

# PRESS RELEASE



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## **\$5 Million Grant Fund to Help Restart Local Tourism Businesses and Put People Back to Work**

*Applications Open for the Buncombe County Tourism Jobs Recovery Fund*

**ASHEVILLE, NC (May 20, 2020)** — On Friday, May 15, 2020, Mountain BizWorks began accepting applications for the Buncombe County Tourism Jobs Recovery Fund – a \$5 million grant program established by the Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority and designed to bolster the area’s tourism-based economy as recovery efforts begin. Applications will be accepted through May 31. All applications submitted by the deadline will be considered equally.

“One-in-seven jobs in Buncombe County is sustained by tourism,” said Stephanie Brown, Explore Asheville president and CEO. “The COVID-19 pandemic has essentially shut down that entire industry for months. As restrictions ease and recovery begins, these grants will be a vital resource for reopening these businesses safely and sustainably.”

The Fund’s mission is to preserve and safely reopen the region’s unique and diverse local business ecosystem and protect tourism-related jobs. It aims to do this through simple and streamlined micro-grants of up to \$5,000 and full grants up to \$50,000.

Businesses and nonprofits are encouraged to apply if they are based in Buncombe County, have between 2 and 200 employees, and provide a direct in-person tourism experience – like restaurants, retail establishments, galleries, attractions, tours and activities, entertainment and event venues, theaters, museums, and breweries,

wineries, cideries, and distilleries. Full eligibility requirements are available at [tourismfund.org](http://tourismfund.org).

“Our local businesses are central to what makes Buncombe County such a great place to live, work, and visit,” said Matthew Raker, executive director of Mountain BizWorks. “Over the past two months, we’ve heard from hundreds of small business owners impacted by the decline in tourism and other COVID-19 challenges. The Buncombe County Tourism Jobs Recovery Fund will provide timely, flexible, and critically needed assistance to help ensure that the vibrant and diverse small business community here rebounds and continues to provide the nationally renowned experiences that make this area such a great place to visit and live in.”

Within the first five days of applications opening, almost 80 small businesses and nonprofits had applied for Buncombe County Tourism Jobs Recovery Fund grants.

“I can’t adequately describe how much potential impact the Buncombe County Tourism Jobs Recovery Fund could have on Asheville’s independent restaurants,” said Jane Anderson, executive director of AIR, Asheville Independent Restaurant Association. “I think Mountain BizWorks, as a known and trusted organization, is the right choice to act as the administrator for the Fund. We are all so appreciative of the work that the TDA, the Asheville Buncombe Hotel Association and Explore Asheville CEO, Stephanie Brown have put into the development of this fund as we all deal with unprecedented times.”

The Buncombe County Tourism Jobs Recovery Fund, authorized by the NC General Assembly and administered by Mountain BizWorks, was created by the Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority with occupancy tax revenue dedicated to tourism product development.

Full program details and application guidance information are available at [tourismfund.org](http://tourismfund.org).

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### **About Mountain BizWorks**

Mountain BizWorks provides learning opportunities, coaching, and financing to emerging and established small businesses in Western North Carolina. We proudly create access to capital and support the local entrepreneurial spirit, in spite of barriers to traditional resources. We turn the dream of business ownership into a reality. For more information, visit [mountainbizworks.org](http://mountainbizworks.org).

### **About the Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority**

Established by legislation in 1983, the Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority invests occupancy tax revenue to attract some 3.9 million people who stay overnight in Buncombe County lodging facilities, providing customers for local businesses. In total, the people who visit Buncombe County spend \$2 billion at local businesses annually, supporting one in seven jobs in Buncombe and generating \$119 million in state and local tax revenues, for a total economic impact of \$3.1 billion. For more information, visit [bctda.org](http://bctda.org).