



# REQUEST FOR LETTERS OF INTEREST: Evaluation of Flexible Funding Approach

## Key Dates and Information

Project Issued: June 20, 2025

**Letters of Interest (LOI) Submission Deadline: July 8, 2025, at 5:00 PM CT**

Review Period for LOI Submissions: July 9- 18, 2025

Invite to Submit Proposal: July 21, 2025

Virtual Q&A Session: TBD

Proposal Submission Deadline: August 15, 2025, at 5:00 PM CT

Final Review Period: August 18-25, 2025

Interview with Top Candidates: August 25-28, 2025

Recommended Firm Selected and Notified: August 29, 2025

Contract Finalized and Projected Start Date: Mid-October

Contract Dates: One year (October 2025 to October 2026), possible extension for two years

Year One Budget: \$300,000 to \$500,000, dependent on scope, inclusive of all expenses

## Background

### Houston Endowment

[Houston Endowment](#) is a private foundation established in 1937 by Jesse H. Jones and his wife, Mary Gibbs Jones, to improve the quality of life for everyone in Greater Houston. Today, it has more than \$2 billion in assets and invests about \$100 million a year in strengthening public education, increasing civic engagement, enhancing the arts and cultural sector, and growing Houston's greenspaces—as well as addressing emerging opportunities in our region. Working with fellow Houstonians, Houston Endowment pursues bold goals, builds partnerships, and invests in innovative solutions to create a vibrant region where all have the opportunity to thrive.

### Overview of HEI Flexible Funding for Capacity-Building

Our grantee partners are vital to the strength and well-being of Greater Houston and play a central role in advancing HEI's mission. Nonprofits are currently navigating a challenging landscape marked by uncertain and unstable funding streams, rising demand for services, leadership transitions, limited resources, and growing pressure to adapt and innovate. In response, Houston Endowment has increased the amount of flexible funding opportunities for grantees. More details about these funds will be shared with consultants who are invited to submit a full proposal.

# Evaluation Scope

Houston Endowment is seeking a learning and evaluation partner to assess the roll-out and impact of HEI's flexible funding initiative across all funding areas: Arts & Culture, Education, Civic Engagement and Greenspaces. The participatory evaluation is planned to be a three-year evaluation and will be contracted in one-year increments. Year one should include a "Planning and Design" phase to enable time to finalize the evaluation plan with all stakeholders and early implementation of the evaluation. Years two and three will continue the evaluation to document use and impacts of the fund.

During the Planning and Design Phase, final evaluation questions will be determined collaboratively between the evaluation consultant, Houston Endowment, and grantee partners. It is anticipated the evaluation will touch these topics:

- Grantee and HEI staff experiences during implementation.
- The types of investments grantees make with the funds.
- Internal and external conditions that facilitate or hinder early use of the funds by grantees.
- The impact of the investment on leadership development, resiliency, and organizational health.
- Any long-term organizational shifts or changes enabled by the investments.
- Considerations for future HEI funding.
- Insights that can inform future funding.

Possible evaluation questions identified by HEI include:

- 1. How did grantees use the dollars?**
  - How did grantees plan to use the dollars? How did they actually use the dollars? How did this evolve over the grant period?
  - How did grantees define leadership and resiliency?
- 2. What were the impacts of this initiative for grantees?**
  - What changed in the organization?
  - What did the grant make possible?
  - To what extent were organizational leadership and resilience strengthened, if at all?
- 3. What were possible unintended consequences?**
  - Did anything negative occur due to this initiative?
  - How could this be overcome in the future?
  - Was the grant amount appropriate for the initiative?
- 4. How does capacity building look different based on organization size, budget, and portfolio?**
- 5. What level and types of non-monetary support was requested? What was the most impactful?**
  - Did we plan for the appropriate amount and type of non-monetary support?

Again, final evaluation questions will be determined collaboratively between the evaluation consultant, Houston Endowment, and grantee partners.

The evaluation will be designed to be participatory, and the selected consultant will work very closely with HEI and grantee partners. The purpose of the evaluation is twofold: 1) HEI learning about the impacts of this funding approach and 2) grantees learning from each other and alongside HEI. Therefore, there the evaluation will deeply engage grantees throughout the project and have opportunities for grantees to share insights, provide feedback, and participate in sensemaking.

Grantees will not be required to participate in the evaluation, but we expect most grantees to opt in to the evaluation.

Houston Endowment is a place-based funder focused on investing in Greater Houston (nine-county metro area). Therefore, it is important for the evaluator to have a Houston presence. If the evaluation firm is not located in Greater Houston, it is expected the selected evaluator will contract with a local evaluator.

## RFP Process

For this project, Houston Endowment will have an open call for Letters of Interest (LOI), followed by an invite only call for Proposals. The open call for LOIs will close on July 8, 2025, at 5:00 PM CT. Following review, selected individuals or organizations will be invited by July 21, 2025, to submit a full proposal, which will be due August 15, 2025, at 5:00 PM CT. The invitation will include the details of the proposal, but minimum requirements will include a detailed evaluation approach and plan for collaboration with HEI and grantees, a schedule of deliverables and a full budget for year one, as well as a brief overview of the evaluation in years two and three. The full proposal will be due on August 15, 2025, with interviews scheduled for the week of August 25-28, 2025. If approved, the evaluation will begin shortly after Board approval.

## Letter of Interest Requirements (LOI)

Please address the following topics in your letter of interest, not to exceed 3 pages. No cover letter is needed.

**LOI Submission Deadline: July 8, 2025, at 5:00 PM CT**

Submission Link:

<https://houstonendowment.app.box.com/f/89e3e9146b3a496f97eb9bd59b0bc848>

1. **Overview of Firm or Individual:** Brief background, including relevant evaluation expertise in evaluating nonprofit capacity-building, leadership development, or community-focused philanthropy.
2. **Key Personnel:** Include short bios and roles of team members likely to be involved in this project. *Full resumes are not required for the LOI.*
3. **Approach to Collaboration:** Describe your philosophy and experience working across sectors with grantees and funders. Include brief examples that illustrate how you have structured collaborative relationships in similar projects.
4. **Evaluation Approach:** Briefly describe your approach to co-develop and implement an evaluation of a flexible funding approach. Include brief examples of similar evaluation projects you have done.
5. **Houston Presence:** Briefly describe your initial ideas for how you will have a presence in Houston. Preference will not be given to evaluation firms located in Greater Houston, but the selected evaluator will be required to have at least one member of the evaluation team located in Greater Houston.
6. **Contact Information:** Include the name and contact information of one to two individuals who should receive all communications and notifications related to the proposal process.

## Submission Instructions

Submit LOI materials as one file to this link. Name the file YourOrganization\_FundingLOI to the [submission link](#) by 5:00 PM CST, Tuesday, July 8, 2025.

## LOI Evaluation

LOIs will be evaluated based on multiple criteria, which include but are not limited to:

- **Alignment and Expertise** -Demonstrated experience in evaluating flexible funding initiatives related to nonprofit capacity-building, leadership development, or community-centered philanthropy. Preference will be given to evaluators who show a clear understanding of flexible funding approaches and who bring relevant methodological expertise appropriate to the goals of the project.
- **Planned Approach** -Clarity, coherence, and feasibility of the overall evaluation design particularly as it relates to the goals and intended outcomes.
- **Effective Collaboration with Stakeholders**-Demonstrated ability to work in partnership with both funders and grantee organizations—particularly community-based nonprofits—to co-design and implement participatory evaluations.
- **Houston Presence**- Thoughtful plans for maintaining a presence in Houston throughout the evaluation period, which may include regular in-person engagement, community-based facilitation, or embedded fieldwork.

*Houston Endowment 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. Houston Endowment will, in its sole discretion and without limitation, evaluate proposals and proceed in the manner Houston Endowment deems appropriate.*

**Please do not hesitate to reach out to Sara Jones ([sjones@houstonendowment.org](mailto:sjones@houstonendowment.org)) with any questions and clarifications.**