



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](#).

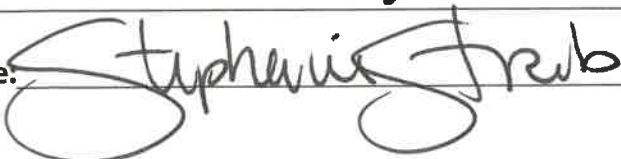
PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: Orange County
Program Title: County Cup Competition
Program Category: Parks & Recreation

CONTACT INFORMATION

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SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Stephanie Straub
Title: Assistant County Administrator
Signature: 

2024 VACo Achievement Award Nomination

Category: Parks & Recreation

Nominee: County Cup Competition

Executive Summary:

Parks and recreation departments are typically focused on designing programs geared towards the public, and rightfully so. However, when Orange County undertook a dedicated effort to revitalize and improve our workplace culture, our parks & recreation department saw and seized the opportunity to be a positive force for change within the organization. By directing some of their creativity and enthusiasm for fun into light-hearted competitive events that broke the barriers between siloed Orange County government departments, they initiated a grassroots effort that has made great strides towards creating a more unified (and cheerful) organization.

The inaugural County Cup Competition was a series of monthly events held in 2023 that forged a set of shared cross-departmental experiences. Engaging in friendly competitions (from trivia challenges to egg tosses) gave departments a reason to interact in a positive way with others that they may usually be separated from either physically or operationally. Devising a variety of competitions that rewarded different skill sets and abilities ensured that all could participate. Participation numbers steadily rose as the competition carried deeper into the year. Regular official updates from the Parks & Recreation Director paired with word-of-mouth anecdotes that traveled organically through the organization, building awareness and fostering a spirit of fun. The County Cup has been a critical component of our greater efforts to improve our workplace and position Orange County as an employer of choice in the area.

Main Nomination:

Recognizing the correlation between employee engagement and the level of service to our residents, Orange County began the process of reviewing potential avenues to improve our workplace in 2022. From that review, the Workplace Culture Initiative was born. In the same spirit and as an element of the Initiative, Orange County



Figure 1: Chief Deputy Clerk Alyson Simpson proudly shows off her certificate and wooden putter trophy from winning the hallway putting contest in June 2023!

Parks & Recreation (OCPR) went a step further and sought to create a fun and engaging grassroots competition to help break down the silos between departments. The County Cup was formed in January 2023 as an answer to this challenge. The cup consisted of a variety of unique, fun, and engaging events that were presented to employees each month by OCPR staff. Typically, each department head selected someone from their office as “Team Captain.” Captains chose who would participate and represent their department each month, since some competitions required smaller teams. Handling participation this way also helped preserve fairness; some of the county departments are much larger than others. At the end of each event, 1-10 points were awarded to the top ten finishers. Overall event winners were awarded a framed certificate and a prize/trophy of some type. Unique prizes were chosen for each challenge to help highlight the nature of the event itself. Monthly leaderboards, sent internally through all-user emails and externally through our county’s newsletter, helped build excitement, and even aided recruitment efforts by promoting our culture to potential job seekers.

January 2023 hosted the inaugural event. The Parks & Recreation team travelled to government buildings across the county to see who could get the highest score in the classic electronic game Simon. Two staff from each department were allowed to participate for points. As mentioned, logistics and fairness often required that representatives from each group compete, rather than the whole department. However, the spirit of the contest also dictated that as many employees as possible should have the opportunity to participate at some point. A balance was struck by occasionally offering “open-to-all” events. February’s event, a valentine-themed Candy Heart Guess, was the first of these. Traveling to each location made participation as straightforward as possible. With very little barrier to entry, 86 participants enjoyed trying to divine the total number of candy hearts in the jar.

Staff kept the monthly challenges relevant and engaging by connecting them to seasonal themes or significant cultural events. March’s event was a



Figure 2: The “yolk’s on you!” Here, Maintenance Technician Austin Haney walks away from the egg toss event a bit messier.

traditional NCAA Men’s March Madness basketball pool. Again, the low entry barrier and widespread interest helped this challenge become very popular. An egg toss in April created the opportunity for some favorite staff photographs, some of which still “crack” us up. Cognizant of the diverse talents of our staff members, it was important to vary the skillset highlighted by each challenge. Some events rewarded physical ability (without becoming true athletic competitions), others emphasized trivia knowledge or deductive reasoning, while still more events were simply focused on good old-fashioned luck.

May's event blurred the lines between luck and skill. An inflatable money machine booth provided the setting. But instead of gathering money, up to four staff from each department took turns scooping, swooping, and spinning to gather as many plastic flowers as they could. Since different colored flowers awarded different point values, there was an element of strategy involved. Despite this, the real fun came from simply watching coworkers dance around in the flowery funnel cloud.

June took a different approach. The "O.C. Open" was held in honor of the U.S. Open Golf Championship. While still light-hearted, this event leaned a bit more towards actual athletic competition. Participants from each department putted multiple golf balls down the Parks & Recreation office hallway to see who could get the highest score in what can best be described as a cross between the Price is Right classic, "Plinko," and putt-putt. One of the most valuable aspects of the County Cup was (and is) the way it generated stories that travelled throughout the organization. Some celebrated triumphs while others lightened spirits with humorous anecdotes, but all of these tales helped eliminate silos by creating a shared experience to which all employees could relate. In fact, a favorite story arose from the June O.C. Open challenge. The gusto with which our Economic Development Director putted during her attempt caused the ball to cascade down the hallway, leap the targets, and put an actual dent in the hallway door. Being a good sport, she took it in stride, and folks still remark about how fun that game was when walking by the mark on the door.

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In July, participants celebrated Parks and Recreation Month with a “Ball Guess.” In this game, participants tried to guess the number of balls inside of the OCPR trophy case. August presented the opportunity to help reinforce the connection between the County Cup and the larger organizational Workplace Culture Initiative. Featuring a dart-throwing competition as an element of the Orange County J.U.I.C.E. Employee Appreciation Event, more than 120 staff members participated! Connecting these pieces of the Initiative improved morale by making clear to employees that Orange County’s cultural goals were truly staff-driven. In September, the inflatable money booth returned by popular demand. Instead of gathering flowers, this time contenders were trying to collect as many leaves as possible, with different point values awarded for different colored leaves. Once again, the shared connection shone through, as participants remembered the previous version of the game. Parks & Recreation staff overhead remarks between competitors referencing which employees had performed well in the previous game, and how they had accomplished the feat. The ability to breach barriers was clear; cross-departmental stories had become the basis for new strategies!

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In October there was trickery afoot, OCPR concocted a riddle-based guessing game where participants tried to guess the amount of candy and corn kernels inside of a jar. Hints to the true amount were hidden inside of a riddle sent to all staff a week before anyone actually saw the jar. This would be the last “open-to-all” event for 2023, but would also receive the most participation. A staggering 132 employees joined the fun. In November, we held a “Turkey Shoot,” possibly the most unique of all the events that year. Teams of three used a three-person water balloon launcher to shoot plush turkeys toward

targets for points. Coupling the actual challenge (hitting the targets was not easy) with the absurd setting of flying plush turkeys created a situation ripe for laughter, morale-boosting, and storytelling.

After building excitement for an entire year, a holiday-themed Jeopardy-style gameshow provided the concluding event for the inaugural County Cup! Each department selected a representative team of four staff. Parks and Recreation staff traveled to each participating group to facilitate the event. To add



Figure 3: Turkeys away! Participants work as a team to launch a plush turkey towards some targets.

value to the prior events, each team began the game with the actual number of points they had accrued so far. Answering questions correctly increased this total, while incorrect answers had the potential to cause a loss of points. Stakes were high. Their total at the end of the challenge became their final score for the year-long competition. Despite the pressure, this actually provided an additional element of fairness; regardless of current standings, everyone still had a chance to win the whole competition. Teams were left completely in the dark about how the other departments finished to avoid influencing which categories and point values they selected. There was also one Double Jeopardy question. If found, the team could risk all the points they had accumulated in hopes of a big payoff. In the end, the Operations Team, who did not miss a single question, won by a single point over a Public Works team. Public Works had risked all their points on a final Double Jeopardy question, and got the answer correct, but it still wasn't quite enough! As a side note, if the Department of Social Services team had gotten their last question correct, they would have actually finished one point ahead of the winning Operations

Team! Knowing all of this behind-the-scenes, Parks and Recreation staff could barely contain themselves. Following the Cup's conclusion, the Director [released a video](#) announcing the winner and detailing exactly how close the competition was, which has continued to foster good-natured competitive talk between several departments that previously did not often work together.

Looking back, we can definitively call the County Cup a huge success! From its humble beginnings with a simple "Simon" contest to a high-stakes trivia gameshow, the Cup never lost sight of its goal - to bridge the divide between departments that are separated either physically or operationally. It was, and is, a key element contributing to the success of our organization's Workplace Culture Initiative. Anticipation grew for each new event and participation increased over time. In the end, 199 individual staff members competed in at least one event, with a total of 820 participants between all 12 events. As mentioned, perhaps more telling than numbers are the stories and camaraderie spread by the County Cup. Time and time again, employees would regularly return from an event and share the hilarious antics or triumphs of their coworkers. Memories from the Cup continue to provide "remember when..." moments that bring our folks together through the shared experience. The Cup was also extremely cost effective. Most games were fashioned using leftover items and equipment already available to OCPR. Leveraging existing resources helped keep expenses minimal. On average, each event cost less than \$125, including trophy and certificate expenses. It was a small price to pay for a significant boost to morale.

Silos are a concern in most organizations, and almost all that operate out of multiple facilities and across several shifts. With that in mind, the overwhelming success of the inaugural County Cup illustrates the importance of creative approaches to bridge

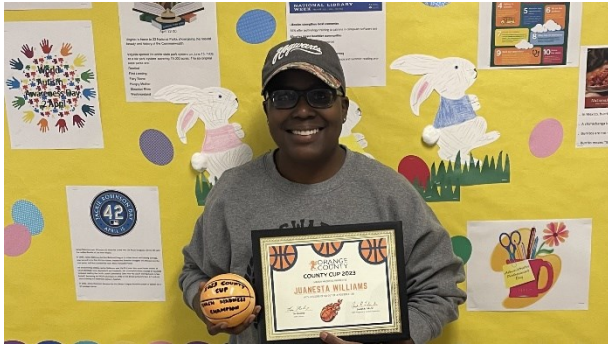
those gaps. OCPR looks forward to continuing to answer this challenge with innovative, engaging, and fun competitions for years to come! After watching the Parks & Recreation Director’s recap of the Cup’s finale, our County Administrator perhaps said it best. “Wow! Such high drama! And so much fun! Congratulations to the winners and all the contestants! Thank you, Tim, and Joe, for a great season of entertainment and competition.”



Figure 4: Tim Moubray, Orange County Parks & Recreation Director, recorded a video following the conclusion of the inaugural competition. This video revealed exactly how close the competition truly was and announced the winner to the organization. Access the video at: https://youtu.be/mJ3kDvs-aB4?si=Bw5VfmrecLk_g-O4

Leaderboard													
Department	Simon	Candy Hearts	March Madness	Egg Toss	Gatherin' Flowers	OC Open	Ball Guess	Darts	Gettin' Up Leaves	Candy Corn Guess	Turkey Shoot	???	Total
DSS	3.5	21.5	7.33	9	8	8	15	8.5	0	19	22		121.83
Public Works	0	3	6.5	19	4	10	9.5	5.5	0	10	0		67.5
Finance	19	6	9	8	10	0	0	0	6	0	6		64
Ops Team	5.5	14	0	0	11	5	6	0	10	0	4		55.5
Admin/HR	0	0	0.33	0.75	0	12.5	9.5	4	10	15	3		55.08
Office on Youth	7	0	18	0	1	6.5	0	9	0	6	3		50.5
Treasurer	0	0	0	0	9	2.5	0	10	7	18	0		46.5
Development Services	0	9.5	0	7	2	0	0	0	6	11	0		35.5
Library	8	0	0	0	7	0	0	0	0	20	0		35
IT	3	0	3.83	0.75	3	4	0	0	3	0	17		34.98
Extension	5.5	0	6.5	5.25	0	0	15	0	0	0	0		32.25
COFEMS	0	0	0	0	0	6.5	0	8.5	0	11	0		26
E-911	0.5	1	0	5.25	0	0	0	0	9	0	5		20.75
EconDev/Tourism	3	0	3.5	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0		10.5
Sheriff	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	9.5	0	0	0		9.5

Figure 5: Monthly leaderboards provided motivation and prompted reflection on recent challenges. New events were kept secret to build anticipation until revealed during that month.



Figures 6-11: County Cup events took a variety of forms, from guessing games, to indoor golf challenges, and more!