



Treehouse Evaluations

Proposal re: The Matchstick Foundation's
Supporting Healthy Minds and Youth Dignity
Funding Opportunity.



Applicant Overview

Treehouse Evaluations believes in the power of youth to shape our present and our future. We are committed to supporting the development of programs that meet youth where they are at and keep them safe, (whole)istically healthy, and engaged. Our program evaluation methods prioritize accessibility, creativity, and a community-first mindset.

Name: Athena Hughes	Role: Evaluation Strategist, Partnership Specialist	Pronouns: She/Her/Hers	Identities: Queer, white, genderqueer woman	Hometown: Washington, DC
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Athena wants to make systems and institutions truly and compassionately serve people who interact with them. She seeks to understand how structures and biases impact real people’s experiences, and figure out how best to change them. She values relationships and looks for ways to bring people along when change is necessary. Athena has worked in domestic violence and drop-in shelters around the country. Her academic background is in English, Peace Studies (BA, University of Notre Dame) and Public Service (MA, Marquette University).

Athena will be responsible for managing the working relationships between Treehouse, The Matchstick Foundation, and grantee stakeholders, ensuring shared understanding of roles, ideas, and needs throughout the process.

Name: Harsh J. Gagoomal	Role: Evaluation Strategist, Communications Specialist	Pronouns: He/Him/His	Identities: Indian, American, brown, third culture kid	Hometown: Manila, Philippines
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Harsh J. Gagoomal is a joyful human who is deeply invested in deconstructing the caste system, wherever it exists. In this effort, he employs his full strengths as an evaluator, artist, and connector. Harsh has previously served as an AmeriCorps youth educator in Chicago and has worked as a storyteller (actor, director, and writer) across the United States for the past decade. Harsh is an alumni of Emerson College (BA in Theatre Studies) and Marquette University (MA in Public Service). He currently resides in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Beauty shall live.

For this project, you can expect Harsh to facilitate some of our creative evaluation approaches and to use qualitative language that brings our collective findings to life.

Name: Brigid Farley	Role: Evaluation Strategist, Education Specialist	Pronouns: She/Her/Hers	Identities: Disabled, White, Queer, American	Hometown: Jersey City, NJ
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Brigid is a passionate creative whose life goal is to improve the enjoyment of school by children in need, and to make school a place where they feel safe and valued. Brigid formerly worked as a Mental Health Carer, helping disabled and mentally ill learn and relearn how to take care of themselves and take control of their lives, and a tutor, helping teenagers in need. Brigid is an alumni of Loyola University of Chicago (BA in Psychology) and Marquette University (MA in Public Service).

Brigid will be organizing the workshops and facilitating open communication during interviews, ensuring we take care of those involved.



Equity Commitment

Treehouse Evaluations defines **equity** as meeting people where they are at and where they want to be. Equity is a process of redistributing power so that everyone can thrive. Treehouse Evaluations was formed as a response to the lack of equitable education that exists for youth, which arises from a systemic denial of love. As we know that young people's lives don't stop the minute school ends, we've focused on partnering with nonprofits and public schools that fund, operate, and support in-school and after-school enrichment programs.

With these partnerships, we've emphasized that we cannot separate education from racism, which infects and affects every choice people make. As such, Treehouse Evaluations chooses to be anti-racist; we choose to be committed to challenging and unlearning oppressive teachings, ideas, biases, and assumptions. We choose to work in partnerships that share this commitment. We believe in the importance of context, history, and asking questions. We will ask "why?" often, without hesitation, and we encourage others to do the same.

We are three people who have experienced a range of pain and pleasure due to our intersectional identities and upbringings. We have also experienced the privileges of higher educational training, which we use when it is helpful and which we denounce when it is harmful. We recognize our own limitations and desire to keep growing. We focus our equity efforts in three main areas:

Language

We do everything we can to say things simply and clearly. Knowing that language can reinforce power dynamics, we aim for everything we share to be accessible. We are mindful of how culture, age, and wealth can affect communication styles. If young people from different cultural backgrounds can't understand what we're communicating, we commit to rewriting and rephrasing, immediately.

We do not confine ourselves to solely communicating in quantitative language, which doesn't depict the whole of human experience. As such, we use qualitative language to share more human, culturally relevant stories, and break free of traditional standards of what is "excellent."



Hierarchy

We believe that hierarchy, where people are kept on different planes of power, does more harm than good. When we begin a new relationship, we reflect on the ways that each person in that relationship experiences oppression and the ways they experience privilege. We then commit to creating more space for people who are often othered, overlooked, and unsolicited. We embrace multicultural perspectives and the expertise of lived experience. When we begin an evaluation process, we first turn to the young people in a community. We ask them questions, we ask them for ideas, and when they speak, we listen.

We don't position ourselves as experts, but as people looking for new knowledge. We help organizations recognize, confront, and address their internal structural biases and "isms" (racism, classicism, sexism, ableism, etc.), while continually examining and addressing our own. As white supremacy lays at the roots of the institutions we work within, we look to bring in outside perspectives that challenge the status quo.

Care

We treat people well. We ask what they want and we do our best to provide it. We know that the people we work with are sharing valuable time and energy with us, and we honor that in our actions and our words. We care about the mental and emotional health of everyone who works with us. For our full-time staff, we aim to prevent burnout, enable the best work possible, and ensure they can meet their own needs.

We know it is necessary to respect the thoughts and personhood of the young people participating in the programs we work with, as they are the ones who are most directly impacted. We therefore pay everyone for their time, regardless of age. Whether people join us for an afternoon or throughout an evaluation period, they will be compensated, honored, and credited.

Approach

Frameworks

Our approach is both systematic (to ensure clarity and consistency) and flexible (to adapt to reality). We use the following frameworks to make this happen:

- Systems Evaluation Protocol: a process to systematically and collaboratively plan what the evaluation process will look like. We will use this process with The Matchstick Foundation to establish a shared understanding and plan for factors like identifying stakeholders, the evaluation's logic model, and details of the reporting process.
- Developmental Evaluation: Our evaluation process is iterative, responsive to new information, and guides new action. We don't wait until the end to review data and draw conclusions. Instead, we check in regularly and use what we've learned to update existing plans and make new ones throughout the process.
- Clarity of Role: We make sure all stakeholders understand our role as evaluators. Grantees will need to know that our role is not to influence TMF's award choice but to help them design the most effective and appropriate process. As a third party paid by the grantor, there's a potential power imbalance between us and grantees. To facilitate trust, we are transparent about what kinds of information we will share and how, and check in regularly to address concerns that may arise during the process.
- Emphasize grantee perspective: In evaluations, parties like Matchstick Fund grantees are traditionally left out of the design and implementation process. We want to make sure that they are included and empowered to influence change. We ask: How might we change the relationship to center their needs & experience?

Process

While participating in and observing the grant review process with The Matchstick Foundation grant reviewers and with grantee program staff, we will lead surveys, focus groups, interviews, and creative activities. We will adapt the structure and delivery format of each activity to the needs and preferences of the people involved.

As part of the grant review, we will examine assumptions and practices at TMF including:

- Qualifications/criteria: what is being looked for? (Officially/theoretically and in reality)
- Is there a gap between on-paper criteria and actual decisions?
- What are the assumptions about what makes a program qualified?
- What would the minimum qualification be?

- What ideas do TMF staff have to improve the process?

When working with grantee organization staff, we will look for information such as:

- Experiences during the previous grant period.
- Workload and cost of meeting requirements for reporting and outcomes.
- What works well and what could be improved.
- Reality of day-to-day work at the organization.
- What does TMF most need to know about how the grant process impacts their program?

Activities

We've learned that many people respond best to activities that tap into their creativity (rather than limit them to focus groups and interviews). While we will have community conversations to establish baseline relationships and trust, we use these creative activities to empower people to express their fullest, most authentic selves.

We acknowledge that we don't have the ability to guarantee the creation of a "safe space" at all times, and that such a guarantee would suggest that we would have power over how everyone behaves, their specific triggers, traumas, levels of discomfort, and comfort. However, since we don't, we opt for the creation of a "brave space" where people are encouraged to lean into the discomfort that comes with being vulnerable while being assured that people can opt out and in at any time. We create group agreements to hold us accountable for any unhelpful language and power dynamics that surface. Above all, we approach everything with care and curiosity.

Photo-Interviewing

Photos tell stories and reveal special insights on people's lives - how they perceive themselves and their surroundings. We provide cameras to participants and ask them to drive the interview process through discussions of the photos that they take. We have found photo-interviewing to be effective at developing trust with participants and promoting deeper conversations about identity. We provide inexpensive digital cameras, and for students who want to create physical copies (for personal use, visual displays, etc.) we provide printing services for them.

Treehouse Evaluations has been impressed by the ability of youth to harness social media as a means to creatively express themselves. As such, we are excited to create youth-led content using popular applications like Tik Tok and Instagram.

Theatre of the Oppressed

Originally developed by the Brazilian theatre practitioner, Augusto Boal, **Theatre of the Oppressed (“TO”)** is a tool for social change: “a rehearsal for the revolution.” TO uses theatre exercises to engage people in their environment - rural settings, inner-cities, schools, factories, prisons, offices - and to help people express their views on their current reality and the reality that they would like to see. Treehouse Evaluations subcontracts TO professionals to facilitate workshops and serve as actors that spur dialogue through performance. We’ve found success in the use of TO for evaluation in two forms:

Image Theatre - Participants silently sculpt their bodies to images in response to prompts and questions. What results is physical storyboarding of evolving images and group tableaux, which reveals people’s truths. These truths are important qualitative information.

Form Theatre - People are engaged in open forum about the oppressions they face, however humble. A performance is enacted that reflects the reality of a group of people, after which point audience members engage in collective problem solving and community dialogue, breaking down the role between audience and performers, as they are one in the same: “spect-actors.”

Trauma-informed

We want participants to engage with challenging issues, but recognize the difference between productive discomfort and harmful distress. When exploring personal experience around things like identity, belonging, and resiliency, we know that participants may have related trauma or toxic stress that could be triggered by open-ended activities.

While we cannot guarantee a safe space, we do what we can to prevent harm, prioritize participants’ wellbeing above the need to gather information, and approach activities with a consent-first mindset. Our process includes:

- Pre-check: Before beginning the activity, we describe the activity, give examples of sensitive topics that could arise, and offer the opportunity for participants to privately indicate topics they prefer not to engage with.
- Anytime “opt-out” and alternatives: We share at the beginning, with periodic reminders, that participants can opt out of any part of the activity, at any time, with no negative consequences and without being ejected from the activity. If they choose to leave the creative activity altogether, we offer interviews and surveys as an alternative.

- Post-check: We debrief what came up in the activity. Participants are welcomed but not required to share any residual feelings and ideas. We then do a “cool-down” activity to support mind-body regulation (breathing exercises, body scan, movement, etc.).
- Lastly, we partner with nonprofits to offer free on-site counseling for participants if they need additional support following the activity.

Deliverables

We provide a variety of formats to review and evaluate data collected during this process.

Options include:

- Data visualization from survey results.
- Key takeaways from interviews and focus groups.
- Summary of observations from application assessment process.
- Content generated from Theatre of the Oppressed experiences (scripts, photos, etc.).
- Notes key takeaways from Theatre of the Oppressed exercises.
- Art created as part of creative exercises.
- Other multimedia options to be discussed.

Schedule Overview

Formative assessment of the Oct 2020 funding cycle (Past Assessment)						
Month:	January, 2021	February, 2021	March, 2021	April, 2021	May, 2021	June, 2021
Action:	Introductory interviews with TMF key staff. Discussions on questions and the scope of evaluation.	Develop relevant models for evaluation. Contact previous 12 grantees.	Solicit feedback from grantees, shadow grantees, generate reflection.	Initial insights are presented.	Finalize plan for whole evaluation with TMF.	Begin Other Assessment.

Participate in grant review conversations for the June 2021 and June 2022 term (Upcoming)				
Month:	June, 2021	July, 2021	August, 2021	September, 2021
Action:	Review previous grant criteria. Examine and question criteria.	Facilitate TMF Workshops surrounding power, bias, assumptions, and hopes.	Participate in grant review conversations.	Reconvene. Share larger-picture thoughts on the review process thus far. Make recommendations for updates, changes.

Month:	June, 2022	July, 2022	August, 2022	September, 2022
Action:	Review previous grant criteria. Examine and question criteria.	Facilitate TMF Workshops surrounding power, bias, assumptions, and hopes.	Participate in grant review conversations.	Reconvene. Share larger-picture thoughts on the review process thus far. Make recommendations for updates, changes.

Summary and analysis of the existing grant portfolio

Month:	January, 2021	February, 2021	March, 2021	April, 2021	May, 2021	June, 2021
Action:	Introductory interviews with TMF key staff. Begin portfolio review and track key data.				Solicit feedback from grantees, shadow grantees, generate reflection.	Present findings.

Design and implementation of an evaluation of the June 2021 and June 2022 funding cycles

Month:	August, 2021	September, 2021	October, 2021	November, 2021	December, 2021	January, 2022
Action:	Begin coordinating with grantees to meet staff and youth. Build the bridge of communication.	Initiate reflection sessions with grantees. Identify what creative activities groups will do. Learn about internal evaluation/ approach.	Share initial ideas for evaluation design with grantees. Develop and finalize evaluation plan with grantees.	Evaluation implementation: focus groups, interviews, surveys, creative engagement (theatre, media, etc).		
Month:	February, 2022	March, 2022	April, 2022	May, 2022	June, 2022	July, 2022
Action:	Evaluation implementation (cont'd).			Reunite youth and grantees for reflection and experience sharing. Compiling data and stories for presentation.	Present findings and make recommendations to TMF.	

Budget

We value our work, we believe in fair pay, and we use our resources wisely. Our projected total expenses are \$201,600. We have the flexibility to reallocate our resources based on our partners' needs and wants.

Our budget includes the following factors:

- Evaluation fee: Our organization's one-time evaluation fee is at the industry standard of 10% of the allotted funding budget: \$25,000.
- We intend to pay the three people who will be working on this assessment:
 - \$30/hour, average of 20 hours/week over the course of the evaluation (actual weekly hours will vary).
 - Projected combined pay for all three specialists: \$129,600, with each biweekly paycheck averaging \$1,200 over 18 months.
- Youth pay, including solo time spent working on creative activities:
 - \$20/hour spent helping us ensure our evaluation is the best it can be.
 - Projected total, depending on number of youth participants: \$8,000.
- Supplies for activities:
 - Includes cameras and physical photo/media development, miscellaneous crafting supplies, and other activity facilitation supplies.
 - We have a supply of digital cameras, but may need to buy more or replace ones that become damaged or lost.
 - Projected total: \$6,000.
- Subcontracts with Theatre of the Oppressed facilitators:
 - Rate per grantee organization using TO activity: \$1,000/day plus applicable fees.
 - Projected total: \$20,000.
- Health and Safety expenses:
 - As COVID continues for the foreseeable future, we want to ensure proper protection for both our staff and the participants of the program. Health is a huge concern in this pandemic, especially with disabled employees and their families.
 - Disinfectant wipes, masks, hand sanitizer, plastic barriers, no contact thermometers, etc.
 - We pay nonprofit partners to offer free counseling following evaluation activities.
 - Projected total: \$9,000.

Evaluation Fee	\$25,000	Total Cost: \$205,600
Specialist pay	\$30/hour	
Total Cost for anticipated hours: \$129,600		
Student Pay	\$20/hour	
Total Cost for anticipated hours: \$8000		
Health Expenses	\$9000	
Activity Supplies	\$6000	
Subcontracting	\$20,000	

Primary Contact

For updates and questions about this application, please contact:
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