

Commonwealth Council on Aging

Best Practices Awards Committee

IN-PERSON MEETING

March 9, 2026
10:00 AM to 1:00 PM

Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services
5620 Cox Road, Glen Allen, VA 23060

DRAFT MINUTES

Members Present: Donna Smith, Paige Wilson, Tracey Gendron, Shannon Arnette, and Carla Hesselstine, ex-officio (Zoom)

Members Absent: Yolanda Stevens

Staff Present: Sara Stowe

Welcome and Roll Call of Members

Sara Stowe, Staff

DARS staff Sara Stowe welcomed members and confirmed a quorum was present.

Review/Approve Agenda

Tracey Gendron, Chair

Proposed Action: Approve Agenda

Chair Tracey Gendron confirmed with members that there were no changes needed to the agenda. The proposed agenda was approved via unanimous consensus.

Review/Approve the October 20, 2025 Meeting Minutes

Sara Stowe

Proposed Action: Approve Minutes

Sara Stowe asked members to review the October 20, 2025 Meeting Minutes. The members did not have any changes. The draft minutes were approved via unanimous consensus.

Public Comment Period

Sara Stowe

There were no public comments received.

Overview of the Process

Sara Stowe

Sara Stowe explained the Best Practices Awards process. Dominion Energy once again committed to sponsor the Best Practices Awards. This year, AARP Virginia also committed to sponsoring the Best Practices Awards. The Awards will provide \$5,500 for first place (Dominion Energy: \$3,000, AARP Virginia: \$500), \$3,500 for second place (Dominion Energy: \$3,000, AARP Virginia: \$500), and \$2,500 for third place (Dominion Energy, \$2,000, AARP Virginia: \$500).

The Request for Nominations for the 2025 Best Practices Awards opened on January 9, 2026. DARS staff shared information about the Request for Nominations with the Council and within its network. Council members were also asked to share the Request for Nominations around and with their networks in order to get the word out as much as possible. Nominations were due on February 6, 2026. The Best Practices Committee is meeting today to make award decisions.

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Scoring was based on seven selection criteria: community need and impact, concept of aging in the community, innovation, inclusiveness, goals/outcomes/evaluation, cost-effectiveness/sustainability, and potential for replication.

In previous years, winners were included in the Older Virginians Month Proclamation that comes out in May. However, the guidance has changed from a 45 day lead time to 45 business days lead time, which this year's timeline did not allow for that timing. This will be considered for next year's timeline.

Scoring Report

Sara Stowe

Sara shared the scoring report with the members. Members received a Top 10 Programs Ranking with the program summaries.

Working Lunch: Discussion and Determination of Winners **Committee Members**

Proposed Action: Vote on Winners

The Committee held a discussion among the winners on the top ranked programs. Committee members considered the impacts of the program as well as the what makes each program a best practices including its replicability.

In 2025, the committee changed the ineligibility clause from: "Programs (not agencies or organizations) that have received a previous Best Practices Award (cash award) or Honorable Mention (non-cash award) are not eligible to be considered for the 2025 awards." The new ineligibility clause allows for renomination of programs who have not won in the previous 5 years.

The top three programs were very close in scores. The committee considered the impact of the funding, previous winners and honorable mentions, and impact versus best practices.

Members then discussed Honorable Mention programs. Members discussed the importance of a strong program impact, sustainability and replicability, and innovation.

Paige Wilson made a motion to approve the winning and honorable mentions as follows:

- First Place: CareMobile
- Second Place: FREE Foundation of Virginia
- Third Place: Purple Flower Program
- Honorable Mentions:
 - Rapp at Home's Regional Transportation Collaborative
 - Community Connections Model of Senior Services of Alexandria
 - Bay Aging's Caregiver Support Program

This motion was seconded by Donna Smith. All were in favor.

Next Steps & Award Ceremonies Discussion

Sara Stowe

Sara provided an overview of the next steps and planning for the in-person and webinar award recognition events, the website updates, distribution of the funds, press release, and upcoming report to the full Council on Aging at the March 18 meeting.

Sara Stowe shared the PR toolkit with resources such as logos, language for press releases, and how to promote their award.

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Members also discussed the potential of changing the ineligibility for programs who have previously won to include more detail about how the program has evolved since its winning. Members also discussed strengthening language around best practices versus impact. Many of the nominations are demonstrating impact but not sharing as much data around what makes the program a best practice.

The outcomes and evaluations section was of interest in making changes and splitting out the section that is “Outcomes/Evaluation” and separating “Impact” to go under the “inclusiveness” section. Members discussed a focus on SMART outcomes but understood the balance of too much data may deter some small organizations from applying. The committee plans to discuss this in more detail prior to the 2027 Award Year.

Throughout the conversation about outcomes, Virginia Center on Aging representatives suggested hosting a 45-minute webinar on outcomes/evaluation and providing tools for organizations that are interested in strengthening their program’s data. Virginia Center on Aging also suggested the Geriatric Training and Education (GTE) program as a pipeline for best practices awards as that requires an evaluation component.

Meeting Adjournment

Tracey Gendron

Chair Tracey Gendron asked if there were any other comments, questions about the awards. Hearing none, Tracey Gendron adjourned the meeting at 11:35 am.

Meeting Handouts:

1. Proposed Meeting Agenda
2. Draft Meeting Minutes from October 20, 2025
3. Top 10 Programs Ranking and Program Summaries Sheet
4. 2026 Best Practices Dissemination Information Handout
5. Best Practices Award Public Relations (PR) Toolkit