

# Indigenous Land Relationship Fund

(Working document June 2023)

## Who We Are:

### **Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts (COLT):**

COLT is a nonprofit organization founded in 2012 with a mission to serve and strengthen the land trust community in Oregon. COLT does that by building connections and advancing policies that help protect the natural world.

### **Oregon Land Justice Project (OLJP):**

The OLJP was initiated by COLT and its members in partnership with First Light Learning Journey, and Tributaries Network. The project organizes land trusts in Oregon to use their individual organizational strengths and assets *collectively* in service to Indigenous people and communities in Oregon. The mission of the Oregon Land Justice Project is to promote Indigenous land access, land return, and tribal sovereignty. Land trusts do this through education, relationship building, and resource development in order to support Indigenous peoples in reclaiming and reconnecting to landscapes and First Foods.

### **Oregon Land Justice Council (Council):**

The Council is a group of land trust representatives who are actively using their collective resources to champion land justice. The Council exists to pool the experience, commitment and financial resources of participating organizations to be in direct service and action to Indigenous efforts to reclaim and reconnect to traditional landscapes and first foods. The Council meets monthly to coordinate on land access projects in response to requests from our tribal partners. The Indigenous Land Relationship Fund is a program of the OLJC, and the Fund is administered by COLT.

“We” and “our” in this document refer to the OLJC. Each member of the Oregon Land Justice Project is expected to contribute \$5,000 annually to the Indigenous Land Relationship Fund. This financial commitment is one of the ways that the council is externalizing its commitment to the mission of the Oregon Land Justice Project.

## Purpose

The Indigenous Land Relationship Fund will directly assist Indigenous people reclaiming and reconnecting to culture, traditional landscapes and first foods.

The fund is a pool of financial resources—currently distributing about \$50,000 per year—created by nonnative land trusts/conservation organizations in support of Indigenous-led nonprofits, Indigenous individuals, and Tribal governments whose ancestral lands include Oregon.

The purpose of this document is to affirm, internally and externally, our goals for the fund as clearly and transparently as possible.

## Our Commitments

- The barriers to access and use of these funds will be minimal. The funding request process will be simple, and funding will be granted with as few strings attached as possible, e.g., no accompanying requirements for photos or lengthy reports.
- We will be transparent about our process.
- The fund is not designed to support white-led organizations or nonnative individuals. Otherwise, Indigenous individuals, Indigenous-led nonprofits and Tribal governments whose ancestral lands include Oregon are all welcome to apply.

## Our Intentions

- Our intention is to shift financial resources and decision-making power to Tribes and tribal communities, and we recognize that our current role as gatekeepers to these funds is misaligned with this intention. Over time and following the interests and needs of Indigenous people, we envision a full transition to inter-Tribal leadership over fund decisions and distributions (see Evolution section below).
- Our intention is to distribute these funds equitably over time across a diversity of Tribes whose ancestral lands include Oregon. We aspire to build community, not be divisive or do harm. We

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acknowledge that we don't know what “equitably across Tribes” looks like and that at the outset, awareness of and access to this fund may be skewed towards individuals and Tribes with which the land trust community has already developed relationships.

- Based on currently available annual resources (~\$50,000), we presume that funds would be most helpful to support land relationship and reconnection efforts as opposed to acquisition of land (though due diligence costs may be considered). The average proposal is anticipated to be \$15,000. The Oregon Land Justice Council may be able to offer additional technical or capacity assistance beyond the requested amount, and will ask those seeking funds to describe additional needs. If additional requests come in beyond available funds, we intend to explore other options to support proposal(s), e.g., connections to prospective donors, donated grant writing support, etc.

### Evolution

**Phase One** (first 12 months; through May 2024):

- We will err on the side of moving funds out the door quickly and responsively; we anticipate fully distributing \$50,000 per year. Without a very good reason to not fund a project, we will fund it.
- We will aim to create broad awareness about this funding source, and work organically with those interested.
- We will reflect on our experiences and review freely offered feedback from Indigenous partners early and often.
- We will respectfully seek guidance on the structure of the fund and how to move money most effectively into Native communities.

**Phase Two** (1-3 years):

- Following a year's worth of experience, learning and feedback, we will make and document necessary adjustments to our process to increase transparency, accessibility and benefit to Indigenous communities.
- If this labor is freely offered, we envision the formation of an indigenous led council that advises on structure, process and funding decisions.

**Phase Three** (within 3 years):

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- Again, following the authentic interests of Indigenous partners, we envision that this fund is fully held and managed by inter-Tribal leadership representing Tribes whose ancestral lands include Oregon. Fundraising labor, however, will remain with non-native collaborators.

### How to Apply

Please answer the following questions in writing or voice/video recording on your phone and send them to Anna-Liza Victory by the 15<sup>th</sup> of every month. Our expectation is that applicants shouldn't need to invest more than 20 minutes into these responses.

- Who's the point of contact? Please include full name, email address and phone number
- Which organizations and/or communities do you represent?
- Which Tribes and/or communities does the project serve?
- How much funding are you requesting?
- When do you need these funds?
- What is the proposed project or effort? Please help us understand how this request supports Indigenous reclaiming and reconnecting to culture, traditional landscapes and first foods.
- The Oregon Land Justice Council may be able to offer additional technical or capacity assistance. Please describe any other needs or requests for support you may have.

### Reporting

Reporting on the use and impact of distributed funds is intended to help the Council improve the funding process and deepen relationships with fundees. The intention of reporting is to collect basic, necessary information without over-burdening those funded.

In an effort to create an efficient reporting process, we offer the opportunity respond to the three questions below via:

1. Email
2. Phone call
3. Recorded video
4. If appropriate, an in-person discussion. A member of the Oregon Land Justice Council could attend an event funded through this effort, visit with program staff/participants, and experience the project first-hand.

Our expectation is that a report on the three questions below should not take more than 10-15 minutes to develop.

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Reporting questions:

1. What was the impact of this work? What went well?
2. How did you spend the funds?
3. What advice do you have for the Council as we continue to direct funds? Are there ways in which the communication, process, or reporting could be improved?

## Process:

The Oregon Land Justice Council will meet monthly to review and award funding requests. Our decisions will be guided by the intentions and evolution structure outlined earlier in this document. All Council members are empowered to share opinions freely about each proposal.

We will be careful about how we evaluate the impact of fund distributions, with the understanding that evaluation can further an unwanted power imbalance between ‘funder and fundee.’ Likewise, the Council will be careful about what information it collects and makes public about funds distributed. There will be options for a funded individual, organization or Tribe to opt into information sharing:

- Option 1: Baseline, required information (Name and Amount), general project description
- Option 2: Additional project information
- Option 3: Interest in sharing story more broadly (based on ethical storytelling principles)

Decisions within the Council regarding the distribution of Funds will be made following a consensus-oriented process where ORJC members indicate their level of support via three tiers: 1) green: I like this, 2) yellow: I can live with this, 3) red: I block this. Red votes would block decisions, except in rare instances when the group decides to move forward *in the absence* of full consensus; e.g., if reoccurring ‘red’ votes from just one or two individuals represented a major barrier to the overarching purpose of the Indigenous Land Relationship Fund, then the Council may explore and agree upon other decision-making models.

## Examples of Potential Projects

- Funding a camp or activity that provides cultural access
- Support for a ‘ceded lands tour’ to reconnect to place and provide elders a chance to share story of place

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- Tribal needs for land transaction or stewardship costs

### Accountability:

This description of the Fund and our internal process for making decisions is posted publicly on our website. Every year, we will also list to whom and for what general purposes all funds have been distributed.