

# Eden for All

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*RFP for Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal  
Recovery Funds*

## *Organic Growers School*

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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. 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.

irs tax exempt letter-OGS.pdf

## Name of Project.\*

Eden for All

**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\***

\$382,606.00

**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

Mental Health/Substance Use

**Brief Project Description\***

Provide a short summary of your proposed project.

No Taste Like Home, LLC (NTLH) and Organic Growers School, 501c3 (OGS) are collaborating to introduce underserved communities to the stress-relieving benefits of foraging.

Nature connection is an essential part of mental health, and foraging is the original outdoor activity. Foraging reduces anxiety, loneliness, depression, and more.

NTLH will offer introductory foraging classes, workshops, and courses as well as internships and employment. The project will serve approximately 5,000 participants, employ up to 50 interns, and hire at least 5 guides.

**Project Plan\***

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

From July 15th, 2022 to November 15th, 2026, the project will provide 5263 spaces in classes, workshops, and/or courses to project participants. Classes are 1.5 hours in duration and will be offered, on average during the project, 150 times a year. Workshops last three hours and will be offered 650 times a year. Courses consist of ten weekly three-hour sessions and will be offered twice in spring, summer, and fall.

Topics covered in all programs include:

- identification
- uses and benefits
- sustainable harvesting
- safe handling and storage
- preparation and preservation
- where to forage and where not to, particularly on public lands

Participants receive a 40-page introductory e-book.

Participants will be entitled to sliding-scale admission to ten classes, ten workshops, and one course per year. The self-selected cost can be anywhere from 10% to 90% of the public ticket price. Free admission will also be available, as space permits, starting 24 hours before each program. Transportation assistance will also be provided.

All programs are limited to twelve participants. Classes, workshops, and courses are open to all ages. Private groups must include one adult for every two children age 11 and under. School and afterschool groups will include at least one adult for every five children.

After attending at least one class and two workshops, adult participants may apply for an internship with the goal of becoming a guide with the company. Interns assist guides in conducting workshops, a.k.a., tours. Assistants are paid \$60 per tour.

The project anticipates that 10-50 participants will apply for internships. Internships can last indefinitely. When an intern is ready, they can elect to become a guide in training. Guides in training are paid \$100 per tour.

The project anticipates that at least 5 interns will, within a year of guide training, become guides. Trained guides are initially paid \$150 per tour. Guides with the company for five years or more (including internship) receive \$200 per tour. Guide positions also last indefinitely.

Performance evaluation will be completed by January 1st, 2027. NTLH and OGS have the commitment and capacity to extend the program beyond 2026, employing staff hired through the project.

## Statement of Need\*

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

People have a need to connect with nature. A lack of nature connection can lead to a host of symptoms collectively termed "Nature Deficit Disorder."

During the pandemic, people in contact with natural spaces showed lower levels of stress, psychological distress and psychosomatic symptoms ("Exposure to nature during COVID-19 lockdown was beneficial for mental health," <https://tinyurl.com/4edd57um>). These symptoms included reduced anxiety, depression, and loneliness ("Nature Can Improve Mental Health During the Pandemic, Study Finds," <https://tinyurl.com/ynvv7yrn>). Time outdoors and exercise have both been key factors in mental health ("The Importance of Nature Exposure and Physical Activity for Psychological Health and Stress Perception:

Evidence From the First Lockdown During the Coronavirus Pandemic 2020 in France and Germany,” (<https://tinyurl.com/3wn6939e>).

Foraging is a way to “not just to be in nature, but to genuinely connect with it” (<https://tinyurl.com/93kb9u9r>). Like the author of Family Foraging says, “you can’t get much more connected to the land than eating from it” (<https://tinyurl.com/5f4jtf3t>).

Contrary to popular belief, foraging can be safe, beneficial to the environment, convenient, and easy. It can literally be a walk in the park, for there is more wild food in the city than in the country. Consequently, foraging can help combat hunger, malnutrition, obesity, and more. Commercial foraging can even combat poverty. Above all, foraging heals the spirit. Even if you put nothing in your basket, you are still fed.

### Link to COVID-19\*

Identify a health or economic harm resulting from or exacerbated by the public health emergency, describe the nature and extent of that harm, and explain how the use of this funding would address such harm.

“The mental-health crisis of the pandemic is real. A staggering 4 in 10 adults have reported symptoms of anxiety and depression, a quadrupling of the pre-pandemic rate. More than 1 in 4 mothers report that the pandemic has had a major impact on their mental health. 24% of parents have reported being diagnosed with a mental-health disorder... Visits to primary care for anxiety and depression have increased 13% among kids. The full array of suffering has yet to completely present itself...” (<https://tinyurl.com/c7swwvc2>).

The pandemic has taxed our ability to maintain good habits, particularly around movement and diet. “Even when people really mean to exercise and eat healthy foods, burnout—a state of low energy and low motivation—is a common barrier to realizing those good intentions” (op cit).

Most of us resist exercise for good reason: it’s unnatural (<https://tinyurl.com/yt7rsw4z>). Feeding ourselves from nature is what we evolved to do (<https://tinyurl.com/ymfvs6ja>). We are built to forage.

Foraging is like an Easter egg hunt, geocaching, or Pokemon Go — except with berries. It’s fun and it’s free. The miracle of foraging for parents is that children with no interest in greens, mushrooms, and other healthy foods suddenly become VERY interested when they find and harvest them themselves.

Foraging provides an “excuse” to take time out — outside, that is. It gives families a way to spend time together, enjoying fresh air, sunshine, exercise, and free wholesome food. And foraging provides something more valuable than physical nourishment. For one, it’s an exercise in mindfulness. Many people won’t go to a meditation class, but they will go for a walk in nature, especially on a scavenger hunt. What better way to “take in the landscape?”

In this time of insecurity, foraging can help us to feel safe and provided for, surrounded by a benevolent, supportive world. What could be more reassuring?

### Population Served\*

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

The project will serve roughly 5,000 county residents. Outreach will focus on BIPOC families with children. We will also accept BIPOC adults and, as space permits, members of other historically underserved communities as defined by White House executive orders (<https://tinyurl.com/93dzv78>, <https://tinyurl.com/3xf67rc8>). School and afterschool programs in QCTs will also be invited to participate.

In promoting the project, NTLH will also promote OGS's BIPOC offerings and opportunities.

NTLH's CEO is Latinx. If needed, programs in Spanish will be conducted.

## Results\*

Describe the proposed impact of the project. List at least 3 performance measures that will be tracked and reported. If possible, include baselines and goals for each performance measure.

The project has three easily measurable goals: (1) to fill at least 5,000 spaces in our programs with local underserved populations, (2) to fill ten year-long internship positions each year for five years, and (3) to hire five guides from among these interns.

A good example of the mental health impact of a foraging education program is provided by Finland. Their official tourism website opens with, "Finland has been chosen as the happiest nation in the world for three years in a row. Being happy has a lot to do with our daily habits: a short walk in the forest, going ice swimming or tasting something fresh from nature. All of these things add a sense of calm and happiness to everyday life – something we all need right now!" (<https://rentafinn.com/en/>).

Finland's nature-based happiness is no accident. In 1969, the country launched a fifteen-year campaign to teach foraging. By 1983, 50,000 citizens had been trained. Today, roughly half the population forages regularly — without harming the forest. Many sell their harvest locally and as far away as Italy (<https://tinyurl.com/y5hz2zv8>).

Buncombe County is uniquely positioned to outdo Finland. We sit in the center of the most biodiverse temperate forest in the Western Hemisphere, possibly in the world (<https://tinyurl.com/3r4k2vkv>). Our area is home to over 500 common wild edibles (<https://tinyurl.com/mv7teerj>), many not available anywhere else. Asheville could be the center of sustainable green industry, the foraging capital of the country, with mental health statistics to match.

We are all entitled to experience the peace that nature provides. It is our birthright. Foraging uncovers the real Garden of Eden, and it has been here all along.

## Evaluation\*

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

Participant attendance is recorded via our online registration system. The total number of intern and guide positions filled through the project will also be recorded.

Quality assurance consists of participant evaluation forms filled out at the close of each program. These are transcribed and reviewed quarterly. Participants also post reviews. NTLH's programs serve 87% tourists, and for ten years, NTLH has been the #1 foraging tour company on TripAdvisor in the country.

## 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?

In recovering our mental health, nature connection is key. But not everyone has had equal access to nature.

Since the pandemic, there has been an explosion in visitation to national parks (<https://tinyurl.com/2rjpx3w>). Interest in foraging is up 25-500% (<https://tinyurl.com/bpvwxary>, <https://tinyurl.com/amuujd3k>, <https://tinyurl.com/7uuukn3c>). NTLH's enrollment is up 48%.

BIPOC, however, particularly Blacks, face a number of barriers to outdoor recreation, particularly foraging (<https://tinyurl.com/5w953ty5>). One is fear of the woods. Fortunately, foraging need not involve camping or even hiking. Classes, held in central Asheville, will show the abundance available right in town.

There is also a lack of role models. Eden for All is designed to change that by offering lucrative employment. In the project period, NTLH will conduct 3,065 tours. The total income for assistants will be \$183,900. Interns that start guide training in 2025 will, by the end of their third year guiding, have earned on average \$52,441. Five guides, our project target, will have earned \$262,205. If the number of guides is more or less than five, their total income remains the same. The same goes for assistants, regardless of how the work is divided among them.

From mid-March to mid-October, each guide leads 2-3 tours a week; each intern assists 1-2 tours. In the winter, there are only a handful of tours. But these are less than half-time positions, allowing for a second job that pays more steadily through the year.

While only a fraction of participants will go on to join NTLH staff, there is also the educational value for all involved. With guides earning a total of \$262,205 in their first three years, \$183,900 going to assistants, \$35,000 spent on guide training, and \$350,000 in instruction, the total project value \*starts\* at \$831,105. Guides and interns will hopefully stay with the company long after 2026. And NTLH intends to continue the program in order to hire more.

## 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 sole subcontractor will be NTLH, providing 100% of the work involved, including promotion/recruitment, program delivery, and evaluation.

NTLH has been working to hire BIPOC staff since September of 2020. Bountiful Cities Project, NTLH's fiscal agent from 2013 to 2019, is providing Dr. George Washington Carver Edible Park (at Stephens-Lee Recreation Center) as a location for classes. Christmount is providing their 600 acres (400 in conservation) for workshops. The NC Center for Health & Wellness and UNCA's Food Equity Initiative, NTLH partners since 2018, are providing The Kellogg Center, and Riverlink is providing an 11-acre parcel at the Wilma Dykeman House. We are also permitted to use the Buncombe County Collier Cove Nature Preserve, and Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy is helping to identify additional teaching sites.

SeekHealing (aid for mental health/addiction), a NTLH partner since 2018, is applying separately for a van, in part to transport participants to project programs. Hood Huggers International has also offered to provide transportation.

Bounty and Soul, NTLH partner since Spring of 2020, will advertise the program. Patchwork Alliance also agreed to help promote the project. Other promotional partners include Pathways to Parks, Outdoor Afro, Beloved Asheville, and Asheville Poverty Initiative. Explore Asheville is assisting with outreach to other potential partners.

We will be consulting with similar existing programs across the country, including Community Nature Connection and Latino Outdoors (<https://tinyurl.com/3dv4tz54>).

## 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.

For 27 years, OGS has conducted classes and other programs for organic farmers and home growers. OGS presents the largest annual sustainable agriculture conference in the Southeast and maintains a strong commitment to social justice and inclusion (see e.g. <https://tinyurl.com/p6ffk8ak> or <https://tinyurl.com/2zu4268s>). For more information, see our 2019 Impact Report (<https://tinyurl.com/jtas56j3>).

No Taste Like Home (NTLH) is a 26-year-old foraging tour company. With over 500 programs a year, NTLH is the largest wild food education organization in the world (<https://notastelikehome.org/>).

Since its inception, with the exception of pandemic assistance, NTLH has been completely self-funded by its own programs. This project will represent less than 15% of the company's volume in the project period.

NTLH's instructors have been with the company, on average, for at least four years. Each is personally trained by NTLH's founding CEO, Alan Muskat, using his 250-page training manual.

For 15 years, Muskat gathered over 500 pounds of wild mushrooms a year, supplying over 100 restaurants and hotels, including The Biltmore Estate and The Grove Park Inn. One of the leading proponents of foraging in the country, he has appeared in over 300 publications.

In 2016, Muskat served on the North Carolina regulatory committee that established the first standards for commercial wild mushroom sales in the state. He is currently completing a 700-page guide to foraging with a focus on mushroom hunting. For more info, visit <http://www.alanmuskat.com/>.

## 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.

OGS Recovery-Funds-budget2.xlsx

## Special Considerations\*

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

This project falls under several additional funding categories: Business Support/Economic Development, Workforce, and K-12 Education.

NTLH's public programs are all by donation (see last question at <https://notastelikehome.org/faq/>). This project would allow NTLH to greatly expand this offering. We are open to partial funding and our delivery dates are flexible.

## File Attachment Summary

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### *Applicant File Uploads*

- irs tax exempt letter-OGS.pdf
- OGS Recovery-Funds-budget2.xlsx

INTERNAL REVENUE SERVICE  
P. O. BOX 2508  
CINCINNATI, OH 45201

DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY

Date: **AUG 02 2006**

ORGANIC GROWERS SCHOOL INC  
C/O KAREN VIZZINA  
926 WELCH RD  
FRANKLIN, NC 28734-0810

Employer Identification Number:  
75-3166329  
DLN:  
17053170046026  
Contact Person: WINNIE W LEE ID# 31208  
Contact Telephone Number:  
(877) 829-5500  
Accounting Period Ending:  
December 31  
Public Charity Status:  
509(a) (2)  
Form 990 Required:  
Yes  
Effective Date of Exemption:  
March 8, 2005  
Contribution Deductibility:  
Yes  
Advance Ruling Ending Date:  
December 31, 2009

Dear Applicant:

We are pleased to inform you that upon review of your application for tax exempt status we have determined that you are exempt from Federal income tax under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Contributions to you are deductible under section 170 of the Code. You are also qualified to receive tax deductible bequests, devises, transfers or gifts under section 2055, 2106 or 2522 of the Code. Because this letter could help resolve any questions regarding your exempt status, you should keep it in your permanent records.

Organizations exempt under section 501(c)(3) of the Code are further classified as either public charities or private foundations. During your advance ruling period, you will be treated as a public charity. Your advance ruling period begins with the effective date of your exemption and ends with advance ruling ending date shown in the heading of the letter.

Shortly before the end of your advance ruling period, we will send you Form 8734, Support Schedule for Advance Ruling Period. You will have 90 days after the end of your advance ruling period to return the completed form. We will then notify you, in writing, about your public charity status.

Please see enclosed Information for Exempt Organizations Under Section 501(c)(3) for some helpful information about your responsibilities as an exempt organization.

Letter 1045 (DO/CG)

