



28 W. Market Street, Lincoln Biography Building  
West Chester, PA 19382  
610.696.8211 www.chescocf.org



**Contact Information**

Nonprofit Org Name: Volunteer English Program	ED/CEO Name: Terri Potrako
Address: 790 E. Market St, Suite215	ED/CEO Email: terri.potrako@volunteerenglish.org
City, State Zip: West Chester, PA 19382	Board Chair Name: Theresa (Terry) Marran
Phone: 610-918-8222 ext. 5	Grant Proposal Contact Name: Terri Potrako
Website: volunteerenglish.org	Grant Proposal Contact: terri.potrako@volunteerenglish.org
EIN: 22-2685077	Grant \$ Amount Requested: \$50,000
Year Founded: 1986	

*In filing this application, the nonprofit certifies that it complies with all federal, state & local laws, including taxation; complies with current public health guidelines; and complies with coronavirus pandemic phased reopening restrictions.*

Agreed by: Terri Potrako	Date: 11.2.2020
--------------------------	-----------------

**Nonprofit Field/s of Interest**

<input type="checkbox"/> Arts, Culture & Historic Preservation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Education	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Health
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Community Development	<input type="checkbox"/> Environment & Animal Welfare	<input type="checkbox"/> Human Services

Figures	Current	PRE-COVID (as of 1/1/20)
Annual Operating Budget	\$372,950	\$358,200
Full-Time Equivalent Paid Staff	3.1	3.1
# Board Volunteers	10	13
# Committee Volunteers	25	52
# Active Direct Service Volunteers	191	221
Annual Volunteer Hours	3,060	6,288

**Funding:** Please indicate if your nonprofit has received funding from any of these regional sources over the past few years. We will invite them to review this funding request.

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ChesCo Comm Fdn	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Brandywine Health Fdtn	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> United Way ChesCo	ChesCo Dept Comm Devel
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ChesCo Fund/W&Girls	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Phoenixville Comm Health Fdtn	United Way S ChesCo	ChesCo Dept Health
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other significant funders: Connelly Foundation, The McLean Contributionship, Robert and Jennifer McNeil			ChesCo Dept Human Svcs

**Narrative:** In a few concise paragraphs, please explain:

**1. Mission**

The mission of the Volunteer English Program (VEP) is to connect adult English language learners with volunteers who provide one-to-one tutoring and cultural enrichment that empowers immigrants to be successful.

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

The Volunteer English Program serves non-native English speakers who live and/or work throughout Chester County. In the fiscal year ending June 30, 2020, VEP provided instruction for individuals from 31 zip codes. Twenty-Two (22) of these reflect individuals who reside within Chester County, while the other nine regional areas represent individuals who commute to the county for employment.

### **3. What population is served? How have your service numbers been impacted by COVID?**

VEP students are immigrants, age 18 to 80 plus years, who need to acquire new or improved English language skills and understanding of U.S. culture, and choose to commit a minimum of one year (144 hours) of 1:1 instruction. In the past 12 months, 267 adult learners participated in the program, of which 74% were women. Sixty-four percent (64%) of all active students report “low income” levels based on federal poverty guidelines. Half of all VEP students are employed, either full- or part-time, with many balancing multiple jobs in order to make a fair living wage.

Currently, VEP students speak 26 languages and are from 38 countries of origin. Latinx community members make up the largest ethnic group at 64%, followed by Pacific Rim and South Asians (21% combined), and 13% Caucasians (European, Eastern European, and Middle Eastern descent). Our service numbers have been impacted as a result of COVID related restrictions and temporarily suspending aspects of programming that could not be done initially via virtual platforms.

Prior to March, VEP had 185 active students, by not adding new students to the program through June, VEP finished the fiscal year at 80% of projected service capacity. As of October enrollment had risen to 209. Combined waiting lists for those same months remained consistent, 174 and 173 respectively. This can be attributed to staff outreach to recruit and train tutors virtually and the tutors’ willingness to commit their new found time at-home to the success of VEP students.

### **4. What has been the impact of COVID-19, and how has your nonprofit responded?**

The pandemic and resulting recession have had a significant impact on English language learners (ELLs). VEP students are navigating the public health crisis and trying to keep themselves and their families safe while balancing the demands of finding and maintaining employment - and for parents, helping with virtual schooling at home. Immigrants are doing all of this in a language with which they are not familiar, putting some of the county’s most vulnerable residents at increased risk.

VEP responded by converting traditional office hours to work-from-home, 7-days-a week operations, thereby remaining open throughout the pandemic. Tutors accepted informal roles as employment coaches, assisting with unemployment forms, COBRA, and other financial paperwork that contains language that is confusing to most native English speakers let alone non-speakers. They became guides, overnight, to their tutees. Nurses, homemakers, attorneys, bankers and other professionals found themselves teaching English as a volunteer while also being trusted for their technical skills and life-experiences.

Capitalizing on new virtual technologies, staff implemented a series of professional development workshops and virtual tutor training experiences to bring volunteers current on VEP’s refreshed tutoring practices. Zoom became the new way of doing business.

In some cases, the virtual platform allowed students to safely care for their families while also learning English online with tutors. By not meeting in person, the hardship of inadequate transportation to a public space or the cost of a babysitter during tutoring sessions has liberated some students to meet more often. Real-time progress reports by tutors indicate increased proficiencies in conversation, writing, and reading. Digital literacy and the ability to communicate by phone has also been demonstrated.

As expected, not all students and tutors were capable of moving from a highly personal to a socially distanced approach. This resulted in increased outreach by staff to capture instructional hours, monitor progress, and preserve existing tutor student partnerships. Part of that effort included the development of the Coping with Coronavirus survey to help identify the most pressing issues facing adult students that could potentially impact their instruction.

Within weeks of the spring weather breaking, tutor student pairs brought beach chairs to empty library parking lots in the area. With whiteboards and 6-foot distancing, they picked up on weekly instruction face-to-face. When the heat of the summer was upon us, more depended on the mail and phone to keep up to date. Students who once met in person twice a week for 3 hours, have elected to speak on the phone or FaceTime daily for 30 minutes. Recently, tutors have shared that they exchange homework assignments through car windows curbside at various workplaces.

Communication with all of our constituents, donors, and partners was increasingly important. More hours were dedicated by volunteers to update the website news and resource pages which could be translated into 50 languages. Increased traffic on social media sites provided time-sensitive information related COVID-19 health restrictions, unemployment, IRS tax stimulus check eligibility, and as a census champion, ongoing Complete Census 2020 instructions.

Since March, VEP has promoted regional conversations groups which welcomed students and community members alike

to participate. Through these informal meetings, by zoom and at outdoor locations, tutor facilitators served as an extension of program staff as they offered a sense of inclusion and comfort during a time of great isolation.

**5. What would this funding be used for? How does this demonstrate innovation and resiliency in dealing with COVID impacts? What would be the community impact of this anticipated funding? Why is it important to fund this now?**

VEP's strategic priorities to date have been focused on People, Technology, and Space. The Innovation and Resiliency Fund award would be used to continue in these areas as follows:

***People:***

Increase staff capacity to establish a much-needed program director who will oversee daily operations, and promote creative short- and long-term solutions to deliver adult ESL instruction.

Add an administrative staff with bilingual skills to complement our existing Spanish and Asian fluent personnel to manage online and in-person scheduling that accommodates re-imagined use of the West Chester office space and is CDC and PA COVID-19 compliant until we can return to outdoor, summer 2020, adaptations, such as parking lot testing and meetings.

Invest in professional development initiatives for 200 volunteer tutors which will result in the consistent delivery of weekly student instruction. In addition to skills-based workshops, community engagement staff will also conduct geographically segmented "meet ups", and host four blended learning training sessions for new volunteers in anticipation of the demand by over 100 prospective students.

***Technology:***

Purchase and integrate new virtual learning technologies such as Zoom, WhatsApp, ProLiteracy Voxy and Off2Class curriculums into the VEP Model of Instruction. Funding will support the purchase, installation and user orientation for these products.

Improve upon current remote communications to include a student-accessible text to email messaging system. This adaptation will create a time-saving solution for remote communications between staff and students and enable non-English speakers to translate information into their native language.

***Space:***

Install a ventilation system in current leased space to encourage a safe, return-to-work environment. This long-term adaptation to the existing 1,200 square foot office space in West Chester will make it possible for staff to resume in-person meetings with students and tutors. The space potentially could support 1:1 tutoring until community-based locations are available again.

***Fundraising / Outreach:***

To offset the loss of in-person fundraising opportunities and traditional funders directing their limited resources to housing, health care, and food security, VEP will use the Innovation and Resiliency award to defray the costs associated with redesigning our 35th Anniversary fundraising event to safely engage our donors and comply with pandemic restrictions.

As a community benefit organization, the impact of this project would be far reaching. Serving thousands of new Chester County residents and new citizens over four decades, we have seen how one adult in the family learning English and securing stable employment can benefit the entire family as they move into more secure housing. Students have returned to tell us with pride that their children have excelled as bilingual speakers, grown-up and become the first person in their family to graduate high school and attend college. We have also seen families share in the profound sense of relief that their family cannot be separated as their mother was finally granted permanent residency. The Chester County economy benefits from a literate, employment ready immigrant workforce. 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 have moved from being "behind-the-scenes" to essential workers.

For the tutors, the program fosters cultural competence and encourages tolerance. The saying "Change Someone's Life and See How It Changes Your Own" invites new community members to get involved. Tutors consistently share how they

never expected that teaching English to an adult immigrant would make such a meaningful impact on their own lives.

It is important to fund this project now because the pandemic and resulting recession have had a significant impact on the VEP adult student community. These friends, neighbors, teachers, nurses, and co-workers in every Chester County community face multiple threats without English language skills. Non-native speakers need the trusted advice of their VEP tutor to navigate emerging information regarding the virus and the world around them. They need the free instruction, books, and resources that only VEP can consistently provide for them. They need a safe haven to reach out for help without fear for their personal safety.

Since March, immigrants who are front line workers, became the most at risk for COVID-19 related illness and death. The impact of unemployment on students in every sector, but most significantly in areas of hospitality, restaurants, and domestic cleaning created another layer of insecurity by summer. CARES Act and unemployment benefits have been made available for some, undocumented individuals are not eligible for this assistance and face food, housing, and health risks as a result.

The ongoing threats of local immigration enforcers present a physical threat to VEP adult students and their children, regardless of permanent residency status. Persevering through any one of these challenges would break someone's spirit. In spite of these obstacles, VEP students seek our services because they want to be an integral part of their adopted country. Learning English is their pathway to a better life - a safer life.

**6. How much funding is sought? How does this compare to your annual operating budget and this year's projected deficit? What is the expected timeframe for use of funds?**

VEP respectfully requests \$50,000, or 13% of FY2021 operating budget. We anticipate full use of the funds by 6/30/21.

Total support, revenue and classifications for FY2020 was \$325,882, resulting in a 10% deficit or \$37,000 budget loss. We attribute this to the cancellation of VEP's in-person fundraiser/gala in April.

Since June, several traditional funders have reprioritized their distributions for an unexpected loss in grant revenue of \$34,500. As a result, the FY2021 break-even budget projection of \$372,950 was adjusted to balance personnel, technology, and infrastructure expenses to be incurred as a result of the pandemic.

VEP's operational model is built on volunteerism, a small professional staff, and 100% philanthropic revenue support. To that end, overhead costs in regard to brick and mortar remain low and our investment in qualified personnel, both paid and unpaid, a priority.

Over the past five years, thousands of dollars have been invested in VEP by pro bono IT and communications volunteers. They have assisted the organization in preparing for web based secure technologies that support secure tutor and student data management, tutor-to-staff communications in real time via a customized portal, as well as remote accessed phone, email and text communication systems. Current business continuity planning guides us so that we remain open, accessible, and fully functional in the event of a work-from-home scenario such as we experienced in 2020.

VEP's biggest challenge in transitioning from a high-touch in person format to remote, safely distanced daily operations was adapting blended instructional learning practices in which both volunteers and students can fully participate. Computers, internet bandwidth, digital literacy, and the willingness to learn these new technologies has been time intensive for staff and is expected to remain a challenge as we focus on recruiting volunteer tutors for a diverse constituency of individuals on all points of the language proficiency spectrum, especially those with little to low literacy in their native tongue.

VEP depends on over 100 community partner locations throughout Chester County to offer free, confidential, 7-days-a week space to teach. With the pandemic restrictions extended, VEP now must reimagine its use of less than 1,200 square feet of existing office space, that accommodates five part-time persons without socially distanced protocols to potential use by multiple pairs of tutors and students over the next 12 months.

VEP relies solely on foundation grants, individual donors, and special events for revenue to sustain operations. VEP anticipates funding priorities to change from some of those sources as emergency funds will likely be redirected to housing, health care, and food security.

The Innovation and Resiliency grant funding will ensure that VEP continues to be a highly sought after community resource that is inclusive for all Chester County residents; one that benefits individuals, neighborhoods, and businesses alike.

Please e-mail all materials as a word.doc and/or pdf to [grants@chescof.org](mailto:grants@chescof.org):

X	This <b>Innovation &amp; Resiliency Fund Grant Request</b> cover sheet & brief narrative
X	Current annual operating budget & most recent audit
X	501c3 determination letter
X	Current strategic plan. If none, explain why your nonprofit doesn't have a plan.  Attached is our existing 2017-2020 plan along with a one- year projection of COVID-19 operational response. The board of directors, executive director and staff have conducted several working sessions over the past 6 months to design an Evergreen model for strategic planning. Beginning with a SWOT analysis by our Advisory Council, composed of Commissioner Kichline, professors from West Chester and Immaculata University, CCIU leaders, and other experts, the members are in process of drafting a final plan for 2021-2023.
X	Support materials included: Price Quotes and Expenses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Innovation and Resiliency Projected Expenses</li> <li>● Air Filter Price Quote</li> </ul> Support for need and enhanced communications <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● In Other Words, VEP Newsletter, September 2020 Issue</li> <li>● Language Data Chester County, PA</li> </ul> COVID Best Practices Related Research Findings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● COVID-19 Rapid Response Report ProLiteracy</li> <li>● ProLiteracy Research Brief: Technology</li> </ul>