

Kids in Parks: Elevating Health, Education, and Equity Outdoors

*RFP for Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal
Recovery Funds*

Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation

Dr. Carolyn Ward
322 Gashes Creek Rd
Asheville, NC 28803

info@brpfoundation.org
O: 866-308-2773

Mr. George Ivey

322 Gashes Creek Rd
Asheville, NC 28803

givey@brpfoundation.org
O: 866-308-2773 x. 408

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.

Kids in Parks: Elevating Health, Education, and Equity Outdoors

Amount of Funds Requested*

\$100,000.00

Recovery Fund Eligible Category*

Please select one:

Services for disproportionately impacted communities

Brief Project Description*

Provide a short summary of your proposed project.

The Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation is seeking \$100,000 to benefit thousands of Buncombe County children by addressing the learning loss associated with the COVID-19 pandemic while improving their physical, mental, emotional, and cognitive health.

The Foundation will utilize its award-winning Kids in Parks (KIP) program to expand its positive impacts on disproportionately impacted Buncombe County children by enhancing KIP’s materials and resources for outdoor exploration and education; expanding KIP’s “TRACK Trail” resources in the county; and partnering with educators and community leaders to connect children to science in their neighborhoods.

KIP will make these new resources available for free to kids, families, students, and teachers for use at parks, community centers, schools, neighborhoods, and official KIP TRACK Trail locations. These complementary efforts will engage many diverse partners and benefit thousands of Buncombe County children for many years to come.

Project Plan*

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

From its Buncombe County home, Kids in Parks (KIP) has partnered with numerous groups and agencies to create a wide network of trails that engage kids and families in outdoor recreation to foster lifelong wellness, learning, and meaningful connections with parks, public lands, and nature. KIP’s TRACK Trails provide visitors with self-guided materials (signs and brochures) that turn ordinary hikes into fun-filled, educational, and discovery-packed adventures.

COVID-19 created both obstacles and opportunities for KIP. People began social distancing and avoided touching public surfaces—including KIP brochure holders and brochures. Remote learning and isolation negatively impacted many children. After initial closings, parks then welcomed record crowds.

Pivoting quickly, KIP created new electronic activities, e-Adventures, that kids could complete on smartphones and tablets in their backyards, neighborhoods, local greenspaces, and official TRACK Trail sites. Based on positive initial results, this experiment with e-Adventures has evolved into a new core strategy for KIP.

This new focus has launched related goals to develop STEM-based community trails, utilize web/app-based gamification strategies, and create new materials to engage more kids in scientific discovery, regardless of where they live. With those goals in mind, KIP is seeking funds to expand its work in Buncombe County, in turn improving the educational progress and physical, mental, emotional, and cognitive health and wellbeing of its children, with a primary focus on low-income and minority populations.

Local partnerships will provide the crucial foundation for project success, especially community groups, school systems, and local government. These efforts will engage dozens of partners and thousands of children to help reverse COVID-19 learning loss, address educational disparities, and promote healthy childhood environments. Specifically, KIP seeks funds to:

- 1 - Install 5 new TRACK Trails, expanding KIP’s network to 13 Buncombe County locations. (2022-2024)
- 2 - Enhance KIP’s 8 existing TRACK Trails in the county by renovating trailhead signs, restocking brochures, and updating related KIP website listings. (2022-2024)
- 3 - Develop site-specific e-Adventures for the 10 TRACK “hiking” trails. (2022-2024)
- 4 - Install 10 of the new STEM-based Community Trails (i.e., separate from TRACK Trail sites), connecting families to scientific discoveries in their neighborhoods. (2022-2023)
- 5 - Create and disseminate lesson plans and curriculum guides that provide teachers and parents with educational activities that improve learning outcomes. (2022-2023)
- 6 - Enhance the functionality and user experience of the KIP website by integrating the activities listed above. (2022-2024)

These new resources will be available for free to kids, families, students, and teachers, and they can be completed in neighborhoods, schools, community centers, parks, and official TRACK Trail locations.

Statement of Need*

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

When COVID-19 hit the United States, schools, parks, and other community resources were shut down, creating a series of issues that affected kids and families including learning loss due to time spent out of school and a lack of access to after-school programs, as well as rising rates of depression and anxiety. This learning loss has impacted—and continues to impact—countless individuals and communities, including thousands of children in Buncombe County.

Studies by McKinsey and Company provide two sobering conclusions about these issues. First, while almost all students have suffered some learning loss during the pandemic, the effects have been more significant in communities with higher populations of students of color (Dorn et al., December 2020). Second, “These effects—learning loss and higher dropout rates—are not likely to be temporary shocks easily erased in the next academic year. On the contrary, we believe that they may translate into long-term harm for individuals and society” (Dorn et al., March 2020).

These studies clearly demonstrate both a need and an opportunity to address learning losses and related issues in disproportionately impacted areas of Buncombe County.

Citations

- Dorn, Emma, et al. "COVID-19 and learning loss—disparities grow and students need help." McKinsey & Company, December 8 (2020).
- Dorn, Emma, et al. "COVID-19 and student learning in the United States: The hurt could last a lifetime." McKinsey & Company, March 1 (2020).

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.

In addition to learning losses, dropouts, and long-term economic disparities related to COVID-19, especially for children of color, the pandemic has negatively impacted people’s mental and emotional health. The value of nature in reversing these negative health impacts is one of the driving forces behind KIP’s work, including this proposal.

Substantial scientific evidence has demonstrated the positive impacts that nature has on health and wellbeing. Research has shown that people who recreate in natural environments demonstrate improved mental wellbeing through reduced stress, anxiety, and depression (Wells and Evans, 2003), and increased cognitive functioning and attention restoration (Kaplan, 1995).

NCSU researchers (Jackson et al., 2021) concluded: “Adolescents...who participated in [outdoor-based and nature play] activities during the pandemic reported smaller declines in subjective well-being.” The study highlights the critical role that time in nature plays in bolstering resilience to stressors like COVID-19 and the importance of promoting outdoor recreation for kids and families.

Based on all this research, this proposal lines up well with the RFP’s Requirements and Examples of Allowable Projects (p. 10): “SERVICES FOR DISPROPORTIONATELY IMPACTED COMMUNITIES...Addressing

Educational Disparities...Evidence-based educational services and practices that address the academic needs of students and/or their social, emotional and mental health.”

Citations

- Jackson, Brent, et al. "Outdoor activity participation improves adolescents' mental health and well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic." *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 18.5 (2021): 2506.
- Kaplan, Stephen. "The restorative benefits of nature: Toward an integrative framework." *Journal of environmental psychology* 15.3 (1995): 169-182.
- Wells, Nancy, and Gary Evans. "Nearby nature: A buffer of life stress among rural children." *Environment and behavior* 35.3 (2003): 311-330.

Population Served*

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

KIP primarily serves K-5 children, who total about 15,000 in the county, including Buncombe County, Asheville City, and homeschooled students. KIP will prioritize the 50% of the K-5 population with the greatest racial diversity, or approximately 7,500 students.

Of course, given their young ages, these students are rarely alone. They go to school, visit KIP park sites, and complete related activities with parents, grandparents, older and younger siblings, teachers, and other chaperones. While these different age groups do not represent KIP's primary audience, they provide a valuable support network for outdoor exploration and learning, while simultaneously reaping the health benefits of spending time outdoors. KIP expects to engage 15,000 secondary audience members, for a total of 22,500 people in priority communities. KIP conservatively estimates that 7,500 students and related people from non-priority communities will also use and benefit from these efforts, for a total annual reach of 30,000 Buncombe County residents.

Based on the most recent U.S. Census data for Buncombe County (retrieved July 7, 2021, from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/buncombecountynorthcarolina>), this project might expect an “average” impact with respect to race and ethnicity of 83% White, 7% Hispanic/Latino, 6% Black, 2% Multi-Racial, and 1% Asian, as well as an average poverty rate of 12%. However, by using the newest census data (available later this year) and drilling down to census tracts and blocks, KIP and its partners can identify specific areas with much higher percentages of children of color and poverty. For example, the county's 2010 Community Health Assessment identified several census blocks that were more than 53% Black and others more than 10% Hispanic. KIP believes a goal of 35% non-White is achievable. Since school districts and park locations don't always match up with these high-diversity census tracts, however, some variability in these results is likely.

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.

KIP will focus on two major performance categories: (1) design, fabrication, installation, and launch of the materials listed in the Project Plan; and (2) associated health and learning outcomes.

KIP will track the following performance measures related to project deliverables:

- 1: Install 5 new TRACK Trails by year-end 2024

- 2: Improve 8 existing TRACK Trails by year-end 2024
- 3: Launch 10 site-specific e-Adventures by year-end 2024
- 4: Install 10 STEM-based Community Trails by year-end 2023
- 5: Distribute lesson plans and curriculum guide materials by year-end 2023
- 6: Enhance KIP website functionality throughout the project, 2022-2024.

KIP will track the following impact measures related to health and learning outcomes for Buncombe residents:

- 1: Facilitate 30,000 KIP-related adventures by Buncombe County residents each year.
- 2: Improve residents' health and wellness through outdoor exploration, resulting in 12,500 hours spent outdoors, 25,000 miles hiked, and 4 million calories burned each year.
- 3: Track the percentages associated with the following statistics:
 - a: First-time hikers (goal: 20%)
 - b: First-time visitors to a TRACK Trail (50%)
 - c: Intentional visitors to a TRACK Trail (50%)
 - d: Repeat participants (40%)
 - e: Repeat participants that visit more than one Buncombe County TRACK Trail (75%)
- 4: Demonstrate educational attainment and scientific principle acquisition associated with the use of TRACK Trails, STEM-based Community Trails, and e-Adventures.

These anticipated impacts are based on 10+ years of data shared by Trail TRACKers (KIP participants) and their families. Also of note: A pre-/post-TRACK Trail installation study in Wilmington, N.C., found that after a TRACK Trail was installed, visitation rates among all people, children, and minorities increased 70%, 76%, 135%, respectively. While results may vary from park to park, this study demonstrates how a TRACK Trail can make a trail more interesting, more welcoming, more popular, and more impactful.

Evaluation*

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

Kids that complete TRACK Trails, e-Adventures, or other offerings can register their adventures through the program's website, answering a series of questions about the outdoor experience in exchange for prizes designed to make their next outdoor adventure more fun and encourage repeat use. These registrations provide crucial participant data, allowing KIP to compile results, perform detailed program assessments, and make confident predictions about future use.

KIP partners with universities, including UNC-Asheville, UNC-Charlotte, Appalachian State, and UNC-Wilmington, to conduct periodic on-site observational studies in order to extrapolate the overall use of KIP materials and resources and the health benefits associated with the program. KIP shares this data with its partners to help them analyze the activity associated with their site(s).

Nationally, over the life of the KIP program, kids and families have completed approximately 1.9 million TRACK Trail adventures, spending at least 910,000 hours outdoors, walking 1.8 million miles, and burning 273 million calories. Within Buncombe County, kids and families have enjoyed more than 145,000 adventures, spending 75,000 hours outside, hiking 150,000 miles, and burning 22.5 million calories.

Registration data also indicate that 51% of registrants are first-time visitors to the park, with 53% intentionally visiting to hike the TRACK Trail. Furthermore, the program boasts a 47% return rate, with 78% of returnees visiting more than one TRACK Trail location. These numbers demonstrate that Kids in Parks is successfully engaging new park users, and through its network of TRACK Trail locations, encouraging intentional visitation and use.

These ongoing evaluation tools and practices will enable KIP to evaluate progress and success in meeting the project goals of engaging thousands more Buncombe County school children and improving their educational progress, as well as their physical and mental health.

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?

The data cited above clearly demonstrates that children of color have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19. For that reason, Kids in Parks will focus its efforts on Buncombe County K-5 populations with the highest racial and ethnic diversity. KIP will utilize the forthcoming 2020 census data to identify these priority neighborhoods. By focusing more resources and attention on these diverse populations, KIP aims to create more equitable long-term results and opportunities for these children. By adding more KIP resources to these local schools and public lands, this project will bring the benefits of KIP closer to these children than ever before. Further, by creating e-Adventures and other materials that allow every trail to become a TRACK Trail, this project will reduce or eliminate potential obstacles to participation, such as transportation needs and costs.

Kids in Parks will make these efforts sustainable through three complementary efforts. First, KIP will focus on creating electronic resources—from curriculum-based lesson plans to e-Adventures—that can be updated quickly with very little cost, and without the expense and potential waste of hundreds of brochures and other printed materials. Second, the on-site materials for the TRACK Trails and STEM-based community trails are built to last 10 years or more, which is more than enough time for current Kindergarten students to pass through and beyond KIP's upper target range of 5th grade. Third, KIP staff will engage local teachers, parents, community organizations, and community leaders to learn about and use both in-school and out-of-school KIP resources to benefit children in priority neighborhoods. This complementary network will sustain much greater long-term success than KIP would by working alone in addressing not only the COVID slide, but also the perennial “summer slide” in school children’s knowledge and learning.

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.

By working with experts from various fields—with potentially overlapping missions, KIP leverages the expertise, energy, and resources of each collaborating organization, increasing the overall impact of the program. Through these partnerships, KIP has installed a national network of TRACK Trail locations, creating hundreds of opportunities for kids and families to develop healthy, outdoor lifestyles through the formation of meaningful relationships with the natural world.

Listed alphabetically, so as to not suggest an order of importance, KIP's partners include: civic groups, community-based organizations, corporations, federal agencies, health foundations, healthcare-based insurance companies, healthcare providers, nonprofit organizations, parks departments, public land management agencies, public health departments, school systems, universities, and more.

For this project, KIP will seek partnerships with (A) municipalities and towns, (B) park departments and public land management agencies, (C) schools and educational institutions, and (D) community organizations that focus on providing services for the priority populations identified above. A list of potential partners in each area currently includes:

A: Municipalities: Buncombe County, City of Asheville, and the towns/cities of Black Mountain, Enka, Fairview, Leicester, and Weaverville

B: Public Lands: Buncombe County, City of Asheville, Blue Ridge Parkway, Pisgah National Forest, greenway systems, and more

C: Schools: Buncombe County, City of Asheville, UNC Asheville, NC Arboretum, Homeschool organizations, WNC STEM Leaders, WRESA, and more

D: Community Groups: YMCA, YWCA, Pathways to Parks, Everybody's Environment, Project Lighten Up, Hola Carolina, and more.

All of the project work (trail design, fabrication, and installation) will be completed by KIP, with the exception of the website modifications (10%); KIP will work with its website contractor to enhance the functionality and user interface.

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.

Founded in 1997, the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation is the primary nonprofit fundraising partner for the Blue Ridge Parkway, providing support for initiatives along the 469-mile route, including historical and cultural preservation, natural resource protection, visitor services, recreation, and education and outreach. The Foundation has 15 staff, with nine located in Asheville, including all four Kids in Parks staff.

The Foundation has worked within federal guidelines and cooperating agreements to fundraise and provide more than \$18 million for projects and programs on the Blue Ridge Parkway. The Foundation's efforts along Buncombe County's 45-mile stretch of the Blue Ridge Parkway include protecting resources at Craggy Gardens; revitalizing interpretive exhibits; and improving trails.

The Foundation has received and successfully managed more than \$600,000 in federal grants and loans, including awards from the Appalachian Regional Commission, Blue Ridge National Heritage Area, National Endowment for the Arts, and U.S. Small Business Administration.

The Foundation launched Kids in Parks (www.kidsinparks.com) in 2008. For the purposes of this grant proposal, the primary employees overseeing the project are Carolyn Ward (CEO of the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation), Jason Urroz (KIP Program Director), and Adam Roades (KIP Associate Director).

Kids in Parks has worked with dozens of federal, state, and local partners to establish more than 225 TRACK Trails in 15 states and Washington, D.C. KIP has created eight TRACK Trails in Buncombe County: Blue Ridge Parkway (Asheville Visitor Center), Charles D. Owen Park, Haw Creek Elementary, Owen High, Enka High, N.C. Arboretum, Black Mountain Veteran's Park, and Montreat. The Foundation remains very grateful to Buncombe County for its previous grants to support several of the trail projects listed above.

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.

BRP Fdn Coronavirus Recovery Project Budget 07152021.xlsx

Special Considerations*

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

Vision and Values: KIP's vision is for all kids and families to cultivate wellness and meaningful connections to nature through outdoor experiences. KIP's values are: education and learning, health and wellness, connections with nature, parks and public lands, stewardship, community, and sense of place.

Buncombe County Roots: KIP was founded in—and is grounded in—Buncombe County. KIP's first TRACK Trail—at the Parkway's Asheville Visitor Center—is KIP's most-registered TRACK Trail. KIP has established more TRACK Trails in Buncombe (8) than in any other county nationwide. This proposal will affirm Buncombe's status as the national home and proving ground for KIP.

Buncombe County Strategic Plan: This project advances many elements of the county's strategic plan, including the Educated & Capable Community and Resident Well-Being focus areas; goals related to underperforming students, health, and recreational assets; objectives such as "reduce racial disparities in student achievement," and sample initiatives such as "[grant] funding to community-based programs delivering...educational support services."

National Recognition:

- Featured by The Washington Post, NY Times, National Public Radio, and Our State and Outside magazines.
- Endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics as a program healthcare providers can prescribe to their patients.
- Mentioned in the National Prevention, Health Promotion, and Public Health Council's 2014 Annual Strategy Report released by the U.S. Surgeon General.
- Rated as a practice-tested intervention by the Center for Training and Research Translation, a North Carolina agency funded by the CDC.
- Featured during a recent National Governors Association conference.
- Earned a 2012 "Let's Move!" Champion of Change award from President Barack Obama and The White House.
- Featured in the National Park Service's Health Parks, Healthy People report.
- Selected for the Outstanding Public Engagement award from the Public Lands Alliance.

File Attachment Summary

Applicant File Uploads

- BRP Fdn Coronavirus Recovery Project Budget 07152021.xlsx

