

# MEHAF

MAINE HEALTH ACCESS FOUNDATION

## 2024 SYSTEMS IMPROVEMENT AND INNOVATION RESPONSIVE GRANTS REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS (RFP)—GUIDELINES

### Important Dates & Deadlines:

- RFP posted: **Wednesday, January 3, 2024**
- Informational Session via Zoom: To register, please email [Holly Irish](#)
  - **Wednesday, January 10, 2024** from 1:00 pm-2:30 pm; the session will be recorded.
- Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) posted: **Friday, January 12, 2024**
- Letter of Inquiry (LOI) due: **Wednesday, January 24, 2024 by 4:00 pm**
- Review Decisions & Invitations for full proposal: **Tuesday, February 20, 2024**
- Informational Session (for invited full proposal applicants): **Wednesday, February 28, 2024** from **9:00-10:30 am**.
- FAQs for full proposal posted: **Monday, March 4, 2024**
- Full Proposal (invited applicants) due: **Wednesday, March 20, 2024 by 4:00 pm**.
- All Applicants Notified of Award Status: **Tuesday, May 14, 2024**
- Grant Period: **June 1, 2024 – May 31, 2025/2026**

The LOI and full proposals must be submitted using an online application on the [MeHAF grants portal](#) by **4:00 pm** on the **due date (January 24 for LOI, March 20 for Full Applications)**. LOIs or full applications submitted by other means will not be accepted. If you are having problems with the online application, need access to a computer, or need help with your submission, please contact [Holly Irish](#) immediately; preferably 48 hours or more before due dates.

### Funds 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 2024 total funding for new grants: approximately **\$360,000**.

### 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 only as a funder, but also as 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 lead staff, [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 for purposes of this opportunity.

1. **System:** The interconnected entities and structures -- the people, policies, services, and organizations --that individuals interact with when seeking support for their health care and health needs.
2. **Community(ties) of focus** is the specific population most affected by barriers to health and health care access who are at the center of the proposed work, and whose health would directly benefit from the project's success.
3. **Community-defined:** Members of the community of focus have been integrally involved in identifying that the health concern or issue the project will address is a priority for them, and have played or will play a meaningful role in informing the project's activities and in determining indicators of the project's success.
4. **Health equity:** 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.
5. **Key partner organizations:** Organizations that have committed to be part of the project and whose support and action is essential to making the desired system change(s).

## **PROGRAM OVERVIEW AND PURPOSE**

The purpose of the Systems Improvement and Innovation Responsive Grants (SIIRG) program is to address policies, practices and perceptions that create disproportionate barriers to health and access to care for some groups of people relative to others by making changes at a system and/or organizational level. The program emphasizes ensuring that the community(ties) of focus has a meaningful and ongoing voice in shaping improvements and innovations in four of MeHAF's strategic priority areas: rural health, aging/older adults, behavioral health, and maternal & infant 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.

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 education, research, or simple replication of models and best practices without meaningful and ongoing participation from community(ties) of focus will not 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 determine whether your idea is a better fit for a planning or implementation grant. Also see [Appendix A](#) to assess your current level of community engagement.

### Planning versus Implementation Grants

Planning Grant	Implementation Grant
<b><i>Stage of Development:</i></b> Your work to address issue or needs may be just beginning. It requires a deeper exploration to fully understand the issue/needs and more information to flesh out what you will do to respond in greater detail.	<b><i>Stage of Development:</i></b> Groundwork for your project is well underway and is based on input from members of the community(ties) of focus 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 it.
<b><i>Relationships:</i></b> 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.	<b><i>Relationships:</i></b> There are communications and relationships with or within the community(ties) of focus and the organization or system. Community members and cooperating organizations are willing to be actively involved with the proposed project.
<b><i>Readiness:</i></b> You need to gather more information and feedback from the community(ties) of focus or others that will be important to informing how you will move forward.	<b><i>Readiness:</i></b> You have a clear and specific plan of action and the commitment and trust among members of the community(ties) of focus and cooperating organizations to move forward.
<b><i>Expected Results:</i></b> You expect to build relationships and knowledge about an issue or problem and explore ideas and support for potential strategies for taking future action. For example, an action plan, a report or paper that shares what you have learned and makes recommendations, a community advisory group, a partnership agreement and/or roadmap for moving forward, etc.	<b><i>Expected Results:</i></b> You have a clear idea of the specific changes that will benefit the community(ties) of focus as a result from your work, if it's successful. For example: Quantitative or qualitative data that illustrates the impact of changes made to policies, practices and/or perceptions made in existing systems or organizations that the community of focus identified as problematic, etc.

### ELIGIBILITY TO APPLY

We fund **501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations, local, state, and tribal government entities, and 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 the 2024 SIIRG program, **either** a planning or implementation proposal. Current MeHAF **grantees with grants under other programs are eligible** to apply for a SIIRG. Separate administrative units of large organizations (e.g., different hospitals within a larger health system) may be eligible to 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 & RATING SCALE**

### **Program Criteria**

Successful SIIRG applications will meet all the following five program criteria:

1. Align with one or more of four strategic priority areas (see [Appendix B](#) for a more detailed description of each):
  - (a) aging/older adults,
  - (b) behavioral health/substance use disorder,
  - (c) maternal and infant health, and/or
  - (d) rural health.
2. Address policies, practices and perceptions that create disproportionate barriers to health and access to care for some groups of people relative to others and propose changes that will occur at a system and/or organizational level.
3. Respond to a need or concern that is defined by the community(ties) of focus.
4. Involve members of the community(ties)of focus throughout the entire project period.
5. Clearly define what success looks like and describe the role of the community(ties) of focus in determining the project's success.

### **Rating Scale**

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 SIIRG 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.

## **HOW TO APPLY & APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS**

### **Step 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 the MeHAF grants portal. The online application includes the following required sections:

- Organization's tax status
- Fiscal sponsorship; Are you applying on behalf of another organization as a fiscal sponsor? (Those that answer yes must submit a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) outlining the fiscal sponsor relationship.)
- Organization’s mission and/or vision statement (up to 500 characters)
- Organization’s leadership (At the full proposal stage, applicants will submit a board or tribal council list.)
- Project title; This may be a working title and can be modified later.
- Alignment with SIIRG *Strategic Priority Areas* (All projects must clearly align with one of four strategic priority areas: rural health, aging/older adults, behavioral health, and maternal & infant health. Applicants may check all that apply.)
- 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...”
- Grant request type (*planning* or *implementation*)

- 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.
- Project start and end dates (Projects will start on 6/1/2024 and be scheduled to end on 5/31/2025 or 5/31/2026.)
- Describe the Community(ties) of focus (The people most affected by barriers to health and care access that your project is designed to benefit.)
- Primary contact's name, title, email, and phone number (This is in addition to the applicant's contact information which could be the same or different.)
- Geographic area served by the project
- Race and ethnicity of population served by the project
- Project Summary and Budget Narrative (as well as a budget form and financial capacity for full proposals) as described below
- Verify compliance with [MeHAF's Nondiscrimination Policy](#)

### A. Letter of Inquiry (LOI) Project Summary

At the LOI stage, you will write a short narrative summary of your project that outlines the most important aspects. Describing the project's fit with the purpose of the SIIRG program and criteria is paramount at this stage. Applicants invited to submit a full proposal 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.

In the text box provided in the online application, please briefly describe your proposed project, demonstrating how it aligns with the five program criteria that are listed on page four of the RFP.

### B. LOI Preliminary Budget Narrative

In a few sentences, please describe how you expect to use the funds being requested 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, following the review of the LOIs.)

MeHAF will copy the text of your LOI response into the full proposal template in the MeHAF grants portal.

### A. Full Proposal Project Summary

At this stage, you will have the opportunity to modify your initial LOI response and asked to respond to the three additional questions below. We offer prompts to guide your responses toward addressing each of the five SIIRG program criteria.

Applicants are strongly encouraged to review the program criteria (listed on page four of the RFP) and read each question and prompt before beginning their responses.

Responses to each of the three questions have a **3,000-character limit** (including spaces). Keep in mind that this is a maximum. You are not required to use the full character limit.

**Question 1:** Describe how this work will address systemic and organizational barriers to health and care access for the community(ties) of focus.

- a. What policies, practices and perceptions are creating disproportionate barriers to health and access to care for some groups of people relative to others?
- b. What planning or implementation activities do you propose to examine or address them?

**Question 2:** Outline your plan for engaging the community(ties) of focus in each part of your proposed project.

- a. At what points in the project are people from the community(ties) of focus engaged?
- b. What specific roles or functions do people from the community(ties) of focus have?

**Question 3:** What changes or outcomes do you expect to see by the end of your project?

- a. How will you know whether you have achieved your expected goals?
- b. What will indicate success to the community(ties) of focus?

In addition, the full proposal must include the following:

## **B. Full Proposal Budget and Budget Narrative**

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 you to read all of [MeHAF's funding policies and guidance](#) prior to completing the budget documents.

You will 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.

Funds requested 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 partnering organizations and/or community members, to acknowledge the value of their roles and contributions to the work.

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

- 1) Amount for applicant organization;
- 2) Amount for partner organizations or participating community members;
- 3) Amount of matching or in-kind support from the applicant, partner organizations or other funding sources in the appropriate columns of the MeHAF budget form and describe them in the budget narrative, if applicable.

Information about matching and in-kind support helps reviewers understand the resources available for the full scope of a project if the MeHAF grant is part of a larger whole. Please note that matching funds may be required, based on the size of your organizational budget. Read about our [Grant Match Requirements](#) to learn the details.

You will submit the **completed budget form and budget narrative** as attachments, 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".

- Indirect Costs: We encourage applicants 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, post award, to a SIIRG 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) of focus. Please review our [Accessibility Expense Policy](#) and if you have questions, please contact Charles Dwyer to discuss.

### **C. Financial Capacity**

In the final section of the online application, you are also asked to answer the questions below to help us best understand your organization's financial position. The questions will not be scored and funding decisions will not be affected by your responses.

1. 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.
2. Does your organization have needs for technical assistance regarding issues of financial capacity, sustainability, and/or controls that, if appropriate, MeHAF may be able to support? Depending on the specific needs and circumstances, MeHAF may have expertise or capacity to provide varying types of technical assistance or referrals to resources that may be helpful. (yes/no)
  - If yes, please briefly describe.

### **D. Attachments**

1. If not already submitted in the last 12 months and not listed on your website, submit a current Board list/Tribal Council list.

## **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 population(s), 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 of focus 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.

Letter of Inquiry: At the LOI stage of the review, MeHAF staff will review and discuss LOIs to select those that best fit with the SIIRG program purpose and criteria to be invited to submit Full Proposals. Applicants will be notified about the status of their LOIs on Tuesday, February 20.

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 entire review team will meet to discuss their individual reviews and recommend a slate of grants to MeHAF's Program & Grants Committee. To finalize their recommendations, the team will consider the ratings reviewers assigned to each application as well as the overall makeup of the proposed grantee cohort, as described above.

The final funding decision is made by MeHAF's Program & Grants Committee following their careful review of the process and 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, May 14. If you do not receive a notification email, please contact Holly Irish.
  - Applicants whose proposals are approved by MeHAF's Program & Grants Committee will receive an award letter and grant agreement by email. 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 are encouraged to schedule an individual debriefing call with MeHAF staff to receive feedback on their application and to ask questions.
  - All applicants from both the LOI and full proposal stages are encouraged to visit MeHAF's website on Monday, July 1 to see the full list of awarded grantees for the 2024 SIIRG Program.

## **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 educational session on identifying and mitigating systemic inequities, including racism.

Grantee organizations that provide direct patient care that have not yet implemented the National Standards for Culturally and Linguistically Accessible Services (CLAS) in Health and Health Care<sup>1</sup> are expected to 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 may be developed collaboratively with MeHAF.

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

MeHAF has engaged evaluation and learning consultants to work in cooperation with grantee organizations across this program and the Community Responsive Grants (CRG) program and the foundation using collaboratively developed evaluation questions. People from projects that receive a MeHAF grant will be invited to participate (at their option) in a small Evaluation and Learning Advisory Group to advise staff and the joint CRG-SIIRG programs' evaluation and learning consultants.

## **QUESTIONS AND INFORMATIONAL SESSIONS**

We strongly encourage applicants 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 may help you to prepare a stronger application. A recording of the informational sessions will be available for those unable to attend or who wish to review the information.

All applicants should log into the MeHAF grants portal well in advance of the due dates to be sure you understand how to access and use the online application, and to allow staff to address any technical issues that may interfere with a timely submission.

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

- Friday, January **12** for the LOI; and
- Monday, March **14** for the full proposal.

The FAQs may 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 if/when an updated version of the FAQ is made available.

## APPENDIX A

Use the chart to assess the level of your project's community involvement

Increasing Level of Community Involvement, Impact, Trust, and Communication Flow

Planning		Implementation		
<i>Outreach</i>	<i>Consult</i>	<i>Involve</i>	<i>Collaborate</i>	<i>Shared Leadership</i>
<p><i>Some Community Involvement</i></p> <p><i>Communication flows from one to the other, to inform</i></p> <p>Provides community with information.</p> <p>Entities coexist.</p> <p>Outcomes: Optimally, establishes communication channels and channels for outreach.</p>	<p><i>More Community Involvement</i></p> <p><i>Communication flows to the community and then back, answer seeking</i></p> <p>Gets information or feedback from the community.</p> <p>Entities share information.</p> <p>Outcomes: Develops connections.</p>	<p><i>Better Community Involvement</i></p> <p><i>Communication flows both ways, participatory form of communication</i></p> <p>Involves more participation with community on issues.</p> <p>Entities cooperate with each other.</p> <p>Outcomes: Visibility of partnership established with increased cooperation.</p>	<p><i>Community Involvement</i></p> <p><i>Communication flow is bidirectional</i></p> <p>Forms partnerships with community on each aspect of project from development to solution.</p> <p>Entities form bidirectional communication channels.</p> <p>Outcomes: Partnership building, trust building.</p>	<p><i>Strong Bidirectional Relationship</i></p> <p>Final decision making is at community level.</p> <p>Entities have formed strong partnership structures.</p> <p>Outcomes: Broader health outcomes affecting broader community. Strong bidirectional trust built.</p>

Reference: Modified by the authors from the International Association for Public Participation.

## APPENDIX B

**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><b>Ensure equitable access to affordable, quality care.</b></p>	<p><b>Insurance Coverage &amp; Free Care</b> Promote high quality public and private coverage, while ensuring free care options when needed.</p>	<p><b>Workforce</b> Strengthen and expand the health, mental health, and dental workforces, with a focus on recruiting from Maine communities.</p>	<p><b>Rural Health</b> Support rural health care transformation into new systems that coordinate and maintain essential services.</p>
	<p><b>Support systemic changes to address critical health issues in Maine.</b></p>	<p><b>Behavioral Health Care</b> Help to build a robust, trauma-informed, integrated behavioral health care system in Maine, especially treatment and recovery for substance use disorders.</p>	<p><b>Oral Health</b> Ensure ongoing access to high quality dental care and improve the oral health status of individuals with low incomes.</p>	
	<p><b>Advance efforts to improve the health of specific populations.</b></p>	<p><b>Children</b> Support efforts to improve the health of Maine children, focusing on early childhood and infant and maternal mortality.</p>	<p><b>Older Adults</b> 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><b>Equity</b> Support groups that experience health inequities to build capacity to improve health in their communities.</p>
	<p><b>Promote shared leadership to achieve equitable health outcomes for everyone in Maine.</b></p>	<p><b>Public Awareness &amp; Commitment</b> Build public commitment to achieving equitable health outcomes.</p>	<p><b>MeHAF’s Leadership</b> Build MeHAF’s leadership skills and capacity to live out our commitment to equity.</p>	<p><b>State &amp; Community Leadership</b> Support efforts to foster equity-minded leadership, to advance access to health care and improve the health of everyone in Maine.</p>