

# Funding Opportunities Through the Volunteer Stewardship Network (VSN)



Volunteer Stewardship Network

## Background

Across the state, thousands of volunteers from all walks of life regularly roll up their sleeves to help clear out invasive species, collect and sow native plant seeds, assist with prescribed fire and monitor populations of indigenous plants and animals. These individuals are part of the Volunteer Stewardship Network (VSN), a loose network of volunteers affiliated with public and private organizations helping to bring health back to our native lands and waters. The VSN is currently comprised of over 120 groups across Illinois.

The VSN was formed in 1983 by The Nature Conservancy and the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission. Through this partnership, we continue to provide leadership and support for the Volunteer Stewardship Network with a goal to support, promote and expand the role of volunteers working to protect and manage natural areas in Illinois.

## Support

### Bi-Monthly Newsletter

Gatherings is an email newsletter that is published bi-monthly by The Nature Conservancy to inform the stewardship community of new resources, upcoming events, funding opportunities, workshops and news from across the state

### Network for Nature

Annual meetings of volunteer leaders, stewardship leaders, and professional volunteer stewardship coordinators representing the various agencies and groups affiliated with the VSN to share ideas and inspire collaboration. In the past, these gatherings were held regionally in northern, central and southern Illinois, however, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the current format will comprise three or more virtual meetings that focus on particular topics

### VSN Scholarship Fund

TNC works with several partners to host networking and training opportunities - i.e., Wild Things Conference, annual herbicide testing and training workshop, and scholarships to attend courses through The Morton Arboretum at no cost.

### Funding Opportunities

The VSN Stewardship Fund provides tools, safety equipment and planting materials to member groups. The Community Convening Fund (CCF) is a new initiative, providing monetary support to increase the capacity of groups working within BIPOC and other historically underrepresented communities to bring individuals together around nature.

## Contacts

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## Stewardship Fund

(Due June 25)

### Goals of the Stewardship Fund

To support the work of volunteer groups by providing stewardship tools and safety equipment and by funding newsletters, websites, and educational materials.

### How are Requests Evaluated?

VSN Stewardship Fund Requests will be evaluated based upon the following criteria:

- Site priority as indicated by the INPC's protection status (e.g. Nature Preserve, Land and Water Reserve, Natural Heritage Landmark)
- Activity level of the VSN group
- Need - could the request be satisfied by the landowner or another funding source?
- Urgency - is something in imminent danger of being lost?
- Benefit to the natural resource
- Does it leverage other resources and funding?
- How well it fits in with the spirit of the VSN

### How are Funds Recieved?

This funding is not a grant, e.g. you will not receive the money in advance. Either you will be reimbursed in a timely way for expenses approved through this process or tools and supplies will be ordered and delivered through The Nature Conservancy.

### Examples of Approved Budget Items from Past Years

- Seed supplies: drying racks, flags, box repairs, inoculant, bags
- Seeds for native pollinator plants
- Seed collecting aprons
- Native plant ID signs
- Interpretive signs
- Pigskin gloves
- Folding saws, chain saws
- Miscellaneous: gas for chainsaws, insect repellent
- Chainsaw safety helmets
- Shovels
- Brushcutter & clearing saw
- Replace worn parts on Stihl Brushcutter
- Backpack sprayer
- Hand pruners
- Liquid fence repellent concentrate
- Field Fence
- UTV Insurance
- Glyphosate concentrate
- Riding lawn tractor
- First aid kit
- 1 year Zoom subscription

## Community Convening Fund (Due June 25)

### Goals of the CCF

To support people and nature by funding projects that:

- Meaningfully engage BIPOC and other historically underrepresented groups in the programming, care and protection of green space with native habitat elements;
- Foster community connections to nature;
- Provide co-benefits for human and environmental health.

### Project Themes

The column to the right features a list of potential project themes with examples. This funding can be used to cover staff time, community stipends, travel costs, and meeting/event costs for these types of projects. This funding cannot be used to cover lobbying, plant material, or restoration tools and supplies (see instead, VSN Stewardship Fund). However, this list is not comprehensive, and we encourage you to use your creativity and add your own!

### New Groups Encouraged to Apply!

We encourage you to apply for funds even if you are not currently a VSN member. Eligible applicants will be invited to become members.

### How are Funds Recieved?

Funding through the CCF will be in the form of a check. Checks received are to be used according to a group's initial budget proposal.

### Themes & Examples

#### 1. Trainings

Example: Brings stewardship training to communities where the needs exist.

#### 2. Expertise Sharing

Example: Information sharing meeting among partners.

#### 3. Conferences & Meetings

Example: Covering registration fees for meetings and conferences.

#### 4. Cultural & Community Building Events

Example: Cover costs associated with cultural events (e.g., food, keynote speaker).

#### 5. Travel & Transportation

Example: Mileage, airfare, Metra tickets, Ventra cards

#### 6. Research & Community Development

Example: Fund surveys and focus groups to better understand community needs, challenges, and desires; host community science projects.