

Organization Information

Organization's Legal Name: Mecklenburg Martyrs, Inc.

Organization's Address: 1234 Maple Street Charlotte, NC 28262

Organization's Telephone: 704-555-0147

Organization's Website: MecklenburgMartyrs.com

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Mission Statement: We empower unemployed or underemployed Mecklenburg County adults to secure sustainable employment and achieve financial stability.

Organizational History (200 words or less): Mecklenburg Martyrs was founded in 2019 by Mecklenburg County residents and former business administration professors Lou and Betty Blackburn. The Blackburns were passionate about teaching their CPCC, Davidson College, and UNCC students the skills needed to market themselves for success in the corporate world. Upon their retirement in 2017, Lou and Betty volunteered at a local shelter where they met dozens of capable residents who could not support themselves or their families. Within a month, the Blackburns had used their teaching experience, network, and marketing expertise to empower 6 shelter residents to become employed. The couple saw an opportunity to give back to the community that they have called home for 40+ years. They founded Mecklenburg Martyrs Inc. to connect Mecklenburg citizens with the skills and foundations necessary to acquire and sustain work to create stability for themselves and their families. Today, Mecklenburg Martyrs' 5 full-time employees and 20+ volunteers create a well-rounded support structure for 600 citizens seeking employment each year. The agency was presented with the 2024 NCDA Member Award for 'Exemplary Career Center' and is now ready to expand to eradicate unemployment in the greater Charlotte region.

Who you Serve: Mecklenburg County, located in southcentral North Carolina, is home to 1.21 million people (2024 U.S. Census). As of December 2024, 33,000 Mecklenburg citizens are not employed. Underemployment is rampant, with 28% of the county's households bringing in less than \$50K per year (What is the income of a household in Mecklenburg County, NC?, 2025).

Mecklenburg Martyrs serves Mecklenburg County residents ages 18+ that are unemployed veterans, minorities, or disadvantaged or those that make less than \$20,000 a year in household income. Each month, 50+ Mecklenburg citizens receive assistance from Mecklenburg Martyrs. 90% of them succeed in keeping their jobs and advancing their careers (MM data).

Programs offered (Your Programs):

Adults have varying reading, writing, and digital abilities. Those who are unemployed or underemployed often need life habits that create positive long-lasting stability. Mecklenburg Martyrs programs meet each person where they are and help them build skills they need to secure a job.

Interested parties begin the process by submitting an application either online or in person at Mecklenburg Martyrs Inc. headquarters. If the applicant meets all requirements, staff review the requested services and

create a file containing the participant's information. The participant is then sent an assessment to establish a baseline of workplace literacy and identify current resources being utilized.

Once the initial intake is complete, the participant is assigned a career coach who works with them to address their needs by connecting them to appropriate resources, networks, and training opportunities. The career coach continues supporting the participant until their goals are met, whether that includes improving financial literacy, securing employment, creating a resume, or other career-related objectives. After all goals have been achieved, the participant's file is closed in the system.

Participants may continue to access Mecklenburg Martyrs Inc. services as needed and are added to mailing lists for fundraising and special events. Those who have benefited from the organization may also choose to give back through volunteering, financial contributions, or mentorship.

Our 'Career Connections' Program includes:

- *Career testing:* Our employees provide a thorough skills, education, and interest assessment to help each candidate narrow down potential careers paths.
- *Resume writing:* Employees are trained by Blackburns on resume preparation. The staff then work on-on-one with candidates to craft their resumes to showcase their skills and interests for use in their job applications.
- *Skills workshops and training:* Volunteer professors and human resource professionals lead workshops addressing how to locate job openings, how to read and understand job descriptions, how to and tailor resumes to meet the jobs expectations, how to communicate clearly through writing and speech, and how to apply for job-specific certifications.
- *Dress to Impress workshops:* Mecklenburg Martyrs have established partnerships with local retailers who provide wardrobe options and advice for clients to wear for job interviews.
- *Saving and budgeting workshops:* Those we serve lack an understanding of personal finance. These workshops prepare them for handling and save money wisely once they acquire a job and have a steady income.
- *Mentorship programs:* Our volunteer mentors are local professionals who work one-on-one with clients to teach them about real world experiences and offer guidance for job postings within their network.

Need Statement

Residents of impoverished or low-performing areas in Mecklenburg County overwhelmingly lack workplace literacy, digital literacy, resume and interview preparation, and personal finance. As a result, a large percentage struggle to compete successfully in today's job market. Without these essential skills, ~20% face barriers to obtaining stable work that allows them to be employable and financially secure.

One such example is Anna Long. At age 19, Anna's life changed overnight when her husband was killed tragically in a car accident, leaving her alone with an 18-month-old daughter and no work experience. Anna had no nearby family and no clear path forward. But as she searched online for help, Anna discovered Mecklenburg Martyrs.

Through one-on-one advising and accountability, Anna was able to identify transferable skills she had developed in school, including writing, communication, digital editing, and social media. Together with her career counselor, Anna built her first professional resume and completed a career assessment to identify suitable career paths. Within two months, she secured an entry-level position with an online

advertising company where Anna now helps create digital campaigns. Today she has stable income, benefits, and a career path – as well as a hope-filled future for her and her child.

Mecklenburg Martyrs helps underemployed or unemployed adults like Anna recognize their abilities, develop job readiness skills, and secure meaningful employment.

Anna is just one of thousands that need the services of Mecklenburg Martyrs. Unemployment remains a persistent challenge in Mecklenburg County. As of December 2024, approximately 197,000 North Carolinians were unemployed –17% of them residing in Mecklenburg County alone. That means more than over 33,000 individuals lack consistent income for providing food, water, shelter, or healthcare. And without access to stable employment and financial opportunities – or the understanding of how to capitalize on their strengths and navigate the job market – many face increased risks of poverty, food insecurity, declining physical and mental health, and long-term economic instability.

At the same time, the marketplace is highly competitive. The typical job seeker is unemployed for 11 weeks prior to securing employment (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics). Increasingly, success depends on professional networks, familiarity with company career platforms, and the ability to adopt emerging skills. A good example is artificial intelligence (AI), which 81% of U.S. hiring managers now rank among their top candidate priorities – and a skill that MM program participants acquire. Mecklenburg Martyrs strives to teach participants how to use different AI platforms, the power of AI tools, how to create prompts, and how to translate prompts into deliverable content.

Further, Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS) is becoming standard in hiring, and uses AI to review applicant submissions and resumes. Successful candidates understand how to optimize their applications. Mecklenburg Martyrs provides the foundational resources necessary for candidates to compete in this evolving workforce – and succeed.

Mecklenburg Martyrs will use the proposed project, Career Classroom, to host a 8-week workshop that moves participants from low employment literacy to job-ready competency, empowering them to build stable futures for themselves and their families.

Goal Statement: Career Classroom’s goal is to increase 450 unemployed or underemployed Mecklenburg County residents’ job readiness and workplace literacy skills so they can become employed.

Objectives

- Develop an 8-week group program (15 participants per class) designed to improve employment literacy scores by 75%.
- Conduct project activities to achieve 450+ resident program completions within 12 months, with a 60% employment placement rate within 90 days of graduation.
- Attract and leverage 3 new community partners or volunteers to assist with job placement support, internships, or employment skills training.

Project Description

Since 2019, Mecklenburg Martyrs has empowered 2,000+ unemployed or underemployed Mecklenburg County adults to find gainful work through career assessments, resume writing, skills workshops, financial literacy, and networking. Up to this point, clients have been assisted one-on-one, limiting the number of adults who can be served. Mecklenburg Martyr's Career Classroom will allow the agency to convert its key instructional information into an 8-week class curriculum, thereby creating a more structured pipeline. This will allow Mecklenburg Martyrs to continue to provide participants with individual assistance they need, but at the same time allow these candidates to build networks and support with each other. Mecklenburg Martyr, too, will benefit by becoming more efficient and thus able to serve more local residents using fewer resources.

The program will use existing recruiting and marketing techniques that have enabled MM to grow exponentially in just seven years, including referrals from employer inquiries, the Mecklenburg County Schools, our website, and word of mouth. Mecklenburg residents who meet the criteria will gather in small group cohorts of 15 at a time to take the course. Each course will be led by one of the 5 full time Mecklenburg Martyr staff members and will leverage the existing volunteer and mentorship base to support as needed. With all 5 full time employees dedicated to a 15-person cohort, this means that 75 residents at a time will be assisted and take steps toward finding employment. Once launched, the program can potentially help more than 450 residents build skills and competencies to gain employment. Classes will meet at MM's offices 1234 Maple Street Charlotte, NC 28262 for 2 hours each week at varying times to accommodate varying residents' schedules.

The program is divided into 8 lessons per week that when completed will create an increase in each participant's workplace literacy and confidence to acquire a job within 90 days of completing the course. Mecklenburg Martyrs will create and print copies of a lesson resource booklet for participants to take notes, follow along with lessons and keep as a reference, once their program has concluded.

Curriculum includes:

Week 1: Introductions & Career Assessments

Participants will be introduced to their instructors, volunteers, and classmates. They will participate in an assessment designed to capture their written, numeric, and digital literacy as well as their understanding of the workplace. Participants will also take a career assessment administered to identify the types of work that interest them.

Week 2: Basic workplace literacy (reading job postings)

Participants will learn the formats of job postings including *About, Roles & Responsibilities, Qualifications & Requirements, Compensation, Company Mission and Values, Benefits* and more. Course leaders will explain each section outlines and how participants can easily assess if it's a position suited to them.

Week 3: Digital literacy (email, job portals, online applications)

Digital literacy is essential for all applicants – and it can be imperative to success in specific careers. Week 3 will address basic Microsoft office systems and email etiquette.

Week 4: Resume building and cover letter writing

Participants will learn how to create their own resume and how to write and adjust cover letters dependent on the job posting. They will learn about formatting, font, keywords, and appropriate length.

Our on-site resource center includes five computers equipped with Microsoft Office for participant use, allowing them to become fluent in basic office systems. Our partnership with Spectrum telecommunications provides reliable Wi-Fi connectivity so participants can search for jobs, complete applications, and take career assessments without barriers.

Week 5: Interview preparation

Participants will learn about interview etiquette including how to make an elevator pitch, how to shake hands, and how to dress for an interview. Mock interviews allow participants to get experience and gain confidence. Goodwill Industries International will provide professional attire through a “Dress for Success”-style initiative and help present themselves confidently in interviews and the workplace.

Week 6: Job placement support

For years, Mecklenburg Martyrs has built a wide network of community partners in various business sectors that are consistently seeking people to employ. We will tap into its broad network of local community and business partners to provide networking opportunities. Participants will learn the basics of networking and follow up.

A highlight of Week 6 is MM’s mini-job fair which gives participants the chance to meet and interact with employers.

Week 7: Utilizing AI

This week, participants will learn about different AI platforms, the power of AI tools, how to create prompts, and how to translate prompts into deliverable content. Participants who successfully complete this week’s sessions will be able to include AI as a skill on their resumes.

Week 8: Financial Literacy and continued support resources

Gaining employment is different from maintaining employment, and that is what this week’s lesson is focused on. In this final week, representatives of MM partner Bank of America will share basic skills for managing a budget, expenses, and savings.

Participants will also take a final assessment of workplace literacy to show them how much they have learned and what areas they can refine. MM will remain a resource for participants to speak with coaches and attend relevant skill building seminars. The agency will record collected pre- and post tests and employment data to measure program success, identify program weaknesses, and make program quality improvements.

Staff and organizational capability. Mecklenburg Martyrs staff consists of 5 full-time employees who are responsible for the planning, facilitation, and maintenance of Mecklenburg Martyr programs. They work with clients to assist in their career journey, organize schedules for volunteers based on client needs, and establish partnership agreements with the local businesses that assist with job placement, speaking at seminars, and donations. These employees, much like Lou and Betty, are former educational instructors, guidance counselors, and career coaches who specialize in clear communication and working with clients towards goals. Full time employees also maintain the facility in which work is hosted. Lou and Betty

lease a structure and maintain the utilities, and there is access to 5 computers on site, including a projector for classroom discussions and presentations.

The agency's 20+ volunteers help with recruiting, including maintaining the Mecklenburg Martyr website, creating marketing campaigns, overseeing the mailing list, and recording past participants' employment statuses. Volunteers assist with intake and onboarding clients. Volunteers also serve as guest speakers, hosting skills workshops relevant to their experience. Others donate clothing for our Dress to Impress workshops. Those connected in the business community offer mentorship and networking for Mecklenburg Martyr clients.

For the Career Classroom proposed project, each of the (5) full-time staff members will lead the 8-week course and will be responsible for delivering subject material, coordinating guest speakers, and being an available resource for clients. Each leader will have access to 3-4 volunteers to assist with lessons, distributing learning materials, checking clients each week, and facilitating the assessments at the beginning and end of each program for data reporting. Volunteers that are not involved with the projected program will continue to provide focus on recruitment, maintaining client relationships, and administrative support.

Throughout the first six months, Mecklenburg Martyrs will continue to use volunteers to conduct career assessment data in week one. Volunteers will identify and recruit local professionals that match participant interest areas. For example, if results show a majority of participants have interest in sales, we will draw upon our network of local retailers and sales channels within Mecklenburg County to connect mentors and potential employers with program participants.

Project timeline. The proposed project will take 12 months to complete.

Month 1

- Finalize program curriculum, including course leader orientation.
- Coordinate scheduling with course leaders, mentors, and volunteers
- Recruit and enroll the first 2-3 participant cohorts.

Months 2-6

- Implement the course starting a new cohort each week to avoid gaps in support of participants. Continue to recruit, enroll, and launch cohorts.
- Meet with local community businesses and business groups to build 3 new partnerships to offer job placement support, internships, and tools/resources to aid in the program.

Months 3-6

- Calculate literacy improvement for program alumni based on pre- and post-testing. Track success in accepting a job.

Months 7-12

- Make adjustments to the program as needed.
- Complete remaining cohorts.

The project will be successful when the 8-week program is implemented and 450+ participants complete it, at least 60% becoming employed within 90 days of program completion.

Mecklenburg Martyrs has a dedicated staff devoted to empowering unemployed or underemployed adults in Mecklenburg County to find and retain employment through increased workplace literacy and skill building. While transitioning to this new way of hosting services is a large undertaking, the staff is ready. We are excited to serve more residents once financial support is secured to implement the project. READING4LIFE can be a key funder to aid in the payment to fund this project and make Mecklenburg Martyrs Mecklenburg County residents' goal of self-sufficiency a reality.

Project Evaluation

The 8-week workplace literacy course, Career Classroom, is a new project. It will be measured quantitatively and qualitatively.

The program's initial success relies on the current curriculum's conversion into a group-based format. Subsequently, the staff will be trained to present the material in a class setting. From that point, the staff will track program enrollment at the beginning of each 8-week cohort, and then conduct pre- and post-tests during weeks 1 and 8 to measure improvement in workplace literacy. Volunteers will use internal tracking software to record inputs, including program completion. Volunteers will also connect with program participants post-graduation weekly to track employment rates.

We will also gather qualitative data from program participants in one-one-consultations and during our course evaluation. We feel confident that the program will be life changing for participants, given the current material's impact on MM alumni testimonials of the current Career Connections services include:

"I did not know where to begin to find a career and Mecklenburg Martyrs helped give me that clarity. "

-Jose Rodriguez, 2020

"My career coach, Jenna, was fantastic! She helped me write my resume and how to adjust it for the different jobs I was interested in. By using the resume created at Mecklenburg Martyrs I was able to get a job that I love!

- Wonda Thomas, 2024

At the close of each cohort, participants will be asked to complete an anonymous evaluation. We will gather that feedback and review it after each cycle to make program adjustments that ensure continuous quality improvements. For instance, if we learn that a large number of enrollees struggle to meet at 11 AM, we will adjust class time in subsequent cohorts to accommodate more residents.

Sustainability Plan

In just 6 years, Mecklenburg Martyrs has established itself as the local "go-to" agency for acquiring employability skills. Now, we are seeking to format our successful approach more efficiently in order to do more with less. The 8-week Mecklenburg Martyr Career Classroom program is to become the new standard for career care in Mecklenburg County. This written curriculum will ensure program sustainability as we train more staff and volunteers to deliver services to more residents in less time. Potentially, this group curriculum could even be replicated in other urban regions.

Mecklenburg Martyrs has built a solid foundation of devoted and dedicated staff and volunteers. "Mecklenburg Martyrs provides me with a sense of purpose," says Brittney Box, recruiting volunteer. "I am so grateful I get to spend my time helping others in ways that I know make a positive impact." Year to

year the number of Mecklenburg Martyr volunteers continue to grow, due to the agency's increasing community presence and success. (20) Local employers have listed MM as a favored company partner. The agency's success has provided increased donations from individual contributors and local businesses. MM applies for 20 grants per year achieving a 70% success rate that not just sustains – but grows – its programs. Former clients provide ongoing financial support and have become some of the agency's most enthusiastic voices. They are our most treasured badge of success and inspire confidence in those who come after them.

MM has remained in the black for (6) years despite economic turmoil and a worldwide pandemic. Our external auditor has returned only unqualified opinions. Our financial partners consider Mecklenburg Martyrs a sound investment because we stay on budget and because we turn those who were once tax burdens into taxpayers.

Project Budget

Mecklenburg Martyrs Project Budget				
Expense Category	Annual Basis	FTE% (Full-Time Equivalent)	Budgeted Amount	Justification
Personnel - Mecklenburg Executive Director - Mecklenburg Program Manager - Mecklenburg Martyr Career Coach - Mecklenburg Martyr Career Coach - Mecklenburg Martyr Career Coach	45,000 45,000 40,000 40,000	60% 60% 70% 70%	27,000 27,000 28,000 28,000	Staff time dedicated to planning, organizing, facilitating and follow up on project activities.
	35,000	75%	26,250	
Facility				
Lease	30,000	50%	15,000	
Utilities	3,000	50%	1,500	
Telephone/Internet	2500	50%	1,250	Mecklenburg Martyrs location includes conference/classroom space, welcome desk and computer lab.
Cleaning	1000	25%	250	

Organizational Expenses Total			\$154,250	
Direct Project Expenses				
Travel			3,000	Funds to assist clients with public transportation fare to attend lessons in the 8-week program
Equipment			4,000	Website software for career assessments, competency assessments, LinkedIn Premium, Malware, website costs, and MS Office applications.
Supplies			2,500	Pens, Pencils, folders and coursework notebooks
Training			200	Refreshments for training
Other Expenses			In-Kind	Marketing materials and community outreach expenses
Direct Project Expenses			\$9,700	
Total Project Expenses			\$163,950	
Amount Requested			\$75,000	
Other Sources			\$110,000	Donors, granters, Fundraising, In-kind

Budget Narrative

The requested funding will support the implementation of an 8-week career counseling program designed to serve 15 participants in over 30 cohorts over a 12-month period. The program focuses on equipping individuals with the skills, resources, and support necessary to secure sustainable employment. Each expense category directly contributes to effective program delivery, participant success, and organizational capacity.

Personnel

Personnel costs represent the largest portion of the budget, as Mecklenburg Martyr’s Career Classroom requires skilled staff to deliver high-quality career services – and because coaching for life change is time-intensive. The program’s five staff members—two founders and three career coaches—will invest a significant portion of their time in preparing the new curriculum, delivering classes, and individually supporting participants.

The Executive Director and Program Manager (60% FTE each) provide program oversight, curriculum development, partnership management, strategic coordination, and assist in the facilitation and career seeking work with clients. Their leadership ensures consistency, quality, and alignment with organizational goals.

The career coaches (70–75% FTE) are responsible for direct service delivery, including facilitating workshops, providing one-on-one counseling, assisting with resume development, interview preparation, and job placement support. Staff also conduct follow-ups to track participant progress and outcomes – critical to maintaining personalized attention and empowering candidates to become employed.

Facility and Operations

Costs include monthly lease payments, utilities, internet, and cleaning services -- all allocated proportionally to program usage. The Mecklenburg Martyrs facility, located at 1234 Maple Street Charlotte, NC 28262, provides classroom and conference space for instruction, a welcome area for participant intake, a kitchen for snack prep, and a computer lab for job searches and digital literacy training. Reliable internet and telephone services allow participants to complete online applications, virtual interviews, and career assessments.

Direct Project Expenses

- Travel (\$3,000):
Transportation assistance removes a critical barrier to participation. Funds are used to support public transit costs (bus, light rail), ensuring consistent attendance for individuals who may otherwise be unable to access the program.
- Equipment (\$4,000):
Technology resources are essential for modern job readiness. Funds support career assessment platforms, LinkedIn Premium subscriptions, website hosting, cybersecurity tools, and Microsoft Office applications. Digital tools enable participants to build resumes, complete applications, and develop digital literacy skills required in today's workforce.
- Supplies (\$2,500):
Each participant will be provided with basic instructional materials including notebooks, folders, pens, and pencils.
- Training (\$200):
Light refreshments are provided during sessions to create a welcoming environment and support participant retention, particularly for individuals attending extended workshops.
- Other (In-Kind):
Marketing and outreach costs are covered through in-kind contributions, allowing the organization to recruit participants and engage community partners without increasing financial burden.

Total Project Cost and Funding

The total project cost is \$163,950. Mecklenburg Martyrs is requesting \$75,000 in funding, with the remaining \$110,000 supported through a combination of donors, grants, fundraising efforts, and in-kind contributions. If we achieve our projected 450 participant enrollment rate, the project cost per participant

is just \$365 – quite a bargain. By investing in qualified staff, accessible facilities, and essential resources, Mecklenburg Martyrs will empower participants with the tools and confidence needed to secure employment and achieve long-term stability.

Executive Summary

Mecklenburg Martyrs, a community-based nonprofit organization, empowers unemployed and underemployed Mecklenburg County adults to secure sustainable employment and achieve financial stability. Over the last (6) years we have served 2,000+ low-income individuals, veterans, and disadvantaged residents, who face employment barriers such as limited workplace and digital literacy, lack of job readiness skills, and minimal access to professional resources. Today, 90% of them are gainfully employed.

The proposed 8-week workforce development project, Mecklenburg Martyr's Career Classroom, will build employment competencies and accelerate job placement in a group setting accompanied by individual coaching. The program will serve 15 participants per cohort, with five concurrent cohorts led by trained staff and supported by volunteers. Over a 12-month period, we will serve 450 individuals with a goal of at least 60% obtaining employment within 90 days of course completion.

Each participant will complete an initial assessment at the start of the program. This assessment will help identify individual needs, goals, and areas for growth. Afterward, MM staff will provide comprehensive support, including job readiness training, resume development, digital literacy instruction, interview preparation, job search strategies, and financial literacy education.

Community partners will also play an important role. They will help provide participants with access to professional attire, financial education, internet connectivity, and technology resources.

Funding will support program implementation, staffing, and the resources needed to expand services. With this support, the initiative will empower participants to secure meaningful employment, increase economic mobility, and build long-term stability for themselves and their families.