

I. **CHESTER COUNTY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION  
GRANT PROPOSAL SUMMARY SHEET**

**Contact Information**

**Date:** October 8, 2021

Organization Name: Volunteer English Program in Chester County

Address: 790 E Market St., Suite 215

West Chester, PA 19382

Phone: 610-918-8222

Website: <http://volunteerenglish.org>

Year Incorporated: 1986

FEIN: 22-2685077

ED/CEO Name: Terri Potrako

ED/CEO Email: [terri.potrako@volunteerenglish.org](mailto:terri.potrako@volunteerenglish.org)

Board Chair Name: Theresa (Terry) Marran

Board Chair Approval (check here):

Primary Contact Name: Terri Potrako

Primary Contact Email: [terri.potrako@volunteerenglish.org](mailto:terri.potrako@volunteerenglish.org)

**Organization Information**

**Field/s of Interest:**  Arts, Culture & Humanities  Education  Health  
 Human Services  Religion  Environment/Animal Welfare

**Mission:** The Volunteer English Program (VEP) connects volunteers with adult English language learners to provide free one-to-one tutoring and cultural enrichment that empowers immigrants to be successful.

**Geographic Area Served:** VEP serves adult immigrants who live and or work in every community of Chester County, Pennsylvania, a total of 35 unique zip codes. The highest concentration of active students live in the West Chester (25%), Phoenixville (20%), and Coatesville (11%) regions.

**Describe Population Served & Annual Number of People Served:** VEP serves adult immigrants, ages 18 and older. This past fiscal year, VEP served a total of 274 adults, of which 77% were female. Fifty-Five percent (55%) of active students report "low income" levels based on Federal Poverty Guidelines, and 53% of active students have at least one child in their household. Currently, VEP students speak 24 languages and are from 46 countries of origin. Latino/Hispanic community members make up the largest ethnic group at 60%, followed by Asian/South and Southeast Asian/Pacific Islanders at 21%, 16% Middle Eastern or European, and 3% African

<b>Annual Budget \$</b> <u>\$383,393</u>	<u>3.87</u> # of Full-Time Equivalent Paid Staff
<u>66</u> % of budget for program expenses	<u>10</u> # of Board Volunteers
<u>16</u> % of budget for administrative expenses	<u>212</u> # of Active Non-Board Volunteers
<u>18</u> % of budget for fundraising expenses	<u>7,736</u> # of Volunteer Hours

**Top 3-5 funding sources:** The Chester County Nonprofit Innovation and Resiliency Fund; Phoenixville Community Health Foundation; Ivywood Fund % Mary Summers and Rogers Smith; Rotary, District 7450 Southeastern, PA; Brandywine Health Foundation

**Is this grant proposal for:** Capacity Building  or General Operating

**Grant Amount Requested from the Community Foundation:** \$7,500

**Proposal Summary:**

The Volunteer English Program (VEP) respectfully requests \$7,500 to support general operations. VEP's mission is to connect community volunteers with local adult English language learners to provide free one-to-one tutoring and cultural enrichment that empowers immigrants to achieve their goals. This funding will ensure that VEP can carry out the essential services needed to continue supporting close to 300 adult immigrants in Chester County who are improving their life and the lives of their family by learning English in order to live and thrive in our region. VEP fulfills an unspoken mandate in Chester County to welcome all immigrants who seek to empower themselves through English language skills and understanding American culture. Community volunteers are trained to serve as tutors and are matched with an adult learner based on their shared life experiences. Students and tutors commit to working together for 3 hours/week (equivalent to 144 hours annually) for a minimum of one year.

## **II. CHESTER COUNTY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION GRANT PROPOSAL NARRATIVE**

### **1. Nonprofit's history, goals, key achievements & distinctiveness**

**History** VEP was established in 1986 by 14 compassionate and motivated individuals who recognized the need for West Chester residents to achieve English literacy. Efforts resulted in an ESL tutoring program that evolved into the current model. During 35 years of uninterrupted service, VEP has remained an independent, 501.c.3 organization, exclusively dedicated to providing student and goal-centered, one-to-one tutoring in English literacy and cultural enrichment for immigrants who live or work in Chester County.

**Goals** As an organization, our long-term vision continues to be that volunteers will power our work and personify a spirit of generosity and openness. As a result, our communities will be enriched by the experiences and contributions of immigrants, and they will have the essential language and cultural skills needed to find their place, their purpose and their voice. To achieve this vision, VEP will focus on several long-term goals:

- \* Promote diversity, inclusiveness and equity in all actions.
- \* Advocate for our communities by empowering current and future generations of new English speakers.
- \* Provide sound governance and leadership to remain an independent, 501.c.3 non-profit, community benefit organization.
- \* Create sustainable growth to meet anticipated census demand.

**Key Achievements** As a resilient and innovative institution, we have swiftly adapted to changing environments and immigration waves. Two significant achievements are VEP's longevity within the Chester County community and the thousands of students' who have made progress in their lives. Recent key organizational achievements include:

- \* Remaining open throughout the pandemic by adapting a predominantly in-person approach into a virtual model of instruction.
- \* Advancing technology infrastructure to increase communication with constituents; improving our ability to collect impact data; and, expanding cloud-based business services.
- \* Mobilizing staff to reach growing immigrant populations in rural parts of the county.
- \* Increasing tutor engagement and retention through professional workshops, meet-ups and virtual training for volunteers.
- \* Launching a small group virtual instruction for parents/grandparents through a CCIU Head Start partnership.

**Distinctiveness** VEP's distinctiveness derives from the adaptability, flexibility, and accessibility of the program model. For over three decades, VEP has been serving immigrants through an individualized, student- and goal-centered approach to English language learning. This approach has allowed the program to be responsive to the shifting social contexts and the demands of our students' lives. Tutors design weekly instruction around the student's goals, which allows tutors to pivot lessons toward each student's most pressing language-learning needs. The program, offered free of charge, meets students wherever they are on the continuum of literacy and English proficiency, regardless of income or residency status. The year-round, community-based, non-classroom model respects the needs of adults to learn at locations and times conducive to their busy lives, which makes the program accessible and achievable for all.

### **2. Funding request**

#### **Description of key initiatives**

Funding will be used to strengthen the Volunteer English Program's general operations. This includes the development of volunteer tutors and direct adult student services for the fast growing and diverse communities within Chester County. VEP offers a unique community-based, non-classroom approach to learning that is focused on meeting the student's needs and goals with an emphasis on cultural sensitivity and the engagement of civic minded volunteers as instructors. The program is offered at no charge to students.

Core services include confidential intake interviews for new students, standardized English proficiency assessments, matching students with a VEP prepared volunteer tutor, and ongoing support for every tutor-student pair. Funding will also support the purchase of instructional ESL books, on-line subscriptions, and other materials that are researched by professional staff and provided free to every student-tutor pair for the life-cycle of the partnership. Concurrently, staff recruit and prepare new community volunteers to serve as tutors each year through a nine-hour workshop that has been transformed into a virtual course during COVID. Here tutors learn the evidenced-based techniques for teaching English as a foreign language to adults and strategies for tutoring remotely, socially distanced, and in-person.

Throughout the pandemic, VEP's general operating activities have evolved to meet the needs of our students and tutors. Funding from the Chester County Community Foundation's Field of Interest and Donor Advised Funds would be used to support a portion of the following activities.

- Continue implementing COVID protocols for student access, assessment, and matching, which includes virtual match meetings of students and tutors, and remote tutoring sessions.
- Continue the collaboration with the CCIU Head Start in West Chester to offer free, small-group English tutoring to parents/caregivers with children in the program.
- Continue offering a legal assistance and referral project to connect VEP students to trusted and affordable legal counsel.
- Continue to provide proficiency leveled books and online instructional resources free-of-charge to students and tutors for the lifecycle of their partnership. These materials are essential as they assist tutors in teaching and support student learning.
- Continue with successful professional development opportunities for existing tutors. Virtual offerings include Tutor Summit, Peer-to-Peer workshops, and Meet-Up sessions to engage with and learn from tutors, and foster the sense of community among tutors.
- Conduct virtual tutor training workshops for new volunteers allowing VEP to expand tutor recruitment beyond Chester County's borders into neighboring communities.
- Conduct onsite or virtual information sessions for potential tutors, students, and supporters.

### **Specific needs & issues to be addressed**

There are 20,000 people in Chester County who do not speak English well, meaning they may not be able to read, write, or converse in English. Many immigrants work long hours and can not attend traditional English as a second language (ESL) classes. VEP's 1-to-1 model of instruction offers high-quality education to adults that other programs can't reach. The emerging issue within VEP is capturing our volunteer base who can be prepared to support English language learners (ELLs). We currently have 29 available tutors and over 120 prospective students who are waiting for a tutor that can meet their learning needs and personal goals. VEP proposes to solve this problem by offering 5 new tutor training workshops for 100 volunteers in 2022. VEP needs to maintain current staff capacity to recruit, train, and retain volunteers who will then be matched with individuals who often wait upwards of nine months for a tutor.

General operating funds will give VEP the continued capacity to support immigrants and build community through meaningful volunteerism, while offering free educational services to a marginalized community.

### **Why it is important to fund this now**

More than ever, VEP must remain available for the community of immigrant neighbors and co-workers experiencing uncertainty as Chester County continues to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic. VEP students have described an urgency to speak and understand English in order to provide for their families and feel safe. VEP students are part of the 9.6% (or 50,400) foreign born residents in Chester County, 20,000 of whom consider themselves Limited English Proficient (LEP) speakers (US Census 2010). For these individuals, tasks such as making a phone call, talking with a neighbor, interviewing for a job, or calling 911 for emergency help are hindered by their ability to communicate in English.

VEP provides critical educational support to an average of 275 adult English language learners (ELL) annually through one-to-one tutoring and cultural guidance. Research has shown that spending a minimum of 100 hours annually in adult basic education programs, including English as a Second Language (ESL) programs such as VEP, positively impacts adult and family issues such as poverty, family literacy, economic prosperity, crime reduction, and other social issues (“The Case for Investment in Adult Basic Education,” ProLiteracy).

VEP’s one-to-one model of instruction offers a unique style of community-based instruction that incorporates best practices in adult second language acquisition for those who have few opportunities elsewhere. Many immigrants work long hours and cannot attend regular English as a second language (ESL) classes. Throughout the pandemic, VEP has remained open to our public by offering language instruction that is secure, confidential, and modified for social distancing. The majority of students and tutors have turned to virtual instruction and meeting over Zoom, FaceTime, or What’sApp. Investing in VEP now will ensure that immigrants have access to a high quality, accessible, and affordable English language instruction and guidance in American culture as they learn to survive and thrive in our shared communities.

### **How impact & results will be demonstrated**

The success of VEP’s mission is realized through the progress made by VEP students working with their one-to-one tutors on a regular basis for at least one year. In a typical 12-month period, we expect to achieve the following measurable outcomes.

1. 275 adult English language learners (ELLs) will partner with a tutor to improve their English literacy skills and work towards their personal goals which will improve their lives and the lives of their family.

Measurement Tool: CiviCRM reports, standardized proficiency assessments, and student functional gains surveys.

2. VEP staff will recruit, train, and prepare 100 new volunteer tutors to work with new students.

Measurement Tool: CiviCRM reports and new tutor satisfaction surveys.

3. VEP will distribute 100 proficiency leveled textbooks and 50 licenses for online instructional materials to new students and tutors free-of-charge.

Measurement Tool: CiviCRM book inventory report and license-use activities reports.

4. Five (5) students will utilize the confidential VEP Legal Access and Referral services wherein they may be referred to any of the ten established community partners which offers equal access to quality counsel.

Measurement Tool: Legal services hours report.

5. One hundred (100) existing tutors will participate in a peer-to-peer professional development offering.

Measurement Tool: CiviCRM Event Participants report

6. Twenty five (25) prospective tutors, students, or supporters will attend one of two outreach information sessions.

Measurement Tool: CiviCRM Event Participants report

## **III. ATTACHMENTS**

### **Included Attachments**

1. VEP IRS Tax Determination Letter
2. VEP Board of Directors 9.1.21
3. VEP FY2020 Annual Review
4. a.VEP Statement of Activities Compared to Budget and Prior Year final-unaudited
4. b.VEP 08.31.21 YTD P&L Budget Vs. Actual
5. VEP Strategic Plan 2021