

EXPLORE ASHEVILLE

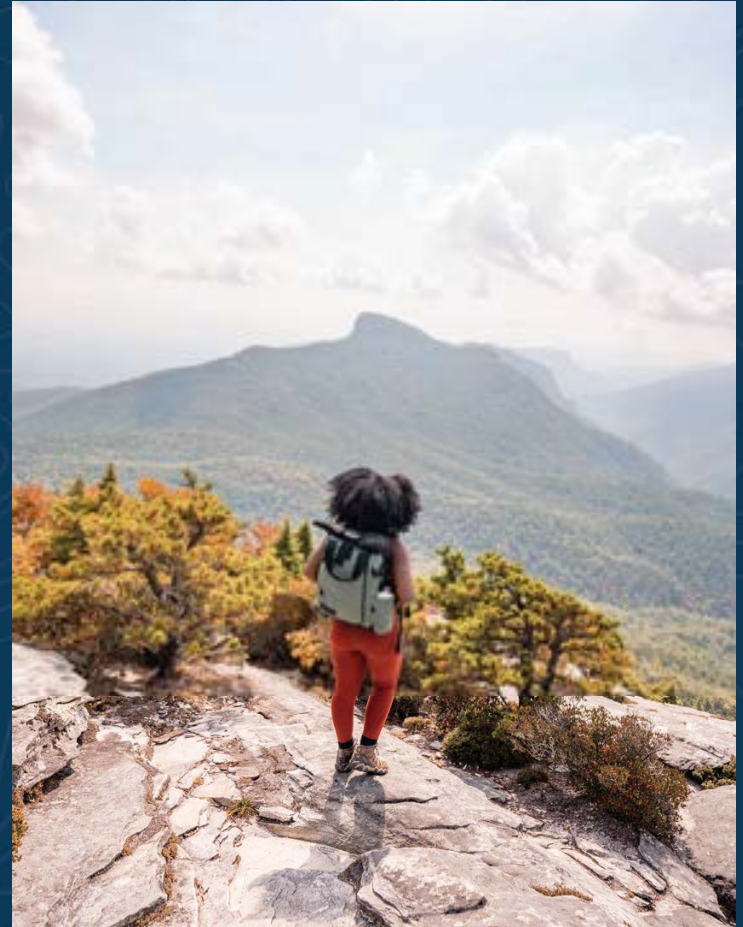
POWERED BY

Buncombe County Tourism
Development Authority

LIFT FUND
INFORMATION SESSION

AGENDA

- Welcome & Introductions
- LIFT Fund Program Guidelines Overview
 - Eligibility Criteria
 - Policies
 - Use of Funds
 - Application Process
 - Funding Pathways
 - Evaluation Criteria
- Roles & Responsibilities
- 2026 LIFT Fund Grant Cycle Timeline Review
- Q&A



BUNCOMBE COUNTY TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

BCTDA organizational overview, mission, and vision

The Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority (BCTDA) is the public authority created in 1983 by an act of the North Carolina Legislature to oversee the collection and investment of occupancy taxes paid by travelers who stay overnight in commercial lodging establishments, such as hotels and motels, bed and breakfast operations, and vacation rentals such as Airbnb and VRBOs.

The members of the BCTDA have a fiduciary responsibility to ensure that the tax dollars are spent in accordance with the specific legislation governing their use.

The members of the Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority carry on a long and proud legacy that has inspired economic growth in Asheville, Buncombe County, and Western NC.

BCTDA Mission Statement

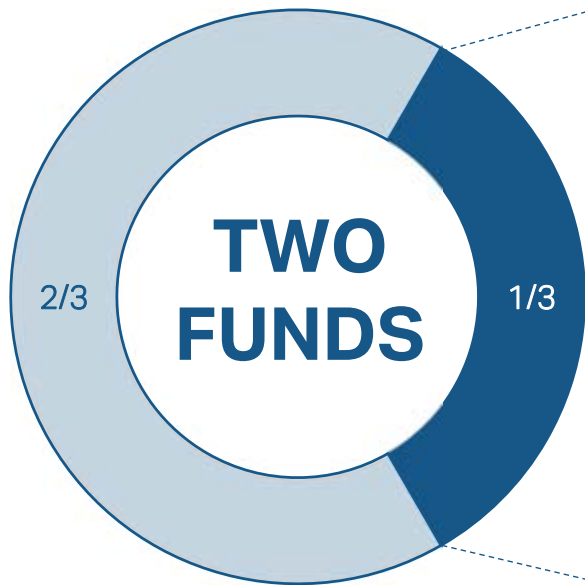
To be a leader in the economic development of Buncombe County by attracting and servicing visitors, generating income, jobs and tax revenues which make the community a better place to live and visit.

BCTDA Vision Statement

Asheville/Buncombe County will retain its unique, authentic and environmental charm while welcoming global visitors searching for personal enrichment and memorable experiences.



COMMUNITY CAPITAL PROJECT INVESTMENT



\$11.8M
PROJECTED IN
2026

**Legacy
Investment
From Tourism
(LIFT) Fund**

Provides financial investment for **tourism-related capital projects** in order to increase patronage of lodging facilities and **benefit the community at large** in Buncombe County, including **maintenance, design, project administration, restoration, rehabilitation, enhancement of natural resources, or expansion of necessary infrastructure.**

\$12.3M
PROJECTED IN
2027

**Tourism
Product
Development
Fund (TPDF)**

Provides financial investment for **major tourism capital projects** in order to increase patronage of lodging facilities in, and **further economic development** in Buncombe County.

Per legislation, cannot include operational expenses

TPDF & LIFT FUND'S LONGSTANDING LEGACY

Nearly \$110 million invested in 55 community projects since 2001

The John B. Lewis Soccer Complex at Azalea Park

ABYSA – JBL Soccer Complex

Grove Arcade

The Bonsai Garden at the North Carolina Arboretum

Asheville Visitor Center

WNC Veterans' Memorial at Pack Square Park

Buncombe County Civil War Trails

Pack Square Park / Pack Square Park Pavilion

Asheville Art Museum

Harrah's Cherokee Center – Asheville

Smoky Mountain Adventure Center

Navitat Canopy Adventures

UNCA - Sports Field Lighting

Pack Square Park Canopy

Highland Brewing Company

Ferry Road Community Greenways & Trails

Black Wall Street AVL

Gateway Park

Beacon Park

White Horse Black Mountain Community Patio

The Collider

RiverLink - Pearson Bridge River Access

Enka Ball Fields

Riverfront Destination Development 1.0 & 2.0

Asheville Museum of Science

WNC Nature Center

Asheville Community Theatre - Expansion & Renovation

Montreat College - Pulliam Stadium

WNC Farmers Market - Retail Revitalization

The Wortham Center – Phase I & II

Woodfin Blueway & Greenway

Black Mountain College Museum + Arts Center

Enka Recreation Destination

Center for Craft - National Craft Innovation Hub

YMI Cultural Center Improvements

Aston Park Tennis Center

Craggy Gardens & Picnic Area Renovations

Red House Gallery and Studios

UNCA On Campus Tennis Complex

Asheville Area Wayfinding Program

LEAF Global Arts Center

NC Arboretum - Garden Lighting & Parking Enhancements

African-American Heritage Museum

Black Cultural Heritage Trail Project

The Wortham Center - Air Ionization System

UNCA - Karl Straus Track

Asheville Municipal Golf Course

WNC Nature Center - Gateway to Southern Appalachians

NC Glass Center in Black Mountain

AVL UnPaved

Karen Cragnoin Park

AMOS Museum Beautification

Swannanoa River Greenway

McCormick Field

WNC Agricultural Center – Equine Facility

Coxe Avenue Complete Street

Blue Note Junction

Asheville Botanical Garden

Warren Wilson College Aquatics Center





LIFT FUND GUIDELINES

**EXPLORE
ASHEVILLE**
POWERED BY | Buncombe County Tourism
Development Authority

LIFT FUND GUIDELINES

Eligibility Criteria

Applicant Eligibility

- Applicant must be a federally recognized non-profit organization or government entity.*
- If the applicant is a non-profit organization, the organization must have been in operation for at least 2 years at the time of application

Project Eligibility

- Project must be principally located in Buncombe County.*
- Project must be a tourism-related capital project.*
- Project must (1) demonstrate ability to increase patronage of lodging facilities, meeting facilities, and convention facilities in Buncombe County by attracting tourists, business travelers, or both and (2) benefit the community at large in Buncombe County.*
- Project must demonstrate ability to balance both resident and visitor needs.*
- Project must not solely benefit a single lodging owner, lodging property, or be situated on a lodging property.
- At time of application, applicant must have legal control of the property through 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.
- Applicant must show how a minimum of a 1-to-1 funding match to the requested grant amount (excluding in-kind goods and services) will be achieved.

LIFT FUND GUIDELINES

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LIFT FUND GUIDELINES

Use of Funds

- Funding must be for one of the following uses:
 - New location or relocation
 - Enhancement or expansion of an existing location
 - Restoration or rehabilitation of an existing location
 - Capital maintenance of a tourism-related capital project
 - Design of a tourism-related capital project
 - Project Administration of a tourism-related capital project
 - Enhancement of natural resources
 - Expansion of necessary infrastructure
- Operational expenses will not be considered for funding

LIFT FUND GUIDELINES

Policies

- The LIFT Fund Committee may utilize a waiver of any non-legislatively mandated eligibility criteria to advance a project if it represents a significant impact upon lodging demand and Buncombe County economic sustainability. All projects must meet all eligibility criteria and requirements stated in legislation.
- LIFT Fund investments cannot be the first funds committed to a project.
- Recognizing that its resources are limited, BCTDA may grant funding that is less than that requested by the applicant.
- BCTDA reserves the right to award or deny grant funding to any project for any reason consistent with the intent of the legislation.
- BCTDA reserves the right to cancel the grant application cycle at any time and for any reason.
- Projects which either directly increase overnight lodging stays by themselves or support a larger initiative that will increase room nights will be evaluated equally.

LIFT FUND GUIDELINES

Policies

- BCTDA will not make payment directly to any vendor or individual. Payment will only be made to the applicant organization as reimbursement.
- If the grantee is unable to fund and/or complete the project, BCTDA may revoke all or part of the grant. The grantee may be forced to return some or all funding plus interest if the recipient is found to have used the funding inappropriately, if the project was not completed, or if the project scope or design was changed without approval of BCTDA.
- All applications are subject to the requirements regarding “public records” found in Chapter 132 of the North Carolina General Statutes. Submitted applications will be disclosed upon request.
- The applicant assumes the burden of all their expenses associated with this application.

LIFT FUND APPLICATION PROCESS

Two Phase Process

Phase I:

- Requests important preliminary information & is designed to assess eligibility of the application & conformity to the goals of the fund
- Does not require supporting documentation
- LIFT Fund Committee reviews all Phase I applications and successful applicants will be invited to participate in Phase II.

Phase II:

- Requires more detailed information & all required application documents
- Applicants are required to present projects in person to the LIFT Fund Committee
- Applicants are required to participate in a project site visit by the LIFT Fund Committee

REQUIRED APPLICATION DOCS – PHASE II

Project, Financial, Organizational, and Supplemental Information

Project Information:

- Proof of legal control of the property, through recorded deed or long-term lease agreement
- Detailed Project Budget
- Room Night Calculator
- Project Marketing Plan
- Drawings, photos, or renderings related to project
- Project feasibility study, if applicable

Organizational Information:

- Proof of non-profit organization status through a filed IRS Form 990
- List of Board of Directors and their affiliations
- List of key staff of organization and project, including description of their roles and responsibilities with the project

Financial Information:

- Statement of Activities (Income Statement) showing current year-to-date actual revenues and expenses compared to year-to-date budget and a year-end projection
- Prior year Statement of Activities (Income Statement) showing previous year's total actual revenues and expenses compared to approved fiscal year budget
- Statement of Financial Position (Balance Sheet) showing current position and beginning year position
- Financial Schedule or Project Pro Forma for first 3 years of operation

Supplemental Information:

- Letters of recommendation (up to 3) regarding your organization's ability to lead this project to success
- Additional supporting documentation, as needed

FUNDING PATHWAYS

Standard, Strategic Priority List, and Major Works Pathway

Standard Grant Cycle (Grant, Loan Guarantee, or Debt Service):

- Applicant must submit application through standard grant cycle.

Strategic Priority List:

- During the standard grant cycle, the LIFT Fund Committee may wish to recommend funding for a project but not yet have the funds available. As per legislation, the BCTDA cannot make a binding commitment to fund projects using future year revenues.
- LIFT Fund Committee may recommend the BCTDA place a project on the Strategic Priority List, to be considered when funding is available. Selected projects would receive priority for funding in future years.
- While the applicant will be required to provide an update to the BCTDA ensuring there have been no substantive changes to the project as presented, the applicant will not be required to resubmit a full application in a future grant cycle.

Major Works Pathway:

- For projects representing a minimum \$5 million capital investment and requiring multi-year funding, this approach allows applicants to present a project to the BCTDA for funding consideration outside of the standard LIFT Fund grant cycle.
- All potential projects must conform to LIFT Fund requirements and are subject to evaluation by the LIFT Fund Committee.
- Applicants interested in pursuing the Major Works Pathway are encouraged to consult with Explore Asheville staff in early stages of project planning.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

Viability of Project & Organization

- **Financial Stability of the Requesting Organization**

Each applicant organization will be evaluated for financial sustainability, and their perceived ability to raise additional funds as needed to bring the project to completion.

- **Strength of Business Planning**

If applicable, the proposed business plan for the project will be evaluated on its accuracy, completeness, and likelihood to support a successful and sustainable operation once the project has opened.

- **Strength of Sales and Marketing Plan/Investment**

If applicable, sales and marketing plans for projects will be evaluated upon the likelihood they will succeed in drawing visitation to the destination.

- **Timeliness of the Project**

Projects which are “shovel ready” may rate more highly than those which are still two or more years from beginning construction.

- **1-to-1 Funding Match Exceeded**

While it is a requirement for applying organizations to have secured a funding match equal to the amount for which they are applying from the LIFT Fund, projects that exceed the 1-to-1 requirement may receive particular consideration.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

Destination Differentiator

- **Strength of Brand Alignment**
Projects will be evaluated on whether they are consistent with the Asheville destination brand and provide additional support for the brand promise.
- **Uniqueness and Innovation of Project**
Attractions and activities which are new to the region or not available to visitors living in key feeder markets for the destination may be valued more highly than those which duplicate offerings already available to visitors.
- **Ability to Promote and Support the Local Creative Sector**
Projects which promote and support the community's creators and makers, and which enhance the destination will receive greater consideration.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

Project Impact

- **Ratio of Overnight Lodging Generated to Funding Requested**

The amount of LIFT Fund investment requested will be analyzed versus the potential return of new overnight lodging demand in Buncombe County to be generated by the project.

- **Generator of New and Incremental Room Nights**

The room night impact of a proposed project will be assessed on whether the project is drawing new visitors to the area, or simply pulling from existing visitors in Buncombe County while not increasing the number of new lodging room nights.

- **Scope of Market to be Served**

Projects that target audiences capable of filling area lodging are valued, but projects that draw new and untapped niche markets to Buncombe County may also be worthy of consideration.

- **Project as a True Motivator of Visits**

Projects will be evaluated based upon their ability to motivate new room nights, proven through sound analysis and data.

- **Scope of Impact Upon Lodging**

The impact of a project upon Buncombe County lodging will be considered not only in terms of demand generated, but also in terms of the geographic impact. Projects capable of generating lodging demand in more than one area of the county may rate more favorably.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

Project Impact (Continued)

- **Project's Benefit to Buncombe County Residents**

Projects will be evaluated based upon the expected benefit(s) the project will provide to the community at large of Buncombe County and the project's ability to balance both resident and visitor needs.

- **Ability to Serve as a Contributing Asset**

Projects that could support an important generator of destination room nights or enhance the visitor experience in Buncombe County, but which may not generate significant room nights by themselves will be considered. Applicants should demonstrate the potential for additional community benefit if their project is built.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

Alignment with BCTDA's Strategic Imperatives

- **Delivering Balanced and Sustainable Growth**

Projects will be evaluated based upon whether they lead to balanced and sustainable growth through distribution of visitors geographically across the county or seasonally throughout the year or days of the week.

- **Encouraging Safe and Responsible Travel**

Projects which encourage care and respect for natural, cultural, and human resources, or support the sustainability of outdoor recreation, will be given greater consideration.

- **Supporting Engagement with and Appealing to More Diverse Audiences**

The committee will assess the ability of a project to diversify audiences and support of place making, community connections, and business opportunities throughout the county.

- **Promoting & Supporting Asheville's Creative Spirit**

The Committee will assess the ability of a project to promote or support Asheville's local creative and maker community.

ROLES IN THE LIFT FUND PROCESS

Staff, committee members, and board are involved

Explore Asheville Staff

- Manage the application process and serve as point of contact for applicants
- Provide support to applicants throughout application process and post-award

LIFT Fund Committee

- Review applicant proposals and make funding recommendations to BCTDA board

BCTDA Board of Directors

- Final approval of grants based upon LIFT Fund Committee recommendations



LIFT FUND TIMELINE

Phase I & II

Date(s)	Milestone
Wednesday, April 1, 2026	Phase I Application Opens
Friday, May 1, 2026, 5:00PM EST	Phase I Application Closes
Week of May 18, 2026	Phase I Applicants Notified / Phase II Application Opens
Wednesday, July 15, 2026, 5:00PM EST	Phase II Application Closes
Week of August 3, 2026	Project Presentations
Week of August 10, 2026	Project Site Visits by LIFT Fund Committee
September 2026 Board Meeting	Committee Funding Recommendations presented to BCTDA



CONTACT INFORMATION

Questions?

For questions during the application process, please use contact information below.

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Destination Investment & Project Manager

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Mobile: 919-539-5157

