

Kids in Parks: Pathways for Education, Mental Health, the Environment, and Equity

*RFP for Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal
Recovery Funds*

Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation

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Application Form

Question Group

Buncombe County requests proposals for projects to help the community recover from and respond to COVID-19 and its negative economic impacts.

Buncombe County has been awarded \$50,733,290 in Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (Recovery Funding), as part of the American Rescue Plan Act. To date, Buncombe County has awarded projects totaling \$23,093,499, leaving a balance of \$27,639,791 available to award.

Visit <http://www.buncombecounty.org/recoveryfunding><http://www.buncombecounty.org/recoveryfunding><http://www.buncombecounty.org/recoveryfunding><http://www.buncombecounty.org/recoveryfunding><http://www.buncombecounty.org/recoveryfunding> for details.

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](#)

Organization Type*

Nonprofit

Nonprofit documentation

If nonprofit, attach IRS Determination Letter or other proof of nonprofit status.

Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation -501C3 - IRS Doc.pdf

Name of Project.*

Kids in Parks: Pathways for Education, Mental Health, the Environment, and Equity

New/Updated Proposal*

Is this a new project proposal or an updated version of a proposal submitted during the earlier (July 2021) Recovery Funding RFP?

Updated version of previously submitted proposal

Amount of Funds Requested*

\$100,000.00

Category*

Please select one:

- Affordable Housing
- Aging/Older Adults
- Business Support/Economic Development
- Environmental/Climate
- Homelessness
- K-12 Education
- Infrastructure and/or Broadband
- Mental Health/Substance Use
- NC Pre-K Expansion
- Workforce

K-12 Education

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 also advancing mental health, environmental awareness, and equity.

The Foundation will utilize its award-winning Kids in Parks (KIP) program to expand its positive impacts on 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.

Kids in Parks (KIP) partners with a diverse range of groups and agencies to create a wide network of trails that engage kids and families in outdoor recreation to foster learning, wellness, and meaningful connections with parks, public lands, and nature. KIP's TRACK Trails provide visitors with self-guided materials (signs, brochures, and more) 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 smart-phone-based 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 mental, emotional, cognitive, and physical health of children in grades K-5, 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. (2022-2023)
- 3: Develop site-specific e-Adventures for the program's "hiking" TRACK Trails in Buncombe County. (2022-2024)
- 4: Install 10 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 distribute 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.

Several studies 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). In a separate study, researchers found that students in grades 3-5 were hardest hit, and poorer students and students of color saw declines sometimes twice as much as White and affluent students (Lewis et al., July 2021). 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 2021).

These reports clearly signal both a need and an opportunity to address learning losses and related issues, especially in disproportionately impacted communities 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 (2021).
- Lewis, K., et al. "Learning during COVID-19: Reading and math achievement in the 2020-21 school year." Center for School and Student Progress. NWEA, July (2021).

[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 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 the research cited here, this proposal lines up best with the “K-12 Education” funding category, because it focuses on educational activities for K-5 children. Also, KIP’s outdoor venues help address the first half of the “Mental Health/Substance Abuse” category, while the proposed STEM-focused materials will improve children’s understanding of “Environment/Climate.”

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 homeschool 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 TRACK Trails, 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 April 11, 2022, 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 14%. By using the newest census data 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 (e.g., Census Tracts 9 (38% Black), 14.02 (37% Hispanic/Latino), and 22.03 (47% non-White). Using this targeted approach, KIP believes a goal of serving a 35% non-White population is achievable. Since school districts and park locations don't always match up with these high-diversity census tracts, some variability in these results is possible.

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 learning and health 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 2023
- 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 learning and health outcomes for Buncombe residents:

- 1: Facilitate 30,000 KIP-related adventures by Buncombe County residents each year.

2: Demonstrate educational attainment and scientific principle acquisition associated with the use of TRACK Trails, STEM-based Community Trails, and e-Adventures (surveys).

3: 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.

4: Track the percentages associated with the following statistics:

a: First-time visitors to a TRACK Trail (goal: 50%)

b: Intentional visitors to a TRACK Trail (50%)

c: Repeat participants (40%)

d: Repeat participants that visit more than one Buncombe County TRACK Trail (75%)

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%, and 135%, respectively. While results may vary from park to park, this study clearly demonstrated 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 KIP's website, answering a series of questions about the outdoor experience in exchange for rewards 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 more than two million TRACK Trail adventures, spending almost one million hours outdoors, walking two million miles, and burning almost 300 million calories. Within Buncombe County, kids and families have enjoyed more than 153,000 adventures, spending 78,000 hours outside, hiking 156,000 miles, and burning 23.4 million calories.

Registration data also indicates that 63% of registrants are first-time visitors to the park, with 49% 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, KIP will focus its efforts on Buncombe County K-5 populations with the highest racial and ethnic diversity. KIP will utilize the new 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 community network will sustain much greater long-term success than KIP would by working alone, to address both the COVID slide and the perennial “summer slide” in 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, KIP leverages the knowledge, energy, and resources of each collaborating organization, in turn 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 have fun while they learn, improve their mental and physical health, and develop a greater understanding of the natural world.

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

For this project, KIP will seek partnerships with (A) local government, (B) park departments and public land management agencies, (C) schools and educational institutions, and (D) community organizations. A list of potential partners in each area currently includes:

A: Local Government: 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, NC Arboretum, greenway systems, and more

C: Schools/Educators: Buncombe County, City of Asheville, UNC Asheville, homeschool organizations, WNC STEM Leaders, WRESA, Muddy Sneakers, and more

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

Several specific products, such as trailhead signs and brochures, will be produced by outside vendors (45-50% of proposed grant). KIP will also work with its website contractor to enhance the site's functionality and user interface (10% of proposed grant).

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 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 14 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 \$20 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 secured and managed more than \$1.1 million in federal grants and loans, including awards from the Appalachian Regional Commission, Blue Ridge National Heritage Area, National Endowment for the Arts, U.S. Economic Development Administration, 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 230 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 TRACK 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 Kids in Parks Project Budget 04122022.pdf

Special Considerations*

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

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 the program's most-registered TRACK Trail. KIP has established more TRACK Trails in Buncombe (8) than any other county nationwide. All four KIP employees work in Buncombe County. This project will affirm Buncombe's status as the national home and proving ground for Kids in Parks.

Buncombe County Strategic Plan: This project advances many elements of the county's strategic plan, including the focus areas of Educated & Capable Community and Resident Well-Being; 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."

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.

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.
- 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

- Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation -501C3 - IRS Doc.pdf
- BRP Fdn Kids in Parks Project Budget 04122022.pdf

**Internal Revenue Service
Director, Exempt Organizations
Rulings and Agreements**

**Department of the Treasury
P.O. Box 2508
Cincinnati, Ohio 45201**

Date: JAN 26 2007

Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation
P O Box 10427, Salem Station
Winston-Salem, NC 27012

Employer Identification Number:
31-1512730
Person to Contact - ID#:
Sirijun Mayi - #31-07372
Contact Telephone Number:
877-829-5500 Phone
Public Charity Status:
170(b)(1)(A)(vi)

Dear Applicant:

Our letter dated April 18, 1997 stated that you were exempt from Federal income tax under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code and classified as a public charity under section 509(a)(3) of the Code.

Based on the information you submitted, we have modified your public charity status to the Code section listed in the heading of this letter. Since your exempt status was not under consideration, you continue to be classified as an organization exempt from Federal income tax under section 501(c)(3) of the Code.

Publication 557, Tax-Exempt Status for Your Organization, provides detailed information about your rights and responsibilities as an exempt organization. You may request a copy by calling the toll-free number for forms, 800-829-3676. Information is also available on our Internet Web Site at www.irs.gov.

Because this letter could help resolve any questions regarding your exempt status, you should keep it in your permanent records.

If you have any questions, please call our toll free number shown in the heading of this letter.

Sincerely,



Lois G. Lerner
Director, Exempt Organizations
Rulings and Agreements

(6) Website Functionality	\$ 10,000.00	\$ -	\$ 10,000.00	Operating	Enhance website functionality and user interface through gamification strategies and increased data collection capabilities @ \$10,000.
STEM-based Activity Development	\$ -	\$100,000	\$ 100,000.00	Capital	Design, develop, and launch a series of STEM-based activities that will be implemented at each TRACK Trail and STEM-based Community Trail listed in (1), (2), and (3). Matching funds of \$100,000 cash.
Project staffing and support	\$ -	\$ 165,000.00	\$ 165,000.00	Operating	Provide staffing and other project support throughout the 3-year project. Matching funds of \$150,000 in-kind & \$15,000 cash.
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