

Accelerate Buncombe

RFP for Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds

Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce Community Betterment Foundation

Kathryn Cramer
PO Box 1010
Asheville, NC 28802

O: 828-258-6119

April Brown

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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), 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.

Accelerate Buncombe

Amount of Funds Requested*

\$1,663,624.13

Recovery Fund Eligible Category*

Please select one:

Assistance to unemployed workers

Brief Project Description*

Provide a short summary of your proposed project.

Accelerate Buncombe is a talent recruitment and workforce readiness program hosted by the EDC of Asheville Buncombe County, in collaboration with AB-Tech, high-wage employers, Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce, JM Leadership Development, Operation Gateway, and Inclusive Hiring Partners' community-based organizations. Once enrolled, students earn \$15/hour during the short-term 8-week accelerated

RFP for Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery

training program, which allows them to quit their current job and learn the skills needed to work with area employers. With paid training opportunities through Accelerate Buncombe, we are leveling the playing field for entry to high wage career paths. Upon graduation, job seekers will receive job offers for direct employment and/or apprenticeship that will keep job seekers on a track for additional credentials and earning potential. The curriculum includes Leadership Development, Certified Production Technician, and Career Readiness Certificate.

Project Plan*

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

Accelerate Buncombe intends to increase the number of qualified individuals aligned with employers' workforce needs and prepare job seekers with skills necessary to enter the manufacturing sector through its accelerated pre-apprenticeship earn-while-you-learn model. Accelerate Buncombe will work with existing partnerships and collaborations, like Inclusive Hiring Partners and Operation Gateway, to bridge the divide between low-wage work and a high-wage, high-skilled career. The project models an innovative program in Cleveland County called Accelerate Cleveland, which was funded by Golden Leaf in 2020. Candidates will be paid \$15/hour for the duration of the full-time, 8-week workforce training program to support them in transitioning from unemployment, incarceration, and/or low-wage work. Project partners will recruit and refer job seekers and mentor them while they complete workforce training at AB-Tech. Financial assistance will also be available to individuals facing hardships such as medical expenses, transportation, auto repairs, rent, utilities, or childcare expenses to ensure they are able to complete the training program. The training has three core components: Leadership Development, Certified Production Technician (CPT+), and the Career Readiness Certificate (CRC). Additionally, Leadership Development training can be offered as a stand alone option for job seekers interested in other high wage fields such as construction, healthcare, and hospitality. The program will work through a network of project partners, community liaisons, and service providers to identify, recruit, interview, and select up to 30 participants per cohort starting with 2 cohorts in the first year and scaling over years 2 and 3 to accommodate up to 5 cohorts, or 300 completers over 3-year project period. Enrollment will be tracked to confirm attendance for weekly compensation. Every completer is guaranteed an interview and job placement services to ensure employment upon program completion. Invested employer partners will have priority to interview and hire candidates.

Manufacturing is thriving in the United States and the EDC's 2025 goal is for Buncombe County to add over 2,000 new manufacturing jobs over the next five years (Source: 5x5 2025 plan). Just this year, Pratt & Whitney announced plans to invest in a new Buncombe County manufacturing facility, resulting in 800 new jobs by 2027 with an average annual wage of \$68,000 (Source: EDC ABC). AccessNC County Profile for Buncombe County, May 2021, reports an average annual income for 2020 at \$48,256 (Source: NC Commerce). Therefore, Pratt & Whitney plans to hire at wages over 40% higher than 2020 average wages. Manufacturing is a critical employment sector for wage growth in Buncombe County and demands every effort possible to ensure a workforce is available and ready to work.

Statement of Need*

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

Over 350 people per year are returning home to Buncombe County from incarceration (DPS, Buncombe Prison Exits, June 2020 thru May 2021). Many of them are ready to find a new sense of purpose and meaning in life. Many gained strong work ethic and transferable skills while in institutionalized care but, because of systemic barriers in workplaces, aren't able to find meaningful employment. Furthermore, because they have bills due immediately and they aren't eligible for government subsidies, they cannot afford to pursue additional credentials often required for high wage careers.

In a workforce analysis survey conducted by the EDC in 2018, of the 720 respondents from area employers, more than 71% listed friends and networks as their primary source of talent recruitment. People facing significant barriers to employment, including intergenerational poverty, previous justice involvement, and systemic racism are historically disconnected from these opportunities, disproportionately impacting their access to careers in high-growth industries. Furthermore, individuals working in low-wage jobs can't afford to quit their job to complete additional training required to qualify for higher wage opportunities. Buncombe County has more than 30,800 residents with income at or below poverty. Furthermore, 35% of Buncombe County's workforce are underemployed, or working full-time for less than living wage (Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages - Bureau of Labor Statistics). Based on the most recent U.S. Census Bureau data (2019), the annual median income of residents between ages of 15-24 is \$34,043 and the unemployment rate is 14%. Residents with a high school diploma or less have an average median income of \$23,612 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). While manufacturing wages are on average above living wage, manufacturing employers are struggling to fill jobs and need to fill about 1,500 jobs in Buncombe County alone for currently open, unfilled positions (Emsi Q2 2021 Data Set).

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.

Accelerate Buncombe prioritizes working with community members facing significant employment barriers like intergenerational poverty and previous justice involvement, both of which disproportionately impact BIPOC communities. Our target population has been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic because they have historically suffered from higher unemployment rates, lower wages, lower incomes, higher poverty rates, and much less savings to fall back on than their white counterparts. Black residents were economically insecure before the pandemic, magnifying the economic damage to these workers and their families. Pandemic-related job losses have been especially devastating for our black communities. Additionally, COVID-19 and the pandemic have greatly impacted manufacturing employers as consumer demand remained high during the pandemic but they couldn't fill open jobs to meet that demand. Even when Buncombe County saw the highest employment rates we've seen in the past 5 years, employers were scrambling for ways to fill their open positions and production and product delivery has suffered as a result. Without this funding, we will fall short on connecting those that need it most to the most available and high wage opportunities in our community.

Population Served*

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

The population served are underemployed workers, many of whom are employed full-time but making less than a living wage. Additionally, we will work with project partners to identify candidates who have significant barriers to employment and/or are currently unemployed. We will target outreach to youth 18-24 years of age and adults 24+ years of age living in under-resourced and low-income communities. This population has barriers to skills training which are not currently being addressed through any traditional community college programs. These workers must maintain employment to support their families. Accelerate Buncombe will be a resource to close the opportunity gap and bridge the financial gap for underemployed citizens to improve their quality of life, address wage disparities, and build a talent pool for Buncombe County's manufacturing.

Operation Gateway is a Workforce Development program at the YMI Cultural Center that specializes in supporting, recruiting, and mentoring the black community of Buncombe County. Operation Gateway staff are working in community to recruit, mentor, and connect people into employment. If our proposal is successful, Accelerate Buncombe will support one Certified Community Health Worker (CCHW) at Operation Gateway

with a capacity to serve up to 80 people per year. Prior to enrollment, the CCHW will work with the individual to determine whether to pursue the Leadership Development training or the CPT+ training. Accelerate Buncombe will rely on the CCHW to recruit and mentor candidates to meet our annual goals. We are also partnering with Jason Muhammad to provide Leadership Development training focused on cultivating a growth mindset and empower students to contribute to an organization and develop the next generation of leaders.

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.

In July 2020, the Inclusive Hiring Partners (IHP), a collaborative initiative between EDC, community service providers, and employers, launched as a resource to close the opportunity gap in Buncombe County. Inclusive Hiring Partners connect Buncombe County residents experiencing employment barriers, like long-term underemployment or unemployment, previous justice involvement, and intergenerational poverty – many of which disproportionately impact local Black communities – with high wage employment. When IHP launched, our goals were to place about 40 job seekers into full-time employment per year and recruit a total of 10 employer partners. While recruited 24 partner employers in the first year, representing over 300 current job openings, job seeker recruitment has fallen short of goal. For example, in the first year, 13 individuals have been placed and have retained full-time employment for over 90 days, at or above living wage. While there are several variables to explain this shortfall during the pandemic, Accelerate Buncombe will enable individuals to quit their low wage jobs to build skills in high wage industries by compensating candidates throughout the full-time, 7-week training program, resulting in an increase in the number of job seekers in the manufacturing talent pool. The core curriculum, Certified Production Technician, consists of four modules - safety, quality practices and measurement, manufacturing processes, and maintenance awareness. Performance Measures: Leadership Development certificate completers - Baseline: 82 completers total, Goal: 150 completers total; CPT+ credential completers - Baseline: 82 completers total, Goal: 150 completers total; Number of job offers per candidate - Baseline: 1 per candidate Goal: 3 per candidate; Percent placed into full-time employment per cohort - Baseline: 70%, Goal: 100%.

Evaluation*

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

Leveraging existing capacity at the Asheville Chamber of Commerce, current staff managing the Inclusive Hiring Partners initiative track all performance data and will provide the funder with quarterly activity, financial, and performance reports. We will use case management software, called Apricot, to collect all job seeker information and performance metrics.

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?

As an extension of Inclusive Hiring Partners, Accelerate Buncombe has equity embedded in its purpose and outcomes. We believe that we can work together to remove systemic barriers, improve access to rewarding careers, and close the opportunity gap in Buncombe County. Our purpose is to connect individuals to opportunities that move them and their families from surviving to thriving. While community service providers work with job seekers to remove employment barriers, we will work with employers to commit to

participating as Inclusive Hiring employer partners, who agree to the following equitable, inclusive hiring commitments:

- Guarantee interviews to job seekers
- Feedback to job seeker if candidate wasn't a fit
- Work hands-on with job seeker success coaches and mentors
- Require management and supervisors attend racial equity and inclusion training
- Evaluate organizational practices based on the Global Diversity and Inclusion Benchmarks

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.

Operation Gateway: Candidate recruitment, mentorship, and wraparound services; 11.43%
 JM Leadership Development: Leadership Development curriculum creation and instruction; 3.1%
 AB-Tech: CPT+ enrollment and instruction and CPT+ Skills Boss Equipment; 12.47%
 Friday Staffing: Participant compensation, payroll and accounting fees, drug screening, background checks; 62.46%
 Kudzu Brands: Logo design and brand development, 0.31%
 EDC & AAOC: Program administration and emergency financial assistance, 10.23%

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.

For more than 120 years, the Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce has been a catalyst for economic vitality in the community. Currently, 1,700 members represent more than 80,000 employees from businesses large and small. The Chamber connects its members to valuable resources such as economic development and research, business education, marketing opportunities and advocacy. The Chamber conveys, connects, and cultivates leaders and influencers and is a local champion for a balanced, thriving economy. The Chamber's initiatives have stimulated economic development, influenced public policy, and supported the growth of thousands of local and regional businesses. Over 25 years ago, the Chamber also partnered with the county, city, and private investors to establish the Economic Development Coalition for Asheville Buncombe County (EDC), which is housed through the Chamber. EDC's five-year plans measure three metrics—adding net new jobs in high wage, in-demand industries; increasing capital investment; and increasing average county wage. Each cycle has shown success in every area. For example, since 2010, EDC assisted in the growth of over 5,000 new direct jobs and \$1.85 billion in new taxable investment in Buncombe County. In the last five-year cycle, EDC has assisted in the growth of 2,000 new direct jobs, with wages exceeding the average for the county. More recently, the EDC launched the Inclusive Hiring Partners initiative, a collaborative resource between service providers and employers to close the opportunity gap. Since July 2020, 24 employers have partnered, representing over 300 currently available job opportunities. 13 of the 17 candidates have been placed into full-time, living wage jobs with benefits.

Working in collaboration with established partners, EDC will create multiple pathways along which long-term unemployed/underemployed adults facing significant barriers to employment become part of a skilled, educated workforce.

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_Accelerate Buncombe.xlsx

Special Considerations*

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

Letters of Support combined - Accelerate Buncombe.pdf

The goals and outcomes of Accelerate Buncombe are aligned with several of the ARPA funding categories, including aid to impacted industries, assistance to unemployed workers, addressing disparities in public health outcomes, and services for disproportionately impacted communities. Additionally, our goals and outcomes are aligned with Buncombe County's 2025 Strategic Plan, including a community focus on a vibrant economy, as well as specific 2025 goals, such as improve college and career readiness; increase median household income to North Carolina benchmark; and increase total employment in the region's targeted industries. Additionally, with its focus on equity and closing the opportunity gap, Accelerate Buncombe is aligned with Buncombe County's Foundational Focus Area of Equity: Systems, policies, and practices that support equity for all people and an organizational culture that embraces diversity and inclusion.

Accelerate Buncombe is aligned and designed to advance the common vision of the AVL5x5 2025 and Buncombe 2025 for a vibrant Buncombe County economy, which is "A robust and sustainable regional economy that builds on our homegrown industries and talent and provides economic mobility for residents." Paid training hours are an investment in workforce equity and will accelerate the pathway to employment and economic mobility for our residents.

File Attachment Summary

Applicant File Uploads

- Recovery-Funds-budget_Accelerate Buncombe.xlsx
- Letters of Support combined - Accelerate Buncombe.pdf

List expenses here			\$	-		
			Total	\$	1,734,088.51	



July 14, 2021

Buncombe County Government
200 College Street
Asheville, NC 28801

RE: Buncombe County Coronavirus Fiscal Recovery Funds Grant Proposal

Dear Review Committee,

Please accepted this letter of support for the Accelerate Buncombe's application for funding.

Accelerate Buncombe will address urgent workforce issues facing Buncombe County by creating a program for individuals who still experience significant barriers to employment. The program will be a resource to close the opportunity gap and bridge the financial gap for highly motivated, underemployed citizens to improve their quality of life, address wage disparities, and build a talent pool for Buncombe County's manufacturing growing workforce needs of today and in the future.

ABB has four customer-focused, globally leading businesses: Electrification, Process Automation, Motion, and Robotics & Discrete Automation. Our Weaverville facility is an advanced manufacturing facility, providing skilled labor opportunities in the production of mechanical power transmission products for over 42 years.

Manufacturing remains a critical employment sector for wage growth in Buncombe County and demands every effort possible to ensure a workforce is available and ready to work.

The Economic Development Coalition for Asheville-Buncombe County (EDC) and the Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce (Chamber) have a proven track record of building community by actively working to recruit and/or expand existing industries that offer high wage jobs in high-demand industries. The Chamber and EDC are well-positioned to leverage established relationships with employers to meet workforce needs and ensure economic mobility for all in our region.

Upon award of this grant, ABB will be pleased to support the implementation of the proposed project and will continue to partner with the Asheville-Buncombe Economic Development Coalition and Accelerate Buncombe to pipeline individuals with significant barriers into high demand, high wage job opportunities.

Respectfully,

Alan Burnette

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alan Burnette', is written over a white background.

Human Resources Business Partner
ABB

Thermo Fisher S C I E N T I F I C

July 14, 2021

Buncombe County Government
200 College Street
Asheville, NC 28801

RE: Buncombe County Coronavirus Fiscal Recovery Funds Grant Proposal

Dear Review Committee,

Please accepted this letter of support for the Accelerate Buncombe's application for funding.

Accelerate Buncombe will address urgent workforce issues facing Buncombe County by creating a program for individuals who still experience significant barriers to employment. The program will be a resource to close the opportunity gap and bridge the financial gap for highly motivated, underemployed citizens to improve their quality of life, address wage disparities, and build a talent pool for Buncombe County's manufacturing growing workforce needs of today and in the future.

Thermo Fisher Scientific is dedicated to our mission of enabling our customers to make the world healthier, cleaner, and safer. Although this might be a global mission, it all begins here at the local level in Buncombe County and the western North Carolina mountain region. The work that has been done by our team in Asheville has been critical in supporting the worldwide response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We are honored to partner with the EDC and AB Tech in support of this program.

Manufacturing remains a critical employment sector for wage growth in Buncombe County and demands every effort possible to ensure a workforce is available and ready to work.

The Economic Development Coalition for Asheville-Buncombe County (EDC) and the Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce (Chamber) have a proven track record of building community by actively working to recruit and/or expand existing industries that offer high wage jobs in high-demand industries. The Chamber and EDC are well-positioned to leverage established relationships with employers to meet workforce needs and ensure economic mobility for all in our region.

Upon award of this grant, Thermo Fisher Scientific will be pleased to support the implementation of the proposed project and will continue to partner with the Asheville-Buncombe Economic Development Coalition and Accelerate Buncombe to pipeline individuals with significant barriers into high demand, high wage job opportunities.

Respectfully,

Keith Howell 

Director of Operations – Asheville Site Leader
Thermo Fisher Scientific

July 14, 2021

Buncombe County Government
200 College Street
Asheville, NC 28801

RE: Buncombe County Coronavirus Fiscal Recovery Funds Grant Proposal

Dear Review Committee,

Please accepted this letter of support for the Accelerate Buncombe's application for funding.

Accelerate Buncombe will address urgent workforce issues facing Buncombe County by creating a program for individuals who still experience significant barriers to employment. The program will be a resource to close the opportunity gap and bridge the financial gap for highly motivated, underemployed citizens to improve their quality of life, address wage disparities, and build a talent pool for Buncombe County's manufacturing growing workforce needs of today and in the future.

Jacob Holm is more than 225 years old. We invest in our operations, our people, and our communities to continue our proud legacy of innovating and adapting. We take valuable lessons from our heritage and combine them with our cutting-edge product technology and DuPont™ history. We aim to continue honoring those who came before us and ensure a bright future for our successors through our economic efforts. We are a global effort at Jacob Holm. As pioneers, leading the nonwoven industry in minimizing environmental impact is our continuous endeavor.

Manufacturing remains a critical employment sector for wage growth in Buncombe County and demands every effort possible to ensure a workforce is available and ready to work.

The Economic Development Coalition for Asheville-Buncombe County (EDC) and the Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce (Chamber) have a proven track record of building community by actively working to recruit and/or expand existing industries that offer high wage jobs in high-demand industries. The Chamber and EDC are well-positioned to leverage established relationships with employers to meet workforce needs and ensure economic mobility for all in our region.

Upon award of this grant, Jacob Holm Industries will be pleased to support the implementation of the proposed project and will continue to partner with the Asheville-Buncombe Economic Development Coalition and Accelerate Buncombe to pipeline individuals with significant barriers into high demand, high wage job opportunities.

Respectfully,

Amy Taylor

Amy Taylor, Human Resources Manager

Jacob Holm (America) Inc. 1265 Sand Hill Road | Candler, North Carolina 28715 | USA

Cell. +1 828 844 0309 | Fax. +1 828 670 0042

www.jacob-holm.com | amy.taylor@jacob-holm.com



July 14, 2021

Buncombe County Government
200 College Street
Asheville, NC 28801

RE: Buncombe County Coronavirus Fiscal Recovery Funds Grant Proposal

Dear Review Committee,

Please accepted this letter of support for the Accelerate Buncombe's application for funding. Accelerate Buncombe will address urgent workforce issues facing Buncombe County by creating a program for individuals who still experience significant barriers to employment. The program will be a resource to close the opportunity gap and bridge the financial gap for highly motivated, underemployed citizens to improve their quality of life, address wage disparities, and build a talent pool for Buncombe County's manufacturing growing workforce needs of today and in the future.

At BorgWarner, we are committed to being an equity employer and working to level the playing field by reducing/eliminating unintentional or unnecessary barriers in our employment practices. We feel honored and excited to be asked to work with the EDC and the Chamber on this project that is in perfect alignment with our goals as a company.

Manufacturing remains a critical employment sector for wage growth in Buncombe County and demands every effort possible to ensure a workforce is available and ready to work.

The Economic Development Coalition for Asheville-Buncombe County (EDC) and the Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce (Chamber) have a proven track record of building community by actively working to recruit and/or expand existing industries that offer high wage jobs in high-demand industries. The Chamber and EDC are well-positioned to leverage established relationships with employers to meet workforce needs and ensure economic mobility for all in our region.

Upon award of this grant, BorgWarner will be pleased to support the implementation of the proposed project and will continue to partner with the Asheville-Buncombe Economic Development Coalition and Accelerate Buncombe to pipeline individuals with significant barriers into high demand, high wage job opportunities.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Lesa Records'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Lesa Records, SPHR
HR Generalist



Buncombe County Government
200 College Street
Asheville, NC 28801

RE: Buncombe County Coronavirus Recovery Funds Grant Proposal

July 14, 2021

Dear Review Committee,

Please accepted this letter of support for the Accelerate Buncombe's application for funding. Accelerate Buncombe will address urgent workforce issues facing Buncombe County by creating a program for individuals who still experience significant barriers to employment. The program will be a resource to close the opportunity gap and bridge the financial gap for highly motivated, underemployed citizens to improve their quality of life, address wage disparities, and build a talent pool for Buncombe County's manufacturing growing workforce needs of today and in the future.

Diamond Brand Gear has been a manufacturer in the area since the 1940's. We work very hard to create a colaborative atmosphere to grow textiles back as an industry in WNC. We work very diligently to change the face of textiles from yesteryear. Examples include the following:

- Living wage certified
- Gain sharing for all hourly employees
- Paid time off and paid holidays for all employees
- Subsidized medical insurance offered
- Company paid teachers to create a virtual learning pod on campus for employees' elementary age children during the Pandemic, as were deemed essential workers
- Created a Industrial Sewing curriculum with local community colleges to serve the growing region of small businesses especially in the Outdoor Industry, requiring skilled sewers
- Conintue to grow and need 20+ additional hourly employees in 2021 & beyond

Manufacturing remains a critical employment sector for wage growth in Buncombe County and demands every effort possible to ensure a workforce is available and ready to work.

The Economic Development Coalition for Asheville-Buncombe County (EDC) and the Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce (Chamber) have a proven track record of building community by actively working to recruit and/or expand existing industries that offer high wage jobs in high-demand industries. The Chamber and EDC are well-positioned to leverage established relationships with employers to meet workforce needs and ensure economic mobility for all in our region.

Upon award of this grant, Diamond Brand Gear will be pleased to support the implementation of the proposed project and will continue to partner with the Asheville-Buncombe Economic Development Coalition and Accelerate Buncombe to pipeline individuals with significant barriers into high demand, high wage job opportunities.

Sincerely yours,


Lauren Rash
Chief Operating Officer
Diamond Brand Gear



Powering Business Worldwide

July 14, 2021

Buncombe County Government
200 College Street
Asheville, NC 28801

RE: Buncombe County Coronavirus Fiscal Recovery Funds Grant Proposal

Dear Review Committee,

Please accepted this letter of support for the Accelerate Buncombe's application for funding.

Accelerate Buncombe will address urgent workforce issues facing Buncombe County by creating a program for individuals who still experience significant barriers to employment. The program will be a resource to close the opportunity gap and bridge the financial gap for highly motivated, underemployed citizens to improve their quality of life, address wage disparities, and build a talent pool for Buncombe County's manufacturing growing workforce needs of today and in the future.

Eaton is a power management company with 2020 sales of \$17.9 billion. We provide energy-efficient solutions that help our customers effectively manage electrical and mechanical power more efficiently, safely and sustainably. Eaton is dedicated to improving the quality of life and the environment through the use of power management technologies and services. Within surrounding counties of Asheville; Eaton employs nearly 1,500 people with hiring projected to continue rising in the coming years as our company embarks on a local production expansion project. We greatly appreciate the longstanding, close partnership we have had with the Economic Development Coalition and are looking forward to working together on the Accelerate Buncombe project!

Manufacturing remains a critical employment sector for wage growth in Buncombe County and demands every effort possible to ensure a workforce is available and ready to work.

The Economic Development Coalition for Asheville-Buncombe County (EDC) and the Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce (Chamber) have a proven track record of building community by actively working to recruit and/or expand existing industries that offer high wage jobs in high-demand industries. The Chamber and EDC are well-positioned to leverage established relationships with employers to meet workforce needs and ensure economic mobility for all in our region.

Upon award of this grant, Eaton will be pleased to support the implementation of the proposed project and will continue to partner with the Asheville-Buncombe Economic Development Coalition and Accelerate Buncombe to pipeline individuals with significant barriers into high demand, high wage job opportunities.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Erin Bowers". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Erin Bowers

Human Resources Manager
Eaton
221 Heywood Road | Arden, NC 28704
mobile: +1 262 765-9764
email: erinbowers@eaton.com