



GRANT OPPORTUNITY
Organizational Capacity Building
Strengthening Operations and Building Organizational Health
Open from May 19 to June 6, 2025

Capacity Building support is funding for activities that help strengthen strategically aligned partners' internal operations to achieve long-term performance and sustainability. It is not meant to support program expenses or service delivery.

Grant sizes will range from \$15,000 to \$50,000 and can be used over a two-year period.

Who is eligible to apply: 501(c)(3) nonprofit public charities of all sizes that serve the Qualla Boundary and 18 counties of Western North Carolina; fiscal sponsorship organizations; government and governmental organizations, faith-based organizations; colleges and universities

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

The following questions are asked as part of the Capacity Building application. They are included here as a preview. All applications must be submitted through Dogwood Health Trust's website at <https://dogwoodhealthtrust.org/grantmaking>.

1. Tell us about your organization's core work and how it contributes to the health and wellbeing of the people of Western North Carolina. (470/500)

Color My Outdoors is committed to reshaping the outdoor narrative in Western North Carolina, confronting entrenched barriers that disproportionately affect Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities.

The Need

BIPOC communities in Western North Carolina contend with enduring challenges such as historical land displacement, persistent gentrification pressures, systematic redlining practices, and the erasure of cultural histories. These issues not only undermine physical health but also have profound implications for mental well-being and community cohesion. These communities continue to grapple with stark disparities in access to green spaces and outdoor amenities in our region. For instance, Black legacy communities in Asheville public transportation routes do not connect to the abundant green spaces of Buncombe County. Moreover, ongoing gentrification and historical redlining practices have created controversy around nature-forward initiatives like AVLUnpaved, limiting BIPOC residents' opportunities for outdoor recreation and exacerbating health disparities. In rural and outlying counties, despite the availability of trails and outdoor spaces, a history of racial harm and exclusion persists, impacting access and participation in outdoor activities.

Color My Outdoors catalyzes change by providing an entry point for nature-deprived communities and individuals who may be hesitant to engage with outdoor environments. Our initiatives are designed to honor and reflect their culture and ancestral connection to the land, empowering BIPOC individuals to reclaim their rightful place in nature.

Our Work

Color My Outdoors addresses these challenges through a comprehensive approach for systemic change:

- **Changing Perceptions:** Through storytelling and media initiatives, we highlight the rich contributions of BIPOC individuals to outdoor spaces, challenging stereotypes and promoting inclusive narratives.
- **Building Skills & Confidence:** We introduce adults to the outdoors through experiential learning, equipping them with the skills and self-assurance needed to engage with nature and share these experiences with their communities.
- **Collaborating Toward Change:** We forge alliances with local businesses and community groups to expand access to outdoor activities and environmental education for BIPOC communities, advocating for policy changes that promote equity and inclusion.
- **Cultivating Leaders:** Leadership development programs provide BIPOC individuals with essential certifications, empowering them to pursue careers in the outdoor industry while fostering economic equity and leadership.

Our Impact

Our impact extends beyond access to the outdoors and physical health gains to address social determinants of health (SDOH) impacting BIPOC communities in Western North Carolina, notably legacy Black and Hispanic communities. By fostering meaningful relationships with nature and advocating for equitable access to the land, Color My Outdoors empowers BIPOC residents to overcome fears and stereotypes that historically limit their engagement with the outdoors.

Through our programs, BIPOC individuals gain essential skills, confidence, and community relationships necessary to fully participate in outdoor activities. These experiences are transformative, providing avenues for reclaiming physical and mental well-being. By dismantling barriers and promoting inclusive outdoor spaces, we

contribute to improved mental health outcomes, reduced stress levels, enhanced resilience, and stronger community connections.

2. How do you stay engaged with and accountable to the community you serve? **(423/500)**

At Color My Outdoors, we are deeply committed to amplifying the voices of BIPOC communities across Western North Carolina, ensuring their perspectives and contributions shape our initiatives. Our approach is anchored in representation and community engagement, which play a pivotal role in building trust and fostering meaningful dialogue.

Founder Simone Adams, a Black Woman and nonprofit leader with over 20 years of experience in operations, strategic planning, and equity-driven fundraising, leads our organization. Supported by a board composed of Women of Color with deep Southern roots, including the Southeast Marketing Director for REI Co-op covering the Asheville area, a Tribal citizen of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, a Buncombe County-based social justice organizer and co-founder of Asheville's Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) Association, and an environmental advocate with extensive policy experience in Appalachia, our leadership team ensures that our strategies are informed by diverse perspectives.

Inclusivity is fundamental to our organization, reflected in our bylaws' Article II, "Stakeholder Engagement and Inclusivity," which embeds equity at all levels of our work. This commitment mandates prioritizing diverse voices and perspectives, ensuring geographic representation and equitable decision-making, with a board composition where at least two-thirds (2/3) identify as People of Color.

We are ready to launch our community advisory committees, comprised of diverse stakeholders, including leaders from AAPI, Latina/o/x, Black, Indigenous, and other marginalized communities with inclusivity across gender, sexuality, generations, and ability. These committees provide critical insights and guidance, ensuring our programs are responsive to community needs and aligned with cultural sensitivities.

Our engagement strategy includes platforms that enable us to elevate marginalized voices, share authentic narratives, and advocate for systemic change. For instance, our recent article "Mountains to Mingling: How This Western North Carolina Affinity Group Continues to Uplift Asian Voices in the Outdoor Community" (read it [here](#)) highlights our efforts to spotlight AAPI voices in outdoor spaces. This initiative not only celebrates cultural diversity but also fosters a sense of belonging and representation within the outdoor community.

While many organizations hope to provide equitable access and create inclusive policies, few of these organizations have leaders, boards, and programmatic teams that represent the communities they wish to serve. Even fewer understand how to gain the

trust and build relationships with the communities to enact the change they wish to impart. Color My Outdoors began as a for-us-by-us grassroots movement rooted in local communities. But our vision, our leadership team, and our ability encompass enterprise-level ambitions aimed at transforming the outdoor narrative on a larger scale. Through strategic partnerships, innovative programs, and advocacy efforts, we are poised to bridge the gap between grassroots activism and industry leadership, creating lasting systemic change and ensuring all communities have equitable access to outdoor spaces.

3. From the list below, please select and rank the top three areas your organization would prioritize for a capacity building investment over the next 24 months. For each selected area, briefly describe how you would use capacity building funding to strengthen your effectiveness and deepen your impact. (493/500 words)

- *Strategic Planning*
- *Other Planning Efforts*
- *Staff, Leadership and/or Board Development*
- *Community Engagement or Increasing Access to Programs or Services*
- *Learning and Evaluation*
- *Advocacy Efforts*
- *Improve Operations and Systems (accounting, legal, HR, IT, etc.)*
- *Resource or Funding Development*
- *Communications, Development or Marketing*
- *Relationship Development or Increasing Collaborations/Connections*

1) Staff, Leadership, and Board Development

Capacity Building Investment:

Color My Outdoors recognizes the critical role of strong leadership and a well-supported team in advancing our mission.

- **Hiring Operational Staff:** Hire an operations assistant and a program lead to allow our leadership team to focus fully on executive strategy and fundraising.
- **Board Training:** Conduct targeted board training sessions to empower our board members to provide strategic oversight, leverage their networks for fundraising, and ensure alignment with our mission and values.
- **Leadership Pathways:** Build career development pathways for staff and board members. This investment will include professional development opportunities and leadership training to cultivate a diverse pipeline of future leaders within our organization.

Impact and Effectiveness:

By strengthening our internal infrastructure through staff and board development, Color My Outdoors aims to build a culturally competent and resilient organization. This

investment will increase operational efficiency, foster a supportive work environment, and enhance our ability to manage growth effectively.

2) Community Engagement

Capacity Building Investment:

To deepen our impact and expand access to our programs and services, Color My Outdoors proposes investing in community engagement strategies that increase access initiatives.

- **Community Advisory Committee:** Launch a pilot Community Advisory Committee to guide program development, bring cultural insights, and build trust within our communities. This committee will play a pivotal role in ensuring our initiatives remain community-centered and responsive to local needs.
- **Feedback Loops:** Establish robust feedback loops to continuously gather input from community members. This means going into the communities we serve, participating in their community activities, and meeting them where they are to introduce them to our work and get feedback on how we can be a better partner. This feedback will inform strategic decision-making, program design, and implementation, ensuring our initiatives are relevant, inclusive, and impactful.

Impact and Effectiveness:

By prioritizing community engagement and increasing access, Color My Outdoors aims to deepen our connection with BIPOC communities, foster a sense of belonging, and promote equity in outdoor spaces.

3) Funding Development

Capacity Building Investment:

Color My Outdoors recognizes the critical importance of securing sustainable, unrestricted funding to support and expand our mission-driven initiatives.

- **Diversified Revenue Strategy:** Secure unrestricted funds to support operational sustainability and flexibility, enabling us to respond effectively to emerging needs and opportunities. This investment will prioritize the development and cultivation of a diversified donor base, including major gifts, corporate contributions, and individual donors through a comprehensive donor-advised fund (DAF) strategy. Our strategy also includes developing earned income streams through fee-for-service offerings.
- **Financial Sustainability Planning:** Create a robust financial sustainability plan that integrates long-term fundraising goals with programmatic impact. This investment will include capacity-building activities aimed at strengthening our financial management systems, donor stewardship practices, and grant management capabilities.

Impact and Effectiveness:

By prioritizing fund development, Color My Outdoors aims to build a resilient financial foundation that supports our growth goals. This investment will enhance our ability to scale impactful programs, deepen community engagement, and advocate for systemic change in the outdoor industry.

4. What do you hope will be different in your organization as a result of a capacity building grant from Dogwood? (365/500 words)

Color My Outdoors has operated with grit, creativity, and an unwavering commitment to justice—but also under constant financial constraint. We’ve stretched every dollar to build a grassroots movement that centers People of Color in outdoor spaces. That lean model got us this far, but it’s not sustainable. It’s an incubator for burnout, not long-term change. A \$40,000 capacity-building investment will help us move out of survival mode and into a strategic, catalytic role—where our leadership, programs, and partnerships can finally operate at the level our mission demands.

This investment allows us to hire essential staff—a program lead and an operations assistant—freeing our executive leadership to focus fully on movement building, fundraising, and policy advocacy. With these roles in place, our day-to-day operations won’t fall through the cracks, and we won’t continue burning out visionaries just to stay afloat. Instead, we’ll be equipped to grow intentionally and deliver deeper, more sustainable impact.

We’re not new to this work—we’re already helping shape it. As a founding member of the inaugural WNC Outdoor Equity Fund grant committee, we helped pilot a fund focused on addressing disparities in outdoor access. We’re also a core voice in the NC Outdoor Coalition, advocating for a statewide “Outdoors for All” fund that would ensure equitable access across the state. These are bold, systemic efforts that require not just presence, but capacity. This funding ensures we can keep showing up and shaping outcomes in rooms where policies and resources are decided.

We’ve also built strong partnerships that reach across Western North Carolina and the state, from hyper-local community orgs to statewide commissions. Our collaboration with the NC Youth Outdoor Engagement Commission invests in the next generation of environmental leaders, while our partnerships with local businesses help build an inclusive outdoor economy that centers equity at every level. We’re also actively engaging white-led environmental organizations, offering resources and strategy to help them authentically connect with BIPOC communities—because systemic change doesn’t happen in silos.

With a capacity-building investment from Dogwood Health Trust, we can shift from reactive to strategic. And we welcome opportunities to partner with Dogwood Health Trust and other regional partners in this important work to advance community well-being, address systemic disparities in outdoor access, and create lasting pathways for People of Color in Western North Carolina to connect with nature, lead in the

outdoor sector, and experience the physical, mental, and cultural benefits of the outdoors.