

**Buncombe County FY2019 Strategic Partnership Grants
Application Summary Sheet**

Project	Courthouse Eviction Defense Project
Organization	Pisgah Legal Services

Amount Requested	\$50,000	Strategic Priority or Sustainability Goal	Affordable Housing
New or Renewal Request	New	Area Served	District 1, 2, and 3

Organization Description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pisgah Legal Services (PLS) pursues justice by providing legal assistance and advocacy to help low-income people in WNC meet their basic needs and improve their lives. The Homelessness Prevention Project works to prevent homelessness by defending evictions and foreclosures and helping people secure needed housing subsidies and essential repairs. In 2017, PLS provided legal assistance to help prevent evictions 298 times, obtain or preserve housing subsidies 171 times, and improve housing conditions 77 times in Buncombe County. PLS utilizes a holistic approach to help clients develop a plan to solve their underlying problems, not just the immediate symptom.
Key Steps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The PLS attorney and volunteers will also spend significant time on the 2nd Floor where Small Claims Court resides. The attorney will monitor the small claims court docket for summary ejection cases and will offer representation to tenants at court, after screening them for income eligibility and conflicts of interest. PLS will also recruit and train volunteer attorneys to handle some of these cases to increase our capacity to serve more tenants in court. Cases that need more follow-up and coordination with community resources will be handled either by PLS staff or volunteer attorneys. Tenant families will be introduced to community resources to assist them with a variety of needs to prevent more eviction filings against them.
People Served	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Serves low-income people in Buncombe County whose incomes are below 125% of the federal poverty rate (\$15,175 for an individual; \$31,750 for a family of four). While anyone might fall within this income category, our clients tend to be female-headed households, people with disabilities, the elderly, and racial minorities. Plan to help 200 adults and children in 100 cases during the year through the courthouse project.
Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Utilize a client data base, Legal Server, to document all needed information including Case outcomes. Will capture the number of clients we represent and advise through the Buncombe Courthouse project and the percentage of the clients represented that obtain a positive outcome, such as preventing their eviction, delaying the eviction to allow for time to locate new housing, or obtaining a favorable financial settlement.

Budget			
Amount Funded FY2018	n/a	Increase Request	n/a
Administrative Budget	22% (from 2016 IRS Form 990)	Total Organization Budget	\$4,665,790
Other Funding Sources: Grants, Individual donations, Federal Government funding, State Government, County Funding, Special Events, Other (interest, Lease Income, Misc.)			

Strengths
Innovative and/or creative program design
Well-linked, creative, and/or non-traditional partnerships
Project serves underserved, underrepresented, minority, and/or high-need population

Courthouse Eviction Defense Project

FY2019 Strategic Partnership Grants

Pisgah Legal Services

Mr. James Barrett
P.O. Box 2276
Asheville, NC 28802

katierm@pisgahlegal.org
O: 828-253-0406
F: 828-252-8977

Ms. Katie Russell Miller

P.O. Box 2276
Asheville, NC 28802

katierm@pisgahlegal.org
O: 828-210-3420
M: 828-777-2275
F: 828-252-8927

Application Form

Question Group

Project Name*

Name of Project.

Courthouse Eviction Defense Project

Amount Requested*

\$50,000.00

PROJECT NARRATIVE

Area Served*

Which areas of the County will be served by this project? Which Commissioner District(s) will be served?

A Buncombe County Commissioner district map is available at [THIS LINK](#).

This project will serve all of Buncombe County by assisting low-income people who are facing eviction through the summary ejection process at the Buncombe County Courthouse.

Organization Description*

Tell us about your organization. What is your mission? Highlight two or three key facts and accomplishments that best define your organization.

Pisgah Legal Services (PLS) pursues justice by providing legal assistance and advocacy to help low-income people in WNC meet their basic needs and improve their lives. Our Homelessness Prevention Project works to prevent homelessness by defending evictions and foreclosures and helping people secure needed housing subsidies and essential repairs. In 2017 we provided legal assistance to help prevent evictions 298 times, obtain or preserve housing subsidies 171 times, and improve housing conditions 77 times in Buncombe County. PLS utilizes a holistic approach to help clients develop a plan to solve their underlying problems, not just the immediate symptom.

In mid-2017, PLS lost \$535,000 in state funding for our homelessness prevention and disability assistance work. Although we are securing funding from other sources, the cuts have led to layoffs and staffing reconfigurations. The courthouse project will provide additional capacity to serve more Buncombe residents facing homelessness.

Strategic Priority*

Which of the following priorities best reflects the primary goal of your project?

Buncombe County Commissioners are dedicated to strengthening the quality of life for everyone by setting new fiscally, socially and environmentally responsible goals that will guide decisions and improve our community for future generations. The Board has committed to strategic priorities as a guide to shape partnerships and investments of resources to insure a healthy, safe, well-educated, thriving and sustainable community.

Details about the Strategic Priorities are available at [THIS LINK](#).

Affordable Housing

Strategic Priority - Other Sustainability Goal

If you selected "Other Sustainability Goal" from the list of Strategic Priorities, please list it here.

Details about the Sustainability Goals are available at [THIS LINK](#).

Shared Vision*

What critical community problem or challenge are you hoping to improve through this project?

Over 1,300 families were evicted in Buncombe County in 2016. 2200 families were summoned for eviction, 80% of them for non-payment of rent. Sixty percent of all cases resulted in an eviction order. In 2016, PLS succeeded in preventing or delaying evictions in 93% of the cases represented.

Primary research conducted by Harvard University researchers showed that case outcomes are materially improved for tenants when they have access to full legal representation, at least in part because “the inability of some self-represented litigants to understand and comply with court rules and procedures may make it impossible for their cases, however worthy, to be decided on the merits.” While some tenants will find alternative housing in the event of eviction or foreclosure, for many others the eviction or foreclosure process will result in either substantial worsening of living conditions or homelessness.

Key Steps*

How will the project work? What are specific activities and milestones that your project entails?

The PLS attorney assigned to the project will work from an office in the courthouse. Clerk of Court Steve Cogburn has identified space on the 8th floor that can be used for this project. The PLS attorney and volunteers will also spend significant time on the 2nd Floor where Small Claims Court resides. The attorney will monitor the small claims court docket for summary ejection cases and will offer representation to tenants at court, after screening them for income eligibility and conflicts of interest.

PLS will also recruit and train volunteer attorneys to handle some of these cases to increase our capacity to serve more tenants in court. Cases that need more follow-up and coordination with community resources will be handled either by PLS staff or volunteer attorneys. Tenant families will be introduced to community resources to assist them with a variety of needs to prevent more eviction filings against them.

People Served*

Who are the members of our community this project will serve? How many people will be served? Include demographics, including age, area median income, race, neighborhood and/or school.

The project will serve low-income people in Buncombe County whose incomes are below 125% of the federal poverty rate (\$15,175 for an individual; \$31,750 for a family of four). While anyone might fall within this income category, our clients tend to be female-headed households, people with disabilities, the elderly, and racial minorities. We plan to help 200 adults and children in 100 cases during the year through the courthouse project. These will be Buncombe County residents who are at risk of eviction from their rental unit that are identified either by reviewing the docket for small claims court or an in-person connection at the courthouse.

Partners*

Which other organizations are you working with to reach your goals? What other local organizations provide similar services or serve similar beneficiaries, and how do you work together?

PLS utilizes a holistic approach to help clients develop a plan to solve their underlying problems, not just deal with the immediate symptom. We frequently collaborate with organizations such as domestic violence protection agencies, consumer credit counseling agencies, housing programs, and health care providers.

We currently have partnerships with the following organizations that serve the same population: DHHS, Homeward Bound, MAHEC, Mission Health, Eblen Charities, ABCCM, RHA Health Services and On Track Financial Education and Counseling.

No other agency in Buncombe County provides free legal aid to tenants, yet we work with our partner agencies to make sure families receive other beneficial services.

Personnel*

Who is responsible for the project? Briefly describe project leaders and the role each will play in the project. How do these leaders reflect the population or community that you serve?

Robin Merrell, Managing Attorney, has over 17 years of experience working on housing cases and advocacy at PLS to address the basic needs of low-income people in Asheville and across Western North Carolina.

Ben Many, Housing Program Director, will supervise the staff assigned to the project. Ben has over 6 years of experience working on housing cases and advocacy at PLS, seeking to address the immediate needs of his clients and root causes of poverty in the community. For the past five years Ben has primarily provided services in Buncombe County.

TBD, a PLS staff attorney to be hired for the project. Two other PLS attorneys may assist with the project: Parker Smith and Molly Maynard.

Success*

How will you measure results? What will success look like? How will you document the impact of your project? Include whether there is a model that serves as basis for project design.

We will utilize our client data base, Legal Server, to document all needed information including case outcomes. We will capture the number of clients we represent and advise through the Buncombe Courthouse project and the percentage of the clients who we represent that obtain a positive outcome, such as preventing their eviction, delaying the eviction to allow for time to locate new housing, or obtaining a favorable financial settlement. We will also capture clients' access to other services.

In 2015, PLS launched a pilot project of locating an attorney at the courthouse during small claims court. The project was effective at identifying people facing eviction and providing on-the-spot legal assistance. Reduced staffing, an excess of requests for services, and the relocation of small claims court resulted in us delaying the full implementation of the project. However, the pilot demonstrated that the model could be effective at allowing us to identify and serve more people in crisis.

Funding*

What is your plan for finding the balance of the project budget? What is your funding timeline and what are your other sources of support?

PLS estimates the full cost of the project at \$111,551 - \$50,000 in attorney salary, \$24,100 in support staff, supervision, and administration, \$25,412 in fringe benefits, and \$12,039 in overhead.

United Way, Community Development Block Grant funds through the City of Asheville, donations by individuals and churches, various foundations, and the Interest on Lawyers Trust Accounts Fund of the N.C. State Bar provide funding for homelessness prevention by PLS. PLS is raising additional donations to support this position and its supervision and administration with a \$10,000 gift from Hometrust Bank which we plan to match. We plan to recruit student interns where possible to help staff the work. We are seeking a modest Strategic Partnership Funds from the City of Asheville to round out funding for this work.

Sustainability*

How will this project be maintained? Please describe funding sources and how you plan to sustain the project in future years.

We believe that the results will be significant and worthy of ongoing funding from the initial sources. PLS continues to urge the N.C. General Assembly to restore funding for civil legal aid work across the state. If that funding is restored, some of it could be used to sustain this project. PLS pursues new foundation and corporate donors and seeks to increase its annual campaign every year.

ATTACHMENTS

Project Budget*

Download the budget form at [THIS LINK](#).

Complete the budget form for this project and the overall organization.

Save it to your computer, then upload it.

PLS strategic-partnership-grants-FY2019-budget Buncombe County.xlsx

Financial Statements*

Upload a copy of the most recently completed financial statements.

All financial statements must be audited, reviewed or compiled by a certified public accountant and include a full balance sheet, income statement, and cash flow statement.

If your organization does not have financial statements, briefly state the reason.

2016 PLS Audit Report.pdf

IRS Form 990*

Upload a copy of the 990 nonprofit tax reporting form that you most recently completed.

If your organization does not have a 990, briefly state the reason.

PLS 2016 990.pdf

Board of Directors List*

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.

PLS Board List 2018.pdf

Authorized Signatory

By typing in below the name of the authorized signatory and date of submittal, you acknowledge that your governing body has authorized this application, that it is true and current to your knowledge. As a condition of any grant awarded, this organization will provide all information in the manner described in the contract to be executed between the organization and Buncombe County or its designee, including program and financial reporting.

Name & Date

James Barrett, 02/09/2018