1. **What geographic area is served? (If not all of Chester County, specify primary Chester County regions served)**

The Volunteer English Program (VEP) serves individuals from every region of Chester County. Potential students must live and/or work in the County, with the highest concentration of students residing in the West Chester, Phoenixville, and Coatesville areas. Volunteer tutors, who provide instruction, are from both within and outside Chester County. During typical times, instruction takes place at over 100 public locations throughout the county, such as libraries, houses of worship, local cafes, and business partners’ conference space.

2. **What population is served, what has been the impact of COVID-19, and how has your nonprofit responded?**

VEP welcomes adult immigrants and refugees, who are non-native English speakers ages 18 to 80+. VEP students are individuals who devote three hours each week to improving their English language skills and understanding of American culture. Many VEP students are “high-touch, low-wage” workers. They are the backbone of Chester County’s manufacturing, health care, service and economic sectors. They are the people keeping local restaurants and grocery stores open. Many are single parents now serving as teachers, staying at home with their children and supporting their education as a result of schools closing.

VEP accepts students regardless of their income, residency status, native literacy, or English proficiency level. In order to fulfill our inclusive mission and fill the gap in accessible adult ESL education, VEP is dedicated to offering free instruction. Through VEP’s innovative one-to-one, community-and volunteer- based model, the program offers high-quality education to adults that other programs can’t reach.

The impact of COVID-19 resulted in the organization taking a predominantly in-person approach and transforming into an entirely virtual model of instruction overnight. Since March 13th, all staff have increased their part-time availability to tutors and students with a responsive, 7 days-per-week, work-from-home schedule, in order to keep VEP fully operational. Staff are in contact regularly with all active tutors (approximately 200) to lend support and provide suggestions about distance learning with individuals who may not have access to technology or the facility with phone communications. Tutors have demonstrated their unwavering commitment to serving some of the most marginalized people in our community during this pandemic crisis. In addition to maintaining lesson plans, tutors are sharing creative ways that they will continue ‘meeting’ with their students virtually, such as FaceTime, Skype, Zoom, telephone, email and U.S. mail. Adult students who have lost jobs require tutor guidance to apply for unemployment benefits. Individuals who are without health care or employment related benefits, depend on the trust and confidential direction provided by their VEP tutors to access food, housing, and child care support. Not only are these services unfamiliar to most, the content on many sites are provided in English or Spanish, making them inaccessible for other VEP students who speak 22 other languages. Tutors are a vital link to over 200 immigrant students. The exchange between staff and student-tutor pairs in real-time is labor intensive, but invaluable for us to be responsive to everyone’s needs.

COVID-19 has inspired staff and tutors to collaborate in helping not only students but our general community who need vital information. As a result, VEP has increased time dedicated to updating website and social media content, participating in county and statewide collaborative task forces, and producing weekly communications so that organizational and health information is current and translatable into 50 languages.

At the start of the social distancing mandates, VEP had just launched an initiative with the CCIU Head Start Program. Tutoring six young mothers whose children attend the West Chester location provides a platform for peer-to-peer language
learning and opportunities for individual empowerment. VEP’s TESOL staff have re-designed the format for the intended three-hour, in person weekly sessions to restart the outreach through 12-hour virtual experiences. The women were invited just one week ago and 80% have committed their participation while also being the primary caregivers for their young children at home.

3. How much funding is sought? How does this compare to your annual operating budget? What will the funding be used for? What is the expected timeframe for use of funds?
VEP respectfully requests $5,000 in a Collateral Damage Grant from the Chester County Community Foundation, which is 1.4% of the current budget, to support individuals with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) throughout the Coronavirus pandemic restrictions. Funding will defray the costs that VEP will incur to maintain operations and to seamlessly transition from a highly personal program model (meeting in person with tutors, students, tutor trainees) to a temporary, virtual protocol that is equally effective. Students urgently need VEP and their tutor in order to continue their studies in English, particularly at a time when understanding and being understood is paramount. The funds will be used by 6/30/20.

Please email grants@chescocf.org
_X__ This Brief COVID-19 Rapid Response Mini-Grant Letter of Request
_X__ Copy of annual operating budget or most recent audit
_X__ 501c3 determination letter

Request letters will be posted on the Community Foundation’s website, in order to share with fund advisors, donors, grant panelists, and other funding sources.
Grants will be processed a few times monthly.
We estimate mini-grants will range from $500 to $5000.

Please direct general questions & inquiries about the Rapid Response Mini-Grants to grants@chescocf.org.
Beth, Steph, Cierra or Kevin will answer you.