



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: York
Program Title: Engaging the Public in the Budget Process
Program Category: Communications

CONTACT INFORMATION

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SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Mark L. Bellamy, Jr.
Title: County Administrator
Signature:

**2024 VACO Achievement Award Program
Nomination Summary
York County, Virginia**

Program Title: Engaging the Public in the Budget Process

Program Category: Communications

Summary/Program Overview:

In all levels of government, public input is key to ensuring the needs of the community are met. This is especially true of local governments where decisions affect the daily lives of residents.

Unfortunately, the number of people who participate in local government is quite low. Too often, feedback from citizens comes only after a project or agenda item has been acted on by the governing body, with a substantial number of citizens stating (inaccurately) that they were not kept informed. In an attempt to increase citizen participation in an open and visible manner, York County launched the Budget Shorts program during the development of the most recent operating budget. The program utilizes an online questionnaire and in-house video production staff to create a series of videos addressing the questions and concerns of the public.

The Challenge:

Over the years, York County has utilized a variety of outreach methods to invite the public to participate in the development of the operating budget, which includes the setting of tax rates and dedication of funding to education, public safety, and other key functions. As technology has changed, so too has the communications program. For example, the development of social media has provided another platform for the advertisement of meetings and has offered additional

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opportunities for public participation. The result was a small increase in public interaction on local governance items. With the knowledge that gains, whatever size, were possible, the challenge was on to find other ways to involve the County's citizens. A group of key staff members met in September 2023, just prior to the start of the County's budget development process, to brainstorm ideas. The result was the Budget Shorts outreach program.

The Solution:

Staff members were under direction to utilize existing resources when establishing the Budget Shorts program. York County has an active Public Affairs Office, which includes the video production staff. One subscription module in use by Public Affairs is Jotform, described on its website as "a powerful online form builder that makes it easy to create robust forms and collect important data." Jotform has been used by York County for public surveys, interoffice team building efforts, and more. Because the form builder was already in use by the County, the staff created a question/answer form with submissions sent to Public Affairs and County Administration staff.

Once received, the questions were reviewed by the County with several becoming the subject of a Budget Short video. Depending on the question, subject matter experts within the County staff were utilized to provide a response via video recorded by Video Services. After the addition of background footage and graphics, the videos were approved by County Administration and placed on the website, social media, and County cable channel (WYCG-TV).

As an added bonus, utilizing County staff members that don't typically interact with the public is an extra perk of this program. Many of these staff members would not usually be known

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to the citizenry and their knowledge, expertise, and importance to the organization is a benefit worthy of sharing. We hope to include additional staff members in the future so that more receive this recognition.

It's also important to note that all questions/comments submitted received an email response, including those that were addressed in a Budget Shorts video.

Financing:

This program utilized in-house resources and an already-subscribed-to platform for the online questions/answers portion. Therefore, this program was produced with no extra cost to the citizens.

Results:

Over 80 questions/comments were submitted with the majority through the online budget form and others through emails to the Board of Supervisors and comments received during meetings. This resulted in 14 Budget Shorts videos being produced and placed online, on social media, and broadcast on the County's cable channel.

In addition, portions of the videos were edited together to give an overview of the series, which was shown at Board of Supervisors' meetings to help advertise the series, and also at a Budget Listening Session that was held at the Yorktown Public Library where citizens could interact with the Board of Supervisors in an informal manner.

York County does not participate in a television ratings system, so there is no way to determine how many viewers watched the Budget Shorts on the cable channel. However, in total,

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the videos placed on Facebook reached over one thousand people, while online views were in the several hundreds.

Ultimately, any program that results in even a single citizen participating in local government is a successful one. Plans are already in the works to not only continue the Budget Shorts program, but to work on ways to enhance it.

The Budget Shorts videos are available to view online at www.yorkcounty.gov/budget.