

**DURHAM COUNTY
NORTH CAROLINA**



**REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS
Golden LEAF Foundation Community-Based Grants Initiative – County Manager
Endorsement
RFP NO. 26-004**

**Proposals Due:
August 19, 2025
2:00 P.M. Eastern Time**



Introduction – Golden LEAF Foundation’s Community-Based Grants Initiative

Golden LEAF Foundation

Established in 1999 by the North Carolina General Assembly, the Golden LEAF Foundation was created to receive and manage a portion of the State of North Carolina’s disbursement under the Tobacco Master Settlement Agreement of 1998 between the four largest United States tobacco companies and the Attorneys General of 46 states that settled lawsuits over state Medicaid coverage of tobacco-related lawsuits. Under its charter, Golden LEAF’s mission is to “provide economic impact assistance to economically affected or tobacco-dependent regions of North Carolina.”

In the over 25 years since its founding, Golden LEAF has worked to strengthen the State’s rural, tobacco-dependent, and economically distressed areas of the State through grantmaking, collaboration, innovation, and effective stewardship of the Master Settlement proceeds, contributing to the creation of 68,000 new jobs, more than \$780 million in new payrolls, and training and professional development for more than 98,000 workers across the State of North Carolina. Golden LEAF investments support a broad range of activities, including, but not limited to, the following:

- Education assistance for tobacco farmers and other works affected or projected to be affected by a decline in production of tobacco products;
- Job training and employment assistance for tobacco farmers and other workers dependent on tobacco farming, production, and sales to transition to other sources of income;
- Scientific research to develop new uses for tobacco or for the development of alternative cash crops;
- Economic hardship assistance experience by tobacco farmers, quota owners, their families and others as a result of decline in quota and/or production of tobacco or tobacco products;
- Public works and industrial recruitment to local governments for upgrading utilities, transportation, and other public service infrastructure to attract new businesses or for more general economic development purposes;
- Health and human services to improve health care and other social services needed to maintain the stability of tobacco-dependent communities;
- Community assistance in the form of grants and/or loans to economically depressed and deteriorating tobacco-dependent communities, to be used exclusively for public purposes.

Community Based Grants Initiative (CBGI)

One of Golden LEAF’s most important initiatives is the Community-Based Grant program. Each year, Gold LEAF invites organizations from the different Prosperity Zones established by the North Carolina Department of Commerce to apply for grants from their \$11 million Community-Based Grants Initiative (CBGI). Under the program, Golden LEAF will only award up to three projects in any one county, with total funding not to exceed \$1.5 million awarded to the County.

While counties play an important role in the CBGI program, as described below, the program accepts applications from any 501(c)(3) organization, county and municipal governments,



community colleges, universities, and other governmental entities. Durham County will accept proposals for endorsement from any organization that meets the Golden LEAF criteria; private individuals and for-profit organizations are not eligible to receive an endorsement.

For awarded projects, funding cannot be used to purchase land or buildings, may not be used for grant administration, and cannot be used to provide impermissible private benefits. Selected projects will be subject to due diligence by Golden LEAF staff, Board, and legal counsel, and will be subject to all reporting requirements of Golden LEAF, the North Carolina State Auditor, and the North Carolina Office of State Budget and Management (OSBM). Grantees will be expected to comply with all terms and conditions of the grantee agreement, and any and all communication to and from Golden LEAF are subject North Carolina Public Records law.

Through the program, Golden LEAF prioritizes grant awards for projects that the organization feels have the potential to have a significant impact, with funding awards limited to projects that address the following Golden LEAF priorities:

- **Job Creation and Economic Investment**
- **Agriculture**
- **Workforce Preparedness**

Job Creation and Economic Investment

The first of three CBIGI priority areas, Golden LEAF targets projects that focus on creating and retaining jobs, attracting new business to North Carolina, expanding industries, and training new workers, with a particular emphasis on creating, expanding, or improving business activity in tobacco-dependent, economically distressed, or rural communities. Targeted outcomes for this priority area include, but are not limited to, investments in publicly owned infrastructure, investments in privately owned property, plant, and equipment, new full-time jobs created, new housing units created, job retention, and wage increases.

Agriculture

The Golden LEAF Foundation views agriculture as an economic development engine. CBIG grants for agriculture projects have supported the development of new crops, expanded markets for agricultural products, scientific research, training for farmers, cost-effective techniques and value-added agricultural enterprises.

Workforce Preparedness

The final CBIGI priority area, Golden LEAF supports workforce projects designed to increase the number of qualified individuals with skills aligned with the current and future needs of North Carolina businesses and to prepare students with the technical and life skills necessary to enter work. Targeted outcomes for projects in this area include, but are not limited to, increasing the number of students earning academic credentials, industry/third party certifications, licenses, or other credentials, increasing completion of CTE pathways, increasing participation in work-based learning, and increasing opportunities for secondary students to receive meaningful exposure and opportunities to explore local career opportunities.

County Manager Endorsement Required



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While the grant program is open to a broad range of public sector organizations, only projects that have been endorsed by a county manager will be eligible to submit an application for consideration by the Golden LEAF Board of Directors. Per Golden LEAF requirements, each county manager within the Prosperity Zone for that year's competition can endorse a slate of up to four projects for consideration. Golden LEAF defers to the county manager for each county to determine the process for identifying which projects will be endorsed for the initiative. Each county manager is permitted to submit up to **four (4) total projects** with a total cumulative funding amount of **\$2,000,000**; however, the maximum amount for an individual project to be endorsed cannot exceed **\$1,500,000**.

CBIG Application Timeline

The CBIG application process is a multi-stage process involving staff at both counties within the year's selected Prosperity Zone and the Golden LEAF foundation. For Fiscal Year 2026, County Managers are required to submit a final list of endorsed projects to the Golden LEAF Foundation by **September 8, 2025**. Following submission of the endorsed projects, Golden LEAF staff then coordinate with organizations that have received an endorsement from a County Manager regarding the process of applying for the grant itself. Applications are subsequently due to Golden LEAF by **November 20, 2025**. Golden LEAF staff will review submitted applications from November 2025 through January 2026, including conducting site visits to potential applicants as necessary. Final decisions on grant awards are anticipated to be made on **February 5, 2026**.

Golden LEAF Feedback – Project Worksheets

If an organization desires Golden LEAF feedback on their potential project prior to endorsement by a County Manager, an organization can complete a Project Worksheet (Attachment A) and submit it to the County by **August 3, 2025**. The County will then submit the worksheets to Golden LEAF by the deadline on **August 4, 2025**; worksheets submitted to the County prior to the August 3rd deadline will be submitted to Golden LEAF prior to the August 4th deadline. Golden LEAF has indicated that it will provide feedback on Project Worksheet to counties by August 14, 2025. The County will then share any feedback with the organizations that submitted the Project Worksheet. **Submission of a Project Worksheet and feedback from Golden LEAF will not be considered as part of the County's evaluation process.** Based on feedback from Golden LEAF, interested organizations can determine whether to make any changes to their proposals prior to the submission deadline to the County.

Golden LEAF CBIG Competitive Criteria

In addition to limiting projects to the three listed priority areas, Golden LEAF's CBIG program standards identify certain project characteristics that the organization prioritizes in selecting projects for funding. Importantly, Golden LEAF highlights the importance of projects that **clearly meet identified issues or needs in the County, address the Golden LEAF priority areas, help improve human and/or physical capital that makes the county more attractive to grow economic opportunity, and which are aligned with investments in the building blocks of economic growth.** Golden LEAF also **encourages** projects that are:

- Strategic;
- Demonstrate immediate need and the ability to put funds to work quickly;
- Focused on action rather than planning projects;



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- Leverage additional funds or investment;
- Builds on previous community planning processes;
- Evidence of community buy-in and support from a variety of citizens and organizations;
- Project sustainability.

Conversely, Golden LEAF notes that there are several characteristics of potential projects that decrease the likelihood of a potential project being funded. Specifically, Golden LEAF **discourages** submission of projects that are targeted at or include the following characteristics:

- Support tourism, arts, or cultural resources;
- Support emergency services, including fire departments;
- Support general social services;
- Include reimbursements for prior expenditures;
- Support a capital campaign or organizational endowments;
- Include general maintenance and operational support;
- Fund development of infrastructure not related to economic development;
- Fund repair or replace existing equipment and infrastructure.

The County will not consider projects for endorsement that include characteristics that the Golden LEAF discourages.

Durham County CBIG Competitive Criteria

In addition to ensuring that proposed programs are aligned with the Golden LEAF criteria, the County will also prioritize projects that meet the following characteristics:

- **Impact on Unincorporated/Rural Areas and Residents of Durham County** – Given the Golden LEAF Foundation's overall mission, the County will prioritize those projects that are expected to provide the greatest economic benefits to residents and communities within unincorporated and/or rural sections of Durham County. These projects are more likely to receive funding through the CBIG program. Projects that are designed to only or predominantly serve residents or communities within the City limits will not be prioritized for funding.
- **Demonstrated Track Record of Success** – For proposals that are expansions or continuations of existing programming for an organization, the County will prioritize those projects that have a demonstrated track record of success. Respondents should provide clear information as to the outcomes of previous projects or programming as supporting evidence of past success. For programs that are new initiatives or pilots, respondents should provide evidence of the organization's past success in similar areas or with other types of similar projects.
- **Evidence-Based Practices** – The County will prioritize selection of those projects that utilize models or theories of action that are informed by best practices or evidence-based research. This will allow the County to prioritize those projects that have the greatest chance of accomplishing intended outcomes.
- **Proposed Budget** – The County will include an evaluation of the projects proposed budget in its consideration of submitted projects. Specifically, the County will consider the following in its evaluation of the budget:



- The County will prioritize programs such that the County is able to submit the maximum number of endorsements to Golden LEAF (4). As noted above, individual projects cannot exceed \$1,500,000 in total cost, while the four cumulative projects cannot exceed \$2,000,000. Accordingly, the County will not consider projects with a budget greater than \$1,500,000. While the County is not otherwise establishing any other limits on the amount of funding sought, the County will prioritize the selection of those projects that allow for the submission of the maximum 4 proposals to Golden LEAF.
 - The County will prioritize projects with budgets that are focused on providing services or otherwise increasing benefits to for residents or stakeholders. Proposals that include substantial costs associated with current operating costs (including salary costs for existing staff) for an organization will not be scored as highly.
- **Timeline for Implementation** – The County will prioritize selection of projects for endorsement that are able to be implemented quickly and completely within the CBIG timeline.

Important Considerations

In addition to ensuring that proposed projects align with the Golden LEAF and Durham County priorities identified above, organizations interested in submitting proposals for potential endorsement by the County Manager should consider the following:

- This Request for Proposals (RFP) is only to seek endorsement of a project by the County Manager for ultimate application to the Golden LEAF Foundation for the Community-Based Grants Initiative. While the County is using its eBids system to publish this RFP and will collect proposals through its Procurement Section, **this RFP will not result in an award of a grant or contract for an endorsed project by Durham County. Selection for endorsement in no way guarantees that a project will ultimately receive funding from Golden LEAF nor does it create any commitment on the part of Durham County to provide funding for the selected organization(s).**
- After endorsing a project, Durham County will have no further involvement in the Golden LEAF CBIG application process for a specific project. **The County will not participate in or support any CBIG grant applications submitted by external organizations.**
- Endorsement of a project for submission to Golden LEAF for the CBIG program does not indicate a commitment by the County to provide any sort of financial support for the project in future fiscal years, whether the project is ultimately selected for Golden LEAF funding or not.
- Durham County is an eligible potential applicant for the Golden LEAF CBIG program. As such, County departments may submit proposals for consideration under this RFP. No representatives or staff members from County departments that submit a proposal will be permitted to participate in evaluations of submitted proposals.
- Durham County is not restricting proposals solely to organizations located in Durham County. However, under Golden LEAF CBIG criteria endorsed projects can **only** be implemented within a single jurisdiction unless a regional application is submitted. Regional applications do not require County Manager endorsement and Durham County



will not consider them through the endorsement process. Additional questions about regional applications should be directed to [Golden LEAF Foundation](#) program staff.

Submission Instructions and Process Highlights

1. **SOLICITATION OF PROPOSALS**

The County of Durham has opened a public application for proposals for endorsement from the County Manager for the Golden LEAF CBIG program. Durham County will accept requests submitted to the Durham County Government by **5:00 p.m. on August 19, 2025. Responses must be emailed to bidsprocurement@dconc.gov by the proposed deadline. No exceptions.**

2. **APPLICANT ORGANIZATIONAL STATUS**

Nonprofits with 501(c)(3) status are eligible to apply for endorsement. Local governmental organizations including Durham County and City of Durham departments, Durham Public Schools, Durham Technical Community College, and local Institutes of Higher Education (IHEs) are also eligible to apply for endorsement. Individuals, businesses (Sole-Proprietors, Partnerships, Limited Liability Corporations, and Corporations), or any company or organized group that is not a government-affiliated agency or nonprofit will not be allowed to apply.

3. **COMMUNICATION WITH PROPOSERS**

There will not be any information sessions associated with this RFP. Questions related to the RFP process should be emailed to John Keefer, County Grants Administrator at jkeefe@dconc.gov. All communication between County staff and prospective Proposers should be in writing. Any questions should be submitted by August 11, 2025.

4. **PROPOSAL DUE DATE**

Proposals must be submitted via email to bisprocurement@dconc.gov by **5:00pm on August 19, 2025**. Proposals cannot be submitted directly to the County Grants Administrator.

5. **LATE PROPOSALS**

Proposals received after the date and time specified will not be considered, no exceptions.

6. **SCHEDULE**

The following is the anticipated schedule for the RFP Process:

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------|
| ○ Issue RFP and Endorsement Application | July 29, 2025 |
| ○ Project Worksheet Submission Deadline (Optional) | August 3, 2025 |
| ○ Application Submission Deadline | August 19, 2025 |
| ○ Deadline for receiving questions | August 11, 2025 |
| ○ Deadline for receiving Durham County answers | August 13, 2025 |
| ○ Notice of Intent to Endorse | No later than September 7, 2025 |

7. **APPLICATION REVIEW CRITERIA**

After receiving the proposals, a review committee will evaluate each application submitted based on the criteria listed below. The application review process will include County staff and relevant subject matter experts, who will evaluate the proposals against the criteria identified below. Each panelist will independently score the proposals and the proposals with the highest scores will be



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recommended to the County Manager for ultimate selection. The County Manager will maintain the discretion to either accept the panel's recommendation or to select a different submitted proposal, provided the selected proposal's score is still within the highest 50% of scored proposals. The County Manager may decide to endorse less than the full number of proposals allowed by the Golden LEAF Foundation.

Applicants shall not assume that any information shared with the County prior to this RFP will be considered in the evaluation process. The evaluation team may or may not have prior knowledge of any discussions and processes. **Evaluation will be completed based on the information submitted in response to the application only.**

The following factors will be considered for evaluation:

- a. Alignment with Golden LEAF Organizational Priorities
- b. Alignment with Golden LEAF Competitive Criteria
- c. Expected Impact on Unincorporated/Rural Residents and Communities
- d. Demonstrated Track Record of Organizational Success
- e. Utilization of Evidence-Based Practices
- f. Proposed Budget
- g. Evidence of Community Buy-In
- h. Complexity/Timeline for Implementation

8. DISCREPANCIES AND OMISSIONS

Should a Proposer find discrepancies in, or omissions from the documents, or should it be in doubt as to their meaning, he/she should at once notify the County, and a written Addendum shall be issued. The County will not be responsible for any oral instructions.

9. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The consideration and endorsement of any non-profit agency or local government entity shall be carried out in a manner consistent with the Code of Ethics for Appointed and Elected Officials of Durham County, adopted by the Board of County Commissioners on December 13, 2010. Applicants will have to complete a Conflicts of Interest form as a part of the application process.

10. MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS

All Organizations submitting a proposal will be notified upon a final determination by the County.

11. PUBLIC RECORD

Unless otherwise exempt under applicable law, applications and application materials are public.



Durham County Government Golden LEAF Community-Based Grants Initiative

Project Endorsement Application

(Project Proposals must be submitted via email to bidsprocurement@dconc.gov)

APPLICANT INFORMATION

Organization Name: _____

Organization Address: _____



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Contact Person Name: _____

Title: _____

Email: _____

Organization Website: _____

Eligible Organization Type:

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Local Government Entity | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Institute of Higher Education | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Eligible Non-Profit | <input type="checkbox"/> |

PROJECT/PROGRAM INFORMATION

Project/Program Name: _____

General Project Overview

- 1. Please provide a general narrative overview of your proposed project, including the services to be provided and/or activities to be completed, a timeline for project implementation, targeted service recipients or beneficiaries, identified community partners or key stakeholders, planned location(s) for service delivery, etc. (Limit 1000 words)**



Golden LEAF Priority Areas

2. Please select the Golden LEAF Project Area(s) with which your project aligns:

- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| Job Creation and Economic Investment | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Workforce Development | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Agriculture | <input type="checkbox"/> |

3. How does your project align with the identified Golden LEAF Foundation priority areas? How will your project contribute to the identified priority areas within Durham County? (Limit 500 words)

Project Need and Community Benefits

- 4. What is the issue or need that your proposed project seeks to address? Why is addressing this need an urgent priority for Durham County? If available, include any data that supports your organization's assertion of community need? (Limit 500 words)**
- 5. How will your project benefit residents and/or communities located in unincorporated or rural areas of Durham County? (Limit 750 words)**
- 6. What types of community engagement have you utilized in the design of your proposed project? What type of feedback have you received from community members on your proposed project or activities? Do you have any evidence of community buy-in for your project or has your project been designed or evolved based on received community feedback? (Limit 500 words)**

Program Outcomes and Likelihood of Success

- 7. What are the primary targeted outcomes for your organization's potential grant project? How will your organization measure progress towards accomplishment of these objectives? What sources of data do you anticipate utilizing to measure project success? (Limit 750 Words)**
- 8. Please describe any previous experience your organization has executing the services and/or activities planned under your proposed project. What success or outcomes has your organization achieved in these areas? If this project represents a new initiative or type of work for your organization, please describe success that your organization has had with other grant-funded projects, pilot programs, or similar types of activities. (Limit 500 Words)**
- 9. What sources of evidence-based research, if any, are reflected in the design of your organization's proposed project? What types of best practices do you intend to utilize for your project, if any? (Limit 500 words)**

Alignment with Organizational Strategic Planning



- 10. Does the proposed project reflect or build off any strategic plan or other completed planning process conducted by the organization? (Limit 250 words)**

Proposed Project Budget and Budget Narrative

- 11. Please complete the budget template below.**

Note: The Golden LEAF CBIG program does not require a match, nor does Durham County factor matching resources into the evaluation of proposals. Information on additional funding for the project is only included to provide further context into the scope of proposed projects.

Proposed Budget

Budget Category	Golden LEAF CGBIG Funding	Other Funding	Total Funding
Personnel			
Equipment and Supplies (Non- Technology)			
Technology			
Capital/Construction			
Design/Engineering Services			
Other Contractual Services			
Personnel			
Other			
Total			

- 12. Please provide a detailed budget narrative that clearly explains and justifies each line item in the proposed budget. The narrative should align with the project's goals and activities and should provide sufficient detail to sufficiently understand the specific types of planned expenses within each budget category, how those expenses relate to previously described project activities, and the basis for the estimated costs/how the amounts were determined. (Limit 750 words)**



ATTESTATION

I hereby certify that the information contained in this proposal and all accompanying documents is true, complete, and accurate to the best of my knowledge. I understand that any false, fictitious, or fraudulent statements or claims may result in the rejection of this application.

Signature: _____

Name (Printed): _____

Title: _____

Organization: _____

Date: _____