

Grant Application: FY24 Express Grant FY24

ORGANIZATION INFORMATION

Year Founded

Mission Statement

Operating Budget \$35,000

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Brief Description The Spring Literary Festival will host eleven writers over the course of four days for a series of free readings, small-group conversations, and book signings.

Discipline

Dates April 1, 2024 through April 5, 2024

Total Project Cost \$43,050

Artist Fee \$4,000

Request Amount \$2,000

Primary Community Served

Which community will your project primarily serve?

Rural (50,000 people or less)

Under-resourced Community

Does any of your project reach an under-resourced community?

An under-resourced community is a group whose demographic, geographic, economic, disability, age, or other demonstrable factor impedes or prevents their access to arts programs, services or resources.

The term “community” can refer to a group of people with a common heritage or characteristic, whether or not they are living in the same location.

No

APPLICANT: Western Carolina University

City/State:



PROPOSED PROJECT PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

Age:

Children/Youth (0-18 years): True

Young Adults (19-24 years):

Adults (25-64 years): True

Older Adults (65+ years): False

No Single Group: False

Race/Ethnicity:

American Indian/Alaska Native: False

Asian: False

Black/African American: True

Hispanic/Latino: False

Pacific Hawaiian/Pacific Islander:

White: True

No Single Group:

Distinct Group:

Individuals in Institutions: False

Individuals with Disabilities: False

Individuals with Low Income: False

Individuals with Limited English Proficiency: False

Military/Veterans/Active Duty: False

Youth at Risk: False

No Single Group: True

APPLICANT: Western Carolina University

City/State:

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ARTIST DETAILS

Name Maurice Carlos Ruffin

City, State, Zip Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 70803

Website <http://mauricecarlosruffin.com>

Fee \$4,000

Project Discipline 10 Literature

10A Literature - Fiction

Demographics BIPOC: True

LGBTQIA+:

With Disabilities:

APPLICANT: Western Carolina University

City/State:



ENGAGEMENT INFORMATION

Days of Artist Service	2
Public Presentations	1
Projected Number of Public Presentation Participants	150
Educational/Community Engagement Activities	1
Projected Number of Educational/Community Engagement Participants	25

Schedule of Activities

List the chronological schedule of activities during the project including what, when, where, who, with/for whom; include ticket prices where applicable.

NOTE: *If your schedule is not complete at this time, provide as much detail as is known about how many activities will take place, and which community members or groups will be involved.*

April 2, 2024 (midday): Workshop. Ruffin meets with students and community members to discuss his craft

April 3, 2024 (7:30): Reading/signing. Ruffin delivers a public reading on campus (book signing to follow)

APPLICANT: Western Carolina University

City/State:

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ARTISTIC EXCELLENCE

Evaluation on this criterion is based on the submitted:

1. *Artist's work samples (i.e., audio, video, film footage, images, and written work)*
2. *Support material (i.e., ensemble/company history, artist biography, or writer's resume/biography)*
3. *Description of artistic excellence for the artist.*

Work Sample

Work samples should represent the quality or type of work the artist/company will have presented during your engagement and should be no more than three years old. For audio/video samples, include instructions identifying the particular selection to be played. For video samples, we encourage applicants to submit a continuous work sample for the artist that is at least 3-5 minutes in length, but not to exceed 10 minutes. If sample is part of a larger publication/book, please mark the passage/section to review. Please refer to the [guidelines](#) for more information on your samples.

Description: A short story from Ruffin's second book THE ONES WHO DON'T SAY THEY LOVE YOU.

Password:

Artist Excellence Description

Maurice Carlos Ruffin was awarded the 2023 Louisiana Writer Award, and his work has won many awards and much praise for its exploration of place (especially New Orleans) and black life in American's past, present, and future (the setting of his first novel). That first novel, WE CAST A SHADOW, was a finalist for the PEN/Faulkner Award, the Dayton Literary Peace Prize, and the PEN America Open Book Prize. It was longlisted for the 2021 DUBLIN Literary Award, the Center for Fiction Prize, and the Aspen Words Literary Prize. The novel was also a New York Times Editor's Choice. (His forthcoming novel, THE AMERICAN DAUGHTERS, will be released just prior to his visit to our festival.) His short story collection, THE ONES WHO DON'T SAY THEY LOVE YOU, was a 2023 One Book One New Orleans selection, as well as a New York Times Editor's Choice pick. The collection was a finalist for the Ernest J. Gaines Award for Literary Excellence and longlisted for the Story Prize.

PROJECT'S ARTISTIC MERIT (40%)

1. *Describe the project; include a detailed description of the presentation and explain why this artist/company was chosen.*
2. *Explain why this project is important to your community.*
3. *The educational/community engagement component* requires that participants be engaged in learning activities that have a lasting impact. Describe the educational and community engagement activities.*

**An educational/community engagement component is a learning event that has a lasting impact on the audience (e.g., workshops, lectures, and master classes) and is not limited to student participants. The educational/community engagement component is integral to the engagement and should be carefully planned. A meaningful component should involve concentrated preparation by the artist(s) and presenter. The artist(s)/company must conduct the activity.*

WCU's Spring Literary Festival has become one of North Carolina's premier literary events, developed from WCU's commitment to provide the best humanities education to students and the best of the arts to the mountain region. According to Census data, 17% of people in Jackson County, where WCU is located, are below poverty level. Fewer than 30% have a college degree. The festival, now in its 22nd year, seeks to create a diverse, accessible, and free literary experience for the people of Jackson County and throughout the western region of the state. We pride ourselves on curating a lineup of nationally known and emerging writers from within and beyond the region, and we believe the array of offerings during the festival offers something for everyone. The festival welcomes an undergraduate English major studying Chaucer the same as it might a retired hairdresser living in Franklin.

More specifically, the festival aims to create room for conversation and exploration by bringing the literary world in all its diversity into an intimate and accessible space full of readings and small-group discussions in Cullowhee and Asheville. In a region that is largely white and bypassed by big-ticket book tours, the Spring Literary Festival aims to bring a diverse batch of writers into the mountains to open up conversations about this place and the rest of world.

Maurice Carlos Ruffin's work and example fit perfectly into this mission. His writing explores the unexpected lives of everyday people in the South, especially Louisiana. His work is full of humor and empathy and complexity, and so his stories provide access points for anyone to step into the life of someone in another place and find the humanity there. Ruffin is also a dynamic speaker (with a background as both an attorney and professor), and his event will not only draw attendees because of his national stature but will also pull them deeper into his work because of his lively presentation.

Ruffin's public presentation will be free and open to the public. He will take questions and sign books as part of the event.

The additional educational and community experiences surrounding this public event will both occur during and in the leadup to the festival. In the months before the festival, we will work with regional book clubs and libraries to generate conversations about and programming related Ruffin's books within the community. We will purchase his books to donate to regional libraries to aid this programming. His books and stories will be taught in literature, creative writing, and history classes on campus.

During the festival, Ruffin will sit down with a small group of students and community members to discuss craft and offer writing exercises. This workshop will be a chance for these aspiring writers to learn about writing about place and writing about history from Ruffin.

AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT & COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT (20%)

Audience development includes assessing audience and community needs, cultivating audiences, creating an engagement plan, and developing effective partnerships.

1. *Describe the audiences and community segments you are targeting and engaging with this project.*
2. *Explain why they were selected for this project, how they are involved in planning, and what community partners are involved.*
3. *Describe any plans to broaden or diversify your audiences, any additional efforts to reach those lacking access to arts programs, services, or resources, or how your organization addresses diversity, equity, and inclusion.*
4. *Describe your marketing plan for target audiences.*

Broadly, the Spring Literary Festival aims to serve students of WCU and residents of the western region of NC. More specifically, we aim to highlight interdisciplinary connections among festival authors and their work in order to attract students and residents from different backgrounds. On campus, we work across departments to find thematic tie-ins. For example, Marcelo Hernandez Castillo's work will be taught in various classes within the interdisciplinary US Latinx Studies program; Sarah Viren's work will be taught in philosophy, journalism, and English classes; and Maurice Carlos Ruffin's work will be taught in history and English classes.

In the region, we target specific groups each year relative to our individual authors. For example, this year, with the help of WCU's Center for Community Engagement and Service Learning, we are connecting with nonprofit groups like Vecinos who work with immigrant populations so that we can tie in Marcelo Hernandez Castillo's work and visit. In the case of Ruffin's visit, we plan to collaborate with Henderson County's Black Histories project to connect with new audiences who will find Ruffin's exploration of history in his forthcoming novel especially relevant.

In addition to these partnerships, we also work with bookstores like City Lights and Malaprops and public libraries across three counties to identify and attract audiences. These long-standing relationships allow us to maintain but also grow our audiences from year to year.

In recent years, we have also formed partnerships with high school classes in the region (relying especially on WCU alumni and our second annual high school writing competition). We create and share sample lesson plans with high school classes within the region and then invite students to attend the festival.

Finally, in addition to the partnerships and personal relationships listed above, we rely heavily on WCU's Communication and Marketing office to promote the festival. We mail posters and brochures throughout the region, maintain an active website and social media presence, create reading guides for book clubs, advertise in print publications and on digital billboards, and create promotional videos in advance of the festival.

ACCESSIBILITY (10%)

Grantees are required to ensure accessibility to funded programs to people with disabilities.

- 1. Beyond meeting the minimum ADA requirements, describe actions to ensure programmatic and communications accessibility. Activities can include and are not limited to planning/advisory committees include people with disabilities, large print programs/labels, American Sign Language interpretation, audio description, and specific marketing strategies.*
- 2. Provide specific details on how you will reach those without access to the arts due to disability for this specific project (not your organization's work in general).*

All Spring Literary Festival public events take place in the A.K. Hinds University Center, which exceeds ADA compliance. The UC Theater, where we hold the public readings, has ramp access, wheelchair seating, listening assistance, and power-assisted doors. Accessible parking is located just outside of the theater.

For the festival, we work with WCU's Office of Service Learning and Office of Accessibility Resources to make arrangements for events. In recent years, we offered ASL interpretation for some events. We create reading guides and author interviews for festival authors on the website. A student intern creates additional content aimed at reaching various audiences prior to and during the festival.

In the lead-up to the festival, we share readings, interviews, and other information on various social media platforms to facilitate audience awareness and community engagement.

Finally, the festival website and printed materials provide directions to campus, visitor parking information, CAT-Tran Shuttle information, a campus map, and contact information for the festival director. Volunteers are available to assist those with special needs.

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY & EVALUATION (10%)

1. *Describe your organization's ability to carry out the proposed project.*
2. *Provide a summary of your organization's presenting/programming history.*
3. *Describe the method(s) you will use to evaluate the project's success.*

2024 will be the 22nd year of WCU's Spring Literary Festival. Since its inception, the festival has hosted distinguished writers from the region like Lee Smith, Fred Chappell, and Robert Morgan, as well as well-known American writers Li-Young Lee, Marilynne Robinson, Billy Collins, Leslie Marmon Silko, Edwidge Danticat, and Tracy K Smith. We've also welcomed internationally renowned authors like Eavan Boland, Colum McCann, and Miroslav Holub.

As we enter our 22nd year, WCU and its partners remain committed to the continuous assessment of our audience, programming, and funding to ensure that we meet the needs of all communities served by the festival. To that end, we work closely with WCU's social media director to create and promote an online audience survey to gather feedback about the success of our programming and to plan for future events. These surveys not only help us to understand our audience in terms of demographic data but also reading tastes and interests. We want our festival to have a little something for everyone.

Our marketing strategies also serve to provide us with feedback. Our relationships with reading groups, bookstores, libraries, and nonprofits allow us to learn about interests of readers in the region. From this feedback, we have widened the genres presented at recent festivals.

Of course, beyond the survey responses, we also listen to our students. The director meets with colleagues across disciplines to ask how the festival might reach more students.