



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: Taking it to HEART: Henrico's Environmental Action Resource Team
Program Category: Environmental

CONTACT INFORMATION

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SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

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Program Overview

Protecting the health, safety, and well-being of a community is a fundamental responsibility of government, and Henrico County believes being a steward of our environment is a key component of this responsibility. Further, our residents and businesses desire Henrico to be a sustainable and resilient community. We created Henrico's Environmental Action Resource Team (H.E.A.R.T.) to advance our environmental goals and increase collaboration. This is a multidisciplinary committee with internal and external stakeholders collaborating on all aspects of environmentalism.

H.E.A.R.T. serves as the think tank and mobilizes the government and the community to implement projects and programs aimed to promote sustainability and mitigate the local impacts of climate change. In less than two years, we have identified and succeeded with holistic short- and long-term goals in natural resource conservation, preserving greenspace, multimodal transportation, and pollution reduction. H.E.A.R.T. has already passed local legislation, secured a significant federal grant, and planted more than 240 trees – this is just the beginning.

Problem/Challenge/Situation Faced by Locality

Henrico County has always had strong environmental programs, but these efforts were decentralized. Further, there were no formal pathways for the public and other external stakeholders to participate in the development and implementation of policies and programs in this realm. At the same time, the need to strengthen our resiliency was necessitated by the developments in climate science and advocacy from the community. The County Manager established an Environmental Policy Statement in 2013, but it needed to be updated to reflect current standards and address advancements in technology.

How Program Fulfilled Awards Criteria

Henrico County has been a leader in environmental stewardship within the Commonwealth of Virginia for many years, and the formation of H.E.A.R.T. has accelerated our sustainability efforts. Our committee was not created out of obligation but for the good of our local ecosystem and passion for creating a resilient county. H.E.A.R.T. has already made tangible outcomes for our businesses and residents through local ordinances, securing grant funding, and increasing the tree canopy with native species on public land. Having internal and external stakeholders

collaborate on environmental projects has expanded our ability to address the local impacts of climate change.

We believe H.E.A.R.T. can serve as a model for other localities to better centralize internal environmental projects to push innovation while broadening community engagement around sustainability. Government – alone – cannot change our climate trajectory. Only through strategic partnerships can we start to make big impacts. By having state agencies, non-profits, residents, and academia, our environmental reach has grown beyond the limitations of local government.

How Program Was Carried Out

In August of 2022, the County Manager tasked staff with bolstering our commitment to environmental stewardship. After forming a group of relevant county agency representatives to better understand the current extent of our environmental program, the Board of Supervisors directed staff in December 2022 to establish H.E.A.R.T. This organization would serve as a formal committee with Board appointments and provide progress reports on sustainability projects and performance measures. Now, H.E.A.R.T. includes representatives from numerous county agencies, resident appointees from the Board of Supervisors, environmental not-for-profit organizations, the Department of Forestry, and students from Henrico County Public Schools (HCPS). The committee has two co-chairs to balance technical and policy advancement and has five subcommittees designed to focus on key industry areas involving the environment.

Financing and Staffing

Currently, most of the programs we plan and execute are funded with existing county agency budgets or capital project budgets. New monies were identified for outreach (\$7,000), establishment of a reforestation program (\$50,000), and match a federal grant to expand public access to EV charging stations (\$363,200). With the ubiquity of federal funding for sustainability projects, the County Administration will continue to match local match money available for successful grant applications.

The membership of the committee is either existing county employees or appointed volunteers from the community. It is the administration's premise that it is every county agency's responsibility to promote sustainability, so the employees who serve on H.E.A.R.T have jobs either directly or indirectly related to the environment. Further, the Board of Supervisors appoints

a community member to be a liaison for their respective magisterial district. Other stakeholders, like our school system, non-profits organizations, and state agencies, volunteer their time on H.E.A.R.T to help advance their environmental goals and collaborate.

Program Results

Since August 2022, H.E.A.R.T. has accomplished local environmental gains in several different manners for both the public and private sectors. Each of our subcommittees has been incredibly active. The measurable outcomes range from small- and large-scale projects increasing tree canopy, implementing flooding mitigation measures, enhancing public and private participation, and transportation initiatives.

The team has successfully received approval for two local legislative actions from our Board of Supervisors. First, Henrico County and Henrico County Public Schools entered into a relationship and executed a Memorandum of Understanding and appropriated \$50,000 to a local non-profit organization, Capital Trees, to implement a reforestation program on park and school properties. Second, Henrico County passed an ordinance opting into the state program called C-PACE to facilitate the financing of energy efficiency, renewable energy, and resilient projects on existing structures and new development. Now, economic development projects can qualify for cost-effective and attractive financing to construct greener buildings thanks to the change in local laws.

Another goal we accomplished related to transportation and energy was to increase the use of EVs in the county. Henrico was awarded \$1,452,800 from the Charging and Fueling Infrastructure Discretionary Grant Program with a local match of \$363,200. The goal of the project is to expand access to publicly available EV charging infrastructure in underserved communities. The program will add the necessary infrastructure to support up to 38 new charging ports at seven public locations across all five magisterial districts.

Other projects were community-focused and intended to engage the public to help increase their awareness and hear their ideas. Some of these projects included the implementation of a dedicated webpage and public relations campaign; we strategically planted more than 500 trees on public land to increase biodiversity, shade, and water quality; and H.E.A.R.T. developed and publicized a local-specific native species list for property owners and developers to encourage the increase of native plantings.

Brief Summary

The committee's mission is to push forward county efforts to promote sustainability, preserve natural resources, beautify the community, and protect the environment. Each subcommittee uses this mission to guide their individual areas of responsibility. The Energy and Resource Conservation subcommittee promotes a culture of sustainability in Henrico to conserve resources, build resilience, improve quality of life, and protect the environment. This group's short- and long-term goals include increasing the use of renewable energy for county operations, increasing the prevalence of electric vehicle (EVs) use in the county, implementing new solid waste programs to reduce, reuse, and recycle, and analyzing data to develop new technologies for energy and water conservation. The next subcommittee is Greenspace and Recreation, whose objective is to champion the preservation and stewardship of greenspace and passive recreational opportunities in Henrico. Some of this group's goals include the expansion of community gardens, promotion of native plantings, and making open space more accessible.

Third, the Mobility and Active Transportation subcommittee encourages awareness and expansion of Henrico's sustainable transportation infrastructure. Active projects include adding end-of-trip facilities for pedestrians and cyclists, developing a mobile application for wayfinding, and promoting pedestrian safety. The Water Resources subcommittee protects and improves Henrico's water resources through community education, county-led actions, and partnerships. Currently, they are working on removing pollutants from public bodies of water, developing programs for residential rainwater harvesting, and completing more riparian buffer projects.

The final subcommittee is Outreach, and this group has the task of promoting and engaging the public and business community about the activities of H.E.A.R.T. They developed a strong web presence and a public relations campaign featuring 'Stewie,' a turtle named for his role in being a steward of the environment. Further goals of this group are expanding its presence at community events, hosting more volunteer events, and engaging the younger generation by establishing the H.E.A.R.T. Youth Council. The Council currently has 9 students from our local school system, who will receive credit for school and community service through their work with H.E.A.R.T. to advance the county's environmental goals.

Each subcommittee's membership is diverse, with individuals from the groups outlined in the overall committee, but they also include other advocates or subject-matter experts for specific

projects. For example, the Greenspace and Recreation subcommittee is partnering with a professor at Virginia Commonwealth University to develop plans for vegetable gardens based on current land use designations and demographics. The Co-Chairs support the work of each subcommittee and are tasked with providing a strategic vision for the committee as a whole.

Supplemental Materials

<https://henrico.us/heart/>

<https://www.instagram.com/stewartheartcrew/>



H·E·A·R·T
Henrico's Environmental
Action Resource Team







