



Strategic Partnership Grants

I. Purpose

Strategic Partnership Grant funding is granted to nonprofit organizations working toward outcomes in alignment with Buncombe County's strategic plan. Buncombe County envisions a caring community in harmony with its environment where citizens succeed, thrive and realize their potential. We promote a healthy, safe, well-educated, and thriving community with a sustainable quality of life.

II. Funding

Strategic Partnership Grants are supported through general county funds, which are budgeted as part of Buncombe County's annual budget. The amount for FY2025 is estimated to be \$900,000-\$1,000,000 (subject to budget adoption). Previous year grants (FY2024) included 23 awards ranging from \$9,930 to \$80,000 with a median award amount of \$39,000. Applicants are limited to request \$80,000 or less.

III. Eligibility

To be eligible for a Strategic Partnership Grant, an organization and project must meet the following criteria:

- a. **Nonprofit.** Applicants must be nonprofit organizations, classified as tax exempt by the Internal Revenue Service, in active operation as an incorporated nonprofit for a minimum of two (2) years. Organizations must operate in Buncombe County with service to Buncombe County. If an organization does not meet this criteria, it may partner with another organization to serve as fiscal sponsor for the purposes of administering grant funding.
- b. **Projects.** Funded projects must align with focus areas in [Buncombe County's Strategic Plan](#). Applicants will be asked to select the focus area and category that best fits their project.
 - **Educated & Capable Community** - A county where all residents thrive and demonstrate resilience throughout their lives
Includes: Adult education, K-12 education
 - **Environmental & Energy Stewardship** - High quality air, water, farmland, and renewable energy for future generations
Includes: Air quality, Energy conservation, Soil quality, Weatherization, Litter & waste diversion
 - **Resident Well-Being** - Our residents are safe, healthy and engaged in our community
Includes: Basic needs, Food, Health, Legal, Mental Health, Safety, Wellness
 - **Vibrant Economy** - A robust and sustainable regional economy that builds our homegrown industries and talent and provides economic mobility for residents
Includes: Financial wellbeing, Small business, Workforce

Note: Some categories are not represented here because Buncombe County has other funding sources that specialize in those areas (e.g. affordable housing, aging services, arts, early childhood education, juvenile crime prevention, land conservation and recreation).



- c. **Public Purpose.** Projects must meet a public purpose and fall within County authority to fund per NC General Statutes, to be affirmed by review by Buncombe County legal department prior to grant award.
- d. **Application.** Organizations must submit a grant application before the application deadline. No late applications will be accepted.
- e. **Funding.** Applicants may request up to \$80,000. Funding must represent less than thirty percent (30%) of an organization’s annual budget. We promote organizational excellence, and funds may be used for capacity building in addition to project delivery. Funds may also be used for administrative costs such as insurance coverage and accounting services.
- f. **Renewal.** Strategic Partnership Grant funding is limited to no more than three (3) years for a single project. In order to be considered for a renewal, organizations must submit a grant application.

Other County Grants. Projects may not apply for funding from more than one county grant program. Application must be submitted to grant program most closely fitting the proposed project. Details about Buncombe County grant programs are listed at buncombecounty.org/grants

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IV. Timeline

December 18, 2023	Grant application opens
January 10, 2024	County Grants Fair (optional) 4:00-6:00 pm 200 College St., 1 st Floor Conference Room
February 9, 2024	Applications due by 5:00
February 12 – April 26, 2024	Grant review by committee
April 26, 2024	Committee funding recommendations due to County budget office
May 2024	Committee grant recommendations published with County Manger’s budget message
June 2024	Public hearing on budget as part of Board of Commissioners regular meeting
June 2024	Grant awards finalized with County budget adoption during Board of Commissioners regular meeting
July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2025	Funding year

V. Application Process

Deadline: Applications are due by 5:00 on February 9, 2024. Organizations are encouraged to apply online through Buncombe County’s grant software, which can be accessed at buncombecounty.org/apply or linked through Buncombe County’s grant website at buncombecounty.org/grants. Paper applications are available at and should be returned to 200 College Street, Suite 343, Asheville, NC 28801.

Grants Fair: A grants fair (optional for applicants) will be held on January 10, 2024 from 4:00-6:00 pm at 200 College St, Ground Floor Conference Room. The purpose of the session is to provide in-depth information about the grant process for applicants and potential applicants.

Consultations: Staff are available to answer questions and to provide basic one-on-one support to applicants. Visit <https://calendly.com/buncombe-county/grant-consultations> to sign up for a session. Staff will also work to match applicants with other community-based grant writing resource support if needed.

Committee Contact: Applicants are asked not to communicate with Strategic Partnership Grants committee members regarding their applications. If the Committee decides to ask follow-up questions of applicants or hold interviews for finalists, applicants will be notified by County staff. Staff do not participate in the grant scoring process.

VI. Required Elements

The application consists of a questionnaire including the following items. Text boxes are limited to 1,500 characters.

1. **Funding Request Amount**
2. **Project Name**
3. **Focus Area & Category** (select from list)
4. **Need for the Project:** What is the community need and purpose this project is established to address? Use data or qualitative factors to show the need. Describe how this project fits with the County's strategic plan focus areas and/or goals.
5. **Primary Location:** What is the address for the primary location where services will be delivered?
6. **Geography Served:** How do your services meet the resource needs of your area? Please use the [Community Index Map](#) to look up your service area(s) in order to assist in your description of resource needs in each location. Include if your project will serve the entire county versus specific locations.
7. **Population Served:** Describe the population that will be impacted by this project.
8. **Project Plan:** Explain the project and how it will work and who it will serve. Include any models or evidence-based practices that will be included and any collaborative partners critical to success. What specific activities and milestones are included in the project plan?
9. **Results:** What results do you hope to achieve with this project, and how will you measure success? Be specific about how much work will be completed and/or how many people will be served. If this is a request for renewal funding, also describe your actual project results achieved for the current year, as of December 31 according to your quarterly report.
10. **Equity:** How does your organization define equity? Describe your organization's equity strategy and activities. Explain how equity is reflected in the proposed project. Equity is one of Buncombe County's values expressed in the strategic plan. Inequities exist across all areas, whether looking at geography, race, gender, age, sexual orientation, disability, and many other traits. Racial equity is a priority because of pronounced racial disparities at a community level. Buncombe County defines equity as the state of being just, impartial and fair.

We define racial equity as when race can no longer be used to predict life outcomes, and outcomes for all groups are improved.

11. Organizational Capacity: Tell us about your organization, including mission and values. Describe the organizational structure, and include any success stories and/or examples of your past initiatives that demonstrate your ability to carry out the project plan.
12. Budget Narrative: Explain how grant funds will be used, including a summary of what expenses will be covered by County funds.
13. Budget Form (attachment) Download a copy of the budget form, complete the form, and upload it. It is important to fully complete the budget form in the attached template, including: all sources of proposed revenue for the project (committed & pending); all planned expenses for the project (paid for with grant funds & other funds); and 3-year overall organization budget (non-itemized total). Explanatory notes are encouraged and a completed budget form in the template provided is required.
14. Sustainability: If this is an ongoing project, describe the organization's capacity to raise funds to continue this project beyond the Strategic Partnership Grant award.
15. Proof of Nonprofit Status: (attachment) Upload proof of nonprofit status, such as IRS Determination Letter or documentation from the North Carolina Secretary of State. If this documentation is not available, briefly state the reason.
16. Current Board of Directors List: (attachment) Upload a current list of your organization's Board of Directors. If your organization does not have a board of directors, briefly state the reason.
17. Other: (text and/or attachment) Is there anything else that you want the committee to know?

VII. Review Committee

Grant recommendations will be prepared by the Strategic Partnerships Grant Committee. The committee consists of nine (9) members, who:

- Applied for membership through the Office of the Clerk to the Board of Commissioners;
- Are appointed by the Board of Commissioners;
- Serve three (3) year staggered terms;
- Represent expertise in the Strategic Plan focus areas;
- Represent the geographic diversity of the County;
- Abide by conflict of interest policies, to include not serving on the Board of Directors or staff of an applicant organization;
- Hold open meetings and comply with public records requirements;
- Utilize a standardized, points-based scoring system to review grants;
- Recommend a portfolio of grants for approval by the Board of Commissioners; and
- Meet throughout the year to monitor grants and review progress.

A committee meeting schedule, along with meeting materials and announcements are posted on buncombecounty.org/grants. All meetings are open to the public.

VIII. Review Process

Applications will be reviewed by the Strategic Partnership Grants Committee utilizing a standardized, points-based system. Reviews will be conducted independently by members of the committee, and discussion will occur during committee meetings.

The following criteria will be considered by the Committee:

- Need – project meets a community need aligned to county priorities
- Project Plan – project includes clear, reasonable actions that are likely to meet the need
- Proposed Results – project includes quantifiable results and plan for measuring success
- Capacity – Organization is structured to carry out the project as described
- Equity – Organization has a demonstrated commitment to equity reflected in the proposed project
- Budget – Includes a clear, reasonable, and efficient budget matched to proposed project

Scoring will be on a scale of 1 to 5 with a maximum total score of 30. Each criterion is weighted equally. See Attachment A - Scoring Criteria for details.

The committee will recommend projects and funding amounts based on project scores as well as balance within the overall portfolio, taking factors into consideration such as geography, project focus areas and categories.

IX. Awards

Grant recommendations prepared by the Committee will be submitted for a vote of approval from the Board of Commissioners. The list will be published as part of the County Manager's recommended budget as presented to the Board of Commissioners at their regularly scheduled meeting in May 2024. Grant awards will be finalized with budget adoption in June 2024.

County Commissioners will not serve on any board or organization seeking funding from County Government unless said service is a requirement through legislation or legal agreement.

X. Performance Contracts

All grant awards will be administered via performance contracts. Contracts will include a scope of work that defines services, deliverables and reporting measures.

FY2024 contracts will be for the period July 1, 2024 through June 30, 2025. Payment of funds will be decided on a case-by-case basis and can be up-front, reimbursement-based, in full or installments. All funds must be spent or returned to the County by July 15, 2025. Requests for extensions will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

Contracts will also include standard indemnification and insurance expectations, which lists the minimum insurance coverage which Contractors agree to procure and maintain. Required insurances and levels vary depending on the nature of the project and can include types such as: Worker's Compensation; Commercial General Liability; Employer's Liability; Professional Liability; etc. The County will collect and review certificates of insurance as part of contract compliance. Insurance is an allowable expense and can be built into the grant funding budget.

In addition to the standard contract expectations for all organizations doing business with the County, nonprofits receiving grant funds must also:

- a. Open their books for the contracting department;
- b. Submit copies of annual IRS tax filings (Form 990s); and
- c. Submit annual financial statements based on a tiered structure, consistent with industry standard practice:
 - Audit: Organizations with annual revenues of \$300,000 or greater must submit financial statements audited in accordance with generally accepted auditing standards.
 - Review: Those with revenues between \$100,000 and \$300,000 must submit financial statements reviewed in accordance with applicable Statements on Standards for Accounting and Review Services (SSARS).
 - Compilation: Those with revenues of less than \$100,000 must submit non-disclosure financial statements compiled in accordance with applicable SSARS.
 - Nonprofit agencies may request a waiver to use other third-party provided documents.

Contract performance will be monitored and evaluated by the County throughout the year, including review of financial and programmatic reporting to ensure funds are utilized in accordance with the public purpose for which they have been granted. Performance results will be published online, and all information related to the grant is considered to be public record. Approval of future funding requests shall be contingent on meeting performance criteria.

XI. Minority Business

Buncombe County's adopted Minority Business Plan encourages participation by minority and women owned businesses. Buncombe County policy is to provide minority contractors an equal opportunity to participate in all aspects of its contracting and procurement programs, and to prohibit any and all discrimination against persons or businesses in pursuit of these opportunities. Minority Business Plan questions may be directed to Buncombe County Procurement at (828) 250-4154. Sources for certified minority firms are available at <http://www.doa.nc.gov/hub>.

XII. Lead Department/Division

Staffing for this grant program is provided by Buncombe County's Strategic Partnerships Department. For more information, contact Strategic Partnerships Director Rachael Sawyer Nygaard at Rachael.Nygaard@buncombecounty.org or (828) 250-6536.

Attachment A - Scoring Criteria
Scoring will be on a scale of 1 to 5 with a maximum total score of 30. Each criterion is weighted equally.

Proposal Evaluation	Incomplete <u>1 Point</u>	Insufficient <u>2 Points</u>	Adequate <u>3 Points</u>	Good <u>4 Points</u>	Excellent <u>5 Points</u>
1 Need for the Project: Project meets an essential community need and fits with the County's strategic plan focus areas	Little to no info regarding the importance of the project to the community at large, or does not align with the County's focus areas.	Presents limited info about the need and/or has weak alignment to focus areas.	Presents basic info demonstrating community need and alignment to focus areas.	Presents qualitative and/or quantitative justification for levels of community need, and aligns to one or more focus area.	Presents significant need with a compelling argument and multiple qualitative or quantitative data points that strongly align with the County's strategic plan focus areas.
2 Project Plan: Project includes clear, reasonable actions that are likely to meet the need	Project explanation is unclear and lacks mention of a specific goal, how the project will work, or who will be served.	Project is not thoroughly or clearly explained or is missing key information about implementation.	Project structure is clear and is aligned to the goals of the grant funds but may be missing details about models, activities, and/or milestones.	Project structure is clear, including model and implementation plans, and is aligned to the goals of the grant funds.	Project is very well designed with specific activities and milestones, based on proven model(s), includes implementation steps, and is well aligned with the goals of the grant funds.
3 Proposed Results: Project includes quantifiable results and plan for measuring success	Little to no description of results or ways to measure performance of the project.	Description of what will be achieved by the project is unclear and/or lacks explanation about performance measurement. (If applicable, poor previous results track record.)	Proposed results are adequately described, aligned to the goals of the grant and project plan, but more information is needed about performance measurement. (If applicable, adequate previous results track record.)	Proposed results are well described, aligned to the goals of the grant and project plan, and there is a clear plan for measuring success. (If applicable, good previous results track record.)	Proposed results are clearly described and likely to have a high impact in alignment with goals of the grant funds, including specific measures and methods for effectively measuring results of the funded project. (If applicable, excellent previous results track record.)
4 Capacity: Organization structured to complete the project as described	Organization does not appear to be structured to complete the project as described.	Organization has not sufficiently demonstrated capacity to carry out proposed plan through record of success and/or collaborative partnerships.	Proposed project scope and scale appears to be reasonably within organizational capacity to carry out.	Organization demonstrates a good likelihood to succeed with the proposed project, including organizational history and collaborative partnerships to leverage necessary project support.	Organization demonstrates strong ability to realistically manage the scope and scale of proposed project, including organizational history and collaborative partnerships to leverage necessary project support.
5 Equity: Organization has a demonstrated commitment to equity reflected in the proposed project	Very limited or no explanation of approach to equity or inclusion.	Equity definition and/or strategy is vague.	Provides an organizational definition of equity and strategy that is understandable and reasonable.	Clear organizational definition of equity, and concrete description of how equity strategy is reflected in the proposed project.	Clear organizational definition of equity. Concrete, tangible description of how equity strategy is reflected in proposed project, including examples of activities and accountability measures.
6 Budget: Includes a clear, reasonable, and efficient budget matched to proposed project	Project budget is incomplete, unrealistic, and/or poorly aligned with the budget narrative.	Budget lacks sufficient detail, is unclear, or includes items that do not seem reasonable.	Budget is complete, clear, realistic, and reasonably aligned with the narrative and project plan, but there are questions on some items.	Budget form is complete with explanatory notes, clear, reasonable and matched to the community need and project plan.	Budget is complete with explanatory notes, clear, detailed, realistic, comprehensive, efficient and clearly aligned with the narrative and project plan.