



The Health Foundation of East Texas Announces Results of the Building Belonging RFP Challenge with Newly Funded Partners and the Building Belonging Cohort

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

TYLER, TX - The Health Foundation of East Texas (HFET) announced more than \$1.98 million in funding through its 2026 Building Belonging initiative, supporting 11 new community partnerships.

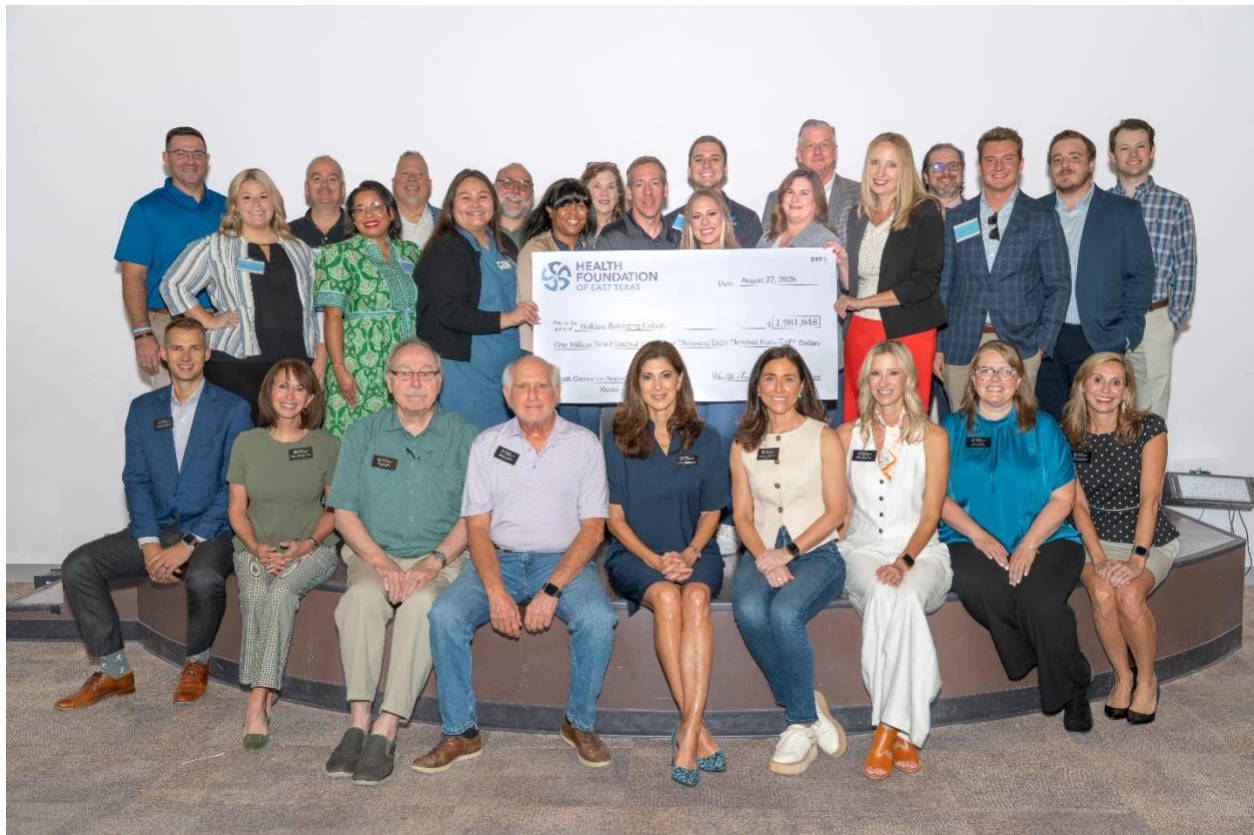
Each award is part of their recent “Building Belonging Challenge” to the community. Guided by the question “What would it take for the youth of Smith County to be more connected to one another, their families and their communities without the use of technology?”, the initiative supports efforts that strengthen youth relationships and community engagement.

The funded projects support a wide range of efforts —from school-based programs and new community infrastructure to initiatives that build stronger social systems and connections aimed at addressing the rising disconnection amongst youth.

HFET is also promoting a greater sense of belonging among their recently funded partners. To bring this to life, HFET launched a cohort model, providing a unique opportunity for partners to engage in peer learning and networking, ultimately encouraging strong capacity building and furthering the impact of the Building Belonging Challenge.

The cohort model will facilitate partner-to-partner learning through six structured half-day meetings and individual coaching sessions led by philanthropic advisor Alex Edgar. Edgar is nationally recognized for his work in advancing youth engagement and leadership, achieving numerous accolades, including recognition as a Forbes 30 under 30 honoree. The Foundation believes his perspective and experience will help bridge the gap between youth voices and philanthropic investment.

The value of the cohort approach expands beyond the current group of funded partners. HFET views this model as a chance to strengthen future funding initiatives informed by the voices of Smith County youth.



Health Foundation of East Texas Building Belonging funded partners, HFET Board Members and Staff, and RPF reviewers pose with a ceremonial check recognizing HFET's investment in Youth Resilience.

On Thursday, August 27, 2026, HFET hosted a celebratory event at The Foundry in downtown Tyler to recognize its 11 recent funded partnerships. The recipients include two individuals, one education-based foundation, two City of Tyler governmental organizations, and six nonprofits. These funds will foster programs in three key areas: connecting youth to each other, connecting youth to their community, and connecting communities around youth.

During the event, HFET formally introduced each funded partner, highlighting the prospective impact of their work. The recognition also honored the dedication and commitment demonstrated throughout every phase of the RFP application process. The event brought together HFET staff, board members, newly funded partners, and community leaders integral in evaluating the RFP applications. Over coffee, conversation, and building relationships, funded partners had the opportunity to learn valuable insight from one another.

By creating much needed new pathways for youth engagement, the Health Foundation of East Texas aims to ensure future investments accurately reflect the priorities of the next generation.

Therefore, in addition to celebrating newly funded partners, the event showcased the Foundation's long-term commitment to invest in community-led projects supporting youth resilience, creating a lasting impact throughout Smith County.

About the Foundation

The Health Foundation of East Texas is a private foundation that invests in solutions, initiatives, and partnerships that significantly improve community health and well-being in Smith County and surrounding communities.

For more information about the Health Foundation of East Texas, please visit healthfoundationet.org.

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