

2021 SCAC Awards Program

This application is for:

J. Mitchell Graham Memorial Award

Project Title

Satellite Voting Unit

County/Counties

Charleston

Staff Contact

tgreen@charlestoncounty.org

Job Title

Communications Coordinator

E-mail Address

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Phone Number

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4045 Bridge View Drive , Suite B231
North Charleston, SC, 29405

Please provide a summary of your entry (no more than 100 words) to be used in a handout for the awards competition and included in press releases/publications. You may either type the summary in the text box or upload it as an attachment below.

The Satellite Voting Unit (SVU) brings the Board of Elections and Voter Registration office to voters within Charleston County. Citizens now have the ability to cast their absentee vote close to where they live without driving. The SVU also serves as a traveling billboard, making it possible for citizens to learn more about our office and the services we provide. Voters can feel disenfranchised if they have to travel great distances or feel discouraged not knowing what our office does. The SVU will allow our office to provide a face in the community of who conducts elections.

Presentations may include more than one speaker; however, each speaker should be aware that the 10-minute time limit is strictly enforced. Please list the name, title, and e-mail address of each speaker:

Name	Title	Email
Isaac Cramer	Director of Voter Registration and Elections	ICramer@charlestoncounty.org

To upload your summary, please type "see attached" in the text box, then upload a Microsoft Word or PDF document below.



Please check boxes for attachments you will submit as part of your application

A concise Project Description to explain the purpose and significance of the entry (up to eight pages). Please follow the prescribed naming convention for your Project Description file.

Any additional materials needed to support your application (up to five pages).

Submissions for The COVID-19 Response and Resiliency Showcase and the J. Mitchell Graham Memorial Award must include a letter of support from the county council chairman or the county chief administrative officer.

South Carolina Association of Counties J. Mitchell Graham Memorial Award

2021 AWARDS COMPETITION

Charleston County Board of Elections and Voter Registration

Satellite Voting Unit



1. Why was this project undertaken?

The Charleston County Board of Elections and Voter Registration (BEVR) identified many challenges for voters during the 2020 elections due to the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Recruiting Election Day and absentee voting workers
 - The need to increase pay
- Accessibility for voters in rural areas of the county
- Disseminating accurate voting information to over 300,000 voters
 - Updates to absentee voting laws
 - COVID-19 Protocols while voting
 - Voting absentee by mail, in-person or on Election Day
- Equipment to process absentee by mail ballots
- Technology to track ballots

We also recognized that our jurisdiction is a large, diverse and growing county. More voters (even when not in a pandemic) want easier access to voting and to our office to register to vote, change their address or get a photo ID. As Charleston County continues to grow, so does the demand for our office's services.

Resources to combat these challenges were limited via the county budget, so our office applied for a grant with the Center for Tech and Civic Life (CTCL). The CTCL is an organization which provides resources and data to election officials and the general public in order to modernize elections and increase public confidence and trust in the voting experience. In 2020, CTCL was able to distribute over \$250 million in grants to over 2,500 election departments across 49 states. We were excited to apply for the grant because we knew it would help us to increase poll worker participation and assist voters across the county in ways we have not been able to do before. One of the unique and innovative ways we knew we could reach our more rural population was to purchase a Satellite Voting Unit (SVU).

The SVU would accomplish the following:

- Absentee voting in rural areas and municipalities located a great distance from North Charleston
- Bring absentee voting to residents working second and third shift
 - A convenient location for voters to drop off by-mail absentee ballots
- Outreach events to inform, educate and interact with voters
 - Festivals
 - Farmer's markets
 - Schools/Colleges
 - Churches
 - Political events/debates/forums
- Serves as emergency polling location on Election Day
- Services for people with disabilities and experiencing homelessness

The availability of the grant funds made it possible for our office to purchase the unit. BEVR provides comprehensive election services in Charleston County including voter records, election operations, election administration and communications. The trailer will allow our office to better provide these services.

2. What is the significance of this project to your community as a whole? How does it relate in importance to the other problems in your community?

Charleston County is over 1,358 square miles, with 33% of it being water. It can take a significant amount of time for residents in some areas to travel to our centrally located county office in North Charleston. Additional factors like traffic, travel over bridges and a person's schedule can make it even more difficult to reach the BEVR. The SVU provides equal access to our voters across the county from McClellanville to Rockville. If a polling place is hard to reach, it is less likely every eligible voter will use it.

The SVU brings our office to each community without having a barrier for transportation. Citizens will be able to cast their absentee vote close to where they live without driving. That means saving some residents over an hour in order to get to our office. The SVU also serves as a traveling billboard, making it possible for citizens to learn more about our office and the services we provide. Rapid growth in our county causes logistical issues to make voting and the ability to register to vote problematic. Voters can feel disenfranchised if they have to travel great distances or feel discouraged not knowing what our office does. The SVU will allow our office to provide a face in the community of who conducts elections.

The SVU has made it possible for our office to go to coastal, rural and urban areas. It also opens the opportunity for us to use hospitals, schools and large businesses to make it easier for voters to cast their ballot from where they work and go to school.

Also, with the threat of hurricanes in October and November, the SVU will stand by in case of an unexpected disaster. If a polling location were damaged or inaccessible due to a storm, we would be able to deploy the SVU to that location in a matter of a couple of hours. This ensures voters would still be able to cast their ballot even if their regular voting location was closed.

3. How much of the county's population is benefited by the project? In what specific ways are different groups of citizens within the county better off than before?

Our citizens will have opportunities to utilize our SVU where they live or work. While national elections typically have the highest voter turnout, often the most influential elections take place at the local level. The SVU encourages voter participation by making voting more accessible.

No longer will our office be constrained by having a physical building; we can travel to every municipality and provide services to our citizens. Students who have moved to Charleston and wish to register to vote will not have to find transportation to our office. Instead, we will be able to conduct voter registration drives during orientation and other times of the year.

As we see with voting, it can be difficult to make a one-day event (Election Day) while working and having busy schedules. Area employers will have the opportunity to provide their employees with the option to vote absentee in their parking lots, making it easier for our citizens to cast their ballot. With large employers like The Boeing Company and the Medical University of South Carolina, both of which operate with second and third shifts, the SVU could eliminate the need for employees to take time off to go cast their ballots.

Senior citizens that live in community homes often rely on bus transportation or voting by mail. In many regards, our most vulnerable voters have to trust someone else in order to make sure their vote counts.

By bringing the SVU to senior living facilities, voters can cast their ballot in person on a machine like Election Day or drop off their by-mail ballot to an election official.

While Charleston County has grown significantly over the last decade, the SVU will meet the needs of voters who do not have transportation. The benefit of the SVU is simple, it will serve all of our citizens regardless of circumstance. It makes voting more convenient and accessible through an innovative solution.

4. What degree of success did the project attain? What major objectives were achieved? Provide data where possible.

Since implementing the SVU, we have used the mobile unit for two absentee voting elections: Town of Hollywood Special Election and Town of Sullivan’s Island General Election. Traditionally, these areas have very few absentee voters due to their perspective locations. Those who wish to vote absentee must travel to the BEVR office in North Charleston, which could be a one-way trip of an hour for some residents.

For the Town of Hollywood Special Election, 95 voters utilized our SVU in a two-day event. To put that in perspective, for the June 2019 normally scheduled election, only 22 people voted in person during the 30 days of absentee voting. The 332% increase in voters demonstrates how inconvenience can hinder the turnout of an election because the commute from the Town of Hollywood to our office is anywhere from 30 to 45 minutes from our office.

We defined success as receiving and utilizing the trailer. The financial restriction of spending over \$100,000 was met with the application and receiving grant funds.

Objectives met:

- We provided absentee voting to rural areas of the county. Example:
 - Town of Hollywood
 - 95 voters voted at the location
 - Over 300 people saw the trailer in use
- We provided absentee voting to a coastal area with great distance to our office
 - Town of Sullivan’s Island
 - 225 voters over a two day absentee voting event
 - Roughly 25% of the historical over all voter turn out
- While deployed to rural and coastal areas, the trailer attracted voters to stop by and learn more about the SVU and BEVR

Project Effort/Difficulty

1. What did your county have to do to accomplish its objectives? If your county worked with another local government or consultant, how was the work divided?

We researched how the trailer was used in other jurisdictions around the country, such as Orange County, California and Denver, Colorado. Staff then developed a plan of how BEVR could use a voting trailer for our own County. We saw their success in providing multiple voting options to their residents and heard feedback from voters on the convenience that a SVU provides.

In order to meet our objectives we had to contact our community partners: Charleston County Public Library, town and city clerks, League of Women Voters and civic groups. Making sure that our community partners were aware of the existence of the SVU was important for advertising and collaboration. Additionally, Town and city clerks needed to authorize the use of the SVU for their local elections.

Finally, we had to write and apply for the grant to purchase the trailer with full support of both the Charleston County Election Commission and Charleston County Council.

2. What challenges occurred during the project? Were there any community concerns?

The CTCL awarded grant funds on August 28, 2020, and Charleston County Council approved the acceptance of the funds September 10, 2020. Once BEVR received the funds, staff worked quickly to order the SVU in hope of using it for the November election. One of the biggest challenge was waiting for the trailer to be delivered. With COVID-19, there were many manufacturing delays that postponed the delivery of the trailer.

Another challenge was finding a vehicle to tow the trailer. Trucks are expensive and finding the right vehicle to tow over 7,000 pounds was just one consideration. Using remaining grant funds, we worked with Fleet Management to purchase a Ford F-250 to transport the trailer.

In October, South Carolina Voter's Alliance sued our office for receiving the grant funds. However, the judge dismissed the case stating that federal judges should only interfere in voting operations close to an election under the most pressing circumstances, and this case does not qualify. As a government agency, BEVR is allowed to apply and receive grant funding. Nothing in South Carolina law stipulates otherwise.

The BEVR had to battle misinformation surrounding what "mobile voting" is and who we were trying to serve with the SVU. The State Election Commission wanted clarity on what we were doing with the trailer and if we were following appropriate state laws. Also, some area groups thought that our office was only targeting minority voters and voters that tended to vote Democrat. Only eligible Charleston County voters can take advantage of absentee voting and only residents of the county can utilize it for other services. The BEVR does not prioritize one group over another with the SVU and it will be used in all areas of the county where elections are being held.

3. What were the nature and extent of the county government's efforts to alleviate the problem(s)? How difficult was it to accomplish the project's goals and/or objectives?

Communication was instrumental to alleviate the previously discussed challenges. We had to communicate with our vendor regularly to ensure the delivery of the SVU and work with their project timeline. It was eventually delivered to our office on October 30, 2020. While it was disappointing to not be able to utilize the SVU for the November General Election, we knew it would still be an integral part of future elections and outreach efforts.

We provided a response to the State Election Commission outlining the purpose of the SVU and that proper laws were followed. Particularly, the question of what law allows a county to utilize the SVU. In practice, the SVU falls under the same statutes and procedures that allow a county to have a brick-and-

mortar satellite voting location for absentee voting. Voting is conducted at the SVU just as it is at any one of our other five satellite voting locations.

4. Was financing the project an obstacle? Were there any unusual factors inherent in financing the project?

BEVR identified the need for a mobile voting trailer in order to address some of the obstacle that comes with facilitating elections. The total cost of the SVU was \$102,000. BEVR did not have these funds available, so staff had to apply for a grant through the CTCL. Without those funds, we would not have been able to purchase the trailer.

The application process included proving a need for the grant funds and demonstrating that we would utilize funding in compliance with United States tax laws. Just some of the stipulations of the grant funds included only using the money for the public purpose of planning and operationalizing safe and secure election administration; expending the funds by December 31, 2020; and documenting how the grant funds have been expended. Funding was the biggest roadblock to making this project realistic.

5. Did any agencies, citizen groups, or other organizations assist your county with this project? Did their participation pose any particular challenges or offer any unique contributions or benefits?

The CTCL was instrumental by providing the grant to purchase the trailer.

6. Are there any unresolved problems or other goals left to tackle?

Our goal is to create a website that will answer the question “Where is the SVU?” The website would be a live locator and detail the events, voting days and any other engagements the SVU would take part in.

Creating a design for the trailer and having it wrapped poses a funding challenge. Our office feels that we can engage area colleges in a competition to design the wrap. We feel this would help get even more “buy-in” from our area colleges and universities. By wrapping the SVU we hope to grab attention as it is being driven around as well as make it more noticeable when it is out in the community. This helps push our efforts of voter registration and election turnout, as well as increase voter education.

Meet with municipalities to utilize the SVU for their elections. Our office needs to communicate the importance and benefits of using the SVU. As seen above, absentee voting will increase with use of the SVU which in turn will increase overall voter turnout and awareness.

Our goal going forward is to send the SVU to outreach events and festivals. We see many opportunities in our area to reach out to the community through music festivals, oyster roasts, church events, non-profit events, concerts, town festivals, and much more. The SVU allows us to take our office to where the people are.

Project Originality/Innovation

1. Justify the uniqueness of this project. What makes it different from other projects designed to achieve the same objective?

Traditionally, voting and events have been conducted at brick and mortar locations. For the first time in South Carolina’s history, there is an ability for a county office to provide voting without the need for a

physical building to be provided. This capability exists only in Charleston County. Our office can literally pick up and move each day to all parts of the county, regardless if we have a building or not.

Other county election offices across the state can only provide voting opportunities if they have a building to use in that community. However, the reality is that most areas don't have buildings that have adequate parking or can service a large number of voters. This is why most counties do not have additional satellite locations for absentee voting or when they do, they can only limit it to population centers in their perspective counties.

2. Do you know of any other similar programs in South Carolina? If so, how is your program different?

No, we are the only county in South Carolina that has a SVU.

3. What innovations were required in accomplishing your objectives?

First, the question was, "How can we expand absentee voting satellite locations across the county?" We quickly realized that the areas we would want to target—areas located 20-30 miles away from our office—lacked adequate buildings that had parking, were ADA accessible, and could be used during social distancing. However, why do we need a physical building to do this? What currently exists in the realm of accessibility and voting? During the pandemic, food trucks became a viable option rather than eating in restaurants. The great thing about a food truck is that it can travel anywhere without a need to have a dine-in area. Voting could be conducted the same way. We then had to set the vision for thinking outside the box when it comes to absentee voting. The pandemic made us think about how we can serve voters while keeping them safe and keeping us mobile.

Ease of access is embedded in our train of thought—with a click of button we can order our groceries and have it delivered to our doorsteps. Shouldn't voting and voter education have the same ease of access? This is now possible with the SVU. In a short time, we can deploy the SVU and set up almost anywhere in the county which serves our community while at the same time following all laws, procedures, and protocols that are necessary to securely conduct elections.

4. Who provided the creativity and imagination in your project?

BEVR's Director, Deputy Director and Project Manager had a vision of using this unit after seeing other states successfully conduct voting and outreach events.



CENTER FOR
TECH AND
CIVIC LIFE

August 28, 2020

Charleston County
Board of Elections
4367 Headquarters Rd.
Charleston, SC 29405

To whom it may concern:

I am pleased to inform you that the Center for Tech and Civic Life ("CTCL") has decided to award you a grant to support the work of Charleston County.

The following is a description of the grant:

AMOUNT OF GRANT: Six Hundred Ninety-Five Thousand US dollars (USD \$695,000).

PURPOSE: The grant funds must be used exclusively for the public purpose of planning and operationalizing safe and secure election administration in Charleston County in accordance with the attached Charleston County Safe Voting Plan 2020

Before we transmit these funds, we ask that you sign this agreement promising to use the grant funds in compliance with United States tax laws. Specifically, by signing this letter you agree to the following:

1. Charleston County is a local government unit or political subdivision in the meaning of 26 USC 170(c)(1).

2. This grant shall be used *only* for the public purpose described above, and for no other purposes.
3. Charleston County shall not use any part of this grant to give a grant to another organization unless CTCL agrees to the specific grant in writing.
4. Charleston County has produced a plan for safe and secure election administration in 2020, including an assessment of election administration needs, budget estimates for such assessment, and an assessment of the impact of the plan on voters. This plan is attached to this agreement. The County shall expend the amount of this grant for purposes contained in this plan by December 31, 2020.
5. Charleston County shall produce a report documenting how this grant has been expended in support of the activities described in paragraph 4. This report shall be written and sent to CTCL by January 31, 2021 or in any other format approved by CTCL.
6. Charleston County shall not reduce the budget of the Board of Elections of Charleston County ("the Board") or fail to appropriate or provide previously budgeted funds to the Board for the term of this grant. Any amount reduced or not provided in contravention of this paragraph shall be repaid to CTCL up to the total amount of this grant.
7. CTCL may discontinue, modify, withhold part of, or ask for the return all or part of the grant funds if it determines, in its sole judgment, that (a) any of the above conditions have not been met or (b) it must do so to comply with applicable laws or regulations.
8. The grant project period of June 15, 2020 through December 31, 2020 represents the dates between which covered costs may be applied to the grant.

Your acceptance of these agreements should be indicated below. Please have an authorized representative of Charleston County sign below, and return a scanned copy of this letter to us by email at grants@techandcivicliflife.org

On behalf of CTCL, I extend my best wishes in your work.

Sincerely,

Tiana Epps Johnson
Executive Director
Center for Tech and Civic Life



CHARLESTON COUNTY

By: Joseph Debney Jr

Title: Executive Director, Board of Elections

Date: 9 Sept. 2020





THIS UNIT WILL BE AN EXTENSION OF OUR OFFICE PROVIDING SERVICES SUCH AS: VOTER REGISTRATION, ABSENTEE VOTING, OUTREACH AND EDUCATION EVENTS, ETC.

**Charleston County Board
of Elections and Voter
Registration**
p: 843.744.VOTE
w: chsvotes.org

**Isaac Cramer -
Executive Director
Josh Dickard- Deputy
Director**



Charleston County Government ✓

Published by Kelsey Barlow · February 22 · 🌐



Today, the Charleston County Board of Elections is in Hollywood with our mobile voting unit! Eligible citizens can vote absentee today and tomorrow from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m at in the parking lot of Piggly Wiggly located at 6251 SC-162, Hollywood, SC 29449. The election is Tuesday, March 2. For more details about the election: <https://www.charlestoncounty.org/depar.../bevr/elections.php>



Charleston County ✓ @ChasCountyGov · Apr 27



Good morning Sullivan's Island! Today, our Satellite Voting Unit will be at Sunrise Presbyterian Church, 3222 Middle St., from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. providing absentee voting services for your Municipal Election. More info on voting absentee at bit.ly/3gFDzz7. #chsnews



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William L. Tuten
Administrator

4045 Bridge View Drive
Charleston, SC 29405
843.958.4000

South Carolina Association of Counties
1919 Thurmond Mall
Columbia, SC 29201
ATTN: J. Mitchell Graham Memorial Award

To Members of the Selection Committee,

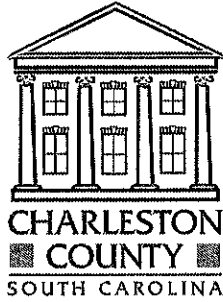
Please accept this letter in support of the Charleston County Board of Elections and Voter Registration's (BEVR) for the J. Mitchell Graham Memorial Award. Despite the challenges of holding elections in the middle of the pandemic, Board of Elections staff had the foresight and ingenuity to utilize a grant in order to purchase a Satellite Voting Unit (SVU) to bring voting out into our community. I recognize not all of our residents have the ability to easily access our building in order to vote absentee. For many, especially our population 65 and older, voting absentee is considered a safer way to vote since it is less crowded and easier to be socially distant. With County funds not available for a purchase this large, BEVR staff did an incredible job finding a way to get the SVU in our community.

Not only will the SVU benefit residents in this pandemic, but will continue to be valuable in years to come. Charleston County is unique in that it is nearly 100 miles long and this geography often proves difficult for citizens to come up to our Board of Elections Office to vote absentee. The unit takes those drive times out of the equation and provides a more convenient way for people to vote.

I strongly recommend that you will consider the SVU for the J. Mitchell Graham Memorial Award. I fully support the innovative efforts of our Board of Elections staff as we continue to deliver services of value to our community.

Sincerely,

William L. Tuten
Charleston County Administrator



Christie Companion Varnado
Board Chair

843.442-9062
Fax: 843.974.6419
cvarnado@charlestoncounty.org
4367 Headquarters Rd
P. O. Box 71419
North Charleston, SC 29415

April 29, 2021

Re: *J. Mitchell Graham Memorial Award*

Dear Members of the Selection Committee:

I would like to express my full support for the Charleston County Board of Elections and Voter Registration's application nominating our Satellite Voting Unit ("SVU") for the J. Mitchell Graham Memorial Award. The mobile nature of the SVU will exponentially improve accessibility, voter turnout, and election awareness for our county's residents. By allowing us to bring our absentee precinct directly into remote communities, the SVU has already facilitated a ten-fold increase in in-person absentee voter participation in two local municipal elections.

The SVU is an innovative solution to problems election boards are facing across the country. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the need to provide opportunities for citizens to vote absentee, and we are facing an unprecedented reduction in voter confidence in election operations. Not only does the SVU provide more convenient options for citizens to register and to vote in person, it also creates an opportunity for our office to build trust with the public as we use the trailer to expand our outreach efforts to educate residents on the election process. By partnering with local municipalities, Charleston County Public Library, schools, and other public entities, we believe the SVU has the capacity to inform thousands of Charleston County residents on the security and impartiality of our elections. In addition, the unit can be quickly dispatched to serve as a substitute polling location in the event of an emergency, allowing us to minimize voter confusion and inconvenience should a venue lose power or become unexpectedly inaccessible on election day.

Thank you for taking the time to consider this letter. I know the SVU will become an integral part of Charleston County's elections, and we hope the program will serve as a model for the state, as well as the nation.

Sincerely,

Christie Companion Varnado
Chair, Charleston County Board of Elections
and Voter Registration

PATRICK M. O'NEIL
MAYOR

TOWN OF SULLIVAN'S ISLAND



TOWN COUNCIL
CHAUNCEY CLARK, MAYOR PRO TEM
SARAH CHURCH
GREG HAMMOND
TIM REESE
BACHMAN SMITH, IV
KAYE SMITH

ANDY BENKE
TOWN ADMINISTRATOR
JASON BLANTON
DEPUTY ADMINISTRATOR/COMPTROLLER
LAWRENCE A. DODDS
TOWN ATTORNEY
GREG GRESS
WATER AND SEWER MANAGER
JOE HENDERSON
DIRECTOR OF PLANNING AND ZONING
CHRISTOPHER GRIFFIN
CHIEF OF POLICE
RANDY ROBINSON
BUILDING OFFICIAL
COURTNEY SOTTILE
TOWN CLERK
M. ANTHONY STITH
FIRE CHIEF

April 28, 2021

Dear SCAC Committee,

Please accept this letter of support for the Board of Elections and Voter Registration's application regarding their Satellite Voting Unit (SVU). The Town of Sullivan's Island recently hosted the SVU for two absentee voting events for our Municipal Election. I personally attended these events and witnessed how efficient and easy it was for residents to vote.

As mayor to a small coastal community, I know firsthand how difficult it can be for residents to make the commute to Charleston County's elections office. Not only to vote absentee. It was thrilling to learn that absentee voter turnout this April at the SVU was half of our typically over all voter participation in a local election. This means more civic engagement from our citizens who want to ensure their voice is heard when it comes to decisions made at a local level.

I whole heartedly support the use of the SVU. After working with election staff to bring the mobile unit on to the island, I know that they are fully committed to providing ground breaking elections services. Please keep this letter in mind when deciding this year's recipient of the J. Mitchell Graham Memorial Award.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Patrick M. O'Neil", is written over a white background.

Patrick M. O'Neil

Mayor, Town of Sullivan's Island

Citizen's Comment

The Satellite Voting Unit is a great addition to the work being done by the Charleston County Board of Elections and Voter Registration. In a County as large as Charleston we have many municipalities with small elections. The SVU allows eligible voters to vote absentee in person right in their community instead of driving 20, 30 or even 40 miles to exercise their right to vote. I'm so glad that Charleston County BEVR applied for a grant to purchase the SVU and has already had success using it in multiple elections.

Kaye Lingle Koonce, Esq.

176 Peachtree St.

Charleston, SC 29403