



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: County of Henrico

Program Title: Becoming Kings

Program Category: Regional Collaboration

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Title: Deputy County Manager for Community Affairs

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Program Overview

The ultimate purpose of the “Becoming Kings” program is to cultivate more prominent leadership among male youth in their communities. The program aims to help young men become leaders by teaching them to think critically and comprehend themselves and the world around them. Henrico County Public Schools’ Office of Equity, Diversity and Opportunity hopes to support these students in embarking on manhood through an intensive process of self-reflection, community and global analysis and an awareness of their own ideas and ambitions. Those who complete the passage will assist in recruiting younger students; instead of men killing each other, the program seeks to make them community assets.

Problem/Challenge/Situation Faced by Locality

Belonging is defined as the feeling of security and support when there is a sense of acceptance, inclusion and identity. Research shows that an increased sense of belonging leads to collaboration, problem-solving and better decision-making. When Becoming Kings was created, it was designed to enhance students’ sense of self, strengthen their ability to collaborate with each other and their communities, critically think and problem-solve and establish better decision-making skills. Becoming Kings seeks to dispel the notion that students of color, especially males, can only outperform their peers when it comes to disciplinary infractions. The program strives to destroy the negative constructs that students cannot destroy. Instead, it encourages them to better serve their communities by becoming more adaptable, emotionally intelligent and communicative.

How Program Fulfilled Awards Criteria

Becoming Kings, participants know the effects this program has had on them and how it has played an integral role in helping them rise and be who they knew they always could be. The

program was never intended to be about being in the spotlight. It is about doing the work that the community so desperately needs to produce students — young Black men — who compete in a world that does not always see them. Becoming Kings is a movement, not just a program and will continue to move the needle, one young Black male student at a time. The program will continue to push them and their capacity to be great. Our program brought together a group of people willing to lead, mentor and guide these young men into successful futures — the type of effort that can be applied to any organization or department willing to do whatever it takes to uplift its population.

How Program Was Carried Out

Becoming Kings is a rite-of-passage program. The purpose of the program is to provide youth with the skills necessary for success as they move to the next part of their lives. The programming focuses on the students' self-esteem, self-efficacy and self-actualization to enhance their sense of belonging. As a result of the program, we believe that the standing of students in their schools and communities will be elevated.

When Becoming Kings was formulated, it was with the historical context that Black men have faced centuries of systemic racism and discrimination, which can contribute to feelings of marginalization and diminished self-worth. This notion, coupled with the constant negative stereotypes portrayed by the media, compelled Henrico County Public Schools' Office of Equity, Diversity and Opportunity to aid our students in their growth. Media plays a major role in the development of our youth. As a result, some Black men have developed defense mechanisms, including inflated egos, to protect themselves from further harm or to assert their value in a society that may not always recognize it.

This ego is seen in classrooms, hallways and countywide data as it pertains to negative behaviors and negative occurrences within the education system. Black male students tend to have much more to contend with than their peers and have fewer positive outlets to manage frustrations and teach them how to have healthy relationships. The program aims to rewrite that narrative and help students find ways to use their voices to elevate themselves and their communities. The Becoming Kings program strives to motivate young black men to be who they are at their core. Since the inception of Becoming Kings, the program has run during the summer months as a six-week intensive rite-of-passage program. The program originated at Highland Springs High School and expanded in 2023 to Varina High School. The summer program has impacted the students, parents and the community alike, creating interest in other schools around Henrico County. Organizers have been approached to make Becoming Kings a full-time program offered during the school year and summer.

The program has three anchors. The first is an introductory period that focuses on helping students build strength in the areas of identity, or who they are; what trust looks and feels like to them; and exploring their communication style. The second anchor is centered on the idea of deconstruction. While the program focuses on deconstructing the paradigms of male Blackness in this segment, the program also shifts to provide an understanding of the importance of emotional intelligence and how its impact applies to all aspects of life. The last strand of the curriculum is centered on the idea of reconstruction. To harness the essence of this notion the program has students complete a capstone project that incorporates the earlier lessons while having them identify a problem and then solve it. Ultimately, they are posed with questions designed to encourage reflection and practice self-actualization and acceptance.

The target student for Becoming Kings is an African American high school male. This student is more than likely overlooked in the traditional school setting because he does not pose any major

behavioral issues. However, he is also not a standout student in terms of educational success. He is more than likely classified as a middle-of-the-road student or one who could easily slip through the cracks.

When selecting students, the program asks that assistant principals, counselors and teachers select students they feel can best be served by the program. We require that students not pose any major behavioral threats and are teachable. Because Becoming Kings has a strict set of operating principles, the program encourages those selecting the students to take the time to explain the program's mission and vision. The program has high expectations and expects all students to adhere to them. The program ensures the principles are explained and received before the inaugural session.

The Cost of the Program

Currently, the Becoming Kings program is funded by \$5,000 in grants. This includes general operating costs, field trips and venue expenses. The general operating costs provide workbooks for the participants, shirts and snacks for each meeting. Field trip costs include buses, lunches and any activity payments. Venue expenses are set aside when the program must rent facilities outside the school division. Additional expenses are incurred for activities that enable the participants to expand their knowledge.

At times, the students have requests of their own that require funding. Administrators examine annual budgets and proceed if funding allows. The program also includes those expenses in its books. General operating costs are around \$1,000. This number is based on a group size of 20 students at both Highland Springs and Varina high schools.

With 20 students, the program spent \$1,000 on snacks for sessions, shirts, workbook materials

and gifts for guest speakers. An additional \$2,000 was spent on food. Dinner was provided for two events for the students and their families. The program orientation provided dinner from Chick-fil-A for all students and parents as well as siblings. Program graduation also included a catered dinner with desserts and decorations. These two events require a major portion of the budget to ensure there is enough food for all participants.

The final \$2,000 is used for field trips, venue payments and miscellaneous items needed for the program. Because all the meetings take place at HCPS venues, the only cost is for janitorial services reserving a space. That helps keep the cost low for venues. However, field trips can be a bit more costly: the team-building field trip at the start of the program ranges from \$800 to \$1,000. Depending on the activity, it can get a little more costly, which must be considered. The program strives to keep a contingency of \$500 to \$700 in the budget for an emergency fund.

Program Results

Over the past two years, the program has been in existence and there has been exponential growth. From summer 2023 to February 2024, the program has grown from eight students at Varina High School to 17 students, nine of whom are new. The parental orientation also had outstanding support. Participation at Highland Springs High School has also grown exponentially, growing from 10 students to 22. Both programs have retained their initial students and also grown interest in the program in a positive way. Students have grown in ways that they voice during each session. They have been able to expand their vocabulary, public speaking abilities and gained more self-efficacy.

Some young men who have successfully completed the Becoming Kings program have returned as mentors, eager to continue the work and grow their community. The students are taking

responsibility for their actions, are more aware and, more importantly, understand how to positively affect their schools and communities. These young men are now first to volunteer, first to speak up amid adversity and first to take a stand on difficult issues. They understand the power of their voices and how, when used effectively, that power can help them achieve great things.

Brief Summary

Becoming Kings is a program designed to advance the exposure, experiences and engagement needs of young African American male students. From the stance of equity, diversity and inclusion, our goal is to provide more opportunities for students than they might otherwise receive. The program advocates for students by creating space for them in different job markets they may have little to no knowledge of. A field trip to Richmond International Airport allowed them to meet with aero-engineers and question them about their education, upward movement in the career field and earnings. By providing hands-on experiences like these, students can begin to bridge the gap of different career fields and expand their palette of what is possible in their futures. The program also offers field trips to colleges and universities to expand students' views of campus living, what it takes academically to achieve acceptance letters and financial requirements to attend these colleges and universities. These onsite experiences help them to broaden their horizons and give upper education consideration.

Despite the socioeconomic issues that participating students may face, the program ensures that they all have equal access to everything the program offers. Also, to ensure that the program advances the narrative of diversity, equity and inclusion, a great deal of time is spent on students' mental development and capacity. The department takes a great deal of time to build strength and confidence in that area as well as in the area of emotional intelligence. The program stresses that emotional intelligence plays a crucial role in relationships that students may encounter. The

program strives to provide them with the ability to adequately express themselves in spaces that traditionally view them simply in a negative context because of negative imagery and stereotypes in the media and other social outlets.

The lasting impact is a culture of positivity, belonging and empowerment that will carry these young men into the future and inform the generations that follow them.