FY2027 Grant Guidelines

Strategic Partnership Grants

1. Purpose

The Strategic Partnership Grants (SPG) program supports community-based projects that advance the objectives and goals of the Buncombe County Strategic Plan 2030 (SP2030). All funded projects must demonstrate clear alignment with one or more of the strategic plan's focus areas and goals

2. Funding

Strategic Partnership Grants are supported through general county funds, which are budgeted as part of Buncombe County's annual budget. The amount for FY2027 is estimated to be $1,000,000 (subject to budget adoption).

3. Grant Options

Applicants may select one of two funding options:

- **Option 1:** Up to $10,000 for one-time, non-personnel, non-operating expenses. Funds may be used for expenses including but not limited to: equipment; supplies; technology; training; or professional services. Administrative or management are not allowed in this category. Grantees will be required to report on project milestones accomplished.
- **Option 2:** Up to $85,000 for general project or program costs, including operational expenses. Grantees will be required to report on project milestones accomplished and results achieved.

4. Eligibility

- **Applicants**
  - Applicants must be nonprofit organizations, classified as tax-exempt by the IRS, in active operation for at least two years, and compliant with legal requirements for nonprofits.
  - Organizations must operate in Buncombe County and serve its residents.
  - 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.
  - Only one application per organization may be submitted per annual grant cycle. Exception = If an organization is applying as a fiscal sponsor for another group, more than one application is allowed.
- **Projects**
  - Projects must directly support one or more objective of SP2030. Applicants will be asked to select the strategic objective that best fits their project:

Growth & Development	- Encourage a diversity of housing as a foundation for affordable, healthy and thriving communities, particularly for the most vulnerable residents - Maximize the use of land, guiding development to targeted growth areas that lead to resilient communities
Economic Development	- Increase opportunities and support for local workforce - Increase economic and business opportunities in Buncombe County
Education	- Enhance early & adult learning - Improve outcomes in education
Community Health	- Increase coordination and resilience of community health services to create a healthier and safer community

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	- Improve outcomes in physical, mental, and behavioral health, and increase connectedness - Improve community well-being by providing person-centered, trauma informed services
Public Safety	- Increase prevention and harm reduction - Increase hazard mitigation and disaster preparedness to support a climate resilient community - Enhance individualized diversion services
Energy & Environment	- Preserve the agricultural heritage of Buncombe County & prioritize the conservation of natural resources - Reduce greenhouse gas emissions and protect air quality

- Applicants are encouraged to submit projects that contribute to recovery from Tropical Storm Helene.
- The following types of projects are excluded from SPG grants to avoid duplication with other Buncombe County investment programs:
    - **Affordable housing development & home repairs** *(See Affordable Housing Services Program)*
    - **Arts** *(See Arts Block Grant)*
    - **Conservation easements** *(See Land Conservation Advisory Board)*
    - **Programs and services specific to early childhood education** *(See Early Childhood Fund)*
    - **Programs and services specific to older adults** *(See Aging Services Funding)*
- 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. Examples of unallowable projects include: those providing exclusive benefit or privilege to private individuals; those that discriminate in the provision of services based on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, or other protected characteristics.

5. Funding Restrictions

- Grants do not fund capital campaigns.
- Grants are not designed for partial funding; projects must be fully funded by the requested amount or demonstrate full funding for the proposed phase.
- For Option 2: Administrative or management costs may be included in project budgets as direct expenses (e.g. rent, supervision, insurance) or grantees may include to a 10% de minimis indirect cost rate.
- Expenses must be reasonable and allowable under county and federal guidelines. The County reserves the right to review and approve all budgeted expenses.
- Examples of unallowable expenses include: goods or services for personal use; lobbying; entertainment; prizes; fundraising; legal fees; investments & investment management, fines, penalties, damages and other settlements.

6. Application Process

- Deadline: **Applications are due by 12:00pm on February 20, 2026.** Organizations must 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.
- Applications must be submitted by the deadline. **Late applications will not be accepted.**
- Applicants must select their grant option and submit the following information:

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- Applicant Name
- Project Name
- Brief Project Description
- Funding Request Amount
- Strategic Alignment
- Project Plan
- Performance Measures (quantifiable milestones & results)
- Organizational Capacity
- Access to Services
- Budget (Narrative & Form)
- Proof of Nonprofit Status

- Consultations: Staff are available to answer questions and to provide basic one-on-one support to applicants. Staff do not participate in the grant scoring process. 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 SPG committee members regarding their applications. If the Committee needs information from applicants, they will be notified by County staff.

8. Review Process

- Applications are reviewed by the SPG Committee using a standardized, points-based scoring system.
- Scoring criteria include: Strategic Alignment; alignment to Tropical Storm Helene recovery; Project Plan; Performance Measures; Organizational Capacity; Access to Services; & Budget. See attached scoring tool for full details.

9. 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	Period of performance (funding year)

10. Awards and Contracts

- Grant recommendations are intended to be the full amount of requested funds.
- 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.

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- 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 July 15, 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.
- In addition to the standard contract expectations for all organizations doing business with the County, 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.
- The standard funding disbursement structure is payment on a reimbursement basis. If an organization needs some level of funding up front, staff have the authority to establish alternate disbursement structures.
- 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 funding requests shall be contingent on meeting performance criteria.

11. Authorities

- Board of County Commissioners:
  - Adopt a strategic plan
  - Appoint members of the Strategic Partnership Grant Committee
  - Maintain a resolution establishing guidelines for the funding of non-profit agencies
  - Adopt an annual budget with consideration of the recommended grant awards
  - Approve grant awards
- Strategic Partnership Grants Committee:
  - Abide by committee bylaws and update as needed
  - Utilize a standardized, points-based scoring system to review grants
  - Recommend a portfolio of grants for approval by the Board of Commissioners
  - Meet throughout the year to monitor grants and review progress
  - Provide feedback to staff about the grant process
- County Manager or staff designees:

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- Manage all processes in the grant lifecycle: application; review; award; contracting; monitoring; and closeout
- Establish grant guidelines
- Recommend an annual budget reflecting committee grant award recommendations

12. 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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