



2026 COMMUNITY RESPONSIVE GRANTS PROGRAM REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS (RFP) – GUIDELINES

Important Dates & Deadlines:

- RFP posted: **Tuesday, May 26**
- LOI guidance video & Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) posted: **Tuesday, May 26**
- LOI virtual drop-in hours – Visit the CRG webpage and click the Zoom link to join during one of the scheduled times:
 - **Friday, June 5** from Noon – 2:00 pm
 - **Wednesday, June 10** from 1:00 pm – 3:00 pm
 - **Tuesday, June 16** from 10:00 am – Noon
- Letter of Inquiry (LOI) due: **Tuesday, June 23** by 4:00 pm
- LOI review decisions & invitations for full proposal communicated: **Tuesday, August 4**
- Full proposal guidance video for invited applicants & FAQ posted: **Tuesday, August 4**
- Full proposal individual workshop sessions (Scheduled upon request – not required):
 - **Thursday, August 13** thru **Thursday, August 27**
- Full proposal for invited applicants due: **Monday, August 31** by 4:00 pm
- Applicants notified of award status: **Tuesday, November 10**
- Grant period: **December 1, 2026 – November 30, 2027 or 2028**

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 **2026** funding for new grants: approximately **\$360,000**.

Key Staff Contacts:

- **For program questions:**
[Email Frank 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 (**June 23** for the LOI, **August 31** 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 Nocito](#) or another member of the [MeHAF staff](#).

PROGRAM OVERVIEW AND PURPOSE

Health inequities result when some groups are favored with extra resources or advantages and other groups run into barriers that result in them getting less than they need. This might have happened in the past, or may be happening now. We can move toward health equity first by identifying those barriers that some groups run into in our health systems and services, and second by working to remove them. This work can lead to health systems that are 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. While your project may help a broad range of people, for this grant program, your community means those people whose health 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. It is essential that community members identify and prioritize the health concern or issue your project will address. In addition to defining the problem, we expect that community members will have clear leadership roles, decision making power, and direct involvement throughout the project.

ELIGIBILITY TO APPLY

We fund **501(c)(3) non-profit organizations, local, state, and tribal government entities, and educational institutions based in Maine**. If your organization is not one of these types, you may be able to apply via a fiscal sponsor. See the following section for more details regarding Fiscal Sponsorship. Individuals and private foundations are not eligible. If you have questions about organizational eligibility, please email Holly Irish, Grants Manager, before beginning an application.

MeHAF grantees with ongoing two-year CRG implementation grants received last year may not apply for a new grant this year. Current **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. An organization acting as a fiscal sponsor is also eligible to submit an additional application on their own behalf.

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 Irish in advance of submitting an LOI will disqualify any fiscally sponsored application.**

The organization serving as the fiscal sponsor is required to:

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

The sponsored organization is required to:

- ensure a relationship with your fiscal sponsor is in place before making an application and that your fiscal sponsor is aware of your intent to apply;
- adhere to the requirements set forth in your Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or agreement between your organization and your fiscal sponsor; and
- 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.

TYPE OF GRANT APPLICATION

Organizations may submit only one application for the 2026 CRG program, **either** a planning **or** implementation proposal. The following table may help you determine whether your proposal is a better fit for a planning or 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. Resulting 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.

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 previous page), 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.

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 an initial part of the application process which must be submitted through the MeHAF grants portal. The online application includes the following required sections:

1. 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.
2. Organization's tax status.
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.
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 12/1/2026 and end on either 11/30/2027 or 11/30/2028.)
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 draft budget, as described below. You will submit a more detailed budget form and respond to questions regarding financial capacity if invited to the full proposal stage.
16. Verify compliance with [MeHAF's Nondiscrimination Policy](#).

A. LOI Narrative

Write a short narrative 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 four). If invited to submit a full proposal, you will have ample opportunity to provide more details about the project.

Your response is limited to **4,000-characters** (including spaces). Keep in mind that this is a maximum. You are not required to use the full character limit.

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 four of the RFP.

B. Draft Budget

In a few sentences or a bulleted list, please describe how you expect to use the MeHAF funds requested. Identify the expected types of costs and their amounts, including project resources for key partner organizations and/or community members that are involved.

Step 2: Full Proposal (For invited applicants only, after LOI review.)

Full applications are due on **August 31 by 4 PM**.

A. Full Proposal Narrative Questions

At this stage, you should consider each of the five CRG program criteria (see page four 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 addressing it 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. We encourage you to read all of [MeHAF's funding policies and guidance](#) before completing the budget 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 you receive a two-year grant, you will 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 budget on the designated income and expense lines, describing each line item in the “Rationale/Details” column of the MeHAF budget form.

- **Income:** This includes MeHAF grant funds and matching or in-kind support from your organization, partner organizations, or other funding sources. Please note that matching funds are **not** required in the CRG Program. 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.

- Expenses: The most common direct costs are listed, including lines for partner organizations and community member involvement. We allow up to 20% of the requested grant amount for indirect costs. 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.

Page two of the budget form is the **accessibility expense worksheet**. CRG applicants have the opportunity to request additional funds to off-set some of the extra costs related to overcoming barriers to the meaningful involvement of community members who will inform and shape the project during its development, implementation, and/or evaluation. As these barriers aren't present in all circumstances, applicants should leave this worksheet blank if it is not applicable.

Please review our [Indirect Cost Policy](#) and our [Accessibility Expense Policy](#) for more detailed information and if you have questions, contact Frank Nocito.

Once the budget form is completed, you will submit it 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 online application, we ask one question in place of requiring you to submit detailed organizational financial information. It is intended to help us understand the applicant 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 concerns identified by your auditors or other professional advisors regarding financial controls, concerns regarding potential loss of charitable status with the IRS, or expected leadership changes. (yes/no)
 - If yes, please briefly describe.

D. Governance

If you have not already submitted a Board list or Tribal Council list in the last 12 months and it is not available on your website, please submit a current 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 participating in funding decisions. At each stage of the application process, in addition to the program criteria outlined in this RFP, reviewers will also consider factors such as the community(ies), geographic regions served, and strategic priority areas to ensure diversity across the group of recommended proposals, taken as a whole. In addition, reviewers prioritize applications that clearly demonstrate that the applicant organization will share grant resources with key partners and members of the community expected to be engaged in the work, commensurate with the role they will play in the project.

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: At the LOI stage, MeHAF staff will review and discuss LOIs. We will invite those that best align with the CRG program purpose described on page two, and the program criteria that is listed on page four to submit full proposals. Applicants will be notified about the status of their LOIs on **Tuesday, August 4**.

Full Proposal: A team of community members with relevant knowledge and experience, as well as MeHAF staff, will review full proposals. After reviewing and rating applications against the program criteria, the review team will meet to discuss their individual reviews and decide on a slate of grants to recommend to MeHAF's Program & Grants Committee. As noted earlier, the team will consider the ratings reviewers assigned to each application as well as the overall makeup of the proposed grantee cohort.

MeHAF's Program & Grants Committee approves the final funding recommendations from reviewers. They review the process and determine final approval of the recommended slate of grants.

All invited applicants who submit a full proposal, regardless of funding decision, will be notified about the status of their applications by **Tuesday, November 10**. If you do not receive a notification email, please contact Holly Irish.

- Applicants whose full proposals are approved will receive an award notice by email with instructions to access and sign an electronic grant agreement. The grantee must (electronically) sign the grant agreement before payment can be issued.
- Applicants not selected for funding will also receive an email notification and an offer to schedule an individual debriefing call with MeHAF staff to receive feedback on their application and to ask questions.
- MeHAF staff will notify all LOI and full proposal applicants via email when the list of 2026 CRG grants awarded and their project profiles is posted on MeHAF's website in early December.

GRANTEE REPORTING, LEARNING, AND EVALUATION EXPECTATIONS

In January of 2026, MeHAF updated its reporting policies for the CRG program and removed the requirements for written financial and narrative reports. Please see below for the new process.

Reporting and evaluation expectations – grantees will participate in:

- An initial conversation with the Program Officer within the first three months of funding.
- Additional check-ins with the Program Officer at six-month intervals, including a wrap-up conversation at the end of the project. The Program Officer will document grantee conversations about their work and learning. These conversations, including the final wrap-up, take the place of written financial and narrative reports.
- One learning opportunity and one evaluation activity, minimum, per grant year.

We encourage grantees to learn from each other and connect with other organizations and communities doing similar or related work. Other topics for peer learning may be developed collaboratively with MeHAF during the grant period.

Grantees will have the opportunity to participate in the co-design of an evaluation plan to assess the degree to which the MeHAF grant funding is supporting each grantee's project objectives and the overall purpose of the CRG program. 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, the systems change strategies employed, project outputs, and any early changes observed in the community or systems.

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 Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) and a program Guidance Video for applicant information.

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

- **Friday, June 5** from Noon – 2:00 pm
- **Wednesday, June 10** from 1:00 pm – 3:00 pm
- **Tuesday, June 16** from 10:00 am – Noon

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 by applicants throughout the process, we may update and repost the FAQ. We advise applicants to read the FAQ and check the CRG webpage for FAQ updates prior to submitting an application.

If you are invited to submit a full proposal, Frank Nocito will offer consultations of up to one hour with individual applicants between **August 13 – 27** 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.