

# Where Bloom Fitness Grows so does Hope for the Future

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*RFP for Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds*

## ***Bloom Fitness***

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# Application Form

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## *Question Group*

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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.

Where Bloom Fitness Grows so does Hope for the Future

## **Amount of Funds Requested\***

\$19,000.00

## **Recovery Fund Eligible Category\***

Please select one:

Address disparities in public health outcomes

## **Brief Project Description\***

Provide a short summary of your proposed project.

To bloom is the process of becoming. As Buncombe County approach a post-pandemic era, blooming will become an essential process, especially when supporting the most underserved populations. Bloom Fitness will assist in overcoming a segment of this Herculean task by providing Buncombe County residents with disabilities access to consistent virtual and in-person community-driven health and fitness programming. Our

sustainable, cost-effective, data-driven service model, done in partnership with Irene Wortham Center, uses fitness to improve mental health, reduce the effects of COVID-19, and support an inclusive economic recovery. In short, Bloom Fitness provides scientifically proven fitness benefits to underserved adults with disabilities, thus improving their overall health and employability. By doing this, we proactively support an inclusive economic recovery where adults with disabilities are less dependent on government-supported health and unemployment supports.

## Project Plan\*

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

This project will have three phases. In the development phase, supplies will be purchased, athletes will be recruited, and training will commence. The implementation phase will include pre-engagement surveying, class implementation, and continued collaboration with Irene Wortham Center. Finally, the maintenance phase will continue to modify and expand programming to meet the unique needs of all athletes.

For the development phase, Bloom Fitness has already engaged in conversation with Irene Wortham Center. Both organizations agree that a partnership will benefit Buncombe County adults with disabilities. Once funding is completed, fitness and technology equipment will be purchased and installed (3-4 months). This timeline will align with the completion of our Bloom Fitness app, which will provide participants access to highly accessible, easy-to-understand virtual programming. Recruits will complete the necessary medical waivers.

Within six months, Bloom Fitness will offer in-person and virtual fitness classes (implementation phase). These will include:

Bloom Cycle provides athletes access to top-quality cycle equipment specifically chosen for ease of use and quality of experience. Once trained for class, athletes participate in interval training, mental health exercising, and pre-employment soft-skills training.

Bloom Strength couples light dumbbell and bodyweight strength training. Athletes complete intentionally designed movements focused on proper form and body movement while engaging in mental health and pre-employment "strength" training.

Bloom Yoga, taught by a certified instructor, encourages cross-body movement, balance, strength, and mindfulness. Bloom Yoga maintains (and possibly increases) brain function in adults with IDD, improves the athlete's range of motion, and encourages healthy mental health through self-regulation, breathing, and meditation.

Bloom Pilates, taught by a certified instructor, consists of low-impact flexibility and strength movements emphasizing proper posture, core strength, and balance. Bloom Pilates movements have been strategically selected to enhance the mind and body, thus improving each athlete's overall well-being.

Bloom Dance keeps athletes smiling and moving - taking the "work" out of a workout. It combines scalable moves into a fun and engaging cardiovascular workout that encourages persistence, positive communication skills, teamwork.

The hallmark of the maintenance phase is our regularly scheduled celebrations where athletes earn awards for commitment, persistence, teamwork, and improved mental and physical health. The awards celebrations create pride rarely experienced in this population. Through these celebrations and ongoing classes, athletes self-advocate to their instructors with the wishes of expanding their reach through fitness, community engagement, and employment. This phase can be maintained with minimal overhead costs for at least ten years.

## Statement of Need\*

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

The Center for Disease Control states that twenty-six percent of Americans have a disability. 6.5 million of these Americans have an intellectual or developmental disability. Despite these numbers, the World Health Organization labeled pre-COVID disability inclusion in health and wellness as a world health issue.

This is at distinct odds with the fact that fitness and movement have long been associated with improved physical and mental health, improve work outputs, and a reduction in the need for government-funded support services (Forbes).

Bloom Fitness is addressing this disparity by partnering with highly qualified disability service providers across North Carolina and Texas to bring community building, mental health supports, and inclusive economic recovery skills training to people with disabilities. Nearly 80% of our athletes never quit. Of these, almost all athletes and their caregivers note improvements in resiliency, self-worth, community engagement, autonomy, and job-related soft skills cultivated through Bloom Fitness programming. By providing an engaging community-driven program that uses scientifically proven wellness techniques to improve overall health and community engagement, Bloom Fitness reduces the isolative effects COVID-19 has had on adults with disabilities and thus improves the likelihood of them engaging in inclusive economic recovery activities.

Additionally, people with disabilities are one of the largest untapped workforces in North Carolina (NC Council of Developmental Disabilities). Yet, because of the lack of access to healthy living practices and programs that support mental health and soft skills training, they are often left on the peripheral – with no equitable opportunities to excel during adulthood. Here at Bloom Fitness, we know that when we lead with heart, fitness follows, and mentally and physically fit people have better community engagement, are more often employed, and have fewer long-term health issues.

## 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 World Health Organization states that the COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately affected people with disabilities – a population already receiving poorer quantitative and qualitative health and wellness supports. This has created even higher rates of community isolation and mental languishing among people with disabilities. Languishing, defined by Emory University psychologist Corey Keyes as "emptiness and stagnation, constituting a life of quiet despair," is a problem because people who suffer from it, not mental illness, often fall through the cracks. Because the effects of languishing do not rise to a level of clinical significance, access to interventions may not be provided. This can lead to lower levels of functioning, absenteeism from work, and a reduced sense of self-worth.

To combat the downward health, community engagement, and inclusive economic recovery spiral created by COVID-19 on people with disabilities, Bloom Fitness leverages five of Compysch's eight recommended self-help practices. Through in-person and virtual cycle, strength, yoga, Pilates, and dance classes, Bloom Fitness provides adults with disabilities the opportunity to:

- keep in touch with each other,
- connect with their community,
- commit to a routine,
- find ways to be productive,

- and remain active.

Through this grant, Bloom Fitness will partner with the Irene Wortham Center to bring these classes and their associated mental and physical health benefits to languishing, post-pandemic adults with disabilities. Monica, age 40, and a first-time athlete in Texas said that “Bloom Fitness makes her happier, healthier, and makes her want to re-enter the community.” Instructors notice that the “spark” returns to their athletes during Bloom Fitness. This, according to research, is the first step in combating languishing and COVID-related health disparities with the ultimate goal of regaining a stronger inclusive workforce.

## Population Served\*

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

Bloom Fitness currently serves over 400 adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities across North Carolina and Texas. Approximately 40% of these adults are over the age of 50, and nearly all of them have other related diagnoses or disabilities. 99% of surveyed athletes experienced adverse health effects and lack of community access during the coronavirus pandemic.

With the addition of the Irene Wortham Center collaborative project, Bloom Fitness expects to serve an additional 200 people with disabilities over three years. 60% of these individuals will come from a low-income family or qualify for Medicaid assistance.

This population will continue to grow as one in 54 babies born today are later diagnosed with an Autism Spectrum Disorder. With these statistics looming over the only community-driven fitness program for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities in America – Bloom Fitness must continue to expand by leveraging the talents and accessibility of disability services providers located within our communities.

## 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 impact of this project will be three-fold: engage adults with disabilities in fitness, improve their health outcomes, and provide them with the skills and confidence to re-enter an inclusive Buncombe County workforce. We will leverage the community focus of our programming to help athletes self-determine that long-term involvement in Bloom Fitness is a positive benefit to their health and well-being.

Performance Measure 1: By 2024, 200 adults with disabilities will participate in Bloom Fitness programming at or with (via in-person or virtual programming) Irene Wortham Center at least twice per week. Current Baseline: 0 participants; Year 1 Goal: 50 participants; Year 2 Goals: 100 Participants; Year 3 Goal: 150 participants; Year 4 Goal: 200 participants.

Performance Measure 2: As defined by athlete and caregiver semi-annual surveys, 85% of athletes will have positive mental health and community engagement outcomes because of their engagement in Bloom Fitness. Baseline: 0%

Performance Measure 3: 75% of Bloom Fitness participants will improve employment soft skills directly taught through the Bloom Fitness classes. These will include but are not limited to timeliness, communication skills, teamwork, self-determination, and advocacy skills. Skill improvement will be measured regularly through quantitative and qualitative instructor observation. Baseline: 0%

## Evaluation\*

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

Bloom Fitness uses a series of surveys to track the athlete's short and long-term progress. The surveys, created in partnership with The University of Houston – Clear Lake's College of Human Sciences and Humanities, collect pre- and post-Bloom Fitness participation data from athletes and their caregivers. This data is then analyzed through an online data analysis system to show trends in improved physical and mental health, employability skills, and community involvement. Classes are then modified based on the athletes' needs.

Additionally, Bloom Fitness will track individual athlete employability skills related to building an inclusive, prosperous post-pandemic economy in Buncombe County. Based on current research, Bloom Fitness will show an increased rate of employability due to overall improved health and skill retention.

Continuous in-person and virtual interactions with the Irene Wortham Center help maintain quality. Additionally, we provide highly trained instructors and a program coordinator to facilitate the implementation of programming.

## 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?

With partnership and heart, Bloom Fitness builds life-changing communities around fitness for the disability community. In essence, the heart of what we do is overcoming the disproportionate negative impacts of health and wellness – significantly exasperated by the COVID-19 pandemic – on people with disabilities. Only when all citizens, regardless of ability, can access health and wellness programming that support positive mental health recovery can Buncombe County and others like them expect to see significant equitable changes in community engagement and employability.

Our fitness classes increase equitable recovery on multiple levels. These include:

1. Filling a gap in fitness programming. Currently, there are no fitness programs available to Buncombe County residents specifically designed to meet the needs of adults with disabilities. This lack of skilled knowledge is the greatest deterrent for adults with disabilities to engage in fitness and movement that improves mental health.
2. Creating a community that strategically improves the mental health of people with disabilities who were disproportionately isolated during the pandemic. With service closures, many adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities do not have a sense of belonging to something bigger than themselves. We as humans thrive on this feeling and require it as a prerequisite to engaging in economic activity.
3. Embedding soft skills employability training into the heart and soul of each fitness class. Best practices in teaching state that people retain more information when applying it to fun and engaging activities. Bloom Fitness takes the soft skills that many adults with disabilities need additional training in and applies them to a rewarding team-building atmosphere. Participants are eager to practice timeliness, positive communication skills, and self-advocacy/determination during Bloom Fitness classes.

## 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.

Our non-funded key partner for this project is Irene Wortham Center. For 57 years, Irene Wortham Center has helped children and adults with developmental and socio-economic challenges lead happy, healthy, and independent lives.

Irene Wortham Center will provide Bloom Fitness with physical space to host in-person classes and store fitness equipment. Additionally, they provide 57 years of experience serving Buncombe County residents with disabilities. The knowledge and connections cultivated throughout this history of servitude will allow Bloom Fitness to create measurable wellness benefits within a shorter period of time and at a reduced cost to the County.

## 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.

Bloom Fitness began in partnership with a Houston-based IDD service provider in 2017 with seven stationary bikes actively engaging adults with IDD through movement. We started by asking their 100 clients who wanted to participate in a cycle program. Since most of the clients had never exercised in their lives, only a reluctant 14 adults signed up. Even so, Bloom Fitness began leading with heart so that mental and physical fitness would follow.

Today, this center boasts an astounding 50 Bloom Fitness athletes who rarely miss an opportunity to engage within the wellness community. Additionally, Bloom has grown to serve over 400-day habilitation and community college participants across southeast Texas and western North Carolina. Classes, now available in-person, virtually, and through pre-recorded videos, include cycle, yoga, Pilates, strength, dance, and chair fitness.

Because of the uniqueness of our program supports, we are continuously enhancing Bloom Fitness - making it easier and more economical to meet the tremendous demand for services. We have hired our first staff member, who now runs the day-to-day components of our virtual programming and works as a liaison between Bloom Fitness and in-person centers. She holds numerous fitness certifications and collaborates with disability specialists to ensure that our programming meets the needs of all athletes.

Our funding has diversified as well. In 2017, Bloom Fitness was 100% founder-funded. In 2020, even with the economic downturn, Bloom Fitness was only 60% founder-funded. During this growth, Bloom Fitness gained a board member which has extensive experience in government-funded grants management. Her experience and MPA degree support all of Bloom Fitness' grant management processes to ensure transparency and accountability.

Lastly, Bloom Fitness maintains relationships with numerous area disability providers across Buncombe County – all of which see us filling a service gap for area residents.

## 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.

BC COVID Grant Budget.xlsx

## Special Considerations\*

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

Bloom Fitness reaches adults at a critical stage in life: the post-graduation years where services and community building are severely reduced and society say they have reached their potential. We encourage these adults to pursue new and sometimes challenging opportunities for growth. Underscoring the important connection between physical and mental health, Bloom Fitness supports the whole adult with IDD when they need it the most. Bloom Fitness athletes learn critical mental health and pre-employment skills such as positive thinking, stress reduction, teamwork, timeliness, and how to connect with others. Evidence shows that our program, unlike big-box gyms, encourages adults with disabilities to continue to learn, engage in the community, and better themselves for possible future employment.

While supporting the entire grant will benefit many more adults within Buncombe County, partial funding would support smaller growth through our program.

To experience the impact by video, visit <https://vimeo.com/464865580>.

# File Attachment Summary

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## *Applicant File Uploads*

- BC COVID Grant Budget.xlsx



List expenses here			\$	-		
List expenses here			\$	-		
List expenses here			\$	-		
List expenses here			\$	-		
			<b>Total</b>	\$	22,900.00	