

Bequest Proposal for Native Land Conservancy

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I. Introduction

Core Request

We are proposing that Friends Meeting at Cambridge (FMC) make an unrestricted contribution to the Native Land Conservancy (NLC), a Section 501(c)(3) charitable organization founded and run by members of the Aquinnah, Herring Pond, Mashpee Wampanoag and Nipmuc tribes in Mashpee, Massachusetts.

The Native Land Conservancy was founded in 2012 with a mission “to preserve healthy landscapes for all living things and help restore land back to its original state wherever possible. We draw upon our collective traditional cultural knowledge as indigenous people with generations of direct experience in the woodlands, coastlines, and waterways of New England.”

(<http://nativelandconservancy.org>) The organization’s priority “has always been on recovering ancestral homelands and providing indigenous access for cultural purposes.” (Ramona Peters, NLC Board Chairwoman)

Overview

Wealth and privilege for white people in the USA have been created by hundreds of years of systematic oppression – particularly of Indigenous and African American people – based on white supremacy culture. White dominance has prospered through theft of people’s lives, work, freedom and dignity; theft of land and property; theft of children; theft of power and opportunity. Systems of white dominance are the scaffold for the relative advantage of all white Americans, and the solid wealth of many, both historically and currently.

Some of the tools of this systematic theft and continuing oppression include demeaning stereotypes of those robbed of livelihood and opportunity by these thefts; sexual violence against women as a form of domination; denial of educational opportunity; and multiple other measures calculated to separate a people from their cultural roots and practices. Federal and state laws have conferred legality on much of this oppression.

We in the Reparations/Reparative Justice group feel spiritually led to encourage the meeting to engage in reparations in order to address the history of genocide and exploitation by releasing resources that we benefit from due to that history. Making reparations is the process of identifying those harmed by our ancestors/ government/ religious groups, and taking responsibility for using our resources to address the harms. Making reparations is an immense project on a regional or governmental level. We are suggesting a first step for FMC.

In creating two concurrent proposals for uses of the recent generous bequest to FMC, we have looked for small, already-established groups led by communities of color. We have sought groups that members of our meeting are or might be involved with in friendship, learning and support, although in no way would FMC's contributions be dependent on such involvement. All decisions about use of FMC contributions would be made by the recipients.

It is important to us that any "reparations" donation we make be understood – by the meeting, by the recipient – as being about accountability and justice rather than charity.

We are asking for a percentage rather than a set amount of the bequest. We believe that it would eventually be appropriate for the Meeting to consider an annual percentage "right sharing" of our abundance towards reparations/ reparative justice.

The Quaker value/testimonies that guide our proposal include the testimonies of equality, right sharing, and right relationship with groups whose wellbeing has been negatively impacted by measures that benefit us and our meeting.

Specific Rationale for this Proposal

White settlers have stolen the land of Indigenous people, and endeavored to erase their language and culture. The women were raped and their children taken from them. They were considered subhuman. In Massachusetts and neighboring colonies/states they faced attempted genocide with repeated government bounties of land and money offered for their deaths. The Indigenous peoples of our area were not even provided with the inadequate alternative lands often forced on the Nations farther west. They lost access to their homes and use of their lands with no provision of alternate dwelling places. The impact of this loss continues today and undermines their livelihood. Many were enslaved and sent to work in Caribbean plantations (some owned by Quakers). Those who remained in our area generally needed to hide in plain sight for survival's sake. This resulted in the loss of documented history and the ability to achieve later federal recognition and to have the ability to raise subsequent land claims for all but the largest tribes and nations. In the face of oppression and attempted erasure, determined descendants have persevered in Massachusetts, working to maintain ties to the land and to continue and revitalize cherished land-based cultural practices.

One stellar example of this ongoing work is the Native Land Conservancy. They are the first indigenous-led land trust east of the Mississippi River and are seen as a model for other tribes and nations. Since their founding, they have created a variety of novel ways to enable indigenous connection to land. Unlike many land trusts, they do not limit their projects to only acquiring parcels of land, although that is one way they address their mission. As a small non-profit they also multiply their impact by creatively partnering with other land conservation organizations and individual landowners to negotiate use agreements allowing traditional activities to occur on lands previously closed to these practices. This has allowed for the gathering of medicinal plants, sacred ceremony, and opportunities for teaching both Indigenous and settler visitors about the different perspective and relationship with the land inherent in the cultures of its original inhabitants.

II. Use of Funds

We propose giving funds to an organization, not for a particular project. We are clarifying this because the Guidelines use the word “project”.

- Does this proposal advise keeping some or all of the bequest for FMC’s capital or budget use?

This proposal requests 10% share of the bequest, \$40,000, understanding that there are other proposals, some of which may be intended for the capital or budget needs of FMC.

- Is this the only funding for this project or is it part of a larger effort?

The Native Land Conservancy has successfully sought other sources of ongoing support for its work. It is highly rated as a 501(c)(3) organization.

- Is it ongoing after these funds are depleted?
- Is this funding for a start-up, a program already up and running, or is this for an expansion?

Since our donation is to be unrestricted, we are not able to answer the two previous questions.

- If being given to an existing program, what portion of that budget will this represent?

The NLC, like most land trusts, experiences significant year-to-year variation in annual revenue, depending on whether they receive an outright gift of land and cash to cover the mandated monitoring and supervision of the parcel required by the IRS to meet contractual obligations of the grant.

Over the last four years, the NLC has had the following annual revenues:

— 2018. \$83,296 — 2019. \$322,211

— 2020. \$74,584 — 2021. \$1,352,860

(The 2021 figure reflects the gift of 32 acres on Cape Cod and the required accompanying cash.)

It is not possible to provide a firm estimate of what percentage of annual revenue this gift of \$40,000 would represent in the year given. But these figures show that a grant of this size would be sufficient to materially assist the NLC in its work but not out of the range of gifts the organization has managed productively in the past.

- If an existing project, are members and/or attenders at FMC already engaged with this project, and if so, how? Are community members welcome to become involved and how?

The Native Land Conservancy has welcomed the participation of FMC community members. Multiple members and attenders are on the NLC's distribution lists and receive ongoing information about their work. Members of the Meeting have attended educational walks and participated in other projects such as clean up of the land from invasive species. FMC has also allocated grant funds to the NLC in the past.

III. Budget - up to three years is recommended

As explained above, our intent is for these funds to be given unrestricted, to be used according to the best judgment of the NLC. Whether or not the funds will be used over multiple years is not our decision to make.

