



## 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: Student Government Day

Program Category: Community & Economic Development

### CONTACT INFORMATION

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### SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Monica Smith-Callahan

Title: Deputy County Manager for Community Affairs

Signature: *Monica Smith-Callahan*

## **Program Overview**

Student Government Day connects high school seniors with professional mentors in Henrico County General Government or Henrico County Public Schools for nearly a full semester of collaboration. Each year, Student Government Day gives some of the county's most talented high school students a firsthand look at the operations of the county government, school system and courts. They spend about three months working alongside key decision-makers — including members of the Board of Supervisors and School Board as well as the county manager, superintendent of schools, judges and leaders of multiple departments. These mentors support and guide students in addressing local and/or school-based issues. This experience culminates in Student Government Day, where students share feedback with officials, present solutions to problems and participate in simulated government meetings.

The program is a hands-on way to cultivate students' awareness of their role in their community and how they can apply the knowledge, skills and attributes they've developed as students to participate actively in local government.

## **Problem/Challenge/Situation Faced by Locality**

Engaging high school students meaningfully in local government can be difficult. Even extremely motivated students with an interest in government are often drawn to higher profile national or statewide issues and processes while remaining disconnected from local government issues that have far more meaningful impacts on their lives.

Student Government Day was created in 1958 to give students hands-on experience and allow them to learn about the work of government and school leaders. The organization is a fellowship of women and men who join to strengthen ties to the community by supporting the lives of young people in programs, fundraisers and service projects.

After 66 years, Student Government Day's mission and purpose did not change, but the overall program development and objectives needed to be adjusted. The continuation of the program was no longer engaging, exciting or effective for our students and adults.

Henrico County Student Government Day exists to connect students more meaningfully to local government broadly and issues that affect their daily lives and their peers specifically.

### **How Program Fulfilled Awards Criteria:**

Promoting and encouraging civic engagement is to the benefit of all. This initiative seeks to accomplish that in ways that other localities can replicate. The benefits of the program are:

**Promoting civic participation:** The program can encourage other schools or educational institutions to implement similar programs, promoting civic participation among students.

**Hands-on civic engagement:** Students engage in civic activities, providing them with a real-world understanding of government processes and functions.

**Professional mentorship:** The involvement of mentors, including elected board members and government leaders, demonstrates a commitment to providing students with valuable guidance and insights from experienced individuals in the field.

**Problem-solving and research skills:** Students research and address local and school-based issues, fostering the development of critical thinking, problem-solving and research skills.

**Simulated government meetings:** Students share feedback and present solutions in simulated government meetings, demonstrating their ability to apply theoretical knowledge in a practical setting.

**Community awareness:** Students are more aware of their roles in the community, which aligns with the project's broader objectives of fostering responsible citizenship and community

Lastly, the investment in Henrico students: students gain valuable experience. They can participate in a program that could lead them on a path of public service for a lifetime.

Henrico Student Government Day is a well-rounded initiative that imparts knowledge and instills a sense of responsibility and active community participation. Henrico County's local government

is stronger with youth, adults and older adults invested in it. The participating youth are outstanding representatives of what a prosperous county should look like. Their talent, energy and participation make it even better.

### **How the Program was Carried Out**

Student Government Day is one tradition that makes Henrico such a great place to live. It highlights the important partnership between Henrico's county government and the school system and gives some of the county's brightest students a hands-on opportunity to learn how their government works every day. With this in mind, organizers had to find a way to reimagine the program and add spark and excitement. Still, it has evolved rapidly in the past three years with new goals to make a more impactful program for the high school students and staff mentors who host them.

The goals for the reimagined Student Government Day program are to:

- Help students develop meaningful working relationships with county government or HCPS central office mentors.
- Give students an authentic civic engagement experience with county government, allowing them to apply the skills and content knowledge they've developed as HCPS students.
- Develop students' skill in defining problems and creative approaches to problem-solving while enabling HCPS and Henrico County government to gain authentic student feedback.
- Encourage school equity by allowing all 11 high school seniors an opportunity to participate.

Student Government Day participants are high school seniors enrolled in Henrico County Public Schools government courses. Students invite students to participate. Once selected, interest surveys are shared to match students based on their specific interests and skills. Mentor and student assignments are shared in the fall of the school year, and over the next few months, students collaborate with mentors to address solutions to a local issue. Students then present

their research findings during the culminating Student Government Day in March while shadowing and attending sessions.

Students are split among Henrico County General Government and Henrico County Public Schools. They work with officials, including the Henrico Board of Supervisors, Henrico Circuit Court, General District, Juvenile & Domestic Relations Court judges, constitutional officers and agency heads. Other students work with the Henrico School Board members, the superintendent, and chiefs and directors of school division departments. Henrico County Public Schools works with Henrico County officials to coordinate active participation by elected officials and county representatives. The schools and county government work together to provide operational support for the program. This collaborative effort ensures that the venues, resources, expectations and communication protocols are well-prepared, contributing to the effective implementation of the program.

The program takes off in early December so that students and mentors can connect and come up with a project/case study focus. Project topics could include information transparency in the digital age, sustainability, community engagement, youth violence or local taxation in the commonwealth. The students have full reign to select whichever topics they feel passionate about. Throughout the next few months, students collaborate with school and county agencies to create a presentation to be showcased on the big day. Student Government Day is usually held in March. The students meet their mentors for breakfast and welcoming remarks. Students then take tours and participate in job-shadowing. Mentors allow students to sit in on real-life meetings and learn about projects they are working on. Students are able to share feedback and help advise on specific projects; for example, one student presented an alternative approach to how the county can be more environmentally friendly. The day concludes with a mock Board of Supervisors meeting for the general government students and a mock School Board meeting for the school students. The student Board of Supervisors and School Board members preside over the meeting and ask questions of their peers after each presentation.

The program has been adapted every year based on survey feedback from county officials, faculty sponsors and students to ensure that participants actively gain practical and meaningful applications to effectively support their communities and schools.

Since the first Student Government Day program, organizers have placed students in internships, provided class credit opportunities and appointed them to Henrico's youth council and other committees to ensure they have a voice in Henrico's present and future.

### **Financing and Staffing**

The costs associated with Student Government Day ensure that all participants can actively engage in the program. To provide cohesion and inclusion, several student participants work with Henrico County's arts specialist to design a Student Government Day T-shirt. These shirts are then distributed to participants to wear on Student Government Day. The budget for T-shirts is \$1,800. The school division provides school-related leave for all faculty sponsors to see their students in action with their mentors. The cost for staff leave is \$1,500. Students may travel to various locations in Henrico County government cars to provide the most authentic learning experience. This cost is less than \$1,000. Organizers from HCPS spend \$1,800 to reserve a location and funding for breakfast and student presentations. The General Government spends \$2,022 for breakfast. Lunch is sponsored by their respective departments and allocated through their departmental budgets. Lastly, organizers recognize student participants with certificates, which cost \$250. In all, the approximate total for the program is \$6,350. The costs are split among different department budgets to share the load for this powerful program.

Resources and projected costs:

- Location and funding for breakfast and student presentations: \$1,800
- Transportation with county cars: \$1,000
- Printing and certificates: \$250
- T-shirt order: \$1,800
- School-related leave for faculty sponsors: \$1,500

## **Program Results**

The success of Student Government Day can be measured through various program results and outcomes that demonstrate the positive impact on participating students and the community.

Student Government Day was so inspiring that this year, a small subset of high school juniors was able to participate in the program to gain firsthand experience of public service. These juniors fulfilled the same requirements as the seniors and completed them efficiently. Since the reimagined program, the number of high school seniors has also doubled. In 2022, there were 95 students; in 2023, there were 69 students; and in 2024, there were 98 students.

Surveys are shared with all the participants, including the mentors, to fully engage and continue to mature the program planning and impact. The 2023 survey of 60 individuals indicated that the reimagined Student Government Day was genuinely beneficial and engaging. The student presentations were creative and informative. Presentation topics included Student Mental Health, Metal Detectors in the School System, Recruitment, School Safety, Improving Student Experience, and Environmental Committee. Students used the art of videos, PowerPoint presentations, live graphs, surveys and technology interaction to share their research findings.

**Increased civic awareness:** Students demonstrate a heightened awareness of local government processes and functions. Surveys reveal a significant increase in students' understanding of their civic responsibilities and the role of government in the community. One student stated that they admire the work of a judge, as he has to make real-life sentencing decisions based on real-life actions.

**Enhanced leadership skills:** Participants showcase their improved leadership skills by researching and addressing local issues. Mentors report observing enhanced decision-making and problem-solving abilities among students.

**Effective communication:** Student presentations during Student Government Day reflect improved communication skills. Feedback from mentors highlights enhanced articulation and presentation abilities.

**Community engagement:** Students actively engage with the community by proposing solutions to real-world issues. Community feedback indicates a positive response to student initiatives, showcasing the program's impact beyond the classroom.

**Positive mentoring relationships:** Surveys and testimonials from students highlight the positive effects of mentorship in shaping their understanding of government and leadership. Mentors report a sense of fulfillment in contributing to the development of future community leaders. Mentors also noted that the program provided valuable perspectives from the current student population.

In summary, the success of Henrico Student Government Day is multifaceted, encompassing increased civic awareness, leadership development, community engagement and positive outcomes for both students and the broader community.

Student Government Day is a reminder that progress must continue. Handing the reins of government to Henrico youth helps them learn how their community functions. The experience helps them grow and to recognize what they can achieve.

When students report for “work,” they see how every aspect of Henrico’s government works together to provide critical services for Henrico residents and the business community.

### **Brief Summary**

Engaging high school students meaningfully in local government can be difficult. Even extremely motivated students with an interest in government are often drawn to higher profile national or statewide issues and processes while remaining disconnected from local government issues that have far more meaningful impacts on their lives.

After 66 years, Henrico County Public Schools’ Student Government Day’s mission and purpose did not change, but the program was reimagined to broaden and update its appeal.



Student Government Day connects high school seniors with professional mentors in Henrico County General Government or Henrico County Public Schools for nearly a full semester of collaboration. Each year, Student Government Day gives some of the county's most talented high school students a firsthand look at the operations of the county government, school system and courts. They spend about three months working alongside key decision-makers — including members of the Board of Supervisors and School Board as well as the county manager, superintendent of schools, judges and leaders of multiple departments. These mentors support and guide students in addressing local and/or school-based issues. This experience culminates in Student Government Day, where students share feedback with officials, present solutions to problems and participate in simulated government meetings.

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**Student Government Day Program  
Supplemental Material**

**2023 Video - <https://youtu.be/244EKXgd6iQ?si=VSLkKNZc6NJpDUd>**

**2024 video - <https://youtu.be/Y0MDeZfeBOM?si=VXbH94lgXPG0TeDN>**









