REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS:
The Nature Conservancy
Cities Strategic Relief Fund

1. Summary and Background

The Nature Conservancy’s (TNC) Cities Network invites proposals from community-based\(^1\) nonprofit organizations across our 20+ Network cities for TNC’s Cities Strategic Relief Fund. This fund is specifically aimed at providing rapid response, emergency relief and support to frontline organizations\(^2\) that are led by and serve the interests of Black, Latinx/o/a, Indigenous and/or Asian American/Pacific Islander communities as well as low-wage earners and migrant laborers. TNC’s Cities Strategic Relief Fund is designed to respond to the disparate health and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on these groups that stem from historic and present-day structural inequities and systemic racism\(^3\).

TNC is a global environmental nonprofit working to create a world where people and nature can thrive. In recognition of the severity of the pandemic-related challenges facing these communities and organizations, TNC is leveraging its unique position and resources to help meet their most immediate and pressing needs.

The purpose of the Cities Strategic Relief Fund is to provide emergency relief funding for nonprofit organizations to ensure their ability to provide continuous support and services to environmental justice, frontline and historically marginalized communities disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. Funding will be directed to frontline organizations that are working to improve community-driven health and wellbeing outcomes and helping to address systemic issues facing people and nature in cities. Success of the Fund will be measured by the ability of grant recipient organizations to provide critical services and support to meet the prioritized, immediate needs of the communities they serve. The Fund is part of a broader transformative initiative managed by TNC’s Cities Network which includes other signature funding programs such as the Partnership Fund and Strategic Small Grants. In addition to the provision of core organizational support, the Cities Network’s funding initiatives seek to shift and share power and decision-making with grantee partners. Through these funding initiatives, TNC is committed to providing financial resources and technical support to frontline and environmental justice communities and organizations in the cities where we work in order to improve community health, social conditions and ecological well-being using a whole communities approach. Deepening our commitment to cross-sectoral organizations working diligently to address community needs will create enabling conditions for increased collaboration, engagement and knowledge sharing to facilitate meaningful coalition building in our Network cities and ultimately inform our approaches and increase our impact.

\(^1\) **Community-based organization**: a place-based public or private nonprofit organization of demonstrated effectiveness that: (a) is representative of a community or significant segments of a community; and (b) provides educational or related services to individuals in the community.

\(^2\) **Frontline community**: a community that has been directly burdened by harmful impacts, that can collectively name the ways it is burdened and that is organizing for action.

To learn more about the Cities Network, please click here.

2. Overview & Purpose

The fund seeks to address the resource impacts of COVID-19 and systemic racism, and support organizations that are working in and with Black, Latinx/o/a, Indigenous and Asian American/Pacific Islander communities, as well as low-wage earners and migrant laborers to achieve their health, safety and wellbeing priorities. Community-based, environmental justice and frontline nonprofit organizations with 501(c)(3) status (or which have a fiscal sponsor), located within one of our 20+ Network Cities are encouraged to apply (see section 3B for a list of eligible cities).

Funding can be used for:

- Emergency relief services related to COVID-19’s economic impacts;
- General operating costs required by your organization such as staff salaries and/or volunteer stipends due to pandemic-related funding gaps;
- Enhancing your organization’s technology infrastructure through training, tools and equipment needed to adapt and transition to effective remote work and communications as well as virtual organizing and engagement resulting from pandemic physical distancing requirements.

3. Funding Guidelines

A. Funding Structure

We will be awarding relief funding ranging from $1,000 to $30,000 over a one-year period to eligible community-based, environmental justice and frontline nonprofit organizations over a one-year period. We anticipate awarding a total of $400,000 in rapid response funding.

B. Eligibility Criteria Checklist

To be eligible for a grant under the Cities Strategic Relief Fund, applicants must meet the following criteria:

- Applicant must be a tax-exempt organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code and have a Federal Employment Identification Number (or has a fiscal sponsor with this designation).
- Applicant’s mission encompasses environmental, social or economic justice and the applicant works to meet community needs.
- Applicant is located in one of our 20 Network Cities and/or in a community where Cities Network has engaged in urban conservation, including: Albuquerque, NM; Atlanta, GA; Austin, TX; Baltimore, MD; Birmingham, AL; Boston, MA; Bridgeport, CT; Chicago, IL; Dallas, TX; Denver, CO; Detroit, MI; Houston, TX; Los Angeles, CA; Louisville, KY; Miami, FL; Milwaukee, WI; New York, NY; Phoenix, AZ; Philadelphia, PA; Portland, OR; Providence, RI; Puget Sound, WA; Rochester, NY; St. Louis, MO; Washington DC; and Wilmington, DE.
- The amount requested in the budget may not exceed fifty percent of the organization’s annual operating budget.

Support will not be given to:

- Organizations that have 501(c)(4) status, partisan organizations, and/or organizations that primarily focus on political causes
- Efforts to influence legislation or the outcome of public elections
- Efforts to conduct or engage in voter registration drives
- Religious or fraternal organizations unless this funding would solely support services that benefit the entire community (e.g. foodbank associated with a church that is providing food for all community members)
- Organizations that discriminate on the basis of race, color, sex, gender identity and/or expression, religion, sexual orientation, national origin, age or ability

C. Selection Process and Criteria

Selection decisions for the proposals will be made by a committee composed of TNC's Cities Network and partners, including:
- Nature Conservancy Staff
- Center for Whole Communities Staff
- Environmental Justice & Community Organizers

The committee will assess funding requests based on two categories:

1) **Health, Safety and Wellbeing**
   - To achieve physical, ecological, social and economic benefits for organizations that respond to the priorities of frontline & BIPOC communities.

2) **Supporting Organizational Operations**
   - To address needs and gaps caused by resource constraints due to the impacts of COVID-19 and systemic racism.

Applications will be scored individually by committee members who will then meet as a group to jointly evaluate applications and recommend a set of proposals for funding. TNC’s Cities Network Director, will have final approval of award decisions and distribution, in recognition of the fiscal responsibility of TNC, its legal responsibilities and accountability to donor expectations and requirements.

4. Application Submission Process

A. Submission Process

- Applicants should answer the questions listed under the Proposal Template section below and submit answers through [https://podio.com/webforms/25229107/1863877](https://podio.com/webforms/25229107/1863877). We ask that you carefully review the eligibility criteria before beginning your application.
- Submission of a proposal by an applicant does not commit TNC to make an offer, promise or guarantee of funding.
- **Applications are due Nov 13, 2020 by 11:59 pm EST.** Relief funds must be spent within 11 months of award announcement (by Dec 15, 2021).
- Only one proposal will be accepted per organization per city.
- If you have any questions, please submit them to relieffund@tnc.org prior to October 30, 2020. A Frequently Asked Questions [living document](https://podio.com/webforms/25229107/1863877) will be regularly updated to reflect submitted questions.
### B. Funding Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>October 14, 2020</td>
<td>RFP Released</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 30, 2020</td>
<td>RFP Questions Deadline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 13, 2020</td>
<td>Application deadline (11:59 PM EST)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 18, 2020</td>
<td>Awards announced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 15, 2021</td>
<td>Deadline to disburse funds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 15, 2021</td>
<td>Deadline to expend funds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 17, 2022</td>
<td>Final report due</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Decisions will be based on the applicant’s ability to meet criteria described herein.

### C. Fund Administration

Once a decision to award funding has been made, TNC’s Cities Network will issue an award memo and supporting materials requirements (see section 5B) that must be completed for each selected organization before funds are transferred.

TNC’s Cities Network will administer all grants. A short form grants template will be provided, which will include all agreement terms and conditions, scope, budget, as well as reporting requirements. A brief report will be required upon completion of the grant period including a narrative of accomplishments, financial expenditures, learnings and any feedback around this funding mechanism for future improvement; more details will be provided if funds are awarded. Funding will be remitted via a check sent to your organization’s address unless this mailing address is not accessible due to COVID-19 impacts. If your organization cannot receive mail, an electronic funds transfer can be processed shortly after the grants form has been filled and signed.

### 5. Proposal Template

#### A. Organizational Information

Answers to the questions below should be submitted through this online form: [https://podio.com/webforms/25229107/1863877](https://podio.com/webforms/25229107/1863877).

The information includes basic details on the organization structure and funding request:

1. Name of Organization to which funds would be paid (please list exact legal name and if relevant, legal name of Fiscal Sponsor)
2. Eligibility Questions (only organizations that respond positively to a-d will be considered): Is your organization:
   a. Located in one of our 20 Network Cities and/or where the Cities Network has engaged in urban conservation, including: Albuquerque, NM; Atlanta, GA; Austin, TX; Baltimore, MD; Birmingham, AL; Boston, MA; Bridgeport, CT; Chicago, IL; Dallas, TX; Denver, CO; Detroit, MI; Houston, TX; Los Angeles, CA; Louisville, KY; Miami, FL; Milwaukee, WI; New York, NY; Phoenix, AZ; Philadelphia, PA; Portland, OR; Providence, RI; Puget Sound, WA; Rochester, NY; St. Louis, MO; Washington DC; and Wilmington, DE?
   b. A 501(c)(3) corporation with a Federal Employment Identification Number (or do you have a fiscal sponsor)?
c. Working to meet a community need and has a mission in which environmental, social or economic justice with a focus on conservation is integral to the organization and its work.
d. Working in frontline communities including Black, Latinx/o/a, Indigenous and Asian American/Pacific Islander communities, as well as low-wage earners and migrant laborers?

3. Mission of Organization (150-word limit)
4. Title (This phrase serves as the title of your grant application for our records)
5. Contact info
   a. Address of organization
   b. Telephone number
   c. E-mail
   d. Website
   e. Executive Director
6. Contact person and title (if not Executive Director)
7. EIN Number (or that of your fiscal sponsor)
8. Requested Amount ($)
9. Annual Operating Budget ($)
10. Budget Request- upload a spreadsheet or use this template to provide detailed budget information for your proposed grant request. Note: The amount requested in the budget cannot exceed 50 percent of the applicants annual operating budget.
11. Brief Narrative:
   a. Please indicate why you are requesting this funding (150-word limit)
   b. What do you plan to do with the requested funds? (150-word limit)
   c. How will the funds help your organization be more successful in the current global context, including impacts from COVID-19? (150-word limit)
   d. Which frontline communities does your organization serve and represent, and how does your organization center community voices at all levels? (150-word limit)
12. From where or whom did you receive this RFP?

B. Supporting Materials

Please note, if your organization is awarded funds you will need:
- A Certificate of Good Standing (from the Secretary of State)
- A completed W-9 Form (TNC will send a blank form to be completed)
- A completed TNC Conflict of Interest Disclosure Form (TNC will send a document to be completed)

Given the timely nature of the opportunity, we kindly ask and encourage you to circulate this RFP with your networks.

You may direct your questions to: relieffund@tnc.org.