# Volunteers for Recreation, Conservation, and Economic Development

FY2021 Strategic Partnership Grants

# Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation

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# **Application Form**

# **INSTRUCTIONS**

As part of the FY2021 Strategic Partnership Grants program, Buncombe County requests proposals for communitybased projects working toward outcomes in alignment with Strategic Plan focus areas.

Please refer to the Grant Guidelines published on the Strategic Partnership Grants website at buncombecounty.org/grants for complete information about the grant program, including: Purpose; Funding; Eligibility; Timeline; Grant writing workshop; Review process; Awards; and more.

Applications are due by 5:00 on February 14, 2020.

# **BASIC INFORMATION**

BASIC INFORMATION – Before completing the application, please tell us a little about the request.

#### **Project Name\***

Volunteers for Recreation, Conservation, and Economic Development

## Strategy\*

Recognizing that some projects will use more than one strategy, select the strategy that most closely applies to this project:

- Environmental Stewardship High quality air, water, farmland and renewable energy for future generations
- Educated & Capable Community A county where all people thrive and demonstrate resilience throughout their lives
- Vibrant Economy A robust and sustainable economy that builds on homegrown industries/talent and provides economic mobility for all
- Resident Well-Being A county where residents are safe, healthy, and engaged in their community

**Resident Well-Being** 

## Funding Request\*

How much funding is this project requesting for FY2021? \$36,000.00

#### **Grant Guidelines**\*

Have you read and understand the information presented in the FY2021 Grant Guidelines Strategic Partnership Grants?

Click here for the Grant Guidelines.

If no, please contact County staff to request assistance: Rachael Nygaard, (828) 250-6536 or rachael.nygaard@buncombecounty.org.

Yes

#### Nonprofit Status\*

Upload proof of nonprofit status, such as IRS Determination Letter or documentation from the North Carolina Secretary of State. If this documentation is not available, briefly state the reason.

Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation -501C3 - IRS Doc.pdf Please see attachment.

#### **Board of Directors\***

Upload a current list of your organization's Board of Directors. If your organization does not have a board of directors, briefly state the reason.

BRP Fdn Trustees and Advisors 02062020.pdf

Attached please find a listing of our Board of Trustees and Council of Advisors. Additional biographical information about our volunteer leadership can be found at https://www.brpfoundation.org/leadership.

## APPLICATION

APPLICATION QUESTIONS – Responses to these questions will be scored by the grant committee. Each question is worth 10% of the final score.

#### **Organization\***

Tell us about your organization. What is your mission? Highlight two or three key facts and accomplishments that best define your organization.

Founded in 1997, the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation is the primary fundraising partner, 501(c)(3), for the Blue Ridge Parkway, providing support for initiatives along the 469-mile route, including historical and cultural preservation, recreation, environmental protection, visitor amenities, and education and outreach.

We achieve our mission by:

-Collaborating with Parkway staff to identify critical needs fueled by declining federal funding. -Raising funds through individual, corporate, foundation and government gifts and grants. -Partnering with other nonprofits, businesses, chambers of commerce, and tourism authorities. -Awarding grants for community initiatives that serve the best interests of the Parkway. -Recruiting and supporting volunteers.

Our efforts along Buncombe County's 45-mile stretch of the Blue Ridge Parkway include numerous projects to improve trails, interpretive exhibits, and resource protection at Craggy Gardens; repairs to road edges to reduce damage to Parkway resources; and support for maintenance of the popular Mountains-to-Sea Trail and Shut-In Trail.

We also encourage exercise and learning through our Kids in Parks program and TRACK Trails (https://www.kidsinparks.com/). We have established seven of these sites in Buncombe County: Enka High School Nature Trail Disc Golf Course, N.C. Arboretum, Haw Creek Elementary Citizen Science Trail, Blue Ridge Parkway Visitor Center, Owen High School Nature Trail Disc Golf Course, Black Mountain Veterans Park, and Montreat. Our data indicates that these seven sites have hosted more than 120,000 adventures, totaling almost 17 million calories burned. We are very grateful to Buncombe County for providing several Community Recreation Grants to support these local TRACK Trails.

We also provided \$25,000 to help create the Buncombe County Greenways Master Plan. That plan proposes to link local trails with the Parkway and the Mountains-to-Sea Trail at five Buncombe County locations.

#### **Need for the Project\***

What is the main issue this project is established to address? What data or qualitative factors/stories are available to show that need?

Buncombe County hosts approximately 45 miles of the Blue Ridge Parkway, from Craggy Gardens and the ridgetops of the Asheville watershed in northeastern Buncombe County to the Folk Art Center and the Blue Ridge Parkway Visitor Center in east Asheville to the French Broad River and up toward Mount Pisgah in southwestern Buncombe County. This stretch of "America's Favorite Drive" attracts millions of visitors each year with its scenic views; benefits both locals and tourists with its many miles of intersecting trails; hosts rare plants and animals; and remains the primary driver of the local tourism economy.

Maintaining these many valuable resources requires a tremendous amount of funding and labor. Unfortunately, the Parkway has amassed a maintenance backlog of over \$500 million, which in turn threatens to diminish the Parkway's many positive impacts on local people (including recreation and health issues) and the local economy (including all the tourism-related businesses and their employees).

The Parkway is a popular destination for Buncombe County residents, and they believe that trails and greenways provide numerous community benefits. Through an online survey related to the county's Greenway Master Plan, Buncombe County residents indicated that:

- The Parkway is their second most desired destination for greenway connectivity (second only to West Asheville).

- Greenways and trails have many community benefits, including recreational opportunities (98%), community health and fitness (97%), quality of life (97%), the environment (95%), and economic development and tourism (93%).

- 59% believe that "better maintenance" was "very vital" or "vital" for encouraging locals to use trails and greenways more.

- 62% would consider becoming trail volunteers.

By engaging the community in hands-on volunteer work, this project will maintain the Parkway's substantial economic, social and environmental benefits for Buncombe County and its 257,000 residents.

#### **Project\***

Explain the project and how it will work. Include the overall purpose and any models or evidence-based practices that will be included. What specific activities and milestones are included in the project plan?

The Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation is seeking a \$36,000 grant to help develop a robust volunteer program that will engage local residents in Parkway projects that improve resident well-being, support environmental stewardship, and maintain a vibrant tourism economy.

As a first step, we will identify and train a volunteer coordinator who will recruit, engage and/or train at least 100 volunteers and match them up with appropriate projects along the Parkway in Buncombe County. The volunteer coordinator will work with individual volunteers, volunteer groups (e.g., Carolina Mountain Club), and Blue Ridge Parkway staff to identify and design appropriate volunteer projects and ensure that the volunteers are effectively supported and thanked for their contributions. The volunteer coordinator will also utilize grant funds to purchase equipment, supplies and materials for different volunteer projects.

The primary focus of these volunteer projects in Buncombe County will be the Parkway's trails, which are very popular with local residents, including the Mountains-to-Sea Trail, the Shut-In Trail from the French Broad River up to Mount Pisgah, and the trails around Rattlesnake Lodge and Craggy Gardens. Both individuals and groups will help assess trail conditions, clear overgrown vegetation and fallen trees, and help address eroded sections that detract from the hiking experience and damage water quality and other natural resources. We expect to impact more than 15,000 linear feet of trails. We also want to recruit a small team of volunteers to serve as "rovers" at Craggy Gardens. The rovers will engage visitors and encourage them to stay on designated pathways in order to avoid damage to rare plants at this popular recreation destination.

While these projects represent the current priorities, we will work to engage volunteers in many other ways that will benefit the Parkway and Buncombe County residents and businesses.

#### **People Served\***

How many people will be served by this project? Describe the people served, including demographics such as geography, income, race & ethnicity, age, etc.

The Blue Ridge Parkway, with more than 14 million visitors every year, has an estimated economic impact of \$1.2 billion every year on neighboring communities, with Asheville and Buncombe County enjoying a large percentage of that benefit. According to the WNC Vitality Index, 6-9% of all Buncombe County jobs are in tourism, and the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area has identified outdoor recreation as the top tourist activity in our region. By protecting the Parkway's recreational assets, the proposed grant will help maintain the Parkway's positive impact on the many people employed at local hotels, restaurants, and other tourist destinations.

Adding in commuter traffic, Buncombe County's reliance on the Parkway grows even more. For example, the Parkway interchange at Highway 25 launched 1,095,278 vehicle trips on the Parkway in 2019, just over 3,000 trips per day.

For those who enjoy walking, hiking, jogging and trail running, the Parkway's trails provide a great variety of recreation experiences. Trails range from flat to steep. Some trail sections run through Asheville

(especially the Mountains-to-Sea Trail), while others provide a welcome escape in more remote areas. In these ways, the Parkway's trails and recreation areas serve a wide range of local recreational users.

The Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation is also working to engage more people of color in outdoor recreation experiences. We are working with Pathways to Parks, whose CEO is a member of the Foundation's Council of Advisors (https://www.brpfoundation.org/content/tanya-marie-cummings). We are also part of Everybody's Environment (https://www.everybodysenvironment.org/), a local partnership of public land agencies and related non-profit groups who are actively working to diversify the employees, volunteers and visitors of public land agencies and non-profit groups. We will work with these and groups to help engage all audiences in our hiring processes, as well as volunteer recruitment and engagement.

#### **Results**\*

What results do you hope to achieve with this project? Be specific about how much impact the project will have in line with Commissioner focus areas.

This project will primarily benefit Resident Well-Being by expanding and maintaining recreational assets, especially trails. The volunteer projects will provide an opportunity for dozens of Buncombe County residents to be engaged in their community. Both the volunteer labor and the trails will encourage Buncombe County residents to be active and healthy.

Our efforts to maintain and improve our local trails will support Environmental Stewardship, especially "high quality water" by correcting or avoiding soil erosion near stream crossings and on the many stretches of sloping terrain. By placing volunteer "rovers" at Craggy Gardens, we will also reduce negative impacts on rare plant species found at this popular recreation destination.

The Blue Ridge Parkway is one of the top drivers of tourism in Buncombe County, so our efforts to maintain and improve Parkway resources will advance the commissioners' Vibrant Economy focus area, creating a "robust and sustainable regional economy" that benefits hundreds of businesses and thousands of workers in Buncombe County.

We will also support the Commissioners' values of "Respect, Integrity, Collaboration, Honesty, Equity," with every interaction with our core partners and dozens of volunteers, and through accountable spending, tracking of results (as detailed in the Evaluation section below), and by developing and implementing plans to improve our community engagement and on-the-ground results.

In all of these ways, we believe the proposed grant will advance the Commissioners' vision of a "caring community in harmony with its environment where citizens succeed, thrive, and realize their potential."

#### **Evaluation\***

How will you know you have succeeded? Explain the project evaluation process, including specific measures that will be tracked.

We will track four specific measures:

- # of volunteers recruited/engaged, with goals of 50 new volunteers and 100 total volunteers
- # of volunteer hours, with a goal of 1,000 hours of volunteering
- # of linear feet of trail assessed, maintained and/or improved, with a goal of 15,000 linear feet
- # of visitor contacts, with a goal of 1,000, primarily at Craggy Gardens via the rovers.

We believe these are valuable measures, because a trained and engaged volunteer can provide long-term support for trail work and other park needs, not just for the year ahead. Meanwhile, by improving trail conditions and educating visitors, we will know our efforts are having positive impacts on Parkway resources and the Parkway experience.

We will track this data through volunteer work logs and reports, as well as project assessments conducted by volunteer supervisors and project managers. We will also review the results with Parkway staff to assess the overall effectiveness of these efforts and possible changes going forward. For example, if there are still unacceptable levels of damage to the rare plants and other natural resources at Craggy Gardens, do we need to add volunteers, extend the volunteer season, and/or add interpretive signage to complement the work of the volunteer rovers? Through such analysis, we will continue to refine our work in order to have the most positive impact on the Parkway and Parkway visitors - including the many residents of Buncombe County.

#### Collaboration\*

List any formal and/or supportive partners. Describe their roles in the project. How will they make it stronger?

National Park Service/Blue Ridge Parkway - As an official non-profit partner of the Blue Ridge Parkway, the Foundation closely coordinates with Parkway staff to identify and implement projects that benefit both Parkway resources and visitors. The park's volunteer coordinator will serve as their primary liaison with our efforts, ensuring that the volunteers we recruit are properly trained, supervised and supported on the projects outlined in this proposal. Basically, we recruit the volunteers, and they provide the technical training and ensure that the volunteers' work meets Parkway goals and standards.

Carolina Mountain Club - Founded nearly a century ago, the Asheville-based Carolina Mountain Club (CMC) maintains 400 miles of trails and leads 175 hikes per year throughout Buncombe County and Western North Carolina. We regularly collaborate with CMC to maintain and improve the trails along the Parkway. We purchase equipment, supplies, and materials, and we help recruit volunteers. CMC provides dozens of their own veteran volunteers, provides training as needed, and coordinates and supervises the trail maintenance and improvement projects. It's a great partnership.

Friends of the Blue Ridge Parkway - The Friends group is based in Roanoke, Virginia, and primarily serves to recruit volunteers for numerous projects along the Parkway. We will engage their Asheville chapter of volunteers (the southernmost of their 10 volunteer chapters) to support the volunteer projects outlined here. This arrangement works very well, because they bring a core group of dedicated volunteers to the table, while we can engage and support those Asheville-chapter volunteers much better, since the majority of our staff are based right here in Asheville.

Buncombe County - As detailed below in the Resource Support section, we would welcome the County's support in improving several additional aspects of our work in Buncombe County.

#### Budget\*

Download a copy of the budget form <u>HERE</u>. Complete the form, and upload it using the button below.

Explain how grant funds will be used, specifically what type of expenses will be covered by County funds. Describe other sources of revenue, including type of funding, source, restrictions and status.

Parkway Volunteers Budget FY 2021.pdf Buncombe County Strategic Partnership Grant (proposed): - \$20,000 for salary for a volunteer coordinator, who will help recruit, train and manage both individual volunteers and volunteer groups, such as the Asheville Chapter of Friends of the Blue Ridge Parkway and the Carolina Mountain Club. The volunteer coordinator will also work with park staff to identify appropriate opportunities for volunteers. Including benefits, this position will cost an estimated \$50,000 per year.

- \$2,500 for training materials and sessions (e.g., First Aid and CPR, chainsaw safety) for dozens of volunteers, as well as the volunteer coordinator.

- \$2,500 for mileage (approx. 5,000 miles) for the volunteer coordinator to travel to speak with community groups, pick up and deliver supplies, and plan and attend volunteer workdays.

- \$5,000 for supplies and materials for trail work (e.g., tools, gloves, first-aid kits) and the rovers at Craggy (e.g., uniforms, backpacks, rain jackets, first-aid kits)

- \$500 for volunteer recruitment and training sessions (primarily for food and drinks)

- \$5,000 for two park radios for the rovers at Craggy to communicate with park staff

- \$500 for printing and marketing, including ads to recruit the coordinator and printing of training forms, guidelines etc.

Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation (from donations and grants TBD):

- \$30,000 in salary and benefits for the volunteer coordinator - if we are unable to secure all \$30,000, we would reduce hours per week and/or seek out a volunteer who can assist the volunteer coordinator - \$1,000 for a computer and other supplies.

Volunteers (in-kind):

- \$24,190 of in-kind labor for trail maintenance and improvements, visitor services and resource protection at Craggy Gardens, and more. This figure is based on Independent Sector's estimated value of volunteer time in North Carolina in 2018 at \$24.19 per hour (figures for 2019 or 2020 are not yet available) - https://independentsector.org/resource/vovt\_details/.

#### **Other County Funding\***

List all other Buncombe County funding that is provided to your organization. For each item, list the project being funded, amount of funding, source (grant, departmental contract, etc.) and whether funding is to be renewed for FY2021.

Buncombe County Recreation Services has awarded the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation's Kids in Parks program a Fiscal Year 2020 grant of \$4,179.59 to install a TRACK Trail (self-guided adventures that use signs to turn visits into fun and exciting outdoor experiences with prizes for tracking progress) at Charles D. Owen Park. This is the fourth such grant since 2010 to help establish TRACK Trails in Buncombe County, and we are very grateful for this partnership with the County.

We have not yet determined if we will apply for another Community Recreation Grant for FY2021; any such proposal would focus on activities based at Buncombe County parks or schools, rather than along the Blue Ridge Parkway.

#### Sustainability\*

How will the project continue to succeed after the funding of the grant? Explain your plan for making this an ongoing effort.

The work outlined in this grant proposal represents one of our first steps to increase our level of engagement and impact in Asheville and Buncombe County. While we are pleased with our results to date, we

believe we can and should do more. In addition to these efforts to step up our volunteer engagement and impact, we have recently hired a Development Officer, George Ivey, who has 20 years of fundraising experience and is focusing on engaging more donors in Asheville, Buncombe County, and surrounding areas. As we engage more people as both volunteers and donors, and as we grow our results and positive impacts along the 45-mile stretch of the Parkway in Buncombe County (and through our Kids in Parks program), we feel confident that we will gain the additional private philanthropic support that will be necessary to sustain and grow these efforts for the long run.

## **OPTIONAL INFORMATION**

**OPTIONAL INFORMATION –** This information will not impact grant scoring but will be helpful to the committee.

#### **Partial Funding**

If the project were to be offered a grant for partial funding, what factors would need to be considered?

We would gladly receive partial funding as necessary. Our primary need is for the volunteer coordinator. Our current staff is fully engaged in their work, and a dedicated volunteer coordinator is absolutely necessary for us to effectively recruit, train and support volunteers. If the \$20,000 requested for this expense is not available, we would welcome a smaller grant, but we would likely delay hiring this position, reduce the hours per week, recruit a volunteer assistant to support the paid volunteer coordinator, and/or adjust our intended impacts as appropriate.

If more than \$20,000 is available for a partial grant, our next priorities for funding would be, in order, training (\$2,500), travel (\$2,500), supplies (\$5,000), and equipment (\$5,000). Understandably, every item not funded or only partially funded will reduce our ability to deliver the results listed above, but we can still make important progress in the areas of community, environment and economy.

#### **Resource Support**

Beyond this grant request, how can Buncombe County support your organization with this project and in strengthening your work?

We would greatly welcome opportunities to collaborate with the County's Community Engagement and Public Engagement team to increase access, equity, inclusion, and collaboration as we work to develop a job description, hire a volunteer coordinator, recruit and train volunteers, and promote the Parkway's trails and other recreation resources with local communities.

We also welcome additional opportunities to work with Buncombe County to advance the County's Greenways Master Plan, particularly for the five proposed greenway intersections with the Blue Ridge Parkway and the Mountains-to-Sea Trail. By connecting these trails together, we can increase the positive impact of each individual trail on local people and local communities.

We are also eager to build our relationships with the Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority and Explore Asheville to promote and support the Parkway as a tourism, recreation, and economic development resource for all of Buncombe County.

We welcome other suggestions for strengthening the relationship between Buncombe County and the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation and for finding additional ways to work together to support local residents, the local economy and our natural resources.

## Other

Is there anything else that you want the committee to know?

We will gladly provide additional information as requested. Thank you for your consideration.

# File Attachment Summary

## **Applicant File Uploads**

- Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation -501C3 IRS Doc.pdf
- BRP Fdn Trustees and Advisors 02062020.pdf
- Parkway Volunteers Budget FY 2021.pdf

Internal Revenue Service Director, Exempt Organizations Rulings and Agreements

Date: JAN 2 6 2007

Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation P O Box 10427, Salem Station Winston-Salem, NC 27012 Department of the Treasury P.O. Box 2508 Cincinnati, Ohio 45201

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,

Dis P. Kennen

Lois G. Lernér Director, Exempt Organizations Rulings and Agreements



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# Strategic Partnership Grants Proposed FY2021 Project Budget (July 1, 2020 - June 30, 2021)

Organization Name:	Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation			
Project Name:	Volunteers for Recreation, Conservation, and Economic Development			
Grant Amount Requested:	\$36,000			

FY2021 Proposed Project Revenue		Amount	Committed or Pending?
Proposed Buncombe County Strategic Partnerships Grant	\$	36,000	Pending
Restricted gifts and grants and/or speciality license plate funds	\$	31,000	Pending, but likely
Volunteer Labor (in-kind) - 1,000 hours x \$24.19/hr = \$24,190	\$	24,190	Pending; we have kept this estimate on the conservative side.
List other sources:			
Tota	I \$	91,190	

FY2021 Proposed Project Expenses	Proposed Grant	Other Funds	Total	Notes
Personnel	\$ 20,000	\$ 30,000	\$ 50,000	New position to recruit, train and coordinate volunteers and vol. groups.
Training	\$ 2,500		\$ 2,500	Volunteer training (e.g., chainsaw safety), best practices training for vol. coord.
Travel	\$ 2,500		\$ 2,500	Mileage for partner mtgs., vol. recruitment, supply p/u & delivery, vol. work days
Supplies / Materials	\$ 5,000		\$ 5,000	Tools and supplies for trail work; supplies and uniforms for Craggy rovers
Meetings (Food, Interpreting, Child Care, etc.)	\$ 500		\$ 500	Supplies for volunteer recruitment and training sessions
Equipment / Furniture	\$ 5,000	\$ 1,000	\$ 6,000	2 radios for Craggy rovers (\$2,500 each); computer for vol. coord.
Printing / Marketing	\$ 500		\$ 500	Ads to recruit coord.; forms, guidelines, etc. for volunteer training
Licensing / Memberships / Dues / Subscriptions	\$-		\$-	
Client Support	\$-		\$-	
Contracts	\$-		\$-	
Professional Services (Legal, Accounting, etc.)	\$-		\$ -	
Insurance and Bonds	\$-		\$ -	
Building Maintenance (Rent, Utilities, Repairs, etc.)	\$-		\$-	
Volunteer Labor (in-kind) - 1,000 hrs x \$24.19/hr = \$24,190	\$-	\$ 24,190	\$ 24,190	Based on Independent Sector's \$24.19/hr est. value of vol. time in N.C. (2018)
List other costs:			\$ -	
List other costs:			\$-	
List other costs:			\$ -	
	•	Total	\$ 91,190	

Overall Organization Budget		Amount	Notes
FY2019 Actual Year-End Revenue	\$	1,629,114	Figures for FY2019 are not yet final; we can provide updated figures as needed.
FY2019 Actual Year-End Expenses	\$	2,189,659	Higher spending related to multi-year grants and gifts received before FY19.
FY2020 Adopted Budget Amount	\$	2,335,765	Includes funds for Kids in Parks program and Blue Ridge Music Ctr operations.
FY2021 Proposed Budget Amount	TBD		The board has not yet developed a budget for FY2021 (which begins 1/1/2021).