Frequently Asked Questions

Blue Ridge National Heritage Area
2020 Heritage Grants Program

BRNHA grants manager:

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Note: This document is a supplement to the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area's 2020 Heritage Grant Guidelines. These questions and answers will make the most sense if you review the Grant Guidelines first.

1. What are my odds of receiving grant funding?

The Blue Ridge National Heritage Area (BRNHA) grants program has always been competitive. We typically fund fewer than half of the proposals we receive, and typically some of the awards are only partial awards (awards for less than the amount requested). We typically receive more eligible and worthy proposals than we can fund.

It is not possible to predict how many proposals we will fund in the 2020 cycle because we do not know how many proposals we will receive. To maximize your chance of success, submit the best proposal you can.

2. The Grant Guidelines say my project must be a new activity to qualify. What does that mean?

BRNHA grants are intended to catalyze and support new undertakings (think: projects) rather than ongoing programs or operations. Projects should represent a new activity for your organization. A project could, however, consist of expanding an existing program for a new purpose, such as serving new audiences or developing new content.

As noted in our Grant Guidelines, for this grant cycle only, there is an exception to this "new activity" rule. If your organization has previously received BRNHA grant support, you may request support for the continuation of an existing program or initiative, so long as it fits within one of the grant categories, connects with one or more core BRNHA interpretive themes, and meets all other grant cycle criteria.

3. If I applied for funding for a project in the prior cycle but did not receive it, may I apply again with the same project idea?

If you are thinking about re-submitting a project idea for funding, we suggest you contact the BRNHA grants manager to discuss the possibility. We have on occasion, funded projects that were not funded in a prior cycle. Typically that involved strengthening the application.

If you do re-submit, you will need to follow the 2020 Grant Guidelines and use the 2020 application forms.

4. You have seven grant categories. Does each grant category have a dedicated amount of funding?

No. The total pot of funding for the 2020 BRNHA grants cycle is $180,000. BRNHA will fund the highest scoring projects, regardless of which category they fall under. So, each category does not have a separate amount of dedicated funding. Please refer to the Grant Guidelines for the evaluation criteria.

5. What should I do if I'm unsure which grant category applies?

Proposals must fit within one of the seven grant categories to be eligible for funding. Feel free to contact the BRNHA grants manager to discuss which category is the best fit for your project.

6. Why do all proposals need to have a connection to one or more of the five core BRNHA interpretive themes?

The five core BRNHA interpretive themes (agricultural heritage, Cherokee heritage, craft heritage, music heritage, and natural heritage) were the basis of the creation of the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area by Congress in 2003, and comprise the core of its mission today. All major programs of the BRNHA, including the grants program, are focused on these areas.

Connection with one or more of the core BRNHA interpretive themes is an absolute requirement in this grants program. Proposals lacking this connection will not be funded. Proposals that have only a weak connection to these interpretive themes are not likely to be competitive.

7. What if I'm not sure whether my project has a clear connection with one of these interpretive themes?

If you are unsure, it is best to contact the BRNHA grants manager to discuss before proceeding with an application.

8. Can my organization apply for a grant if it is not located within the BRNHA region?

Yes, if your proposed grant project clearly serves and will benefit the 25-county BRNHA region and meets all of the other eligibility criteria.

9. Do I need to include any partners in the project?

Including partner organizations is not a requirement, but we strongly encourage you to consider including partner organizations in your proposal. Partnerships can bring new perspectives to your effort, add valuable expertise, and help your project reach new audiences. Partners may also contribute matching resources.

10. Are there kinds of projects or activities you don't fund?

Yes. We <u>do not</u> provide grant funding for:

- Fundraising or fundraising products.
- Lobbying.
- For-profit ventures.
- Property or easement acquisition.
- Festivals, concerts, or concert series.
- Books.
- Paid advertising.
- Addition or renovation of restrooms.

This list is not exhaustive, but these are activities we are often asked about.

11. What if some or all of the match in my proposal is pending?

Please tell us what portions of your matching contributions are confirmed at the time you submit your application and what portions are pending. Put this in the letter documenting your matching contributions. For instance, if part of your listed match will come from a grant proposal currently under review by another funder, let us know this match is pending and tell us on what date you are likely to hear a decision. While our preference is for confirmed matches, we understand that the timing of grant support in general, makes it possible that some matches will be pending. The Grant Guidelines provide further instructions for the letter documenting your match.

12. Is it okay to list more than a one-to-one match?

Absolutely. In fact, the more eligible matches you are able to include in your proposal, the better. Your proposal will not be penalized for showing a lot of match coming from other funders, from your organization, or from partners. You will be expected to document those matches during the grant reporting process, if a grant is awarded.

13. If I am including volunteer labor as part of my match, what value can I place on that labor?

The dollar value you place on volunteer labor in your project budget should be consistent with rates paid for similar work by your organization or for similar work in your community. If those rates are not possible for you to determine, you may use the <u>North Carolina</u> value of volunteer labor calculated by Independent Sector. Currently that rate for North Carolina is $24.72 per hour.

14. If my project is supported by another federal grant, can I apply for a BRNHA grant?

Yes. You can apply for a BRNHA grant if your project is supported by another federal grant. But the catch is that you can't use those other federal dollars as part of your match for the BRNHA grant. Nor may you use the BRNHA grant funds, which are federal, as part of your match to any other federal grant. That said, if your project has other federal support, it will be seen as a positive in our review.

15. May I include, and should I include, indirect costs in my request?

Indirect costs are costs incurred for a common or joint purpose benefitting more than one project or program that are not readily apportioned between these projects or programs. Indirect costs commonly include such expenses as administrative labor, accounting, rent, and utilities.

Whether you include them or not in your proposal is entirely up to you. Some applicants choose to do so; others do not. Inclusion of indirect costs will not affect your proposal score. If you do include indirect costs, please refer to the directions in the Grant Guidelines.

16. What date can I use for a start date and how long do I have to complete the project?

Once the grant is started, you'll have 12 months to complete the grant project. So the grant period is 12 months.

You will have several options for a start date. Generally, you may propose a start date between February and July 2021. If you need a start date later than July 2021, please contact the BRNHA grants manager to discuss, before you submit your application.

The start date is important because we will not be able to reimburse any project costs that are incurred before that date.

You may request a start date earlier than February 2021, (but not earlier than mid-December 2020), if your project is on an accelerated timeline. Be aware, though, that our target date for notification of awards is February 1, 2021. If you incur project expenses before you are notified of our funding decision, you incur them at your own risk.

We recognize that the start date you list in your proposal may be an estimate at the time of submittal. If a grant is awarded, we will check with you then to determine the best start date to use in the grant agreement.

17. What if my project is a multi-year effort?

If you have a larger project that will be implemented over multiple years, you may propose a distinct portion or phase of that project (up to 12 months) to us for grant support. In your application, be sure to explain both the multi-year timetable for the larger project and the timetable for the portion or phase that would be supported by a BRNHA grant.

18. Which organizations should I ask to submit letters of support?

We suggest you ask those organizations or individuals who can speak to the importance and benefits of the proposed project and your organization's ability to do it well. You are limited to five letters, so make those letters count. In our experience, the most effective letters clearly provide outside insight or perspective on the value of your project and come from institutions or individuals who are in a position to understand the work of your organization.

19. When will my organization receive the grant funds?

BRNHA grant funds are provided on a reimbursement basis. So you will need a reserve of other funds to pay for project expenses first, and then you will be reimbursed by BRNHA through our reimbursement process. To help with cash flow, we can provide reimbursements multiple times if needed during the life of the grant.

There is one exception to the reimbursement structure of our grant funding. You may request a partial advance payment (up to 50% of the grant) in your application narrative (see question 15 on the application form). You will need to explain why the advance is necessary. Advance payments that are approved will be paid upon signing of the grant agreement. After the advance is paid, the remainder of the grant will be paid on a reimbursement basis. Please note that you will need to document first that you have expended the advance before other project expenses can be reimbursed.

20. Do you have any general advice on proposal preparation?

Absolutely! Here you go:

- Be sure to read the Grant Guidelines thoroughly before you decide whether or not to apply. If you are not sure whether your project is eligible, feel free to contact the BRNHA grants manager.
- Get started early on preparing the proposal and requesting the letters of support. You will produce a stronger application if you and your partners have the time you need to be thorough.
- Review all the questions on the application form before you start answering them. Map out your answers to avoid repeating the same information in different sections of the narrative.
- Enlist a proofreader or two to review your narrative and budget before you submit. Another set of eyes will strengthen your proposal.
- Check your math on the project budget form and supporting materials. Math errors will not help your proposal.
- Use the application checklist at the end of the application form to make sure you include all of the applicant components. Incomplete applications may be rejected without further consideration.

For more information

If you have questions that aren't answered here or in the Grant Guidelines, don't hesitate to contact the BRNHA grants manager:

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