

SMART Down-Granting Request for Applications (RFA)

January 2025

Executive Summary

The Texas Center for Child and Family Studies (the Center) is inviting applications for innovative pilot projects aimed at enhancing mental and emotional resiliency among Texans. Supported by the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) via the SMART Innovation Grant program, this RFA seeks community-driven solutions to systemic gaps in mental health and family support services. With total funding of \$700,000 available, awards will range from \$25,000 to \$100,000 per project. Applications must align with SMART program objectives and demonstrate potential for scalable impact. Special emphasis is placed on preventing foster care placements and addressing workforce shortages.

Overview

The Center aims to improve outcomes for children, youth, and families across Texas through targeted interventions addressing mental health and family support service gaps. This RFA represents an opportunity for organizations to test scalable, sustainable, and innovative programs that strengthen individual and community resiliency. The initiative specifically prioritizes preventing foster care entry and addressing underserved populations.

Background

The Center is the nonprofit research and education arm of the Texas Alliance of Child and Family Services. It has successfully managed grant programs, such as rapid-response initiatives during the COVID-19 pandemic, that supported workforce retention, technology upgrades, and crisis interventions. These efforts underscore the Center's capacity to administer grants effectively, achieve measurable outcomes, and support innovative approaches.

Purpose

This RFA aims to:

- Test and implement novel approaches to strengthen individual and family resiliency.
- Address systemic gaps in mental health and family support services.
- Foster cross-sector collaboration for prevention and early intervention.
- Develop scalable, sustainable solutions for improving outcomes for children, youth, and families.
- Build organizational capacity for long-term success.
- Prevent unnecessary foster care placements and strengthen family units.

Eligibility Criteria

Applicants must:

- Be a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Proof of this status, such as an IRS determination letter, must accompany the application.
- Provide direct mental/behavioral health services to children, youth, and/or families at risk of mental health crises or placement disruption.
- Operate within at least one Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) region (whether operating under Community Based Care or Legacy system) and specify the region(s) served.
- The organization must have an active governing board that meets at least quarterly. Applicants must include meeting minutes or an equivalent verification.
- Demonstrate compliance with state and federal laws, including:
 - No outstanding placement holds, licensing suspensions, or relevant corrective action plans with HHSC or DFPS.
 - Alignment with nonprofit governance and fiscal management requirements.
- Propose projects aligned with SMART objectives such as innovative service delivery models, workforce support, and mental health interventions.
- Commit to tracking and reporting measurable program outcomes.
- Ensure grant funds supplement, not replace, existing funding sources.

SMART Objectives

The SMART down-grant program is designed to:

- Promote mental and emotional resiliency through prevention and early intervention.
- Build community-based solutions as scalable models.
- Strengthen nonprofit organizations' capacity to deliver innovative mental health services.
- Foster cross-sector collaboration to address systemic barriers to mental health challenges.
- Support evidence-based practices and innovative methodologies.

Specific Focus Areas

Applicants must design projects that align with at least one of the following:

1. **Mental Health and Resiliency Programs:** Develop pilot programs to enhance emotional resilience through innovative service delivery methods.
2. **Children and Youth in Crisis:** Implement community-based interventions for children at risk of mental health crises.



3. Family Preservation and Crisis Prevention: Focus on early intervention strategies and resources to strengthen families, prevent unnecessary child removals, and reduce involvement in the child welfare system.
4. Workforce Development and Support: Create strategies to recruit, train, and retain skilled mental health professionals, while addressing workforce burnout.
5. Innovative Service Delivery Models: Employ creative approaches, such as mobile services, integrated care models, intermediate care services, and other methods to improve access in underserved areas.

Funding Details

- Total Funding Available: \$700,000.
- Award Range: \$25,000 to \$100,000 per project.
- Funding Period: Projects must begin by April 1, 2025, and conclude by February 28, 2026.
- Disbursement Schedule:
 - 100% upon grant agreement execution.

Milestones and Deadlines

- RFA Release Date: January 29, 2025.
- Deadline for Applicant Questions: February 5, 2025, by 5pm CST.
- Responses to Applicant Questions Posted: February 12, 2025.
- Application Submission Deadline: February 19, 2025, by 5pm CST.
- Notification of Awards: February 28, 2025.
- Contract Start Date: March 1, 2025.
- Quarterly Progress Reports: Due at the end of each state fiscal quarter until all awarded funds have been expended.
- Final Project Report and Closeout: March 30, 2026, by 5pm CST.

Application Process

1. Initial Screening: Applications are reviewed for eligibility and completeness.
2. Scoring by Review Panel: Independent evaluation based on defined criteria.
3. Selection and Ranking: Applications are ranked; geographic distribution and program priorities may influence final decisions.
4. Tie-Breaking Criteria: Priority given to projects serving high-need populations or demonstrating exceptional innovation.
5. Final Approval: The Center reserves the right to adjust awards based on available funds.

Evaluation Criteria

0. Mandatory Basic Qualifications* (5 Points)
 - a. 501c3 Designation
 - b. Direct Service Provider
 - c. Quarterly Board Meeting
 - d. Grant Represents <10% of Grantee Budget
 - e. Budget Aligns with Program Proposed
1. Project Design and Innovation (20 Points)
 - a. Alignment with SMART objectives.
 - b. Creativity and feasibility.
 - c. Clear implementation plan.
2. Impact and Outcomes (10 Points)
 - a. Target population and needs addressed.
 - b. Measurable outcomes.
 - c. Scalability and sustainability.
3. Organizational Capacity (20 Points)
 - a. Relevant experience and expertise.
 - b. Financial and reporting capabilities.
4. Budget and Cost-Effectiveness (25 Points)
 - a. Detailed, justified budget.
 - b. Reasonable cost relative to impact.

**All category criteria must be met for application to be valid and scored.*

Reporting and Accountability

Grantees must:

- Submit interim quarterly progress report on 6/15/2025 detailing activities, funds expended, and progress toward goals.
- Provide a final project summary, including:
 - Comprehensive evaluation of outcomes.
 - Metrics such as individuals served, reduction in crises, and mental health improvements.
 - Financial reconciliation report.
- Maintain detailed documentation, including formal reporting, for review by the Center and HHSC.
- Participate in site visits, audits, or monitoring activities as requested.
- Failure to implement proposed project as outlined under grant agreement may result in funds recoupment.

Eligible and Ineligible Costs

Eligible Costs:

- Personnel expenses (e.g., salaries, training).
- Program supplies and therapeutic materials.
- Technology for service delivery (e.g., telehealth platforms).
- Indirect costs (capped at 10%).

Ineligible Costs:

- Lobbying, fundraising, or political activities.
- Costs incurred outside the approved funding period.
- Capital expenditures (e.g., construction, land acquisition).
- Non-programmatic expenses.

Submission

Please submit all completed applications along with required documentation via the appropriate portal found at <https://tacfs.org/resources-insights/grant-opportunities/>.

Contact Information

For questions, email SMART@tacfs.org.

Checklist for Applicants

- Completed online application form.
- Project budget with narrative justification.
- Most recent IRS Form 990.
- Documentation of board governance (e.g., meeting minutes).
- Optional letters of support.
- Certification that funds will supplement, not replace, existing resources.
- Overall organization budget and pro forma income statement, balance sheet, and statement of cash flows.