



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: _____

Program Title: _____

Program Category: _____

CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: _____

Title: _____

Department: _____

Telephone: _____ Website: _____

Email: _____

SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: _____

Title: _____

Signature: _____



VACO ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OPPORTUNITY: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- **Introduction:** County Staff wanted to create opportunities to improve and increase community engagement with local government, in an innovative, fun, and interactive way that fosters relationship building and communication between County employees and Citizens.
- **Methodology:** County staff leveraged our Event Planning Committee to conduct benchmarking with other localities to see what is being done that is successful and effective.
- **Conclusion:** The Event Planning Committee proposed a series of monthly food truck events running from May to September and the results have been wildly successful! Thus, **Downtown Chow-Down** was born!

VACO ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

OPPORTUNITY: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Challenge (or Opportunity):

County staff has been challenged with finding ways to improve community engagement. This has been an area of opportunity that continues to present itself; a gap that we wanted to try and fill in a non-traditional, creative, and fun way. Our goal was (and is) to engage our citizens to foster good will and encourage relationship building. After all, relationships are an essential building block in any strong foundation.

Our first efforts were focused on what other municipalities are doing in this arena. So, we did some benchmarking and found (based on our responses) that there wasn't anything out of the ordinary happening other than traditional meetings, town halls, etc. While these meetings are necessary, most would agree that they are not the most effective way to build relationships and improve engagement. We then put our creative hats on and brainstormed various ideas, without putting any limitations on what the ideas were, including the amount of money we could spend. From that list, we identified what was realistic vs. out of the question! We came up with two (2) really great ideas and decided on one that would be our initial project. There were several factors that we had to consider when planning: cost, logistics, the what, who, when, where and how.

We knew cost would be a major concern as it is for every municipality. The trick was to identify how to get the most out of what we had to work with. We also had to

consider logistics, since Pittsylvania County is the largest county in the Commonwealth. It would be impossible to include every citizen, so we decided to start small. For those who are not familiar, the County seat is located in Chatham, Virginia. Chatham is a small, quaint, and what some may call romantic town. Everyone knows everyone. This would be a huge advantage when planning the event. All other considerations fell into place once we determined the “what”, or the solution we decided on.

The Solution:

The first ever **Downtown Chow-Down** event was held in the summer of 2023 in Pittsylvania County!

The How:

County staff sought the help of our Event Planning Committee (Committee). The Committee has been responsible for planning and executing some truly great events for the past few years; most employee centered. When we met in early 2023, we wanted to do something really unique for employee appreciation in June. We hashed over several ideas, but when someone mentioned a food truck event, it was a unanimous YES!

Now, planning an event like this takes time, space, collaboration, money, and of course food trucks. So, we started to rally our resources which included:

Maintenance Staff

- Set-up for tables and chairs
- Identify space and block off for the day of the event

Public Relations Staff

- We needed to market this event to all of our employees and citizens!

- Coordinate with Town management to let them know important details of the event.

Finance

Because this was an employee appreciation event, we wanted offer employees something to bring them to the event (other than the delicious food). So, the Committee came up with the idea of a Food Voucher that had a dollar value assigned. This \$\$ had to be approved by Finance.

Committee Staff

Identify food truck vendors and secure for date of event. This was difficult task given the County seat is in Chatham and most vendors were wary of travel expenses vs. turnout. But our solution to this concern was the creation of the Food Voucher, which essentially carried a guarantee that food would be purchased. And having such a large number of employees only improved the Vendor's chances of sales. The vendors were committed at this point.

Committee members created Vouchers with a dollar value that were to be handed out on the day of the event. A table was set up at the event where employees could claim their Voucher. Employees were required to RSVP and Vouchers were created beforehand for each employee. A committee member wrote the employee's name on the Voucher. (This ensured no employee received multiple vouchers). We also kept blank Vouchers on hand that could be used for employees that showed up but did not RSVP. (Human Resources provided the committee with an employee roster to keep track of attendees.)

The employee would then use the Voucher for purchase of food. Any food purchase exceeding the Voucher total would be paid directly by the employee. Likewise, any food purchase that was less than the value of the voucher would not be refunded, or change given to the employee.

Collaborate with all of resources to make sure every aspect of the event was being taken care of.

The When:

It was decided that the first event would be held in June. Because it was so well attended, and because everyone loved the various food choices from the food trucks, and because it gave everyone an opportunity to have lunch, relax for an hour or so, sit down and talk, get introduced to people you don't know in the community ... and because there were so many positive outcomes from this one event, we decided to continue monthly through the summer. With a great twist – invite citizens, families, and businesses to join us! And everyone LOVED it! The timeframe for the event was 11am – 2pm. This way it allowed the food trucks time to get in early and get set up, and allowed employees time to come on their lunch breaks and even stagger lunches if needed so everyone could attend.

The Where:

The County owns a sizeable parking lot adjacent to the County Administration building. We decided to have the monthly **Downtown Chow-Down** in the parking lot where there is plenty of space for the food trucks and the proper electrical hook-

ups, room for tables and chairs ... it was the perfect spot. And, it's right on Main Street in Chatham so citizens, businesses, school kids, could all attend.

The Results:

We had to come up with a catchy name for this event since it had expanded beyond our employees. We brainstormed many different names but when someone said **Downtown Chow-Down**, we knew that was it! And it has been one of the best events that the County has facilitated, and one that we will continue during our summer months due to popular demand.

It's not just about the food, even though food does bring people together. It's the opportunities that are borne out of this event that have lasting impacts; relationship building, collaboration between departments, citizens and businesses, fostering good will with our citizens and giving them a chance to participate side by side with our staff so they can get to know us a little better and may even call us by name when they see us again!

The fun, the fellowship, getting to spend time together over some good food during lunch, putting our phones away and having a conversation with each other, creating memories and taking photos ... it's all part of **Downtown Chow-Down!**