



## Volunteer Stewardship Network Community Convening Fund

Instructions and Application

**Application Deadline: Friday, July 14, 2023**

The Volunteer Stewardship Network (VSN) is a statewide program that supports, promotes, and expands the role of volunteers and communities working to protect and manage native ecosystems, community gardens, parks, and other green space in Illinois. Currently, more than 145 organizations belong to the VSN, including public agencies (e.g., Forest Preserve Districts, Conservation Districts, Park Districts), private organizations (e.g., land trusts), and grassroots/community-based organizations (e.g., community gardens, affinity groups).

The VSN lends support to its members by providing stewardship tools and trainings and serves as a platform for groups to share information and resources. In addition to the Community Convening Fund, specific support includes:

- **Gatherings Newsletter** – A bi-monthly email newsletter to inform the stewardship community of new resources, upcoming events, funding opportunities, workshops, and news from across the state.
- **Network for Nature** – The VSN hosts and supports virtual and in-person meetings and workshops to allow its members to share ideas, inspire collaboration, and learn new skills.
- **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, DEIJ workshops, Wilderness First Aid trainings, 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 volunteer opportunities near home.

## **Community Convening Fund Goals**

The VSN Community Convening Fund (CCF) was established to support organizations that are:

- Fostering community connections to nature.
- Meaningfully engaging Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC), LGBTQIA+, veterans, people with disabilities and other groups that have not been prioritized in the past, in the programming of outdoor activities and care and protection of green space.
- Providing co-benefits for human and environmental health.

## **Eligibility**

- Applications will be accepted from organizations that connect people to nature through volunteer stewardship of green space or through other outdoor programming activities.
- Applicants are expected to engage BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, veterans, people with disabilities, and/or other groups that have not been intentionally prioritized by programming efforts in the past.
- **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).** Proof of 501(c)(3) will be required before funds are distributed. If you are having trouble finding a fiscal agent, please let us know.

## **Project Themes**

The Community Convening Fund accepts projects that incorporate one or more of the following themes:

### **Theme 1: Education**

*Description:* Projects that expand volunteers/communities' ecological skills or that provide opportunities to increase awareness and understanding about diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice issues.

*Examples:* Brings trainings to communities where the needs exist; provides virtual or in-person workshops.

### **Theme 2: Expertise Sharing**

*Description:* Projects that provide volunteers/communities a space to share knowledge and exchange ideas.

*Examples:* Hosts or participates in information sharing meetings among partners (in-person or virtual); hiring a consultant to help with planning a pollinator garden.

### **Theme 3: Conferences / Meetings**

*Description:* Projects that provide their volunteers and community members the opportunity to attend meetings and conferences.

*Examples:* Covering registration, lunch and other costs associated with attending a local conference.

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

*Description:* Projects that engage communities in cultural and other events in green spaces and natural areas.

*Examples:* Cover costs associated with hosting a harvest festival (e.g., food, supplies, keynote speaker) at a community garden.

#### Theme 5: **Travel and Transportation**

*Description:* Projects that cover travel expenses so that volunteers/communities may participate in field trips, meetings, volunteer activities, and other events.

*Examples:* Pay transportation costs (mileage, Metra tickets, Ventra cards, rental cars) for volunteers/communities to attend in-person trainings at The Morton Arboretum.

#### Theme 6: **Research / Community Development**

*Description:* Research projects that increase organizational capacity of engaging new audiences in stewardship and/or outdoor programming.

*Examples:* Cover fees associated with conducting surveys and focus groups to better understand community needs, challenges, and desires.

#### Theme 7: **Educational/Outdoor Supplies and Equipment**

*Description:* Fund supplies and equipment that enhance outdoor experiences and education.

*Example:* Cover costs for purchase of binoculars and bird ID books for birdwatching activities; rain ponchos and other outdoor gear for hiking and exploring. **\*Note:** to request restoration and habitat management tools and supplies (e.g., loppers, native seeds, chainsaws), please refer to the VSN Stewardship Fund application.

#### **Timeline**

- Applications are due **Friday, July 14, 2022.**
- Project Dates: **August 1, 2023 - July 30, 2024**

#### **Awards**

- The total VSN Community Convening Fund is \$30,000. 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 \$2,000.
- This funding can be used to cover staff time (with limitations), and costs associated with the above list of themes. However, this list is not comprehensive, and we encourage you to add your own theme.

- Funding cannot be used to cover plant material, restoration tools, supplies, safety equipment (see instead, VSN Stewardship Fund).
- This funding may not be used for lobbying.

### **Submission Instructions**

Applications must be emailed in Microsoft Word or PDF form to [brooke.thurau@tnc.org](mailto:brooke.thurau@tnc.org) by **Friday, July 14, 2023**. Hand-written applications will be accepted but must be scanned and emailed. Use “VSN Community Convening Fund” in the subject line of the email. **Please let [brooke.thurau@tnc.org](mailto:brooke.thurau@tnc.org) know if there are barriers to submitting your application in this format.**

If you have any questions about eligibility, the application process, or if you would like to discuss your project ideas, please sign up for one of our VSN info sessions or contact Brooke Thureau at [brooke.thurau@tnc.org](mailto:brooke.thurau@tnc.org)

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



## VSN Community Convening Fund Grant Application 2023 - 2024

We accept requests for funding once a year. Please fill out the application completely and submit it to [brooke.thurau@tnc.org](mailto:brooke.thurau@tnc.org), using "VSN Community Convening Fund" in the subject line of the email.

**Applications are due Friday, July 14, 2023.** Award decisions will be made in early August. If there are barriers to completing this application, please let [brooke.thurau@tnc.org](mailto:brooke.thurau@tnc.org) know.

**Please provide the following information with your request:**

1. Date of Application \_\_\_\_\_
2. Organization name \_\_\_\_\_
3. Contact Name & Title \_\_\_\_\_
4. Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_
5. Mailing Address \_\_\_\_\_  
*please include City, State & zip code*
6. Fiscal agent (if applicable) \_\_\_\_\_
7. Please provide your organization's mission statement (or a brief description of your organization)

8. Project Title\_\_\_\_\_

9. Please briefly describe the problem or need which you seek to solve through this grant project (1 paragraph).

10. Please describe your project objectives and outcomes/deliverables. In this section, include a description of how your project will foster community connections to nature and meaningfully engage BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color), LGBTIQ+, veterans, people with disabilities, or other groups that have not been prioritized in the past, in the programming of outdoor activities and care and protection of green space. (2 - 3 paragraphs).

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. 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.

**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 Name _____	
	\$
	\$
	\$
	\$
Theme Name _____	
	\$
	\$
	\$
	\$
Theme Name _____	
	\$
	\$
	\$
	\$
<b>TOTAL:</b>	\$