Texas Water Trade secures $500,000 grant to launch ‘Clean Water for All Texans’ business venture

AUSTIN, Texas – Texas Water Trade announced today that it has received a $500,000 grant from Lyda Hill Philanthropies to launch a “Clean Water for All Texans” water service that will provide clean, affordable water to underserved populations across the state.

The one-year startup grant will be used to launch a public benefit corporation, Vida Water, that aims to deploy affordable onsite water treatment systems to thousands of households and dozens of schools in Texas that do not have access to affordable, reliable clean water today.

‘Clean Water for All Texans’ was one of five projects selected from 172 proposals as part of the Lone Star Prize competition, a joint effort of Lyda Hill Philanthropies and Lever for Change to find and fund bold solutions focused on building healthier, stronger communities in Texas.

“We are so honored to receive start-up funding to pursue our vision of delivering affordable, clean water to millions of Texans who are living today without secure drinking water,” said Sharlene Leurig, CEO of Texas Water Trade. “By securing this startup grant, we can develop our business plan, initiate our engagement with communities in need and onboard a CEO who can bring this innovative subscription service to life.”

Texas Water Trade is positioned to receive additional funding for the project from Lyda Hill Philanthropies if key performance indicators are met over the next year.

“This clean water gap in Texas has been known for decades, yet neither the market nor the public sector have closed the gap for the poorest and most marginalized,” said Lyda Hill, founder of Lyda Hill Philanthropies. “Clean Water for All Texans has the potential to achieve transformational change across Texas -- and potentially beyond.”

Texas Water Trade’s new water service will aim to close the clean water gap for millions of Texans who do not have consistent access to clean, affordable drinking water. The problem is widespread across all geographies and income levels, including: those dependent on public water supplies with lead-tainted water; those reliant on private groundwater wells that are unmonitored and unregulated for water quality; and those in underserved communities along the southern border and across the state who have no water infrastructure at all.

Texas Water Trade, through Vida Water, will deploy and maintain onsite water treatment technologies for households and schools using a subscription payment system designed to beat what the lowest income Texans pay today for bottled water. The carbon filtration and reverse osmosis treatment systems it will use are already being used by millions of Americans today and can be purchased at most hardware stores.
Lack of consumer knowledge about appropriate treatment technologies, combined with concerns about having the resources to buy, install and maintain these systems, have been cited by researchers at The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) as reasons for why underserved households have not gained access to these readily-available technologies.

“The subscription-based service proposed by Texas Water Trade promises to be sustainable, affordable solution to close the decades-old clean water gap among Texas households along the border and elsewhere,” said Ivonne Santiago, Ph.D., associate professor of the Department of Civil Engineering at UTEP, a project partner. Other UTEP collaborators include Drs. Shane Walker and Alex Mayer from the Department of Civil Engineering, Dr. Jeannie Concha from the College of Health Sciences Department of Public Health and Dr. Kristina Mena from the University of Texas - Houston School of Public Health El Paso Campus.

Over the next few years, Texas Water Trade’s new entity will aim to test and validate its solution in at least three high-need communities, each representing a different water access challenge, including:

- The Rio Grande Valley, where 140,000 Texans, many living in informal developments known as colonias, are living with no water services at all.
- Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex, where homes and schools served by public utilities face significant costs to mitigate lead contamination in their drinking water.
- Central Texas, one of the fastest-growing regions of the country, where growth is outpacing extension of public water systems—leaving households reliant on unregulated groundwater wells increasingly vulnerable to groundwater contamination.

Editor’s Note:
Texas Water Trade CEO Sharlene Leurig and UTEP’s Dr. Ivonne Santiago will be speaking with Matt Crommett, Director at Lyda Hill Philanthropies, about Texas’ clean water gap at the upcoming virtual BigBANG! Conference on Wednesday, October 27.