

Exclusive: Reliant Energy, YMCA team up to create Houston equity center downtown



By [Chris Mathews](#) – Reporter, *Houston Business Journal*

The YMCA of Greater Houston and Houston-based Reliant Energy are collaborating to create a new center focused on equity and inclusivity.

The Equity Innovation Center Powered by Reliant is being developed inside of the Tellepsen Family Downtown YMCA. The roughly 3,100-square-foot center will provide educational resources, workshops and other activities centered around addressing racial inequalities and biases.

The center will also assist companies and organizations in developing and enhancing equity plans. [Stephen Ives](#), president and CEO of the YMCA of Greater Houston, said that the center aims to work with local youth, adults and businesses to address racial inequalities in the Houston region.

"This is not just a new program — this is the evolution of years of work, but a jumpstart of something that should be very transformational for our organization and, quite frankly, our community that we're also proud to be part of," Ives said.



Stephen Ives, president and CEO of the YMCA of Greater Houston

Reliant is financing the center's creation through a donation of \$100,000 — or two years of \$50,000 commitments.

"It's sort of like, 'If not us, then who?'" said [Elizabeth Killinger](#), president of Reliant. "If we don't, as a community, come together to help make a difference for lasting change, then who would?"

The Equity Innovation Center Powered by Reliant will open in three phases. The first phase, scheduled for August, will consist of the YMCA of Greater Houston addressing its own systemic racial inequalities. Online trainings will be made available to all staff and board members to address bias, diversity, cultural lenses and allyship.

The second phase will include virtual learning experiences and engagement with the community through partnerships, listening sessions and planning of the interactive learning lab at the downtown Y.

The third and final phase will include the opening of the physical lab space downtown, which will serve as a place for individuals and groups to gather and connect in-person. Due to the spread of Covid-19 throughout the Houston region, the opening of the physical lab space will be delayed until conditions improve, Ives said.

Additionally, the YMCA plans to hire one or two staff members to assist in running the center, Ives said.

Founded in 1886, the YMCA of Greater Houston is among the [largest nonprofits and charitable organizations in the Houston metro region](#), according to data from The Better Business Bureau of Greater Houston & South Texas.

Reliant is the retail arm of Houston- and New Jersey-based NRG Energy Inc. (NYSE: NRG). With 1,350 local employees as of 2019, [NRG is one of the largest energy employers in greater Houston](#), according to Houston Business Journal research.

Separately, both Ives and Killinger were [recently named as two of the HBJ's 2020 Most Admired CEOs](#).