



**Request for Qualifications for
Evaluator for Austin / Travis County's
Permanent Supportive Housing Pay for
Success Initiative**

**Responses Due:
June 4, 2018**

The Ending Community Homelessness Coalition (ECHO), Social Finance, and The Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH), are soliciting Requests for Qualifications from qualified persons/firms with demonstrated capacity and experience to develop and implement a rigorous evaluation of a Pay for Success (PFS) initiative that will provide supportive housing to chronically homeless¹ individuals who are frequent users of both the health and criminal justice systems and struggle with mental health and substance use challenges.

About ECHO, Social Finance, and CSH

ECHO – The Ending Community Homelessness Coalition (ECHO) is a non-profit that plans, develops, prioritizes, and implements systemic, community-wide strategies to end homelessness in Austin and Travis County, Texas. Together with its community partners, ECHO uses strategic, data-driven decision making and innovative, bold thinking to transform the system to end homelessness. As a coalition, ECHO works with different partners on a regular basis through different taskforces and working groups.

Social Finance – Social Finance, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to mobilizing capital to drive social progress. Social Finance is committed to utilizing Pay for Success and other innovative financing tools to tackle complex social challenges, facilitate greater access to services for vulnerable populations, and direct capital to evidence-based social services – all with the goal of measurably improving the lives of people most in need and driving more effective use of taxpayer resources.

CSH transforms how communities use housing solutions to improve the lives of the most vulnerable people. We offer capital, expertise, information, and innovation that allow our partners to use supportive housing to achieve stability, strength, and success for the people in most need. CSH blends over 25 years of experience and dedication with a practical and entrepreneurial spirit, making us the source for housing solutions.

In addition to ECHO, Social Finance, and CSH, the following stakeholders are key partners in the development of the PFS Initiative: Austin Public Health and Neighborhood Housing and Community Development departments of the City of Austin, Travis County Justice Planning department, Central Health, Seton Healthcare Family, St. David's Foundation, and the Dell Medical School.

Background and Program Overview

Pay for Success (PFS) is a public-private partnership that funds social services through a performance-based contract. Pay for Success projects enable federal, state, and local governments to partner with high-performing service providers by tapping private investments to expand effective programs. If, following an independent evaluation, the

¹ Having experienced homelessness for at least a year, or repeatedly, while struggling with a disabling condition such as a serious mental illness, substance use disorder, or physical disability.
<https://endhomelessness.org/homelessness-in-america/who-experiences-homelessness/chronically-homeless/>

program achieves predetermined outcomes that benefit society and generate value for government, then government will make outcomes payments to investors. However, the government pays only at the level of outcomes achieved. Further detail regarding the components of a PFS transaction can be found in the Appendix.

According to the 2018 Point-in-Time count in Austin/Travis County conducted by ECHO², there were 2,147 individuals experiencing homelessness In Austin/Travis County on a given night in January. Of those experiencing homelessness 1,014 individuals were sleeping outdoors (unsheltered) and 498 met the definition of chronic homelessness.

It is well documented that supportive housing – which offers affordable housing and linkages to support services for physical and mental health, substance abuse and other issues – can reduce long-term spending on emergency services such as shelter, emergency hospital services, police, court and jail services, while improving outcomes for chronically homeless individuals. For example, the PFS feasibility study in Austin estimated a total cost avoidance of \$49,601 per person per year as a result of targeting the intervention of supportive housing to high utilizers. However, despite mounting evidence of effectiveness, local governments often have trouble securing the necessary investments for supportive housing.

In April 2016, CSH released the [Austin/Travis County Pay for Success Feasibility Report](#) in which it was determined that PFS could be a useful and powerful new tool in Austin to scale supportive housing for the highest utilizers of the homelessness, healthcare, and criminal justice systems. Following this report, ECHO was awarded funding from the Nonprofit Finance Fund for PFS transaction structuring activities. In addition to continuing work with CSH, ECHO partnered with Social Finance to structure a PFS transaction. In July of 2016, ECHO was also awarded funding from The Department of Housing and Urban Development and Department of Justice (HUD-DOJ) to create a Pay for Success Permanent Supportive Housing Demonstration project with a focus on high utilizers of the criminal justice system.

The funding awards and local support for the PFS project including from local health partners, foundations, Travis County, and the City of Austin have all propelled the project forward and with additional support from the St. David's Foundation a PFS project pilot launched in the spring of 2018.

The program aims to address the challenges that vulnerable individuals experience in obtaining and sustaining stable housing, including mental health and substance use issues, while also reducing Austin/Travis County's criminal justice and emergency health systems costs. The primary goals of this initiative are to:

- House and provide supportive services to approximately 250 high utilizers of public crisis services (including jails, shelters, substance use, judicial, law enforcement, health and mental health services)

² <http://www.austinecho.org/echo-reports/>

- Successfully (re)integrate participants into the community in stable, affordable housing
- Improve overall health of participants and increase use of appropriate preventive health services while reducing avoidable use of crisis care such as hospital emergency rooms, inpatient services, detox facilities, etc.
- Reduce utilization of the Travis County jail and criminal justice system
- Demonstrate PFS as financing mechanism for supportive housing

Key Program Elements

Target Population

The initiative will target chronically homeless high utilizers of public crisis services. This RFQ will be used to identify evaluation persons/firms to conduct a rigorous evaluation to assess the impact and cost-effectiveness of the PFS initiative.

High utilizers are those individuals who are frequently before the court, in jail, and habitually using a spectrum of resources including:

- Healthcare -- emergency rooms, emergency medical services (EMS), and psychiatric inpatient hospitalizations.
- Criminal justice -- arrests, jail admissions and bookings.

The target population of homeless high utilizers of public systems will be further refined based on a minimum number of criminal justice and healthcare encounters and a ranking system that ensures those with the highest utilization are prioritized. Individuals meeting these criteria may also be further prioritized by their score on a triage assessment known as the VI-SPDAT. This assessment is designed to identify those individuals who are most vulnerable and is used across Austin/Travis County to prioritize those who are most in need of housing and other resources designed to address homelessness. ECHO staff will locate and conduct initial outreach and engagement of identified PFS clients. Once engaged, ECHO will connect these clients with local service providers who will work to connect them with a housing unit, determine their service needs and provide ongoing supportive services.

Though the PFS team is still refining the eligibility criteria with partners, based on data and reports from the local health information exchange: Integrated Care Collaboration (ICC), the Travis County Sheriff's Office (TCSO), and the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), it is estimated that there are at least 800 individuals in Austin/ Travis County who are anticipated to meet the definition outlined above. Housing and service providers will collectively target this specific population using administrative data, conducting outreach/in-reach to Travis County Jail, hospitals and other public entities.

Supportive Housing

This initiative will identify and provide affordable, permanent supportive housing to the target population. All housing must meet the definition of Supportive Housing which means:

1. Housing that is affordable, meaning the tenant household ideally pays no more than 30% of their income toward rent, which can be located in a single site or scattered in multiple locations in the community
2. Housing that provides tenant households with a lease or sublease identical to non-supportive housing — with no limits on length of tenancy, as long as lease terms and conditions are met
3. Housing that proactively engages residents in a flexible and comprehensive array of supportive services, without requiring participation in services as a condition of ongoing tenancy. This includes onsite services and/or community based, intensive team based case management models like Assertive Community Treatment (ACT)
4. Informed property or landlord management – Property management maintains a balance between ensuring the effective operation and management of the physical facility and fostering tenants' housing stability and independence
5. Housing that supports tenants in connecting with community-based resources and activities, interacting with diverse individuals including those without disabilities, and building strong social support networks

Additionally, programs will encompass the following four supporting elements:

1. *Housing First* -- The goal of "housing first" is to immediately house people who are homeless. Housing comes first no matter what is going on in one's life, and the housing is flexible and independent so that people get housed easily and stay housed. Housing first can be contrasted with a continuum of housing "readiness," which typically subordinates access to permanent housing to other requirements. Housing first is a low-barrier entrance process that supports moving persons quickly into housing of their choice from settings such as the streets or shelters, without preconditions of treatment acceptance or compliance.
2. *Harm Reduction* -- A model of substance-use intervention that focuses on helping people who use substances to better manage their use and reduce the harmful consequences to themselves and others, including actively working to prevent evictions. In conjunction with housing first and supportive housing, using the harm reduction philosophy means that individuals do not have to be sober to be eligible to enter housing and are not evicted solely for a failure to maintain sobriety.
3. *Person-Centered Care* -- Where services are voluntary, customized and comprehensive, reflecting the individual needs of tenants, and, tenants have meaningful opportunities to engage in the community.
4. *Assertive outreach and engagement* -- Programs conduct assertive outreach to engage and recruit members of the target population. Programs will engage

target population members and offer them the opportunity to obtain affordable housing along with health and social services.

Purpose of this RFQ

The purpose of this RFQ is to seek information from independent evaluation entities interested in and qualified to develop and implement a robust and rigorous evaluation for this Austin/Travis County PFS initiative. This document is not intended as a formal offering for the award of a contract or participation in any future solicitation. ECHO, Social Finance, and CSH are currently working to determine the contracting entity for this program evaluation.

The issuers of the RFQ reserve the right, at their sole discretion, to withdraw the RFQ; to use the ideas or proposals submitted in any manner deemed to be in the best interests of ECHO and the PFS initiative, including (but not limited to) negotiating with one or more respondents or undertaking the prescribed work in a manner other than that which is set forth herein. In their sole discretion, the issuers of this RFQ reserve the right to choose to discuss various approaches with one or more potential partners (including those not responding to the RFQ).

Evaluation Goals/Scope of Services

ECHO, Social Finance, and CSH are requesting expressions of interest from qualified respondents and have identified three primary goals for the evaluation:

1. Develop and implement a rigorous experimental or quasi-experimental evaluation design to measure the impact of the programmatic intervention on participant outcomes. Examples of possible evaluation design include:
 - Randomized Control Trial (RCT)
 - Regression Discontinuity
 - Other quasi-experimental design involving a comparison group

Respondents proposing an experimental evaluation design (e.g. RCT) are encouraged to also briefly describe how you would approach evaluating the PFS project using a quasi-experimental research design, as the review committee desires to consider multiple methodologies to answer the core research questions outlined in this RFQ.

2. Assist with building a PFS agreement; in particular assist in the development and refinement of success benchmarks and key outcome metrics that will be used to determine performance-based payments; and work with relevant parties to develop data tracking/collection systems and strategies to accurately measure and validate outcomes.

Tasks for this work may include, but are not limited to:

Design Stage

- Review operational results and processes used in the PFS pilot program serving the same or similar target population of chronically homeless persons in Austin that might be helpful in designing the full evaluation.
- Work with initiative partners to prepare a comprehensive evaluation plan, including evaluation design, data collection and analysis plans, a detailed work plan and timeline, and securing IRB approval, if necessary.
- Interview initiative partners, providers and other key stakeholders to assess needs, goals and potential risks/challenges of the evaluation related to design, data collection needs and feasibility (including an understanding of data availability and existing data use agreements), measurement, etc.; propose mitigation strategies.
- Work with local public agencies – including health care providers, hospitals, behavioral health entities, jails, shelters and courts - to obtain access to administrative data on service utilization and costs, develop and execute data sharing agreements, and ensure secure transfer and use of confidential data.
- Work with housing and service providers to assess, develop, and create standard processes to collect individual-level data on client engagement, service participation, housing, and other relevant outcomes.

Operating Stage

- Work with initiative partners and providers to implement the evaluation in a coordinated manner.
- Develop training materials and deliver start-up training (including ongoing training as needed) for providers and other key staff on evaluation methodology, data collection, survey administration, etc.
- Work collaboratively with initiative partners to implement the evaluation and participate in regular (monthly) calls to discuss progress and challenges.
- Aggregate, clean and analyze data from all sources.
- Submit regular outcome reports based on an agreed upon timeline.
- Present outcome information and respond to stakeholder questions regarding outcome reports at periodic stakeholder meetings.
- Work collaboratively with initiative partners to present key findings of evaluation to local and national stakeholders.

RFQ Submission Guidelines

All proposal items must be submitted ELECTRONICALLY by 5 pm CST on June 4, 2018 to: austinfo@csf.org . Note: hard copies of proposal or application materials will not be accepted.

Proposal narrative must be submitted in Microsoft Word or PDF format and should not exceed twenty (20) single-spaced pages using Times New Roman 12-point font and one-inch margins.

Respondents should address the following:

1. A cover letter, which provides the name, mailing address, telephone number, and email address of the individual to whom we may communicate regarding the proposal. The cover letter should clearly state that the proposal is in response to the Request for Qualifications.
2. Organization/Evaluator background
 - Provide 1-2 paragraphs describing organization's history, mission, core values, and areas of expertise.
3. Describe your team/organization's experience designing, developing and implementing rigorous impact evaluations of programs targeting persons experiencing homelessness, complex mental health needs or other highly vulnerable populations; include knowledge of or experience with multiple assessment methods and using experimental and/or quasi-experimental designs.
4. Describe your experience working on large scale evaluations in a collaborative environment across government and nongovernmental entities.
5. Proposed Evaluation Activities:
 - Describe the evaluation methodology or methodologies you believe are best suited for this initiative, balancing both feasibility and the desire for a rigorous evaluation design.
 - Describe the potential risks you see in evaluating this PFS project using experimental or quasi-experimental methods and how you would mitigate those risks.
 - Based upon similar work or knowledge of the public systems involved with this initiative (homelessness, healthcare, and criminal justice) what are the best data sources and collection strategies for the initiative?
6. Identify any anticipated challenges to the implementation of the evaluation; and discuss strategies to mitigate those challenges, particularly issues related to creating comparable comparison group(s), accessing administrative data for both intervention and comparison groups and obtaining consent from study participants.
7. Briefly describe the anticipated roles and relevant background of key staff that will work directly on this project. Describe their experience and qualifications as they relate to the program as described in this RFQ. Describe plan for evaluation staffing and oversight;
 - a. Include a description of prior experience for key staff that is comparable in content, scope and design.
8. Provide a rough budget for proposed evaluation activities. Please be sure to note costs by phase: design, structuring and operating phases. The budget should include a rationale for all proposed fees and costs.
9. Provide at least three names and contact information of individuals who can describe the capacity and experience of the applicant/organization related to evaluation projects of similar scope.

Selection Criteria/Process

All proposals will be reviewed and evaluated by a selection committee consisting of key staff from partnering agencies.

Submissions will be evaluated based on the following criteria and qualifications:

- Demonstrated experience and knowledge of multiple assessment methods; experience designing and implementing rigorous impact evaluations of complex social programs using experimental and/or quasi-experimental methods
- Demonstrated knowledge of and experience conducting evaluations of the target population (frequent users of criminal justice and crisis service systems who are experiencing homelessness with chronic health/mental health conditions) and the systems/providers that serve this population
- Soundness of approach and degree to which proposed evaluation design and activities meets stated goals
- Established track record of successful collaborations with high-profile public-private partnerships
- Experience reporting the results of program evaluation activities in a thorough, accessible and usable format to various stakeholders
- No conflict of interest with initiative partners
- Management plan, staff availability, and readiness to proceed
- Budget feasibility
- Quality of references

Conditions of Proposal Submission:

- Only one proposal will be accepted from any one organization. Organizations may respond individually or as part of a team. Multiple organizations may form a team for this application, but should clearly identify the lead organization and the anticipated role(s) for each partner organization.
- All costs incurred in the preparation and presentation of the submitted proposal, in any way whatsoever, shall be wholly absorbed by the prospective contractor. Any material submitted by the prospective contractor that is to be considered confidential must be clearly marked as such.
- Evaluation entities must be independent from any of the provider and partner organizations listed above as partners.

Questions

The contact person(s) for all questions is:

Annie Bacci, Associate Director, CSH

Stephanie Mercier, Director, CSH

austinfo@cs.org

Timeline:

The overall project timeline is still under consideration and contingent on a number of factors, but the PFS project pilot launched in April, 2018 and has begun actively engaging participants. Given this timeline, evaluation activities would likely begin in as soon as possible and proceed in the following manner:

- Evaluation Design Phase: July-December 2018
- Operating Phase: Q1 2019 plus five years

The goal is to house and serve approximately 250 homeless frequent users in supportive housing over a five to six-year period. Placements will occur gradually during this period with approximately 50-75 persons being housed each year until we reach our overall goal of 250 households. Ideally, the timeframe for the evaluation would align with the duration of the PFS initiative, capturing outcomes for at least two or more years post-housing for all enrolled participants. The exact timeframe will be determined by our evaluation budget and ongoing funding for the initiative.

This RFQ is being issued on May 7, 2018; and responses to it are due no later than **5pm Central Standard Time on Monday, June 4, 2018.**

ECHO, Social Finance, and CSH will host an online information session and Q&A webinar on May 23, 2018 at 1:00pm CST to answer any questions prospective applicants may have about the RFQ or the PFS initiative. **To RSVP for this information session, please email austinfo@csch.org** by May 21, 2018.

Initiative partners may also hold phone interviews with leading respondents the week of June 11th or June 18th

All applicants can expect to receive a response by June 29, 2018

RFQ issued	May 7, 2018
RFQ Information and Q&A Webinar	May 23 2018
Applications Due	June 4, 2018
Notification to top candidates and interviews scheduled	By June 15, 2018
Phone Interviews conducted with top candidates	Week of June 18, 2018
Selection of Evaluator completed	June 29, 2018

Appendix:

▶ WHAT IS PAY FOR SUCCESS?

