

RESOLUTION NO. 20200409-081

WHEREAS, on March 6, 2020, the City of Austin and Travis County issued a Declaration of Local Disaster that allows the City to take measures to reduce the possibility of exposure to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) and promote the health and safety of Austin and Travis County residents; and

WHEREAS, On March 13, 2020, Governor Abbott issued a Declaration of State of Disaster to prepare for, respond to, and mitigate the spread of COVID-19 to protect the health and welfare of Texans; and

WHEREAS, subsequent executive orders in the City of Austin, Travis County, and the State of Texas to limit Austin business operations and residents' interactions have been necessary to protect and promote public health, in alignment with guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ("CDC"); and

WHEREAS, these and other necessary measures taken by jurisdictions across the United States and the world to control the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic have limited public interactions, closed schools and businesses, and resulted in economic uncertainty that has left an unprecedented number of Austin residents facing unemployment or underemployment; and

WHEREAS, on March 27, 2020, the third federal stimulus package in response to the economic crisis created by the COVID-19 pandemic, the CARES Act, was signed into law,

which authorizes \$2 trillion in federal economic relief through housing and public health programs, as well as direct financial assistance and additional unemployment benefits to individuals; and

WHEREAS, even the pre-pandemic economic equilibrium left many Austin residents struggling to support themselves and their families, living paycheck-to-paycheck, and the economic shock currently unfolding leaves these residents more vulnerable than ever; and

WHEREAS, the mission statement in the City of Austin's Strategic Direction 2023 highlights the values of economic opportunity and equity, which are echoed throughout the numerous outcomes, indicators, anchors, and strategies that guide the City's priorities and governance; and

WHEREAS, the City of Austin's Austin Public Health, Equity Office, and other City departments have worked to implement and fund equity grant programs, driven by community needs and designed to support work on-the-ground reaching specific populations; and

WHEREAS, the City Council of the City of Austin passed Ordinance No. 20200326-090 and Resolution Nos. 20200326-091 and 20200326-092, each of which respond to needs of Austin residents amid the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic, and open a path toward relief in housing, economic strain, and utility expenses during this crisis; and

WHEREAS, finding multiple, direct pathways to relief is critical in this extraordinary time, including those that empower Austinites to make decisions that are best for themselves and the well-being of their families; **NOW, THEREFORE**,

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

The Council authorizes the City Manager to utilize previously unbudgeted funds to expand social services contracts with existing providers and execute new emergency contracts as needed in order to provide immediate direct services and assistance that are equitably focused, temporary, and for vulnerable Austinites impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic with minimal administrative costs or delay. Relief in a State of Emergency (RISE) funding will target relief and services to be provided in April, May, and June of 2020, unless otherwise extended by Council. Funding in an amount not to exceed \$15 million, pursuant to a budget amendment approved by Council, is intended to be distributed to the community to the best of the City's ability as follows: half in one phase to provide immediate relief in April, 2020, and the second half in another phase in May, 2020.

Authorized funds will be used to provide equitable relief, and social service provider recipients of funds should prioritize those Austinites and communities that have dire economic needs that are not being met and/or cannot be met by government programs such as direct financial assistance under the CARES Act or unemployment insurance. The City

Manager is directed to utilize the most restrictive funds (e.g., CDBG funds) prior to tapping General Fund dollars for any of the purposes described below.

Funds will be distributed per the guidelines below.

Goal

The needs of vulnerable Austin families must be supported during this crisis to prevent noncompliance with local public health orders and to protect public health by mitigating the spread of COVID-19. The Council's goal is to get relief to Austinites impacted by the pandemic, as quickly as possible, with a particular focus on populations considered lower-income and vulnerable, and who may either be ineligible for other forms of assistance and/or other forms of assistance are not sufficient or timely to meet their basic needs. RISE relief can be achieved by expanding the capacity and reach of community-based organizations that may already be in partnership with the City of Austin, but may also require new partnerships with specialized providers with existing models to reach particular populations in new ways that meet impacted families where they are. Services and direct assistance should target populations who are traditionally marginalized or typically face additional barriers to enrolling in assistance programs, such as, but not limited to, language barriers. Services and assistance should be distributed by providers that have a history of trust and success in reaching communities of color, the LGBTQ+ community, immigrant communities, seniors, and other historically marginalized communities.

Funding Distribution

Half of allocated funds will be distributed to qualified service providers offering direct relief services to Austin residents. “Direct relief services” include programs designed to:

- Improve food access;
- Provide rental or mortgage assistance;
- Provide assistance with necessary bills, such as utility bills to enable children to attend school remotely;
- Assist with medical expenses;
- Assist with the purchase of diapers and baby formula and other child-care expenses;
- Assist survivors of domestic violence;
- Case management; or
- Other direct relief services provided by community-based organizations to assist individuals and families in meeting basic needs, including essential hygiene, and alleviating hardships.

The remaining portion of allocated funds will be distributed as direct financial assistance to eligible Austin residents by one or more qualified organizations with an operational model acceptable to the City. For the purpose of RISE funding, “direct financial assistance” refers to legally allowable transfers or other one-time payments, such as pre-paid debit or credit cards, provided to individuals through service providers to assist with basic living expenses

consistent with the existing framework established by APH to ensure that the City has mechanisms in place to properly account for the funds. Council directs that direct financial assistance is finite and limited as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, but should be distributed as immediately as possible to individuals and families in need.

Eligibility for Relief

Service providers will determine the eligibility of clients, prioritizing those who:

- Meet broad eligibility standards for Austin Public Health grant programs, such as a family income at or below 200% of federal poverty income guidelines;
- Have experienced a significant hardship or loss of household income related to the COVID-19 pandemic, which may include those who have experienced a reduction in income, layoffs or furloughs, or who have taken unpaid leaves of absence from work due to school or daycare closures, the need to care for family members, or the need to remain quarantined after possible COVID-19 exposure;
- Are ineligible for other forms of significant governmental relief (such as the CARES Act) or are receiving such relief in a limited or delayed manner that does not meet their needs; and
- Who have tested positive for COVID-19 or have a high probability of infection based on contact tracing, while maintaining appropriate confidentiality.

Eligibility for, or enrollment in, other means-tested benefits programs, such as SNAP or Medicaid, may be considered as a substitute for income or demonstration of need, but this standard may not be required for RISE eligibility. Requests for documentation of eligibility may not impose an unnecessary burden on those applying for relief services or direct financial assistance and may not unnecessarily delay the approval and distribution process.

Community-based organizations who work directly with vulnerable populations understand the needs in these communities, and as such, these requirements are not to be interpreted as limiting the pool of recipients who are in need, as long as the eligibility criteria in use are consistent with Council's goals.

Service Providers

The City Manager is authorized to negotiate and execute amendments to existing social services contracts with service providers who will use the funds to expand the number of people served well beyond the existing populations currently served by organizations in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and economic crisis. These providers may subcontract with other organizations to expand capacity to provide these services.

The City Manager is also authorized to negotiate and execute new emergency contracts, to be executed pursuant to the City's emergency contracting procedures, with social service providers who currently reach vulnerable populations that are historically marginalized and any new contracts necessary to meet the Council's goals for the RISE fund.

The City Manager is authorized to negotiate and execute contracts or contract amendments (as appropriate) with one or more providers to work with those who have tested positive for COVID-19 or have a high probability of infection (based on contact tracing) so that those individuals receive assistance tailored to their needs and are better able to comply with containment measures. The City Manager is authorized to streamline the administrative process so that funds can be distributed as quickly as possible to those in need, including issuing waivers or modifications of liability or providing other forms of insurance requirements for community-based organizations that can provide these relief services or the direct financial assistance, but that are unable to meet increased insurance requirements.

Organizations with minimal or low administrative costs, with the ability to conduct outreach in the target populations, who have the capacity to distribute services and assistance efficiently and quickly, should be prioritized.

Compliance with the following standards is required of all service providers:

- Providers will be responsible for providing the City with such reporting as they currently have in place, to include aggregate descriptive data about aid recipients and their communities, as well as schedules of distribution and other regular reporting;
- Providers must be able to employ a mechanism to audit all expenditures;
- All data must be secured, and personally identifiable information must be protected, pursuant to City of Austin guidelines and applicable law;

- Accessibility options, such as prepaid debit cards or gift cards, should be considered and made available for clients who are not able to receive ACH transfers with suitable controls as are currently utilized by organizations that contract with APH.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

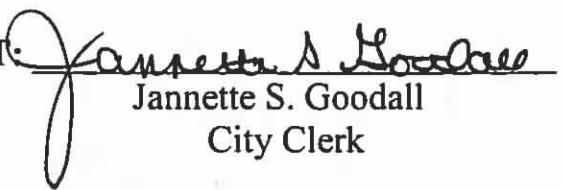
The City Manager is directed to work with Travis County to partner in funding for to expand the programs in RISE, to provide an extension of funding, and subsequently as needed.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

The City Manager will provide Council an update on the implementation of this resolution by April 23, 2020.

ADOPTED: April 9, 2020

ATTEST:


Jannette S. Goodall
City Clerk