

MEHAF

MAINE HEALTH ACCESS FOUNDATION

2023 SYSTEMS IMPROVEMENT AND INNOVATION RESPONSIVE GRANTS REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS (RFP)—GUIDELINES

Important Dates & Deadlines:

- **RFP posted:** Wednesday, November 9, 2022
- **Informational Sessions via Zoom:** To register, please email [Holly Irish](#)
 - Wednesday, November 16, 2022 at 10:00 to 11:00 am
 - Thursday, November 17, 2022 at 2:00 to 3:00 pmA recording will also be available following the sessions.
- **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) posted:** Monday, November 21, 2022
- **Letter of Inquiry (LOI) due: Tuesday, December 13 at 4:00 pm**
- **Review Decisions & Invitations for full proposal:** Friday, January 20, 2023
- **Informational session for invited applicants:** To register, please email [Holly Irish](#)
 - Tuesday, January 31, 2023 at 10:00 to 11:00 am
- **FAQs for full proposal posted:** Friday, February 3, 2023
- **Full Proposal (invited applicants) due: Thursday, February 23, 2023 at 4:00 pm**
- **All Applicants Notified of Award Status:** Tuesday, May 9, 2023
- **Grant Period:** June 1, 2023 – May 31, 2024/2025

LOIs and full proposals must be submitted using an online application on the [MeHAF grants portal](#) by **4:00 pm on the due date (December 13 for LOIs, February 23 for Full Applications)**. If you are having problems with the online application, need access to a computer, or are in need of help with your submission, please contact [Holly Irish](#) immediately; preferably 48 hours or more before its due.

Available:

- Individual grants: one-year planning grants up to **\$30,000**, or one- or two-year implementation grants up to **\$50,000** per year.
- Expected 2023 total funding for new grants: approximately **\$400,000**.

Key Staff Contacts:

- **For program questions and to discuss proposal ideas:** [Email Senior Program Officer Charles Dwyer](#) or call at (207) 620-8266, x103
- **For technical questions about the online application or submission:** [Email Grants Manager Holly Irish](#) or call at (207) 620-8266, x115

We see ourselves not as just a funder, but also part of the health and nonprofit communities in Maine. We value our relationships with organizations and strive to build relationships with applicants whether they are awarded funds or not. We encourage you to reach out with any questions you may have throughout the process and use us as a resource. If you have questions at any point in the grant process, please do not hesitate to contact [Senior Program Officer Charles Dwyer](#) or another member of the [MeHAF staff](#).

HELPFUL TERMS TO KNOW

The following terms appear in this RFP and are defined here to help applicants understand how MeHAF is using them.

1. **System:** For the purposes of this opportunity “system” is defined as the interconnected entities and structures -- the people, policies, services, and organizations --that individuals interact with when seeking support for their health needs.
2. **Community(ies) of focus:** This is the specific population that is most affected by health disparities who will be at the center of the planning process or proposed implementation. MeHAF expects that members of this community will be meaningfully involved at each stage of the proposed project from conception through to the end of the grant period. This includes identifying the health equity related need or concern, providing input that informs action, and playing a role in determining how well the project met the community-identified need(s).
3. **Health equity:** Health equity means that all people have what they need to lead healthy, productive, and purposeful lives. This includes, but is not limited to, access to quality, affordable health care. The goal is to address health disparities created by those in power, which have systemically advantaged some groups and disadvantaged others both historically and currently. Achieving health equity requires a commitment to examine and address barriers across services, systems, and sectors and begin to compensate for the impact of cumulative disadvantages to achieve fair and just health outcomes for all.
4. **Planning grant:** This is a grant to support exploring and developing a health service improvement or innovation to address a community-defined health need or concern, that results in some type of product, e.g., a plan of action or the development of a project concept that could be implemented.
5. **Implementation grant:** This is a grant to support the implementation of a project based on an existing action plan, developed with the involvement of the community of focus, to address a community-defined health need or concern and reduce barriers to care and advance health equity.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW AND PURPOSE

The Systems Improvement and Innovation Responsive Grants (SIIRG) program focuses on creating change at the system and organizational levels that responds to community-identified health needs. The program emphasizes ensuring that the community of focus has a meaningful and ongoing voice in shaping improvements and innovations that address their barriers to health equity. The program funds organizations to improve health and access to care in four strategic priority areas: rural health, aging/older adults, behavioral health, and maternal and child health. Applicants may apply for a one-year planning grant up to \$30,000 or one-or-two-year implementation grant of up to \$50,000 per year. We developed the SIIRG program as a complement to MeHAF’s Community Responsive Grants (CRG) program, launched in 2019. The CRG program supports projects that align with MeHAF’s goals and

advance health equity, by funding **community-led** organizations responding to community-defined health needs. The CRG program grew out of the recognition that those closest to a given problem are often closest to the potential solutions. We also recognize that some community health services and access to care needs require action by systems and organizations – “the providers” of care, prompting the creation of SIIRG.

MeHAF experience suggests that the most successful projects with the longest staying power after grant funding ends are those tailored to be responsive to community and cultural needs, focused on reducing inequities, and designed to leverage local resources, talents, and opportunities. Projects that propose simple replication of models and best practices without meaningful community participation may not be successful and are less likely to be funded. New applicants are encouraged to review learning from MeHAF’s Community-Based Initiatives in the [Practical Guide for Responsive Grant Applicants](#).

The table below may help you to determine whether your idea is a good fit as a planning or implementation proposal.

Planning versus Implementation Grants

Planning Grant	Implementation Grant
<i>Stage of Development:</i> Your work on the issue or need is just beginning and requires exploration to fully understand it and flesh out what you will do to respond in greater detail.	<i>Stage of Development:</i> A degree of groundwork for your project has already been completed – you understand the problem your project will be trying to solve, based on what you have heard from the community, and have a good idea of how you will go about addressing it.
<i>Relationships:</i> A significant part of your work will be establishing relationships with other people or organizations that will help you to accomplish the work you want to do.	<i>Relationships:</i> You have the important relationships already in place that will be essential to the success of the work you are proposing.
<i>Readiness:</i> You are at the stage of needing to gather more information from the community or others that will be important to informing how you move forward.	<i>Readiness:</i> You have a clear and specific plan of action that you and your partners are ready to move forward.
<i>Expected Results:</i> The expected outcome of your work may be described as having learned more about an issue, problem or possible strategy that will support future action. For example, what you will have to show for the work you have done may include things like an action plan, a report or paper that shares what you have learned and makes recommendations, a roadmap for moving forward, etc.	<i>Expected Results:</i> You have a clear idea of the specific changes that will make a difference for the community your project seeks to serve that will result from your work, if successful. For example, what you will have to show for your work may include things like quantitative or qualitative data that illustrates the impact of a change, changes to policies, practices and/or perceptions that have been made in existing systems that the community identified as problematic, etc.

ELIGIBILITY TO APPLY

We fund organizations that are **501(c)(3)s, local, state, or tribal government entities, or educational institutions**. Applicants must be organizations **based in Maine**. If your organization is not eligible to apply independently, and you need to apply via a fiscal sponsor, please contact MeHAF before applying so that we can assist you with the steps. Individuals and private foundations are ineligible.

Eligible organizations may submit only one application for a Systems Improvement and Innovation Responsive Grant (either a planning or implementation proposal). Current MeHAF grantees with grants

under other programs **are** eligible to apply for a Systems Improvement and Innovation Responsive Grant. Separate administrative units of large organizations (e.g., different health centers within a larger FQHC organization) may each submit individual proposals.

For questions about organizational eligibility, fiscal sponsorship, and applications coming from distinct units of a large organization please email Holly Irish before beginning your application.

PROGRAM CRITERIA & APPLICATION RATING

Successful SIIRG proposals must meet the following five criteria:

1. Align with one or more these four strategic priority areas:
 - (a) aging/older adults,
 - (b) behavioral health/substance use disorder,
 - (c) maternal and child health,
 - (d) and/or rural health.
2. Respond to a community-defined health need or concern.
3. Focus on changes at the system and organizational levels by addressing policies, practices and perceptions that create disproportionate barriers to health and access to care for some groups of people relative to others.
4. Engage members of the community of focus (those who are facing a barrier to health that will be addressed by the proposed project) in meaningful ways over the course of project.
5. Define what success will look like for the project and demonstrate that the key organizations involved and the community of focus have a role (or will) in defining success.

Rating

In stage 1, the LOI phase, responses to the application questions will be assessed on how closely they align with each of the five SIIRG program criteria (see above), using this rating scale (1–4):

- **1** – Does not align with the criteria.
- **2** – Minimally aligns with the criteria.
- **3** – Somewhat aligns with the criteria.
- **4** – Strongly aligns with the criteria.

In stage 2, the full proposal phase, the alignment of the applicant’s workplan and budget will also be considered when making the overall decision.

HOW TO APPLY & APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

Stage 1: Letter of Inquiry

The Letter of Inquiry (LOI) is not an actual “letter,” but an initial part of the application process which must be submitted through MEHAF’s grants portal. The online application includes the following required sections:

- Organization's tax status
- Fiscal sponsorship
- Organization's mission and/or vision statement (up to 500 characters)
- Strategic priority areas of focus (You must choose one or more)
 - a. aging/older adults;

- b. behavioral health/substance use disorder;
- c. maternal and child health;
- d. rural health.
- Project title
- Brief project description (up to 500 characters)
- Planning or implementation
- Year-one and, if applicable, year-two request amounts
- Project start and end dates
- Additional contact's name, title, email, phone number
- Geographic area to be served by the project
- Race & ethnicity of communities to be served by the project
- Verify compliance with MeHAF's Nondiscrimination Policy

A. Community of Focus

Please identify the specific population affected by barriers to health and care access who will be at the center of the work you are proposing.

B. Letter of Inquiry (LOI) Narrative Questions

You will be asked to give brief answers in response to the questions below. Each question has a 2,000-character limit total, including spaces. Please note that planning and implementation applicants have different questions for number three.

Question 1: What is the issue or concern that the proposed project will address, and how did the community(ies) of focus help to determine that it is a priority?

Question 2: Briefly describe the project, highlighting how it will improve health equity at a systems level.

Question 3: (*Planning proposals only*): What key things do you expect to learn more about through the planning project that will lead to the next phase of this work?

OR

Question 3: (*Implementation proposals only*): What will be the lasting change at a systems level as a result of implementing this proposed project?

C. Preliminary Budget Narrative

In a few sentences, please describe how you plan to use the requested grant funds (no individual budget line amounts are needed). No MeHAF budget form is necessary for the LOI stage of the application.

D. Other Attachments

- 1) If you are applying as a Fiscal Sponsor for another entity, submit a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) outlining the fiscal sponsor relationship.
- 2) If not already submitted for another MeHAF application within the last 12 months, submit a current Board List/Tribal Council List if one is not listed on your organization's website.

To upload a document as an attachment, go to the MeHAF grants portal and follow the instructions: click on "Upload a file," select the appropriate document from your computer, and then click on "Open."

Stage 2: Full Proposal (For invited applicants, following the reviews of the LOIs.)

E. Full Proposal Narrative Questions

At the full proposal stage, you will be able to modify and add details to your original LOI responses. A set of prompts to guide your expanded responses are included in the full proposal questions below. MeHAF will put the text of your LOI responses into the full proposal template in the MeHAF grants portal.

Question 1: What is the health issue/concern(s) that the project will address, and how did the community(ies) of focus help to determine that it is a priority?

- a. Describe why you selected this service improvement or innovation and how the community was involved in identifying it to address the issue/concern(s).

Question 2: Describe the project, highlighting how it will improve health equity at a systems level.

- a. Describe how the project will improve health equity by addressing one or all of the following: policies, practices, and perceptions that create disproportionate barriers to health for the community(ies) of focus.
- b. Describe how the community(ies) of focus will be involved in your project from conception to the end of your grant period.

Question 3 (implementation proposals only): What will be the lasting change at a systems level as a result of implementing this proposed project?

- a. What difference will the community(ies) of focus experience?
- b. What role will those most impacted by the problem/concern have in determining how well the project met the identified issue/concern(s)?

OR

Question 3 (planning proposals only): What key things do you expect to learn more about through the planning process that will lead to the next phase of this work?

- a. Describe the key questions to be answered and/or the products that will be developed as a result of the planning.
- b. What role will those most impacted by the problem/concern have as the work moves forward?

F. Work Plan

Please submit a work plan that describes the overarching aim, objectives, activities, who is responsible for each activity, and how you will monitor progress and measure outcomes. Applicants seeking two years of funding are only required to submit a detailed first-year workplan with their application. See Appendix B for detailed instructions.

G. Letters of Commitment

Compile into a single pdf document all letters of commitment from key partner organizations that describe:

- 1) their role(s) in the project;
- 2) the amount of grant funds to be provided them and any in-kind or matching support they will provide;
- 3) their agreement to send at least one individual to participate in annual equity training session(s) hosted by MeHAF (see details on pages 8 and 9 of this RFP)

H. Budget and Budget Narrative

Submit a budget that details the income and expenses for the proposed work. If the application is for a two-year grant, a detailed budget is requested for the first year only. If funded, you will be asked to develop and submit a second-year budget near the end of your first grant year. Please review MeHAF's [Budget Form Guidance](#) and complete the MeHAF budget form and brief budget narrative, using the templates that can be downloaded within the application to explain how your organization will use the grant and other funds to carry out the proposed activities. We encourage applicants to read all of MeHAF's [funding policies and guidance](#) prior to completing the budget documents.

Include the following details about how the funds will be used:

- 1) Direct Costs: Amount for applicant organization;
- 2) Direct Costs: Amount for partners or participants;
- 3) Indirect Costs: MeHAF encourages applicants to budget for indirect costs of up to 20% of the requested grant amount. Please note that both direct and indirect costs must be included in the total amount requested, and taken together, may not exceed the maximum amounts noted above by grant type. See MeHAF's [Indirect Costs Policy](#) for more information.
- 4) Accessibility Expenses: MeHAF may provide funds in addition to the maximum grant amount to offset accessibility-related expenses with the goal of reducing barriers to equitable participation in the project. Please note that requests for accessibility-related expenses may not exceed 20% of the total grant amount requested. See MeHAF's [Accessibility Expense Policy](#) for more details.
- 5) Matching Funds: Although matching funds are required only for implementation grant applicants, be sure to note cash or in-kind support from the applicant, partner organizations or other funding sources in the appropriate columns, if applicable. This helps reviewers understand the resources available for the full scope of a project if the MeHAF grant is part of a larger whole. See MeHAF's [Grant Match Requirements](#) for more information.

Submit the **completed budget form and budget narrative** as attachments, by going to the MeHAF grants portal and following the instructions: click on "Upload a file", select the appropriate document from your computer, and then click on "Open".

Reviewers will consider how the budget aligns with the scope of the work described. *Planning grants* can be **up to \$30,000**. One- or two-year *implementation grants* can be **up to \$50,000 per year**. Funds requested must be proportionate with the work to be completed.

I. Other Attachments

If you have not already submitted the following items in the past 12 months, they must be included with your application.

- 1) For applicant organizations requesting \$25,000 or more, include either the organization's most recent Audited Financials, IRS Form 990 or confirmation of filing of form 990-N (for organizations with gross receipts of \$50,000 or less).
- 2) For applicant organizations that do not have an audit or IRS Form 990, including those that submit proof of filing a form 990-N, submit a current balance sheet and your organization's operating budget, including current fiscal year revenue and expenses and previous fiscal year budgeted and actual revenue and expenses.

You may also upload one other document (non-financial) with your application, if relevant to the application. Briefly describe the contents of the optional attachment. Note, this is not a requirement.

REVIEW PROCESS AND AWARDS

MeHAF is committed to a thorough and fair review of all applications, and follows a policy to avoid conflict of interest for all staff, reviewers, and committee members responsible for funding decisions.

Letter of Inquiry: A staff team will review and discuss LOIs to select those invited to submit full proposals. All applicants will be notified about the status of their LOIs on Friday, **January 20**.

Full Proposal: Full proposals will be reviewed by a team of community members with relevant knowledge and experience, as well as by MeHAF staff. The review team will meet to discuss their reviews and recommend a slate of grants to MeHAF's Program and Grants Committee. To finalize their recommendations, the team will consider the scores reviewers assigned to each application as well as the overall makeup of the proposed grantee cohort. This will include factors such as geographic distribution and ensuring a diversity of populations and issues covered by the group of recommended grantees, taken as a whole. The Program and Grants Committee will carefully review the recommended slate and make the final funding decision. During the review process, MeHAF may contact applicants with clarifying questions and ask for responses either verbally or in writing.

- All invited applicants who submit a full proposal will be notified about the status of their applications by Tuesday, **May 9**. If you do not receive a notification email, please contact Holly Irish.
 - Applicants whose proposals are approved by the Program and Grants Committee will receive a formal award letter and grant agreement via email.
 - Applicants whose proposals are not selected for funding will also receive an email notification and are encouraged to schedule a debriefing call with MeHAF staff to receive feedback on their application and to ask questions.
 - All applicants (LOI and full proposals) will receive email notification of the final list of awards on **June 1**.

GRANTEE REPORTING, LEARNING AND EVALUATION EXPECTATIONS

Reporting expectations – grantees will:

- Submit a financial report and have an interim check-in with the MeHAF Program Officer at the mid-point of each year of funding; and
- Submit annual/final narrative and financial reports at the conclusion of each year of the grant period.

We hope that grantees will learn from each other and connect with other organizations and communities doing similar or related work. Grantees will be expected to participate in a MeHAF hosted learning community that will meet one to two times each year, to include an annual training session on identifying and mitigating systemic inequities, including racism.

It is an expectation that grantee organizations that provide direct patient care that have not yet implemented National Standards for Culturally and Linguistically Accessible Services (CLAS) in Health and Health Care¹ will do so during the grant period. While the standards are meant for internal organizational change, MeHAF will facilitate peer support of this work to the extent possible. Other topics for peer learning will be developed collaboratively with MeHAF.

MeHAF will engage an evaluation consultant to work in cooperation with grantee organizations and the foundation. Evaluation questions will be developed collaboratively. The foundation-supported evaluation will include qualitative assessment of the degree to which the grant funding supported accomplishments, such as identification of barriers and facilitators to achieving the proposed activities, degree to which the work was framed and carried out with an equity perspective, the nature of community/patient/client involvement, and actual or potential eventual systems improvement.

QUESTIONS AND INFORMATIONAL SESSIONS

Applicants are strongly encouraged to join the informational sessions prior to completing both the LOI and full proposal, and to contact MeHAF staff with questions at any point in the process. Guidance and clarification of LOI and full proposal requirements can help you to prepare a stronger application.

Applicants are advised to log into the MeHAF grants portal well in advance of the due dates to avoid technical issues which may interfere with a timely submission.

Answers to initial **Frequently Asked Questions** (FAQs) will be posted on MeHAF's web site on:

- Monday, November 21 for the letter of inquiry
- Friday, February 3 for the full proposal

The FAQs will be updated periodically as applicants raise additional questions that are broadly applicable. Additionally, applicants that are invited to submit a full proposal will be emailed whenever an updated version of the FAQ is posted.

¹ The National CLAS Standards [<https://thinkculturalhealth.hhs.gov/clas>] are intended to advance health equity, improve quality, and help eliminate health care disparities by providing a blueprint for health and healthcare organizations to provide effective, equitable, understandable, and respectful quality care and services that are responsive to diverse cultural health beliefs and practices, preferred languages, health literacy, and other communication needs.

APPENDIX A

The Systems Improvement and Innovation Responsive Grants (SIIRG) Program focuses on four of MeHAF’s Strategic Priority Areas.

MeHAF GOALS AND STRATEGIES: 2022 - 2025					
	<p>Ensure equitable access to affordable, quality care.</p>	<p>Insurance Coverage & Free Care Promote high quality public and private coverage, while ensuring free care options when needed.</p>	<p>Workforce Strengthen and expand the health, mental health, and dental workforces, with a focus on recruiting from Maine communities.</p>	<p>Rural Health Support rural health care transformation into new systems that coordinate and maintain essential services.</p>	<p>Costs Promote learning and problem solving regarding economically sustainable health care, particularly concerning rising costs.</p>
	<p>Support systemic changes to address critical health issues in Maine.</p>	<p>Behavioral Health Care Help to build a robust, trauma-informed, integrated behavioral health care system in Maine, especially treatment and recovery for substance use disorders.</p>	<p>Oral Health Ensure ongoing access to high quality dental care and improve the oral health status of individuals with low incomes.</p>		
	<p>Advance efforts to improve the health of specific populations.</p>	<p>Children Support efforts to improve the health of Maine children, focusing on early childhood and infant and maternal mortality.</p>	<p>Older Adults Improve the health of Maine’s older adults, focusing on health care linked to mental health care, as well as social services and community supports.</p>	<p>Equity Support groups that experience health inequities to build capacity to improve health in their communities.</p>	<p>Social Determinants Participate in cross-sector efforts to address social determinants of health (such as transportation, food security, and housing).</p>
	<p>Promote shared leadership to achieve equitable health outcomes for everyone in Maine.</p>	<p>Public Awareness & Commitment Build public commitment to achieving equitable health outcomes.</p>	<p>MeHAF’s Leadership Build MeHAF’s leadership skills and capacity to live out our commitment to equity.</p>	<p>State & Community Leadership Support efforts to foster equity-minded leadership, to advance access to health care and improve the health of everyone in Maine.</p>	

APPENDIX B

SIIRG WORK PLAN TEMPLATE

Please use the following format to complete your work plan. A template is available within the grants portal.

Work Plan: (June 1, 2023 – May 30, 2024) One-year planning or one-year and first-year implementation project proposal work plans should be submitted with the application. Second year work plans will be requested from funded implementation projects that propose two years of grant funding, near the end of your first grant year.

Goal/Aim: What is the shared goal that you and your partners are working toward? There needs to be only one over-arching Goal or Aim for the proposed planning or implementation project proposal.

Objective: (What do you and your partners plan to achieve during the grant period? You may identify more than one objective.)

- **Activity/Timeframe:** (List high-level tasks/actions that will be undertaken to achieve the objective. List months or quarters in which each activity will occur, for example, August-September 2022 or 2nd Quarter 2022. Objectives may have a number of activities; simply add each new one to the list in a new row.)
- **Responsible Parties:** (List specific staff, contractors, and/or partner organizations, as appropriate. Each activity should have a responsible party listed.)
- **Outputs/Outcomes:** (Describe how achievement or success will be determined. Outputs as well as short-term and intermediate outcomes for planning or project of this length and scope are expected.)

→ Repeat this format as needed or use the template provided within the grants portal.

Systems Improvement and Innovation Responsive Grant Work Plan: June 1, 2023 – May 30, 2024			
Goal/Aim:			
Objective 1:			
Activities:	Timeframe:	Responsible Parties:	Outputs/Outcomes:
1.1.			
1.2.			
Objective 2:			
2.1.			
2.2.			