

Ending Community Homelessness Coalition
(ECHO)

Strategic Plan

Request for Proposals

Fall 2021

Background:

The Ending Community Homelessness Coalition (ECHO) is the lead agency for the Austin / Travis County Continuum of Care. ECHO works to engage policymakers, housing providers, those experiencing and with experiences of homelessness, and the community to end and prevent homelessness in Austin/Travis County, Texas. As the designated Continuum of Care (CoC) lead agency for Austin/Travis County, ECHO manages the collaborative process to develop and submit the Austin/Travis County application for U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) funding for the annual HUD Continuum of Care Program. ECHO also administers the HUD required Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), is responsible for system wide outcomes and reporting to HUD and is the appointed facilitating agency of the community's Coordinated Entry system.

Governance Background:

ECHO is a local nonprofit and is governed by a nonprofit board that is responsible for overseeing the organization's activities. As such, the ECHO nonprofit board follows their adopted by-laws. The ECHO Board consists of 9 board members and 5 Ex-Officio Members. The ECHO Board oversight of ECHO includes adopting the agency's budget and strategic direction.

The Austin/Travis County Leadership Council serves as the Governing Board for the community's homelessness response system and is elected by CoC Stakeholders at CoC Fall Stakeholder meetings. ECHO staff provide support to the Leadership Council and the associated committees and workgroups as part of the CoC lead agency responsibilities. ECHO's strategic plan, which will include input from the Leadership Council, will not be adopted nor overseen by the Leadership Council. Instead, the awarded vendor will assist in the development and adoption of a strategic plan to guide ECHO's nonprofit board and staff on the direction of the agency, internal operations, and its strategic role in the homelessness response system.

ECHO History:

ECHO was founded in 2011, and over the past 10 years has experienced tremendous growth, with a current annual budget of over \$3 million and approximately 34 staff positions. ECHO is transitioning from a startup nonprofit to a mature organization. In addition, in the last three years, ECHO's leadership has turned over, with the founding Executive Director leaving and a new E.D. starting in the summer of 2019. As the Austin / Travis County's homelessness response system has grown and matured in response to the community's growth, ECHO's responsibilities to the CoC have challenged the organization to change and adapt to rapidly changing and developing needs, causing occasional stress in the community and internally at ECHO as we work to meet the economies of scale.

Key internal challenges ECHO staff have identified include underdeveloped systems for human resources and organizational development support, information technology, staff training, and

leadership training. As lead agency of a community coalition, ECHO's role is so outward facing that internal systems, policies, processes, and staff support have often been overlooked and undernourished. Additionally, ECHO's unique role in the system as a collaborative leader during currently unprecedented times, in the middle of a global pandemic, leads to high expectations for performance from those experiencing homelessness in our community, federal, state, and local leaders, as well as our fellow service providers.

ECHO strives to support the needs and goals of the homelessness response system. Some of the key new initiatives of the agency have been the following:

- Investing in staff to coordinate with institutions that feed into the Homelessness Response System, including health care and criminal justice
- Expanding our research and evaluation department to help our system understand how the HRS functions, including implications for racial equity
- Supporting the new Leadership Council governance and the associated committees and workgroups
- Increasing system equity through intentional partnerships with community-based providers who have traditionally been excluded from the formal HRS, specifically Black and Brown-led organizations
- Expanding access to the private rental market through a centralized vacancy list
- Supporting the community, in creating a prioritization tool which increases racial and gender equity within the community's Coordinated Entry System
- Expanding internal expertise, technical assistance, and processes to support the street outreach, diversion, emergency shelter, transitional housing providers, the Crisis Response System
- Executing a new Data Quality Plan through technical assistance and coordination the HMIS database
- Expanding internal expertise and technical assistance skills to support permanent housing projects, crisis response projects, housing location, homelessness system inflow points, racial equity in service delivery, and system management and coordination.

These recent initiatives have necessitated a change in ECHO's roles and responsibilities in the community, requiring shifting from providing direct services, to providing technical assistance, and hosting community trainings, and facilitating the restructure of HRS governance to effectively support direct services. These rapid changes and growth have happened in and around ECHO without the guidepost of a Strategic Plan. ECHO is seeking an applicant to facilitate the development of a strategic vision, informed by people with lived experience of homelessness, ECHO staff, board members, and community members, to guide the growth of ECHO as a nonprofit to best meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness and the appointed responsibilities of the organization to the Austin / Travis County Continuum of Care.

Goals for Strategic Planning:

- Create a Strategic Plan that includes clear goals and objectives for ECHO as a nonprofit organization for the next 3-5 years that are informed by an explicit racial equity lens
- Update the Mission, Vision, and Philosophy of Service to define ECHO's commitment to more clearly to racial equity, guide future growth, and clarify external messaging about ECHO's role in the community
- Provide a clear roadmap to guide the culture shift necessary to center racial equity in both internal organizational operations, policies, processes, and activities, and the external role ECHO plays in the HRS
- Establish clear metrics and benchmarks for ECHO to ensure that goals are accomplished.
- The strategic plan should create for ECHO a clear vision that also mitigates conflicts of interest perceived by providers and the community. Conflicts of Interest are limited and/or removed and do not create a barrier to accomplishing system goals/responsibilities/roles.
- Adequately delineate and address both internal and external operational needs for ECHO as a nonprofit and as a coalition lead agency during the strategic planning process
- Build out a structure for authentic inclusion of people with lived experience in ECHO operations

Scope of Work

The awarding entity will be responsible for accomplishing the following:

- Research and SWOT Analysis – Through a potential combination of surveys, focus groups, and interviews with key stakeholders (including agency staff, board members, Leadership Council Members, provider agencies, people experiencing homelessness, local government representatives, and local racial justice and equity experts), to:
 - Determine the current strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of ECHO
 - Determine the current state of ECHO's commitment to and implementation of racial equity practices and the impact on the HRS and those directly providing and receiving services
- Facilitate retreats/meetings with the ECHO nonprofit board and ECHO staff with the goal of relationship-building, aligning vision and strategy, and increasing knowledge of racial equity principles and practices
- Create an actionable strategic plan for ECHO including metrics for identifying completion of goals and recognizing barriers to success in meeting goals

Qualifications

Required Qualifications

- Experience and expertise with Strategic Planning and change management particularly in the social service sector.
- Expertise in applying a racial equity lens to strategic planning, organizational change management, community-based participatory research, or comparable activities which highlight commitment to equitable impact
- Strong facilitation skills
- Experience at gathering and utilizing research, racial equity analysis, SWOT analysis, and best practices to inform the planning process
- Experience collaborating with system users in strategic planning process

Preferred Qualifications

- Familiarity with the Homeless Response System, including an understanding of federal guidelines and the roles and responsibilities of a CoC Program Collaborative Applicant and HMIS Lead Agency
- An understanding of the impacts of racial disparity in the homelessness response system and the role of nonprofits in promoting and leading racial equity
- Background in intersecting areas of justice & equity (e.g. disability, LGBTQ+, recovery)
- Lived experience (homelessness, housing instability, poverty, disability, recovery)
- Experience at creating an equitable environment for, and soliciting input from, individuals from various sectors and with different levels of positional power

Timeline

November 5, 2021 – RFP Released

November 30, 2021 – Proposals Due

By Mid December 2021 – Consultant Selected

Summer 2022 - Strategic Plan complete

Proposal Submissions

General Information

The requested scope of work may be conducted by a single consultant, a consultant group, or by a partnership of consultants. The proposal should provide the name, title, address, telephone number, and email address for each person engaged in scope activities. Further, if a consultant group or partnership of consultants is proposed, the proposal should indicate who will serve as the “point” person for the purposes of this RFP and the engagement.

Consultant Qualifications and Roles

The proposal must describe the consultant's qualifications to conduct the RFP scope of work activities, including expertise, knowledge, and experience. Experience should include examples of conducting similar or related work.

If a consultant group or partnership of consultants is proposed to conduct the RFP scope of work, the proposal must indicate which activities each consultant will conduct as well as information about their level of expertise, knowledge, and experience to conduct those specific activities.

Work Plan

The proposal should contain a detailed description of the activities to be conducted by the consultant in order to complete the requested scope of work, including:

- Summary of Overall Proposal Vision, Scope, and Philosophy of Consulting
- the specific activities to be conducted at each stage,
- a timeline for the activities at each stage,
- milestones and deliverables tied to those activities, and
- a budget for each stage, along with a proposed payment schedule tied to project milestones and/or deliverables.

References

The proposal should include three references of individuals who can speak to their experience with the consultant or consultant group in conducting projects of similar scope. Information regarding each reference should include:

the Reference's name, address, telephone number, and email address.

GENERAL APPLICATION INFORMATION

Inquiries and Point of Contact

ECHO is serving as the point of contact for inquiries related to this RFP. All questions/inquiries regarding this RFP may be directed to Kate Moore, at katemoore@austinecho.org.

Submissions

Submissions should be emailed to Kate Moore, at katemoore@austinecho.org by 5pm on November 30, 2021.

Proposal Selection

ECHO Executive Leadership Team will work with ECHO's Strategic Planning Committee in consultation with the ECHO Board to select a vendor to complete the scope of work. The committee and ECHO reserves the right in negotiation with the contractor to amend the scope of work and timeline.