

Chester County Community Foundation Grant Proposal Summary Sheet

Contact Information

Organization Name: Volunteer English Program in Chester County

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

Phone: 610.918.8222

Website: <https://volunteerenglish.org/>

Year Incorporated:

FEIN: 22-2685077

Executive Director/CEO Name: Terri Potrako

Executive Director/CEO Email: terri.potrako@volunteerenglish.org

Board Chair Name: Valerie A. Rozek

Board Chair Approval (check here): Approved by Valerie A. Rozek

Primary Contact Name: Terri Potrako

Primary Contact Email: terri.potrako@volunteerenglish.org

Organization Information:

Fields of Interest:

Arts, Culture & Humanities Environment/Animal Welfare Education
 Health Human Services Religion

Mission: The Volunteer English Program connects volunteers with adult English language learners to provide 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 all adult immigrants who live and/or work in Chester County. 46 unique zip codes.

Annual Budget \$ 365,500

<input type="checkbox"/> 72_% of budget for program expenses	<input type="checkbox"/> 3.8_# of Full-time Equivalent Paid Staff
<input type="checkbox"/> 18_% of budget for administrative expenses	<input type="checkbox"/> 7_# of Board Volunteers
<input type="checkbox"/> 10_% of budget for fundraising expenses	<input type="checkbox"/> 200_# of Active Non-Board Volunteers
100 % total	<input type="checkbox"/> 12,500_# of Volunteer Hours

Top 3-5 funding sources:

1. Phoenixville Community Health Foundation - \$25,000
2. Connelly Foundation - \$25,000
3. United Way of Chester County - \$20,000
4. Bob and Jennifer McNeil - \$10,000

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

If Capacity Building Proposal, the focus is: Technology X

Grant Amount Requested from the Community Foundation: \$5,000

Proposal Summary: A Technology Capacity Building Grant will support the essential improvement of VEP's customized tutor portal within its existing CRM. After eight years, this upgrade to our cutting-edge technology will provide a seamless transition from an increasingly complicated Drupal 7 CMS platform to Backdrop, a free and Open Source Content Management System.

Chester County Community Foundation

Grant Proposal Narrative

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

History: In 1986, while investigating the need for a literacy program for the homeless, 14 members of the Calvary Lutheran Church in West Chester discovered a growing need for teaching English as a foreign language to adult immigrants in Chester County. Led by Mrs. June Hamilton, a Chester County resident, and Westtown School teacher, this small band of volunteers organized and administered a tutoring program known as the Volunteer English Program (VEP).

For almost 40 years, VEP has been an independent 501(c)(3) organization. It remains the only non-profit organization in the county exclusively dedicated to the mission of providing one-to-one English language, cultural immersion, and citizenship tutoring for immigrants and refugees who live or work in the Chester County area.

Goal: Convert the VEP website and Tutor Portal to BackDrop from Drupal 7 before the end-of-life support in December 2024.

Objective 1. Enlist the services of the BOT team, staff, and volunteers to prepare for the seamless transition between Open Source platforms that support daily program operations and secure data management.

BackOffice Thinking (BOT) technology firm designed a customized Tutor Portal that integrates within the existing constituent relationship management system (CiviCRM). The Portal allows tutors to record instructional hours and advancement efforts toward student-directed goals independently in real-time. In return, staff can schedule progress assessments and anticipate changes in enrollment. This functionality is our most vital link to 200 autonomous volunteers working every day in any part of the region.

Through the capabilities of the Portal, VEP extends its program support in the following ways:

- Hybrid and remote learning
- Recording all instructional hours and advancement efforts
- Updating goals as student's purpose for learning English evolves
- Timely measurement and effort outcomes
- Streamlining of data administration and information management by volunteers
- Opportunities for TESOL- (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) certified team members to interact with volunteer tutors to make suggested changes to instruction or to resolve concerns that preserve the match

Objective 2. Implement the recently launched Portfolio Assessment System for all VEP Students

As a result of the TESOL experience professional staff and the evolution of the customized Tutor Portal, VEP launched a comprehensive portfolio assessment system over the past two years. With adult students engaged in measuring their personal progress, VEP now collects and stores examples of student progress over time, providing a holistic picture of how learning English impacts each individual.

Work continues to integrate and retrieve functional gains surveys, standardized tests, portfolio contributions, and instructor surveys. By integrating website communications with portal accessibility, we can offer adult learners a hands-on experience sharing their success as emerging bilingual speakers.

To accomplish the objective:

- VEP will move to the affordable and accessible BackDrop platform, ensuring the protection of the data collected through the student portfolio.
- VEP will create a user-friendly means to access the new platform regardless of digital literacy.
- VEP will use new customized fields within the platform to collect and aggregate evidence of a student's progress, such as responses to readings, writing samples, cultural expressions/ art/poetry/ music, or other work-related accomplishments.

Key Achievements-Fiscal Year 2024:

Tutor Corps

Through five interactive nine-hour volunteer tutor training sessions, VEP added 76 new members to an existing 200-plus tutor corps. Student tutor pairs meet weekly for an average of three hours of instruction (over 10,000 hours annually), which includes all language domains: speaking, listening, reading, and writing.

Board and Staff Succession

The Board of Directors welcomed three new members while appreciating the long service of the immediate past President. The current seven-member team and the community-centered Advisory Council bring expertise in finance, business development, education, executive leadership, and strategic planning. As a direct result of a CCCF Capacity Building grant, VEP launched its 3-year strategic planning with the assistance of Stamm Consultancy, Inc.

During this same period, VEP celebrated the retirement of a 10-year staff member who established the VEP Without Walls model. The succession of two key staff members was a priority focus. A retired ESL teacher from the Downingtown School District filled the role of Program Coordinator for western Chester County. Her multi-lingual English/Spanish/Japanese skills and 15 years working directly with parents of ELD children made her uniquely qualified to advance outreach activities throughout the area. In the spring of 2024, the part-time position was turned over to a multi-lingual English/ Korean speaker who is a skilled international ESL teacher. TESOL-certified and with diverse backgrounds in language acquisition, the new team is leading the effort to engage local volunteers to meet the growing demand of students.

Partnerships

In 2024, partnerships remained key to integrating VEP's efforts within other partner agencies, the Chester County Intermediate Unit's Head Start program, and the Open Hearth Financial Stability efforts. VEP is also proud of its partnership with the West Chester Food Cupboard, an integral part of the mission to address food insecurity throughout our region. Since February 2024, VEP has actively partnered with the Chester County Economic Council in exploring onsite ESL classes for employees of regional manufacturing companies.

Distinctiveness:

VEP is the only program in the region that exclusively focuses on matching volunteers with students to learn English one-on-one, without charge or restrictions for the student. After the students are interviewed and assessed, the program staff spends much time and effort creating the tutor-student matches. A hallmark of the program is the thoughtful tutor and student matching process. Partnerships are based on compatible life experiences and shared availability, which ensures student retention and success.

VEP tutor-student pairs meet in available community spaces, such as libraries, coffee shops, and places of worship, supporting VEP in keeping the need for office space to a minimum. Another benefit of this model is that the tutor creates lessons based on the specific student's English proficiency level, needs, interests, and goals. Often, the tutor-student match goes beyond learning English. For many immigrants, their tutor is their first ally in Pennsylvania. In addition to supporting their students with English, tutors have helped students study for their driver's license test or citizenship exam, create a resume, and apply for a job. Tutors have also taken students on field trips to concerts, regional museums, national treasures such as Longwood Gardens, or local restaurants, providing cultural enrichment and expanded means to practice their language skills.

2.) Funding request: \$5,000 Capacity Building Grant to offset the total cost of implementation

Key Initiatives: VEP respectfully requests capacity-building funds in the amount of \$5,000 to provide a complete overhaul of our portfolio system, which will be completely inoperative on December 31, 2024. Measuring progress toward language acquisition is a multi-tiered approach. For VEP adult learners, this upgrade will enable VEP staff and tutors to participate in a robust evaluation of students' functional gains and impact on the community using the new and innovative portfolio assessment system designed by and for VEP. This recently piloted program demonstrates what students have learned from their 1:1 tutoring experience and illustrates how they adapt new skills. It is designed for adults of all ages, backgrounds, and global experiences.

VEP aims to remain current and meet student needs. With the support of our dedicated TESOL professional staff, we will fully implement and manage the portfolio-based system for students that demonstrates their journey of language acquisition and their collective impact on our region. Using evidence-based solutions to assess and engage adult learners, our staff will expand on ways to demonstrate immigrant students' impact on the health and vitality of the greater community. Through a post-pandemic pilot program, students participated in demonstrating their achievements through an asset rather than a deficit-based approach to learning English. The portfolio upgrade is integral to maintaining a student-focused experience for our organization, which is at the heart of our mission.

Specific needs & issues to be addressed:

VEP students have described the urgency of speaking and understanding English to provide for their families and give them comfort and safety within their communities. Their limited ability to speak or understand English hinders tasks often overlooked, such as making a phone call, talking with a neighbor, applying and interviewing for a job, speaking with their child's doctor or teacher, or calling 911 in an emergency. The Philadelphia region is reaching increasing rates of residency not seen in over 40 years. As a result, the demand for English instruction continues to grow. Specifically, in Chester County, there are a total of 22,000 non-native-born adults who report "not speaking English well." (2020 Census) Financial support is crucial to support VEP's mission. Our focus remains on serving adult learners with the assistance of our portfolio assessment methods.

Why it is important to fund this now:

The termination of our portfolio program will occur at the end of 2024 and will result in VEP's loss of real-time data for our adult learners. Without a seamless transition to the BackDrop platform, our ability to reach students and their tutors, who work independently throughout Chester County, will be compromised.

Without the capabilities of the BackDrop platform, VEP would incur unfunded personnel expenses to ensure that we have the staff needed to offset the time and cost of collecting tutor and student data.

Our technology must meet 21st-century technological advancements while remaining fully operational at the start of 2025.

For capacity building grant proposals:

How will this capacity-building initiative impact your nonprofit?

Enhancing VEP's Tutor Portal, website communications (specifically the language access portions), and the Portfolio Assessment System will allow VEP to maintain our flexible, individualized approach to instruction where students and volunteer tutors meet virtually or in person at mutually convenient times and locations each week. Our system enables these relationships to flourish and give our adult learners a valuable and life-changing experience. Tutors become friends, and adult learners become confident members of their communities.

How will impact & results will be measured and demonstrated?

VEP will evaluate for project success through the following methods:

- Upon completion of the migration, front-end users will test the site to ensure that they retain full accessibility to the Tutor Portal with limited to no adjustments.
- Students will be invited to share examples of success due to improved English language skills through personal interviews and Functional Gains Surveys. The annual VEP Scope of Service evaluation will include all language domain aspects (oral, written, reading, and comprehension). Students will view the data as they meet with professional staff.
- Students will continue participating in the standardized CASAS education testing system to benchmark English proficiency levels. Individual and collective results will demonstrate proficiency advancements.
- Students will actively engage with professional staff and their tutors in the Portfolio Assessment System. They will be encouraged to share videos, resumes, emails, letters, creative expressions, and other language proficiency examples related to their learning goals.

Include a description of the expected activities, timeline & costs to implement the initiative:

BackOffice Thinking, located in West Chester, PA, is the vendor managing and overseeing this project and will convert VEP's Drupal 7 website to a live BackDrop platform.

The Project Timeline:

Step 1: Create a demonstration site through BaseCamp to allow BOT and VEP staff to develop mirror functionality and collaborate on testing the system.

Step 2: VEP staff will test the site, replicating the tutor experience and the organization's back-end use.

Step 3: BOT will transition the platform supporting the website and the tutor portal before it expires on 12/31/24, protecting our CRM database and creating a seamless, user-friendly system for volunteer tutors.

Project Costs: \$25,000. The BOT Proposal and Budget are attached for details.

Paul Keogan and his firm, BackOffice Thinking, have designed and supported VEP's client, volunteer, and donor constituent management systems for nearly twenty years. BOT has donated the majority of VEP's IT and related technology support as in-kind services, averaging \$30,000 annually.

According to BackOffice Thinking, this implementation is the most cost-effective option financially, especially for an organization of our size whose mission is to provide services at no cost to adult learners. This option will result in limited disruption to VEP business.

III. Attachments

Email 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