

Rio Grande Valley Collective Impact Working Group

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Creation of a Backbone Organization to Coordinate RGV-CI Effort

TIMELINE:

September 12, 2012	RFP Released
September 25, 2012	Informational Phone Call
October 5, 2012	Proposals Due
October 19, 2012	Finalists Notified
Early November, 2012	Finalist In-Person Interviews
November 7, 2012	Backbone Selected

Purpose: *To select an organization or individual(s) to launch and sustain a “Backbone” organization that will coordinate implementation of a long-term, regional effort to improve college access and success in the Rio Grande Valley.*

1. DESCRIPTION OF RGV COLLECTIVE IMPACT EFFORT

During the winter of 2011-12, a group of funders, college presidents, and K-12 superintendents came together to discuss a regional effort to transform college readiness and success in the Rio Grande Valley (RGV). This gathering of leaders came at a time of urgency but also great possibility for the RGV. Students in the region, often from highly disadvantaged backgrounds, face significant obstacles to achieving school and career success. Current research also suggests that the demographics of the RGV, with its large Hispanic population, will resemble the demographics of Texas in the future. Understanding how to better serve this group of students is imperative not just for the lives that can be changed today, but to ensure the prosperity of Texas, and the nation, in the future.

Recognizing the complexity of the challenge, this group of leaders chose the process and precepts of [Collective Impact](#) as a means to address educational and career attainment in the RGV in a cross-sector, systemic way. Since May of 2012, a “Working Group” – comprised of eight RGV superintendents and five higher education presidents – launched this effort with support from Educate Texas, FSG, and several state and national funders including Greater Texas Foundation, Ford Foundation, and Lumina Foundation.

The Working Group has met regularly to identify assets and challenges in the RGV, share best practices, and construct a shared vision for this work that *“All RGV learners will achieve a degree or credential that leads to a meaningful career.”* The Working Group has also set preliminary strategies and metrics to support this vision, and has founded three “Strategy Groups” to lead implementation of the work in the following key areas along the educational pipeline:¹

1. *Students graduate high school college ready.*
2. *Students successfully transition between high school and postsecondary.*
3. *Students attain a degree or credential with labor market value.*

Going forward, this Collective Impact effort will rapidly expand. The initiative’s focus on high school and postsecondary will grow to include strategies for success across the educational pipeline from pre-kindergarten to workforce connections. While the Working and Strategy Groups were founded by school district and higher education leaders, they will broaden quickly to include diverse, cross-sector stakeholders as partners. We ultimately envision a powerful collaborative of educators, community leaders, businesses, nonprofits, funders, policymakers, and more working together on linked activities and held accountable by shared goals in order to dramatically improve educational and life outcomes for students across the RGV.

¹ *These areas are preliminary and subject to revision as the initiative evolves.*

2. BACKBONE ORGANIZATION ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Within this cross-sector, cross-pipeline effort, the Backbone Organization will be both an agent of change and will provide the supporting infrastructure to coordinate work among partners. The Backbone will help drive all major aspects of this initiative, but will also be a behind-the-scenes leader to connect organizations across the RGV and amplify the existing partnerships and strengths in the Valley. Based on the experience of similar efforts across the country, a robust Backbone function is a key success factor to sustaining Collective Impact. While the Backbone role is often played by a single organization, networks of individuals or a shared service model across organizations may also prove effective, and individual(s) as well as organizations are encouraged to apply.

The following roles and responsibilities will be especially important for the RGV Backbone Organization. While the Backbone will play a critical function in a region-wide effort, it also involves a significant commitment, and prospective applicants are encouraged to consider these roles and responsibilities carefully before deciding to apply. Key RGV Backbone roles and responsibilities are as follows:

1. Provide overall project **strategic coherence**.
2. Serve as a **neutral convener** and facilitate effective dialogues while mediating any conflict among stakeholders. The Backbone will need to be seen as an honest broker working on behalf of the group, rather than promoting a single viewpoint.
3. Manage **data collection and analysis**, and utilize measurement as a tool for ongoing learning.
4. Support **community engagement** and build key relationships. This will require a deep appreciation for the unique culture, history, assets, and challenges of the RGV. The Backbone will need to possess or quickly establish connections and credibility within the Valley in order to foster relationships, create partnerships, and build on existing regional initiatives.
5. Develop effective **communications and advocacy** agendas that create an urgency for change among participants, policymakers, funders, and the public.
6. Maintain a **full-time presence in the RGV**. This will initially require hiring and sustaining 1 FTE staff member, with the ability to grow to and sustain 3+ FTEs within a year, with functional skills in leadership, data, facilitation, and stakeholder engagement.
7. Be able to **fundraise** to support a Backbone function at an estimated cost of \$400K/year or higher at 3+ FTE capacity. These funds may come from the Backbone entity itself and/or through outside fundraising in conjunction with fundraising for the broader Collective Impact effort, but the Backbone should possess the capacity to raise a significant share of the required resources.

3. SELF-ASSESSMENT FOR INTERESTED APPLICANTS

The following questions are intended to assist applicants in assessing their own capacity and interest for serving as the Backbone Organization.

Are you or your organization:

- Currently **based in the Rio Grande Valley** or willing to develop a full-time presence there?
- Perceived as a **neutral convener and honest broker** as opposed to an advocate of specific viewpoints?
- Viewed as a **credible organization with deep relationships, partnerships, and knowledge** within the RGV?
- Culturally competent** in working with largely under-resourced, Hispanic communities such as those within the RGV?
- Experienced in the **skills** of: *strategy development, group facilitation, data analysis, and public and community advocacy and communication?*
- Able to marshal **sufficient financial resources**, in conjunction with efforts of the Working Group, to sustain an organization of 3+ FTEs plus associated costs?

4. SHORT RESPONSE QUESTIONS FOR APPLICANTS

Responses to the questions below should address the applicant's approach to founding, operating, and sustaining a Backbone Organization that fulfills the roles and responsibilities described in Section 2.

Aggregate responses should not exceed 2,500 words.

- ❖ **Why** do you want to serve as the Backbone for this effort? How does this **fit** with your existing work or mission?
 - What **obstacles** might you/your organization face to working as the Backbone? What general challenges would you foresee to implementing this Collective Impact effort?
- ❖ Please **detail your expertise in the following key areas**:
 - *Topical* expertise in education, with a focus on high school and college success.
 - *Functional* expertise in: strategy development, group facilitation, data analysis, and public and community advocacy and communication.
 - *Regional* expertise in the RGV, including level of knowledge, relationships, and partnerships with key stakeholders in the Valley.
- ❖ How would you plan to **launch, staff, and sustain** a \$400K/year (or higher) Backbone Organization?
 - Please include a **time** estimate for how soon you could staff the effort and begin work if selected.
 - If you are not currently located in the RGV, please indicate how would you **establish a physical presence** as well as build key **relationships** in the Valley.
- ❖ How would you **establish / maintain an identity as a neutral convener**?
- ❖ If possible, please include a **recent financial statement** with your application.

5. SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

All submissions should be emailed to matthew.wilka@fsg.org no later than **Friday, October 5, 2012**. All applicants will receive an email acknowledging receipt of your proposal.

6. SELECTION PROCESS & CRITERIA

Each applicant will be **evaluated using consistent criteria** developed from the roles and responsibilities of a Backbone outlined in Section 2, and based on each applicant's responses to the questions in Section 4. Following initial review by members of the Collective Impact Working Group, **a subset of applicants (~3-5) will be chosen as finalists**. Finalists will be invited to interview with Working Group members at a mutually convenient time, and the Working Group will select the Backbone applicant by **November 7, 2012**.

7. QUESTIONS

All **questions** regarding this RFP may be emailed to matthew.wilka@fsg.org.

An optional, **informational phone call and Q&A** will be held on **Tuesday, September 25, 2012** from 3:00—4:30 PM Central Time using the following conference line: (800) 371-9219 x2456600#.

Applicants may find the following, four-part blog series in *Stanford Social Innovation Review* – [Understanding the Value of Backbone Organizations in Collective Impact](#) – to be useful in understanding the experiences of other Backbone Organizations involved in similar efforts. The *Stanford Social Innovation Review* articles, [Collective Impact](#) and [Channeling Change: Making Collective Impact Work](#) may also provide relevant background.