

# 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](mailto: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](mailto: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 \$** 395,748

☐ 80 % of budget for program expenses

☐ 3.00 # of Full-time Equivalent Paid Staff

☐ 15 % of budget for administrative expenses

☐ 6 # of Board Volunteers

☐ 5 % of budget for fundraising expenses

☐ 216 # of Active Non-Board Volunteers

100 % total

☐ 11,000 # of Volunteer Hours

### **Top 3-5 funding sources:**

1. Phoenixville Community Health Foundation - \$30,000
2. Connelly Foundation - \$25,000
3. United Way of Chester County - \$20,000
4. Wyss Foundation - \$10,000
5. CCEDC - \$98,000

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

If Capacity Building Proposal, the focus is: Implementing Year 1 Strategic Initiatives through Community Engagement

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

## Proposal Summary:

VEP's Board of Directors, Executive Leadership, and Staff have recently created a 3-year Strategic Imperatives Plan beginning in 2025 that will require an increase in time and reserves to initiate new community engagement efforts and prepare related promotional materials to ensure the organization's ability to serve the Chester County community over the next three years. As VEP approaches its 40th year of uninterrupted service to immigrants who live and work throughout the region, a Chester County Community Foundation Capacity Building grant will help us develop printed and electronic communications that promote board recruitment, volunteer tutor participation, donor investment, and local business partnerships.

## 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 in Chester County (VEP).

For 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 free, one-to-one English language, cultural immersion, and citizenship tutoring for immigrants and refugees who live or work in the Chester County area.

**Goal:** To implement the first year of a three-year Strategic Imperatives Plan, designed as a result of research and consultation with independent experts in the areas of development, capacity building, board succession, brand and marketing, and English as a Second Language education.

#### Objective 1.

**Increase Board Capacity to expand VEP's reach throughout the community.** Through personal engagement and public information sessions, VEP's non-profit leadership will become more resilient and prepared to meet the organizational challenges of providing free educational services to immigrant adults in every community.

#### Objective 2.

**Image and Branding will be vital as VEP prepares to celebrate its 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of service during the country's bisesquicentennial- 250America.** Over the past few years, messaging and marketing materials have been updated as needed. Coordinating all aspects of community engagement will unify our brand and improve awareness of our service to individuals and local partners.

#### Objective 3.

**Corporate Connections are established to raise essential funds through sponsorships or to meet the individual needs of employees working in specific industries throughout the region.** Over the past two years, VEP has gained traction in its ability to offer 10-week, ESL small group sessions with Head Start, JGM, USSC, and Avanceon. With more companies

depending on the expertise of multi-lingual workers, we anticipate an increase in demand on our team to respond quickly with professional communications about our capabilities.

#### **Objective 4.**

**Public Communications and Events are essential to maintaining VEP's presence in a competitive fundraising environment.** As an organization that is 100% philanthropically supported, we plan to review and coordinate all internal and public communication systems. This intentional, rather than transactional, approach will streamline the work of a small operational team and engage other stakeholders, including those at the board, advisory council, and volunteer levels, to help promote a unified mission and vision.

#### **To accomplish the objectives:**

- ✓ VEP will build on its four-decade reputation of providing quality, personalized English language instruction through the engagement of adult immigrants and civic-minded volunteers.
- ✓ VEP will assess the skills and talents of board and staff, and engage external promotional experts as needed to create professional communications packages that are affordable and replicable.
- ✓ VEP will continue to participate in regional non-profit partnerships to explore opportunities for cross-cultivation of new ideas and ways to engage the community while also protecting the confidentiality of our at-risk participants.

#### **Key Achievements-Fiscal Year 2025:**

##### **Tutor & Student Corps**

Through five interactive, nine-hour volunteer tutor training sessions, VEP added nearly 100 new members to its existing 200-plus tutor corps, enabling us to once again serve 300 adults throughout Chester County. Over 30 active tutors accepted multiple students to reduce the wait time for an instructor. Student tutor pairs met weekly for an average of three hours of instruction (over 10,000 hours annually), which included all language domains: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Over 60% of our students gained employment, several entered college, and others became US Citizens.

##### **Board and Staff Succession**

The Board of Directors remained consistent this year. The term-limited treasurer position was filled internally by a finance committee member and a CPA who was nominated for his in-depth knowledge of VEP's processes. We anticipate a leadership succession by the end of 2025. The current six-member board and the community-centered Advisory Council bring expertise in finance, business development, education, executive leadership, and strategic planning.

##### **Partnerships**

In 2025, VEP was invited to participate in a workforce project with CCEDC. Through this effort, VEP conducted onsite ESL classes at USSC and JGM. Twenty-four individual VEP students also gained access to Hire One interviews. We are beginning a new effort with ifm efector in the fall of 2025.

#### **Distinctiveness:**

VEP is the only program in the region that exclusively focuses on matching volunteers with students to learn English one-on-one, at no charge, and with no 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 prepare 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, gardens, and local restaurants, providing cultural enrichment and an expanded means to practice their language skills.

**2.) Funding request:** \$5,000 Capacity Building Grant to offset the \$7,300 cost of year one implementation

### **Key Initiatives:**

VEP respectfully requests capacity-building funds to design and implement a communications and marketing plan that will:

- support board recruitment and succession;
- create relevant and understandable messaging that is on brand with VEP's mission and vision;
- create an awareness of the impact that a personalized, adult-focused 1:1 English language tutoring approach has, and prepare us to meet the growing needs of our community partners, businesses, and individuals who live or work in Chester County.

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

With a small staff and board, funding support will enable us to focus on a comprehensive assessment and approach to all communications, both printed and electronic.

A milestone such as a 40th anniversary, combined with the 250America celebration in 2026, presents a window of opportunity to refresh signage and marketing materials that have been in existence for close to 10 years. By segmenting the products, we can address specific questions about the program and its capabilities to targeted demographics. We also intend to approach communications from a user's point of view rather than a one-size-fits-all delivery.

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

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.

While VEP was not immediately impacted by state or federal funding cuts since January, it has been affected in other ways. Students have become increasingly fearful of meeting in person and are therefore utilizing more of our hybrid resources to attend weekly sessions. As such, they are relying on a variety of communication methods between their tutors and program staff to ensure their safety and access to resources.

Tutor recruitment has been exceptionally successful in just the first six months of 2025 in response to the new administration and the desire to give back on a local level. At the 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Tutor Summit held in

August, the consensus of 65 tutors was that “VEP needs more tutors” to reduce the 18-month waiting time for a student to be matched. With an enhanced community engagement plan and targeted volunteer materials, we hope to achieve this goal.

The demands on local foundations to meet emerging needs such as food distribution, mental health care, and housing reduced VEP’s FY25 annual revenue from these traditional sources. Language remains the first line of defense for someone threatened by financial or food insecurity. It is more important than ever that organizations such as VEP not lose their place in supporting the entire network of non-profits that sustain our residents on a fundamental level – the ability to speak and to be understood.

***For capacity building grant proposals:***

**How will this capacity-building initiative impact your nonprofit?**

The Volunteer English Program holds a unique position as the only independent, non-government-sponsored provider of free, flexible, and individualized adult English instruction in Chester County, backed by unmatched expertise and a growing volunteer base driven by a social justice mission. As demand rises due to shifting demographics and the reduction of federal language access funding, especially in schools, VEP is ideally positioned to expand its impact on new English-speaking adults in the years to come.

We believe that the source of our strength has always been and will continue to be our investment in people. Adult volunteers provide thousands of instructional hours with the professional preparation and guidance of ESL-certified staff. New English learners participate in VEP’s instructional approach because it is a trusted, accessible, and affordable source of support.

VEP’s depth and breadth of experience in responding to the changing needs of people who come from over 44 countries and who speak as many, or more, languages, provides the confidence needed to chart a course for the Volunteer English Program’s growth and advancement over the next five years. Through our continued partnership with the Chester County Community Foundation and its donors, this capacity-building initiative will better prepare our governance and leadership for short- and long-term challenges that are occurring throughout the nonprofit sector.

**How will impact & results will be measured and demonstrated?**

By the end of December 2026, VEP will have completed its first of three strategic planning annual cycles. We anticipate making progress in four strategic focus areas, as detailed in the attached budget. As a result of our capacity-building efforts, we also hope to demonstrate increased financial and operational stability for future years.

**We will measure success when:**

1. Two to three new board members are recruited and installed.
2. A pipeline of interested board members is developed through community and partner engagement activities.
3. VEP has a refreshed branding to recognize its 40-year history in Chester County.
4. Brochures, flyers, and public information packets are designed and printed for targeted audiences.
5. An integrated communication plan that coordinates fundraising, program, and operational messaging is designed for immediate use and will serve as a template for successive years and personnel.
6. VEP continues to be successful in offering on-site language instruction for Head Start families and employees within local industries.
7. VEP rebuilds its 6-9 months of cash reserves, which have been diminished as a result of FY25’s technology infrastructure improvements and the reduction in traditional foundation support.

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

**The Project Timeline: 12 months**

**Project Costs: Estimated \$7,300 plus additional contributions of in-kind board and volunteer hours.**

**Budget:** The attached budget details the expected activities, timeline, and estimated costs to implement this initiative. It is anticipated that we will use an external promotional consultant, Hechinger Consultants, which has been providing a wide variety of public relations, website management, and fundraising services to VEP for five years. VEP also utilizes local printing companies, such as Star Printing and Market Street Printing, to produce hard-copy materials as needed.

### **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