chance to correct their mistake while performing a vital community service. It also saves time and money for law enforcement and the courts. It is available only for offenders with no prior criminal history. This program represents a significant cost savings for citizens and also benefits citizens in a number of ways:

- It cleans up the county.
- It increases public awareness about the ongoing litter issue.
- It provides the opportunity for the offenders to give back to the community.

## **BOTETOURT COUNTY | Botetourt Broadband Strategy | [Read Submission](#)**

Beginning in 2017, Botetourt County began to understand the broadband problem more fully in the County. A consultant was hired to survey residents and businesses of their broadband needs, reporting a high demand for broadband. Technical studies concluded that, officially, approximately 30% of the County did not have Internet access, although County officials knew this to be understated. The County then developed its two-fold strategy. The first part was to create a local Broadband Commission to lead the County's efforts to increase broadband deployment. The second part was to host a Broadband Summit that would bring together the best minds in the country to help solve the rural broadband problem. After those two things happened, the milestones came one after another. In 2019, the County and Craig-Botetourt Electric Cooperative (CBEC) won a Virginia Telecommunications Initiative (VATI) grant to bring fiber-to-the-home to a large unserved part of the County. That fiber is ready to go into the ground in 2020. And, other providers are ready to launch as well. BARC Electric Cooperative, Lumos, and Blue Ridge Towers have all coordinated with the Broadband Commission to work to find solutions to deploy more fiber in the County. The goals of the Botetourt Broadband Strategy continued to be met. As the County powers through 2020, its partnerships with the Roanoke Valley Broadband Authority, private companies, and the state continue to reap rewards for the residents and businesses in the County. We have turned the ship and our broadband future is bright.

## **BOTETOURT COUNTY | Botetourt Housing Strategy | [Read Submission](#)**

For most of its history, Botetourt County has been a predominantly rural and suburban county more often seen as simply a bedroom community for the Roanoke Valley or as a retirement destination for people moving from the west and northeast. This led to a traditional housing stock of mostly low density, single-family homes that are owner occupied. As a result, broad access to and availability of housing options in the County were severely limited. The demand for housing in the County, however, began to drastically increase in 2016. Over 1000 new jobs have been announced in the County since that time, and the Board of Supervisors set a goal of having the ability for those who work in the County to be able to live in the County. This would have the added benefit of helping to create a more complete community in Botetourt as other businesses would grow up around a diversity of housing options and an increased population. As a result of that goal, the County created a housing strategy to create more housing in the County. This strategy began with a consultant report analyzing the existing market and trends. Then, the County hosted a Housing Summit to bring together regional, state, and national partners to engage with the housing dilemma in the County and to begin developing solutions to the problem. This led to the creation of a series of recommendations and a Housing Toolkit that staff can use to help developers and builders meet the housing goals of the County. The goals of the program have been more than exceeded. Nearly 1000 new units have been approved or developed in the past three years. And, new tools are continually developed, the most recent being the adoption of a cluster ordinance to help maximize both development and green space.

## **CHESTERFIELD COUNTY | First Responders and Multicultural CommUNITY Cup | [Read Submission](#)**

Chesterfield County facilitated a unique event to engage the multicultural community with first responders in the region. The First Responders and Multicultural Community Cup was a regional partnership among Chesterfield and Henrico counties, the City of Richmond and the Virginia State Police. The event brought the communities together for a day of soccer, community building, family activities and opportunities to interact with each other. Soccer teams consisted of members from the multicultural community and first responders who played in a tournament. Attendees enjoyed competitive soccer action, children's

activities, first responders' vehicles and booths, food, and music. This first event was held in September 2019 with plans to host the event annually. One goal of the Community Cup was to educate the multicultural community about the roles of public safety officials. In addition, the event provided an opportunity for the groups to communicate in a relaxed atmosphere. The first responders were educated on the cultural norms of the groups represented and were able to gain a greater understanding of the concerns and needs of this community. The Community Cup was a great demonstration that the people from the region, many from different backgrounds and cultures, can live, work and play together, respecting and appreciating both our differences and our similarities.

**CHESTERFIELD COUNTY | Coordinated Local Government  
Implementation of “The Basics” | [Read Submission](#)**

In Chesterfield County, twelve local government agencies, including the school system, worked collaboratively to promote The Basics, five clusters of parenting and caregiving behaviors, distilled from research by the Achievement Gap Initiative at Harvard University, that encompass most of what experts find is important for boosting cognitive and social-emotional development of children from birth to age three. County agencies promoted The Basics through strategies including print materials, videos, media, social media, care giver education, parent workshops, playgroups, toolkits, 1:1 citizen interaction and partnership with child care and health care providers. Chesterfield County's 2019 implementation survey results indicated a 48% increase in awareness of the Basics among those in Chesterfield. The Chesterfield Basics implementation team works closely with a Greater Richmond Regional Basics steering committee which has promoted the Chesterfield implementation blueprint as a model for other local governments.

**FAIRFAX COUNTY | My Field Journal | [Read Submission](#)**

The Fairfax County Field Journal is a hands-on education tool that connects thousands of students to their local watershed and the Chesapeake Bay, while also providing an opportunity for teachers to relate state-mandated standards of learning to real world experiences. This program is offered free of charge by ecologists from the Department of Public Works and Environmental Services (DPWES) in Fairfax County, Virginia. For many years, Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) has expressed the need for students to have a field journal that is closely

connected to Virginia's Standards of Learning. The Fairfax County Field Journal is the response to this need. The goal of the journal is to combine focused watershed-based education and activities with inspired journaling to create a product that meets the needs and aims of both teachers and the county. The journal allows students across grade levels to learn about their watershed and the importance of stormwater management, learn about and apply science curriculum skills and concepts, and get outside to connect with, explore, and protect their natural world. Students who use the journal expand their working knowledge of watershed science, practice scientific thinking skills, and can make connections between behaviors and environmental impacts. Fairfax County benefits from an educated community. The Field Journal is also not only applicable locally, but easily transferable to other jurisdictions across the country to assist with environmental awareness and foster environmental stewardship.

## **FRANKLIN COUNTY | Summit View Business Park | [Read Submission](#)**

As Franklin County continues to recover its pre-Great Recession luster as one of the fastest growing communities in western Virginia, it is investing heavily in its economy, its businesses, and its people through an innovative approach to economic development and population attraction. The County boasts an enviable quality of life for those seeking a rural/suburban lifestyle but has seen its economy and population stagnate over the past decade. The vision of the Franklin County Board of Supervisors is to reinvigorate the community through a focused population attraction program centered on the one missing piece necessary for success: the creation of high wage jobs. The Franklin County Board of Supervisors has invested approximately \$36 million to date in the creation of a new type of business park that is designed to attract companies and jobs of a higher caliber than were previously located within the community. The County's mission is to bring companies to the area that value the community and their employees and that reward both by providing high employee salaries and act as leading corporate citizens. These new companies will provide opportunities for more people to relocate to Franklin County without sacrificing income or job quality. The Summit View Business Park is designed to be the vehicle through which this is achieved. The Summit View Business Park in Franklin County is the next generation of business park for Virginia and has seen incredible success to date. The County purchased the first of numerous parcels that make up the 550-acre park at the beginning of 2016 and made the first of three business announcements in 2018. In all, the County has announced three new businesses locating to

the park with total private investments of over \$50 million and nearly 200 new and saved jobs. Most striking is the success the park has had in raising wage levels locally. The average wage announced for the three incoming businesses to the park is \$25.39 per hour, a 55% increase over the prevailing wage in Franklin County!

**HENRICO COUNTY | LGBTQIA Book Discussion Group | [Read Submission](#)**

Henrico County Public Library created the LGBTQIA+ Book Discussion Group to improve service to the LGBTQIA community. Through a combination of outreach, thoughtful planning, intentional materials selection, and flexible program design, the book discussion has established a healthy following. The book discussion group improves community engagement with the library through conversations about books with LGBTQIA authors, themes, and characters. The group's success indicates that the library is establishing itself as a welcoming community space for members of the LGBTQIA community.

**HENRICO COUNTY | Queens UNITED | [Read Submission](#)**

“Queens UNITED” is a program designed to foster a positive and loving environment for teen girls. UNITED is an acronym for Unity, Nobility, Integrity, Trustworthiness, Education and Destiny. The program began in February 2017 at Huguenot High School with a small group of girls who have since grown in numbers and spirit. The program is now run primarily from the campus of Henrico County Public Schools’ Academy at Virginia Randolph, but still includes students at Huguenot High School. Queens UNITED seeks to educate, strengthen and empower girls by cultivating self-awareness and accountability, positive relationships, educational and personal goal-setting, leadership and community service opportunities, and sisterhood. Our overarching goal is to ensure that students are successful and have the necessary tools to excel. To that end, we work closely with the girls’ parents, guardians and communities, because we understand that it takes a village to create an atmosphere that nurtures success. This program has proven to be impactful and encourages girls to be successful. Queens UNITED has gone from one group of 11 students to three different groups, each comprising more than 20 students. The students have expressed how much the program has helped them with communication, organization and planning. Most of the students who have been mentored through the program have gone on to either a

community college or a four-year university. We are currently working on expanding our program to other Henrico County schools and schools in the City of Richmond. We aim to continue to support the ladies we build relationships with, as well as their parents, guardians and communities.

## **HENRICO COUNTY** | Trailblazers Wall | [Read Submission](#)

The Trailblazers Wall at the Fairfield Area Library in Henrico, Virginia is an inclusive, dynamic digital history wall that showcases biographies of individuals whose lives and work had major impacts on the county, the state, and the nation. Inspired by the Supervisor of the Fairfield District, content for the wall was selected by a committee of community members knowledgeable about local history, with the goal of inspiring paths in life for young people of the Fairfield District. The resulting wall highlights many people of color and women whose historical narratives have been submerged, and demonstrates how community engagement can lead to more inclusive and valuable services in public libraries. Public response and usage patterns show that the inclusive historical display has deeply resonated with the community, and that local history has a natural home in public libraries.

## **LOUDOUN COUNTY** | Busy Buddies | [Read Submission](#)

Loudoun County Animal Services (LCAS) receives over 2,400 animals a year, and as widespread spay/neuter efforts and access have taken hold in the community, the population of animals in need of sheltering has changed. Consistent with nationwide trends, more than 60% of homeless pets in Loudoun County arrive at the shelter in need of additional medical and/or behavioral intervention prior to adoption. Consequently, the team combined a set of staff-supervised, volunteer-driven, in-kennel enrichment programs to reduce stress in dogs, which had historically led to behavioral decline, increased rates of contagious disease, and euthanasia. LCAS developed “Busy Buddies,” which carries minimal cost, and is almost entirely volunteer-operated, to significant success. Euthanasia over the past four years has dropped by 21%, disease outbreaks have dropped by 60%, and length of stay has dropped by 9 days. Volunteers report high levels of satisfaction with the youth-friendly craft programs, and spots for volunteer opportunities now routinely have a wait-list. Initiating programs to preserve the mental well-being of the animals in shelter custody has had lasting impacts on the staff, the volunteers, and the dogs, and the program has since been expanded to

provide enrichment for animals of all species needing temporary refuge at Loudoun County Animal Services.

## **LOUDOUN COUNTY | Loudoun County Implementation of Billing and Collection for Incorporated Towns | [Read Submission](#)**

Loudoun County encompasses more than 400,000 residents and 7 incorporated towns. For many years, town residents received tax bills from both the county and from their respective towns with different due dates and payment methods, which led to confusion, late payments, frustrated taxpayers and the need to make separate payments to the towns and the county. To improve the efficiency and effectiveness of tax collection for the County and the incorporated towns, Loudoun County has become the first jurisdiction within the Commonwealth of Virginia to take on the billing, collection, and administration of personal property and real property taxes for five of those towns: Leesburg, Lovettsville, Hillsboro, Middleburg and Round Hill. This joint solution improves service to our taxpayers by making the tax billing and collection process easier for taxpayers to understand, as town residents will receive one bill for both county and town taxes. In addition, the Commissioner of the Revenue for Loudoun County previously provided assessment data to the towns for their use in tax administration; by unifying the assessment and tax administration functions within the County government systems, the risk of error and duplication is reduced, and the process simplified. The county successfully implemented systems for billing and collection of Real Property taxes in 2019 and Personal Property taxes in 2020. The programs have transitioned to the county seamlessly while providing improved customer service, communication, and consolidated billing for the citizens. This innovative program improves the administration of a major county government function – the administration and collection of tax revenue. By partnering County and town functions, this program promotes intergovernmental cooperation and coordination in addressing shared problems and meeting the needs of residents in a nonpartisan manner. This program changed legislation in Virginia and provides a template for other jurisdictions to successfully follow.

## **MONTGOMERY COUNTY | Meadowbrook Public Library Summer Backpack Program | [Read Submission](#)**

The Montgomery-Floyd Regional Library system is comprised of four branches: Blacksburg, Christiansburg, Floyd (Floyd County), and

Meadowbrook. The Meadowbrook Public Library resides in the eastern section of Montgomery County, which is very rural. According to the Montgomery County Public Schools, Eastern Montgomery Elementary School has the highest percentage of students eligible for free and reduced lunch in the county. During the 2015-16 school year, 55 percent of students attending Eastern Montgomery Elementary School were eligible for free or reduced lunch, qualifying them to receive a bag of food each Friday to take home for the weekend. Working with various community groups, including White Memorial Methodist Church, Blacksburg Kiwanis, Shawsville Lay Ministerial Association, Shawsville Ruritans, Mt. Valley Charitable Foundation, VFW Post 4920, and private donations, the Meadowbrook Library was able to offer a supplemental food program, not only once, but twice a week during the summer. During the eight-week program, 121 children were served, and 724 bags of food were distributed.

**PITTSYLVANIA COUNTY | Doggie Bag Thrift Store | [Read Submission](#)**

Pittsylvania County was looking for ways to address the high volume of perfectly good items and furniture that ended up in our convenience centers, which was encouraging the unsafe practice of scavenging, as well as finding a revenue stream to minimize the costs to operate our county animal shelter. The solution was to open our thrift store, which would garner community support, and help our county's animals. By partnering with the SPCA of Pittsylvania County (non-profit animal rescue), we strengthened the relationship that they had with our Pet Center, and our store staffing was covered for a percentage of the profits. The SPCA fundraises to help citizens and animals in our county, and this aids the Pet Center in their life-saving mission. This venture has resolved several issues, given our citizens a program and store they can be proud of, in which 100% of the proceeds go right back into helping our animals in need throughout the county.

**PITTSYLVANIA COUNTY | Regional Pet Food Pantry | [Read Submission](#)**

The Pittsylvania Pet Center prides itself in taking a proactive approach to its mission to help the animals and citizens of our county. The pet food pantry pre-COVID-19 was an effective program that helped establish them as a resource to the community, and not just the stereotypical pound. As COVID-19 started to impact so many, the need grew and the Pet Center

rose to the challenge. Thanks to support secured by the Pet Center, GreaterGood.org donated over \$300,000 worth of Pet Food and supplies to our shelter. To date, over 20,000 pounds of these supplies have been distributed locally and almost 50,000 pounds have been distributed to other animal welfare organizations with similar programs throughout the Commonwealth. Through the hard work and dedication of the staff and volunteers at the Pittsylvania Pet Center, animals and the people that love them across Virginia have received the support they needed.

## **ROANOKE COUNTY** | Illuminights | [Read Submission](#)

In November 2019, Roanoke County's Explore Park launched the region's largest holiday event, an immersive outdoor walking lights tour. Illuminights was the culmination of three years of planning efforts by the County and local non-profit Center in the Square. Featuring over 500,000 lights, this new annual tradition exceeded attendance expectations with over 43,000 admissions. The event brought together various community partners, business sponsors and media sponsors to result in Explore Park's biggest month of attendance in history, while raising over \$450,000 in net revenue to be shared between the sponsor organizations.

## **WISE COUNTY** | Project Intersection-Lonesome Pine Regional Industrial Facilities Authority | [Read Submission](#)

Within the recent past, traditional coal and tobacco industry related jobs have disappeared from the economic landscape of far Southwest Virginia. Efforts to diversify the economy and create new jobs for the region are a top priority. The model for accomplishing this comes from within the strength of 5 localities that are working together across physical boundaries and under the umbrella of the Lonesome Pine Regional Industrial Authority (LPRIFA). Historically these localities have competed not only against other areas of the state, but often against each other for those coveted new jobs for its citizens. Capitalizing on the strength and resources found by working together through the RIFA model, each locality can choose to contribute to the "good of the whole" and realizing the benefits through a revenue sharing program. Project Intersection, located at the crossroads of U.S. 23 and Alt U.S. 58 in Norton, Virginia, is the inaugural project of the LPRIFA that is designed to accomplish these goals of job creation and diversification. Collaborating with numerous partners, the LPRIFA has obtained more than \$10.8 million to date in

order to repurpose a former coal surface mine site that provided natural resources and provided jobs, into a second life of producing jobs through the creation of a new business and industry campus. The diversification of these jobs will provide opportunities in new areas of business focusing on information and emerging technologies, advanced manufacturing, and energy.

## **YORK COUNTY** | Citizen Cyber Security | [Read Submission](#)

York County's Citizen Cyber Security initiative is designed to educate the community of the dangers of the Internet and how to easily protect themselves from most cyber threats. The initiative accomplishes this through a three-phase approach. The first step is to engage the citizens with an in-person presentation to make them aware of the various risks and how to reduce them in a broad sense. The second step is an informal question and answer session where citizens can ask how the prior guidance applies to their devices and lifestyles. The final step is access to an on-line repository of the exact steps needed to protect themselves, delivered in a non-technical format. The original plan was to deliver the presentation at 3 sessions to at least 15 attendees. Over the course of a year, it has been delivered in 12 sessions to over 375 people. The overall average follow-up survey rating by attendees has been 4.9 out of a possible 5. The overhead of this initiative was extremely small and consisted of creating online documentation and a single presentation that could be delivered at different locations. The community response has been overwhelmingly positive.

---

VACo exists to support county officials and to effectively represent, promote and protect the interests of counties to better serve the people of Virginia.

### **CONTACT**

Gage Harter | 804.343.2502 | [gharter@vaco.org](mailto:gharter@vaco.org)

### **VIRGINIA ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES**

1207 East Main Street | Richmond, Va. 23219 | [www.vaco.org](http://www.vaco.org)