

Amplifying Mental Health Services for Those Most Impacted by COVID-19 in Buncombe County

RFP for Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds

All Souls Counseling Center

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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.

Amplifying Mental Health Services for Those Most Impacted by COVID-19 in Buncombe County

Amount of Funds Requested*

\$347,336.00

Recovery Fund Eligible Category*

Please select one:

Enhance behavioral and mental health services

Brief Project Description*

Provide a short summary of your proposed project.

It is widely recognized that the mental health impacts of the pandemic, which include isolation, grief, PTSD, anxiety, and depression, as well as increased rates and severity of substance abuse and domestic violence, will not diminish along with the virus. The challenges are multiplied for those who have also experienced job loss, housing issues, and other financial distress.

All Souls Counseling Center (ASCC) is dedicated to serving the mental health needs of uninsured and underinsured adults in Western North Carolina (WNC) as they cope with the after effects of the pandemic. As we prepare to reopen our counseling center for face-to-face therapy, as well as continue to offer phone and video therapy, this project will help us implement air filtration measures and other safety protocols at the Center in Asheville, as well as increase therapist pay to attract and maintain an adequate number of therapists to meet the post-COVID mental health needs of clients.

Project Plan*

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

Our project will begin immediately upon signing of our contract with Buncombe County. In a two-pronged approach, we will strengthen our capacity to respond to COVID-19 and the negative economic impacts it has had on our clients and our staff.

To help ensure the health and safety of clients and staff as we prepare to reopen the Counseling Center located at 35 Arlington Street in Asheville, we will purchase and install portable air purifiers with HEPA dual air filters in each counseling room, as well as the administrative areas and waiting room. We will also implement enhanced cleaning, sanitation, and safety protocols to reduce the potential spread of COVID-19 and any variants that are circulating in the community. This activity will be complete within the first two months of the contract period.

The second area we must address is attracting and maintaining an adequate number of qualified therapists to meet the increased need for mental health services in Buncombe County. We currently employ 20 part-time, contract therapists. When ASCC was established in 2000, we paid our therapists \$25 per hour. Since that time, their hourly rate has only increased to \$35 per hour. As the cost of living has skyrocketed in the Asheville area over the past year, it is essential that we align with the changing economy and provide fair market compensation to the therapists. We currently maintain several grant funding sources that support the \$35 per hour pay for our therapists. We are requesting funds through this opportunity to add \$15 per hour to their pay, for a total of \$50 per hour.

While our therapists are motivated to give back to the community by providing their services at a discounted rate to those who normally would not have access to these mental health services, it is important that they continue to feel valued. Even with the proposed \$15 increase, therapists will be receiving much less per individual session than they would normally receive in private practice. However, by making their hourly rate more attractive, we will be able to retain therapists who are inspired to care for our community, increase their weekly availability for new clients, and recruit new therapists to our team, expanding the number of sessions we can offer. We will implement this enhanced pay upon the signing of our contract with Buncombe County and maintain it throughout the contract period.

Statement of Need*

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

Mental health has long been a key health issue in our region, as identified by the WNC Health Network. From 2012 to 2018, the percentage of adults reporting they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with life rose from 5% to 11%. Among very low-income adults, the percentage was 26%; among low-income adults it was 17%.

The pandemic has further exacerbated the prevalence of mental health issues. As the emergency phase of the pandemic ebbs in the US, experts anticipate long-term mental health impacts across the population

(statnews.com, 5/7/2021). The Raleigh News Observer (6/25/21) reports that people with mental health illnesses are increasingly ending up in the emergency rooms of NC hospitals, which are ill equipped to treat them. On a local level, the Department of Psychiatry at MAHEC reports a fourfold increase in depression and anxiety among adults over the past year (ACT 7/11/21).

As the pandemic unfolded, we continued to serve the mental health needs of uninsured and underinsured adults in WNC, closing our Center to in-person visits, and offering sessions by phone and video. However, as existing clients requested additional therapy sessions, and our waiting list of new clients increased, we faced challenges in attracting and maintaining an adequate number of qualified therapists to meet the need. As we prepare to reopen our center for face-to-face sessions again, we must also ensure the safety of our staff and clients by enhancing the air filtration at our Center to protect against the spread of COVID-19 and its variants.

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.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated mental health issues in our nation and our region. Surveys administered by The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) found that 38% of respondents reported anxiety or depression from April 2020 to February 2021, up from 11% in 2019. Emergency department visits for overdoses and suicide attempts from mid-March to mid-Oct. 2020 were up 36% and 26%, respectively, from 2019. Several behavioral health service providers have reported increasing demand for their services.

The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) reports that the rates of anxiety and depression have tripled in North Carolina during the pandemic, with marginalized populations especially hard hit. In Buncombe County, the severity of domestic violence, as well as mental health and substance cases, has increased, according to Buncombe County HHS (ACT 7/11/21). Frontline healthcare workers, including those who provide mental health care, are also at high risk for experiencing trauma, PTSD, and depression as a result of caring for those impacted by COVID-19. These mental health issues and their effects are likely to continue well beyond the pandemic. For those who are also experiencing economic impacts of the pandemic, the challenges are multiplied.

By offering our team of experienced therapists a more attractive hourly rate compensation, ASCC will enable our existing team of therapists to offer more counseling sessions per week. This higher hourly rate will also attract new therapists to our team, and we'll be able to offer more sessions to clients in Buncombe County, both to new clients and the clients on our waiting list. The addition of the portable HEPA air purifiers will likewise make it safer to see these clients in person at our Center.

Population Served*

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

ASCC serves adults from all backgrounds, with the common denominator being that they are uninsured or underinsured and are struggling with mental health issues. Counseling is provided on a sliding scale, with no one turned away for inability to pay. During our 2019-20 fiscal year, 77% of new clients were uninsured, and 60% reported making less than \$20,000 per year. Our typical client pool is 70% women; 7% are aged 24 or younger; 69% are between the ages of 25-49; and 24% are between the ages of 50 and 64. While we serve all of Western North Carolina, 88% of our clients reside in Buncombe County.

Our 20 licensed therapists offer individual, couples, and family therapy to help clients work through issues that include: domestic/family violence, physical/sexual assault, anxiety, depression, PTSD/trauma, addiction recovery, grief and loss, postpartum depression, parenting issues, LGBTQ issues (LGBTQ affirming),

and relationship challenges. Bilingual English/Spanish counseling is available in a limited capacity, and we are working on expanding this capacity. We are also engaged in ongoing efforts to expand services to the African American population of Asheville with the assistance of a private funder. When needed, our psychiatric services offered by our board-certified psychiatrist provide clients with evaluations and medication.

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.

This project will significantly impact our ability to provide mental health care for those who need it most and can least afford it. Enhancing the safety of our Center will allow us to once again offer counseling to clients in a comfortable and non-bureaucratic setting. Raising the hourly pay rate of our therapists will raise morale of existing staff and allow us to attract new therapists to meet the needs in our community.

In our 2018-19 fiscal year, we served 646 clients with 4,310 counseling sessions. In the past fiscal year (2020-21), our waiting list climbed to 74 and we served 274 clients with 3,370 counseling sessions. During the pandemic, our therapists have been seeing clients for more sessions than they previously did.

Our objectives for this project are to reduce our waiting list and restore our number of clients served to the prior level.

Over the course of the project, we are committed to achieving the following results:

- 1) We will increase the number of clients served by 250 over the course of 5 years (starting from the beginning of the grant period), with an average of 50 additional clients each year over the current amount (274)..
- 2) We will offer 2500 additional individual therapy sessions over the course of 5 years, starting from the beginning of the grant period. This is based on an average of 10 sessions per client.
- 3) 90% of respondents to our Client Survey will report improvements in their mental health as a result of counseling received at ASCC.

The benefits of the mental health counseling we provide clients can include improved relationships, better overall health and wellbeing, and job retention. Individual counseling for those who would otherwise not have access to it can often prevent mental health issues from reaching a crisis, thereby reducing use of more costly services such as mobile crisis, emergency departments, and inpatient care.

Evaluation*

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

In order to evaluate improvements in our ability to deliver services to more clients over the course of this contract, we will track our success in attracting additional therapists through various job posting sites and monitor our waiting list to track how quickly clients go from initial call to the Center to assignment to a therapist. We will also monitor job satisfaction of therapists through communication methods such as regular meetings, surveys, and email updates.

To evaluate improvement in behavioral health issues in our clients, we use the Global Assessment of Functioning (GAF) Scale at the beginning and at the conclusion of treatment. We also conduct an anonymous Client Survey twice per year with approximately 20% of our current clients (those who have been seen by their ASCC therapist three times or more) to hear their reflections on whether treatment has helped them or

not. Respondents report on whether they've experienced improvement in managing daily functioning, decreased symptoms, and/or achieved their goals as a result of counseling received at ASCC.

We use the results of both the GAF and the Client Surveys to refine, as needed, our approach to providing mental health care to the uninsured and underinsured population of the region. More recently, we have used the results to assess the feasibility of continuing remote options (phone and video) for delivering counseling after we reopen our Center for in-person sessions. We also use evaluation results to expand and enhance our services and resources beyond what we currently provide through networking and linkages to our partners in Buncombe County in the medical and social services sectors.

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?

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, people of color, low-income individuals, LGBTQ individuals, and other underserved communities already faced large disparities in health and healthcare coverage. The pandemic has exacerbated these disparities. Besides the direct health effects of the pandemic, the economic and mental health challenges for these communities were disproportionately felt.

A survey from the Kaiser Family Foundation in February 2021 showed that 59% of Hispanic adults and 51% of Black adults said their household lost a job or income due to the pandemic, compared with 39% of white adults. Adults with a household income under \$40,000 were three times as likely as those with a household income of \$90,000 or more to say they have had trouble paying for basic living expenses during the period of March - May 2021.

Because of the longstanding inequities that create barriers to health care and health care coverage for these communities, ASCC's mission includes providing access to individuals in these communities. By increasing the access to our counseling and psychiatric services with a larger pool of available therapists, we will be able to better serve these communities that have been most affected by the pandemic.

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.

While there are no subcontractors we intend to use for the proposed scope of work, we maintain collaborative partnerships with many other service providers in Buncombe County. These collaborative partners are essential to our ability to link clients to needed services and resources beyond what we provide. With the shared goal of building and maintaining a comprehensive system of support for those in our community who are low-income and without essential resources, ASCC is part of Buncombe County's Health and Human Services Safety Net Coalition, which is a network of organizations that provide services to people in need in our community. Partner organizations refer clients to us and we in turn refer clients to them. Our referral partners include: A-B Tech, Asheville Buncombe Community Christian Ministry (ABCCM), Comprehensive Care Center, Department of Social Services, Planned Parenthood, Helpmate, Mountain Area Health Education Center (MAHEC), Mission Hospital, Dale Fell Center, Family Preservation, Pisgah Legal Services, Western North Carolina Community Health Services (WNCCHS), 211, Our Voice, RHA, Vaya Health, mobile crisis, law enforcement, private therapists, medical providers, JFK-ADATC, and October Road.

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.

Executive Director Leslie D. McCrory, LCMHCS, LCAS, CCS, will provide oversight for the project and ensure that objectives are achieved, and all reporting requirements are met. Ms. McCrory has worked for 33 years in Asheville in the field of mental health and substance use services in direct care as a therapist, supervision of other therapists, education/teaching/training, and management.

Clinical Manager Pam Penland provides information and screenings for clients at ASCC, in addition to overseeing the scheduling process and medical records system. She also helps clients apply for Patient Assistance with medications, as needed. She has worked in the mental health field for 25 years, with a background in psychiatric nursing, including in psychiatric inpatient settings and community mental health.

Business Office Manager Nicole Almeida oversees financial operations, including payroll, billing, contracts, audits, expense tracking and reporting, and data management. Nicole has 11+ years of experience working in finance, including office and contract management. For the last 5 years her work has focused primarily on non-profit organizations.

Development Director Brendan Hughes coordinates fundraising, annual giving, donor communications, database management, social media and website content, and special events. Brendan has 11 years of experience in nonprofit development and management in the social entrepreneurship, youth development, and affordable housing sectors.

Grant Writer Lee Stevens conducts grant research, maintains a grant calendar, and writes grant proposals and grant reports.

ASCC's 20 licensed therapists have an average of ten years of counseling experience, and some have 30+ years. We also have a board-certified psychiatrist to provide evaluations and prescribe medication as indicated for current clients.

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.

Buncombe County COVID Recovery Funding Budget - All Souls Counseling Center.xlsx

Special Considerations*

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

If awarded this grant, ASCC will use the time during the grant period to search for other funding sources, including donors and public and private grants, to continue offering the more attractive \$50 per hour rate to therapists past the grant period.

File Attachment Summary

Applicant File Uploads

- Buncombe County COVID Recovery Funding Budget - All Souls Counseling Center.xlsx

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