

RESOLUTION NO. 20200604-049

WHEREAS, the City of Austin, Travis County, and the State of Texas issued disaster declarations relative to each jurisdiction in response to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in order to protect public health; and

WHEREAS, the economic uncertainty resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and related necessary mitigation measures have left an unprecedented number of Austin residents facing unemployment or underemployment; and

WHEREAS, Austin City Council passed the Relief in a State of Emergency (RISE) Fund, Resolution No. 20200409-081 and Ordinance No. 20200409-087, to allocate and appropriate funds to provide direct relief services and direct financial assistance to vulnerable Austin-area residents, in underserved communities, who have been impacted by COVID-19 and who may not receive other forms of assistance; and

WHEREAS, the City of Austin has received significant federal relief funds for use in responding to the public health emergency with respect to COVID-19 relief such as emergency financial assistance to individuals and families directly impacted by a loss of income due to the COVID-19 public health emergency, which those individuals and families may use for housing assistance and food assistance, among other needs, and City staff have introduced a spending framework in response to Council Resolution No. 20200507-060 to outline plans for impactful uses of these funds; and

WHEREAS, RISE Fund has been implemented and funds distributed to those who are in most need with all necessary speed, need for relief remains incredibly high, especially in communities that continue to be underserved, even after RISE Fund allocations have been exhausted; **NOW THEREFORE**,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF AUSTIN:

The Council authorizes the City Manager to negotiate and execute contracts with service providers to offer direct financial assistance to members of underserved communities impacted by COVID-19, in the form of ACH transfers, debit cards, gift cards, or other methods sufficiently flexible to support a variety of needs which are due to the COVID-19 public health emergency. The updated RISE Fund framework is intended to prioritize relief for people in underserved communities who are low- or very low-income and/or who remain unemployed or underemployed, with a special emphasis on those who do not qualify for other forms of assistance, such as unemployment insurance. The City Manager is authorized to prioritize contracts that ensure funds are distributed to individuals by trusted community organizations that have access to larger networks of lower-income residents, and that can demonstrate their ability to reach and provide service to target priority populations, and who can perform active outreach through their clientele networks.

In an effort to remedy inefficiencies and inequities that can occur in an entirely first-come, first-served process of applying for relief, the City Manager is directed to seek a simplified, centralized application(s) and intake process available, and consider expanding

the options for awarding funds to individuals based on a lottery, or similar process, or client-based direct assistance programs (which provide support to existing clients who have previously qualified for assistance). The Council's policy objective is easing the burden of the application process for qualified residents. Options are at the discretion of staff but could include options such as the following:

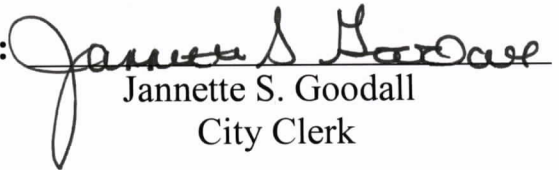
- An open application period of at least 7 days over at least one weekend;
- An application accessible online and by phone, widespread outreach and plain-language instructions and information;
- Options to accommodate speakers of languages other than English throughout the application and service period;
- Simplified ways to provide required documentation and reduce levels of documentation required;
- Consistent applicant eligibility guidelines across service providers;
- Sufficient notifications to ensure applicants are up-to-date on the process;
- Ensuring any client-based direct assistance programs partner with organizations that can show they have access and trust with large numbers of persons in priority populations; and
- Other considerations as appropriate.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

The City Manager is directed to explore using available resources to the extent possible to streamline the application process and intake, potentially to include underutilized City staff time as allowable and as consistent with administrative requirements that are included in awards to service providers and for which the service providers are being paid a service fee. If needed for programmatic or administrative costs, the City Manager is directed to return a budget amendment for consideration by the Council.

ADOPTED: June 4, 2020

ATTEST:


Jannette S. Goodall
City Clerk