Equitable Training Opportunities for Election Officials

RFP for Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds

Buncombe County Government

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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.

Equitable Training Opportunities for Election Officials

Amount of Funds Requested*

$43,663.75

Recovery Fund Eligible Category*
Please select one:

Services for disproportionately impacted communities

Brief Project Description*
Provide a short summary of your proposed project.

Election Services would like to partner with Buncombe County Public Libraries (BCPL) to expand the Laptop/Hotspot Lending Program by adding 25 iPads with cellular data service. As a result of COVID-19 in 2020, Election Services began virtual training for our poll workers and it was met with very positive feedback. We plan to continue offering this type of training for all future elections and we want all of our poll

workers to have equitable access to our new online resources. This includes the use of our learning management system through our online Moodle training site. A partnership with the library loaner program will allow our election officials to view virtual training in the event they do not have access to the technology needed.

Project Plan*

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

This request is a partnership between Election Services and Public Libraries. The primary need for the iPads would be for remote training of all poll workers during election time. When the iPads are not in use by Election Services, the public libraries would be able to circulate these devices to the general public.

IT would select and purchase the iPads and hotspots. They would image them and send them to the library for cataloging. The library would catalog them using the same circulation procedures in place for the already established laptop/hotspot lending program. All iPads would have a clean browsing protection installed, the ability to wipe the iPads in between checkouts, and Find My Ipad, in case of theft or loss. Imaging would take at least one month. Library cataloging should take 2-3 weeks.

During an election, Election Services would inform the libraries with a 30 day notice of the number of units that would need to be reserved for remote training of Election Officials. Twenty five iPads allows room for Election Services to request a certain number be held, while still allowing extras for the library to continue to circulate to the general public. The library's delivery system can be used to send the devices to whichever library they need to go to for Election Officials to pick up, or they can be sent downtown to Pack Library for Election Services to pick up and distribute.

Statement of Need*

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

Election Services trains up to 600 Election Day Officials and 300 Early Voting workers. Due to COVID-19 and limited in-person capacities, Election Services began virtual training programs. These programs were very successful and well received by our workers; however, we did encounter a number of workers with technology barriers to attending. This project will address the need that these workers are best prepared when they have access to our online training materials, give all workers the opportunity to attend virtually, and, while not in use by Election Services, will provide the general public with more access to the internet and a device with which to use it – something that, according to 2019 American Community Survey estimates, 20% of the Buncombe County population is without.

As we move forward in the COVID-19 pandemic, it is still important to have virtual training access for poll workers to be prepared for any further outbreaks. Elections must happen regardless of outside factors and virtual training provides resilience in the face of any surges of COVID or any other possible outbreaks in the future.

Source: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/science/science-briefs/scientific-brief-emerging-variants.html

Buncombe County Public Libraries have been spent much of last year working on digital inequity issues exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. This project will expand their current Laptop/Hotspot Lending Program which has 70 laptop/hotspot combo units, 6 laptop/hotspot combo units with accessibility hardware for patrons with disabilities, and 4 individual hotspot units. Libraries have always filled the gap for

those without internet or computer access at home. This collaboration helps to support the library's core mission of access to information and literacy (digital in this case), especially in a pandemic environment where everything from school to work to healthcare is being facilitated online.

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.

According to the North Carolina Broadband Infrastructure Office, 12-14% of the Buncombe County population are without access to computing technology. While evident before, the outbreak of COVID-19 has exacerbated this divide now that everything from school, to work, to healthcare is being facilitated online.

In prior years, Election Services was able to train up to 1000 Election Officials in two to three weeks by hosting in-person sessions that had 70-90 people. COVID-19 caused safety concerns with these large group gatherings. Election Services had to find a way to train these workers in an efficient manner while still protecting them from transmission. This funding would allow all our workers to have access to online training materials and the choice to attend virtually.

Population Served*

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

Buncombe County's total score on broadband adoption, according to the North Carolina Broadband Infrastructure Office is 63.5 out of 100. While slightly just above state average, it is much lower than what one would expect for the economic hub of the region. According to the 2019 American Community Survey, between 12 –14% of households don't own a computer.

In the Buncombe County Broadband Community Profile survey, respondents that don't have access stated 'service availability' and 'cost of service' rank as the top barriers to internet adoption. Indeed, the lowest speed of service could cost households $58.78 a month according to the Institute of Museum and Library Services. A lack of access to devices is another barrier to broadband adoption.

As this is a partnership between Election Services and Public Libraries, there are two main populations to be served. One is the nearly 1000 Election Officials (600 Election Day, 300 Early voting, and backups) per election. This demographic is often older residents of Buncombe who are retired and able to offer their time. The average age of these workers is around 65 years old. We found that in 2020 elections, around 10-20 poll workers per election had to come to our office to watch virtual training sessions in person, as they did not have technology access at home.

The second population is any Buncombe County resident with an adult library card in good standing. The libraries laptop/hotspot lending program targets current and potential library users that have limited or no means to internet and computing technology, but is open to all. The devices requested in this application could be folded into this existing program, and this partnership between Election Services and Public Libraries means that the iPads and additional hotspots would have the potential for year round use, not solely during election time.

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.

The project will also allow for Election Services to offer virtual training to all Election Officials, not only those with at home technology access.

The impact of the project would also be that the Public Libraries' Laptop/Hotspot Lending Program is able to serve more patrons since it will be expanded.

One measure to be tracked is the use of these iPads and hotspots by Election Services workers. This can be tracked via library circulation statistics and communication between the Libraries and Election Services and a running spreadsheet.

Another measure is the attendance of Election Officials in person at virtual trainings and the satisfaction with these trainings. Election Services has sent surveys to their workers for a few years and 2020 provided a baseline in survey responses which can be compared against future survey responses.

The library will track the use of these devices when not in use by Election Services. The goal would be consistent circulation of these devices to maximize the use. This can be tracked by viewing circulation history of these items. They will also keep track of user satisfaction by regularly and consistently analyzing the responses on their User Satisfaction Survey given at check in for every electronic device they loan.

Evaluation*

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

This project will follow Buncombe County Public Libraries' current tracking system for the Laptop/Hotspot Lending Program. This plan is as follows:

Utilizing current library and county tracking infrastructure, we will record program output along six indicators:
1) circulations on devices
2) average holds placed on a device at one time
3) where (geographically) the devices are being checked out
4) monthly data usage on hotspots / how much data is being used per checkout
5) number of calls and % of time staff troubleshoot team spends on help requests
6) total library users

The User Satisfaction Survey provides to all program participants to receive feedback in six categories:
1) demographics
2) rationale for borrowing
3) self-reported usage (time and content)
4) satisfaction with equipment, library support, connectivity
5) method of referral/contact

Election Services also completes a survey for the satisfaction of Election Officials and questions will be added to ask if officials took advantage of this program and if it benefited their training experience.

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?

This project addresses inequities in technology access during the time of COVID-19. The pandemic highlighted the need for equitable technology and broadband access as it was crucial for work from home policies, schooling, and job searches including virtual interviews or trainings. One area where this was seen was in the training of Election Officials. These workers offer their time to assist in a fundamental part of democracy and would benefit from equitable access to virtual training and utilizing online training resources. Providing Election Officials with the opportunity to attend virtual training regardless of internet access is also a way to ensure workers remain safe during the COVID-19 pandemic. Election Services is also able to reduce the number of large in-person gatherings required to conduct an election, adhering to social distancing recommendations.

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.

The Buncombe County Public Library system will be a major partner to this project and have agreed to manage the iPad distribution under the Laptop/Hotspot Lending Program already in place.

The Buncombe County IT department will assist with preparation of these tablets to be cataloged in the library system.

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.

The Laptop/Hotspot Lending Program through the public libraries was implemented with Cares Act funds. The library system has experience managing funds to implement this project, and this would be an expansion. This project is already underway and therefore capacity to manage this project has been demonstrated. The library has also completed partnerships with other departments to loan equipment, such as with the census.

Election Services demonstrated the capacity and success of virtual training for our Election Officials by hosting virtual training in the latter half of 2020. Online training materials for Elections Officials are already created and survey responses indicate positive feedback for the virtual training program. Additionally, there were no reports of COVID-19 clusters related to voting in North Carolina, indicating likelihood that adhering to social distancing measures and utilizing virtual training practices was successful.

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 Ipad Loaner Budget Template.xlsx

Special Considerations*

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

N/A - No special considerations.

File Attachment Summary

Applicant File Uploads
- Recovery Funds Ipad Loaner Budget Template.xlsx

Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds
Proposed Project Budget

Organization Name:	Election Services and Buncombe County Public Libraries
Project Name:	Equitable Training Opportunities for Election Officials
Amount Requested:	$ 43,663.75

Proposed Project Revenue Funder	Amount	Confirmed or Pending?	Notes
Proposed Buncombe COVID Recovery Funds	$ 43,663.75	Pending	
List other sources here			
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Total	$ 43,663.75		

Proposed Project Expenses	Proposed Recovery Funds	Other Funds	Total	Capital or Operating Expense?	Notes
25 iPads 10/2 inch 8th gen 32GB	$ 12,438.75		$ 12,438.75	Capital	Bulk purchasing may result in a lower quote than shown
Data plan for 25 iPads for two years	$ 22,800.00		$ 22,800.00	Operating	
Ipad cases $50 each	$ 1,337.50		$ 1,337.50	Captial	Taxes included
Extra charging cords $50 per unit	$ 1,337.50		$ 1,337.50	Capital	Taxes included
DeepFreeze equivalent for IOS for 3 years	$ 3,250.00		$ 3,250.00	Operating	
IOS LockDown service to prevent changes by patron	$ 2,500.00		$ 2,500.00	Operating	IT would determine best service for this
List expenses here			$ -		
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