

Request for Proposals

Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Expertise/Consultant(s)

About the Texas Hill Country Conservation Network

The Texas Hill Country is home to the headwaters of 13 of Texas' rivers and sustains life from the rural backroads of Central Texas through the rapidly growing cities of the I-35 corridor, to the bays and estuaries of the Gulf of Mexico.

The [Texas Hill Country Conservation Network](#) (the Network) was created to coordinate a conservation response to sprawling development, climate change, and booming population growth and to scale up the impact of conservation-focused organizations working throughout the Hill Country.

Specific goals of the network include:

- Permanently protecting 100,000 acres of open space
- Passing strategic county and city bonds totaling \$400M for land conservation
- Developing a Hill Country-wide watershed conservation plan
- Securing investments in green infrastructure in all 18 Hill Country counties.

Justice, Equity, Diversity, & Inclusion (JEDI) and The Network

Like many fields in the United States, environmental conservation has long been interwoven with dynamics of racial oppression and exclusion related to race, class, and gender. The Texas Hill Country has not escaped the effects of this history and these dynamics. Yet, The Network understands that to achieve our mission to maximize protection of the Hill Country's natural resources through enhanced collaboration, we must work to create a culture of inclusion and equality among our members, within our stakeholder communities, and within all our conservation endeavors in order to ensure that our mission equitably serves all within our community. The success of our conservation efforts depends upon our ability to encourage, support, and celebrate the diverse voices of the Texas Hill Country and the regions its natural resources support.

In 2020, The Network formed a JEDI Committee which identified the following drivers for action and this Request for Proposals:

1. Issues and biases related to justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion pervade our society and create systems that produce inequitable and sub-optimal outcomes.
2. The Network's membership and leadership demographics do not reflect the full diversity of the Hill Country nor our desire to increase diversity of those working and participating in the environmental community. Increasing the diversity of experiences, perspectives, and voices will

increase the number of innovative solutions for conservation in the region and deepen their impact.

3. The need to include stakeholder voices from the broader region (from Central Texas to the Gulf of Mexico) of people who share the water resources of the Hill Country. Inclusion ensures greater attention to, and mediation of, all threats in the region and ensures that our work is relevant not only to those living in the Hill Country, but to all who benefit from the conservation of land and water in the region.
4. While the Hill Country is largely privately owned, the Network should strive to increase access to, and understanding of, this special place. Time in nature provides mental and physical health benefits and all stakeholders being called to help conserve this region should enjoy some level of access to it. The Network should include planning for the least represented stakeholders in effort to ensure access for everyone.
5. Addressing equity and justice issues in our work will also help address environmental objectives by ensuring that The Network's capabilities, actions, and accomplishments are broadened and enhanced by including diverse perspectives and experiences.
6. The Network seeks to create a new history where environmental conservation partnerships are based on diversity, equity, and inclusion rather than repression or exclusion of specific voices.
7. Promoting JEDI principles and practices among The Network membership will broaden the effectiveness of each member organization and the whole network.

Scope of Work

The Network's JEDI Committee is seeking the specific expertise, external perspective, and dedicated focus of a consultant to advise us around pursuing answers to the questions below and the broader pursuit of advancing anti-racist policies and outcomes in our work. We expect that this individual or organization has the ability to guide us through the process of developing a report and plan with specific actions and outcomes as to how we can best approach and incorporate JEDI into our internal policies and practices. Applicants are welcome to propose variations to the stated scope of work. Proposals from teams led by or consisting of BIPOC members, or bolstered by partnerships with BIPOC organizations for the purpose of carrying out the deliverables of this effort, will be favored. In bringing on this consultant, the Network intends to intensify our commitment to JEDI, not just within our policies but within our engagement with one another and future partners. Overall, we seek a customized and comprehensive work plan, inclusive of best practices, training, etc., suitable to our needs and context within Central Texas. The consultant will lead both the in-house research and design of strategies that support and engage the Network in our mission. In addition to this broader call, the Network seeks a consultant to help it pursue the questions listed below and to plan for appropriate responsive action:

1. How can we identify & learn from historic oppression and exclusion in environmental conservation, specifically in Texas?
2. What can we learn about the history of oppression and exclusion in environmental conservation and resource stewardship in the U.S. and in Texas specifically that can help us incorporate corrective action into our future goals?
3. How could the Network identify adjustments, additions, and edits to our programmatic goals that better reflect our desire for JEDI?
4. What environment-related issues that matter to Central Texas residents might the Network currently be overlooking?

5. How could the Network increase JEDI through internal and external communication?
6. What demographic groups or organizations are underrepresented in our work – or missing from the conversation altogether?
7. How could expanded collaboration with new partners amplify JEDI work in other organizations?
8. In what ways is the Network perpetuating or tacitly endorsing dynamics of oppression and exclusion in our region? In the field of conservation?

Proposed Work

I. Phase 1 (April – July, 2021) Network Leadership Scoping and Training

- i. Design and facilitate workshop(s) with the Network JEDI and Steering Committees to:
 - a. co-create a JEDI Strategy, exploring the needs for the Network to improve its JEDI performance and establishing high-level JEDI goals for the Network;
 - b. develop shared vocabulary for Justice, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and key terms;
 - c. develop guiding principles that articulate values, principles and definitions to guide our work internally and externally;
- ii. Conduct training(s) available to all Network members on historic and contemporary oppression and exclusion in environmental conservation and resource stewardship. Content specific to Texas is preferred. Training should also include workshop outcomes from above.
- iii. Produce a plan and timetable for introducing Phase 2 (below) to the Network.

II. Phase 2 (July – December 2021) Network Member Roundtables and Report

- i. Engage Network members in surveys, communications, and at least 2 facilitated roundtable conversations to explore:
 - a. how oppression and exclusion are present in Central Texas conservation and how the Network might be perpetuating or tacitly endorsing dynamics of oppression and exclusion in our region;
 - b. changes that could be made to the Network's strategic programmatic goals to improve its JEDI performance, including a review of environment-related issues that matter to Central Texas residents but are currently not addressed by the Network;
 - c. changes that could be made to the Network's work practices and communications to improve JEDI; and
 - d. new partnerships with diverse groups and organizations that could benefit from and bring additional value to the Network.
- ii. Engage a more diverse set of stakeholders (who are not current members of the Network) in providing feedback on/vetting feedback on the questions above.
- iii. Produce a Report, including action items, metrics, protocols for tracking progress, and a framework for holding ourselves accountable for making progress based on the outcomes, to guide the JEDI and Steering Committees.

III. Phase 3 (2022) Implementation

- i. Convene 2 meetings, 6 months apart, to review the Network's progress on JEDI implementation and provide written feedback on progress, areas for renewed focus, and suggestions for further adjustments.
- ii. Final written feedback to include a 2-year timetable for assessment, adjustment and further action.

Deliverable/Milestone	Tentative Timeline
Network Leadership Scoping	April – July, 2021
Network Leadership Training	April – July, 2021
Network Member Surveys/Roundtables	July – December 2021
External Stakeholder Engagement	July – December 2021
Report	December 2021
Implementation Check In	March 2022
Implementation Check In	August/September 2022
Ongoing Consultation and Support	April 2021 - December 2022

Budget

The Network has budgeted \$35,000 - \$45,000 for this request for proposals (this represents the complete budget for all phases of work). Follow-on work may be conducted on a retainer basis. We welcome recommendations for optimizing the budgeted amount to best meet the stated objectives. Please provide daily and/or hourly rate(s) for ongoing consultation and support as described in the timeline and milestones.

Responses to the RFP

Proposals are due by close of business on March 29, 2021. All submissions should be emailed to Cliff Kaplan, Hill Country Alliance Program Director, at cliff@hillcountryalliance.org, 512-387-3097. Please include a bid for each phase of work, with the understanding that at least Phase I and likely Phase II will occur virtually due to the pandemic. The Network intends to initially contract for Phase I, with Phases II and III contingent upon mutual agreement and satisfaction with the working relationship and outcomes. Clarifying questions are welcome prior to the deadline and can be directed to Cliff Kaplan at the contact listed above.

Proposals are limited to 5 pages and should include a cost for each deliverable/milestone, description of qualifications (including identification of similar past projects or clients), your own mission and goals for JEDI within your work and organization, any known conflict of interest, and 1-2 page resumes/CV's of the delivery team (resumes/CV's do not count toward the page limit).

Proposals will be assessed for their feasibility, soundness of approach, and the applicant's qualifications and experience.

Proposals will be reviewed by The Network's JEDI Committee:

Amanda Fuller, National Wildlife Federation
Azuri Gonzalez, University of Texas, El Paso
Carrie Thompson, The Meadows Center for Water and the Environment, Texas State University
Cliff Kaplan, Hill Country Alliance
David Buggs, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
Frank Davis, Hill Country Conservancy
Iliana Pena, Texas Wildlife Association
Ivonne Santiago, University of Texas, El Paso
Jennifer Walker, National Wildlife Federation
John Rooney, Texas Hill Country Conservation Network
Katherine Romans, Hill Country Alliance
Kyle Garmany, The Nature Conservancy
Leah Cuddeback, Hill Country Alliance
Lyda Creus Molanphy, Great Springs Project
Parc Smith, American Youthworks
Paul Sanchez-Navarro, Defenders of Wildlife
Rachael Lindsey, Hill Country Conservancy & Eco-vative Associates
Vanessa Puig-Williams, Environmental Defense Fund
Vanessa Torres, LBJ National Historical Park

The Network anticipates that the contract will be awarded no later than April 22, 2021.

Project Management and Payment

Contracts will be between the Consultant(s) and [the Hill Country Alliance](#), which serves as the fiscal sponsor for the Network. The consultant will primarily correspond with a small team, no more than 3 people, from the JEDI Committee, at least one of whom is also on the Network's Executive Committee.

Payment for each phase would be made in two installments, half before and half after the phase.