

# MEHAF

## MAINE HEALTH ACCESS FOUNDATION

### 2025 SYSTEMS IMPROVEMENT AND INNOVATION RESPONSIVE GRANTS REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS (RFP)—GUIDELINES

#### Important Dates & Deadlines:

- RFP, Letter of Inquiry (LOI) guidance video & Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) posted: **Thursday, January 2**
- LOI virtual open office hours—Visit the [SIIRG webpage](#) and click the Zoom link to join during one of the scheduled times:
  - **Thursday, January 9** at 11:00 am – 1:00 pm
  - **Wednesday, January 15** at 10:00 am – 12:00 pm and 2:00 pm – 4:00 pm
  - **Tuesday, January 21** at 11:00 am – 1:00 pm
- **LOI due: Thursday, January 23** by 4:00 pm
- LOI applicants notified of decision via email and guidance video for applicants invited to submit a full proposal posted: **Tuesday, February 25**
- Full proposal consultation sessions—optional, scheduled individually upon applicant request: **between Monday, March 3 and Thursday, March 13** contact [Charles Dwyer](#) to schedule
- **Full proposal (from invited applicants) due: Tuesday, March 18** by 4:00 pm
- Full proposal applicants notified of award status via email: **Wednesday, May 14**
- Grant period: **June 1, 2025 – May 31, 2026 or 2027**

#### 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 funding for new grants in 2025: approximately **\$420,000**.

#### Key Staff Contacts:

- **For SIIRG program questions:**  
[Email Charles Dwyer](#), Senior Program Officer, (207) 620-8266, ext. 103
- **For questions about eligibility, 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 (January 23 for LOI, March 18 for full proposal)**. If you have any 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.

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 staff lead, Senior Program Officer [Charles Dwyer](#), or another member of the [MeHAF staff](#).

## **HELPFUL TERMS TO KNOW**

1. **Systems:** The interconnected entities and structures – that affect interactions and perceptions, policies and practices, services and resources--when individuals seek support for their health care and health needs.
2. **Community(ies) 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. Reaching this goal requires a commitment to address barriers within and across systems, 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(ies) 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/substance use disorder, 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(ies) of focus will not be funded. New applicants are encouraged to review the resources on the [SIIRG webpage](#).

The table below may help you determine whether your proposal is a better fit for a planning or implementation grant.

### Planning versus Implementation Grants

Planning Grant	Implementation Grant
<b><i>Stage of Development:</i></b> Your work to address an 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, based on input from the community(ies) 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 them.
<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> You have communications and relationships with or within the community(ies) 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(ies) 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(ies) 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 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.	<b><i>Expected Results:</i></b> You have a clear idea of the specific changes that will benefit the community(ies) of focus as a result of your work, if it is 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 of focus 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.** 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.

Eligible organizations may submit only one application for the 2025 SIIRG program, **either** a planning **or** implementation proposal. Those with ongoing two-year SIIRG 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.

## **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 assist to arrange a brief meeting with the sponsored organization, and the fiscal sponsor organization to review of the requirements of both organizations and ensure a mutual understanding of the steps involved in the grant process. Please note that failure to make contact regarding the intended fiscal sponsorship of your grant application could interfere with eligibility or result in a delay of processing your application.

### **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.

## **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 the [SIIRG webpage](#) for a more detailed description in MeHAF's Framework of Goals and Strategies):
  - (a) Rural health,
  - (b) Aging/older adults,
  - (c) Behavioral health/substance use disorder, and/or
  - (d) Maternal & child health.
2. Propose changes that will occur at a system and/or organizational level to address policies, practices, and perceptions that create disproportionate barriers to health and access to care for some groups of people relative to others.
3. Respond to a need or concern that is defined by the community(ies) of focus.
4. Involve members of the community(ies) of focus throughout the entire project period.
5. Clearly define what success looks like and ensure the community(ies) of focus has a role 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 (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:

- 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 MOU outlining the fiscal sponsor relationship and indicate that they have discussed this with the MeHAF Grants Manager, Holly Irish.)
- 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/substance use disorder, 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 6/1/2025 and be scheduled to end on 5/31/2026 or 5/31/2027.)
- Describe the Community(ies) of focus (The people most affected by barriers to health and care access that your project is designed to benefit.)
- 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.
- Geographic area(s) that is the primary focus of the project
- Race and ethnicity of population(s) that is the primary focus of the project
- Project Summary and Budget Narrative as described below. You will submit a detailed budget form and respond to questions regarding financial capacity if invited to the full proposal stage.
- Verify compliance with [MeHAF's Nondiscrimination Policy](#).

### **A. LOI Narrative**

Write a short narrative summary of your project that outlines the most important aspects. Be sure to describe the project’s fit with the purpose of the SIIRG program and criteria 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. 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. Project Narrative**

At this stage, you will 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(ies) 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(ies) of focus in each part of your proposed project.

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

In addition, the full proposal must include the following:

## **B. Budget Request and Report Form**

Please review MeHAF's [Budget Form Guidance](#) and complete the new MeHAF budget request and report form, using the template that can be downloaded within the application.

Be sure to include a rationale for the amount of each line-item amount in the form and details about the use of MeHAF grant funds and any 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 new budget form.

For those who have applied for other MeHAF grants in the past, please note that the budget form changed in 2024 and be sure to use the current form. The new form combines the budget, budget narrative, and annual financial reporting all 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 it is awarded, you will be asked to develop and submit a second-year budget near the end of your first grant year.

Budgeted funds 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 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/Explanation:"

- 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.

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 more.

- **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.

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 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. Attachment

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 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(ies) 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 via email.

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 25**.

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 decide on a slate of grants to recommend 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 **Wednesday, 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 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 2025 SIIRG grants awarded and their project profiles is posted on MeHAF's website in early July.

## **GRANTEE REPORTING, LEARNING AND EVALUATION EXPECTATIONS**

Reporting expectations – grantees will:

- Schedule an interim check-in with the 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. Grantees have the option to have a conversation about their work and their learning with the Program Officer in place of a written narrative report.

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 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.

External evaluation consultants work in cooperation with grantees and the foundation to evaluate this program. The co-designed evaluation plan includes technical assistance intended to strengthen 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 [SIIRG 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 SIIRG webpage.

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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.

At the beginning of both the LOI and full proposal stages, a document listing the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) and a video guide will be posted for applicant information.

Following your review of these materials, we encourage you to “drop-in” during the SIIRG LOI Open Office Hours via Zoom hosted by the program lead, Charles Dwyer, to address questions during the following times:

- January 9, 11:00 am – 1:00 pm
- January 15, 10:00 am – Noon
- January 15, 2:00 pm – 4:00 pm
- January 21, 11:00 am – 1:00 pm

Use the Zoom link on the [SIIRG 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, the FAQ may be updated and reposted. Applicants are encouraged to check the SIIRG webpage for updates.

If you are invited to submit a full proposal, Charles Dwyer, the program lead, offers consultation of up to one hour with individual applicants between **March 3 – 13**. Contact him to schedule an appointment.

While we encourage applicants to take advantage of this opportunity, it is **not required** and will not influence reviewers’ consideration of your application.