CCCF COVID-19 Rapid Response Mini-Grants
Per IRS Regulations, applicants must be charitable, tax exempt organizations with 501(c) (3) certification & cannot be individuals.

Background/Eligibility
The Community Foundation’s COVID-19 Rapid Response Fund provides flexible resources to Chester County nonprofits that are disproportionately impacted by coronavirus and the economic consequences of this outbreak. This is designed as a flexible short-term response fund to provide relief for a variety of unexpected costs. We envision three funding priority levels:

- **Front Line Grants** fund community-based nonprofits that have increased demand for services due to COVID-19. These nonprofits have deep roots in community and a strong track-record serving people who are immediately and disproportionately suffering from this crisis. This includes services to financially vulnerable people who work in industries without sick leave &/or health care; homeless people; and health-challenged vulnerable people. Grants are intended to complement the work of public health officials and expand local capacity to address acute needs of the outbreak as efficiently as possible. These grants are NOT of the scale to support larger public institutions that are strained by increased demand for services. Examples of the types of nonprofits in most need of Front Line Grant Support, as service numbers rise: community-based health clinics; food bank & food pantries; meal delivery programs; homelessness programs.

- **Service-Challenged Grants** fund nonprofits that are modifying their in-person service delivery modes extremely rapidly due to COVID-19, and need assistance to do so. These nonprofits likely need additional assistance to upgrade sanitation protocols and obtain cleaning supplies & service personnel. This includes: youth centers, recreation centers, child care, senior services, adult day care, community-based education programs.

- **Collateral Damage Grants** fund nonprofits facing extreme difficulty because of lost revenue due to closures and cancellations, as well as other challenges.
COVID-19 Rapid Response
Mini-Grant Letter of Request

What Chester County geographic area is served?

All of Chester County is served. Additionally, due to the unique 9-12-month program our shelter offers, we do receive applicants from Montgomery, Bucks, and Philadelphia counties. Applicants must have three interviews, drug and alcohol testing, and be able to work.

What population is served?
Single homeless women of Chester County without children in their care.

Impact of COVID-19 on our clients:

Our homeless clients already suffer from increased in depression, anxiety, joblessness, and financial insecurity. The combination of social distancing, concern for clients with pre-existing health conditions, and the shelter in place order, on top of the daily stressors they are experiencing, has them in a state of panic. Because our two shelters house 4 women each, the women are in very close contact with each other, and feed off each other’s moods. The current situation has become one of mild hysteria, and is difficult to address with the current mandates of sheltering in place. Consistent, sustainable employment is the basis of our shelter program, and the additional stress of not being able to work and the inability to save money has further contributed to shelter residents’ panic.

We discovered that after a 9 month stay at The House, with support, employment assistance, counseling, and structured guidance, our clients were ready to move out of The House and into a shared living arrangement or apartment. To our dismay, we discovered a severe lack of affordable housing existing in Phoenixville, forcing clients out of Phoenixville in order to find affordable permanent housing. Moves to Philadelphia, Norristown, or Coatesville netted an apartment they could afford, but removed them from their source of transportation, employment, counseling, community support services, and frequent interaction with our staff. To this end, we rallied fundraisers, donors, funders, and grantors, and purchased Next Step House in October 2019 as permanent low-income apartments into which graduates of The House could move, continue to save money, and allow them to remain near their systems of support.

Four months of safety, fire, borough and HUD inspections followed, and in early March we opened our doors to our first residents, both graduates of The House. The third is due to arrive April 1. Her arrival is now on hold due to the virus. We cannot take the chance of bringing anyone new into either Next Step House or The House since they may have been exposed. Our inability to accept new clients means that more women are stuck living on the streets, in their cars, and in abusive relationships.

Additionally, now that we’ve purchased our second shelter, our inability to accept clients who participate in the HUD-assisted low-income renters’ program means each empty bed translates into lost funding from HUD, which eventually will leave us unable to pay the mortgage for the facility we just purchased.
The impact of this vicious virus has far-reaching tentacles.

Our jubilance of opening Next Step House and serving as a model of a much-needed low-income successful shared living arrangement has been quickly shut down. Maintaining sustainable employment and participating in a mandatory savings system are the backbone of our entire program. Working gives our clients a sense of purpose, structure, and pride. Already in two short weeks, we have seen COVID-19 destroy morale, initiative, and consistency of effort. Without the structure of daily interaction and purposeful workdays, clients have begun to show signs of relapsing into old behaviors and choices which are not conducive to their independence and success.

Several of our clients have children in the foster care system, with whom reunification is contingent on maintaining a job and consistent savings, moving into a place of their own, and keeping themselves in a strict pattern of stability. The longer the virus demands social distancing and working from home (or rather, due to the nature of the jobs our clients typically have, not working at all) innocent children are being deprived of their mothers through no choice of their own.

Our two biggest fundraisers, which generate a combined revenue of $50,000+, have been shut down by the government as a safety precaution. Businesses are already in financial jeopardy and initiating layoffs, impacting the ability of both businesses and individual donors to support our local nonprofits as they had previously. Particularly for young, small nonprofits such as Phoenixville Women’s Outreach, this pandemic may be the kiss of death. Unlike Phoenixville’s men’s shelter and the family shelter, both of which have a large staff, long-standing corporate donors, and funding from the county, PWO is still in its infancy with a staff of 1.5 and subsists solely on grants, donations, and contributions. As the one full-time paid employee, I question whether I myself will have a job at the end of this year.

Phoenixville is renowned for its large number of nonprofits and infectious community spirit. As all small nonprofits bend under the strain of the virus and its implications, each of us will compete even harder for the limited funding available. One hopes that this virus will not poison our collaborative spirit as we all rush to apply for monies to help our clients and to keep the services we offer afloat.

Though our nonprofit is still in its infancy at only 5 years old, in 2019 we doubled the number of shelters we operate, the number of clients we serve, and the mortgages we pay. Suddenly, all incoming clients have been paused and all existing clients are forbidden to work. This leaves us in financial chaos. How will we continue to serve our existing clients as well as pay the mortgage on our second shelter? Banks and mortgage lenders need to consider an alternative plan of payments in order to help keep nonprofits and small businesses afloat.

Many of our clients are from a lower socio-economic stratum. Single moms working two or even three jobs to make ends meet may now have children unattended (or in charge of other younger children) at home, increasing the likelihood that these children will fall farther and farther behind in school. Children in low-income and urban schools, already two full years behind, will fall farther behind, which may result in more dropouts, more children on the streets, more teen pregnancies, more addiction, and more in prison. Once again, the children are the innocent victims most hurt in this scenario.

How PWO has responded to serve our clients:

We have been doing a lot of hand-holding, reassuring, and stress-management. Our clients are already emotionally fragile, lack the support of their families, are socially isolated, and financially unstable. Our primary concern has been to ensure that they know they are not alone. Our Resident Director has been physically stopping in at each shelter every day (as is her normal routine) to let them know we care about them. The use of Zoom, Skype, FaceTime, text, and email allows us to check in on them daily. Homemade meals are dropped off with notes of encouragement. We reiterate that we are not going anywhere, that we support them fully as we always do.
How much funding is being requested?  
$5,000 (less than 1% of annual operating budget)

2020 Annual Operating Budget: $547,598
(2020 budget doubled from 2019 budget due to purchase of Next Step House in October 2019)

What will the funding be used for? What is the expected timeframe for use of funds?
Funding will be used for general operating funds of The House and Next Step House in order to keep both open for clients. Clients stay at The House for 9-12 months nearly free of charge; it is kept open solely through donations, grants, and fundraisers. Next Step House clients pay rent on a sliding scale through HUD; during the coronavirus crisis, they are not working and therefore not contributing to rent. In order for our shelters to remain open, we need to replace funding lost by the shutdown of fundraisers and employment. $5,000 would allow us to pay for both programs for 2.5 months.

Please email grants@chescocf.org

_x__ This Brief COVID-19 Rapid Response Mini-Grant Letter of Request
_x__ Copy of annual operating budget or most recent audit
_x__ 501c3 determination letter

Request letters will be posted on the Community Foundation’s website, in order to share with fund advisors, donors, grant panelists, and other funding sources. Grants will be processed a few times monthly. We estimate mini-grants will range from $500 to $5000.

Please direct general questions & inquiries about the Rapid Response Mini-Grants to grants@chescocf.org. Beth, Steph, Cierra or Kevin will answer you.