

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

CHALLENGE:
Building Belonging -
Youth Connection
Beyond Screens



**HEALTH
FOUNDATION**
OF EAST TEXAS

Letter from the Executive Director



The Health Foundation of East Texas is pleased to announce our first challenge statement-based Request for Proposal (RFP) to support community-based organizations and other eligible entities that are advancing health and wellness in Smith County. Through this funding opportunity, the Foundation seeks to invest in initiatives that advance youth mental wellness and resilience.

The Foundation recognizes that sustainable improvements in youth mental wellness and resilience are driven by locally informed, collaborative solutions. We are committed to partnering with organizations that demonstrate a deep understanding of our community needs, employ evidence-informed and innovative approaches, and engage residents and stakeholders in meaningful ways. Funding awarded through this RFP is intended to support programs, services, and strategies that align with the Foundation's mission and strategic priorities.

The Foundation is seeking applications from a diverse range of organizations, including nonprofit organizations, community-based groups, and other qualified entities that share our commitment to increasing the mental wellness and resilience of the youth of Smith County. Your organization is encouraged to submit a proposal that directly addresses the challenge statement and **describes how you would build belonging and foster youth connection beyond screens.**

We are excited to invite you to participate in this RFP process and look forward to partnering with your organization. While we hope that we have answered your questions through this RFP guidance, we know that we have not anticipated all the potential questions that you may have. Please feel free to reach out to us at anytime to discuss further.

Sincerely,

Smittee Root

Smittee Root, *Executive Director*

About the Health Foundation of East Texas

The Health Foundation of East Texas is rooted in the belief that early action drives long-term, transformational change. Our focus is on improving youth mental wellness, strengthening resilience and fostering a thriving community for generations to come.

To do this we combine strategic grant-making and on-the-ground, iterative work to address the causes of health challenges rather than their symptoms. By uniting key community stakeholders, we co-create solutions that empower future East Texans to thrive mentally and physically. Like the East Texas Piney Woods that surround us, we show that lasting change grows from strong roots.

Our Vision

The Health Foundation of East Texas is a leading catalyst, trusted convener, and engaged partner in addressing the most pressing health issues in Smith County and the surrounding communities.

Our Mission

The Health Foundation of East Texas invests in solutions, initiatives, and partnerships that significantly improve community health and wellbeing.

Request for Proposal Guidelines

Building Belonging – Youth Connection Beyond Screens

Challenge Statement

What would it take for the youth of Smith County to be more connected to one another, their families and their communities without the use of technology?

The Health Foundation of East Texas seeks proposals that address the growing challenge facing youth: declining face-to-face connection, community engagement, and a sense of belonging in a technology-saturated world. We are particularly interested in ideas that reimagine how youth connect to one another, to caring adults, and to their broader community.

Recent research published by the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#)* adds to the growing body of evidence for holding off on smartphones until age 13 or later. The national study found that children at age 12 with smartphones were significantly more likely to experience obesity, depression, and insufficient sleep, compared to their peers without smartphones. They also found that the younger a child is when they get a smartphone, the greater these risks become. While measures such as the newly mandated phone-free schools are assisting in minimizing these risks, we believe that community solutions are the key to long-term change.

The Health Foundation of East Texas has prioritized this growing concern that impacts families, schools, and entire communities. Our focus on developing community building activities for youth will allow us to work upstream – providing opportunities for youth to engage in screen free activities that will create lasting social connections.

** Source: The American Academy of Pediatrics - "Smartphone Ownership, Age of Smartphone Acquisition, and Health Outcomes in Early Adolescence" - December 2025*



Request for Proposal Guidelines (continued)

The foundation is interested in upstream solutions that:

- Build or rebuild social infrastructure for youth
- Strengthen relationships, norms and environments that foster connection
- Reduce reliance on technology as the primary means of social engagement
- Create sustainable, community-based alternatives that endure beyond the grant period

Upstream solutions are those that:

- Address root causes of youth isolation and over-reliance on technology
- Shift systems, environments, policies, or norms
- Emphasize belonging, and connection
- May engage multiple sectors (schools, faith community, nonprofits, employers, local government, families)

Examples of investments might include but are not limited to:

- Redesigning physical or social spaces to encourage youth gathering
- Developing a strategy to drive more awareness and adoption of an existing “screen-free” alternative
- Enhancing youth-led models that foster purpose and belonging
- Embedding connection-building into existing systems
- Cross-sector partnerships that reimagine how youth connect across the community without screens

Who Should Apply:

Anyone with a bold solution, including:

- Businesses
- Individuals
- Colleges or Universities
- Faith-based organizations
- Municipal or community-based entities
- Nonprofit organizations
- Schools or school districts

Funding Details:

- Grant size: Up to \$250,000
- Grant term: 12-36 months
- Funding may support planning and design, pilot projects, evaluation, and related staff time

Note: We are not seeking proposals that are primarily technology-delivered, short-term activities, or individual level services without broader systems impact.



2026 Timeline

RFP Released	Concept Note Due	Invitations Extended for Full Proposals	Full Proposal Due	Notification of Awards
March 6	April 1	mid-April	mid-May	late June

Health Foundation of East Texas encourages applications for organizations representing and serving diverse communities in Smith County. We are committed to equitable funding and to supporting innovative, community-led solutions.

Request for Proposal Details

Round 1: Concept Note

Submit via [our portal](#)* a short, smartphone quality video (4 minute max) or a graphic (2 page max) outlining the following:

Category	Questions to Consider
The Challenge	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How does technology-related isolation or overreliance on technology show up for youth in our community?• What root causes are you seeking to address?
The Opportunity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What is missing in the current ecosystem of youth connection?• Why are existing approaches insufficient?
Proposed Solution	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What is your core idea?• How does it create or strengthen in-person community for youth?• What makes this approach innovative?
Who is Involved?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Who are the key partners if any?• How will youth or community members be involved in shaping or leading the work?
Potential for Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If successful, what would change for youth and the broader community?• How could this influence systems, norms, or long-term practice?

Round 2: Full Proposal (by invitation only)

If invited, you will receive an email requesting a full proposal be submitted through [our portal](#). * After submission of your proposal, Health Foundation of East Texas will reach a final decision on funding and you will be notified by email.

Applicants will be asked to define:

- Project details
- Implementation plan and timeline
- Learning and evaluation approach
- Sustainability plans
- Budget and staffing requirements

The following selection criteria will be evaluated:

Selection Criteria	Description
Understanding of the Challenge	Demonstrates a clear, nuanced understanding of youth isolation and over-reliance on technology, grounded in local context and root causes
Upstream Orientation	Focuses on prevention, systems, environments, or norms rather than short-term or individual-level solutions
Innovation & Creativity	Introduces new thinking, approaches, or partnerships; challenges the status quo in a thoughtful way
Community & Youth Voice	Meaningfully engages youth and community members in design, leadership, or decision-making
Potential for Lasting Impact	Shows promise for sustainability, replication, or influence beyond the grant period
Learning & Adaptability	Includes a realistic plan for learning, reflection, and adjustment during implementation

Note: [Our portal](#) requires a tax ID and organization. If you are an individual applicant, please use any 9 digit number and your full name in these fields.



HEALTH FOUNDATION OF EAST TEXAS

For questions, please contact us: impact@healthfoundationet.org

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