## I. Introduction

The City of Austin (City) seeks proposals in response to this Request for Proposals (RFP) from qualified nonprofit organizations or quasi-governmental entities (Offerors) with demonstrated experience in workforce readiness services to provide adult basic education (ABE), high school equivalency (HSE) preparation, English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), digital literacy, and job training to individuals residing in Austin/Travis County.

## II. Background and Purpose of Funding

In 2022, Austin City Council adopted the City's Federal Legislative Agenda via Resolution 20221201-027, citing that:

> "The City of Austin's continued growth depends in large part on our City's ability to deliver quality educational opportunities for our future workforce. The City supports legislation and funding that will enhance and create programs that increase quality access to education.
>
> The City supports legislation and increased funding to provide students and residents with career pathway opportunities, including work relief programs, apprenticeship programs, and workforce skills training…."

The City of Austin is committed to providing its residents with the skills and training they need to succeed in the workforce by working collaboratively with community-based organizations, the private sector, training providers and elected leaders.

Increasing access to job training and employment opportunities is critical in assisting Austin residents in achieving economic & social mobility. Additionally, Austin's Hire Local Plan has a number of strategies and tactics related to addressing workforce development. Strategy #2 speaks specifically to equipping workers with targeted skills by aligning training curricula with regional employers' needs, growing regional trainers' capacity to meet demand, increasing access to trainings for equitably-paying mid-level jobs for residents who have economic disadvantages, and enhancing training completion rates. Strategy #3 is to connect employers with local talent by increasing the number of earn-and-learn opportunities, creating opportunities to connect with employers before training program completion, promoting local hiring for mid-level positions, and implementing evidence-based hiring practices.

Data Austin reported in 2021 that 37.7% of people participating  successfully complete Workforce Development trainings offered by the City of Austin and local training partners. Of those who completed these trainings, 33% moved out of poverty into middle-skill jobs. 13% of Austin residents are living below poverty levels and 36% of households are paying more than 30% of income towards housing; while 24.6% of households are paying more than 50%.

According to Literacy Texas, Texas ranks first in the United States for the number of working adults who have not obtained at least a high school education.  Close to 3 million Texans, or 18% of the adult population, are without a high school diploma or certificate of high school equivalency.  Despite Austin's status as one of the ten most educated cities in America, 12% of Austinites had not obtained at least a high school diploma as of 2022. Lack of quality education disproportionately impacts Black, Indigenous,

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and People of Color (BIPOC) with only 2.5% of Austinites without a high school diploma identifying as White. Performance reports from current workforce development service providers funded by Austin Public Health (APH) show that while access to high quality education for the economically disadvantaged is lacking in every corner of Austin-Travis County, the majority of these residents live in East Austin, the St. John's neighborhood, and Govalle.

APH launched a community input survey requesting feedback from Austin/Travis County residents. The survey opened on Friday, March 17, 2023, and closed on Friday, March 31, 2023. The survey was available in English, Spanish, Vietnamese, Korean, Arabic, Traditional Chinese and Simplified Chinese. The overwhelming feedback was that while all solicitation objectives were important and in need of funding, the biggest need in Austin/Travis County is for more ESOL, ABE and affordable training opportunities for eligible community members.

**Solicitation Objectives**
The objectives of this funding are to:
1. Provide low-cost, high-quality ABE, HSE, ESOL and vocational training.
2. Provide education opportunities that are culturally relevant.
3. Provide wrap around support services, to foster increased sustainability and self-sufficiency.
4. Provide integrated education and training to meet students where they are and provide training in their language.
5. To move Austinites into jobs making at least $15 per hour.

## III.    Funding and Timeline

**Department***:*  Austin Public Health
**Services Solicited:**  Workforce Readiness
**Available Funding:**  $3,325,517
**Request Limits: The minimum request is $75,000**
**Anticipated Number of Awarded Agreements**: APH anticipates awarding up to 4 agreements from this Workforce Readiness Request for Proposal
**Contract Term:**  The agreements will have an anticipated effective start date of April 1, 2024, for a 60-month period. Funding beyond fiscal year 2024 is subject to annual budget approval.

Reimbursable agreements are APH's standard agreement type, as defined below. In rare instances, based on agencies' needs and when fitting with RFP funding priorities, a deliverable agreement may be possible.

Reimbursable Agreement- An Agreement where an agency is reimbursed for expenses incurred and paid through the provision of adequate supporting documentation that verifies the expenses

Deliverable Agreement- An Agreement where an agency is reimbursed for a report or product that must be delivered to the City by the grantee (or by the Subgrantee to the Grantee) to satisfy contractual requirements.  It can include goods or finished works, documentation of services provided or activities undertaken, and/or other related documentation.

## IV.    Priority Populations

Primary populations are:

- Adults 18 years and older from families with low income

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- Adults who have not obtained a high school equivalency
- Adults who do not speak English as their primary language
- Adults interested in enrolling in post-secondary or vocational education to increase wages and self-sufficiency

**City of Austin Eligibility Requirements**

Adult clients must be residents of, work in, or have children enrolled in schools in the City of Austin and/or Travis County. Clients must meet all other requirements to be eligible as described in Exhibit A.3: City of Austin Client Eligibility Requirements (Exhibit D of this Solicitation Package).

Some eligibility criteria may be waived for specific program models. Changes to eligibility are subject to negotiation and approval by APH staff.

Programs serving a variety of populations will be considered. Priority will be given to programs that include a focus on:

- **People identifying as Black, Indigenous, or Person of Color (BIPOC)**: Decades of occupational, educational and residential segregation have left BIPOC persons more vulnerable to economic downturns, which can exacerbate the racial wealth gap.
- **People living at or below 200% of the federal poverty line**: In 2021, Austin's average hourly wage outpaced the national average making the Austin-Round Rock Metropolitan Iarea a more expensive place to live than comparable cities across the country, and leaving behind those without high school equivalencies, vocational training, or whose salaries fall below the federal poverty line or state median income

## V. Austin Public Health Emergency Response

All agencies that are awarded funding through Austin Public Health Requests for Proposals are expected to provide emergency services in the event of a public health emergency (see Sections 8.6 and 8.6.1 of Exhibit E: Standard Boilerplate). Should agencies be called upon to engage in response activities, contract resources may be shifted, or new uses of resources approved within an awarded program budget at the discretion of the City.

## VI. Services Solicited
**Program Services**

The City allows and encourages Offerors to propose solutions to meet community needs effectively. The below list is a non-exhaustive summary of possible Workforce Readiness programs.

- **Adult Basic Education** classes for adult learners who demonstrate a first through eighth grade proficiency on the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE).
- **High School Equivalency** classes for adult learners who demonstrate a ninth grade and above proficiency on the TABE.
- **English for Speakers of Other Languages** classes for adult learners who demonstrate a need for improved English proficiency.
- **Digital Literacy** classes, in conjunction with other educational programming, to provide assistance with resume writing, composing emails, and orienting to a desktop or laptop computer.
- **Career Training** to include, but not limited to, vocational training, associate degrees, certificate programs, and integrated education and training.

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- **Wrap around services** such as case management, referral services, and direct financial assistance to increase stability and program completion.
- **Job Placement** services to assist with resume writing, interview skills and linking clients to local job opportunities.

## VII.    Principles of Service Delivery

1.  Trauma-Informed Practices: Successful applicants will apply the principles of trauma-informed practice to program and service delivery: safety, choice, collaboration, trustworthiness, and empowerment.

2.  Language Access Plan: Applicants will be in development of or already have developed a Language Access Plan. A language access plan is a document that guides the implementation of or plan to provide access to translation and interpretation services. Language access plans include a four-factor assessment that links service provision with the languages spoken in a grantee's geographic service area. Language access services, such as interpretation and translation, including sign language interpretation, are eligible expenses for program budgets funded through this solicitation. Please refer to Form 3 – Program Budget Narrative and Funding Summary within the Instructions tab for information on which budget categories would include such expenses.

3.  Data Sharing Agreement: Applicants providing services must be willing to upload information in a community database that tracks outcomes (such as Austin's Empowerment Case Management (ECM) system and participate in annual workforce development studies by The University of Texas at Austin's Ray Marshall Center.

4.  Referrals: Applicants should offer access to referrals and information on how to access other aligned services and providers.

5.  Program Accessibility: Programs should actively seek to eliminate barriers to services such as lack of transportation, limited communication and outreach, immigration documentation status, institutional barriers, and other restrictions.

6.  Equitable Service Delivery: Offerors must ensure that programs are providing services that meet the needs of diverse populations, considering systemic, institutional, and environmental barriers and inequities that exist and seeking to mitigate the effects on participant outcomes.

**Best Practices**
All supportive services programs are encouraged to incorporate the following best practices:

- Evidence-based Practices: Evidence-based practices are those which have been developed from research, are found to produce meaningful outcomes, can be standardized, and replicated, and often have existing tools to measure adherence to the model. The Offerors are encouraged to use evidence-based practices in their proposed program designs which should include developmentally appropriate practices and research based instructional practices for school readiness.

- Incorporating Perspectives from People with Lived Experience: Programs should be designed with input from individuals with lived expertise.

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- Livable Wage: The City of Austin recommends offerors follow Strategic Direction measure EOA.C.3 and pay at least a livable wage to all staff working on the program (EOA.C.3 - Dollars-per-hour wage that an individual must earn to support a family in Austin | Open Data | City of Austin Texas).

- Collaboration with the Community: Successful candidates will participate in local working groups and engage with community stakeholders.

## VIII. Data Collection and Program Performance

**Data Collection and Reporting**

For all programs serving individuals or providing client services, agencies will track and report the number of unduplicated clients served and document proof of the services provided where applicable. Client tracking should include methods for securely recording identity, zip code, income, and demographics of the people served without violating client confidentiality. The City does not collect personal health information (PHI) or personal identifying information (PII). No PHI or PII should be submitted to the City and if collected by the agency, must be securely maintained.

For those not directly working with individuals or providing client services, alternative performance measures will be made.

**Performance Measures**

The awardee(s) will be required to report on the following:

**Output:**
1. Number of unduplicated individuals served in a 12-month period

**At least one of the following Outcomes:**
1. Percent of participants in digital inclusion programs that improved their basic digital skills
   Numerator: Number of participants in digital inclusion programs that improved their basic digital skills
   Denominator: Number of participants in digital inclusion programs

2. Percent of individuals who complete an educational program and show improved knowledge
   Numerator: Number of individuals who complete an educational program that improves their knowledge
   Denominator: Number of individuals participating in the educational program

3. Percent of individuals obtaining employment
   Numerator: Number of individuals obtaining employment
   Denominator: Number of individuals exiting the program

**Supplemental Output:**
1. Number of participants whose wages increased upon completion

**Supplemental Outcome:**
1. Percentage of participants who maintain or improve employment after 6-months

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2.  Percentage of participants who obtain employment paying $15 per hour or more

**IX.**     **Application Evaluation**

A total of 100 points may be awarded to the application.  All applications will be evaluated as to how the proposed program aligns with the goals of this RFP and whether each question has been adequately addressed.

| RFP 2023-007 Workforce Readiness Rubric | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Form 1: Offer Sheet** | Offerors must print, sign, scan and upload signed forms. | No points, but Offeror must submit signed form. |
| **Form 2: RFP Proposal** | | |
| **Part I: Fiscal and Administrative Capacity** | Agency Information | No points awarded, but Offeror must pass threshold defined in Offeror Minimum Qualifications in C - Scope of Work. |
| **Part 2: Scored Proposal** | | |
| Section 1: Experience and Cultural Competence | Agency Experience & Performance Principles of Service Delivery Cultural Competence & Racial Equity | **20 points** |
| Section 2: Program Design | Program Work Statement     Goals and Objectives     Clients Served     Outreach     Program Services and Delivery     Program Accessibility     Referrals     Evidence Based Practices     Collaboration with Community | **50 points** |
| Section 3: Data Informed Program Management | Data Security & Systems Management Quality Improvement & Feedback Performance Measures | **10 points** |
| Section 4: Cost Effectiveness **Form 3** | Program Staffing & Time Program Budget & Funding Summary | **10 points** |
| | Cost Effectiveness & Number of individuals served/ total budget = Cost Analysis | **10 points** |
| | | **Total: 100 points** |
| **Form 4: COA Certifications and Disclosures** | Offerors must print, sign, scan and upload signed forms. | No points, but Offeror must submit signed form. |

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**X.     Applicant Minimum Qualifications**

- Agencies, board of directors, or leadership staff submitting a proposal must have a minimum of two years established, successful experience providing services OR must already have one or more directors with a minimum of two years' experience in related workforce development, adult basic education, literacy education, job placement, public communication, or advocacy role(s).
- Be a non-profit organization or quasi-governmental entity able to conduct business in the State of Texas, and legally contract with Austin Public Health.
- Have submitted all applicable tax returns to the IRS and the State of Texas (e.g., Form 990 or 990-EZ and state and federal payroll tax filings).
- Be eligible to contract and are not debarred from contracting with the City of Austin, State of Texas and Federal government, according to SAM.gov, and State and City Debarment information.
- Be current in its payment of Federal and State payroll taxes.
- Not owe past due taxes to the City.
- Have the ability to meet Austin Public Health's standard agreement terms and conditions, which includes Social Services Insurance Requirements.

- Have an active Board of Directors that meets regularly and reviews program performance, financial performance, and annually approves the agency budget. The Board of Directors shall have a strong commitment to fundraising to ensure well-funded, sustainable programs and operations.


**XI.     Application Format and Submission Requirements**


See <u>Exhibit B: Solicitation Provisions, and Instructions</u> for all requirements.

The Application must be submitted in the <u>PartnerGrants database</u>.  No late submissions will be accepted. Responses should be included for each question.

**Please note:** Only name your uploaded documents with letters and numbers. To reduce possible submission and/or review delays, please ensure any attached file from your local drive DOES NOT contain any special characters. Letters and numbers are acceptable.

**Offerors Initial Steps: Registration**
1. Confirm your organization is a registered vendor with the City of Austin.
    - To find the City of Austin Vendor Number please visit <u>Austin Finance Online</u> and search for the organization's legal name.
    - To register to become a potential City of Austin vendor, go to Austin Finance Online to register.

2. Be a registered user in the PartnerGrants system. The proposals will be submitted through this web-based system.
    - To register, visit PartnerGrants and click on "Register Here."
    - Note that the organization's City of Austin Vendor number is required to complete registration in PartnerGrants.


**Offeror Initial Steps: Pre-Application**
3. Complete an Annual Agency Threshold Application in the PartnerGrants database.

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- This form must be submitted once per 12 months and remains valid for all competitions closing within that time period. The threshold application will be reviewed by APH staff and the agency will be notified once approved.
- Once logged into PartnerGrants, click on "Opportunity" and then opportunity title "Annual Agency Threshold Application-Applicants for Funding Start Here" to complete a new threshold application.
- Submit one per agency per 12-months and note the submission date for future use

4. Complete an **Intent to Apply form** for each proposal the offeror plans to submit by the due date identified in Form 1 – Offer Sheet.
    - Once logged into PartnerGrants, click on "Opportunity" and then opportunity title "RFP 2023-007 Workforce Readiness Issue Area" and complete an Intent to Apply form including a Threshold Certification verifying completion of Step 3 above.
    - Offerors may submit more than one Intent to Apply form and must submit a unique Intent to Apply form for each proposal per the guidelines of the RFP.

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