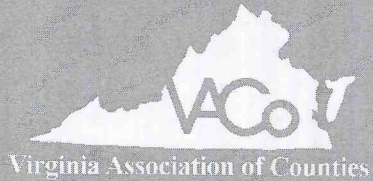


Recognizing the Best in County Government Programs!



# 2014 Achievement Awards



## 2014 VACo Achievement Awards

Deadline: June 2, 2014

### Application Form

All applications must include the following information. Separate applications must be submitted for each eligible program. **Deadline: June 2, 2014.**

#### Program Information

Locality Henrico County

Program Title Henrico Citizens Academy

Program Category Communications

#### Contact Information

Name Cristol Klevinsky

Title Management Specialist

Department County Manager's Office

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#### Signature of county administrator or chief administrative officer

Name John A. Vithoukas

Title County Manager

Signature 

## Call for Entries

# Henrico Citizens Academy Henrico County, Virginia

## **Overview**

The Henrico Citizens Academy was a new and free program offered by Henrico County in May 2013 designed to provide an opportunity for residents to learn about their local government and public schools, and to become more engaged citizens. This new program provided a hands-on educational experience to learn about daily county operations, services offered, and the public school system. An equal number of participants from the County's five magisterial districts were allowed into the program so that residents from every part of the County could participate. The 10-hour program operated for five consecutive weeks and classes were held at a different County facility in each of the five magisterial districts. The program featured 21 presentations by Agency Heads introducing departments and their services to County residents. Each weekly location offered a tour of the facility location and heavy equipment brought to the site.

The Citizens Academy was created based on a suggestion from two constituents in one of our five magisterial districts who had become knowledgeable of County operations through their community involvement. The suggestion was not only considered, but a new program was approved, developed, and held within four months.

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## **The Problem**

Prior to the creation of this new program, Henrico offered Fire and Police citizen academies for residents, which have been very successful. However, an academy or other kind of program for residents to learn about the daily operations of their local government and public schools did not exist. Residents could certainly learn about parts of general government and public schools through public meetings, yet a comprehensive program that encompassed learning about how raw water is processed, filtered, and distributed throughout the county or educational advances in our school system had not been developed for county residents.

In February 2013, two Henrico residents provided the suggestion to their magisterial district Board member. The idea was presented in detail to the Board of Supervisors during a special meeting on March 12, 2013 and was approved. From there, the conceptual design began to take shape. A program coordinator was assigned to prepare a five-week program, two hours for each class held in the evening after work, and provide a condensed and fast-paced learning environment. The Henrico Citizens Academy would not follow suit with other cities, counties and towns. We would brand our own program tailoring it to fit the inquiring minds of our residents and offer it at no charge.

## Description of the Program

The Board of Supervisors approved for the creation and development of the program on March 12, 2013 to meet several objectives. The first objective being that we wanted our citizens to learn more about their local government and public schools in a fast-

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paced learning environment. The second objective was to give them an opportunity to become engaged to further help their community. Lastly, we wanted to provide a hands-on and memorable learning experience. The idea of offering a Citizens Academy program was expanded upon it to create a unique program that would not only educate about County operations but to involve residents and allow them to interact with their elected officials and County administrators.

A coordinator was assigned to develop and implement the new program. This person was responsible for all aspects related to the Citizens Academy: program development; researching other governmental Citizens Academies; handling registration, securing locations for each weekly meeting, and planning the weekly presentation and tour. The coordinator would also attend each class with the participants and be their direct contact throughout the program. The coordinator researched other citizen's academies nationwide and found that programs varied widely; therefore the sky was the limit on how Henrico wanted to structure their program. Another important factor was to show County facilities and heavy equipment. Libraries, recreation centers, and parks are widely visited, however residents may never visit a maintenance complex to see how a local government maintains a fleet of vehicles, such as school buses and refuse trucks.

The program structure was one of the first things defined for the inaugural Citizens Academy. It was determined that a limit of 30 residents could participate, allowing six residents from each of the five magisterial districts to ensure all residents had an equal chance to join in. The program would be available for residents living in the County and must meet the age requirement of 18 years or older. The program would also be

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offered at no cost to the resident to encourage the greatest participation. Another decision made was that the participants would meet at the selected location each week giving participants the chance to travel to other parts of the County. The program schedule would run for five consecutive weeks and determined that the five Thursdays in May 2013 would be a perfect schedule. The time that the participants were committing to the program was given high consideration so that it was used efficiently. We elected to hold our classes from 7:00 – 9:00 p.m.

When considering the program registration, the Recreation and Parks department utilized a software system, called ActiveNet, supporting event management and online registration that worked very well for their many programs and activities. They agreed to handle the registration, which could be completed online or in person at their main office location, with a paper registration entered directly into the ActiveNet system.

During the planning of where the classes would be held, consideration was given to which topics would be presented. The program needed to educate the participants on their local government in general, providing overviews of the various departments and outline services provided; Agency Heads would give presentations. From there, several aspects were considered to arrange the agenda for each class: working with the schedules of the Board members, County Manager and Deputy County Managers to each attend one of the classes; ensuring the class met in different types of facilities. Each facility would be conducive to a large parking area and handicap accessibility, the kind of tour offered, and available space for having a hands-on tour of heavy equipment outside of the location.

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Once the location was determined and reserved, logistics for the room set up began to take shape. A Microsoft PowerPoint presentation would be shown each week to cover all of the agenda topics, therefore the room needed to be equipped with or have the capability for audio-visual equipment. With the creation of a weekly PowerPoint presentation, the idea to give a copy to each participant gave way to provide each participant with a 3-ring binder to hold each week’s presentation, which was handed out at the start of class.

In total, the program was developed and implemented within four months, from February to May 2013. The program began on May 2 and ended on May 30, and included a curriculum of twenty-one presentations developed to highlight the many areas of general government, public schools, and provide engaging discussion throughout the five weeks. The class was able to meet the five members of the Board of Supervisors, the County Manager, the four Deputy County Managers, and numerous Agency Heads. Tours of County facilities and heavy equipment were also offered to give a hands-on experience.

<i>Class Date &amp; Location</i>	<i>Topics Covered</i>
<u>May 2, Class 1</u>  “Overview and Engagement”  Location: Eastern Government Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introductions of County Staff, participants, opening icebreaker question</li> <li>• Henrico History &amp; County Manager Form of Government</li> <li>• Local County Government Overview</li> <li>• Legislative Agenda and Legal Environment</li> <li>• Community Engagement</li> <li>• Tour of Dabbs House Museum and Tourist Information Center</li> </ul>
<u>May 9, Class 2</u>  “Public Safety, Recreation &	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Police</li> <li>• Fire</li> <li>• Recreation &amp; Parks</li> </ul>

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<p>Parks, Libraries”</p> <p>Location: Water Treatment Plant</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public Library</li> <li>• Tour of Water Treatment Plant, Police vehicle, Fire truck, and Mobile Library</li> </ul>
<p><u>May 16, Class 3</u></p> <p>“Educational and Human Services”</p> <p>Location: Henrico Theatre</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social Services</li> <li>• Mental Health &amp; Developmental Services</li> <li>• Public Health Department</li> <li>• Henrico County Public Schools</li> <li>• Tour of historical theatre</li> </ul>
<p><u>May 23, Class 4</u></p> <p>“Community and Economic Development”</p> <p>Location: Deep Run Recreation Center</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning</li> <li>• Economic Development</li> <li>• Community Revitalization</li> <li>• Public Utilities</li> <li>• Public Works</li> <li>• Tour of Deep Run Recreation Center, Public Works Sewer Jet Truck, Public Utilities CCTV Sewer Camera</li> </ul>
<p><u>May 30, Class 5</u></p> <p>“Stewardship and Services”</p> <p>Location: Operations &amp; Maintenance Complex</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finance</li> <li>• General Services</li> <li>• Internal Audit</li> <li>• Human Resources</li> <li>• Tour of the Operations &amp; Maintenance Complex using a School Bus</li> <li>• Graduation</li> </ul>

Use of Technology

Many areas of this program used technology as a basis for the creation or final result. Online registration was heavily used, more than in-person, which provided a quick and seamless process for the residents to register. The ActiveNet software system gave the coordinator the ability to run a variety of reports that could be exported into Excel for

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further manipulation. Microsoft Outlook email communication was used to interact with the participants each week providing updates or reminders about the upcoming class.

Using audio-visual equipment at each class to show a PowerPoint presentation consisted of a projection screen, LCD projector, laptop to run the presentation, microphone, podium, and a wireless clicker to advance the slides. Each week's presentations were combined into one cumulative file containing all of the topics for that evening which made it easier to load onto the laptop, and to print to hand out to the participants each week. Lastly, SurveyMonkey.com was used to provide a survey to the class participants after the five-week program ended. This online survey company offers a free survey with ten questions and provides a detailed analysis, which helped in planning the next academy.

### **The Cost**

There was no cost for the participants to register for the new Citizens Academy program. With the classes held in County facilities, there was no charge for building rentals, or overtime incurred from the staff and presenters who prepared for and attended each week. An estimated budget of less than \$1,000 for the five-week duration was projected to cover basic materials and supplies for the 3-ring binder compilation, and a certificate, refreshments, and a t-shirt for the graduates for the inaugural class. In the end, \$580 was spent.



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### **The Results**

The Henrico Citizens Academy received very positive praises from the Board of Supervisors, County staff, and most importantly the class participants. After three months of planning and creating the program, the program filled to the 30-limit capacity within nine calendar days. The program was promoted by the County's Public Relations and Media Services department press releases and an interview by the local newspapers. This promotion of the program generated numerous telephone inquiries to the coordinator from excited residents wanting to immediately sign up. After the maximum number of registrants filled the class to provide equal representation across the magisterial districts, ten additional registrants were placed on a waitlist.

Due to unforeseen personal conflicts, we had 22 complete the program and graduate on May 30, 2013. The inaugural class was a delight to meet and get to know over the five-week period. The median age was 53 years old and ages ranging from 36 to 88 of working or retired residents. Several of the participants shared the topics covered each week within their neighborhood associations and coworkers. The class was invited to attend the June 11, 2013 Board of Supervisors meeting to be recognized as the inaugural class; one person spoke to the Board, on behalf of the many participants who attended, to thank them for offering this program and recommended its continuation.

A Survey Monkey electronic survey was created and sent out one month after completion of the Academy to the graduates to anonymously respond providing them the opportunity to reflect and provide feedback. The results returned favorably with very minor adjustments. Based on this response, the Henrico Citizens Academy would

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become a program to be offered every year giving a new group of residents the opportunity to participate. The next Citizens Academy is being planned to be held again in May 2014 and has been expanded to allow seven residents from each of the five magisterial districts, for a total of 35 to participate, and each class will be held for five weeks on Thursdays with an earlier start time of 6:30 p.m. and ending at 9:00 p.m.

### **Worthiness of an Award**

Henrico County was pleased to offer an inaugural Citizens Academy to its residents to educate them about their local government, public school system, and to primarily become a more engaged citizen. This program provided the environment where county residents could come together to meet their local government officials and become more engaged within their communities. A unique aspect is the incorporation of public schools into the program, which went above providing more than a general government overview.

We are particularly proud that the idea was brought to us by two active and involved residents who believed that other residents would gain significantly from learning about where they live, work, and the educational system provided to the County's youth. This program was a collaborative effort of 21 departments that presented to the class, the five facilities that held the locations, and the tours of the facilities and heavy equipment used within the County. The achievement of this program will carry through in future academies with its ability to reach out to all five magisterial districts, opening the doors to promote engagement between residents and their local government.