2025 Awards Competition – ENTRY SUMMARIES

J. MITCHELL GRAHAM MEMORIAL AWARD

Chester County

Chester County Animal Control's Community Spay/Neuter Initiative tackles pet overpopulation through affordable, accessible, and prevention-focused services. In partnership with local rescues, veterinarians, clinics, and grant providers, the program offers low-cost sterilization, microchipping, vaccinations, and a $20 Trap-Neuter-Return option for feral cats. Since launching, over 950 animals have been altered, cutting shelter intake, nuisance complaints, and health risks. Mobile units, year-round clinic access, free supplies, and streamlined scheduling remove barriers for residents, while a new shelter opening in 2026 will add an on-site surgical suite. This collaborative approach transforms animal control from reactive enforcement to proactive, community-based care.

Dorchester County

Dorchester County Emergency Management Department (EMD) works to prepare residents, businesses, and local governments for disasters, with a focus on inland flooding and hurricane storm surge risks affecting more than 80,000 residents in evacuation zones. Building on creative public education efforts, EMD has launched innovative outreach campaigns, including partnerships with local businesses to feature a QR code linking to the state's hurricane preparedness site on products such as a special beer can and "Storm Surge" coffee. In 2025, these efforts expanded to include a livestream preparedness talk during the Cooper River Bridge Run, a hurricane-themed parody of "My Girl," and hosting the tri-county area's largest hurricane expo, all aimed at increasing awareness and accessibility of preparedness information.

Edgefield County

In March 2025, Edgefield County opened a $42 million, 74,000 square foot public safety complex—the county's largest infrastructure project—housing the sheriff's office, a modern detention center, magistrate offices, a courtroom, and a law enforcement training hub. With funding from South Carolina's Plutonium Settlement and a voter-approved 2020 Capital Project Sales Tax, the project was completed under budget and replaces a 1978 facility with advanced systems for digital inmate communication and centralized monitoring. The site also features the county's first Animal Care and Control Facility and a recreation park with sports fields, a splash pad, and trails. Recent expansions have elevated the Miracle League Complex to one of the state's premier community resources.

Georgetown County

The Georgetown Outdoor Adventure Trails (GOAT) program is a countywide outdoor wellness initiative launched in 2023 by Georgetown County Parks and Recreation. It promotes physical activity, environmental stewardship, and community connection through accessible activities for all ages and abilities. Offering guided hikes, paddling excursions, navigation and fitness challenges, and specialized programs for seniors and youth, GOAT leverages the county's natural resources to foster active, healthy lifestyles. In its first year, the program engaged over 2,500 participants who logged more than 20,000 miles, a figure already surpassed in 2025 with over 24,000 miles recorded by August. By combining recreation, education, and inclusivity, GOAT demonstrates how a county can creatively use its outdoor assets to achieve significant public health and community engagement outcomes.

Richland County

Richland County and nonprofit Serve and Connect transformed the former Peterson Presbyterian Church into a community hub in the underserved Woodfield Neighborhood. With CDBG funds and private investments, the renovated facility serves as both Serve and Connect's headquarters and a center for programs, resources, and public services. Located near high-poverty schools, it hosts food drives, youth events, and health outreach, and will soon include a welcome center for international families in partnership with Richland School District Two. Positioned along the Decker Boulevard "International Corridor," the project shows how targeted public investment and nonprofit collaboration can drive sustainable community revitalization.

Spartanburg County
Launched in January 2024, Spartanburg County's CERT91 program uses trained volunteers as a dedicated 911 response team for lower acuity calls such as lift assists, welfare checks, and medical alarms, freeing EMS, fire, and law enforcement to focus on life-threatening emergencies. Operating under Spartanburg County Emergency Management, CERT91 has handled more than 2,100 calls and contributed over 11,000 volunteer hours, reducing system congestion and improving response times. Volunteers, many with backgrounds in healthcare, public safety, or military service, receive structured training to respond safely and effectively. By filling a long-standing service gap and strengthening interagency collaboration, CERT91 has become a trusted part of the county's emergency response system, demonstrating how innovation, volunteerism, and strategic coordination can expand capacity and enhance public safety without sacrificing service quality.

BARRETT LAWRIMORE MEMORIAL REGIONAL COOPERATION AWARD

Berkeley, Charleston, and Dorchester Counties
The Tri-County Biological Science Center in North Charleston is South Carolina's first regional forensic DNA lab, serving Charleston, Berkeley, and Dorchester counties. Designed to provide critical DNA analysis for law enforcement, coroners, and the judicial system, the facility reduces processing times, accelerates investigations, eases detention and court backlogs, and enhances public safety and community trust. Supported by SLED, the Center exemplifies the impact of regional collaboration, shared investment, and data-driven planning, ensuring local agencies no longer rely solely on overburdened state labs. Beyond improving forensic services, it stands as a model of innovation, efficiency, and responsive government, symbolizing the region's commitment to justice, scientific excellence, and public service.

Fairfield County
The Fairfield Joint Water and Sewer System Commission is a partnership between Fairfield County and the Towns of Winnsboro and Ridgeway to expand wastewater treatment capacity across the county. With growing residential and industrial development, the Commission aims to ensure adequate wastewater infrastructure to support economic growth. By June 2026, the Winnsboro Connector Line Project will add 500,000 gallons per day of treatment capacity by linking the Fairfield Commerce Center to the Winnsboro facility. By 2029, the county aims to complete a new wastewater treatment facility on the Broad River to provide sustainable service for the county and its towns.

Georgetown County
Georgetown County Government, the Chamber of Commerce, and Leadership Georgetown Class 32 partnered on the Safer Shores beach signage project to improve safety and wayfinding along the Hammock Coast. The signs use color-coded animal identifiers linked to beach access numbers and include QR codes for real-time National Weather Service updates, with all locations integrated into the county's 911 CAD system for rapid emergency response. By combining regional partnerships, tourism networks, and government resources, the project enhances public safety, accessibility, and the visitor experience, showcasing the impact of coordinated, community-driven initiatives.

Greenville and Pickens County
The 2025 Table Rock Complex Fire—the largest recent wildfire in Upstate South Carolina—began on March 21 in Table Rock State Park and was joined by the Persimmon Ridge Fire near Caesars Head State Park. Fueled by dry weather, steep terrain, strong winds, and hurricane debris, the fires burned 15,973 acres across Pickens and Greenville counties and briefly into Transylvania County, North Carolina. A coordinated multi-agency response, involving over 1,000 personnel and 400 apparatus from state and federal agencies, used ground crews, aerial water drops, and controlled backburns to contain the blaze. Evacuations and air quality alerts were issued, but no fatalities or structural losses occurred. The incident underscores the critical role of interagency collaboration, emergency preparedness, and wildfire mitigation in protecting communities from large-scale natural disasters.