

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS: EVALUATION CAPACITY BUILDING FOR THE HOUSTON IN ACTION COLLECTIVE IMPACT NETWORK

As part of its technical assistance program, Houston Endowment is supporting Houston in Action in its search for a partner to build the learning and evaluation capacity of Houston in Action staff and approximately 50 network partners.

Houston in Action is a collective impact initiative made up of people and organizations who come together to strengthen and grow community-led civic participation and organizing culture in the Houston area.

KEY DATES AND INFORMATION

RFP release date:	Tuesday, July 19, 2022
RFP close date:	Friday, August 26, 2022, at 5 pm CDT
Last day to email intent to submit a proposal:	Friday, August 12, 2022
Last day to submit questions:	Friday, August 12, 2022
Q&A session:	Monday, August 15, 2022, at 1 pm CDT via Zoom
Project timeframe:	October 2022 – December 2023
Total project budget:	Not to exceed \$2,000,000
Proposal submission and RFP contact:	Email proposals to:
	Brittany Fitz Director of Collective Learning Houston in Action brittany@houstoninaction.org With a copy to: Patrick Moreno-Covington Program Analyst Houston Endowment Pcovington@houstonendowment.org

BACKGROUND

Please note that the following information was provided by Houston in Action.

About Houston in Action

Houston in Action is a collective impact initiative focused on civic engagement in Houston, Texas. We believe that regardless of social identity, people should have equal opportunities to participate in, and have a meaningful impact on, civic life.

The initiative boasts over 50 member organizations and over 100 participating organizations that include academic and research organizations, foundations, non-profit organizations, and other civically engaged entities across Houston and Harris County. These members and partners are dedicated to the long-term work needed to promote community leadership and break down systemic barriers to civic participation. As a result of our role in the community, we have coordinated successful efforts and moved the needle around an accurate count in the 2020 Census, voter registration and mobilization efforts, and recently led a successful Unity Mapping effort for Harris County Redistricting. Houston in Action also acts as the anchor partner in Harris County for the Equitable Vaccine Initiative and has established an organizing ecosystem for continuous, not-campaign centered investment in local communities.

As the backbone organization for the larger civic engagement initiative, we also believe in strengthening the nonprofit sector in Harris County through intentional relationships with organizations and communities, creating opportunities for organizational networking and partnership building, and building the capacity of our partners. Building capacity within our partners includes providing access to various infrastructure such as data systems, access to content and research experts, coaching and mentoring by our staff, and access to funding through joint/collaborative proposals. Houston in Action believes that equity takes all forms and works with even the smallest, or emerging, organizations to make an impact. Many of these organizations received their first funding because of their involvement in the initiative.

Our Structure

Houston in Action is composed of a dedicated internal staff, a steering committee that guides the work, and a collection of working groups and funding tables that focus on specific topics around civic engagement. Our internal team brings together experts from across communications, data, facilitation, and policy in order to best support our partner organizations through their journeys. Our partners engage with the network at many levels: one-on-one meetings with Houston in Action staff, participate in the Steering Committee, or attend working group meetings. Through these meetings partners have developed a common agenda around civic engagement, share data, coordinate reinforcing activities, and engage in continuous communication between members and the communities they serve. Houston in Action strives to be the trusted source of information and our partners are the trusted voices within their communities.

Steering Committee

Houston in Action has a steering committee which provides board-like governance and leadership to the initiative. This body is responsible for the guidance and direction of the initiative as well as ensuring coordination and alignment among partners and campaigns. The steering committee is composed of organizational representatives from active campaigns, community leaders, and funding and research partners.

Working Groups and Tables

In addition to the steering committee, Houston in Action also coordinates and facilitates numerous tables and working groups around campaign-specific topics including equitable vaccine distribution and voter engagement. These groups are led by partner co-chairs helping to establish a truly partner-led initiative. These groups meet monthly to share the latest research, update on partner progress, and determine aligned next steps. In addition to campaign specific work, Houston in Action facilitates the development and coordination of an organizing ecosystem in Harris County. Prior to this effort, there was not a cross-mission effort or support network for groups organizing in the region. We have established three organizing cohorts representing the Black, Latinx, and Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) communities. For example, the Black Community Organizing group is made up of Black-led organizations who had a dedicated mission to building leaders within their communities. While the individual member organizations focus on different segments of the population (LGBTQ, immigrants, women, etc.) and have different missions (voter engagement, advocacy, transportation, etc.), all of these groups unite around the process of organizing and creating community-led leadership.

Future Work

2022 is an exciting year for the Houston in Action initiative with large scale plans around elections and the ongoing organizing work. We are focused on three interconnected outcomes: create opportunity, build knowledge, and amplify voices. These three reflect a collective mission and vision in which Houston grows the culture of learning and organizing for community influence and strength, and once achieved, will allow *every person to have a powerful role to play in shaping a just and vibrant community*. We aim to create opportunity by building systems with equitable community-led policies and strong democratic notes, we build knowledge by advancing community members into positions of power, and we amplify voices by strengthening the communities' influence through new and existing platforms.

To achieve these goals, we will engage in a robust 2022 voter registration and mobilization campaign, support our organizing cohorts (Black and Latinx) and work towards creating two new cohorts (AAPI and youth), engage in local redistricting (school districts and city), look into expansion into new areas or deepen engagement in existing areas, and strengthen our ability to offer capacity building both internally and externally. Building capacity is not limited to learning and evaluation, but part of a larger strategic plan to bolster our groups' capacity in communications, data and evaluation, organizing, and field work. We are currently doing this through a series of training sessions throughout the year and individual coaching with pre-determined partners.

EVALUATION CAPACITY BUILDING SCOPE

Please note that the following information was provided by Houston in Action.

Project purpose

As a core tenant of collective impact work, we help organizations build capacity within member organizations in a myriad of ways; however, most of our work in data and evaluation has either been on the front end with data collection/access to systems and on the back end with aggregate data reporting. We work with organizations to understand how to look at their data and make changes (rapid evaluation practices), demonstrate practices on collecting formal and informal information (human-centered design thinking), but we have not outright labeled and offered training explicitly to build evaluation capacity either internally with staff or externally

with partners. We are working to shift the narrative from where data is punitive to a culture where we can use data as a learning tool for future efforts. We acknowledge the history of colonization and structural racism associated with data and work to embrace alternatives.

In 2022, we welcomed Brittany Fitz, our Director of Collective Learning, to the team. She has been a consultant with us over the last two years, but with her transition to full-time, we anticipate our partners will be more exposed to the specifics of evaluation. She currently works with partners to assess needs around evaluation and works with the more advanced partners to design program evaluations.

For other areas of our capacity building work, we utilize an academy model, partnering with network and external experts to provide training and coaching on dedicated topics such as media training, foundational principles of organizing, or data systems training. These trainings are sometimes campaign specific, but also contain lessons applicable outside of a campaign. We would like to develop a similar curriculum to address similar gaps in evaluation capacity among partners.

The purpose of this evaluation capacity building project is two-fold: (1) expand the relationship and understanding our staff has with evaluation, and (2) build the capacity of our 50 network partners to plan and execute their own programmatic evaluations and share data and learnings with Houston in Action.

First, we would like to build the formal evaluation capacity of our team. We currently employ several evaluation techniques to collect feedback and insight from partners including pre- and post-interviews, post-campaign surveys, group debriefs, etc. This information is used in grant reporting, shaping future efforts, and relaying the overall success of our network. We invite proposals to strengthen our reasoning behind data collection, create shared vocabulary among team members, provide guidance and tools to help assess our network's ability and willingness to collect and report meaningful data. We are looking for an organizational evaluation framework that includes a theory of change, measurement approaches and plans, an examination of data processes within Houston in Action, an examination of data processes between Houston in Action and partner organizations.

Second, we would like to extend these learnings to our entire network of partners through the creation and piloting of a learning cohort around a shared evaluation curriculum. We invite proposals that will acknowledge the different levels of experience our partners have with data and evaluation, acknowledge the problematic position of data within systemic racism, and contribute to the healthy growth of our nonprofit ecosystem by giving partners the tools, skills, and knowledge to not just operate, but upend established norms of evaluation. We anticipate the work of the learning cohort to outlive the length of this engagement. Approaches to this work should allow for us to carry on the work past 2023, meaning established tools and curriculum that can be repeated and built upon for our ongoing work.

To ensure ongoing and significant participation from our partners, **we anticipate a large portion of the project budget to be allocated towards partner stipends.** Up to 50 partner organizations will participate in this project and the budget should reflect stipends to all participating organizations. This should be commensurate with the proposed training and coaching schedule.

A third component of the proposal is the documentation and analysis of insights learned from an evaluation capacity building project of this scale. This project is being funded by [Houston Endowment](#), a local funder who seeks to understand the elements of success for an evaluation capacity building project of this type and for a collective impact organization and individual member organizations. The audience for this deliverable is funders, collective impact

organizations and partners, and evaluators carrying out large scale evaluation capacity building projects. It is anticipated this deliverable will synthesize data collected throughout the project and will include recommendations and considerations for future evaluation capacity building projects.

Please feel free to propose additional components of evaluation capacity building you feel are missing from this request. We want to ensure that our organizations receive the full benefit of this interaction and exposure to your expertise.

Our Evaluation Values

Since its inception, Houston in Action has operated under a set of network-built working principles and community norms. These are reviewed at each meeting, and network members are held accountable for embodying these principles throughout the work. Last year, the data and evaluation team took these principles and determined how the team can do their work living through these principles, the result is listed below:

- Freedom from discrimination
 - Protect confidentiality
 - Continuously test assumptions
 - Build capacity
- Inclusive decision-making
 - Seek input and feedback on successes and failures
 - Present information in an unbiased manner
- Everyone has a voice
 - Incorporate varying perspectives
 - Give preference to mixed-method approaches
 - Participatory
- Accessibility
 - Adhere to high standards while understanding the capacity of our partners
 - Always keep the larger context in mind, adapt accordingly
 - Never be punitive
- Engagement with community
 - Share data and finding both internally and externally
- Group goals over own interests
 - Prioritize needs of the group and choose strategically
 - Understand that impact is only achieved through the collective efforts of our partners
- Equity and systems-level change
 - Seek to measure long-lasting change
 - Focus on measuring change of major significance and value
- Conflict resolution
 - Be as transparent as possible
 - Communicate in a constructive and timely manner
 - Stay focused on contribution over attribution

We are working to embody these principles into our research and evaluation projects. While we do not expect the proposal to directly incorporate each of these principles by name into the proposal, these principles will guide the RFP selection process and the capacity building activities of whomever is selected.

Evaluation Partnership

Brittany Fitz, Houston in Action's Director of Collective Learning, will act as the main point of contact for this partnership. She will work closely with our Director of Capacity Building, Laila Khalili. We expect and anticipate the selected evaluation partner to work in collaboration with our team and partners. The evaluation partner should be prepared to make recommendations and periodic presentations to our staff, partners, and steering committee.

This RFP allows a significant amount of time for the evaluation partner to become familiar with Houston in Action, our values, how we function, and how we achieve our goals. As a collective impact initiative, our work is complex and operates at multiple levels. We want recommendations and next steps to be tailored to our work and style.

We know our partner organizations have a wide-range of experience with data and evaluation. Some have been doing it for decades, while others are still tracking numbers on paper. Our role is to provide insight and access to partners and our own systems. Internally, the evaluation partner will work closely with the data team and our team of Initiative Coordinators who are our primary connection to our partner organizations and serve as the first point of contact and hold monthly one-on-ones with partners as needed. As this relationship moves into the external phase with an evaluation partner, we would like all partner organization training sessions to be co-led with a member of our team and a member of the evaluation consultant team to provide a warm introduction as well as establish ourselves as the point of contact.

Proposed high-level timeline:

Date(s)	Activity
October through December 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Build familiarity with the Houston in Action (e.g. document review, informational interviews, etc.)- Assess internal capacity for evaluation with internal staff- Observe and document processes, practices, strengths, barriers, etc. during the 2022 Election Cycle- Develop and share an evaluation capacity building plan focusing on internal development
December through January 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Begin executing internal training sessions to prepare internal staff to support during external phase- Develop and share an evaluation capacity building plan focusing on external development
January 2023 through December 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Consultant carries out the evaluation capacity building plan
Ongoing July 2022 through December 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Project insights of the evaluation capacity building project

Houston in Action will provide a list of important events and timetables for the evaluation partner as you consider how to best interact with our team and partners. We anticipate that you will have alterations to the original plan after the summer getting to know our partners and programs. We ask for an updated proposal at the end of September/early fall that will coincide with a presentation to our Steering Committee and staff. Please incorporate a kickoff meeting or workshop to introduce yourselves and the process to our network in any proposal timelines.

Responsibilities of the Evaluator

We expect the evaluator will work directly with our staff and our external partners.

- *Act as a champion for evaluation.* Demonstrate to our staff and partners an interest in the process and products of evaluation. Reinforce ideas that evaluation activities are intended to be helpful to staff, partners, and other decision makers. You may need to reassure staff and partners that evaluation practices are not intended to be punitive, but rather informational and instructive.
- *Build a working knowledge of the collective impact.* Observe and analyze the internal and external processes that guide our work. Develop a working theory of change that accurately depicts the work broadly and construct an ongoing data collection plan that links individual effort (programmatic data from our partners) to the collective effort within the context of the theory of change.
- *Ensure the utility and feasibility of evaluation activities.* Work with Houston in Action staff to ensure the project (1) generates information that is truly useful to the team and external partners, (2) can feasibly be completed with available resources and support, and (3) will take partner experiences and expertise into account.
- *Build internal evaluation capacity.* Communicate the knowledge you gain throughout the project with internal staff, partners, and funders. Explain the rationale behind your choices and allow internal staff to participate in decision making.

Deliverables

We are thinking of this project in three phases and are open to reimagining this paradigm.

1. Evaluation of internal capacity and growth
 - a. Audiences
 - i. Primary: Houston in Action Staff, Board, and Steering Committee
 - ii. Secondary: Houston Endowment
 - b. Deliverables:
 - i. An **overarching theory of change** to give clarity around how the backbone staff and partners fit into the work
 - ii. An **evaluation framework** including a documented plan, process, and tools to collect and share data as well as a data collection plan and recommendations for how data is used and shared between Houston in Action and partners
 - iii. **Evaluation capacity assessment** for internal staff to gauge the experience and knowledge of our team around data and evaluation. What are the necessary core competencies? How should we measure growth?
 - iv. **Internal training sessions and tools** to demonstrate growth
 - c. Things to consider:
 - i. Relation to our election and organizing work (ladders of engagement)
 - ii. Familiarity with our existing data systems (EveryAction, voter files)
2. Evaluation of external capacity and growth
 - a. Audiences:
 - i. Primary: Houston in Action Staff, Steering Committee, and Partners
 - ii. Secondary: Houston Endowment
 - b. Deliverables:

- i. **Evaluation capacity assessment** for external partners to gauge the experience and knowledge around data and evaluation. What are the necessary core competencies? How should we measure growth?
 - ii. A **clear plan to engage with individual organizations**, facilitate learning between organizations, and develop a strong evaluative partnership between network partners and Houston in Action.
 - iii. An **informed curriculum** incorporating the findings of the evaluation capacity assessment and delivered in tandem with Houston in Action staff. This can be done through one-on-one coaching, group training sessions, or a combination of both.
 - iv. **Execution of the learning community** (a yearlong engagement) consisting of our partner organizations established evaluation best practices and building their capacity around data and evaluation. Reporting on measurable growth through the process.
 - v. A **detailed/summative and co-created transition plan for ongoing work**
 - 1. How Houston in Action can best carry out continued evaluation capacity building with network partners.
 - 2. Consider continuation with existing partners and onboarding new organizations.
 - 3. Recommendations, not limited to, timing, additional support, staffing considerations
 - c. Things to consider:
 - i. Experience of our partners
 - ii. Needs and expectations of funders
 - iii. Focus on not just the growth of partners, but taking into consideration the health of our partners.
- 3. Project insights
 - a. Audiences:
 - i. Primary: Houston Endowment
 - ii. Secondary: Houston in Action, other funders supporting collective impact organizations, other Collective Impact Initiatives, and evaluators carrying out evaluation capacity building projects
 - b. Deliverables:
 - i. **Presentation and discussion of findings** for Houston in Action and Houston Endowment that highlights lessons learned, elements of success for a large-scale evaluation capacity building project, recommendations and considerations for other organizations who will be beginning an evaluation capacity building project. It is anticipated this portion of the project will include mixed-methods data collection throughout the project.
 - ii. A **report outlining findings, recommendations, and considerations** intended for internal audiences (i.e., Houston in Action and Houston Endowment).
 - iii. **Short report of findings, recommendations, and considerations** for funders, other organizations, and evaluators interested in engaging in similar evaluation capacity building efforts. This short report should use plain language, be designed and visually appealing, and easy to understand by audiences with varied knowledge of evaluation capacity building.
 - c. Things to consider:
 - i. Documentation process throughout the project lifecycle

ii. Communication with funder throughout project

Regular check-in meetings between Houston in Action and Houston Endowment project leadership are expected throughout the course of the project to assess progress on deliverables, update on important developments and provide an opportunity to iterate.

Note on Deliverable Ownership: Houston in Action will have ownership of all final work projects produced under Deliverables #1 and #2. Houston Endowment will have ownership of work projects finished under Deliverable #3 (project insights). Selected consultants can share deliverables related to this project with both Houston in Action and Houston Endowment's permission.

Desired Skills, Qualities, and Experience

- Experience with large-scale evaluation capacity building
- Experience working in the community organizing and/or electoral participation sectors
- Focuses on equity in all aspects of the work; engaging with different racial and ethnic groups, LGBTQ, women, low income, and youth
- Experience with participatory methods
- Ability to facilitate relationship development between multiple stakeholders
- Strong knowledge of the Houston civic engagement sector
- Strong project management
- Strong written and verbal communication skills

PROPOSAL REQUIREMENTS

Your proposal should include a cover letter, a written narrative addressing the topics below, and 2 to 3 references for similar projects completed in the last 5 years. Your **project narrative should not exceed 12 pages**. This does not include project budget, team biographies, examples of previous work, or references.

Responses can be from an individual firm or a collaborative proposal including various areas of expertise. We know it might be difficult to find a single firm with expertise in elections, organizing, collective impact, and evaluation. We encourage you to think broadly about what this proposal entails. Additionally, project teams can use subcontractors for components of the project. In your narrative please indicate if you plan to use subcontractor(s) and for which phases of the work.

Approach

- Describe your overall approach to evaluation capacity building
 - How you plan to engage HiA staff and HEI representatives
 - How you plan to engage network members
 - How you plan to work deeply with each network organization and tailor evaluation capacity building to their needs
 - How you plan to use participatory methods
 - How you will center equity
- Describe your overall approach to the project insights component
 - How will plan to design this component of the project
 - Who you will engage
 - How data collection will take place

Organization's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion

- Please provide a brief (e.g., one paragraph) overview on your approach to operationalize diversity, equity, and inclusion in your evaluative work and how your organization (staff, board, advisory groups, etc.) represent the perspectives of the populations this work will serve.
- Please describe and provide examples of how your organization will center diversity, equity, and inclusion throughout this project.

Workplan

Evaluation capacity building and project insights

- Key activities
- Dates/timeline
- Stakeholders engaged
- Deliverables

Budget

- Budget includes
 - Stipend amount to network organizations for participating
 - Travel
 - Software and supplies
 - Subgrants or subcontracts to content or systems experts
- Narrative
- Not to exceed \$2,000,000, inclusive of all project expenses

Qualifications/Team biographies/Example projects

- For each core team member please describe:
 - Role on this project
 - Experience or example similar projects
 - Any other relevant skills and experiences

References

- Please include at least two references for similar completed projects within the last 5 years
- Contact information, organization name, brief description of the project

Submission instructions

- Please email an optional intent to apply by Friday, August 12, 2022 to Brittany at Brittany@houstoninaction.org and CC Patrick Moreno-Covington at Pcovington@houstonendowment.org. Please limit this email to a brief email body that includes anticipated team members and has the subject line “Notice of Intent: [Team Name]”.
- Please email Brittany at Brittany@houstoninaction.org if you would like to participate in the Q&A session on Monday, August 15, 2022 at 1 pm CDT and she will send you the Zoom link.
- Please email submissions by Friday, August 26 at 5 pm CDT to Brittany at Brittany@houstoninaction.org and CC Patrick Moreno-Covington at Pcovington@houstonendowment.org. Please include the subject line, “Eval Capacity RFP: [organization name].”

TIMELINE AND ACTIVITIES

Key dates

Date(s)	Activity
Tuesday, July 19, 2022	RFP open
Friday, August 12 2022 at 5 pm CDT	Last day to submit optional intent to apply and questions
Monday, August 15, 2022 at 1 pm CDT	Questions and answers session via Zoom
Friday, August 26, 2022 at 5 pm CDT	Last day to submit proposals
September 2022	Proposals reviewed
End of September through beginning of October 2022	Interviews with finalists
October 2022	Consultant selected and notified

Proposal evaluation

Proposals will be reviewed by Houston in Action staff with the assistance of Houston Endowment and a subgroup of engaged stakeholders. The evaluation and selection process will focus on the following items:

- Overall approach and how equity is centered in the work
- Experiences with similar projects
- Engagement with Houston in Action and community partners
- Depth of evaluation capacity building work with network partners
- Team infrastructure and capacity is well-matched with scope of project and the needs outlined in this request

We are particularly interested in reviewing proposals from women, BIPOC, or LGBTQ-led firms with lived experience in organizing and civic engagement.

The selected consultant will hold the project contract with Houston Endowment. Houston in Action is the primary client for the consultant and Houston Endowment will be engaged throughout the project.

Houston Endowment, either alone or together with Houston in Action, reserves the right to modify, supplement, or withdraw this RFP at any time, and issue one or more addenda to this RFP. No part of this RFP and no part of any subsequent correspondence by Houston Endowment or its employees, directors, officers, or agents shall be taken as providing legal, financial, or other advice or as establishing a contract or contractual obligation. Contractual obligations will arise only if and when definitive agreements have been approved and executed by the appropriate parties having the authority to approve and enter into such agreements.