



2026 HEALTH EQUITY CAPACITY-BUILDING GRANTS PROGRAM REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS (RFP) – GUIDELINES

Important Dates & Deadlines:

- **RFP posted:** Wednesday, November 12, 2025
- **LOI guidance video & Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) posted:** Wednesday, November 12, 2025
- **LOI virtual drop-in hours:** (Zoom link to be posted on [HECB webpage](#) during each session)
 - Thursday, November 13 - 2 pm - 4pm
 - Tuesday, November 18 - 10 am - Noon
 - Wednesday, November 19 - 10am - Noon
- **Letter of Inquiry (LOI) due:** Wednesday, December 10, 2025 at 4:00 pm
- **LOI review decisions & invitations for full proposal sent:** Wednesday, January 21, 2026
- **Full proposal/Interview guidance video & FAQ posted:** Wednesday, January 21, 2026
- **Interview option for invited applicants – between January 28 and February 18, 2026**
- **Full proposal or video option for invited applicants due:** Wednesday, February 18, 2026 at 4:00 pm
- **Applicants notified of award status:** Wednesday, May 13, 2026
- **Grant period:** June 1, 2026 – May 31, 2030

Please Note:

LOIs must be submitted using an online application on the [MeHAF grants portal](#) by 4:00 pm on **Wednesday, December 10, 2025**. 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. If you have questions about organizational eligibility, please email Holly Irish before beginning an application. If your organization intends to apply through a fiscal sponsor, you must email Holly Irish to discuss your situation and confirm eligibility before beginning an application.

Funding Available:

- Individual grants: Four-year grants of **\$30,000** per year (\$120,000 total). We expect to select seven organizations to receive one of these four-year awards

Key Staff Contacts:

- **For program questions:**
[Email Dania Bowic](#), Program Officer, (207) 620-8266, ext. 104.
- **For technical questions about the online application or the MeHAF grants portal:**
[Email Holly Irish](#), Grants Manager, (207) 620-8266, ext. 115.

The mission of MeHAF is to promote access to quality health care, especially for those who are uninsured, and underserved, and improve the health of everyone in Maine. 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 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 the staff lead, [Program Officer Dania Bowie](#) or another member of the [MeHAF staff](#).

PROGRAM OVERVIEW AND PURPOSE

MeHAF began the Health Equity Capacity-Building (HECB) grants program in the spring of 2018 and over seven years has funded twenty one Maine organizations which promote access to quality health care to the community.

The program goal statement, which grantees developed in the first years of the program is:

- *The long-term goal of the HECB program is to provide a foundation for MeHAF and grantees to collectively work toward building a movement for health equity in Maine.*
- *Through the program, grantees and MeHAF will forge new transformative, healing relationships, both between funder and grantee and across communities.*
- *Working together, grantees and MeHAF will craft a system and structure that enables grantees to examine and strengthen their internal systems, skills, resources, networks, and audience so that they each have what they need to pursue their missions and build long-term, sustainable power.*
- *MeHAF will use its voice and influence to spread equitable practices to other funders, the state, and mainstream organizations. By learning alongside grantees, MeHAF will build and sustain grant programs that advance justice and equity, and apply that learning across its other programs.*

The grantee cohort is made up of organizations that work with communities facing the most acute health disparities and access to healthcare, based on factors including, but not limited to, race, ethnicity, language and communication barriers, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability status, and experience with criminal justice, sexual violence, and homelessness (the “Underserved Communities”). In its first two rounds, the program paired unrestricted \$25,000 operating support grants with a cohort learning community and a budget of \$10,000 per grantee per year for self-selected technical assistance supports, both in group and individualized settings, to enhance the stability, effectiveness and overall capacity of these systematically under-resourced organizations and communities. Each grantee identifies their priority needs for capacity-building and selects the best method to address that need. In the latest round of grantmaking in 2025, we increased the grant amount to \$30,000 per year per grantee, with a \$5000 per year per grantee budget for self-identified capacity-building support.

The grantees design their convenings, focused on building connections and fostering collaboration and shared understanding across the different organizations and communities represented in the cohort.

In this grant round, MeHAF will award seven new organizations an unrestricted operating support

award of \$30,000 per year for four years, along with a \$5,000 annual budget for capacity-building activities. We will fund organizations that are: (1) led by and serving communities that are systematically excluded from resources, including BIPOC, people with disabilities, LGBTQ+ people, and people experiencing homelessness, and (2) working to advance health equity for their communities. We will pair new grantees with an organization from the current grantee cohort that will help with orientation to the program and serve as a connection point with the other grantees.

ELIGIBILITY TO APPLY

Applicants must be a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization or a tribal government entity based in Maine. If an organization is not one of these types, they may be able to apply via a fiscal sponsor. If you have questions about organizational eligibility, please email [Holly Irish, Grants Manager](#) before beginning an application. For more details, refer to the *Fiscal Sponsorship* section below. Individuals and private foundations are not eligible.

Eligible organizations may submit only one application for the 2026 HECB program for their own organization. An organization may act as a fiscal sponsor for multiple applications, and may also submit one application for your own organization and one or more as a fiscal sponsor. Current MeHAF **grantees in other programs are eligible** to apply.

FISCAL SPONSORSHIP

Organizations intending to apply through a fiscal sponsor, must contact Holly to discuss your situation before beginning an application. Holly will guide you in submitting a fiscally sponsored application that meets all requirements. **Please note failure to make contact regarding your grant application and the fiscal sponsorship process will make your application ineligible for consideration.**

The organization serving as the fiscal sponsor will be required to:

- submit the letter of inquiry (LOI) and, if selected, the full proposal for this grant application,
- legally assume 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,
- if a grant is awarded, sign a grant agreement stipulating all legal terms of the award.

The organization being sponsored will be required to:

- 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,
- adhere to the requirements set forth in your Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or agreement between your organization and your fiscal sponsor,
- acknowledge your organization is qualified to carry out the proposed work or project.

APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS & HOW TO APPLY

Step 1: Letter of Inquiry

The Letter of Inquiry (LOI) is not an actual "letter", but the first part of the application process. It must be submitted through the MeHAF grants portal. LOIs are due **December 10**.

The online LOI application includes the following required sections (Please note some sections below note what text should be entered while others will be up to you to write):

- Organization's tax status
- Fiscal sponsorship; are you applying on behalf of another organization as a fiscal sponsor? If yes, you must submit a MOU or fiscal sponsorship agreement outlining the relationship.
- Organization's mission and/or vision statement (up to 500 characters)
- Organization's leadership demographics (At the full proposal stage, applicants will also submit a board or tribal council list).
- Project title: ***You will fill in "Operating Support for Capacity Building" here***
- Request amount: **\$120,000 will be pre-populated in your application**
- Project start and end dates: ***You will enter a start date of 06/01/2026 and an end date of 05/31/2030***
- Describe the community(ies) you serve.
- Additional contact's name, title, email, and phone number (*optional*). You may identify a secondary contact person for your organization in addition to the person listed as the applicant.
- ***Please describe your organization*** and how it aligns with the two criteria for the program in the text area provided. The suggested length for your response should be between 2,000 to 4,000 characters and should not exceed 9,000 characters.
- Verify compliance with [MeHAF's Nondiscrimination Policy](#)
- Indicate your preferred final application format if selected

PROGRAM CRITERIA & APPLICATION RATING

Successful Health Equity Capacity-Building applicants will meet the following two criteria:

1. **Organization led by and serving people with lived experience in one or more Underserved Communities, including communities of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), LGBTQ+ people, people with disabilities, and people experiencing homelessness.** When considering this criterion, reviewers will think about
 - a. Whether the staff and staff leadership are reflective of the lived experience of the community you serve.
 - b. Whether the Board and Board leadership are reflective of the lived experience of the community you serve.
 - c. How the organization gathers and acts on guidance and leadership from the community, beyond its own Board and staff.
2. **Organization working to advance health equity for its community.** When considering this criterion, reviewers will think about:
 - a. Whether the organization has a primary or major focus on health issues faced by its community.
 - b. Whether the organization's programs or activities have an important impact on health care access and/or health status for their community.
 - c. Whether the organization's expertise, community trust, leadership and/or other factors make them able to advance health equity for the community in ways that other organizations cannot.

Rating

Reviewers for LOIs will evaluate the organization's alignment with each of the program criteria (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.

For the full application stage, reviewers will again use this rating scale to provide ratings on the above criteria, as well as the following two additional criteria:

- The applicant has clear vision and strong opportunity to build their capacity to advance health equity as a result of the program.
- The applicant has a strong orientation toward collaboration, acting in solidarity with other communities, and being part of a broader movement for health equity.

Step 2: Narrative Questions and Full Proposal Submission Options (For invited applicants only, after LOI review)

A. Narrative Questions

Question 1: Tell us about how your community leads your work. In particular, please share about the specific ways that community leadership works for your organization and the roles community members fill (Staff, Board, other forms of community leadership).

Question 2: Tell us about how your work is advancing health equity for your community. Share any details about your focus on health, how your work impacts health or health access for the community, and what expertise, community trust, leadership and/or other factors make you able to advance health equity for the community in ways that other organizations cannot.

Question 3: If your organization is selected to participate in this capacity-building grants program, what aspects of your organization and your work do you hope to grow and improve as a result of the grant funding and capacity building support?

Question 4: Current HECB program grantees have made it a major priority to create space to collaborate, to act in solidarity across communities, and to be part of a broader movement for health equity. Talk about how your organization relates to these themes.

B. Full Proposal Submission Options

We will invite up to 14 LOI applicants to the second stage of the application process. This second stage offers applicants an opportunity to speak more about their alignment with the program criteria, their vision for capacity-building, and their orientation toward collaboration and collective action with other organizations and communities represented in the cohort. At this stage, applicants will have three options for completing their applications:

- A 30-minute **Zoom interview** with Program Officer Dania Bowie and a small panel of existing HECB grantees.
- Submitting a **video** of up to 30 minutes in length, in any style the applicant chooses
- Submitting a series of **written responses** through MeHAF's grants portal, with a recommended length of 2-3 pages and a limit of 5 pages.

Please note, the **interview** format has the advantage of allowing finalists to respond to follow-up questions and provide clarifications in real time, prior to reviewers entering their scores and recommendations. All applicants, regardless of the format of their submission will have an opportunity to respond to follow-up questions from reviewers in writing after submission. We will share those responses with reviewers at the review meeting, but will be too late to affect their initial scores and ratings.

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.

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

Letter of Inquiry: A panel of current HECB grantees will review and discuss LOIs and invite those applications that best align with the program criteria to complete an interview, full proposal, or video submission. We will notify you of these decisions on Wednesday, **January 21**.

Full Proposal: Current in the HECB program will assign one or more people to review full proposals using the program criteria. This will include watching recordings of applicants interviewed, viewing video submissions and/or reading written applications, depending on the formats applicants choose. The full grantee cohort will then meet to discuss the applications and decide on a recommended slate of grants. The grantees will consider reviewer ratings as well as the overall makeup of the proposed grantee cohort, as described above.

MeHAF's Program & Grants Committee reviews the process and the review team recommendations and approves a final slate of grants.

- We will notify all invited full proposal applicants, regardless of funding decision, by email about the status of their applications by Wednesday, **May 13**. 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.
 - We encourage applicants not funded 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 2026 Health Equity Capacity-Building grants awarded is posted on MeHAF's website in late May.

GRANTEE REPORTING, LEARNING AND EVALUATION EXPECTATIONS

The Program Officer will have a check-in/interview with each grantee once per each year of funding.

MeHAF may also ask grantees to participate in a structured interview at the end of the project with program evaluators and/or MeHAF staff.

We expect grantees to participate in a learning community with other grantees in the cohort. This group meets four times per year. We will also pair new grantees with an existing grantee in the program to help with orientation to the program and connection to other members of the cohort.

FURTHER PROGRAM INFORMATION AND APPLICATION SUPPORT

We strongly encourage applicants to explore MeHAF's [HECB 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 HECB webpage.

At the beginning of both the LOI and full proposal stages, we 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, virtual drop-in hours via Zoom with the program lead, Dania Bowie, to address questions during the following times:

- Thursday, November 13 - 2 pm - 4pm
- Tuesday, November 18 - 10 am - Noon
- Wednesday, November 19 - 10am - Noon

To access one of these drop-in sessions, visit the HECB webpage for the Zoom link that will be posted during those times. There is no need to schedule in advance.

Based on questions raised during drop-in hours, we may also update the FAQ and repost it to the HECB webpage. We will notify applicants if/when we make updates.