

I. CHESTER COUNTY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION
GRANT SUMMARY SHEET

Date September 13, 2023

Contact Information

Organization Name: The Volunteer English Program in Chester County

Address: 790 E. Market Street, Suite 215, West Chester, PA 19382

Phone: 610-918-8882 Ext. 5

Website: www.volunteerenglish.org

Year Incorporated: 1986

FEIN: 22-2685077

ED/CEO Name: Terri Potrako

ED/CEO E-mail: terri.potrako@volunteerenglish.org

Board Chair Name: Valerie A. Rozek

Board Chair Approval (check here):

Primary Contact Name: Terri Potrako

Primary Contact E-mail: terri.potrako@volunteerenglish.org

Organization Information:

Field/s of Interest:

Arts, Culture & Humanities Environment/Animal Welfare

Education Health Human Services Religion

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 *(If not all of Chester County, specify primary Chester County regions served):*

VEP serves adult immigrants who live and or work in every community of Chester County, Pennsylvania, a total of 42, of the 56, unique zip codes in the county. The highest concentration of active students rent or own homes in the West Chester (25%), Phoenixville (20%), and Coatesville (11%) regions.

Describe Population Served & Annual Number of People Served:

VEP teaches English and provides cultural enrichment to approximately 300 adult immigrants, men and women, ages 18 and above, annually. While Latino/Hispanic community members make up the largest ethnic groups at 60%, emerging bilingual learners also represent 11 regions and 46 countries around the world as follows: Asian/South and Southeast Asian/Pacific Islanders at 21%, 16% Middle Eastern or European, and 3% African. Seventy-four percent (74%) of active participants report that their income levels fall within or below ALICE (Assets Limited Income Constrained Employed) thresholds for a survivable household budget.

Annual Budget \$ 379,554.00

of Full-Time Equivalent Paid Staff 3.86

% of budget for program expenses 71%

of Board Volunteers 7

% of budget for administrative expenses 17%

of Active Non-Board Volunteers 258

% of budget for fundraising expenses 12%

of Volunteer Hours 11,984 *100 % total*

Top 3-5 funding sources: Phoenixville Community Health Foundation, Alliance for Health Equity, United Way of Chester County, The Fund for Women and Girls, Robert and Jennifer McNeil, and The Connelly Foundation.

Is this grant proposal for: Capacity Building or General Operating

If Capacity Building Proposal, the focus is:

Mission, Vision & Strategy Governance & Leadership Partnerships & Collaborations Fundraising, Development & Marketing Technology Other:

Grant Amount Requested from the Community Foundation:

\$ 2,500.00

Proposal Summary: The Volunteer English Program (VEP) respectfully requests \$2,500 in funds for the purpose of securing an external consultant to design and facilitate a Board and Executive leadership retreat. The primary objectives for the consultant will be to:

- Provide an opportunity for the board and ED to explore options for advancing VEP's 38-year mission in a sustainable way.
- Review collective and individual roles and responsibilities of board members in achieving shared goals for the health and long-term growth of this unique community benefit organization.
- To support the identification of opportunities and next steps in building board engagement specifically in a board-competitive environment.

The consultant, board of directors, and executive director will conduct a half-day retreat in 2023 with pre- and post-retreat engagement exercises to define the support needed to secure financial resources in the short term and anticipate the potential growth by the organization as we enter into the next 3-year, 2024-2027 strategic planning cycle.

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 of matching new English speakers with civi-minded volunteers throughout the area. After 37 years of uninterrupted service, VEP remains an independent, 501.c.3 organization, exclusively dedicated to providing adult immigrants with student- and goal-centered, one-to-one tutoring for English language acquisition, literacy, and cultural enrichment wherever they live or work in Chester County.

Goals

The Volunteer English Program's primary goal is to enrich the lives of English Language Learners by remaining a free, reliable, accessible, and community-based source of support.

We are guided by these additional goals:

1. Optimize the tutor engagement and experience, creating life-long opportunities for Chester County residents to contribute and achieve personal fulfillment through volunteerism.
2. Position VEP as a leading advocate for immigrant literacy and cultural engagement within all communities.
3. Increase VEP's visibility through the community so that other agencies, businesses, and thought leaders can benefit from our depth and breadth of experience.
4. Strengthen VEP's infrastructure and financial stability so that it continues to weather waves of immigration, and economic shifts, while remaining true to its founding mission.

As a Board and Leadership, we take the above goals into consideration when we focus on six strategic operational areas. They include Programming, Human Resources, Governance & Board Development, Technology & Innovation, Communications, Community Engagement, and Fundraising/Resource Development.

Key Achievements

As a resilient and innovative institution, VEP has consistently adapted to changing adult educational environments and immigration. Recent organizational achievements include:

- Building on the lessons learned through the pandemic by creating programming that supports learning opportunities for students and tutors in-person and online.
- Mobilizing program coordinator resources to support outreach to the growing immigrant populations in the northern and western regions of the county while helping to meet the surge of requests we receive weekly for services.
- Increasing tutor engagement and retention through regularly offered professional workshops, meet-ups, and virtual training for volunteers.
- Establishing a private, donor-supported effort to remember the impact Meredith Huffman made on our shared communities. The Loving Connections Fund financially supports learners in their search for meaningful employment, citizenship, or professional credentialing, as a result of their commitment to learning the language and culture of English.
- Expanding programs for parents of preschoolers while their children attend the Head Start programs in West Chester, Coatesville, and Phoenixville, eliminating the roadblock of finding quality child care so that parents can focus on learning English.
- Offering pro bono legal referral aid to students who otherwise would not have the resources to get confidential and affordable direction.
- Committing to the goal of decreasing social isolation and desperation within our immigrant communities. Building confidence through conversation, with an emphasis on women who report improved self-esteem as they are able to speak with others, such as their children's teachers, healthcare providers, cashiers at stores, and their neighbors.
- Creating pathways for individuals who are able to work or return to work through improved job skills. Students may now re-enter careers they once held in their home countries, or launch their own businesses. VEP contributes to a fast-growing, multilingual workforce, contributing to Chester County's economic growth.

Distinctiveness

VEP's distinctiveness derives from the adaptability, flexibility, and accessibility of the program model. Since its inception almost four decades ago, VEP continues to be the only organization in Chester County exclusively dedicated to serving immigrants through an individualized, student- and goal-centered approach to English language learning powered by trained volunteer tutors. As an independent, non-publicly funded community organization, the program is responsive to the demands of VEP's students' lives and the multi-generational base of civic-minded people who make Chester County a sought-after place to live.

Trained tutors design weekly instruction around the student's personal or professional goals, which allows tutors to pivot lessons toward each student's most pressing language-learning needs. The program 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 achievable for all.

- On a daily basis, ESL professional staff are involved in a parallel process of identifying students, training tutors, and creating and supporting successful student-tutor matches for the life-cycle of every partnership.
- The Life Cycle of a Student- When a student reaches out to VEP to become a part of the program they are invited to participate in an intake interview to identify their goals for learning English. An English language proficiency assessment is administered to obtain each student's English language proficiency. Once the student's goals and proficiency level are identified, program staff match the student with a tutor based on time availability and shared life experiences.
- The Life Cycle of a Tutor- A prospective volunteer tutor attends a Tutor Information session with program staff to learn about the responsibilities of becoming a tutor. To move forward, prospective tutors participate in a nine-hour training led by VEP program staff who are highly trained in second language acquisition. After the initial training, tutor volunteers are prepared to be matched with a student. Tutor training is ongoing throughout the year, including Tutor Meetups led by VEP's community engagement coordinator, Peer-to-peer sessions led by VEP's most experienced tutors to support newer tutors, and the annual Tutor Summit which provides a full day of professional development including a keynote speaker and round table topics of interest to tutors. In addition, tutors may connect with program staff at any time for more specific support. Tutors are asked to teach two 90-minute lessons per week for a minimum of 1 year, with many tutors staying with VEP beyond the requested year.

And lastly, VEP's distinction from other language learning opportunities derives from our Guiding Principles:

1. We welcome newcomers from all countries.
2. We work in solidarity with immigrants to achieve their goals and aspirations.
3. We enhance the understanding and acceptance of diverse cultures and people.
4. We are inspired by the idea that we can change the world, one person at a time, starting with our own communities.

2. Funding request

•Description of key initiatives

VEP requests a capacity-building grant of \$2,500 to secure the services of Sonia J. Stamm, CEO of Stamm Consultancy and conduct a Board/ Executive Director half day planning retreat.

Ms. Stamm is committed to supporting the evolution of mission-based organizations. Sonia has worked with a wide range of nonprofits in the areas of board development, leadership transition/succession/search, strategic planning, and organizational effectiveness. With expertise in facilitating groups and group processes, Sonia leverages the interconnectedness of such functions and integrates DEI values when guiding nonprofits through such organizational crossroads as board turnover, founder succession, and/or growth or restructuring.

With Ms. Stamm's professional guidance, the Board of Directors and Executive Director seek to learn from the following activities:

1. Conduct pre- and post-board/leadership assessments to uncover current board strengths, vulnerabilities, and priorities.
2. Design, Administer, and Analyze a brief board self-assessment questionnaire.
3. Create a customized blueprint for conducting an effective board retreat with members from diverse backgrounds, length of board experience, and capabilities.
4. Conduct a four-hour retreat.
5. Produce a board-invested action plan with follow-up consultation to explore progress after 3 months.

•Specific needs & issues to be addressed

Through this capacity-building effort, VEP will be able to prepare for:

- Smoother board member succession
- Reduced turnover by members who are unable to meet their three-year term commitment
- Improvement in building community and business connections to communicate the impact that VEP has on the economy
- Diversifying board and leadership representation to amplify the work being done by tutors and students in the field
- An empowered membership who will be able to anticipate term limits and nominate successors to create long-term stability

•Why it is important to fund this now

VEP is at a critical juncture in the life cycle of the board. Over the past 10 years, many members have renewed their 3-year terms in order to secure the leadership for the organization. During that time, many past board members have remained as emeritus, advisory council, and major donor constituents. Without their support, we would have realized our current challenges much sooner. Current and past presidents, in particular, have extended their service with few on the executive team ready, or able, to assume more responsibility.

The board of directors strives to serve as a governance board. However, the small nature of the operations team requires a higher-than-normal level of reliance on board members to participate in a hands-on way. This is especially true in the areas of human resources, fundraising, and community engagement.

Over the years, VEP has enjoyed a diverse board which has brought creativity, energy, and connections to the organization. The increasing demand for volunteers' personal time, accelerated in the post-pandemic years, has resulted in fewer candidates expressing interest in board service. This puts additional strain on the hard work being done by a group of 7.

We have carefully selected Ms. Stamm for her expertise and demonstrated accomplishments. Her input and the CCCF's Capacity-Building funds will prepare us with the new ideas and energy to sustain VEP.

•How impact & results will be demonstrated

Results of this capacity-building effort will include the following:

1. Current board members will identify their individual roles and responsibilities within VEP's evolving, philanthropic-dependent organization.
2. Board members and executive director will identify the challenges and risks of zero growth in a highly competitive non-profit environment and put actions into place in the upcoming strategic plan.
3. The creation of a road map as a result of the board matrix which will enable the Board Governance & Development Committee to support current members' skills and interests while expanding our reach to recruit new members.

•Closing Statement

As an organization, we derive 100% of our operational funding through philanthropic efforts so that we may, without reservation, serve the individuals who most urgently need English language and cultural services. Strengthening board and executive level leadership for the near future creates a ripple effect on those we serve.

At first glance, the value of strengthening English language skills for individual program participants may border on the obvious. VEP outcomes have more complex impacts that function on multiple levels.

Individual level:

- decrease in general social isolation because of language
- improved access to healthcare for individuals and children
- improved ability to support education of children/family members
- improved potential for work advancement and economic gain

Local/community level:

- expanded ability to participate in social, political, and/or business activities
- facilitates deeper assimilation into American mainstream activities in the community
- weakening of cultural barriers and perception of isolation or estrangement
- local communities are enriched by the contribution of new and diverse experiences and viewpoints.

Regional/National /Global level:

- increase in human capital for economic growth and development in Chester County
- a program that offers unique services in our outlying metropolitan area distant from services usually offered in the urban core
- cultivation of possible links to international communities for business, travel, education, and communication
- enhanced probability of improved multicultural acceptance within American society during a period of widespread polarization

Capacity building grant proposals:

How will this capacity-building initiative impact your nonprofit?

This initiative will strengthen our board and executive director leadership. Through this guided, team building experience, we will overcome current obstacles and execute a multi-year strategic plan for the next three years. Individual roles and responsibilities will reaffirm our commitments to the organization, to one another, and to the active and future students who rely on VEP for their survival.

Include a description of the expected activities; timeline & costs to implement the initiative. If external consulting services are required, include the anticipated costs & expertise of the consultants to be hired. Include external consultant proposals if applicable.

1. We plan to secure the services of Sonia Stamm Consultancy, Inc. for a 1.5-days- total fee of \$2,400.00. Proposal attached.
2. We plan to conduct the half-day, full-board retreat in the fall of 2023 in advance of the January 2024 strategic planning session. Estimated costs for materials, meeting space, and light refreshments will total \$100 for 9 participants.
3. Ms. Stamm will conduct several activities in advance of the retreat. Her discovery will include interviews, a review of board materials, and an electronic board self-assessment questionnaire.
4. Following the retreat, Ms. Stamm will deliver a retreat summary with recommendations.
5. Ms. Stamm will contact VEP's Board leadership 3 months following the retreat to determine progress.

III. ATTACHMENTS

E-mail or mail this support information

1. Copy of 501 (c) (3) federal tax-exempt letter
2. List of Board of Directors, with their affiliations
3. Most recent annual report & financial statement, audited if available
4. Itemized organizational operating budget with actual results for prior fiscal year & current fiscal year to date
5. If capacity building initiative, itemized budget (including external consultant's proposal, if applicable)
6. Current strategic plan. If your nonprofit does not have a current strategic plan, explain why.



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so their legacies make a difference.***