

Graduation Initiative

FY2021 Strategic Partnership Grants

Eblen Charities

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Application Form

INSTRUCTIONS

As part of the FY2021 Strategic Partnership Grants program, Buncombe County requests proposals for community-based 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*

Graduation Initiative

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

Educated & Capable Community

Funding Request*

How much funding is this project requesting for FY2021?

\$50,000.00

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.

3 PG 501c3.pdf
Uploaded

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.

Eblen Charities Board Members .xlsx
Uploaded

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.

The Graduation Initiative is a program of the Buncombe County Schools (BCS) that came into existence to find unique and flexible ways to keep students engaged, and focused towards graduation. It began as a partnership between BCS, Eblen Charities and Buncombe County Government. We are a small team of four people with social work and counselor training and backgrounds. Our director has administrative certification and experience. The mission of the Graduation Initiative is to have every student in Buncombe County remain in school, successfully graduate and become contributing members in the community. We use research-based methods to put programs and supports in place for our most at-risk students. Since the inception of the Graduation Initiative in 2006-2007, we have made great strides in reducing the number of students who dropout each year. In 2006-2007 Buncombe County Schools had 452 dropouts compared to only 131 in 2018-2019. This is a 71% reduction in the number of dropouts and the second year in a row that

our dropout number has been below 200 students. Our Twilight and Mini-mester programs served 362 students during 2018-2019. Most of these students completed courses needed to keep them on track for graduation. We graduated 36 students at the end of Mini-mester this past summer - most of whom would not have returned for a 5th year of high school.

Our overall four year cohort rate for 2006-2007, the year we began our work was, 73.4%. Most recently, in 2018-2019 our cohort rate has increased to 86.9%. This school year we added an online Virtual Academy option to assist students on their way to graduation.

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?

The Graduation Initiative is a unique partnership that brings together the Buncombe County School System, Buncombe County Government and Eblen Charities to reach out to students in Buncombe County who have dropped out or may be at risk of leaving school before graduation. The major focus of the Graduation Initiative is to help remove barriers that may be preventing a student from being successful in school, which may subsequently, result in them dropping out. The partnership allows the Graduation Initiative to access the vast community resources available through Eblen Charities along with Buncombe County community services. In terms of data to support the need, we have been keeping data since our inception in 2006-07 school year. In that year, Buncombe County Schools had 452 students who dropped out of school. Since that time we have continued to respond to the changing needs of young people in this day and age to offer night programs, summer programs and most recently, virtual online programs. As a result, in 2018-19, Buncombe County Schools had an all time low of 131 students dropout. The need for a focus on at risk students continues because we are working with new students each and every year. Our work is never quite done.

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?

Our project is the work of the Graduation Initiative. Graduation Specialists work with the counselors and social workers at each of the nine high schools to identify students who have failed required courses and have thereby put themselves at risk of being retained in the current grade level or of not graduating on time. The Graduation Initiative Program is comprised of a director and three graduation specialists. The graduation specialists meet weekly with a team of administrators, counselors, social workers, and teachers at each of their assigned schools to track individual student progress and provide support for those identified at-risk students. The extensive research of Dr. Robert Balfanz from John Hopkins University shows that students who are struggling academically, have poor attendance and several behavioral referrals tend to give up and drop out. The weekly at-risk meetings focus on the needs of individual students and what they may need to get back on track. The graduation specialist is critical in helping the school to remove barriers. They have direct connections to community supports and work with school social workers to help students and families access the needed resources. Our academic support programs (Twilight and Mini-mester) allow students opportunities to recoup credit and catch back up with their peers by attending our programs in the evening and/or the summer at no charge. Priority is given to seniors, then juniors and on down the line until we are at capacity. Mini-mester is a 6-week summer opportunity that will target around 300 students from all BCS high schools who have fallen behind in credits needed to graduate. Twilight School is a semester-long opportunity for up to 60 students who are off-track to graduate. This evening time frame allows students more flexibility and provides smaller, more personalized learning opportunities. Our goal is that 92% of our students enrolled will be successful in Twilight and/or Mini-mester.

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.

Last year, the Graduation Initiative served 1,824 students is some supportive capacity. We serve all of Buncombe County (Six districts and 42 schools with an enrollment of nearly 25,000 students). We serve all students in that the program aims to have all students in Buncombe County graduate. Specifically, the Graduation Initiative works with homeless students, students with mental health issues, first generation immigrants, teenage parents, students involved with the Department of Juvenile Justice, students with substance abuse issues, students suffering from severe anxiety and depression, students in foster care, students and families in poverty, disengaged students, students who live with families in crisis, students who move frequently from district to district, and all students in danger of dropping out or not completing high school with a diploma. Students are identified and referred through several methods. Each middle and high school has an "at-risk" team that meets weekly or biweekly and identifies and tracks students at risk of dropping out. Students of concern are identified using research-based predictive criteria (including attendance, behavior, and course completion). The Graduation Initiative Specialists are part of these meetings so they hear first hand the individual student's circumstances. Parents may also refer their child if they are having trouble keeping their student engaged in school. Students may also self-refer. Our Twilight and Mini-semester programs serve high school age students.

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.

Our mission is to have every student in Buncombe County remain in school and successfully graduate and become contributing members to our community. The Graduation Initiative has that one single mission and is the main vehicle for accomplishing that goal. Our specific goal is to have a 95% graduation rate by 2024-25 which aligns with North Carolina state and Federal goals and also connects nicely with three of Buncombe County's major strategies - Educated and Capable Community, Vibrant Economy and Resident Well-Being. Lowering the dropout rate has a tremendous impact on the economic health of our community. Recent research shows that each additional graduate confers a net benefit to taxpayers of about \$275,000 over the graduate's lifetime due to increased tax revenue, fewer health care costs, reduce criminal justice costs, and less need for public assistance. High School graduates have better health and lower mortality rates than dropouts; they are less likely to commit crimes and be incarcerated; they are less likely to need public assistance; and they are more likely to have children who graduate. The impact of a graduate is long-lasting, both for the graduate and the community.

Evaluation*

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

Simply stated, the evidence of the success of the Graduation Initiative lies in the reduction of students dropping out and an increase in the four year cohort graduation rate. Research supports the Graduation Initiative's approach to increasing the graduation rate through developing an intense collaborative focus on removing barriers that are preventing students from being successful. Research also supports the importance of that strong anchor relationship that encourages and supports students in their day to day struggles to remain in school. Our program follows both of these evidenced-based research premises.

We track the number of students that dropout at the end of each school year by individual school and by demographic sub-group. We track the four year cohort graduation rate by school and demographic sub-group. We also track trends over time in both of these areas as a means of evaluation and renewed focus. We use our year end data to compare ourselves to both state and national results. Additionally, we track our referrals to Eblen Charities and work with them to equate those supports to a dollar figure to gauge the level of financial support for students and families garnered from our partnership with Eblen. For evaluation purposes, we also track our referrals to other community resources such as Goodwill, DSS, DJJ, Mother Love, etc. Doing this allows us to monitor our work and verify that we are effectively using all available partners within the community at large. It also allows us to identify any areas where there are gaps in our ability to provide services to students and families. In terms of accountability for results in our Twilight and Mini-mester programs, we strive to have at least 92% of our students successfully complete their course work and earn credits toward graduation.

Collaboration*

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

Eblen Charities - this partnership provides support and assistance in securing the necessary items or financial support to remove barriers experienced by our students preventing their regular attendance and success in school. Items such as food, clothing, school supplies, and services such as dental and vision screening, access to medical care and much more are secured through our partnership with Eblen. Eblen Charities has the capacity to provide services and supports that the school system is not equipped to provide. They are an essential partner in our success.

Asheville Merchants Association: Last year we secured a grant from the AMF for \$50,000 over two years (\$25,000 each year) to help support our program expenses such as salaries for our Twilight School and Mini-mester programs.

The salaries of the Graduation Initiative staff (4) are paid by BCS and NC State School Funding. However, our program expenses typically are funded totally by grant support. This fact makes the contribution of the County Commissioners extremely vital to our continued focused efforts and the success of reaching our 95% graduation rate goal. We constantly seek avenues to funding for our programs and in the past have been fortunate to receive a "People in Need Grant" and funding through the Sisters of Mercy Foundation.

While absolutely vital to our existence, our funders are not involved in our daily work with students and families. Their role is for our ultimate accountability and oversight of our results through the evaluation process, site visits or other means as requested. The exception to that being Eblen Charities, whom we call upon almost daily to assist us in removing barriers through financial and in-kind help, such as housing assistance, food, clothing, school supplies, eye glasses, etc. Both our funders and Eblen Charities make our program stronger and more responsive to the needs because we require that level of support to operate our programs for students.

Budget*

Download a copy of the budget form [HERE](#). 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.

FY21_SPGrant_Budget_Form.xlsx

We are requesting funds to support the directors' position of the Graduation Initiative. The other three positions of graduation specialist are funded through regular State School Funds and the program costs of teachers and staff for Twilight and Mini-mester along with supplies for those programs are supported through grant seeking efforts performed by the director. Any salary expenses beyond the requested amount, such as Workers Compensation and benefits, are covered by State funds.

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.

Currently, there is no other funding from Buncombe County for the Graduation Initiative.

Sustainability*

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

The Graduation Initiative is seen within our school system as a vital part of who we are and how we support at-risk students and families. Because our programs occur in the evening and in the summer we have more flexibility than the normal 8 to 3 school day approach to learning. Our class sizes are significantly smaller and we develop meaningful relationships with the young people we serve. We are very intentional about hiring teachers who value the individual student and their diverse needs; who have empathy, yet high standards for their students; who recognize that each student is unique with a different story and a unique set of previous learning experiences that they bring with them to the classroom; and most importantly, teachers who truly like students. We have three extraordinary ladies as graduation specialists who relate well to students, who let students know that they care and that they will absolutely not give up on them. These human factors remain the key to our success over the years. We will always struggle for funding as long as we remain a grant supported program. Unfortunately, the more strides we make, the less attractive we are to the large national and state level funders. We must rely on local philanthropy to support our work. We will remain relentless in our efforts.

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?

Three of the four positions within the Graduation Initiative are funded from State School Funds. However, the director's position historically has been funded from Buncombe County Government funds. The director is responsible for grant writing, oversight of the daily operation of all programs and activities, hiring teachers and staff for Twilight and Mini-mester, ordering supplies for both programs, registration of all students and assignment to classes for Twilight and Mini-mester, securing locations for both programs each year, meeting with principals and others related to serving specific at-risk students and various other duties. The director also serves the Nesbitt Discovery Academy as the graduation specialist to alleviate some of the work load from the other three specialists serving 2-3 schools each on a weekly basis. This position is critical to the continuation of the program.

Resource Support

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

There can always be better coordination of efforts across the various departments within any government structure. Often we don't act out of the knowledge that we are all on the same team, working for the common good of our community. Finding ways to continue to open up lines of communication and collaboration is always welcome.

Other

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

File Attachment Summary

Applicant File Uploads

- 3 PG 501c3.pdf
- Eblen Charities Board Members .xlsx
- FY21_SPGrant_Budget_Form.xlsx

INTERNAL REVENUE SERVICE
DISTRICT DIRECTOR
C - 1180
ATLANTA, GA 30301

DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY

Date: AUG 20 1992

THE EBLEN FOUNDATION
C/O WILLIAM J MURDOCK
191 AMBOY ROAD
ASHEVILLE, NC 28806

Employer Identification Number:
56-1758077

Contact Person:
MARY ROGERS

Contact Telephone Number:
(404) 331-0589

Accounting Period Ending:
June 30

Form 990 Required:
Yes

Addendum Applies:
Yes

Dear Applicants:

Based on information supplied, and assuming your operations will be as stated in your application for recognition of exemption, we have determined you are exempt from Federal income tax under section 501(a) of the Internal Revenue Code as an organization described in section 501(c)(3).

We have further determined that you are not a private foundation within the meaning of section 509(a) of the Code, because you are an organization described in section 509(a)(2).

If your sources of support, or your purposes, character, or method of operation change, please let us know so we can consider the effect of the change on your exempt status and foundation status. In the case of an amendment to your organizational document or bylaws, please send us a copy of the amended document or bylaws. Also, you should inform us of all changes in your name or address.

As of January 1, 1984, you are liable for taxes under the Federal Insurance Contributions Act (social security taxes) on remuneration of \$100 or more you pay to each of your employees during a calendar year. You are not liable for the tax imposed under the Federal Unemployment Tax Act (FUTA).

Since you are not a private foundation, you are not subject to the excise taxes under Chapter 42 of the Code. However, you are not automatically exempt from other Federal excise taxes. If you have any questions about excise, employment, or other Federal taxes, please let us know.

Grantors and contributors may rely on this determination unless the Internal Revenue Service publishes notice to the contrary. However, if you lose your section 509(a)(2) status, a grantor or contributor may not rely on this determination if he or she was in part responsible for, or was aware of, the act or failure to act, or the substantial or material change on the part of the organization that resulted in your loss of such status, or if he or she acquired knowledge that the Internal Revenue Service had given notice that you would no longer be classified as a section 509(a)(2) organization.

THE EBLEN FOUNDATION

Donors may deduct contributions to you as provided in section 170 of the Code. Bequests, legacies, devises, transfers, or gifts to you or for your use are deductible for Federal estate and gift tax purposes if they meet the applicable provisions of Code sections 2055, 2106, and 2522.

Contribution deductions are allowable to donors only to the extent that their contributions are gifts, with no consideration received. Ticket purchases and similar payments in conjunction with fundraising events may not necessarily qualify as deductible contributions, depending on the circumstances. See Revenue Ruling 67-246, published in Cumulative Bulletin 1967-2, on page 104, which sets forth guidelines regarding the deductibility, as charitable contributions, of payments made by taxpayers for admission to or other participation in fundraising activities for charity.

In the heading of this letter we have indicated whether you must file Form 990, Return of Organization Exempt From Income Tax. If Yes is indicated, you are required to file Form 990 only if your gross receipts each year are normally more than \$25,000. However, if you receive a Form 990 package in the mail, please file the return even if you do not exceed the gross receipts test. If you are not required to file, simply attach the label provided, check the box in the heading to indicate that your annual gross receipts are normally \$25,000 or less, and sign the return.

If a return is required, it must be filed by the 15th day of the fifth month after the end of your annual accounting period. A penalty of \$10 a day is charged when a return is filed late, unless there is reasonable cause for the delay. However, the maximum penalty charged cannot exceed \$5,000 or 5 percent of your gross receipts for the year, whichever is less. This penalty may also be charged if a return is not complete, so please be sure your return is complete before you file it.

You are not required to file Federal income tax returns unless you are subject to the tax on unrelated business income under section 511 of the Code. If you are subject to this tax, you must file an income tax return on Form 990-T, Exempt Organization Business Income Tax Return. In this letter we are not determining whether any of your present or proposed activities are unrelated trade or business as defined in section 513 of the Code.

You need an employer identification number even if you have no employees. If an employer identification number was not entered on your application, a number will be assigned to you and you will be advised of it. Please use that number on all returns you file and in all correspondence with the Internal Revenue Service.

If distributions are made to individuals, case histories regarding the recipients should be kept showing names, addresses, purposes of awards, manner of selection, relationship (if any) to members, officers, trustees or donors of funds to you, so that any and all distributions made to individuals can be substantiated upon request by the Internal Revenue Service. (Revenue Ruling

THE EBLEN FOUNDATION

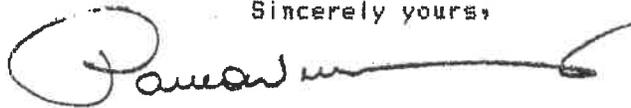
56-304; C.B. 1956-2; page 306.)

If we have indicated in the heading of this letter that an addendum applies, the enclosed addendum is an integral part of this letter.

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

If you have any questions, please contact the person whose name and telephone number are shown in the heading of this letter.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paul Williams", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Paul Williams
District Director

Enclosure(s):
Addendum

Governing Board

Roger Aiken
Dewey Andrew
Tom Crouch
Sonya Greck
Tim Gwennap
Neal Hanks
Scott Hughes
Joe Kimmel
Donna Parsons
Sheila Pelle
Drue Ray
Heath Shuler
Ben Smith
George Suggs
Joe Ward
Dave White

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Advisory Board

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kayeschmidt@outlook.com

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

Organization Name:	Eblen Charities
Project Name:	Graduation Initiative
Grant Amount Requested:	\$50,000

FY2021 Proposed Project Revenue	Amount	Committed or Pending?
Proposed Buncombe County Strategic Partnerships Grant	\$ 50,000	Pending
Asheville Merchants Association	\$ 25,000	Second year of \$50,000 grant award commitment
People in Need Grant	\$ 25,000	Pending - will apply next cycle
Sisters of Mercy Foundation	\$ 50,000	Pending - will apply next cycle
List other sources:		
Total	\$ 150,000	

FY2021 Proposed Project Expenses	Proposed Grant	Other Funds	Total	Notes
Personnel	\$ 50,000	\$ 11,210	\$ 61,210	Salary includes benefits and workers compensation
Training			\$ -	Provided in-kind by Buncombe County Schools
Travel			\$ -	Provided in-kind by Buncombe County Schools
Supplies / Materials	\$ 1,500		\$ 1,500	
Meetings (Food, Interpreting, Child Care, etc.)			\$ -	
Equipment / Furniture			\$ -	Provided in-kind by Buncombe County Schools
Printing / Marketing			\$ -	
Licensing / Memberships / Dues / Subscriptions			\$ -	
Client Support			\$ -	
Contracts			\$ -	
Professional Services (Legal, Accounting, etc.)			\$ -	
Insurance and Bonds			\$ -	
Building Maintenance (Rent, Utilities, Repairs, etc.)			\$ -	Provided in-kind by Buncombe County Schools
Mini-mester Salaries	\$ 49,649		\$ 49,649	
Twilight School Salaries	\$ 37,641		\$ 37,641	
List other costs:			\$ -	
List other costs:			\$ -	
Total			\$ 150,000	

Overall Organization Budget	Amount	Notes
FY2019 Actual Year-End Revenue	\$ 5,413,818	
FY2019 Actual Year-End Expenses	\$ 4,754,699	
FY2020 Adopted Budget Amount	\$ 4,800,000	
FY2021 Proposed Budget Amount	\$ 5,000,000	