



SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: July 1, 2024.** Please include this submission form with the electronic entry. If you do not receive an email confirming receipt of your entry within 3 days of submission, please contact [Gage Harter](#).


PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: Dinwiddie County
Program Title: Dinwiddie Citizens Academy
Program Category: Communications

CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: Marie Grant
Title: Grants & Community Information Coordinator
Department: Administration
Telephone: 804-469-4500 Website: www.dinwiddieva.us
Email: mgrant@dinwiddieva.us

SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: W. Kevin Massengill
Title: County Administrator
Signature: 

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The Dinwiddie Citizens Academy was established to increase awareness and transparency in local government. The goal is to create a cohort of well-informed citizens who are equipped to serve as ambassadors for the County in their communities. The program was developed and designed entirely in-house, by County staff and incorporates every facet of Dinwiddie County government. The Citizens Academy offers an innovative opportunity for County residents to increase awareness and become better educated regarding existing County government programs. The Academy enlists the support and participation of all components of County government to include the Board of Supervisors, Constitutional Officers, and all County departments. During the eight-week series, participants receive in-person presentations from each of these individuals and are provided opportunities to ask questions and provide feedback. Participants enjoy exposure to a variety of County facilities and graduate the Academy with a better understanding of Dinwiddie County operations and a desire to become more involved in local government processes.

PROBLEM or NEED:

The Dinwiddie County Board of Supervisors is committed to transparency in local government. Despite sharing information through a website, social media platforms, and a bi-annual mailing of a countywide newsletter, misinformation continues to circulate throughout the community. Citizens often said they were unaware of the official purpose and function of the Board of Supervisors, County Administrator, and County departments; with no clear understanding of how we work for them. Citizens were also not aware of opportunities to become more involved in local government.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION:

The Dinwiddie Citizens Academy was created to increase transparency in local government. The Academy is designed to provide a comprehensive overview of Dinwiddie County government. Participants attend a series of eight, 2.5 hour sessions, during which they are introduced to all five members of the Board of Supervisors, the County Administrator and County Attorney, all five Constitutional Officers, and Directors of all County Departments. Each of these individuals provides a synopsis of the purpose and function of their specific area of government. Participants have opportunities to ask questions and share feedback during and following each session.

A small Dinwiddie County-branded promotional item is given to participants at each session. Items include a small tote bag for Citizens Academy materials, notebook and pen, post-it notes, coffee mug, first-aid kit, Water bottle, magnetic clips, and lapel pins.

Sessions are held at various locations throughout Dinwiddie County in an effort to introduce and expose participants to County facilities. Sessions take place in the Board Room, Training Room, and Community Room of the Dinwiddie County Government Center; as well as in the Courthouse, Public Safety Building, Historic Courthouse, Robert & Betty Ragsdale Community Center, and the Eastside Community Enhancement Center. Guided tours of each facility are incorporated into the session.

The Citizens Academy culminates with graduation ceremony and presentation on how graduates can take a more active role in local government through participation on various boards and commissions.

Graduates of the Citizens Academy are added to the distribution list for media releases, in order to continue to equip them with good and accurate information to be shared in their communities.

The Citizens Academy is offered twice annually and can accommodate 25 participants per session.

FINANCING and STAFFING:

There is no cost to participants of the Citizens Academy. The program operates on an annual budget of \$1,750. This includes promotional items, light refreshments at each session, a graduation meal and certificates.

The Citizens Academy is coordinated by the County's Grants and Community Information Coordinator. She promotes and recruits participants, works with County staff and elected

officials to set the schedule, coordinates meeting location, giveaways, refreshments, post-session evaluations, plans the graduation agenda and meal, maintains communication with participants following graduation in order to disseminate important information to be shared in communities.

RESULTS/SUCCESS of PROGRAM:

The Dinwiddie Citizens Academy was launched in January 2023 and has been a tremendous success! Through the Academy we have raised awareness and increased transparency of local government operations. Further, we have cultivated a cohort of citizens who are well-equipped to serve as “ambassadors” for Dinwiddie County in their communities. Knowledge gained through the Citizens Academy has prepared graduates to take a more active role in local government. After two cohorts (Spring 2023, Fall 2023), we have graduates who are now serving as Officers of Election, on the Social Services Advisory Board, and one graduate is now Chaplain for the Sheriff’s Office. Participants complete a brief evaluation form following each session and the responses have been 100% positive! Comments include “Extremely informative!”, “I have learned a lot about what Dinwiddie County has to offer its citizens”, “Outstanding presentations”, “Great program”, “I am so glad I signed up for this Academy”, and the accolades go on and on...

Another success of the Dinwiddie Citizens Academy is the positive response we receive from presenters. From members of the Board of Supervisors to the Director of Public Works; we have received nothing but positive feedback. To have full participation of all five Board members, all five Constitutional Officers, the County Administrator, County

Attorney and each of our Department Directors, speaks volumes. Presenters have shared that they find the Citizens Academy “refreshing”, and “energizing”. They appreciate sharing information with citizens who genuinely want to learn more about how Dinwiddie County government operates.

Another unintended outcome and success of the Citizens Academy is the bond that is formed amongst participants. Participants get to know each other over the eight-session program. They build relationships that continue outside and extend beyond the Citizens Academy. Establishing connections is part of building a stronger community.

The Dinwiddie Citizens Academy was awarded a 2024 NACo Achievement Award.

WORTHINESS OF AWARD:

We truly believe the Dinwiddie Citizens Academy is worthy of a VACo Achievement Award. The program was developed and designed entirely in-house, by County staff and incorporates every facet of Dinwiddie County government. The Citizens Academy offers a new opportunity for County residents to increase awareness and become better educated regarding existing County government programs. The program has demonstrated measurable results through improved constituent services and intergovernmental cooperation. While other localities of our size have offered similar programs in the past, they have not had the support and participation of their entire local government system.

**Dinwiddie County
Citizens Academy
Virginia Association of Counties
2024 Achievement Award**

We are incredibly proud of our Citizens Academy and initiated our third cohort in May 2024. Sessions thus far have been filled to capacity.

We hope to, at some point, be able to expand the concept to include a “Senior Citizens Academy” tailored to citizens over 65 years of age; and a “Junior Citizens Academy” for teens 14-18.

Great things are happening in Dinwiddie County, and the Dinwiddie Citizens Academy is certainly at the top of the list!



Citizens Academy

**Cohort #1:
January - April 2023**



**Cohort #2:
September - December 2023**

**Cohort #3:
May—September 2024**





Assistant Director of Parks & Recreation, Chris Walters, presents to participants at the Eastside Community Enhancement Center.

Deputy County Administrator for Finance & General Services, Anne Howerton, gives an overview of her division to include the budget process, in the Community Room of the Government Center



Deputy County Administrator for Planning and Community Development, Tammie Collins, the Director of Planning, Mark Bassett, and the County Building Official, Jerry Perkinson, presenting to the Citizens Academy at the Eastside Community Enhancement Center.



Board of Supervisors member, Harrison Moody (now retired) welcoming the first-ever Citizens Academy, and discussing his role in local government. This session was held in the Board Room of the Government Center.

Director of Economic Development, Morgan Ingram, gives an overview of her role and answers questions pertaining to strategies for bringing new business and industry to Dinwiddie County.



Citizens Academy participants take a guided tour of the Government Center.



Participants listen intently to a presentation made by Fire & EMS Chief, Dennis Hale. This session was held in the Public Safety, Emergency Operations Center.



Participants hear from Sheriff D.T. "Duck" Adams in the Dinwiddie Historic Courthouse.

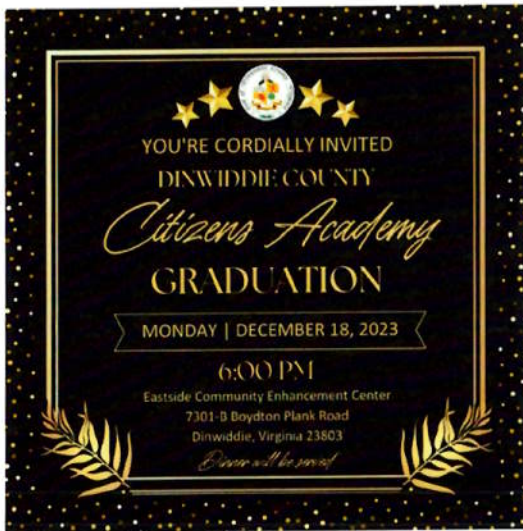
Participants receive a "behind the scenes" tour of the Circuit Court Clerk's Office.



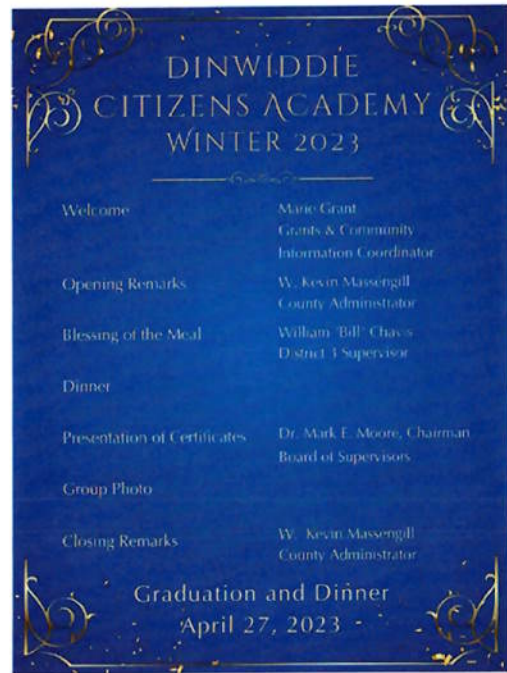
County Treasurer, Jennifer Perkins, presents to participants. This session was held in the County Courthouse.

County-branded promotional items given to participants over the 8-week series (one per session),





Invitation to Graduation



Graduation Program



Graduation meal for Cohort #2. All presenters are Invited to join the celebration. Participants are seated alongside County leaders and enjoy a meal and continued discussion of topics. This graduation was held in the ballroom of the Eastside Community Enhancement Center. In this photo, graduates are seated with Board member, Dr. Mark Moore, County Administrator, Kevin Massengill, and Director of Parks & Recreation, Ray Vines.

Also attached:

Citizens Academy Schedule

Citizens Academy Post-Session Evaluation

Citizens Academy Schedule

Summer 2024

The Dinwiddie Citizens Academy meets from **6:00 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.** on alternating **Thursdays**, beginning May 23, 2024.

The schedule is as follows:

Week 1 (Thursday, May 23, 2024)

Location: Dinwiddie County Government Center – Board Room
14010 Boydton Plank Rd.
Dinwiddie, VA 23841

Topics: Orientation to Citizens Academy
Introduction of Board of Supervisors
Overview of County Administration
County Attorney

Week 2 (Thursday, June 6, 2024)

Location: Government Center – Community Room
14010 Boydton Plank Rd.
Dinwiddie, VA 23841

Topics: Finance & General Services
Children’s Services
Public Works
Information Technology

Week 3 (Thursday, June 20, 2024)

Location: Eastside Community Enhancement Center
7301-B Boydton Plank Rd.
North Dinwiddie, VA 23803

Topics: Economic Development
Tourism
Youth Workforce Development Initiative
Planning
Building Inspections

Week 4 (Thursday, July 11, 2024)

Location: Dinwiddie County Courthouse
14008 Boydton Plank Rd.
Dinwiddie, VA 23841

Topics: Constitutional Officers
General Registrar

Week 5 (Thursday, July 25, 2024)

Location: Robert & Betty Ragsdale Community Center
20916 Old School Rd.
McKenney, VA 23872

Topics: Parks & Recreation
Cooperative Extension

Week 6 (Thursday, August 8, 2024)

Location: Public Safety Building – Emergency Operations Center
13850 Courthouse Rd.
Dinwiddie, VA 23841

Topics: Department of Social Services
General Registrar
Human Resources

Week 7 (Thursday, August 22, 2024)

Location: Government Center – Training Room
14010 Boydton Plank Rd.
Dinwiddie, VA 23841

Topics: Department of Social Services
Human Resources

Week 8 (September 5, 2024)

Location: Robert & Betty Ragsdale Community Center
20916 Old School Rd.
McKenney, VA 23872

Topics: Graduation



**Citizens Academy
Post-Session Evaluation**

*Please respond to the following statements using a scale of 1-5.
(1= strongly disagree....5 = strongly agree).*

I found the presentation interesting and engaging.

1 2 3 4 5

The presentations were clear and easily understood.

1 2 3 4 5

The session increased my knowledge and understanding of the departments highlighted.

1 2 3 4 5

Adequate time was allotted to cover each department.

1 2 3 4 5

I have follow-up questions for specific presenters.

Yes No

Presenter: _____

My Name: _____

(Your contact information will be provided to the presenter you listed and he/she will contact you directly to follow-up.)

Please feel free to share comments below: