



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: Regional River Response
Program Category: Criminal Justice & Public Safety

CONTACT INFORMATION

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Program Overview

The Henrico County Division of Fire is responsible for a large portion of the James River and responding to emergencies in these areas. This includes the upper and lower portions of the river, which combine both open/navigable water and swift water challenges in the non-navigable areas. Calls for service in these waters often yield treacherous conditions for both residents and first responders.

There is strength in numbers on these calls, and the more first responder personnel present allows for safer, more efficient, and effective rescue operations that benefit first responders and the community. This project utilizes the regional Emergency Communications Centers to operate off a common GIS mapping layer to dispatch the three (3) closest municipalities with appropriate resources for river response. This GIS layer identifies Emergency Access Points to the river from Hopewell to Goochland. Common terminology ensures first responders understand where available access points are on the river and automatically dispatch the closest applicable resources to ensure safe and efficient river operations.

Problem/Challenge/Situation Faced by Locality

During a river response, or anytime first responders are dealing with a crisis in the water, it creates some of the most hazardous conditions for our personnel and the Special Operations section. Ensuring a quick response with an adequate footprint to the river is a gap that had been identified for some time, and a sufficient response for any one municipality is difficult. Regional partnerships ensure adequate staffing of these incidents with specialized personnel and equipment. This gap was experienced on Memorial Day weekend in 2022, when a group of paddleboarders and tubers went over the Boshers Dam in 9-foot flood waters, losing two civilians in the process. With no formal process for automatic regional response, the City of Richmond received the call for service

that day and attempted to mitigate the incident on their own on the first day. Conditions were treacherous for Richmond's swift water teams, and their strength in numbers was not there due to a small compliment of swift water personnel present. There was no luck in finding the two victims the first day. Richmond City reached out to Henrico and asked for assistance, and at that point, with a unified command in place, a significant regional response happened. This included 9 agencies, all sending resources. The search effort lasted for a week and finally, in the end, both victims were located to help bring closure to the families. These efforts were made in a safe environment due to a large compliment of emergency personnel and with safety boats present during searches, effective rehab time for providers, as well as air and drone support from the Virginia State Police. This is how a water incident should be run. Regional partnerships are strong, and interoperability between departments is healthy. This new model has since been implemented with Henrico Fire spearheading the effort.

How Program Fulfilled Awards Criteria

This program checked many boxes, but the biggest win here is not only an improvement to the Henrico County Community, but an improvement to the regional community collaboration initiative. This program worked outside the boundaries of one locality and found success region wide. This large-scale strategic goal makes the program worthy of this award by the number of people and communities it is improving. In addition, the program enhances response to the community and ensures a higher quality of safety for first responders. Although Henrico County decided to spend some funding to upgrade resources, not all municipalities did. This was a program implemented with regional touchpoints and in most cases, very little cost. Municipalities primarily changed their response model by working together and developing / maintaining regional partnerships and relationships.

How Program Was Carried Out

When a call for service comes in on the James River, the caller's location will affect which cell tower is activated, and in turn will affect which Emergency Communications Center is called. When the Emergency Communication Center (ECC) receives the call, the dispatcher will try to determine the closest Emergency Access Point to the caller for river access. When they click on that Emergency Access Point in the GIS map layer, a host of information pops up, which includes specified coordinates, special needs for access, and the 4 closest municipalities, with the 3 closest being dispatched. Four are listed in the event one municipality is not available. This ensures adequate personnel and logistical resources are dispatched simultaneously.

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Financing and Staffing

Henrico County did recognize internal weaknesses in its swift water and maritime response capabilities, mostly associated with aging equipment and a small on-duty footprint. The regional response project was primarily centered around adequate personnel response and the project could have improved existing responses by doing just that. Henrico County did take the opportunity during this process to re-evaluate its logistical assets in addition to personnel assets to ensure the best equipment was being utilized, and to replace long overdue aging water assets.

Henrico Fire expanded its on-duty swift water and marine team personnel compliment and trained them appropriately to meet industry gold standards. While the County did not hire additional personnel for this initiative, it did reallocate existing employees to these response teams and train them. Logistical equipment upgraded internal programs already in place and made them better, while enhancing the capability of the regional effort.

Program Results

Fortunately, the region has not encountered another disastrous call like the 2022 Memorial Day example, but we are much more prepared if we do. There have been some false alarms and smaller-scale events that have occurred in the last year where the system has dispatched the appropriate response force. Not only are we providing a diverse response to a diverse regional community, but we are also ensuring that our first responders are safer and go home to their families. The regional partnerships have also improved interoperability and day-to-day relationships between regional departments, even when not on the river. In addition, regional partnerships between Emergency Communications Centers have improved. Thanks to regional MOU's and the necessity for ECC's to work more closely for Regional Mutual Aid capability, communications centers that may have not regularly partnered with each other now have to work more closely together to ensure these calls for service on the river are dispatched appropriately. These types of relationships are invaluable to the community and ensure a better outcome in the event multiple municipalities must work together on an emergency scene.

Brief Summary

Emergency response and public safety are expensive. Human and physical resources, along with specialized training, require a large amount of support from any municipality. Regional partnerships help adjoining communities better meet response times in certain areas, and

eliminate each municipality's need to single handedly address expensive internal human and physical resource issues by relying on regional partnerships to share that load. Looking specifically at budget and economic reality, it is fiscally responsible to develop MOU's / partnerships with regional stakeholders to ensure efficient and consistent response to the community without being solely responsible for the solution. This program checked many boxes, but the biggest win here is not only an improvement to the Henrico County Community, but an improvement to the regional community.