



2025 COMMUNITY RESPONSIVE GRANTS PROGRAM REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS (RFP) – GUIDELINES

Important Dates & Deadlines:

- RFP posted: **Monday, June 9**
- LOI guidance video & Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) posted: **Monday, June 9**
- LOI virtual open office hours – Visit the CRG webpage and click the Zoom link to join during one of the scheduled times:
 - **Wednesday, June 11** from 9:30 am – 11:30 am
 - **Tuesday, June 17** from Noon – 2:00 pm
 - **Tuesday, June 24** from 11:00 am – 1:00 pm
- Letter of Inquiry (LOI) due: **Tuesday, July 8** by 4:00 pm
- LOI review decisions & invitations for full proposal communicated: **Tuesday, August 5**
- Full proposal guidance video for invited applicants & FAQ posted: **Tuesday, August 5**
- Full proposal individual workshop sessions (Scheduled upon request – not required): **Monday, August 11** thru **Thursday, August 28**
- Full proposal for invited applicants due: **Thursday, September 4** by 4:00 pm
- Applicants notified of award status: **Tuesday, November 4**
- Grant period: **December 1, 2025 – November 30, 2026 or 2027**

Funding 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 total **2025** funding for new grants: approximately **\$360,000**.

Key Staff Contacts:

- **For program questions:**
[Email Frank Martinez Nocito](#), Senior Program Officer, (207) 620-8266, ext. 116.
- **For technical questions about the online application or the MeHAF grants portal:**
[Email Holly Irish](#), Grants Manager, (207) 620-8266, ext. 115.

Please Note:

Organizations intending to apply through a fiscal sponsor or considering submitting multiple applications from distinct units of a large organization, must email Holly Irish before applying to confirm eligibility.

LOIs and full proposals must be submitted using an online application on the [MeHAF grants portal](#) by 4:00 pm on the due date (**July 8** for the LOI, **September 4** for the full proposals). If you have any problems with the online application, need access to a computer, or need help with your submission, please contact [Holly Irish](#) as soon as possible, preferably 48 hours or more before the due date.

We see ourselves not as only 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 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 the staff lead, Senior Program Officer [Frank Martinez Nocito](#) or another member of the [MeHAF staff](#).

PROGRAM OVERVIEW AND PURPOSE

We don't have **health equity** when some groups are favored with extra resources or advantages and other groups run into barriers that result in them getting less. This might have happened in the past, or may be happening now. We can achieve equity first by identifying those barriers that some groups run into in our health systems and services, and second working to remove them. This work can lead to health systems are more fair and just for everyone.

The Community Responsive Grants (CRG) program is based on the idea that those closest to a problem often have the best ideas about potential barriers and solutions. The purpose of this program is to use those community-led solutions to respond to community needs. These may be to address emerging opportunities, or to test new, or creative ideas. They may also be solutions that are based on the community's experience and what it sees as the best ways to overcome the barriers to health equity it experiences.

We use the term **community** to refer to the specific group that is the focus of your work. This community is a group of people who have a shared identity, history, or experience. While your project may help a broad range of people, for this grant program, your community means those people who will directly benefit from your project. This may be a group with a shared identity, a common cause, common geographic location, similar health and health access needs, or other shared experiences or characteristics.

PROGRAM CRITERIA & APPLICATION RATING

This program will fund projects that improve health equity by focusing on changing the policies, practices, and perceptions that create barriers to health care and good health.

Successful CRG applications will meet the following five program criteria:

- 1) Aligns with at least one of [MeHAF's Four Goal Areas](#): equitable access, address critical health issues, better health for specific groups, and shared leadership.
- 2) Improves health equity by addressing policies, practices and/or perceptions that create more barriers to health and access to health care for some people than others.
- 3) Responds to a community-defined need or opportunity with a community-defined solution.
- 4) Ensures that the majority of leadership and decision-makers are from the community.
- 5) Defines what success will look like for the project and demonstrates that both the applicant and the community have participated in defining success.

Rating

In both stages of the application process (LOI and full proposal), reviewers will evaluate the project based on how closely it aligns with each of the five CRG program criteria (see page two), 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.

Type of Funding

Applicants may apply for either:

- a *planning grant* for one-year of **up to \$30,000** or
- an *implementation grant* for one- or two-years of **up to \$50,000 per year**.

Please use the table below to help you decide whether your project is a better fit as a planning or an implementation grant application.

Planning versus Implementation Grants

Planning Grant	Implementation Grant
<u>Stage of Development:</u> Your work to address an issue or need may be just beginning. It requires a deeper exploration to fully understand the issue/need and more information to flesh out what you will do to respond in greater detail.	<u>Stage of Development:</u> Groundwork for your project is well underway and based on collected input from the community and system/organizational contacts. You have an adequate understanding of the issues your project will work to resolve, and have a good idea of how the project can address them.
<u>Relationships:</u> A significant part of your work will be establishing and/or developing connections with other people or organizations that could help you to accomplish the system change work you want to do.	<u>Relationships:</u> You have communications and relationships with or within the community(ies) and the organization or system. Community members and cooperating organizations are willing to be actively involved with the proposed project.
<u>Readiness:</u> You need to gather more information and feedback from the community(ies) or others that will be important to informing how you will move forward.	<u>Readiness:</u> You have a clear and specific plan of action and the commitment and trust among members of the community(ies) and cooperating organizations to move forward.
<u>Expected Results:</u> You expect to build relationships and knowledge about an issue or problem and explore ideas and support for potential strategies for future action. Examples of final products may include: an action plan, a report sharing your learning and recommendations, a community advisory group, a partnership agreement and/or a roadmap for moving forward, etc.	<u>Expected Results:</u> You have a clear idea of the specific changes that will benefit the community(ies) as a result of your work, if it's successful. Result examples include: Quantitative or qualitative data that illustrates the impact of changes made to policies, practices and/or perceptions in existing systems or organizations that the community identified as problematic, etc.

ELIGIBILITY TO APPLY

We fund **501(c)(3) non-profit organizations, local, state, and tribal government entities, and educational institutions based in Maine**. Individuals and private foundations are not eligible.

If your organization is based in Maine, but not a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, local, state, or tribal government entity, or an educational institution, you may be able to apply via a fiscal sponsor. See the following section for more details regarding Fiscal Sponsorship below.

If you have questions about organizational eligibility, please email Holly Irish, Grants Manager, before beginning an application.

Eligible organizations may submit only one application for the 2025 CRG program, **either a planning or an implementation proposal**. Those with ongoing two-year CRG implementation grants received last year may not apply for a new grant this year. Current MeHAF **grantees in other programs are eligible** to apply. Separate administrative units of large organizations (e.g., different hospitals within a larger health system) may be eligible to submit individual proposals. If you are with such an organization and interested in submitting multiple applications coming from distinct units, please email Holly Irish **before** beginning your application to confirm eligibility to do so.

Failure to reach out to Holly Irish will disqualify your LOI.

FISCAL SPONSORSHIP

Organizations intending to apply through a fiscal sponsor, must contact Holly Irish, Grants Manager, to discuss your situation before beginning an application. Holly will arrange a brief meeting with the sponsored organization and the fiscal sponsor to review the requirements of both organizations and ensure a mutual understanding of the steps involved in the grant process. This is a requirement that applies to all applicants intending to use fiscal sponsorship, including those that have done so for other MeHAF grants and those that have had conversations about this program with other staff. **Please note that failure to make contact with Holly in advance of submitting an LOI regarding your grant application and the fiscal sponsorship process will disqualify your application.**

The organization serving as the fiscal sponsor is required to:

1. submit the letter of inquiry (LOI) and, if selected, the full proposal for this grant application;
2. legally assume responsibility for the proper expenditure and accounting of all funds received and disbursed for the sponsored organization's activities;
3. report grant funds received as income for both tax and financial reporting purposes; and
4. if a grant is awarded, sign a grant agreement stipulating all legal terms of the award.

The sponsored organization is required to:

1. ensure a relationship with your fiscal sponsor is in place before considering an application and that your fiscal sponsor is aware of your intent to apply;
2. adhere to the requirements set forth in your Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or agreement between your organization and your fiscal sponsor; and
3. acknowledge your organization is qualified to carry out the proposed work or project.

Subject to the requirements outlined in the above section regarding fiscal sponsorship, an organization may submit an application on their own behalf **in addition** to applying as a fiscal sponsor for another organization.

HOW TO APPLY & APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

This application process for this grant program is organized into two separate stages.

Step 1: Letter of Inquiry (LOI)

The LOI is not an actual “letter,” but the first part of the application process. It must be submitted through the MeHAF grants portal.

The online LOI application includes the following required sections:

1. Organization's tax status.
2. Fiscal sponsorship; are you applying on behalf of another organization as a fiscal sponsor? If yes, you must submit a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) outlining the relationship.
3. Organization’s mission and/or vision statement (up to 500 characters).
4. Organization’s leadership demographics. (At the full proposal stage, applicants will also submit a board or tribal council list.)
5. Project title; this may be a working title and can be modified later.
6. Alignment with MeHAF’s four Goal Areas (All projects must **clearly and explicitly align** with at least one of four goal areas: equitable access, systems change, better health for specific groups, and shared leadership. Applicants may check all that apply.)
7. Brief project description (up to 500 characters); Complete these two sentences:
 - “The grant will support...”
 - “By the end of the grant period this project will...”
8. Grant request type (*planning* or *implementation*).
9. Request amount(s); if applying for a 2-year grant, include the requested amount for each year and the total amount, in the spaces provided.
10. Project start and end dates (All projects start on 12/1/2025 and end on either 11/30/2026 or 11/30/2027.)
11. Describe the community(ties) i.e., the people whose health would directly benefit from the project’s success.
12. Additional contact’s name, title, email, and phone number (*optional*). You may identify a secondary contact person for the project in addition to the person listed as the applicant.
13. Geographic area served by the project.
14. Race and ethnicity of primary population served by the project.
15. Project summary and budget narrative, as described below. You will submit a more detailed budget if invited to the full proposal stage.
16. Verify compliance with [MeHAF's Nondiscrimination Policy](#).

A. LOI Narrative

Write a short summary of the most important aspects of your project. Be sure to describe how it aligns with each of the five CRG program criteria (see page two). Your response can be up to **4,000-characters** long (including spaces). Keep in mind that this is a maximum. You are not required to use the full character limit. If invited to submit a full proposal, you will share more details.

Instruction: In the text box provided in the online application, please **demonstrate** how your proposed project aligns with each of the five program criteria on page two of the RFP.

B. Preliminary Budget Narrative

In a few sentences, please describe how you expect to use the requested funds from MeHAF, including how you will share project resources with key partner organizations and/or community members you plan to involve in your work.

Step 2: Full Proposal (For invited applicants only, after LOI review). Full applications are due on **September 4, four weeks after the date of the invitation.**

A. Full Proposal Narrative Questions

At this stage, you should consider each of the five CRG program criteria (see page two of this RFP) in responding to the following six questions.

Your response to each question can be up to **3,000-characters** long (including spaces). Keep in mind that this is a maximum. You are not required to use the full character limit.

Question 1: What problem or need is your community facing and how will you address it to improve health equity?

Question 2: Who is most significantly affected or being harmed by this problem or need (who is your specific community you will focus on)?

Question 3: What is your proposed solution to the problem or need, and how do you intend to put it into action through this project?

Question 4: How have you worked with or are part of the community(ies) and how have you and other community members been involved in creating the proposed solution(s)?

Question 5: What role(s) will members of the community(ies) have in leading and shaping this project throughout the grant?

Question 6: What will be different for the community(ies) if the project is successful?

In addition, the full proposal must also include the following:

B. Full Proposal Budget Request Form

Please review MeHAF's [Budget Form Guidance](#) and complete the MeHAF Budget Request Form, using the template that you can download within the application. Explain how your organization will use this grant and any other funds supporting this work to carry out the proposed activities. We encourage you to read all of [MeHAF's funding policies and guidance](#) before completing the budget form.

For those who have applied for other MeHAF grants in the past, please note this form changed in 2024 and be sure to use the current form. The form combines the budget and budget narrative into one document. Your budget is expected to detail the income and expenses for the proposed work for **one year**. If the application is for a two-year grant, and awarded, you will be asked to develop and submit a second-year budget near the end of your first grant year.

The budget must be proportionate with the work to be completed. Reviewers will consider:

- how the proposed budget aligns with the scope of the work described, and
- the degree to which you demonstrate plans to share grant resources with partner organizations and/or community members, to acknowledge the value of their roles and contributions to the work.

Include the following information (as applicable) about the project funds on the designated income and expense lines of the MeHAF budget form and describe them in column C, “Details”:

- 1) Amount for applicant organization;
- 2) Amounts for partner organizations and/or participating community members; and
- 3) Amount of matching or in-kind support from the applicant, partner organizations, or other funding sources.

Information about matching and in-kind support helps reviewers understand the resources available for the full scope of a project if this grant would be part of a larger whole. Please note that matching funds are not required.

- Indirect Costs: We encourage you to review our [Indirect Cost Policy](#) and to budget 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.
- Accessibility Expenses: MeHAF can provide additional funds to a CRG grantee to offset eligible accessibility-related expenses with the goal of reducing disproportionate barriers to equitable ongoing participation in the project development, implementation, and evaluation by members of the community(ies). Please review our [Accessibility Expense Policy](#) and if you have questions, please contact Frank Martinez Nocito to discuss.

You will submit the **completed budget form** as an attachment, by following the instructions in the MeHAF grants portal: click on "Upload a file", select the appropriate document from your computer, and then click on "Open".

C. Financial Capacity

In the final section of the application, we ask a question to help us understand your organization's financial position. Your response will not affect reviewer ratings of your proposal.

- Do you have any current or anticipated issues that may impact your organization's financial health and capacity to carry out the work being proposed? These might include things like expected leadership or other key staff changes, anticipated loss of revenue, concerns identified by your auditors or other professional advisors regarding financial controls, concerns regarding potential loss of charitable status with the IRS. (yes/no)
 - If yes, please briefly describe.

D. Attachments

If you have not already submitted one in the last 12 months and it is not listed on your website, please submit a current Board list or Tribal Council list under “Attachment”.

REVIEW PROCESS AND AWARDS

MeHAF is committed to a thorough and fair review of all applications, and follows a policy to avoid conflicts of interest for all staff, reviewers, and committee members involved in funding decisions. At each stage of the application process, in addition to the program criteria outlined in this RFP, reviewers consider factors including the population(s), geographic regions served, and strategic priority areas to ensure diversity across the group of recommended proposals, taken as a whole. Reviewers also prioritize applications that demonstrate a commitment to sharing grant resources with key partners and community members that will be engaged in the work, commensurate with the roles they will play.

During the review process, MeHAF staff may contact applicants with clarifying questions and ask for responses, either verbally or in writing via email.

Letter of Inquiry: MeHAF staff review and discuss LOIs and invite those applications that best align with the program criteria to submit full proposals. We will notify you of these decisions on **Tuesday, August 5**.

Full Proposal: Community members with relevant knowledge and experience, as well as MeHAF staff, review full proposals using the program criteria. The review team then meets to discuss the applications and decides on a recommended slate of grants. The review team considers reviewer ratings as well as the overall makeup of the proposed grantee cohort, as described above.

MeHAF Program & Grants Committee reviews the process and determines final approval of the recommended slate of grants.

We will notify all invited full proposal applicants, regardless of funding decision, by email about the status of their applications by **Tuesday, November 4**. If you do not receive a notification email, please contact Holly Irish.

- We will send funded applicants an award letter and grant agreement by email. The grantee must electronically sign the grant agreement before payment can be issued.
- Applicants not funded are encouraged to schedule a debriefing call with MeHAF staff for feedback on your application and to ask questions.
- MeHAF staff will notify all LOI and full proposal applicants via email when the list of 2025 CRG grants awarded is posted on MeHAF's website in early December.

GRANTEE REPORTING, LEARNING, AND EVALUATION EXPECTATIONS

Reporting and evaluation expectations – grantees will participate in:

- An interim check-in with the Senior Program Officer at the mid-point of each funding year;
- An annual/final conversation with the Senior Program Officer at the conclusion of each year of the grant period; and
- One learning opportunity and one evaluation activity, minimum, per grant year.

MeHAF will work collaboratively with grantees to identify relevant ways to support peer and community learning through various convening opportunities. When feasible and appropriate, MeHAF also hopes that grantees will connect with other organizations and communities doing similar or related work to learn from each other. MeHAF staff will support making relevant connections whenever possible.

MeHAF will offer dedicated evaluation support for individual projects to build their unique capacity. An external evaluation consultant will work in cooperation with grantees to support grantee evaluation activities (e.g., planning, data collection, analysis), training, and technical assistance to grantees at an individual level. The intention is to strengthen individual grantee organizations' ability to apply evaluative strategies to their own projects and a qualitative assessment of the degree to which the grant funding supports accomplishments. This includes identifying barriers and facilitators to the work, the degree to which projects were framed and carried out with an equity perspective, the nature of community involvement, and actual or potential systems changes.

FURTHER PROGRAM INFORMATION AND APPLICATION SUPPORT

We strongly encourage applicants to explore MeHAF's [CRG webpage](#). Please log into the MeHAF grants portal well ahead of the application deadlines to be sure you can access and use the online application and address any technical issues that could interfere with a timely submission. Applicants can find a recorded tour of MeHAF's online grants portal on the CRG webpage.

At the beginning of both the LOI and full proposal stages, MeHAF will post a series of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) and a program Guidance Video for applicant information.

We encourage you to review these materials. We are also offering optional drop-in Office Hours via Zoom with the program lead, Frank Martinez Nocito, to address questions during the following times:

- **Wednesday, June 11** from 9:30 am – 11:30 am
- **Tuesday, June 17** from Noon – 2:00 pm
- **Tuesday, June 24** from 11:00 am – 1:00 pm

Use the Zoom link on the CRG webpage to join during one of the scheduled times. There is no need to schedule in advance, just join in if you have questions about the LOI.

Based on questions raised during Office Hours, we may update and post a revised version of the FAQ on the CRG webpage. We will notify applicants if/when we make updates.

If you are invited to submit a full proposal, Frank Martinez Nocito will offer consultations of up to one hour with individual applicants between **August 11 – 28** for input and advice on your application. While we encourage applicants to take advantage of this opportunity, it is **not required** and will not influence reviewers' consideration of your application.