

## Project Happy Home

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*RFP for Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds*

### ***The Firefly Gathering***

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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.

Project Happy Home

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

\$175,000.00

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

Please select one:

Services for disproportionately impacted communities

## **Brief Project Description\***

Provide a short summary of your proposed project.

Project Happy Home unites skilled builders, contractors and volunteer laborers with households and families facing negative economic impacts due to COVID-19. Our Community Liaison will assist us with connecting to the communities we are aiming to assist. We will identify and execute basic to mid-level home repairs, weatherizations and improvements. By partnering with local organizations and businesses we'll

create a web of support and equitable outcomes for some of Asheville's most covid impacted populations. By improving the quality and functionality of individuals' homes, we offer security and increased value to people who are already struggling to pay their bills, let alone make repairs and improvements. When repairs are performed on rental properties, they can be applied toward rent, giving relief to tenants and homeowners alike. Project Happy Home will bring increased well-being, connection, safety and efficiency to some of Asheville's racialized and marginalized populations.

## Project Plan\*

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

Our project consists of four key positions: Project Manager (PM), who will implement and oversee each project, create collateral, contract documents, ensure project sustainability through strategic partnerships, and activate the Community Liaison (CL). The CL will network and coordinate resources and identify and engage individuals for the project from racialized communities disproportionately affected by covid. The Volunteer Coordinator (VC) will organize volunteers from the greater Asheville community for work crews. The Project Leads (PL) will assess individual projects, create repair plans, compile material lists and oversee repairs and improvements.

Our plan is for the PM to work with the CL to identify individuals from Asheville's most underserved communities and invite them to apply for our program. We will then evaluate the requests and match them with a PL who will visit the home and create a project plan, including a materials list and volunteer needs. The PL will then work with the VC to compile the appropriately skilled crew and create a timeline to execute the repairs, as well as ensure the necessary legal documents with landlords, liability insurance, etc.

The PM will work with the CL to reach out to various neighborhoods, including: S. French Broad Ave/Burton St., MLK Jr. Blvd., The Shilo Community, Southslope, and some West Asheville neighborhoods. Firefly has partnered with Grind Coffee Shop and Black Wall Street AVL to source the Community Liaison, as well as connect with people of color in the focal communities. Grind Coffee has offered to be a central location where applicants can seek help in filling out forms, can drop off written requests and apply for the program in person, as well as conduct follow up interviews with project recipients and gather feedback and stories to assess our progress.

We are also partnering with Asheville Tool Library, a local nonprofit who lends tools like a library lends books. Through this partnership, we can source tools and create connections for people from racialized communities with free local resources and know-how to help ongoing maintenance be more accessible. This will also help reduce costs within the program.

We'll begin outreach this fall, spreading the word about the program through neighborhood canvassing, local papers, churches, etc. We will start accepting requests for repairs fall of 2021. This winter we will begin evaluating requests, meet with residents and create timelines for repair. We will continue to accept requests and execute repairs while funding lasts.

Our intention is to serve 25 to 50 families/homes/residents per year, depending upon the scope of each project. As Project Happy Home is implemented, the PM will focus on long term viability through grant opportunities, fundraising outreach, and in-kind donations. In this way, these initial funds will help create a project that will have lasting impact in the communities we seek to engage for years to come.

## Statement of Need\*

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

Before folks can engage in leisurely activities like strolling on the greenway and visiting the library, their basic needs for secure homes must be met. "People with greater social support and greater interpersonal trust live longer and healthier lives than those who are socially isolated. Neighborhoods richer in social capital provide residents with greater access to support and resources than those with less social capital" (County Health Rankings, 2018). Our plan will have a direct impact on the well-being of real, everyday people in the most heavily impacted populations who were already marginalized before covid and who now stand to benefit the most from assistance.

From 2015-19, the median sale price and rent list price for housing in Buncombe County have been growing by an estimated 7% and 10% per year on average. As of 2015, 44.5% of renters and 26% of homeowners are housing cost-burdened, i.e., housing costs exceed 30% of their household income (Buncombe County Home Prices & Values, July 2019). As the affordable housing crisis continues to unfold, it is crucial to repair and increase the functionality and value of existing homes. Project Happy Home will assist families who do not have the option to move to nicer, newer homes. As the cost of materials continues to skyrocket, home improvement is not a viable option for those who are currently struggling just to pay their rents or mortgages.

Family Friendly Affordable Buncombe observes that "the increased costs of renting or buying a home have outpaced local wages." The cost burden on renters and mortgage holders is reflected by data from the 2-1-1 Counts Dashboard, where Buncombe ranks highest in the state in requests for housing and shelter by County. The data is clear. Improvements like weatherization and new windows can decrease utility bills and increase comfort and security while improving not only the value and functionality of a home, but the way it feels to its inhabitants as well.

## 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.

Even before the pandemic hit, individuals in Asheville's lower income populations were struggling to make ends meet. Covid-19 immobilized many of these communities, who were already grappling with poverty, compounding generations-old problems of inequity with the new challenges that the pandemic brought, leaving inordinate numbers of people out of work and facing the threat of losing their homes. As we begin to rebound from the pandemic, these folks continue to face unprecedented challenges, especially in light of the growing affordable housing crisis.

To compound the situation, rising inflation directly due to covid has caused the cost of many things to soar, building materials in particular. Lumber prices rose by more than 250% in the last year, according to Business Insider; and The National Association of Homebuilders said the increases added more than \$24,000 to the price of the average single-family home. This bleak financial situation makes the reality of home repair and improvement that much more challenging for people who already do not have enough material resources to meet their basic needs.

Our project is applicable to both renters and homeowners alike. Individuals struggling with rent costs could gain reimbursement from home owners for completed projects. Homeowners would benefit from improvements to their property, along with eased financial strain. Everyone would gain a sense of community engagement.

Now more than ever, people need safe spaces to live, work, and play. Covid has permanently transformed the face of the workplace. Many companies are realizing that they can conserve resources by allowing people to work from home. It is imperative that people have safe and functioning homes from which to work, where they experience a sense of ease and well-being.

This project would address these issues by bringing together builders, volunteers, and individuals needing assistance to meet a fundamental human need: to have a safe and functioning home.

## Population Served\*

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

The 2018 Buncombe County Community Health Assessment reports that they gave a list of conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age, as well as known factors that contribute to a person's health. This assessment ranked the lack of safe housing as the top social determinant of good health.

Furthermore, Healthy People 2020 named five major social determinants of health: economic stability, education, health and healthcare, neighborhood and built environment, and social community.

"These factors are strongly correlated with individual health. People with higher incomes, more years of education, and a healthy and safe environment to live in have better health outcomes and generally have longer life expectancies. Although these factors affect health independently, they also have interactive effects on each other and thus on health. For example, people in poverty are more likely to engage in risky health behaviors, and are also less likely to have affordable housing. In turn, families with difficulties in paying rent and utilities are more likely to report barriers to accessing health care, higher use of the emergency department, and more hospitalizations."

Our project aims to address these issues. We will primarily serve low-income racialized communities and the elderly, those populations most heavily impacted by covid. The 2010 Census found that, at that time, Asheville was 79% white and 13% black. And yet African-Americans represented 52% of the population living in subsidized housing. The 2021 census showed little to no improvement, citing that only 20% of the population is Black or Latino, but accounts for almost 80% of the population living in poverty. These disparities must be addressed. Our proposal would serve those households most needing assistance.

Our goal is 25-50 projects per year. If, on average, there are 4 people per household, that's at least 200 individuals whose lives would be positively impacted by this program in one year.

## 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.

There are many projected positive impacts that will result from this endeavor, both seen and unseen. Some are quite tangible, such as windows and doors that work, thereby creating more efficient and functioning residential spaces; faucets that no longer leak, saving water and lowering utility bills. Also, as homes are improved, property value goes up for homeowners. For renters, the PM will negotiate for rent reduction in place of repair costs which will relieve financial strain for both renters and homeowners.

Other impacts are more subtle, but just as important. For instance, recipients will experience feeling more supported by and connected to the greater community, rather than having to rely solely upon themselves and

resources that are already stretched thin. Also, residents will feel more safe due to the improvements around their homes; this is especially relevant for structural repairs, locks on doors and windows, installing smoke detectors, mold repair and prevention, etc.

An even more abstract, but deeply relevant, impact is recipients experiencing a sense of pride and accomplishment for having homes that look, feel and function well. It is difficult to measure the effects that community support has on marginalized populations, and even more challenging to quantify the good feelings and sense of personal pride that individuals experience when their homes look good and operate well. “Where we live is at the very core of our daily lives. For most Americans, home represents a place of safety, security, and shelter, where families come together. Housing generally represents an American family’s greatest single expenditure, and, for homeowners, their most significant source of wealth. Given its importance, it is not surprising that factors related to housing have the potential to help—or harm—our health in major ways” (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, taken from the 2018 Buncombe County Community Health Assessment). By fixing homes, we are improving health.

## Evaluation\*

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

To ensure that applicants qualify for Project Happy Home, we will create an application process that includes socioeconomic demographics such as ethnicity, age, and income. To protect all parties involved, we will utilize a waiver of liability between the homeowner and renter.

Quality assurance will be carried out by the Project Leads, who will visually document the property before engaging in repairs, and then again after they are completed.

There are various methods we will employ to evaluate the effectiveness of our program. The primary tool will be a survey style project completion evaluation, asking participants to rate their experience both before the project and after. Questions on the survey will reflect the aims we have set out to achieve.

Sample questions are:

Describe your sense/feeling of community connection and/or support before/after becoming involved in this project.

Describe your economic/relational (either to home or to owner) status before/after becoming involved in this project.

Describe your sense/feeling of safety or well-being related to your home before/after the project.

Describe the functionality of your home before/after the completion of the project.

Have you noticed a change in any of your utility bills?

How was your experience, overall, with the Project Lead and crew of volunteers who worked on your home?

Will you utilize the Asheville Tool Library in the future?

These surveys can be done with 1-10 scales or range of answers (very connected, somewhat connected, neither connected or disconnected, somewhat disconnected, very disconnected, etc.) to gauge feelings and gather information in a way that is easily organized into accessible, analyzable and shareable information. We will also document the improvements and accomplishments of Project Happy Home with before and after

photographs, as well as personal testimonials by people who engaged with our project, including tenants, landlords and homeowners.

## 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?

“When the COVID-19 global pandemic struck in March of 2020, disparities in Buncombe County widened, with Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) communities disproportionately affected. Not only were our BIPOC communities suffering more from the economic devastation, but they also were more likely to be impacted by the virus, with disproportionate death rates among our Native, Black, and Latinx populations,” (Racial Equity Action Plan, Buncombe County).

Even before covid began, "Buncombe County had the highest percentage of unemployed African-American workers than any other county in the state," (Syneva Economics, 2017). Project Happy Home specifically targets racialized communities, where the impacts of covid have been disproportionately experienced. More people in low-income communities were displaced from work and had a harder time working from home. It is clear that the American workplace has been permanently altered by covid, with more employers requiring employees to continue to work from home, even as the pandemic recedes. It is vital that these heavily impacted racialized communities have the option to work from home. For this to happen, residents must experience a sense of ease and well-being in safe and nourishing home environments.

Another impact of Project Happy Home is improved relations between renters and owners. Tension accumulated in many situations during the covid pandemic, with many people unable to pay rent while simultaneously eviction was prohibited. This program will benefit both tenants and homeowners, thereby providing emotional, structural and relational improvements in the communities that participate in this program.

We are specifically focusing on meeting people’s very personal and basic needs in zone one: their homes. By working to increase the property value, functionality and overall well-being of these lower economic communities, we are working to address the disparities that have been accumulating for generations.

## 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.

The Firefly Gathering will be the biggest collaborator, providing the Project Manager and Volunteer Coordinator, as well as anchoring the program and ensuring its ongoing success. We are excited to collaborate with the following businesses and organizations:

\*Grind Coffee Shop: Bruce Waller: We will utilize Grind Coffee Shop as a meeting hub and resource center. Bruce will be our Community Liaison and connect our program with people in the community.

\*Asheville Tool Library: We will borrow tools/resources from them, as well as help network and connect people with fewer material resources to the Tool Library so they can have access to materials needed to do their own home maintenance. We anticipate borrowing 15-25% of tools needed from them.

\*Home Depot: We will ask for in-kind donations and reduced costs for materials and tools. The percentage of their scope will be determined by the size of their donation.

\*Lowe's: We will ask for in-kind donations and reduced costs for materials and tools. The percentage of their scope will be determined by the size of their donation.

\*Habitat for Humanity: We will purchase materials and tools, ask for reduced prices and in-kind donations, collaborate on ideas, supplies, and referrals from their list of applications that better fit our project's scope. The percentage of their scope will be determined by the size of their donation.

\*Green Opportunities: We will look to hire carpentry graduates from their programs to work on or lead repair teams. The percentage of their scope will be determined how many hirees we retain from them.

\*The Firefly Gathering is connected with many local professional contractors and builders who are excited to be a part of this program and build relationships with these communities. We will also work with our Community Liaison to source builders, contractors, painters, etc. from the communities being served, thereby creating jobs as well as community connections in the process.

## 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.

The Firefly Gathering is a well established grassroots, community-based organization, successfully serving the greater Asheville area since 2007. We provide classes in community and nature connection, farming and permaculture, natural and sustainable building, traditional crafts and skills, communication, equity work and more. In 2019 we became a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization with the intention to engage with and benefit more diverse populations than our organization had previously been reaching. This project is an exciting opportunity to continue that mission.

We have an extensive resource base of builders and licensed contractors who are excited to get involved, as well as many people from the greater community who want to engage in a volunteer capacity who come from a background of farming, building and DIY culture, making them resourceful and resilient and therefore up to the challenge of helping in home renovation and repair on a budget.

Our Executive Director, who will serve as the Project Manager, has participated in several racial equity and anti-oppression trainings, and so is familiar, skilled and comfortable engaging with and being in communities of color. She has already been networking with Bruce Waller of GRIND Coffee, and has an established and healthy relationship. Furthermore, most of Firefly's staff have received equity training, which we feel will help this project be effective.

As a nonprofit, we have experience in both writing budgets and adhering to them. We have received grants and put them to good use. We managed our fledgling nonprofit through Covid, even without our annual event, which brings in most of our revenue. We are resourceful and committed.

We strive to foster connection between Asheville's racialized communities and its more affluent members. We are bridge builders, both metaphorically and literally! We take these matters deeply to heart and have the capacity to manage federal funds in a most honorable and effective way.

## 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-template.xlsx

## Special Considerations\*

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

Thank you for the opportunity to share a dream that our organization has been incubating for some time, and for considering Project Happy Home. It is our hope that you will see the merit in our idea and be moved to fund our endeavor, thereby helping some of Asheville's most underserved populations. The Firefly Gathering hopes to be a conduit of empowerment and healing, serving as bridge builders, connecting racialized communities with more affluent people in the greater Asheville area, thereby redirecting much needed material resources to the people who stand to benefit the most from it.

2020 saw so much tension and upheaval around the nation, with communities of color and their white allies rallying together to demand change in the face of obvious inequity and generations of despair. Project Happy Home is an opportunity for Buncombe County to use federally allocated funds to improve the lives of individuals in Asheville's racialized neighborhoods, thereby taking steps toward a more harmonious and equitable future for everyone. Thank you.

## File Attachment Summary

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### *Applicant File Uploads*

- Recovery-Funds-budget-template.xlsx

## Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds Proposed Project Budget

<b>Organization Name:</b>	
<b>Project Name:</b>	
<b>Amount Requested:</b>	

Proposed Project Revenue Funder	Amount	Confirmed or Pending?	Notes
Proposed Buncombe COVID Recovery Funds			
List other sources here			
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<b>Total</b>	\$ -		

Proposed Project Expenses	Proposed Recovery Funds	Other Funds	Total	Capital or Operating Expense?	Notes
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