

RESOLUTION NO.

1
2 **WHEREAS**, on March 6, 2020, the City of Austin and Travis County issued a
3 Declaration of Local Disaster that allows the City to take measures to reduce the
4 possibility of exposure to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) and promote the health and
5 safety of Austin and Travis County residents; and

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

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

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

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

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

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

27 **WHEREAS**, the mission statement in the City of Austin’s Strategic Direction
28 2023 highlights the values of economic opportunity and equity, which are echoed
29 throughout the numerous outcomes, indicators, anchors, and strategies that guide the
30 City’s priorities and governance; and

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

35 **WHEREAS**, the City Council of the City of Austin passed Ordinance No.
36 20200326-090 and Resolution Nos. 20200326-091 and 20200326-092, each of which
37 respond to needs of Austin residents amid the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic,

38 and open a path toward relief in housing, economic strain, and utility expenses during
39 this crisis; and

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

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

44 The Council authorizes the City Manager to utilize previously unbudgeted funds
45 to expand social services contracts with existing providers and execute new emergency
46 contracts as needed in order to provide immediate direct services and assistance that are
47 equitably focused, temporary, and for vulnerable Austinites impacted by the COVID-19
48 pandemic with minimal administrative costs or delay. Relief in a State of Emergency
49 (RISE) funding will target relief and services to be provided in April, May, and June of
50 2020, unless otherwise extended by Council. Funding in an amount not to exceed \$15
51 million, pursuant to a budget amendment approved by Council, is intended to be
52 distributed to the community to the best of the City's ability as follows: half in in one
53 phase to provide immediate relief in April, 2020, and the second half in another phase
54 in May, 2020.

55 Authorized funds will be used to provide equitable relief, and social service
56 provider recipients of funds should prioritize those Austinites and communities that have

57 dire economic needs that are not being met and/or cannot be met by government
58 programs such as direct financial assistance under the CARES Act or unemployment
59 insurance. The City Manager is directed to utilize the most restrictive funds (e.g., CDBG
60 funds) prior to tapping General Fund dollars for any of the purposes described below.

61 Funds will be distributed per the guidelines below.

62 **Goal**

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

76 distributed by providers that have a history of trust and success in reaching communities
77 of color, the LGBTQ+ community, immigrant communities, seniors, and other
78 historically marginalized communities.

79 **Funding Distribution**

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

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

95 The remaining portion of allocated funds will be distributed as direct financial
96 assistance to eligible Austin residents by one or more qualified organizations with an
97 operational model acceptable to the City. For the purpose of RISE funding, “direct
98 financial assistance” refers to legally allowable transfers or other one-time payments,
99 such as pre-paid debit or credit cards, provided to individuals through service providers
100 to assist with basic living expenses consistent with the existing framework established
101 by APH to ensure that the City has mechanisms in place to properly account for the
102 funds. Council directs that direct financial assistance is finite and limited as a response
103 to the COVID-19 pandemic, but should be distributed as immediately as possible to
104 individuals and families in need.

105 **Eligibility for Relief**

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

- 107 • Meet broad eligibility standards for Austin Public Health grant programs, such as
108 a family income at or below 200% of federal poverty income guidelines;
- 109 • Have experienced a significant hardship or loss of household income related to
110 the COVID-19 pandemic, which may include those who have experienced a
111 reduction in income, layoffs or furloughs, or who have taken unpaid leaves of
112 absence from work due to school or daycare closures, the need to care for family

113 members, or the need to remain quarantined after possible COVID-19 exposure;
114 and
115 • Are ineligible for other forms of significant governmental relief (such as the
116 CARES Act) or are receiving such relief in a limited or delayed manner that does
117 not meet their needs.

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

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

128 **Service Providers**

129 The City Manager is authorized to negotiate and execute amendments to existing
130 social services contracts with service providers who will use the funds to expand the
131 number of people served well beyond the existing populations currently served by

132 organizations in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and economic crisis. These
133 providers may subcontract with other organizations to expand capacity to provide these
134 services.

135 The City Manager is also authorized to negotiate and execute new emergency
136 contracts, to be executed pursuant to the City's emergency contracting procedures, with
137 social service providers who currently reach vulnerable populations that are historically
138 marginalized and any new contracts necessary to meet the Council's goals for the RISE
139 fund. The City Manager is authorized to streamline the administrative process so that
140 funds can be distributed as quickly as possible to those in need, including issuing waivers
141 or modifications of liability or providing other forms of insurance requirements for
142 community-based organizations that can provide these relief services or the direct
143 financial assistance, but that are unable to meet increased insurance requirements.

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

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

- 148 • Providers will be responsible for providing the City with such reporting as they
149 currently have in place, to include aggregate descriptive data about aid recipients

150 and their communities, as well as schedules of distribution and other regular
151 reporting;

- 152 • Providers must be able to employ a mechanism to audit all expenditures;
- 153 • All data must be secured, and personally identifiable information must be
154 protected, pursuant to City of Austin guidelines and applicable law;
- 155 • Accessibility options, such as prepaid debit cards or gift cards, should be
156 considered and made available for clients who are not able to receive ACH
157 transfers with suitable controls as are currently utilized by organizations that
158 contract with APH.

159 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:**

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

163 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:**

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

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ADOPTED: _____, 2020

ATTEST: _____
Jannette S. Goodall
City Clerk