

2025 Grant Cycle - Phase II Application

Name of Project	Warren Wilson College Aquatics Center
Organization Name	Warren Wilson College
Email	mfields@warren-wilson.edu

Eligibility

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

Applicant Organization Information

Organization Type	Non-Profit Organization
Organization Phone	(828) 771-2000
Organization Physical Address	701 Warren Wilson Rd Swannanoa, NC, 28778

Primary Contact Information

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

Project Details

Physical Address of Project	701 Warren Wilson Rd, Building 134 Swannanoa, NC, 28778
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 recorded deed (Applicant owns the property)

Please describe your project in detail.

The completion of The Warren Wilson College Aquatic Center will be catalytic for the County's tourism industry, specifically for hotels, restaurants, and other businesses in the eastern part of the county. By hosting regional and national intercollegiate and high school swim and diving meets, the Center will help boost hotel occupancy rates as well as increase occupancy tax and tourism revenue.

The Warren Wilson College Aquatic Center will be a significant economic driver. In year three, the facility is estimated to add \$4,668,080 in lodging revenue and \$280,085 in occupancy tax revenue to the local economy.

This facility will serve as a focal point for the growth of the region's sports-based economy and as an important economic engine to support the region's renewal in the wake of the destruction and disruption caused by Hurricane Helene. Moreover, the County's investment in the Center will contribute to the ongoing renewal and revitalization of the College, which has been a significant driver of the regional economy since its founding in 1894.

The College has seen transformational progress since the arrival of President Damián J. Fernández in summer of 2023. An improved value proposition driven by lower tuition, new career-readiness programming, NCAA Division III membership, and expanded experiential learning opportunities has led to stable enrollment and higher retention. To punctuate its commitment to environmental sustainability, the College added a Masters in Applied Climate Studies and set aside 800 acres of campus land as a conservation easement and to establish a preserve. And this past academic year, the College celebrated the reaffirmation of its accreditation for the next ten years. Key to this achievement is the College's sound financial footing, with two successive years of balanced budgets (FYs 24 and 25).

Success begets success. Donors have responded to this positive outlook with transformative gifts that are catapulting the institution forward. This last fiscal year (July 2024-June 2025), the College raised over \$17M that included the largest gift (\$10M) in the College's 131-year history. The Aquatics Center will play an important role in building on this momentum and accelerating economic renewal in the region post Helene.

The primary objective of this grant proposal is to fund the completion and upgrade of the Warren Wilson College Aquatic Center, which will attract visitors to Buncombe County through numerous regional and national intercollegiate and high school athletic events, educational programs, and recreational opportunities. The Aquatic Center will provide tourists with extended recreational offerings, increasing the probability of prolonged and repeat stays in the area, boosting hotel occupancy rates and helping to support local businesses, particularly the 150 hotels and motels and 137 eateries within a ten mile radius of the College.

The Aquatic Center will help the area retain dollars from residents who would otherwise have to travel elsewhere to access indoor aquatic facilities. Public surveys conducted in 2023 by the Asheville Parks & Recreation Project Team for the Recreate Asheville 10-year Plan ranked indoor swimming facilities as one of the highest priority needs for Asheville residents (Appendix 1). The lack of year-round, indoor swimming pool access paired with recent public pool closures has resulted in a lack of youth swimming lesson options for residents, as highlighted in a 2024 Mountain Xpress article (Appendix 2). The lack of youth swimming lessons and the rising rates of drowning for ages 1-4 as reported by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention makes the local need for this project clear (Appendix 3).

Architectural Features

The spacious 10,000-square-foot renovated facility will house a US standard (25 yards in length), six-lane pool with two competition-level diving boards (1M and 3M springboards) as well as seating for 200 spectators and 50-100 seats for swim team members (total occupancy is 433 people). The footprint of the renovated pool enclosure will be incorporated into existing spaces: lockers rooms along the northeast corner and a fitness center on the east side.

The exterior will feature vertically-oriented wood boards on inset walls and stone-cladding on the supporting piers. The use of wood and stone for the exterior and native-plant landscaping will help merge the building into its natural surroundings and align it with the College's architectural vernacular. New sidewalks, parking, and accessibility upgrades will improve entrance to and egress from the facility. A retaining wall to the south will guide visitors to the southeast entrance to be fronted by a generous concrete plaza accessible via a ramp and a staircase. A second entrance with quick access from the parking lot will be on the southwest corner of the building.

Generous floor to ceiling windows framing the two main entrances, tall vertical windows punctuating the west wall, and ample clerestory fenestration will flood the interior with natural light. The high ceiling and broad roof will be supported by four massive, tapered and curved, laminated wood girders that echo the wooden wall cladding on the exterior. The competition pool will be oriented along an east-west axis with the two springboards along its eastern end and team seating to the west. Bleachers for spectators will be placed along the south wall to provide a clear view of the pool and easy access to the two main entrances to the facility.

Furnishings include a PA/sound system, fire-sprinkler system, digital scoreboard, a timing system, appropriate signage, railings and slip-resistant decking, pool ladders, and an ADA-compliant pool lift. Interior LED lighting and photovoltaic roof panels will reduce the facility's energy consumption to support the College's interest in environmental sustainability.

Athletic Events and Recreational Activities

The Warren Wilson College Aquatic Center will host a variety of events year round, including NCAA and Independent South Conference swim competitions, high school meets, triathlons, and summer camps, to bring a conservative estimate of 14,000 - 20,000 new visitors to Buncombe County per year, though that number is expected to increase year to year. Recreational and educational programs to be offered will include: swim and paddling practices, water safety training, scuba diving instruction, open swims, and canoe/kayak/paddle boarding instruction, among other programs.

Partnerships and Collaboration

Partnerships with local tourism and recreational organizations, led by the Office for Strategic Ventures, Programs, and Partnerships, will maximize the use of the Aquatic Center and amplify the economic return on investment. The College has a long track record of partnering with local businesses (hotels and restaurants included) to provide services to thousands of guests who visit the College every year.

Attractions, Amenities, and Education

The Warren Wilson College Aquatic Center is strategically located near popular attractions like the Blue Ridge Parkway, on-campus and off-campus hiking trails, Mount Mitchell, Asheville, and Black Mountain, and will encourage outdoor enthusiasts to extend their stays in Buncombe County. The pool will complement the visitor experience, especially since other pools in the region restrict or limit visitor access. In addition, access to the facility will appeal to visitors attending cultural and educational programs offered by local organizations, including the College's Swannanoa Gathering, which welcomed 1,030 visitors last summer; our Mountain Institute for Lifelong Learning with 50-70 visitors; and the College's two Masters programs, which are projected to draw roughly 160 new visitors each year; With the addition of a new Non-fiction track to our MFA low-residency Master's program, this number is projected to increase to roughly 235 in the next two years. Plans to expand pre-college summer academic programs at the College in 2026 will attract even more visitors to the region. Hotels and restaurants close to campus will see an noticeable increase in business.

As a value-added to the college experience, the Aquatic Center will be helpful in attracting prospective

students and student-athletes to the College and retaining current students. The College's six-year plan includes increased enrollment projections from the current study body of about 720 to around 870 by 2029. A larger student body brings more out-of-town visitors (parents, families, friends, and alumni) to the campus on a regular basis to attend various events such as Homecoming, Family Weekend, athletic events, and graduation. Last year, the College hosted around 325 people for Family Weekend and 400 guests for graduation; Homecoming was canceled due to Hurricane Helene but drew a crowd of 400 out-of-market visitors in 2023. Visitors to these yearly events stay at local hotels and inject dollars into the local economy at restaurants, breweries, bars, and entertainment venues in the Asheville region. As the College grows, so will the economic impact of the Center.

Warren Wilson College is known for its ethos of sustainability, a commitment to preserving our natural resources, and a mission of helping people understand their footprint, all of which make the campus an ideal place for visitors to learn responsible tourism practices. The campus is recognized as a Certified Wildlife Habitat, a Native Plant Habitat, and a Certified Monarch Butterfly Waystation and is home for the Center for Working Lands—a working, learning, and living laboratory committed to demonstrating sustainable land management. Clear evidence of the College's commitment to environment sustainability is the establishment of a conservation easement and preserve on 800 acres of College-owned property, which will ensure long-term access to pristine biodiverse natural habitat for teaching, learning, tourism, and recreation.

"The Warren Wilson [conservation easement] project is a phenomenal accomplishment. It'll be looked at as one of the most significant conservation projects in the county's history," said Buncombe County Board of Commissioners Chair Brownie Newman. "I don't think that's overstating it at all. It's one of those iconic places in the county just in terms of natural beauty and the working landscapes." The land includes scenic views, rich forests, the Swannanoa River, and public hiking trails. The trail system, which is open to the public, connects to Buncombe County's Owen Park in Swannanoa.

New and existing student-run initiatives like the College's seasonal Makers Fairs, Farm School General Store, farmers market, and pop-up market will mean visitors to the Aquatic Center will be provided a first-hand opportunity to sample and enjoy local products from Buncombe County businesses and artisans. In addition, a thriving Arts and Craft department at the College provides opportunities for visitors to meet local artists, attend workshops and demonstrations, and visit the Elizabeth Holden Gallery, which hosts up to eight exhibits per year.

Construction Scope: To help us understand the size and scope of the project, please provide a detailed description of the scope of work for the physical construction of the project, along with associated costs for each component. As applicable, include number of buildings/structures, materials, square footage, equipment, etc.

The scope of work includes the demolition and disposal of an existing 7,500-square-foot pool enclosure, as well as portions of entrances and sidewalks, to build a new 10,000-square-foot enclosure housing a six-lane pool (to be deepened and refinished) with two competition-level diving boards (1M and 3M spring boards) and new seating for 200 spectators and 50-100 seats for athletes (total occupancy is 433 people). The new building will feature two new main entrances as well as a secondary secured entrance requiring student access cards. The renovated space will include a new PA/sound system and digital scoreboard. Photovoltaics mounted on the roof will improve energy efficiency to align with the College's commitment to environmental sustainability. Exterior site work will improve landscaping and entrance to and egress from the pool, including ADA-compliant accessibility upgrades.

Demolition and Site Preparation: ~\$180,000 – \$200,000

The project will begin with the demolition of the existing 7,500-square-foot pool enclosure, including the entire roof structure, windows, and wall panels. The site will be prepared to accommodate the larger, expanded pool enclosure. Site utilities for the new sprinkler system and storm water management will be installed underground and a building pad will be prepared for a new slab on grade foundation. Timeline: June-August 2026

Construction of New Building: ~\$2,420,000 – \$2,600,000

The facility will be designed to be used by both the public and College for recreation and competition. The new enclosure will feature either long-span steel or glulam wood girders, tongue and groove wood ceilings, and numerous windows to bring in ample natural light. A roof-mounted photovoltaic system will be installed. The pool will be deepened to accommodate NCAA design recommendations for competition diving. An anti-slip epoxy finish will be applied to the pool deck and all of the lighting in the building will be LED to reduce the building’s electrical load. Timeline: August-November 2026

Furnishings, Fixtures & Equipment: ~\$630,000 – \$700,000

The interior will be outfitted with seating for 200 spectators (including accessible seating) and 50-100 seats for team members. Railings and other safety-related furnishings, signage, PA/sound and timing systems, a fire sprinkler system, connections to mechanical and filtration systems, and other furniture, fixtures and equipment will be included. The pool, pool deck, and bleachers will be refurbished. Timeline: October-November 2026

Sitework: ~\$470,000 – \$550,000

The site around the pool will see substantial upgrades and improvements: expanded handicap parking with accessibility to the entrance, landscaping, retaining walls, and a concrete plaza. The underground storm drainage system will be reconfigured, water distribution and fire protection systems improved, and utilities extended. Timeline: November-December 2026

Project Milestones

What is the projected break ground date? Monday, June 1, 2026

What is the projected completion date? Thursday, December 31, 2026

What is the projected opening date? Friday, January 1, 2027

If applicable, please list any additional project milestones. Be sure to include both the date and a brief description of each milestone.

The pool was closed in 2016 for renovations. Since 2016 the College has invested \$2,403,130 in the facility. These upgrades include:

1. Removed and replaced roofing.
2. Updated men’s and women’s locker rooms with expanded storage and renovated bathrooms.
3. Installed new pool heating and filtration systems.
4. Purchased new scoring system, lane dividers, and other FF&E.

Project Financial Information

What type of funding are you requesting? Grant

What is the total budget for your project? \$3,700,000

What is your requested funding amount? \$1,850,000

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	College Capital budget	\$1,000,000	Committed
Source 2	Buncombe County Grant	\$300,000	Committed
Source 3	Fundraising	\$550,000	Pending
Source 4			
Source 5			
Source 6			
Source 7			
Source 8			
Source 9			
Source 10			

Total Amount of non-TPDF funding \$1,850,000

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.

N/A

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

The funding sources above are not contingent on receiving funding through the Tourism Product Development Fund; however, the Buncombe County funding is contingent on the project being completed.

Project Impact

Does your project currently serve (or will serve) visitors to Buncombe County?

Yes

How many total guests do you receive annually, including local residents and out-of-market visitors? 25,000

How many out-of-market visitors do you receive annually? Please describe how you define "out-of-market"?

The Center is currently closed but Warren Wilson Athletic events draw roughly 25,000 visitors yearly, of that an estimated 20,000 are out-of-market visitors.

Out-of-market visitors are defined as visitors from outside of Buncombe county. This include NCAA collegiate athletes and families, Coast to Coast Conference member institutions, and youth and high school athletes and families; families of current students and prospective students; triathletes and spectators; cyclists and spectators; and, visitors participating in cultural and educational programs.

What percentage of your out-of-market visitors spend the night in paid accommodations in Buncombe County?

Estimated 30%

What data or methods did you use to develop your visitor and out-of-market visitor estimates? (e.g., historical data, ticket sales, market research)

Total estimates are based on conservative projections of attendance for weekly educational and community programming, summer camps, winter training sessions, year-round youth enrichment and learn-to-swim programs, year-round high school, collegiate and club meets, conferences and tournaments that the College will be able to host in the Aquatic Center. Third year estimates factor in a reasonable number of out-of-market visitors generated by our marketing efforts. Percentage of out-of-market visitors are averaged across all three years to account for natural fluctuations such as years the College would host championship competitions instead of traveling to other venues.

How many days would a typical out-of-market visitor patronize your project during one visit to Buncombe County?

3

What percentage of out-of-market visitors to your project do you estimate will stay overnight in paid lodging within Buncombe County?

95%

Describe the market to be served by your project.

This project will serve the same targeted audiences identified in our Marketing Plan (listed below) and is expected to have a significant financial impact on the Eastern Buncombe County and Swannanoa areas with a secondary financial impact on Central Buncombe county hotels, restaurants, shops, and recreational activities:

NCAA collegiate athletes and families, Coast to Coast Conference member institutions, and outside Buncombe county high school swim club athletes and families;
Current Warren Wilson students, employees, alumni, and their families;
Buncombe county residents and regional K-12 public and private schools and programs;
Local and civil service personnel (e.g. fire and emergency personnel);
Triathletes and spectators;
Cyclists and spectators;
Summer camps students and staff;
Department of Veteran Affairs and civil service personnel;
Visitors engaged in paddling practices, water safety training, scuba diving instruction, and canoe/kayak/paddle boarding instruction; and,
Visitors participating in cultural and educational programs.

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.

Disclosure 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

2025 Grant Cycle - Phase II Application

Many of these questions will build on the Phase I application and some of the questions are the same. For ease of the application, we recommend you have your Phase I submissions on hand to copy / paste and modify from there. Please reach out to our team if you have any questions along the way.

Primary Contact Information

Name of Person Completing the Application	Mary Fields
Title	Grants Manager
Phone Number	(828) 771-2052
Federal EIN Number	56-0767736
Organization Mailing Address	Warren Wilson College, PO Box 9000 Asheville, NC, 28815

Briefly describe your organization's mission and the history of the organization.

Mission:

Warren Wilson College’s distinctive approach to education intentionally integrates academics, work, and community engagement to cultivate curiosity, empathy, and integrity. We empower graduates to pursue meaningful careers and lead purposeful lives dedicated to a just, equitable, and sustainable world.

History:

Warren Wilson College started as the Asheville Farm School in 1894, became a coed junior college in 1942, and transitioned to the four-year Warren Wilson College in the 1960s.

At the close of the nineteenth century, the Women’s Board of Home Missions of the Presbyterian Church established church-supported schools in areas where there were no public services. They purchased property in the Swannanoa Valley near Asheville in 1893.

In 1894, the Asheville Farm School officially opened with 25 boys attending and a professional staff of three people. It was not until 1923 that the school had its first graduating class. In 1936, the first post high school programs in vocational training were begun. In 1942, the junior college division was established. The Dorland-Bell School of Hot Springs was joined with the Farm School, which brought high school age girls to campus. The Warren Wilson Vocational Junior College was joined with them under our one administration.

After WWII, the public education system in North Carolina improved dramatically, and the need for the mission’s high school diminished. The last high school class graduated in 1957, and the school remained a junior college until March 1966 when it was established as the four year Warren Wilson College, offering six majors. In 1972, the National Board of Missions deeded the WWC property over to the college’s Board of Trustees.

Identify and describe any pending legal action against you or your organization that would threaten the ability of the applicant to complete this project. If none, enter "N/A".

N/A

Is your organization formally registered with the IRS and State of North Carolina and is it in good standing? If not, please explain below.

Yes

List the key leadership of your organization and project. Please also include a description of each individual's specific role with the project. (You can list up to 6 people.)

	Name	Primary Company / Organization	Role
Key Leadership of Project or Organization #1	Damián J. Fernández	Warren Wilson College	President; He will provide oversight for all aspects of the project and ensure the project meets the goals of the BCTDA and the College. He will act as signatory for all contracts.
Key Leadership of Project or Organization #2	Valerie Gliem	Warren Wilson College	Vice President of Institutional Advancement, Marketing, and Strategic Communications; She will oversee all fundraising efforts and work with Athletic Director, Robin Davis, to implement the marketing plan and communications.
Key Leadership of Project or Organization #3	Robin Davis	Warren Wilson College	Athletic Director; She will develop and manage programming, assist with marketing, and ensure the proper tracking and record keeping of ticket sales, meet attendance, and attendance for various events and offerings for grant reporting.

	Name	Primary Company / Organization	Role
Key Leadership of Project or Organization #4	Ian Smith	Warren Wilson College	Executive Director of Operations and Facilities; He will interface with our architect and construction partners to lead the renovation project and, in collaboration with the controller, oversee budget management.
Key Leadership of Project or Organization #5	Mary Davis	Warren Wilson College	Controller; She will oversee fund management and compliance.
Key Leadership of Project or Organization #6	Amy Ager	Warren Wilson College	Executive Director of Strategic Ventures, Programs, and Partnerships; She will work with Robin Davis to expand partnerships with businesses, schools, and organizations across the region to attract local and out-of-market visitors to the Center.

If applicable, identify any current partnerships your organization holds with other organizations that are related to this project. Include the name of the organization and nature of the partnership.

Though we plan to bid out this project we have partnered with the following companies to develop the scope and cost estimates for the Center renovation:

Legerton Architecture (conceptual design)
Harpers General Contractors (general construction)
Gary Alden Pool Design Consultants (pool design)
Medlock and Associates (structural engineering)
Tilden White and Associates (mechanical, electrical, and plumbing)
Siteworks Studios (landscape architecture)
Pisgah Energy (photovoltaics)

The College has several partners who will utilize the Warren Wilson College Aquatic Center and other partners who will help attract tourists to the facility:

National Collegiate Athletic Association Division III: This will be the single largest revenue generating partnership as the College will host competitive intercollegiate swim meets both in and outside of the conference, as well as bid for host site opportunities for championships.

Owen High School: Prior to the closure of the existing facility, high school student athletes used the pool and are eager to utilize it again. The College will leverage this partnership during the fundraising and community engagement processes. This will be a key partnership for revenue after the Aquatic Center is completed.

Riceville Fire Department: The Fire Department needs a pool for fire/water safety training and would like to use the new facilities. The College will make the facilities available to other local fire departments and emergency personnel that need use of a pool for similar purposes.

UNC Pardee Health: Pardee partners with the College to provide athletic training. They will use the pool for physical therapy.

UNC-Asheville: UNCA is interested in using the pool for 3M Diving.

MAHEC/Emerge-Ortho: The College’s current partnership with MAHEC, and Dr. Boykin, through Emerge-Ortho, will expand into utilization of the pool facility.

Blue Ridge Diving: Expressed interest in offering scuba classes at the pool.

Additional Community Sponsors and Partnerships include:

- The Asheville Hotel Group
- Holiday Inn East
- Fairfield Inn & Suites
- Clarion Inn
- Bermuda Triangle Dive Shop
- Buncombe County School
- YMCA of WNC
- Smoky Mountain Aquatic Club
- Black Mountain YMCA
- Blues Aquatics

Have you received TPDF funding in the past for this specific project?

No

Describe the value of your project to tourism in Buncombe County.

The Warren Wilson College Aquatic Center will generate an estimated \$644,195 in total occupancy tax revenue and draw an estimated 49,450 out-of-market visitors through athletic events, educational programs, and recreational opportunities in its first three years of operation.

Warren Wilson’s goal is to create an aquatic center to attract competitive athletes and their families to Buncombe County by hosting numerous local, regional, and national athletic events. The Warren Wilson College Aquatic Center will provide tourists with extended recreational offering and increase the probability of prolonged and repeat stays in the area. In turn, this will boost hotel occupancy rates and create opportunities for increased revenue for local businesses.

The closure of the Malvern Hills Park and Recreation Park pools is forcing locals and tourists to travel out of the county to access indoor pool facilities for safety, fitness, and swimming classes and competitions. The Warren Wilson College Aquatic Center will help Buncombe County retain local dollars and satisfy demand for access to aquatics facilities and programming in the region.

If any of the above milestones have changed from what was provided in your Phase I application, please provide an explanation for the change. (If no changes, please enter "N/A")

N/A

When will TPDF funds first be required? This will depend on the terms of the contract agreement with the construction firm but we would want funding available soon after the award date given the short time to ramp up before the start of the project in June 2026.

If your project will not begin construction within 18 months of the award notification, please explain why securing funding at this stage is essential to the project's success.

N/A

Does a project similar to yours already exist in Western North Carolina? If so, please identify the project(s) and how your project will draw new or additional overnight visitors.

A similar project is the Buncombe County School Aquatics Center that opened in 2019. However, BCSAC is primarily used by local school swim teams and provides space for community rentals. The primary focus of the BCSAC is to serve Buncombe County school children and is not targeted at tourists and driving tourism.

The other pools in the area are either outdoor pools that are only open during the summer or membership-based facilities such as the YMCA locations. The Warren Wilson College Aquatic Center will be an indoor, year-round space that will be marketed at athletics-based tourism while also being available to the local and College community.

Has a feasibility study been completed for this project?

Yes

What are your project and/or organizational goals, and how will you determine if you met them?

The College’s primary goal is to open a state-of-the-art, ADA-compliant aquatic center to host thirty to forty regional and national clubs, high school, and collegiate swim meets each year. There is a need for a pool in the East Asheville and East Buncombe County area to accommodate this demand and specialized use. With its strong ties and long history in the community, Warren Wilson College can provide this much needed resource. The Warren Wilson College Aquatic Center will accommodate up to 100 swimmers and 300 spectators. Facility usage will be tracked by registration counts and ticket sales.

Another goal is to develop a learn-to-swim program open to the public that will benefit the Buncombe County community and visitors. With an abundance of popular water-based activities on local lakes and rivers, it is necessary to increase swimming access and education. This goal is important because drowning deaths in the U.S. have been increasing since 2020 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention). The Aquatic Center will provide the space, instructional capacity, and decades-long record of effective community engagement to meet the need for accessible aquatic education. This goal will be measured by the number of people registering for the learn-to-swim program.

A third goal is developing community partnerships to help draw tourists to the area. The College will develop visitor guides to promote local restaurants, shopping destinations, music venues, art galleries, craft centers, and other tourism hotspots. The College will partner with the Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority, hotels, and other visitor-centered businesses and organizations who can assist in promoting the opportunities at the Aquatic Center. See the marketing plan below for tactics and metrics.

The Warren Wilson College Aquatic Center will promote the active lifestyle associated with Asheville and Buncombe County, ensure sustained tourism opportunities, and engage with diverse visitors. The College’s Aquatic Center will have a significant impact on tourism and the economy in Buncombe County and be a vital resource to the local community, which is in need of another aquatics venue. The County can be assured the College will manage the Aquatic Center project efficiently and effectively and closely monitor project metrics and goals. The College will track and evaluate the Aquatic Center’s role as a driver of tourism, impact on the local economy, and as an educational and recreational asset to the local community.

If any of the above funding sources are grants, please provide a description of the expenses covered by each grant.

Institutional fundraising efforts may include grants but currently committed funding does not include grant funds. The College has many long-standing relationships with foundations that have supported a number of brick-and-mortar projects over the years. These include the George I. Alden Trust, The Cannon

Foundation, and The Kaman Foundation, and The Philip L. Van Every Foundation, as well as others, from which we plan to solicit support for the pool project. Any grants awarded during the project period would be disclosed, along with funding requirements, to the BCTDA.

What is the estimated annual cost to operate and maintain the project? Who will be responsible for ongoing operations and maintenance?

The typical annual operating expense for a pool of this size is about \$60,000. Warren Wilson College will be responsible for operation and maintenance and these funds will be included in a set budget for the Warren Wilson College Aquatic Center. Budgets are built out each fiscal year in the spring. The College anticipates funding for continued maintenance will come from the revenue that the Center generates each year.

What is the LEAST amount of TPDF \$1,850,000
Funding your project could receive without significant changes to the project scope?

Project Marketing Plan

Describe the target audience for your project.

The current and expected audiences include the following:

- NCAA collegiate athletes and families, Coast to Coast Conference member institutions, and outside Buncombe county high school swim club athletes and families;
- Current Warren Wilson students, employees, alumni, and their families;
- Buncombe county residents and regional K-12 public and private schools and programs;
- Local and civil service personnel (e.g. fire and emergency personnel);
- Triathletes and spectators;
- Cyclists and spectators;
- Summer camp students and staff;
- Department of Veteran Affairs and civil service personnel;
- Visitors engaged in paddling practices, water safety training, scuba diving instruction, and canoe/kayak/paddle boarding instruction; and,
- Visitors participating in cultural and educational programs.

How do you plan to reach your target audience?

As of September 1, 2024, the College became a full member of NCAA Division III and, as a result, can market the Aquatics Center to the 200+ colleges and universities in Division III. We are eligible to host four to six NCAA meets per season that together will draw roughly 1,200 out-of-market participants to the area for multi-night stays. These meets will consist of swim teams and supporters from our competitor schools: Southern Virginia, Piedmont, William Peace, and Pfeiffer. Moreover, every two years we have the opportunity to bid for conference championships which will bring five teams to the county for a multi-night stay. Scheduling for these meets is flexible (weekdays and weekends) and will contribute to a well-rounded calendar of events throughout the year. (This information is also provided in the Marketing Plan document in the additional materials section).

The College will bid to host meets at the collegiate, high school, and club level. Most of this outreach will come from meetings with local partners (such as other colleges, middle schools, and high schools) to develop plans for meets, events, and classes. The College will also utilize its relationship with the Sports Commission to promote the Aquatic Center as a host site for Buncombe County events.

Partnerships with local tourism and recreational organizations, led by Amy Ager, Executive Director of the Office for Strategic Ventures, Programs, and Partnerships, will promote the Aquatic Center and other resources on and around campus to out-of-market visitors. The College will collaborate with community groups and regional tourism stakeholders to ensure the success of promotional efforts to attract visitors

to Buncombe County.

How much do you plan to invest in marketing annually? How much will be invested outside the Asheville market? (Out-of-market is defined as 50 miles or more from Asheville.)

As an NCAA Division III member, the College has a captive and reliable audience. Yearly scheduled meets between institutions are already established and the aquatics facility will enable us to serve as the host for competitions rather than traveling to other venues to compete. The Coast to Coast Conference as well as the Independent Swim Conference have member institutions from all across the United States that we are able to schedule competitions with at no additional cost.

Warren Wilson Athletics, the NCAA, and Coast to Coast Conference all have their own social media channels through which we will promote events. Through student recruitment and other practices, the Athletics Office will cultivate new and existing relationships with swim teams across the country. These relationships will lead to opportunities for hosting events year after year.

The College has an established partnership with the Asheville Buncombe Regional Sports Commission and will continue to be a host site for local, regional, and national events. This partnership will allow us to showcase the pool venue as an ideal location for events and, in particular, competitive diving since the Center will be one of a few locations with both 1M and 3M springboards.

Furthermore, Warren Wilson College will use engaging social media content to reach tourists, locals, and prospective students and families. The College uses both paid and unpaid marketing social media channels to communicate with its constituents. Each year the Office of Admission contacts more than 150,000 high school sophomores, juniors, and seniors from across the country through a coordinated print, email, and digital advertising campaign. Well over 90 percent of the College's marketing is directed outside the Asheville region. This includes photos and information about College facilities. The aquatic facility and programming will factor in these communications. The marketing budget for the Center will be pulled from revenue generated by the Center and the College's operating budget. The College's current marketing, admission, and recruitment budget for FY 25 is \$350,000.

Finally, the Office of Strategic Ventures, Partnerships and Programs will connect with community organizations and businesses about partnering with the College. The College will leverage partnerships and sponsorships to market the Aquatic Center to those organizations' constituents through their marketing channels (e.g. social media, programs, event announcements).

Who will implement the marketing plan?

Implementation will be handled jointly by the Offices of Athletics; Marketing; and Strategic Ventures. Spearheading these efforts will be Robin Davis, Athletic Director; Valerie Gliem, Vice President of Institutional Advancement, Marketing and Strategic Communications; and Amy Ager, Executive Director of Strategic Ventures, Partnerships, and Programs.

Please describe the demographics of your current guests, if possible.

Youth-aged athletes (10-14 yrs), high-school aged athletes (14-18 yrs), college-aged athletes (18-24 yrs), adult athletes (25 yrs+), plus parents and families (25 yrs+).

Please describe the methods your organization uses to calculate total annual visitation and to distinguish out-of-market visitors.

Calculations are based on the NCAA sponsorship minimums for competitions per sport (17 varsity sports and 1 club sport) and OASYS software that tracks registration for camps and tournaments.

How will your project drive increased patronage of lodging facilities in Buncombe County by attracting tourists, business travelers, or both?

The College's Aquatic Center will enhance Buncombe County's tourism industry and boost hotel occupancy rates. The facility will become a central hub for attracting diverse audiences through competitions and recreational activities, driving economic growth across Buncombe County, particularly

in the eastern region and Swannanoa. Visitors will be drawn for multi-day stays for a variety of athletic events, educational programs, and recreational opportunities as they explore other tourism resources.

Collegiate swim meets will bring over 20 college teams to Buncombe County over the course of the year to compete at the Center. Warren Wilson Athletics is a member of the Coast to Coast Conference, a destination championship conference with members from across the United States. Therefore, when hosting events with conference members, most participants and guests will fly into Asheville and stay at local hotels and motels. Moreover, Warren Wilson is an NCAA Division III member and all Division III sports compete in a 70% or higher Division III schedule, which means teams from all over North Carolina, Tennessee, Georgia, and Virginia travel to compete at Warren Wilson.

The College plans to host both regular high school swim meets and post-season meets. These meets will bring dozens of competitors, coaching staff, and spectators from high schools outside Buncombe County to the Aquatic Center. These competitions, both collegiate and high school, will bring revenue into Buncombe County and the City of Asheville through both the use of hotels and the purchases of food for traveling teams. In addition, the College will build partnerships with local club swimming programs to serve as a host for their competitions. Lastly, Asheville is a destination site and is a great place to host a Wilderness First Aid certification class, which again will bring visitors to Buncombe County.

By expanding recreational options for tourists, the Aquatic Center will increase the likelihood of longer and repeat stays, which will boost hotel occupancy rates and support for local businesses. The Aquatic Center will serve tourists by offering recreation, relaxation, educational opportunities, fitness options, and convenience. The Center will enrich their travel experience to the area and contribute to a memorable and enjoyable visit.

Please provide your estimated total number of guests—both local and out-of-market—for each of the first three years of operation. Also include an estimated percentage for out-of-market visitors for each year.

	Total Guests (Local + Out-of-Market)	Percentage of Out-of-Market Visitors
Year 1	25000	43
Year 2	40000	43
Year 3	50000	43

How will future visitation to the project be tracked? Please specify the methods you plan to use (e.g., ticket sales, registrations, surveys, or other tracking tools).

Future visitation will be tracked through data analytics obtained through Oasys. Oasys is a company that helps organizations with communication, administrative efficiency, and maximizing financial potential. Oasys can track payments (ticket sales), demographic information such as gender, age, addresses, and phone numbers, and usage information such as camps, meets, classes, memberships, and/or corporate sponsor use. The College uses this company for registrations of all events hosted on campus. In order to track new visitors, Warren Wilson Athletics requires waivers of any guest that uses facilities. These waivers go into a form stack that is pulled monthly.

The College requires rental contracts of all outside groups using College facilities, which is how all outside partner use is tracked. Warren Wilson also scans all student, faculty, staff, and alumni membership ID cards at the front desk. This data can be used to generate statistical and demographic analyses of facility use.

Please describe how you came up with the above estimate for the number of days a typical out-of-market visitor would patronize your project during one visit in Buncombe County.

Three days is the typical length of a swim competition and/or camp, however, some of the winter trainings could last up to ten days. Only one or two competitors would have the ability to travel home

each day - the majority of them would have to spend the night.

Will your project draw out-of-market visitors to Buncombe County during identified periods of need for lodging room nights?

Yes. This facility will be open year-round and is expected to draw out-of-market visitors throughout the year with seasonal spikes. Swim meets are held throughout the year but competitive collegiate and high school swim seasons typically run from August to March. The Athletics Department also plans to host 7-10 day training camps over the College’s winter break time (three weeks between the end of December to the middle of January) for 2-3 college teams with 30-60 swimmers on their rosters. Add accompanying staff and faculty and these camps will bring around 2,160 out-of-market visitors to the Asheville area during the winter months.

Between June and September, the College hosts several multi-day and week-long events including the Swannanoa Gathering, the MFA Program for Writers, the Masters in Applied Climate Studies, the Climate Action Now Summit and programs, and the Mountain Institute for Lifelong Learning, which draw out-of-market visitors for week-long programs (The Swannanoa Gathering brings visitors to campus the entire month of July). Additionally, our Homecoming (held in October) and Family Weekend (held in September) events draw out-of-market alumni visitors and families that will stay past the event dates to enjoy Asheville and the surrounding areas. Access to the Warren Wilson College Aquatic Center will encourage extended stays.

What methodology do you plan to implement to determine the project’s impact upon lodging once the project opens?

The Oasys system can analyze a large amount of quantitative data that can be used to determine an estimated impact on lodging driven by swimming competitions, meets, and camps. In addition, Warren Wilson Athletics has partnerships with several hotels in Buncombe County and conducts a yearly review from will be drawn additional and/or supporting data.

The Colleges online marketing efforts will provide feedback regarding web traffic and unique interactions generated. The Marketing, Admissions, and Strategic Ventures teams will be tracking successful marketing campaigns as a part of normal operations.

Furthermore, the College will ensure that partnerships with tourism organizations include measurement tools for tracking the project’s impact on generating new visitors.

After your project opens, how many new, permanent full-time positions do you anticipate your project will generate that are directly related to the project? 1-3 positions

After your project opens, how many new, seasonal or part-time positions do you anticipate your project will generate that are directly related to the project?

The College will hire lifeguards and class instructors, incorporating assistance from its student Work Program to fill these positions and help run programs in the Center. This project will contribute to part-time and seasonal positions offerings in the area through the training and certification of lifeguards and swimming instructors. These trainings will be offered throughout the year, which will help Buncombe County alleviate some of the lifeguard shortage being felt across the country as a result of changing employment trends and COVID-19 (Appendix 4).

Alignment with Strategic Imperatives and Destination Brand

Please describe how the project is aligned with each of the four strategic pillars of Buncombe County

Tourism Development Authority. [Learn more about the Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority's Strategic Imperatives.](#)

How does your organization and proposed project complement and support the strategic imperative of: Delivering Balanced and Sustainable Growth?

The College's Aquatic Center will be open year round and will offer regular recreational programs such as swim and paddling practices, water safety training, scuba diving instruction, and personal watercraft instruction to cater to individuals seeking both recreation and education throughout the year.

How does your organization and proposed project complement and support the strategic imperative of: Encouraging Safe and Responsible Travel?

Warren Wilson College has a longstanding ethos of sustainability, a commitment to preserving natural and cultural resources, and a mission of helping people understand their footprint, all of which make the campus an ideal place for visitors to learn responsible tourism practices. The campus is recognized as a Certified Wildlife Habitat, a Native Plant Habitat, and a Certified Monarch Butterfly Waystation and is home for the Center for Working Lands—a working, learning, and living laboratory committed to demonstrating sustainable land management. As mentioned, the College is setting aside 800 acres of campus as a preserve and conservation easement. As part of the mission of the Aquatic Center, the College will partner with local organizations and businesses to create year-round events and programs to grow the local outdoor economy in a sustainable way. The Aquatic Center will complement nearby tourist attractions and encourage outdoor enthusiasts to extend their stays in Buncombe County.

How does your organization and proposed project complement and support the strategic imperative of: Engaging and Inviting More Diverse Audiences?

Access to the College's ADA-compliant Aquatic Center will complement the Buncombe County visitor experience and the College's inclusive programming will appeal to a broad, diverse demographic and those attending cultural and educational programs offered by local organizations, including the College's Swannanoa Gathering, which welcomed 1,058 visitors last summer; the MFA Program for Writers with approximately 120 visitors per year; and the Mountain Institute for Lifelong Learning with around 70 visitors.

The College is committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment to students, the community, and visitors; Bold.org ranked Warren Wilson College as the number one LGBTQ+ College two years in a row (2023 and 2024).

In alignment with the College's goal of advancing opportunity and access to diverse audiences, the College will establish partnerships with local organizations and host inclusive events focused on providing a resource for racially diverse audiences and LGBTQ visitors. The College will collaborate with an array of community groups to ensure the accessibility and success of the Aquatic Center in its return to a hub for aquatic education, recreation, safety, exercise, and events.

Sports and natural resources appeal to a diverse array of people and drive billions of dollars in tourist spending. With robust partnerships in place, visitors who are drawn to the College's natural, cultural, and educational resources are positioned to benefit from the institution's community connections. Because of the College community engagement commitment, the campus is a hive of community connections to trailblazers, entrepreneurs, businesses, nonprofits, and civic groups. The Aquatic Center will build community and provide an inclusive, trusted space for residents and visitors.

How does your organization and proposed project complement and support the strategic imperative of: Promoting and Supporting Asheville's Creative Spirit?

New and existing initiatives like the seasonal Makers Fairs, Farm School General Store, and pop-up market will mean Aquatic Center visitors will be provided a first-hand opportunity to sample and enjoy campus goods, student-made wares, and local products from Buncombe County businesses and artisans. Summer visitors will be able to enjoy a concert sponsored by the Chamber Music Society of the Carolinas here on campus in Kittredge Theatre during the Chamber Music Festival or experience the delight of traditional folk music sessions across campus throughout the Swannanoa Gathering, which

runs all of July. Additionally, the College’s thriving Arts and Craft department provides opportunities for visitors to learn about and meet local artists, attend a lecture or gallery show at the Elizabeth Holden Gallery, or attend workshops and demonstrations at the Blacksmithing forge, Woodworking shop or Fiber Arts studio.

Required Supporting Documentation

Proof of Legal Site Control of the Property: May provide copy of 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.



Proof of Legal Control.pdf

Proof of non-profit organization status through a filed IRS Form 990



Proof of Non-Profit Status.pdf

List of your organization's Board of Directors and affiliations



FY25 BOT Roster.pdf

Drawings, photos, or renderings related to the project (optional).



Aquatic Center Renderings.pdf

Completed Room Night Calculator



Room Night Calculator.xlsx

Project Budget - if possible, budget line items should align with the scope of work provided in the "Project Financial Information" section of this application. Please provide the project budget in a Microsoft Excel or Word format (.xls, .xlsx, .csv, .doc, .docx).



Project Budget (w_ Timeline).xlsx

Proof of non-TPDF funds raised to date for the project. Example documents can include the following: commitment letters, account statements that show available cash in a dedicated checking account, cancelled checks from funders, loan documents, or any other evidence demonstrating proof of other funds to be used for the Project.



Proof of Funding.pdf

Most recent Statement of Activities or Income Statement showing current year-to-date actual revenues and expenses compared to year-to-date budget and a year-end projection.



Budget to Actuals.pdf

Prior year Statement of Financial Activity showing previous year's total actual revenues and expenses compared to approved fiscal year budget.



Prior Year Statement of Activities.pdf

Statement of Financial Position or Balance Sheet showing current position and beginning year position.



Warren Wilson College 6-30-24 Audit.pdf

Letters of recommendation (up to 3) regarding your organization's ability to lead this project to success.



Rec Letter - Bill Christy (2025).pdf



Rec Letter - Eric Ager (2025).pdf

Any additional supporting documentation (optional).



Appendix.pdf



Example Weekly Pool Schedule & Prici...pdf



Marketing Plan.pdf

Terms of Agreement