



## REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

### Technology Workforce Development Training Program at the Ion



Rice Management Company  
Houston, Texas

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Issued: Monday, May 9, 2022  
Responses Due: Thursday, June 30, 2022, 5pm CT

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**Please send all final submissions via one-single PDF document to: [RFP@ionhouston.com](mailto:RFP@ionhouston.com)  
Point of Contact: Samuel C. Dike, Manager of Strategic Initiatives, Rice Management Company**

# 1. Introduction

## INTRODUCTION

**Rice Management Company is seeking proposals from qualified workforce development providers to deliver cost-effective, tech-focused job training and talent placement programs at the Ion.**

Houston is the fourth-largest city in the United States and has a recognizable presence of tech companies and talent. The Houston tech ecosystem supports 227,000 jobs making up 7% of the total regional workforce. Houston's tech ecosystem spans its economy with industries ranging from professional services, oil & gas, manufacturing, and government all seeking employees with digital and high-tech skills. One of Houston's best assets is that it also boasts a demographically diverse workforce - one of the most diverse in the nation – with almost 50% of its workforce identifying as either Black or Hispanic. Some of the nation's largest companies including Amazon, Google, Microsoft, and [Hewlett Packard Enterprise](#), have recognized the strength of Houston's tech ecosystem and are opening sizeable offices in the city.

While the tech ecosystem in Houston is stabilized in its presence, Houston has seen negligible growth in tech occupations in industries traditionally considered tech. In addition, the job growth that is occurring is not equally distributed, with Black and Hispanic representation significantly skewing towards the lower end of the income spectrum. Among some of the largest tech occupations - including software developers, computer user specialists, and computer systems analysts - Black, Hispanic, and female representation remains underrepresented. Diversifying the tech sector and ensuring under- and unemployed Houstonians have access to employment opportunities in tech-focused occupations is essential to the success of creating an inclusive, vibrant tech ecosystem.

The purpose of this request for proposals (RFP) is to find and engage a best-in-class tech workforce training operator to partner with RMC and the Ion to fulfill a commitment within a community benefits agreement (CBA) between RMC and the City of Houston. Through that commitment, RMC and the Ion will provide funding for high-growth and tech-enabled sector job training and talent placement program administrator focused on underrepresented Houstonians. RMC is seeking a tech-focused workforce development provider to develop or expand an existing tech training program that will serve unemployed or underemployed Houstonians that will lead to good-paying jobs in the tech ecosystem. The programs should directly serve populations that have been underrepresented in digital and tech roles, including, but not limited to those who identify as Black, Hispanic, and/or women.



## 2. Context

## CONTEXT

### RICE UNIVERSITY & RICE MANAGEMENT COMPANY

[Rice University](#) is a comprehensive research university that fosters diversity and an intellectual environment that advances tomorrow's thinking to create a more competitive Houston region. The University is home to 7,400 students, including 4,000 undergraduates and 3,400 graduate students, and 700 full-time faculty and 150 adjunct faculty. Rice is a critical cornerstone of economic expansion and innovation in the region; it is home to several highly interdisciplinary research centers and institutes of excellence.

[Rice Management Company](#) (RMC) manages Rice University's \$8.1 billion endowment, which funds 40% of the University's annual operations and supports the University's mission through enlightened stewardship of its financial resources. Its mission is to provide sufficient, stable, and growing endowment cash distributions to support the core endeavors of the University: path-breaking research, unsurpassed teaching, and access for students regardless of ability to pay.

The University has committed to "... engage Houston as a focus and partner for research and education ... enabling Houston's success as a 21st-century metropolis." Houston has the third-highest concentration of STEM workers in the country and an abundance of innovation occurring at its universities and leading companies. Nevertheless, the city is only now emerging as a recognized hub of entrepreneurship in the tech sector. [The city, its business leadership, and Rice University seek to accelerate its tech sector success by creating Houston's first centrally located innovation district.](#)

RMC is the sole owner of the Ion. The team that manages and activates the Ion ("the Ion team") are employed by RMC and coordinate regularly on achieving the activation and ecosystem-generating goals set for the Ion. In simple terms, the Ion is the building, the Ion team are the people that activate the building, and RMC is the entity that is the financial steward for the building.

### THE ION

[The Ion](#) – Houston's innovation hub – is the first phase of [the Ion District](#), an accessible, walkable, and integrated urban community spanning 12 city blocks (16 acres) in Houston's Midtown. Initiated by Rice University, with support from the City of Houston and Midtown Redevelopment Authority, the Ion District energizes a more sustainable, resilient, and inclusive future – actively programming events for residents, start-ups, corporate, academic, and civic leaders.

The impossible-to-replicate size and location of the District presents an unmatched opportunity. The light rail connects the site to both Downtown Houston and the Texas Medical Center in less than 10 minutes via Wheeler Station, which is directly adjacent to the Ion. The site is surrounded by cultural amenities, academic institutions, businesses, and residential neighborhoods, with Montrose, Museum Park, the Third Ward, and Downtown all within a 5-minute drive.

The Ion, at the center of the burgeoning district, has emerged as the epicenter for Houston's innovation ecosystem because it is an inclusive, dynamic, vibrant, and dense hub that draws talent and fosters collaborations amongst entrepreneurs, incubators, accelerators, corporations, academics, and the Houston community.

The Ion is a six-level, 266,000 square-foot building designed and developed by RMC to offer co-working spaces for startups and businesses, various events and speaker series, and access to restaurants and amenities. Larger events are hosted in the central interior 250-seat forum. Smaller events take place in the series of conference rooms or the 60-seat training room. Anchor office tenants include several large companies such as Microsoft, Chevron Technology Ventures, Schlumberger, and Dow. The building's co-working space, which is operated Common Desk, is nearly at capacity and has far surpassed initial expectations.

The Ion's programming is focused on activating and accelerating Houston's innovation ecosystem through partnerships, pathways, and programs. Together these create opportunities to advance and sustain resilient economic growth in Houston. The Ion collaborates with local business owners, mid and large-scale companies, global Fortune 500 companies, civic and municipal decision-makers, and venture capitalists to accelerate innovation through connecting corporate innovators to academic network members, community partners, and startups and entrepreneurs. Some of its corporate partners include Baker Botts, BP, Chevron, Intel, Microsoft, and Aramco. The Ion sees developing tech talent in Houston as an integral piece of its mission to develop the tech ecosystem. Current programs at the Ion include such highlights as:

- [The Ion Academic Network \(IAN\)](#): a partnership with Houston area two and four-year academic institutions to accelerate career growth and expand opportunities for Houston's workforce.
- [The Ion Prototyping Lab](#): a 6,500 sq ft lab with equipment, engineers, and access to technical training for inventors, innovators, and creators and operated by TXRX.
- [The Ion Accelerator Hub](#): co-locating four complimentary accelerator programs to amplify the programs' strengths and enable a more effective and inclusive development of entrepreneurial talent. The four accelerators are the Ion Smart and Resilient Cities Accelerator; the Ion Aerospace Innovation Accelerator for Minority Business Enterprises (MBE); the Rice Alliance Clean Energy Accelerator (CEA) and DivInc Houston Accelerator.
- [Ion Upskilling Programs](#): The programs have been created with the support of founding partner Microsoft and are offered in a variety of formats, including boot camps and courses. Programming includes several workforce development pilot programs including with General Assembly, Ampersand, High Performance Institute, and the Kino-Eye Center for Visual Innovation.

## COMMUNITY BENEFITS AGREEMENT

As part of the creation of the Ion Innovation District, RMC entered into a Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) with the City of Houston to ensure that the development of the Ion District provides a wide range of benefits for Houstonians. The CBA documents \$15.3 million in direct investments and community partnerships in affordable housing, minority and women tech ventures, women and minority accelerator programming, homeless and housing grants, early capacity-building grants, and job training to be disbursed over three years. Together, these investments ensure area community members are beneficiaries of the economic activity at the District. [for more information on the CBA, [see here](#)]

# 3. The Opportunity



## THE OPPORTUNITY

**RMC and the Ion team view workforce development as an integral piece of developing Houston’s tech ecosystem and are seeking a partner that they can work with to improve and diversify the tech talent pipeline in Houston.** Through conversations with local and regional employers, including the Ion’s partners and major employers across Houston, there is a clear need for qualified tech and tech-adjacent talent at all levels that are not being fulfilled. There remains a tremendous opportunity to address this opportunity gap and to diversify the tech sector in Houston, and the Ion seeks a partner to help support this work.

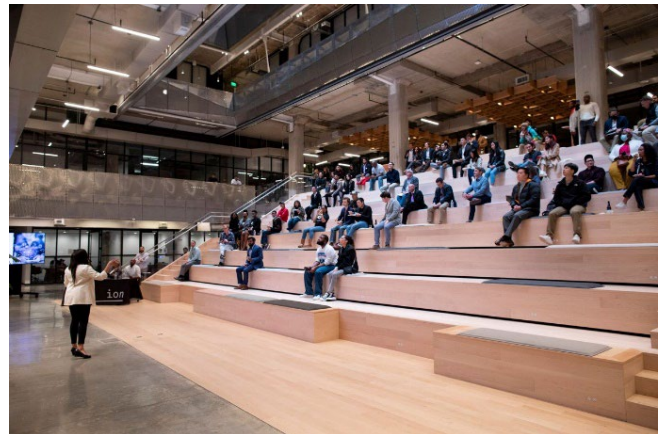
### *Access to employer partners*

The Ion team collaborates with local business owners, mid and large-scale companies, global Fortune 500 companies, as well as startups and entrepreneurs. Their partnership includes employers and businesses in the region – Chevron, Intel, and Microsoft – that support tech and tech-enabled jobs. In preparation for the release of this RFP, the Ion team also met with dozens of employers to understand their needs and confirm their interest in working with a workforce development provider (provider) at the Ion as part of this grant. As part of this engagement, the Ion team has also confirmed with startups in their community their interest in working with a provider to hire talent, develop curriculum, and provide mentoring and project-based learning opportunities.

Through the Ion Academic Network – including, but not limited to Rice University, The University of Houston, Texas Southern University, San Jacinto College, Lone Star Collage – the Ion team has brought together educational programming, faculty commitments, access to programs, and other opportunities to students across the Houston area. This provides an additional opportunity for partnership development with a provider around talent recruitment and program development.

### *Access to classrooms, event and conference spaces, and numerous networking opportunities*

As Houston’s innovation hub, the Ion offers immense opportunity for a provider to use its amenities and space. The six-level building offers co-working spaces, various events and speaker series, and access to restaurants and amenities. In addition to available classroom space, there is also access to smaller huddle spaces for 1:1 discussions, a 250-seat forum for large-scale presentations, smaller conference spaces, and a 60-seat training room. A provider could go far beyond merely taking advantage of the classroom space and make use of ample networking and educational events to support the growth of their recruitment and partnership activities.



To ensure adequate classroom space is made available, the Ion team will work with the provider to address their space needs. Classrooms can fit various configurations based on the teaching style and interest of the provider. All rooms are outfitted with Wi-Fi, a 75” TV monitor, with some classrooms having additional basic audio equipment, as needed. Classroom space will be provided at no cost to the provider.

## 4. Scope of Work

## SCOPE OF WORK

The purpose of this RFP is to seek proposals from a provider to deliver tech training at the Ion that leads to tech and tech-enabled jobs, specifically for under- and unemployed Houstonians. The training should specifically focus on training individuals from backgrounds traditionally underrepresented in tech jobs including, but not limited to those who identify as, Black, Hispanic, and/or women. The selected program administrator will be expected to provide most of (if not all) the training physically at the Ion over the three-year period of the grant and should be open to engaging with the Ion in developing additional programming in the future to meet the needs of Houston's employers.

RMC is open to both expanding and scaling existing programs, and developing new programs, including programs that reskill and upskill talent. We welcome proposals from local, regional, and national providers, and welcome proposals that partner multiple organizations to fulfill the requirements of the grant. RMC and the Ion team will work with the chosen provider on the final implementation timeline for programming, but we do expect programming to begin within approximately six to nine months of selection.

The selected provider will offer the following:

- Program curriculum must train for high-growth tech or tech-enabled sectors;
- Program must be free or low-cost to participants;
- Program should include some soft skills development;
- Program may include proposals that include budget for relevant wraparound services needed for talent to succeed;
- Program should have or demonstrate an actionable plan to develop deep partnerships with employers; and
- Program should have a proven track record for training, placing, and retaining underrepresented populations in tech or tech-enabled jobs.

Intended target population:

- Must serve under and unemployed Houstonians, particularly serving those historically underrepresented in tech and tech-adjacent jobs.

In addition to the requirements above, the selected provider will be requested to provide semi-annual reports with key metrics to RMC and the Ion team. Required reporting data includes the reported number of students trained per year, the number of jobs and apprenticeship placements, and where available, the average wage of placed individuals broken out by race, gender, and other demographic indicators. The reports provided to RMC will be included in a public database. The provider should be prepared to publicly present relevant progress and findings as requested by RMC yearly to fulfill CBA requirements.

RMC will provide an investment of \$2 million in grants and in-kind donations to support this job training over three years at the Ion. Use of Ion classroom and relevant facilities, including tech-enabled classrooms and associated utilities will not be charged to the provider. This sum is in addition to the in-kind donation of classroom space provided.

*Program requirements and experience expected*

- Demonstrated experience and success in providing digital and tech training, in addition to soft skills development serving unemployed and underemployed talent interested in working in the tech ecosystem;
- Demonstrated experience working with underrepresented people including people who identify as Black, Hispanic, and/or female;
- Demonstrated experience in developing curricula tailored for specific populations that address the needs of the community;
- Track record developing partnerships with employers to develop training curriculum that represents the needs of employers. If relevant, please include your experience in working with startups and/or small businesses in addition to larger employers;
- Proven success in placing participants in apprenticeships and securing full-time employment; and
- Demonstrated experience providing access to wraparound services that are beneficial to the training participants.

# 5. Submission Requirements

# SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

## PROPOSAL COMPONENTS

The recommended length of each submission is approximately six to eight pages with recommended page amounts below. Please submit a single PDF document that includes the following:

**1. Cover Letter** [one page]

A brief letter describing your organization's experience, qualifications, and approach to the project and partnership. Please indicate if your organization has a presence in Houston. If this would be a new city for your organization, please indicate why you are interested in expanding to Houston and the approach your organization would take towards entering the Houston market.

**2. Organization Information** [1/2 page]

- a. Legal Name
- b. Address
- c. Number
- d. Year organization started
- e. Relevant contact information for the point person

**3. Description/explanation of how the organization will design and deliver training.**

Proposals should include: [approx. three pages]

- a. Curriculum: course/curriculum description, including length of time of program, intended class size, length of training, and what jobs the course trains for. Please indicate if any of this programming is virtual.
- b. Implementation and Evaluation: clear outline of metrics and goals you expect to reach as part of this training (number served, job placement numbers, and average wages) and how training will be evaluated. Please indicate annual numbers for your organization's existing programming including:
  - i. Demographics of your programs
  - ii. Number of people served
  - iii. Number of classes and locations offered
  - iv. Number of employer partners
  - v. Job placement numbers and salary when relevant/available.
- c. Population Served: intended target population, a brief overview of recruitment practices, and wraparound services provided as relevant (or how students can access such wraparound services).
- d. Employer Partnerships: tech and tech-enabled employer relationships and how employers have supported the design of the curriculum. The program should have or demonstrate an actionable plan to develop deep partnerships with employers. If new to the Houston area, please indicate any current employer partners in the region, and/or how you plan to build employer relationships.
  - i. Additional partner information, as relevant
- e. Future Partnership: A vision of partnership opportunity with the Ion, including ideas for how to engage people within the Ion, its community, and its startups as part of your program.

#### 4. Logistics Information [1/2 page]

- a. Please briefly indicate the type of space you need to properly run the programming within the Ion. Please include the size and configuration of space needed, anticipated frequency of use, whether you can share space with other providers, whether you have an equipment requirement (e.g., computers), and if you need space for administrative purposes.

#### 5. Budget and timeline [1 page]

- a. One-page budget and budget narrative, as relevant.
- b. Please indicate approximately how long it would take to start your program, and what process would need to occur ahead of recruitment and starting classes.

#### 6. Appendix

- a. *Resumes* - please include key bios or resumes for management and staff that will directly work on this project.
- b. *Financial Strength* – please include your organization’s 990 or, if privately held, a statement of financial backing.
- c. *References* – please provide three professional references for each person who is listed as part of the submitting team.

Please send all final submissions via one-single PDF document to: [RFP@ionhouston.com](mailto:RFP@ionhouston.com)

## EVALUATION CRITERIA

RMC and the Ion team seek responses that provide a clear outlook of the opportunity to support job training and placement for Houstonians into tech and tech enabled jobs. To that end, the submitted proposals will be assessed on their track record, qualifications, and experiences as aligned in the scope of work. Each proposal will be evaluated on the following:

### **Curriculum design and alignment with scope of work:** 25 points

Provides clear level of detail in the proposal on the curriculum design and alignment with the scope of work. Provider includes robust, proven curriculum that serves target population.

### **Program’s approach to implementation and evaluation:** 25 points

Includes a clear outline for implementing services effectively, in a timely manner, and builds strong partnerships. This includes an assessment of the providers track record, qualifications, and previous experience as aligned with the scope of work and the submitted proposal. Provider includes strong success metrics including number served and placement numbers.

### **Approach towards serving target population:** 15 points

Describes a plan that recruits, engages, and supports target population (un- and underemployed Houstonians). This should include soft skills development (resume building, mentoring opportunities, networking), but may also include access to wraparound services.

### **Quality and strength of employer partnerships:** 15 points

Describes outstanding employer relationships and their role in the program’s response to the scope of work, describes how employer partnerships will influence and strengthen the curriculum as employment needs change or become clearer, and describes past employer experiences (including who has hired graduates). Consideration shall be given to how the provider plans to develop new employer relationships as detailed in individual proposals.

**Approach towards future partnerships:** 10 points

Details the providers vision and approach towards the Ion partnership, including engaging the Ion, its community, and its startups as part of the program.

**Cost proposal and timeline:** 10 points

Provides clear budget that includes a projected cost per student served, and projected timeline that aligns with the scope of work.

**KEY DATES**

Issued:	Monday, May 9, 2022
Request for clarification/questions:	Thursday, May 20, 2022
Tours:	Provided upon request prior to submission date
Pre-Bid Webinar:	Thursday, June 2, 2022**
<b>Responses Due:</b>	<b>Thursday, June 30, 2022, 5pm CT</b>
Interviews as needed:	August 2022
Expected award notification:	September 2022
Engagement:	October 2022

**Please send questions, tour requests, and final submission to: [RFP@ionhouston.com](mailto:RFP@ionhouston.com)**

**Point of Contact: Samuel C. Dike, Manager of Strategic Initiatives, Rice Management Company**

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\*\*Information on the pre-bid webinar will be shared in the coming weeks.

RMC reserves the right to announce any changes to these dates.