

Submission Responses

Trust for Civic Life 2024 Civic Hub Application Form

Thank you for your interest in our Civic Hub grants, and for completing our pre-application survey. The survey was designed to help you understand what we are looking for in a Civic Hub grantee and if this grant is a good fit for your organization.

To continue in our process, please fill out the formal application below and expand on your pre-application answers with details and examples. You should allow a few hours to complete this form.

The application will close at 5:00 pm PT on Monday, April 15, 2024.

Administrative Basics

Legal Name

Hidalgo County

Organization DBA (AKA)

Hidalgo County Judge's Office

Organization Headquarters Address 1

100 E. Cano

Organization Headquarters Address 2

Second Floor

Organization Headquarters City

Edinburg

Organization Headquarters State

Texas

Organization Headquarters Zipcode

78539

Primary Contact Name

Thomas Garcia

Primary Contact Email

thomas.garcia@co.hidalgo.tx.us

Organization Legal Status

Other

Tax-ID Number (EIN)

To give us an understanding of the scale of your operation, please list your organization's total annual operating budget for the last three years.

Annual Budget in 2024 (Bottom-line operational budget number)

3656066

Annual Budget in 2023 (Bottom-line operational budget number)

3004012.75

Annual Budget in 2022 (Bottom-line operational budget number)

2728364.71

Does your organization manage any donor-advised funds, major financial assets, or endowments? If so, how much is under management?

None

Are you working in any of the following geographies? Select the area that most closely represents your focus.

Southern Border

If you work in communities that have experienced major economic or demographic shifts in the last 20-25 years, please describe those shifts and how you're handling them.

In 1998, Hidalgo County's unemployment rate was 21% and its poverty rate was 35%. Today, Hidalgo County's unemployment rate is 6% and its poverty rate is 27%. These figures demonstrate both an expanding labor force and a persisting poverty issue. At the County Judge's Office, we are handling this issue by enhancing educational attainment, workforce development, and social services through the Prosperity Task Force, which consists of over 160 community leaders who collaborate across sectors.

Do you work in areas that have experienced federal poverty rates of 20% or more for 30 years or more?

Yes

Does your work have a digital component?

No

If yes, please provide a short description of your organization's digital work. Feel free to include hyperlink examples, if applicable.

Organizational Details

Tell us about the region you serve.

1. Who lives, works, and visits your region?

Hidalgo County is situated along the Texas-Mexico border in the Rio Grande Valley. The county is 92% Hispanic. Over the past 25 years, our county has expanded to 5 ports of entry through our international bridges, which have resulted in economic shifts since the implementation of NAFTA. Several of our top industries include automotive, advanced manufacturing, and cold storage & food processing. Our county benefits from Mexican nationals crossing into the United States for leisure and commerce on a daily basis. Our county also benefits from the ecotourism industry; key contributors to our ecotourism are retirees from across the country who flock to Hidalgo County for birding and hiking: <https://www.hidalgocountyed.com/explore-hidalgo-county-nature-trail>

2. What are the region's biggest needs?

Hidalgo County has had a persistently high rate of poverty of over 25% for the past 25 years. We need a robust social infrastructure that responds to the needs of our underserved populations. Our community-based organizations and government agencies need to create more pathways to prosperity for our residents. One solution is to fund more case managers who refer residents not only to social services, but also to educational opportunities and job placement services.

Reliable transportation to social services, educational opportunities, and employment is a key obstacle for residents in our rural areas. Our county is reliant on vehicular travel, and we do not have a regional transit system.

Our youth programs lack the capacity to service our most underserved residents in areas like higher education and job training. Moreover, career mentorship is lacking; we are adept at producing human capital, but residents who leave the region for higher-paying jobs produce a brain drain effect.

3. What are the region's biggest opportunities?

Hidalgo County has an expanding and young labor force. Since 2010, our population has grown from 779,000 to about 900,000 residents; nearly 31% of our population is under 18 years of age.

Situated along the U.S.-Mexico border, we are a county rich with biculturalism, as demonstrated through our bilingualism. Local school districts such as Pharr-San Juan-Alamo ISD tout dual language programs that equip our future workforce with both English and Spanish language skills. Our location along the U.S.-Mexico border also grants us unique economic growth opportunities through the commerce crossing our international bridges.

Through the Hidalgo County Prosperity Task Force, we have an opportunity to break down silos between community-based organizations, higher education institutions, the business community, and local government. Our key focuses on transportation, career mentorship, youth programs, and case management will close opportunity gaps for our underserved residents.

4. What is your region's formal or informal vision for the future? Who was involved in its development and how often are they included in revisions? Please include examples or hyperlinks, if applicable.

Our county's vision is to work across sectors to reduce our poverty rate and to attract industries that will create jobs with living wages. The Hidalgo County Prosperity Task Force, an initiative within the County Judge's Office, convenes over 160 community leaders to implement strategies and projects to uplift our residents out of poverty. Our 14 committees work collaboratively with our County Judge's Office, and they are heavily involved in developing and revising our vision: <https://myrgv.com/featured/2023/09/28/hidalgo-county-calls-on-community-leaders-to-join-prosperity-task-force/>

Moreover, Hidalgo County is at the center of the Rio Grande Valley's "One Region, One Voice" campaign. Our county works collaboratively with Starr, Cameron, and Willacy Counties to attract industries to our region. A key Prosperity Task Force partner, the RGV Partnership, spearheads this initiative: <https://riograndeguardian.com/valley-mayors-time-to-commit-to-truly-being-one-region-with-one-voice/>

Civic Hub Alignment

A Civic Hub plays an important place-based role in bringing people together across different communities, groups, and sectors to create shared vision, solutions, and resources. We'd like to understand more about what role(s) you play as a Civic Hub and how that shows up in your work. For more information please see our FAQs (linked above).

Please answer with a short description, examples, and hyperlinks where applicable.

5. How are you building the local civic marketplace (e.g. creating, uplifting, or coordinating civic programs); matching the programs with opportunities for support, resources, or funding; and coordinating new innovative programming?

The Hidalgo County Prosperity Task Force is building a local civic marketplace by connecting community-based organizations, economic development corporations, and local governments. At the County Judge's Office, we coordinate anti-poverty initiatives among our 14 committees and provide ongoing support and capacity building. Through our community collaborative, we identify and refer Hidalgo County residents living at or below the poverty line through our job placement program, Pathways to Prosperity. In the process, we identify funding the short-gaps, capacity limits, and organizational bottlenecks within our partners as they service Hidalgo County residents. Once these obstacles are identified, we at the County Judge's Office work to match our partners with resources and opportunities for innovative programming.

A recent example is our resource and job fair for displaced sugar mill workers: <https://riograndeguardian.com/how-hidalgo-county-is-helping-displaced-sugar-mill-workers/>

6. How does your organization work across sectors and coordinate services or programming with other organizations, institutions, and communities in your region? How integral is this type of coordination in your work?

Working across sectors and coordinating services are exactly what the Prosperity Task Force is designed to accomplish. Our 14 committees operate within 4 categories:

"Creating Human Capital" consists of community leaders who conduct mentoring & career counseling and provide financial support to our residents in our job placement program, Pathways to Prosperity. When one of our community partners identifies a resident in poverty, the organizations in this category are activated; these organizations range from higher education institutions to nonprofits like the Boys & Girls Club.

"Jobs and Credentials" provides higher education, vocational, and job placement support to our residents.

"Data and Policy" consists of local government leaders, CEOs, and higher education researchers who provide data and insights into our anti-poverty initiatives (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6_WGhSxEhK8).

"Wraparound Services" provides transportation, food, healthcare, and housing to our residents.

7. How does your organization cultivate resources for your region that provide funding, technical expertise, capacity building, etc?

The incentive for a community-based organization, economic development corporation, or local government to join the Prosperity Task Force is the opportunity for capacity building and technical expertise. The purpose of our 14 committees is to connect organizations, initiatives, and projects across sectors to increase capacity levels and produce innovative programming.

One ongoing example is our work with our county's housing authorities; we are enhancing the quality and increasing the capacity of their Family Self-Sufficiency Programs, which are designed to transition families out of housing authorities. We identify the programming and technical needs of each housing authority program, create a strategic plan with our Prosperity Task Force partners, and execute innovative partnerships. Several housing authorities have tapped into career mentorship, job training, and financial literacy programs resulting from our efforts.

8. How are you using collective action in your region to implement community-identified solutions? Please describe the tools, activities, or approaches you use to work together across differences to identify and tackle problems in your region.

Because the Prosperity Task Force is an initiative within the County Judge's Office, we serve as an effective convener of diverse organizations. One ongoing example of our efforts is expanding access to Workforce Solutions' myriad programs and services. We have sought to replicate and expand on our local workforce board's efforts across our 22 cities, including in the rural and small

towns with no economic development corporations.

Moreover, we tap into our community-based organizations to assess their obstacles toward obtaining gainful employment and base our initiatives on their input. Our intent is to focus on 4 areas: Transportation, career mentorship, youth programs, and case management.

This is the primary reason why spearheading a regional transit authority is now one of our long-term projects; it emerged from our transportation committee's recommendations:

<https://riograndeguardian.com/cortez-hidalgo-county-is-looking-to-set-up-a-rapid-transit-authority/>

Additional Considerations

9. How will your work and community look different in three years as a result of this grant?

Within 3 years, our goal is to continue to reduce our poverty rate to below 25%. Our work will shift away from building a robust social infrastructure that more seamlessly refers residents to social services, educational opportunities, and job placement services. Instead, our work will shift toward enhancing the scope of the social infrastructure; we will shift toward developing initiatives and programming for more underserved populations, particularly residents without any existing relationships to a community-based organization. This grant would be a catalyst in shifting our work toward a future where our burgeoning civic hub can impact our colonia residents and our residents without a high school diploma.

As a result, our residents will look toward our civic hub as an opportunity for resource sharing, community building, and economic prosperity. Our community will look different because of the Prosperity Task Force's work building trust with residents who have otherwise lost hope.

10. Part of the grant includes participation in a learning cohort driven by grantee interests (please see FAQs for more information). What topics would your organization like to learn about? Some examples include: how rural communities are impacted by the influx of second-home ownership that shifts race and class dynamics; how to build long-lasting civic hubs in rural regions; proven solutions for communities struggling with toxic polarization; or meeting peers that champion system change and help stave-off burnout and more.

Proven solutions for communities accustomed to working in silos as opposed to regionally. How to build long-lasting civic hubs in rural regions. How to activate community leaders from colonia neighborhoods and sustain long-lasting leadership. How to develop leadership cohorts and sustain projects beyond cohort lifespans.