



Volunteer Stewardship Network Community Convening Fund

Instructions and Application

Application Deadline: Friday, June 25, 2021

Instructions

Background

The Volunteer Stewardship Network (VSN) is a statewide program with the goal to support, promote and expand the role of volunteers and community members working to protect and manage native ecosystems (big and small) in Illinois as well as supporting efforts that foster community connections to nature. Currently, more than 120 organizations belong to the VSN across the state. VSN members are a mix of public agencies (Forest Preserve Districts, Conservation Districts, Park Districts), private organizations (land trusts), and grassroots/community-based organizations (community gardens).

The VSN not only connects people to opportunities and nature, it lends support by providing tools and stewardship trainings, and serves as a platform for groups across the state to share information and resources. Specific support includes:

- 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.
- Member to Member Networking – The VSN is currently exploring an online platform to allow VSN groups to connect virtually. Stay tuned for details! Additionally, the VSN hosts *Network for Nature* meetings in which VSN members are invited to participate in workshops covering a wide range of topics and discussion sessions to provide groups an opportunity to exchange information and ideas.
- **VSN Stewardship Fund** – Annual small grant that helps build the capacity of local groups through the purchase of stewardship tools and safety equipment, and funding volunteer/community newsletters, websites, and educational materials.

- 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.
- Website Promotion – “[Volunteer for Nature](#)”
 - Members may list their sites on an interactive map that helps potential volunteers find opportunities near home.

Community Convening Fund Goals

The goals of the Community Convening Fund (CCF) are to support people and nature by funding projects that:

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

Eligible applicants will be invited to become members of the VSN and will receive the bi-monthly, virtual newsletter called Gatherings, regular communications from the VSN about funding and training opportunities, and more!

Project Themes

Below is a list of potential project themes with examples. This funding can be used to cover staff time (with limitations), community stipends, travel costs, and meeting/event costs for these types of projects. However, this list is not comprehensive, and we encourage you to be creative and add your own theme! **Note:** this funding cannot be used to cover plant material, restoration tools, supplies, safety equipment (see instead, VSN Stewardship Fund) or lobbying.

Theme 1: Trainings

Description: Support for volunteers or community partners to participate in trainings and workshops.

Example: Brings stewardship training to communities where the needs exist

Theme 2: Expertise Sharing

Description: Supports volunteers or community members to share knowledge and expertise.

Examples: Information sharing meeting among partners; hiring a consultant to help with planning a pollinator garden.

Theme 3: **Conferences / Meetings**

Description: Support for individuals/groups to attend meetings and conferences.

Example: Covering registration fees for virtual or in-person meetings and conferences.

Theme 4: **Cultural and Community Building Events**

Description: Sponsor cultural events in green spaces.

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

Theme 5: **Travel and Transportation**

Description: Support travel or other expenses associated with VSN group work with BIPOC and other historically underrepresented communities/groups.

Example: Mileage, airfare, Metra tickets, Ventra cards.

Theme 7: **Research / Community Development**

Description: Support or lead research projects, including engaging new audiences in community science.

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

Eligibility

- Applications will be accepted from organizations that are currently connecting people to nature.
- Organizations are eligible if they are currently managing native habitat in publicly accessible green space OR plan to develop native habitat in publicly accessible green space. For example, an organization managing a community vegetable garden may ask for funding to support community meetings to plan the addition of native plants. (If your organization needs seeds, planting materials or tools, please apply to the VSN Stewardship Fund).

- Applicants are expected to engage volunteers/community residents in their work.
- Applicants must submit responses to grant application questions, as well as the required attachments to be eligible for awards.
- Applicants must be a 501(c)(3) organization or have a qualified fiscal agent (an organization that acts on behalf of your organization to manage funds such as reimbursements). Proof of 501(c)(3) will be required before funds are distributed.

Timeline

- Applications are due Friday, June 25, 2021.
- Awards will be available from August 1, 2021 – June 31, 2022

Awards

- The total VSN Community Convening Fund is \$10,000, of which \$5,000 is allocated to groups working in Cook County. The total number of awards and amounts will be dependent upon the number of applicants and total requests received.
- Please consider applying for awards that are no more than \$1,000.

Submission Instructions

- Applications must be emailed in Microsoft Word or PDF form to brooke.thurau@tnc.org by **Friday, June 25, 2021**. Hand-written applications will be accepted, but must be scanned and emailed. Use “VSN Community Convening Fund” in the subject line of the email.

Questions?

If you have any questions about eligibility, the application process, or if you would like to discuss your award ideas in advance, please don't hesitate to contact Brooke Thurau at brooke.thurau@tnc.org

We look forward to supporting your visionary community engagement work through this funding opportunity!



VSN Community Convening Fund Grant Application – FY21

We will accept requests for funding once a year. Please fill out the application completely and submit it to brooke.thurau@tnc.org, using “VSN Community Convening Fund” in the subject line of the email. **Applications are due Friday, June 25, 2021.** Award decisions will be made in July and notification will come shortly after.

Please provide the following information with your request:

1. Date of Application _____
2. Contact Name _____
3. Organization name _____
4. Fiscal agent (if applicable) _____
5. Current VSN Member? (Yes/No) _____
6. Please provide a brief description of your organization, its mission and projects (1 paragraph)

7. Landowner/Property Owner _____

8. Mailing Address _____

9. Phone _____ Email _____

10. Name of green spaces or natural areas managed. _____

11. What theme/s (from instructions above) does your project fall under? Please add your own if your project doesn't fall under the listed themes.

12. Do you engage with BIPOC individuals/communities in the care of nature and human health? Yes No

13. Describe your current engagement or plans to engage BIPOC or other traditionally underrepresented communities/volunteers (1 –2 paragraphs)?

14. Provide a narrative that describes your organization's plan to (3 -4 paragraphs):

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

15. Budget: Using the provided budget template, insert detailed anticipated expenses. Budget items should reflect the spirit of your narrative (need). Note: please limit staff time to 10% of your budget.

16. Goals and data tracking: Please list your expected outcomes and describe how you will track data. In other words, what is it that you will achieve with these funds and how will track your achievements?

Budget Template:

Do not feel required to fill out every space on this template. As a reminder, you may create your own themes or utilize the themes provided above. Please itemize your budget according to the theme that each cost falls under. If you need to list more items for a theme than there is space provided, leave the next "Theme" line blank and continue on.

Item(s) / Description	Cost (\$)
Theme 1:	
	\$
	\$
	\$
	\$
Theme 2:	
	\$
	\$
	\$
	\$
Theme 3:	
	\$
	\$
	\$
	\$
	\$
TOTAL:	
	\$