Early Childhood Grants

I. Purpose

The purpose of the Early Childhood Education and Development Fund is to ensure that every child in Buncombe County has an equal opportunity to thrive during their first 2,000 days, including access to quality early childhood education. The Fund was established in response to a well-documented local shortage of quality early childhood education programs, barriers that families face in accessing existing programs, including affordability, and a well-documented shortage of qualified teachers and staff in classrooms and centers.

II. Funding

Grants may be awarded up to the total amount of $4,054,185, the anticipated budget for the Early Childhood Education and Development Fund for FY2027 (subject to budget adoption). On October 30, 2018, the Board of Commissioners for Buncombe County voted to create the Early Childhood Education and Development fund for the purpose of annually investing $3.6 million beginning in the FY2020 budget with an annual increase of 2% in future years.

III. Priority

Funding is earmarked to support early care and education for children birth through kindergarten. This includes the following categories:

- infants/toddlers – ages six (6) weeks to three (3) years old
- preschoolers – ages three (3) to five (5) years old
- pre-kindergarteners (pre-k) – 4 year old rising kindergarteners (4 years old by August 31st)

Emphasis in the fund is given to preschool and pre-kindergarten. The term pre-kindergarten is broader than "NC Pre-K," which is a program of the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Child Development and Early Education.

IV. Eligibility

To be eligible for an Early Childhood Grant, an organization and project must meet the following criteria:

a. **Organization.** All organization types are eligible to apply. This includes public/governmental agencies as well as private organizations, including nonprofits and private businesses. Organizations must operate in Buncombe County with service to Buncombe County. If an organization does not meet this criteria, it may partner with another organization to serve as fiscal sponsor for the purposes of administering grant funding.

b. **Public Purpose.** Projects must meet a public purpose and fall within County authority to fund per NC General Statutes, to be affirmed by review by Buncombe County legal department prior to grant award.

c. **Application.** Organizations must submit a grant application before the application deadline. No late applications will be accepted. Projects may not apply for funding from more than one county grant program. Application must be submitted to grant program most closely fitting the proposed project. Details about Buncombe County grant programs are listed at buncombenc.gov/grants

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d. **Strategies**. Funding will be allocated for projects working toward the following strategies:
   - Develop early childhood workforce
   - Maintain/enhance existing slots
   - Increase slots for enrollment
   - Increase quality
   - Support families
   - Enhance effectiveness of overall system of early care and education

e. **Funding.** There are no restrictions on the amount of funding that can be requested or granted to an organization or project. Multi-year requests will be considered, up to 3 years.

f. **Capital.** Requests for capital projects will be restricted to the public school systems. Capital outlay projects are defined as planning, construction, reconstruction, enlargement, improvement, repair, or renovation of buildings and for the purchase of land for early childhood care and education purposes.

V. Timeline

January 5, 2026	Grant application opens
January 5 - February 19	Grant consultation calls
February 20, 2026	Applications due by 12:00 pm
February 23 – March 30, 2026	Grant review by committee
April 17, 2026	Committee funding recommendations due to County budget office
May 2026	Committee grant recommendations published with County Manger's budget message
June 2026	Public hearing on budget as part of Board of Commissioners regular meeting
June 2026	Grant awards finalized with County budget adoption during Board of Commissioners regular meeting
July 1, 2026 – June 30, 2027	Funding year

VI. Application Process

Applications are due by 12:00 pm on February 20, 2026. Organizations are encouraged to apply online through Buncombe County's grant software, which can be accessed at buncombecounty.org/apply or linked through Buncombe County's grant website at buncombenc.gov/grants. To request a paper application, please contact Angelyn Johnson (angelyn.johnson@buncombenc.gov)

Staff are available to answer questions and to provide basic one-on-one support to applicants. Visit https://calendly.com/buncombe-county/grant-consultations to sign up for a session. Staff will also work to match applicants with other community-based grant writing resource support if needed.

Committee Contact: Applicants are asked not to communicate with Early Childhood Grants committee members regarding their applications. If the Committee decides to ask follow-up questions of applicants or hold interviews for finalists, applicants will be notified by County staff. Staff do not participate in the grant scoring process.

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VII. Required Elements

The application consists of a questionnaire including the following items. Text boxes are limited to 1,500 characters.

1. Project Name
2. Strategy (select from list)
    - Develop early childhood workforce
    - Maintain/enhance existing slots
    - Increase slots for enrollment
    - Increase quality
    - Support families
    - Enhance effectiveness of overall system of early care and education
3. Organization: Give a brief history of your organization, including date of founding, focus, services and record of success.
4. Need for the Project: What is the main issue this project is established to address? What data or stories are available to show that need?
5. Project Plan: Explain the project and how it will work. Include information about any models used that are supported by evidence or research. What specific activities and milestones are included in the project plan?
6. Results: What results do you intend to achieve with this project? Explain how you will measure the results, including the specific measures you will track. If this is a request for renewal funding, also describe your actual project results achieved with previous award(s) including specific measures.
7. Slots: For projects requesting funding for slots, also please include:
    - Total new early care and education slots created
    - Total slots maintained
    - # of NC Pre-K slots maintained
    - # of Subsidy slots created
    - # of Subsidy slots maintained
    - # of teachers/staff positions created
    - # of teachers/staff positions maintained
8. Workforce: For early care and education providers, also please include:
    - Total # teachers/# staff employed
    - Education levels and credentials of staff
9. People Served: Who will be served by this project? Include how many people and the expected demographic makeup, such as race, ethnicity, socio-economic, disability/special needs status, community, etc.
10. Collaboration: List any formal or supportive partners. Describe their roles in the project. How will they make it stronger?
11. Sustainability: Describe your plan for sustaining your program. Is there additional information the committee should know about the sustainability of your program in the future?
12. Funding Request Amount
13. Budget Narrative: Explain how grant funds will be used, including detail about the specific expenses to be covered by County funds.
14. Budget Form (attachment) Download a copy of the budget form, complete the form, and upload it. It is important to fully complete the budget form, including: all sources of proposed revenue

DRAFT

for the project (committed & pending); all planned expenses for the project (paid for with grant funds & other funds); and 3-year overall organization budget (non-itemized total). Explanatory notes are encouraged.

15. Partial Funding: If the project were to be offered a grant for partial funding, what are your priorities?
16. Other: (text and/or attachment) Is there anything else that you want the committee to know?

VIII. Review Committee

Early Childhood Grant recommendations are prepared by the Early Childhood Education and Development Committee. The Committee consists of fifteen (15) members which serve two (2) year staggered terms and are appointed by the Buncombe County Board of Commissioners upon application as follows:

- three (3) members of the Buncombe County Board of Commissioners;
- one (1) business community or economic development professional;
- one (1) funder or community investment professional;
- one (1) parent;
- one (1) pediatrician or medical professional in service to young children;
- one (1) professor or higher education professional;
- one (1) retiree from the field of early childhood education; and
- six (6) members of the public representing the community at large.

The Committee holds regular meetings on the first (1st) Tuesday of each month. A committee meeting schedule, along with meeting materials and announcements are posted on the Early Childhood Grants website at buncombecounty.org/grants. All meetings are open to the public and include a public comment period at the end of every regular meeting limited to three minutes for any individual or representative addressing the committee.

IX. Review Process

Applications are reviewed by the Early Childhood Committee utilizing a standardized, points-based system. Reviews will be conducted independently by members of the committee, and discussion will occur during regular or special called meetings.

The following criteria will be considered by the Committee:

- Need – project meets a community need aligned to county priorities
- Project Plan – project includes clear, reasonable actions that are likely to meet the need
- Results – project includes quantifiable results and plan for measuring success
- Capacity – Organization is structured to carry out the project as described
- Budget – Includes a clear, reasonable, and efficient budget matched to proposed project

Scoring will be on a scale of 1 to 5 with a maximum total score of 25. Each criterion is weighted equally. See Attachment A - Scoring Criteria for details.

The committee will recommend projects and funding amounts based on project scores as well as balance within the overall portfolio, taking factors into consideration such as geography, project focus areas and categories.

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X. Awards

Grant recommendations prepared by the Committee will be submitted for a vote of approval from the Board of Commissioners. The list will be published as part of the County Manager's recommended budget as presented to the Board of Commissioners at their regularly scheduled meeting in May 2026. Grant awards will be finalized with budget adoption in June 2026.

County Commissioners will not serve on any board or organization seeking funding from County Government unless said service is a requirement through legislation or legal agreement.

XI. Performance Contracts

All grant awards will be administered via performance contracts. Contracts will include a scope of work that defines services, deliverables and reporting measures.

FY2027 contracts will be for the period July 1, 2026 through June 30, 2027. Payment of funds will be decided on a case-by-case basis and can be up-front, reimbursement-based, in full or installments. All funds must be spent or returned to the County by June 30, 2027. Requests for extensions will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

Contracts will also include standard indemnification and insurance expectations, which lists the minimum insurance coverage which Contractors agree to procure and maintain. Required insurances and levels vary depending on the nature of the project and can include types such as: Worker's Compensation; Commercial General Liability; Employer's Liability; Professional Liability; etc. The County will collect and review certificates of insurance as part of contract compliance. Insurance is an allowable expense and can be built into the grant funding budget.

All grantees will be expected to provide financial transparency information. Per county resolution #19-11-05, nonprofits receiving grant funds must also:

a. Open their books for the contracting department;
b. Submit copies of annual IRS tax filings (Form 990s); and
c. Submit annual financial statements based on a tiered structure, consistent with industry standard practice:
    - Audit: Organizations with annual revenues of $300,000 or greater must submit financial statements audited in accordance with generally accepted auditing standards.
    - Review: Those with revenues between $100,000 and $300,000 must submit financial statements reviewed in accordance with applicable Statements on Standards for Accounting and Review Services (SSARS).
    - Compilation: Those with revenues of less than $100,000 must submit non-disclosure financial statements compiled in accordance with applicable SSARS.
    - Nonprofit agencies may request a waiver to use other third-party provided documents.

Contract performance will be monitored and evaluated by the County throughout the year, including review of financial and programmatic reporting to ensure funds are utilized in accordance with the public purpose for which they have been granted. Performance results will be published online, and all information related to the grant is considered to be public record. Approval of future grant funding requests shall be contingent on meeting performance criteria.

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XII. Contact Information

Staffing for this grant program is provided by Buncombe County's Strategic Partnerships Department. For more information, contact Angelyn Johnson, Strategic Partnerships Grant Manager (angelyn.johnson@buncombenc.gov)

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