

# 2025 Grant Cycle - Phase I Application

Name of Project	Hickory Nut Gap Farm & Project HNG Learning Center
Organization Name	Project HNG
Contact Name	Mary Byers
Email	mary.byers@hickorynutgap.com

## Eligibility

Please complete the questions in this section to confirm your project is eligible for the Tourism Product Development Fund before beginning the application.

Is the applicant a federally recognized non-profit organization or government entity?	Yes
Is the project a festival, cultural event, or other event?	No
Is the grant application for operational expenses only?	No
Is the project located in Buncombe County?	Yes
At the time of application, does the applicant organization have legal control of the property through recorded deed or long-term lease agreement?	Yes
Will the project solely benefit a single lodging owner, lodging property, or be situated on a lodging property?	No

Is the project a major tourism capital project?

Yes

Will the project increase patronage of lodging facilities in Buncombe County by attracting tourists, business travelers, or both, AND further economic development in Buncombe County?

Yes

Will requested grant funds be used for one of the following: (1) Construction of a new location or relocation, or (2) Expansion of an existing location?

Yes

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## Applicant Organization Information

Organization Type

Non-Profit Organization

Organization Phone

(828) 767-5206

Organization Physical Address

57 Sugar Hollow Road  
Fairview, North Carolina, 28730

Organization Mailing Address

57 Sugar Hollow Road  
Fairview, North Carolina, 28730

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## Primary Contact Information

Please provide the contact information for the primary point of contact for this application.

Name

Mary Byers

Title

Head of Marketing

Email

mary.byers@hickorynutgap.com

Phone Number

(828) 767-5206

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## Project Details

Physical Address of Project

57 Sugar Hollow Road  
Fairview, North Carolina, 28730

**Is your project an expansion of or improvement to an existing facility?**

Yes

**At the time of application, does the applicant organization have legal control of the property through a recorded deed or long-term lease agreement? If property is owned by a municipal partner, such as the City or County, a non-profit organization may provide a letter of support or other agreement with the municipal partner.**

Yes, the applicant organization has legal control of the property through a long-term lease (Applicant leases the property)

**Please describe your project.**

At Hickory Nut Gap Farm Education Project (Project HNG), we envision a future where agritourism thrives in Buncombe County, a beacon of sustainable farming practices, environmental education, and community engagement. This aligns with the mission of Hickory Nut Gap Farm, which is to build community through agriculture. We're creating a place where kids and adults engage with the outdoors, work hard, get dirty, and have fun—and, most importantly, develop world-class agricultural education opportunities.

While the recent impacts of Hurricane Helene caused disruption to parts of our farm and infrastructure, they have only strengthened our resolve. If anything, the storm underscored the urgency and importance of building resilient, inclusive, and engaging spaces that connect people with the land. Our goals for the project remain unchanged, and we see this effort as an opportunity to not only rebuild but to reimagine the future of educational agritourism in Buncombe County.

With the support of this grant, we aim to transform Hickory Nut Gap Farm into a dynamic learning destination that inspires visitors of all ages to connect with nature, understand the importance of regenerative agriculture, and foster a deeper appreciation for this special area of Buncombe County.

Our proposed improvements will enhance the overall visitor experience and reinforce our commitment to accessibility, education, and environmental stewardship.

First, we plan to reimagine our agritourism pens with state-of-the-art fencing, ensuring the safety and comfort of our animal residents while providing an immersive learning environment for visitors. Additionally, we will install a concrete path designed to be handicap accessible, allowing all individuals to explore our farm with ease and inclusivity. Reflecting the importance of proximity to nature, the improvements will also include an outdoor classroom where students can gather for educational opportunities and the installation of native plant species to highlight the importance of biodiversity.

Furthermore, we intend to construct a pig nursery, farrowing pens, and pig huts, along with a brooder house for pasture-raised chickens, equipped with a walk-through viewing area. These interactive spaces will feature educational signage and messaging, empowering children and families to learn about sustainable farming practices and the importance of ethical animal husbandry.

In alignment with our commitment to environmental education, we propose creating a child-friendly area, with special recognition of stream ecosystems and hands-on exploration. This interactive area will encourage children to engage with nature, fostering a sense of stewardship and curiosity about the environment.

Moreover, we aspire to establish the Project HNG Learning Center, a transformative hub for education and innovation. This two-story structure will house a downstairs history exhibit, curated in consultation with local Native American tribes, showcasing the rich cultural heritage of the land and the agricultural legacy of the McClure family. Additionally, the learning lab will serve as a dynamic space for exploring regenerative agriculture practices, providing hands-on experiences and workshops for visitors of all ages. The upstairs conference room will offer a versatile venue for hosting ecotourism groups and corporate events, fostering collaboration and dialogue around sustainability initiatives and education about regenerative agriculture.

To oversee these initiatives, Project HNG will interview and hire a Learning Coordinator to facilitate groups visiting the grounds after construction.

While the space currently hosts private events, tour groups, field trips, corporate outings, teambuilding, classes, workshops, markets, and more, these infrastructure updates will make the space even more loved by locals and visitors alike, offering a world-class meeting environment.

Through these strategic enhancements, Hickory Nut Gap will emerge as a premier destination for agritourism, environmental education, and community engagement. The Project HNG Learning Center will serve as a catalyst for positive change, inspiring visitors to become stewards of the land and advocates for a more sustainable future. Together, we can cultivate a thriving ecosystem of learning, innovation, and conservation at Hickory Nut Gap.

**Provide a detailed description of the project scope of work. For each task / deliverable, include description, cost, and timeline of completion.**

PHASE 1

- Brooder House: Construction of brooder house (800 sq ft) \$48,000.00, May 2026-March 2027
- Agritourism Pens, Two 3-wall pig hut structures, grading) \$44,000.00, May 2026-April 2027
- Children's Learning Structure (Shed roof covered pathway 60ft), pathway construction, concrete, elevated section, slide) \$39,000.00, May 2026-March 2027
- Outdoor Classroom (grading, tiered sections, student seating, instructor area) \$22,000.00, May 2026-September 2027
- Infrastructure Improvements
  - Parking Lot and Bus Loop Grading & Gravel \$38,000.00, November 2026-March 2027
  - Crosswalk from lower parking lot and children's area, \$10,000.00 November 2026-March 2027
  - Paved accessibility to agritourism pens and brooder house, parking lot \$30,000.00, November 2026-March 2027
  - Wayfinding and Educational signage throughout property (100 signs) \$20,000.00, November 2026-March 2027
  - Landscaping / Native Plants \$35,000.00, November 2026-March 2027
- Project Management and Program Support
  - Learning Coordinator (4 years) \$220,000, Hire by May 2026
- TOTAL FOR PHASE 1: \$506,000.00

PHASE 2

- Project HNG Learning Center
  - Demolition & haul away of current barn structure \$80,000.00, May 2027-October 2027

2 Story Building with a downstairs classroom and ag science lab, history area, upstairs conference room (4000 sq ft) \$1,600,000.00, May 2027-April 2028

TOTAL FOR PHASE 2: \$1,680,000.00

## Project Milestones

What is the projected break ground date? Monday, May 26, 2025

What is the projected completion date? Saturday, April 1, 2028

What is the projected opening date? Monday, March 1, 2027

Please provide other project milestones, if applicable. Please include the date and the milestone description.

all listed above

## Project Financial Information

What type of funding are you requesting? Grant

What is the total budget for your project? \$2,186,000

What is your requested funding amount? \$2,186,000

List the current mix of non-TPDF funding for your project. Include the source, amount, status, and if the funding is contingent on TPDF funds.

	Source	Amount	Status
Source 1	Fundraising	\$100,000	Pending
Source 2	Line of Credit	500,000	Pending
Source 3	Grants	TBD	Pending
Source 4			
Source 5			
Source 6			
Source 7			
Source 8			

	Source	Amount	Status
Source 9			
Source 10			

Total Amount of non-TPDF funding      600,000

**If the total amount of non-TPDF funding sources listed above is less than the requested TPDF funding amount. Please describe your plan to raise the remaining amount to meet the 1-to-1 funding match requirement.**

We have secured a line of credit for \$500,000, and believe that we can raise at least \$100,000 through private donations and fundraising. Over the last year, many conversations have been conducted with individuals and organizations who are value-aligned, and would love to see this project come to fruition. There are also other grants that could support this project, all of which might be contingent on receiving TPDF funding.

**If any of the above funding sources are contingent on receiving funding through the Tourism Product Development Fund, please explain below.**

At this point, the project is contingent on receiving TPDF funding. We are researching other grant options at this time, but have not found a fit for the project.

Have you received TPDF funding in the past for this specific project?      No

## Project Impact

Will the project be able to track the number of visitors to the project through ticket sales, registration, surveys, or other similar methods?      Yes

If applicable, how many visitors does your current operation serve annually?      35,000

What is the estimated number of visitors at your project for YEAR 1 of operation?      74,410

What is the estimated number of visitors at your project for YEAR 2 of operation?      93,013

What is the estimated number of visitors at your project for YEAR 3 of operation?      116,266

# What are your visitation estimates based on? (Example: existing customer data, ticket sales, research, etc.)

Existing customer data, ticket sales, and planned programming and educational content.

## How many days would a typical visitor patronize your project during one visit to Buncombe County?

## What is your estimated percentage of visitors to this project who will stay overnight in Buncombe County in paid lodging?

### Please describe your current or expected audience.

By offering a diverse and dynamic array of events, the project will attract a wide range of visitors, from local families to out-of-town guests, ensuring that the farm remains a vibrant and sought-after destination throughout the year. Programming types include Summer Camps, Spring Break and Winter Break Camps, Saturdays at the Farm, Equine Assisted Therapy, Veterans Ride Community Programs, Urban Ag Courses, Naturalist Workshops, School Field Trips, Homesteading, Horseback Riding Lessons, Regenerative Farming Training (through the Savory Institute), Corporate Events and Retreats, Food Festivals, Butchery Workshops, Barn Dances, Big Barn Makers Markets.

We expect this programming will appeal to local and regional audiences (Asheville and Western, NC, Charlotte, Winston-Salem/Triad, Raleigh/Triangle. In addition, we believe this project will bring in visitors from the Southeast and Mid-Atlantic, from Greenville, south to Florida, and up the east coast. We also believe that corporate groups and leadership teams with a direct flight to Asheville Regional Airport will find the location inspiring for corporate retreats - especially those focused on corporate sustainability initiatives.

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## Terms of Agreement

Please read each of the following statements and acknowledge that you understand and agree to them by checking the boxes. Applications cannot be submitted unless this field is completed.

### Disclsoure for the Public Record

As a public authority, the Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority is subject to Chapter 132 of the North Carolina General Statutes. Therefore, any and all aspects of this application must be made available by the BCTDA to any party, public or private, upon request without exception. If you are concerned that the distribution of any of your application materials may do irreparable damage to you, your organization, or associated parties, the BCTDA highly recommends that you seek alternative funding in lieu of TPDF funds.

### Project Monitoring

I hereby acknowledge that if I am awarded TPDF funding, I will be required to submit an annual report by January 15 of each year during the term of the agreement, with the term commencing on the effective date and continuing for four years after the completion date. Reports include marketing plans and

methodologies for capturing annual and out-of-market visitation, up-to-date room night projections, and copies of survey instruments used for data among other requirements.

**BCTDA Marketing**

I hereby acknowledge that certain information from my application, such as the project description, timeline, and leadership, may be used by the BCTDA at its sole discretion for the promotion and marketing of the TPDF program and the region as a tourism destination.

**Completed Application**

I hereby acknowledge that I have completed this application in good faith and have done so in full compliance with the law. I have made no attempt to falsify or misconstrue facts or data anywhere in this application. The information contained in this application is complete and accurate to the best of my knowledge.

**Terms and Conditions**

Accepted