REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Executive Summary

The Coalition for the Homeless of Houston/Harris County, lead agency to The Way Home Continuum of Care, seeks proposals from interested and qualified communications firms to (1) help build out its communications capacity; (2) secure national media coverage of The Way Home CoC’s remarkable progress in reducing homelessness since 2012 and a new initiative, the Community COVID Housing Program.
Background

The Coalition for the Homeless of Houston / Harris County and The Way Home Continuum of Care

The mission of the Coalition for the Homeless is to lead in the development, advocacy, and coordination of community strategies to prevent and end homelessness.

The Coalition maximizes the impact of resources and agencies that serve people experiencing homelessness so that everyone in the Houston region has a safe place to call home.

Since 2011, the Coalition has served as lead agency to The Way Home Continuum of Care (CoC), the local homeless response system with more than 100 stakeholder partners working together to prevent and end homelessness in Harris, Fort Bend, and Montgomery counties, Texas.

The Coalition serves those who serve people experiencing homelessness in three key areas: aligning partners toward a single vision on ending homelessness; acquiring, aligning and leveraging resources for homelessness programs; and using data to build an efficient, effective system.

Our progress

Since 2011-2012:

- Homelessness has decreased by 53% in the Houston region.
- The Way Home CoC has placed nearly 24,000 people in permanent housing, with more than 90% of people remaining housed over the long-term.

Our success is due to our commitment to the Housing First philosophy and our focus on permanent housing with supportive services as the solution to homelessness.

For those working in the field of homelessness, the Coalition is a much sought-after expert. We have been told by consultants that work across the country that “the Houston region exemplifies how every city wants to address homelessness.”

However, due to the fact that there has been a slight uptick in unsheltered homelessness in recent years (even as overall homelessness has declined precipitously since 2011), most people who live in Houston are not aware of our CoC’s progress in reducing homelessness. To put it simply: our progress (the number of people who have been — and remain — housed) is invisible while the work we have still to do is highly visible (as in encampments) and undermines public support for our work.

The Community COVID Housing Program (CCHP)

In spring 2020, Houston, like all communities, was trying to determine how to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.
Working with the City of Houston and Harris County, the Coalition for the Homeless and partners of The Way Home CoC were able to set up several short-term responses to help people experiencing homelessness, including an auxiliary shelter so that emergency shelters could de-densify and practice social distancing, a quarantine and isolation facility where people experiencing homelessness could rest and recover from COVID-19, and a dedicated COVID-19 testing process for people experiencing homelessness.

But we realized we would need a long-term response as well.

On July 1, 2020, the City of Houston, Harris County, and the Coalition for the Homeless along with the partners of The Way Home Continuum of Care announced a joint $65 M plan to accelerate the work of the local homeless response system to serve 5,000 people experiencing homelessness by October 2022 to limit the spread of COVID-19. Funded by both public and private supporters, the Community COVID Housing Program (CCHP) represents an unprecedented, coordinated effort to address homelessness in our community.

Houston/Harris County’s focus on permanent housing also represents a different approach from what other communities have done to help people experiencing homelessness during COVID (e.g., put them in hotel rooms). It is premised on the idea that “housing is healthcare” and that “housing is a vaccine” for people experiencing homelessness.

In short, Houston/Harris County has taken a unique approach to addressing homelessness during COVID-19 that has already made tremendous progress and we feel merits national media attention.
The assignment

The Houston region’s success in reducing homelessness is a compelling “untold story.” With the CCHP, we’re poised to make even more progress.

There has been much media coverage of the plight of vulnerable people during the COVID pandemic and how they are being served by their local municipalities. Little, if any, of this has been focused on how Houston and Harris County are serving their populations of people experiencing homelessness.

Also, visible signs of homelessness (e.g., encampments) lead local residents to believe that the problem is worse than it is; what they cannot see is the progress we have made since 2012 to house nearly 24,000 people.

We see an opportunity to highlight our region’s success and continuing work on the national stage.

We would like to showcase:

- The progress of our CoC in reducing homelessness since 2012.
- How the City of Houston and Harris County work together with the Coalition, including how they came together and contributed federal CARES and American Rescue Plan Act funding toward permanent housing, supportive services, and other evidence-based programming for people experiencing homelessness, as a response to COVID.
- The leadership and project management role of the Coalition for the Homeless, a 501c3.
- The work of direct services agencies working to secure permanent housing for people experiencing homelessness.
- The stories of real people and families who have been housed by our system.

Activities / Deliverables

The consultant will do the following:

- Assist in the creation and packaging of a compelling story and messages about the progress of The Way Home CoC and the ongoing Community COVID Housing Program, to pitch to media.
- Identify journalists at high-profile national and regional media in print, digital, radio, and broadcast with whom the Coalition can build relationships, and help facilitate that relationship building.
- Help establish and implement a process for working with partner agencies to identify and train clients of our homeless response system (with previous lived experience of homelessness) for media interviews and other opportunities to share their story.
- Help identify specific clients to share and record their stories, and prep the clients for media interviews.
- Help set up processes and expectations around system media opportunities with partner agencies. Engage with direct service provider partners for their inclusion in stories highlighting system success, including developing talking points and providing general guidance on working with media.
• Come up with actionable plans for creative ways for The Way Home to showcase its progress in reducing homelessness.
• Create a press strategy calendar with target release dates, pitch opportunities, and editorial deadlines.
• Assist in organizing media pitch materials, virtual press conference(s) and media interviews.
• Project management support for related activities.
• Participate in weekly meetings with Coalition staff.
• Media monitoring and tracking to be provided monthly.

How we’ll measure success / desired outcomes

• Relationships with prominent journalists.
• High-profile national and regional media coverage of The Way Home CoC’s work.
• Functioning process for working with direct service provider partners to participate in system media opportunities, including by identifying clients to highlight.
• Actionable plans for creative ways to showcase our work.

Expected timeline and budget

The initial engagement will be for four to five months, as a trial period, with the option to extend the contract for up to three years (one year at a time), either immediately following the end of the initial contract period, or later on, when additional funding becomes available.

This work will begin as soon as a consultant is selected.

Important dates (expected, subject to change):
• Sept. 13: Proposals due.
• Sept. 17: Up to 3 top-scoring applicants will be notified.
• Sept. 20-21: Coalition staff will have brief (30 minute) Zoom calls with up to 3 top-scoring applicants.
• Sept. 21: Selected firm will be notified.
• Sept. 21-30: Contract will be finalized and signed. Coalition will have kick-off meeting(s) with selected firm.

The Coalition has budgeted $20,000 for this work; however, we would be interested to see consultants’ proposals for what they might accomplish with a larger budget (either within the four to five months or beyond), in case additional funding is identified.

The firm

The successful applicant will have proven experience working with non-profits/cause-driven organizations to hone and pitch their stories to high-profile national media and coming up with creative ways to showcase success.
Submission Requirements

Interested consultants should submit their proposal electronically to:

- Ryan Clay at rclay@homelesshouston.org,
- The deadline for submission is 12PM Central on Sept. 13.

Prospective consultants must include the following information in their proposals:

- List of key personnel assigned to this contract;
- A history of working with homeless service or nonprofit organizations and/or experience working with people with lived experience of homelessness or other vulnerable populations;
- Evidence of experience gaining national, high-profile media coverage and building relationships with reporters at those outlets;
- Work to be performed within the stated budget ($20,000 over four to five months);
- What might be accomplished with a larger budget (either within the initial contract period or beyond); and
- List of at least three (3) professional references.

Criteria used for selection of a consultant will include, but not be limited to, experience, qualifications, as well as the amount of work to be performed within the stated budget. The Coalition for the Homeless of Houston/Harris County reserves the right to award all or part of the project based on budget restraints.

The initial engagement will be for four to five months, as a trial period, with the option (at the sole discretion of the Coalition) to extend the contract for up to three years (one year at a time), either immediately following the end of the initial contract period, or later on, if/when additional funding becomes available, without re-procurement.