The Welcome Center

RFP for Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds

Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College

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Application Form

Question Group

Buncombe County requests proposals for projects to help the community recover from and respond to COVID-19 and its negative economic impacts.

Buncombe County has been awarded $50,733,290 in Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (Recovery Funding)i, as part of the American Rescue Plan Act. This infusion of federal resources is intended to help turn the tide on the pandemic, address its economic fallout, and lay the foundation for a strong and equitable recovery.

Buncombe County is committed to investing these funds in projects that:

- Align to county strategic plan and community priorities
- Support equitable outcomes for most impacted populations
- Leverage and align with other governmental funding sources
- Make best use of this one-time infusion of resources
- Have a lasting impact

Proposals shall be submitted in accordance with the terms and conditions of this RFP and any addenda issued hereto.

Click here for the full terms and conditions of the RFP

Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds*

Name of Project.

> The Welcome Center

Amount of Funds Requested*

> $3,000,000.00

Recovery Fund Eligible Category*

Please select one:

> Assistance to unemployed workers

Brief Project Description*

Provide a short summary of your proposed project.

> A-B Tech requests Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds to support the purchase of an available property located at 111 Victoria Road in which we will establish The Welcome Center, a facility intended to centralize intensive support to new students, ongoing student success coaching for at-risk students, and Career Center services. This building is centrally located on the main campus with adequate

parking and office space to house new and existing student support personnel who will implement a comprehensive, coherent student success model that includes integrated case management and career services that are culturally competent, proactive, and individualized. Purchase of the building will support a wide range of efforts A-B Tech is implementing to better serve individuals who need access to education opportunities to recover from the economic impacts of the COVID pandemic and achieve financial stability and sustainability.

Project Plan*

Explain how the project will be structured and implemented, including timeframe.

Purchase of the property will co-locate a variety of student support personnel, including advisors, student success coaches, and career services counselors, all engaged in implementing a new student success model, the Ask-Connect-Inspire-Plan approach described by Lahr and Jenkins (2021). This model program for student support includes an intake focused on financial wellness, academic support, educational and career planning and ongoing, intensive support to ensure that students succeed and reach their individual educational and career goals.

The Welcome Center will serve all major education departments of A-B Tech including Curriculum (degree), Continuing Education and Workforce Development (non-degree), and Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act-funded Transitional Studies (adult basic education, English-language acquisition, and incarcerated individual services) programs creating a One-Stop Shop and single point of entry for everyone seeking access to any of our education programs and services.

The available facility is of an ideal size and in an ideal location to house these services and its purchase will contribute to the College maintaining a contiguous campus footprint. The building has recently been in use as a medical office and is not expected to require substantial renovation or reconfiguration to accommodate the services A-B Tech proposes to house there.

A-B Tech has received a detailed, preliminary appraisal of the property. The property is identified as an approximately 2.67 acre parcel of land with an approximately 10,415 Gross Sq Ft, two level, brick and siding, medical office building and associated infrastructure. In addition, there is an approximately 160 sq ft covered porch entry. Other site improvements include asphalt paved and gravel drives and parking areas, signage, landscaping, and associated infrastructure.

We anticipate that once purchased, the facility can be fully operational within 6-12 months. A-B Tech is actively pursuing a wide variety of external funding opportunities that will support the programs and services we propose to co-locate in the building. These include: federal Department of Education, Title III Strengthening Institutions Program ($2.1M) and ReThink Adult Education Challenge funds ($250,000); Department of Labor and Appalachian Regional Commission, Workforce Opportunity for Rural Communities funding ($1.5M); and, Dogwood Health Trust funding (~$5M). In addition to these pending requests, A-B Tech was recently awarded all three available WIOA grants to support our Transitional Studies program.

Unfortunately, these funding opportunities will not support property acquisition and this additional space will be needed to house frontline personnel related to these programs. The timeline for Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds aligns with all these efforts and this purchase will support effective implementation of all these efforts to greatly enhance our student services and supports.

Statement of Need*

Describe the need that this project will address. Include data to demonstrate the need, and cite the source of the data.

The Asheville-metro has the 2nd highest level of disparity between cost-of-living and relative income of mid-size metros in the Southeastern US and the 8th highest in the nation (Smith, 2020). Upskilling unemployed and under-skilled workers is the most effective way to address the relative income needs of our residents (Black, Mather, & Sanders, 2007). A-B Tech is Buncombe County's most valuable asset in upskilling adult workers.

Over two decades of research points to the importance of providing one-stop shops for student services on college campuses (Dauphinais, 1998). More recent studies point to the need to evolve our model, especially for community colleges (Rivera, 2019). Remote-learning during the pandemic highlighted this need at A-B Tech and it was clearly articulated by multiple taskforces during our strategic planning process.

We will enhance access to a centralized home for welcoming and providing intensive support to new students (first term and <30 credits earned), ongoing student success coaching for at-risk students, and Career Center services following these best practices as well as the Ask-Connect-Inspire-Plan approach (Lahr & Jenkins, 2021) which will include an intake focused on financial wellness, academic support, educational and career planning and the Nudging to STEM Success implementation model (Soricone & Endel, 2019).

There is no shortage of research into the efficacy of comprehensive advisement and student success coaching. However, a variety of factors impact successful implementation and ethical concerns should be considered in designing interventions. We will take into consideration the 17 factors that contribute to variance in credit-hour completion identified by Pechac and Slantcheva-Durst (2019), be sensitive to ethical concerns raised by Hall and Reavis (2021), and include evidence-based practices identified by Lahr and Jenkins (2021) and best practices for serving minority male students from Valentine and Price (2020).

Link to COVID-19*

Identify a health or economic harm resulting from or exacerbated by the public health emergency, describe the nature and extent of that harm, and explain how the use of this funding would address such harm.

We know the economic impact of the pandemic is nuanced. Our community has very low unemployment and employers struggle to fill positions. The Citizen Times reported in June 2021, "It's important to note that we had a tight labor market before the pandemic, so even then it wasn't easy for employers to hire. At that time employers were raising wages and expanding their talent pool to add the workers they needed…their most recent labor market data just came out for April 2021, and it shows the unemployment rate for April in the Asheville metro area was 3.9%." Yet in May 2021 Buncombe County employment rates among workers in the bottom wage quartile decreased by 34.8% compared to January 2020 (Opportunity Insights, 2021). This disconnect directly relates to bottom-wage quartile workers lacking skills to fill available jobs. To meet the need for skilled workers, it is imperative we meet the needs of adult learners and A-B Tech is Buncombe County's strongest asset to support labor force growth.

A-B Tech conducted extensive research into the direct and indirect impacts of the pandemic on our students. We surveyed students in Spring and Fall 2020 to gain insight into their pandemic-related needs and found students are managing multiple responsibilities and not all have access or tools for success. Female and minority students were especially hard-hit. We also engaged with a variety of educational forecasting resources including: Post-COVID Challenges and Opportunities–anticipated gaps in preparation of incoming students and how this might worsen current disparities in student success by race-ethnicity (April 2021) and The Future of the Academic Enterprise, a discussion by an education futurist and national education experts addressing trends in program of study demand, which pandemic-inspired innovations will persist, and socio-political factors that will continue to impact our work. To overcome the economic harm wrought by COVID, our students need us now more than ever.

Population Served*

Define the population to be served by this project, including volume and demographic characteristics of those served.

In the 2019/20 school year, A-B Tech's annual headcount was 21,654; for Fall 2020 curriculum (degree) enrollment was 6,592 and continuing education enrollment was 3,436 students. U.S. Census records indicate our region is 89% white; our data show our students are more diverse: 79% White, 9% Hispanic, 7% Black, 1% Asian, 1% Native American, 2% Multiple races/ethnicities, and 1% Unknown. Fifty-three percent (53%) are female; 47% are male. Just 24% of our students are ages 18-24. Forty percent (40%) are 25-44 and 20% are 45-64. Eleven percent (11%) are under 18 and 5% are over 65.

Our Transitional Studies program which serves our highest-need and most at-risk learners has an even more diverse service population with: 57% female, 43% male; 46% White, 33% Hispanic, 14% Black, 4% Asian, 1% Native American. Six percent (6%) of our participants have documented intellectual disabilities; 42% are English language learners; and, 52% participate in adult basic education and high school equivalency preparation. Transitional Studies serves ages 16 and older: 52% are 25-44, 28% are 16-24, 20% over 65. Most are very low income.

All of our students have one thing in common- a desire to leverage the educational opportunities we provide to improve their lives. As an open-access institution, everyone is welcome to join us. And we are committed to providing them with the access and supports they need to succeed.

Results*

Describe the proposed impact of the project. List at least 3 performance measures that will be tracked and reported. If possible, include baselines and goals for each performance measure.

Our project has two overarching goals: 1) provide centralized, comprehensive support to students in defining and achieving their educational and career goals from enrollment through retention to timely completion of a credential and career or transfer placement; and 2) improve access and outcomes for student subgroups, especially Black students.

We will fulfill these goals by meeting the following objectives: 1) increasing enrollment by at least 3% annually for a cumulative increase of 15% over 5 years; 2) increasing first-to-second year retention by 2.4 percentage points annually to reach excellence-level performance in 5 years; 3) improving course success for Black students by at least 3.4% annually for a cumulative improvement of 17% over 5 years; and, 4) increasing graduation and completion/credentialing rate by at least .9 percentage points annually for a cumulative increase of 4.5 percentage points over 5 years.

We have identified baseline indicators for each objective: 1) average enrollment for the prior three years (9,455); 2) average cohort retention rate of first-time students for the prior four years (58.9%); 3) three-year average for course success in the fall term: American Indian/Alaskan 72.3%; Asian 81.7%; Black 63.3%; Hawaiian/Pac. Islander 79.3%; Hispanic 74.3%; Multiple 72%; Unknown 75.7%; and White 79%; and, 4) Fall 2016 cohort overall curriculum completion rate (47.7%). Disaggregated by race, the cohort completion rates are: Asian 64%; Black 35%; Hispanic 41%; Multiple 33%; Unknown 51%; White 49%.

Together, these numbers reveal that, even before COVID, our Black students experienced disparity in student success. As student surveys and emerging data reveal, the disproportionate impacts of the pandemic has only worsened the divide.

Evaluation*

Describe the data collection, analysis, and quality assurance measures you will use to assure ongoing, effective tracking of contract requirements and outcomes.

A-B Tech's evaluation plan includes formative and summative assessments to determine attainment against the established baselines and targets. Our Office of Research and Planning will lead formative and summative assessment of the program. The formative assessment includes new and existing data sources. Using real-time quantitative data collection through new retention software, we will use data integrated with the College's learning management system, attendance-taking software, and predictive analytics to gauge progress.

At the same time, our evaluation will utilize data elements from the existing institutional monthly, term, and annual reports that college leaders routinely review. The Office of Research and Planning will continue to collect student surveys on satisfaction and financial wellness on an alternating yearly cycle. Existing student survey data will be gathered and benchmarked against prior averages. The open comments in these surveys provide valuable qualitative data for formative assessment.

We will conduct quarterly assessments to determine if A-B Tech is on track to meet its goals and five-year objectives through two primary duties: (1) tracking the outcome data for the project objectives, and (2)

ensuring the project's fidelity to the timeline. At the end of the grant period, we will submit summative reports. They will include a culminating assessment of the attainment of the goals and objectives against the five-year targets and report additional impacts on the institution and its mission.

Equity Impact*

How will this effort help build toward a just, equitable, and sustainable COVID-19 recovery? How are the root causes and/or disproportionate impacts of inequities addressed?

The Welcome Center is designed to address equity issues that impact our students. The project will create a centralized home for a wide variety of student support services, making services easier for students to find, access, and navigate. The strategies we will house in The Welcome Center are evidence-based, best practices specifically selected for their efficacy in providing equitable education access and support.

Our efforts are strategically aligned with Buncombe County's racial equity plan and will enhance equitable economic drivers by providing education opportunities to potential Black business owners in the community, supporting workforce development initiatives that address earnings and the wealth gap, include developmental programs that increase graduation rates, and reduce college and career readiness gaps.

Due to our high cost of living, our students work more hours than their peers at other community colleges and more enroll part time. Part time students are more likely to stop out and are less likely to complete or transfer. A 2021 Spring student survey (n1043) shows a high rate of stressors including work related demands, worry about affording housing or food, home-life, and feeling disconnected are disproportionately affecting Black students. Our Black students report being less likely to come up with $400 in the case of an emergency and are deregistered from their classes for nonpayment at a much higher rate than White students (3x). And, student surveys during COVID show a 10% disparity for Black students related to having a quiet, private space to study and adequate software to complete course work. This directly affects course success rates.

All of the best practices that form the basis of our approach (Pechac and Slantcheva-Durst, 2019; Hall and Reavis, 2021; Lahr and Jenkins, 2021; and, Valentine and Price, 2020) have been selected for their efficacy in decreasing disparities among student subgroups, especially Black students.

Project Partners*

Identify any subcontractors you intend to use for the proposed scope of work. For each subcontractor listed, indicate:
1.) What products and/or services are to be supplied by that subcontractor and;
2.) What percentage of the overall scope of work that subcontractor will perform.

Also, list non-funded key partners critical to project.

This project primarily relates to the purchase of the facility to house and co-locate student support services. The purchase will follow state and local procurement regulations. Any necessary facility modifications or reconfiguration will also conform to established state and local procurement requirements. Otherwise, no funds will be subcontracted in connection with this project.

While the facility will be wholly operated and occupied by A-B Tech programs and services, these programs and services will benefit from the partnership and support of numerous federal, state, local, and community partners including, but not limited to: the federal Department of Education; the North Carolina Community College System; Department of Labor; Appalachian Regional Commission; Dogwood Health Trust; and, Buncombe County. In addition, each program that will house personnel in the facility- Student Services, Curriculum, Continuing Education and Workforce Development, and Transitional Studies- benefits from an extensive network of partners who support our work and provide wrap-around supports for our students. In particular, our partnership with the Family Justice Center and our WIOA-funded engagement of incarcerated individuals will benefit from services and supports housed at The Welcome Center strengthening our

contributions to reducing recidivism and aligning with the County's racial equity goal of improving justice outcomes for the most impacted communities.

Capacity*

Describe the background, experience, and capabilities of your organization or department as it relates to capacity for delivering the proposed project and managing federal funds.

Every member of A-B Tech's executive leadership team has a role to play in the implementation and success of this project. Each member is a highly qualified leader in their respective area. Together, we have 252 years of combined leadership experience and 67 years of graduate study. Dr. Dirk Wilmoth, vice president for business and finance and chief financial officer for A-B Tech, will have primary responsibility for overseeing, coordinating, and facilitating the property purchase and any necessary facility modifications. Dr. Wilmoth has over forty years of experience and has managed numerous projects of similar size and scope.

Financial services personnel, under Dr. Wilmoth's supervision, have managed many grants at the state and federal levels, use accounting procedures consistent with generally accepted accounting principles, state and federal laws, and the Office of Management and Budget's Uniform Grant Guidance. Quarterly grant status review meetings will include financial services staff. They will be instrumental in ensuring this project is implemented with fidelity, and any adjustments are made as needed to ensure project success. Financial services will be supported by both our Office of Research and Planning and Office of Sponsored Programs in collecting and reporting project data.

Budget*

Provide a detailed project budget including all proposed project revenues and expenditures, including explanations and methodology. For all revenue sources, list the funder and denote whether funds are confirmed or pending. For project expenses, denote all capital vs. operating costs, and reflect which specific expenses are proposed to be funded with one-time Buncombe County Recovery Funds.

Download a copy of the budget form HERE. Complete the form, and upload it using the button below.

Recovery-Funds-budget-A-B Tech.xlsx

Special Considerations*

Provide any other information that might assist the County in its selection.

A-B Tech Special Considerations.pdf

Thanks to federal and state emergency relief funds, A-B Tech now has multiple options to cover all costs for students who enroll this fall. Multiple relief-related programs- the Trailblazer Promise, You Enroll, We Pay, which includes the Longleaf Commitment, A-B Tech Works, and Continuing Education- are all providing students with unprecedented affordable education options. And, the myFutureNC initiative is driving significant publicity to overcome negative misconceptions about the quality and value of community college education state-wide. A-B Tech has never been in a better position to affect meaningful change in our students lives, especially as our nation and our community recovers from the impacts wrought by the COVID pandemic.

But we are in it for the long haul and know that the pandemic not only made sudden, deep economic waves that devastated already at-risk individuals and families, it also exacerbated existing inequities, widening achievement gaps and disproportionately affecting already underserved populations, especially our Black students.

The Welcome Center and the myriad of programs and services we are aggressively pursuing to house there constitute an investment and a promise to not just be here for the short term COVID recovery. A-B Tech

is leveraging this moment to radically address the systemic root causes of disparities for our students and create a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive College to support our students long-term. We value our partnership with Buncombe County and appreciate the opportunity to work together to change lives and strengthen our community.

File Attachment Summary

Applicant File Uploads

- Recovery-Funds-budget-A-B Tech.xlsx
- A-B Tech Special Considerations.pdf

Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds
Proposed Project Budget

Organization Name:	Ashville-Buncombe Technical Community College
Project Name:	The Welcome Center
Amount Requested:	3000000

Proposed Project Revenue Funder	Amount	Confirmed or Pending?	Notes
Proposed Buncombe COVID Recovery Funds	$ 3,000,000.00	Pending	
Title III Strengthening Institutions Program	$ 2,137,577.00	Pending	Submitted
ReThink Adult Education Challenge	$ 250,000.00	Pending	Submitted, advanced to finalist round
Workforce Opportunity for Rural Communities	$ 1,500,000.00	Pending	To be submitted 7/21/21
Dogwood Health Trust	$ 5,000,000.00	Pending	To be submitted 7/28/21
Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act	$ 1,326,932.00	Awarded	Submitted, approved, pending final award amount
List other sources here			
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Total	$ 13,214,509.00		

Proposed Project Expenses	Proposed Recovery Funds	Other Funds	Total	Capital or Operating Expense?	Notes
Facility purchase	$ 2,760,000.00		$ 2,760,000.00	Capital	
Facility modifications	$ 240,000.00		$ 240,000.00	Capital	
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Total			$ 3,000,000.00		

Budget

A-B Tech requests Buncombe County Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds in the amount of $3,000,000 to support the purchase of an available property located at 111 Victoria Road in which we will establish *The Welcome Center*, a facility intended to centralize intensive support to new students, ongoing student success coaching for at-risk students, and Career Center services. Recovery Funds are requested for purchase of the facility, with a preliminary appraised value of $2,760,000, and $240,000 to address any facility renovation or reconfiguration needs in order to house the proposed programs and services.

A-B Tech has made extensive additional funding requests to a variety of funders to support the programs and services to be housed in the facility. In the current funding environment and given our track record in securing these types of funding opportunities, we fully expect most if not all of our outstanding requests for programmatic funding to be fulfilled. Regardless of the extent of these outcomes, however, we are committed to centralizing and co-locating our existing, core student support services to make them easier for students to access and navigate.

Buncombe County Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds		
The Welcome Center		
	Facility purchase	$2,760,000
	Facility modifications	$240,000
Additional Programmatic Funds		
Funder	*Status*	*Request Amount*
Title III Strengthening Institutions Program	Submitted; pending	$2,137,577
ReThink Adult Education Challenge	Submitted; pending	$250,000
Workforce Opportunity for Rural Communities	In development; July 21, 2021 submission	$1,500,000
Dogwood Health Trust	In development; July 28, 2021 submission	$5,000,000
Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act	Submitted; approved; pending final award amount	$1,326,932

References

The below references support citations in this proposal as well as the evidence-base informing best practices proposed in our programmatic funding applications to federal, state, and local funders.

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