

## Affordable vehicle repairs for families in need

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*RFP for Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds*

### ***W4H Asheville dba Working Wheels***

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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.

Affordable vehicle repairs for families in need

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

\$92,400.00

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

Please select one:

Assistance to households

## **Brief Project Description\***

Provide a short summary of your proposed project.

Working Wheels requests \$92,400 to expand our Vehicle Repair Program to reach 100 families in Buncombe County who have been disproportionately negatively impacted by Covid-19. Of the requested amount, \$60,000 would cover the costs for auto parts and mechanic labor to repair 75 of the 100 vehicles.

\$32,400 would cover a portion of the overhead costs associated with the project. The total project cost is \$140,000.

Since the average program participant's family is comprised of three people, this project will directly improve the lives of 300 Buncombe County residents.

## Project Plan\*

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

Working Wheels Working Wheels provides affordable, reliable transportation to local families in need. We do this through two programs: the Vehicle Purchase Program and the Vehicle Repair Program. For the Vehicle Purchase Program, we repair and refurbish donated cars and sell them for \$500 to working families. For the Vehicle Repair Program, we offer deeply discounted vehicle repairs for people who cannot afford to repair a vehicle they already own. We offer these programs because we know that a dependable car opens the doors to education, employment, access to healthcare, and an improved quality of life.

A report by the UNC Department of Public Policy on July 23, 2020, entitled, "The Impact of Covid-19 on North Carolina", found that, when compared to white households, Black and Latino households are experiencing a more severe loss of income, increase in housing insecurity, and onset of mental health issues.

In response to this reality, we have selected six of our current 20 referral partners to participate in this project. Each organization works with a high percentage of Black and Latino clients. Additionally, each offers long-term case-management services, a crucial component of our partnership model. The six partners are Asheville Housing Authority's Family Self-Sufficiency Program, Buncombe County Re-Entry Council, OpenDoors of Asheville, Pisgah Legal Services, the YWCA of Asheville, and the YMI Cultural Center. Each organization will be able to refer 16 or 17 of their clients over a 2-year timeframe to Working Wheels for affordable vehicle repairs. To reach the goal of serving 100 families during the timeframe for this project, we will serve four or five participants each month.

Each Vehicle Repair Program vehicle will go through a multi-point inspection to find and resolve other problems that might be occurring. Working Wheels will invest up to \$1,200 in the vehicle. Program participants pay 10% of the repair bill. After being inspected, some vehicles may be deemed too far gone to repair. When this happens, the program participants may be referred to the Vehicle Purchase Program as slots are available.

Vehicle assessments and repairs will be performed by our partner mechanic shops. Each shop owner believes in our mission and provides repairs for Working Wheels clients at a discounted rate.

## Statement of Need\*

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

In a May 2021 study by the Federal Reserve entitled, "Economic Well-Being of U.S. Households in 2020", researchers found that more than one-fourth of adults had one or more bills that they were unable to pay in full that month or were one \$400 financial setback away from being unable to pay them. The percentages are higher for Black and Latino households.

A discounted vehicle repair from Working Wheels means that money can be saved or designated for other family needs. It also means that the program participant can continue to go to work, attend classes, take

family members to medical appointments, and continue down the path toward realizing their full potential. Cedaria, a recent Vehicle Repair Program participant referred to Working Wheels by OpenDoors of Asheville, stated, "This discounted vehicle repair will enable me to help my parents with the bills and add to my savings for a laptop."

A study in the "Journal of Planning Education and Research" shows that owning a car is among the most powerful economic advantages a U.S. family can have. A dependable car leads to more time spent at work and home. More time at work increases the family's income. More time at home means more time for exercise, school events, family meals, and an overall better environment for children's learning and well-being.

There are many organizations in Western North Carolina (WNC) addressing important needs including housing, education, employment, financial empowerment, healthcare, and re-entry. For the people affected by these issues, the lack of dependable transportation is often a primary barrier to success. This is a critical gap in services that Working Wheels is uniquely positioned to meet. Working Wheels focuses squarely on removing this barrier one car, one repair, and one family at a time.

### 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.

According to the NC Policy Collaboratory at UNC Chapel Hill in an article entitled, "Covid-19 and the NC Economy," "Buncombe County had the 3rd largest increase (of all 100 Counties) in the seasonally adjusted unemployment rates from April 2019 to April 2020... and the October 2020 unemployment rate is still three to four percentage points higher than their October 2019 unemployment rate. The 20 Counties with the highest unemployment rate spike in April 2020 are still, for the most part, suffering as the recovery has begun."

This drop in employment was largely due to Buncombe County's dependence on tourism and the steep decline of tourism beginning in March 2020. Pre-existing systemic disparities made the situation worse for many of the most exploited in our society. Many low-income employees who didn't have jobs in the tourism sector were forced to continue working since their jobs were declared essential, greatly increasing their possible exposure to Covid-19. Furthermore, these individuals often have limited access to good quality, affordable healthcare.

In an article from January 2021 in the "NC Medical Journal" entitled, "Centering Equity and Community in the Recovery of the Covid-19 Pandemic," the authors point out that, "This pandemic has revealed that health is not just about healthcare; it is about housing, transportation, food access, and educational opportunity. It is about the duality of essential workers being dubbed essential, yet policies failing to protect them... It is about the ability to be employed without experiencing a heightened risk to the health of one's family."

Expanding the Vehicle Repair Program will shift some of the power back to the workers. A dependable car gives job seekers the chance to search for a better opportunity across town rather than accepting an available but less desirable job close by. Access to affordable vehicle repairs can remove a barrier and empower a family to do what is best for them and their quality of life.

### Population Served\*

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

For this project, Working Wheels will serve 16 to 17 clients from each of the following six organizations over a 24-month period: Asheville Housing Authority's Family Self-Sufficiency Program, Buncombe County's Re-Entry Council, OpenDoors of Asheville, Pisgah Legal Services, the YWCA of Asheville, and the YMI Cultural Center.

We have chosen these partners for three reasons:

- 1) Each serves a high percentage of Black and Latino community members – those most affected by the pandemic.
- 2) Each offers long-term case management services to help address the other obstacles that program participants might be facing.
- 3) We already have a Memorandum of Understanding in place with each organization.

The demographic data of all of the clients served by Working Wheels over the last six years break down as follows:

- 86% female, 14% male;
- 54% white, 40% Black, 5% Latino, 1% other;
- 32% in their twenties, 30% in their thirties, 22% in their forties, 16% in their fifties and sixties.

The demographic data for this project will reflect our targeted approach of serving more people of color: 60% black, 10% Latino, and 30% white.

Amanda Cary, former Program Director at the Re-Entry Council, stated the following about our partnership. "Working Wheels is truly invaluable to our population of people returning to Buncombe County from prison. Having reliable transportation for someone who is trying to get on their feet, provide for their family, and better themselves is imperative. Relying on the transit system can be an incredible stressor and often makes an already overwhelming schedule feel impossible. Having transportation gives our folks hope, and without hope, re-entering into the world from incarceration is very difficult."

## 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.

As our local economy recovers, there are a lot of job opportunities available. However, people need dependable transportation to obtain and keep these jobs. Dependable vehicles lead to increased income, better access to medical providers, and a higher quality of life. Access to affordable repairs through Working Wheels will enable those most affected by the pandemic to keep their cars on the road and access the best job opportunities for their families.

The vehicle repairs provided through the Vehicle Repair Program provide temporary relief, but another mechanical malfunction is inevitable down the road. Success at Working Wheels is measured by the program participants' ability to use this opportunity to make improvements and achieve long-term results in their lives beyond the life of the car or replaced auto parts.

We conduct an annual survey with each program participant via email and text message with questions about how the vehicle continues to impact their ability to access their family's medical appointments, increase their income, improve their living conditions, and enhance their overall quality of life. We also ask if the vehicle is still running and dependable. In our most recent survey of program participants conducted in January of 2021, 65% report an improvement in their housing, 68% report an increase in their income, 97% report an improvement in their quality of life, and 100% report that a car enables them to more easily access their family's medical appointments.

## Evaluation\*

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

In 2019, we integrated a new database that enables us to automate some of our communication with program participants. At chosen intervals, we send messages via email and text to gather survey and outcome data, as well as send updates and information.

The program participants' survey results are discussed and analyzed by the staff and board of directors of the organization. We also discuss the possibility of adding questions and refining the current questions to make sure we are capturing the data we need. The survey results are displayed on the Impact Section of our website ([www.workingwheelswnc.org/impact](http://www.workingwheelswnc.org/impact)) as well as our printed brochure and other marketing materials.

Throughout the project, the staff will meet quarterly to discuss our progress toward the outcomes, monitor contract requirements, and create action plans to address issues that may arise.

## 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?

As referenced above, Black and Latino households have been most negatively impacted by the pandemic. A just, equitable, and sustainable Covid-19 recovery must be centered around this truth and recovery resources must be focused squarely on them.

The United Way of North Carolina conducted a Covid-19 Impact Survey in the summer of 2020. One of the questions on the survey was, "What would make an important difference to your household's finances at this time?" 33% of the respondents (the largest group) responded that help paying bills would make the most difference. One of the disproportionate impacts for marginalized families is the difficulty in saving money. Savings are the lifeline that provide families with a pathway out when a vehicle fails and needs repairs. When there is no savings available, car repairs are often financed at unfavorable rates and can lead to burdensome monthly credit card payments.

The vehicle repairs that Working Wheels provides will give direct financial assistance to marginalized households at a time when savings are low and needed for other things. Furthermore, the vehicle, once repaired, will continue to enable the owner to generate an income, access medical appointments, take children to school events, and so many other activities that lead to a high quality of life.

## 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.

Working Wheels relies on partnerships with local towing companies to transport the vehicles and with mechanic shops to help assess and repair them. Each works for a reduced labor rate, and their services are invaluable.

For this project, approximately 60% of the repair work will be performed by Elk Mountain Motors, 15% by Mostly Automotive, 15% by Curtis Hi-Tech, and 10% by other local mechanic shops recommended by the program participants. We will split the tows evenly between Asheville Wrecker and El Niño Towing.

The program participants will be referred to Working Wheels by the case managers at the following six organizations: Asheville Housing Authority's Family Self-Sufficiency Program, Buncombe County's Re-Entry Council, OpenDoors of Asheville, Pisgah Legal Services, the YWCA of Asheville, and the YMI Cultural Center.

## 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.

In 2014, a group of local volunteers gathered monthly to discuss the lack of reliable and accessible transportation options. The group discovered Wheels4Hope, a nonprofit organization operating in Raleigh and Greensboro that provides low-cost vehicles to those in need of transportation. We formed a partnership and opened Wheels4Hope Asheville on March 1, 2015. In January of 2017, Wheels4Hope Asheville became Working Wheels - an independent, local organization with the same mission and time-tested model. Being independent has enabled us to customize our model to the needs of the economically-disadvantaged families in the mountains of WNC. In 2020, we added a Vehicle Repair Program to reach families who own vehicles but are unable to afford the repairs needed to keep them safe and dependable.

Working Wheels benefits from a model that generates through earned income about 25% of the revenue needed to sustain the organization. Even though our commitment is to repair and place with families as many donated vehicles as possible, many are not suitable for the program because they are beyond repair. We call these vehicles "organ donors" and use their best parts in potential program vehicles. Some vehicles and parts are sold to the public or at wholesale auctions.

Jamie Beasley is the Executive Director and charged with the successful implementation of this project. He has a Master's degree in Business Administration from Western Carolina University (WCU), holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Religious Studies from the University of Richmond, and is a fluent Spanish speaker. Previously, Jamie worked as the Director of Development at Mountain BizWorks, a local Community Development Financial Institution. As part of that role, he managed several federal, county, and city grants.

To properly expand the Vehicle Repair Program, we will hire a part-time Program Coordinator. This person would serve as the facilitator for this project and be funded by a variety of sources.

## 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 Working Wheels.pdf

## Special Considerations\*

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

OpenDoors and Elk Mountain Motors Letters of Support.pdf

Please find 2 letters of support attached from Elk Mountain Motors and OpenDoors of Asheville. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

## File Attachment Summary

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### *Applicant File Uploads*

- Recovery-Funds-budget-template Working Wheels.pdf
- OpenDoors and Elk Mountain Motors Letters of Support.pdf

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

<b>Organization Name:</b>	<b>W4H Asheville dba Working Wheels</b>
<b>Project Name:</b>	<b>Affordable vehicle repairs for families in need</b>
<b>Amount Requested:</b>	<b>\$92,400</b>

Proposed Project Revenue Funder	Amount	Confirmed or Pending?	Notes
Proposed Buncombe COVID Recovery Funds	\$ 92,400.00	pending	
Individuals	\$ 12,000.00	75% confirmed	
Corporate Sponsors	\$ 10,600.00	50% confirmed	
Other Foundation	\$ 25,000.00	pending	perhaps People in Need
List other sources here			
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<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 140,000.00</b>		

Proposed Project Expenses	Proposed Recovery Funds	Other Funds	Total	Capital or Operating Expense?	Notes
Auto parts, mechanic labor, and towing	\$ 60,000.00	\$ 20,000.00	\$ 80,000.00	operating	100 total vehicles; \$800 average repair expense per vehicle
Program Coordinator (part-time)	\$ 26,400.00	\$ 18,600.00	\$ 45,000.00	operating	part-time for 24 months
Rent	\$ 6,000.00	\$ 6,000.00	\$ 12,000.00	operating	24 months
Insurance	\$ -	\$ 1,500.00	\$ 1,500.00	operating	
Utilities	\$ -	\$ 1,500.00	\$ 1,500.00	operating	
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<b>Total</b>			<b>\$ 140,000.00</b>		



July 13, 2021

To the Members of the Buncombe County Grant Committee,

We at OpenDoors are incredibly grateful for our partnership with Working Wheels of Western North Carolina and we offer this letter of support for funding their impactful programs. Together, OpenDoors and Working Wheels support Black and Brown students and families in Asheville through access to reliable and affordable transportation through greatly discounted car repairs.

OpenDoors of Asheville has partnered with Working Wheels since 2018 and has supported 6 vehicle repairs, and are in the process of providing yet another vehicle to a hard working parent. This partnership provides a critical resource because the possession of a reliable vehicle is central to our mission to provide equitable access to education, and further translates to offering greater employment opportunities. We are deeply honored that in 2021, Working Wheels will continue to partner with OpenDoors by supporting additional participants in their Vehicle Repair Program.

We see that access to a reliable car “opens doors” for our constituents and promotes an overall improved quality of life. Research shows that easy access to a car plays a key role in allowing Americans to achieve upward mobility, which is how our students break the cycle of poverty for themselves and for generations to come. We hope that you will support this impactful program and allow us to continue to invest in students, so they, in turn, can invest in themselves.

With much hope and gratitude,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jen", is placed over a light gray rectangular background.

Jen Langdon Ramming  
Executive Director  
OpenDoors of Asheville  
jramming@opendoorsasheville.org  
828-777-1135

# ELK MOUNTAIN MOTORS



108 Elkwood Ave. Asheville NC 28804  
828-259-5937  
Disco\_rob@msn.com

07/11/2021

To: The Buncombe County Grants Committee,

I am writing this letter in support of Working Wheel's application for Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds through Buncombe County.

Elk Mountain Motors is a full-service auto shop in Asheville North Carolina. The mission of Elk Mountain Motors is to provide the best possible service and repair for all vehicles that come into the shop through a commitment to excellence, and continuous improvement.

We work in partnership with Working Wheels because we believe in their mission, and their values align with ours. Working Wheels mission of furthering education and employment opportunities via solid, dependable vehicles is an important piece of the puzzle. It is our belief that hard work and perseverance should be encouraged and rewarded. This is exactly what Jamie and his team are doing at Working Wheels. Someone who has the drive to go to work or school every day and contribute something to the world while bettering their own life and that of their family deserves to have a little help along the way. If my passion for cars and my team's skills along with Jamie's vision can provide reliable transportation for people like this, then I'm all in.

I encourage you to support Working Wheels in this endeavor to expand the Vehicle Repair Program. Elk Mountain Motors is proud to be a part of their effort. If I can be of service to you, please do not hesitate to contact me directly.

Thank you,  
Rob Harmon  
Owner of Elk Mountain Motors

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Rob Harmon", written in a cursive style.