

# PRESS RELEASE



## Virginia Counties Recognized for Model Programs



**RICHMOND (May 12, 2026)**—The Virginia Association of Counties (VACo) is pleased to announce the 40 recipients of the 2026 Achievement Awards, which recognize excellence in local government programs. VACo received 103 submissions.

Winning entries focused on addressing issues of public safety, community development, and health, as well as finding solutions to challenges that counties encounter daily.

### [Winning Achievement Award Submissions](#)

### [All 2026 Achievement Awards Entries](#)

“Virginia’s counties continue to demonstrate that local government is where innovation meets action,” VACo Executive Director **Dean Lynch** said. “This year’s submissions reflect the creativity, leadership, and commitment county officials bring every day to solving real challenges and improving the quality of life for residents across the Commonwealth. Congratulations to all winners and thank you to all who participated.”

This year’s judges were **Charles Hartgrove, ICMA-CM**, Managing Director of the Virginia Institute of Government; **Dr. Sheryl Bailey**, Visiting Professor of Practice at Virginia Tech, and former Chesterfield County Deputy County Administrator; and **Penny Gross**, former longtime Fairfax County Supervisor.

**Henrico County** and its *Combating Ageism Amongst Emergency Service Providers* won this year’s **Best Achievement Award**.

“Henrico County’s program stood out for tackling an issue that often goes unrecognized but has a direct impact on workforce culture, service delivery, and public trust,” Hartgrove said. “By addressing ageism within emergency services, Henrico has created a model that strengthens both its employees and the communities they serve.”

The judges also selected winners for **Best Small County Achievement Award** (population 70,000 or less) and **Best Large County Achievement Award**. **Greene County’s Employee Cross-Training Program** earned top honors among small counties, while **Prince William County’s Crisis Receiving Center Complex** received the large county award.

“Programs like Greene County’s Employee Cross-Training initiative show that innovation is not defined by population size or budget—it’s driven by leadership, adaptability, and a commitment to investing in people,” Bailey said. “Counties like Greene routinely develop solutions that strengthen organizations from the inside out.”

Gross praised Prince William County for its innovative program. “Prince William County’s Crisis Receiving Center Complex represents the kind of bold, collaborative leadership communities need today,” Gross said. “It addresses critical public needs while bringing together partners, resources, and long-term vision in a way that will make a lasting difference for residents.”

**Chesterfield County** tops the all-time Achievement Awards list with 63. Chesterfield County has won an award in each year of the 24-year history of the program. **Henrico County** is second on the list with 53 Achievement Awards while **Loudoun County** is third with 37.

The VACo Achievement Awards program is a competitive program open to local government members of the association.

[Winning Achievement Award Submissions](#) | [Achievement Awards Website](#)  
[2026 Achievement Awards Entries](#) | [Past Winners](#) | [Past Judges](#)

VACo exists to support county officials and to effectively represent, promote, and protect the interests of counties to better serve the people of Virginia.

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