

MeHAF

MAINE HEALTH ACCESS FOUNDATION

2026 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: **Tuesday, January 6**
- LOI virtual drop-in sessions—Visit the [SIIRG webpage](#) and click the Zoom link to join during one of the scheduled times:
 - **Tuesday, January 13** at 11:00 am – 1:00 pm
 - **Thursday, January 15** at 10:00 am – 12:00 pm and 2:00 pm – 4:00 pm
 - **Tuesday, January 20** at 11:00 am – 1:00 pm
- **LOI due: Tuesday, January 27 by 4:00 pm**
- LOI applicants notified of decision via email and guidance video for applicants invited to submit a full proposal posted: **Thursday, February 26**
- Individual applicants may schedule a one-hour optional full proposal consulting session between: **Tuesday, March 3 thru Thursday, March 19** contact [Charles Dwyer](#).
- **Full proposal (from invited applicants) due: Tuesday, March 24 by 4:00 pm**
- Full proposal applicants notified of award status via email: **Tuesday, May 12**
- Grant period: **June 1, 2026 – May 31, 2027 or 2028**

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 2026: approximately **\$410,000**.

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 27 for LOI, March 24 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](#).

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 working to remove them. This work can lead to health systems that are fair and just for everyone.

The purpose of the Systems Improvement and Innovation Responsive Grants (SIIRG) program is to reduce health inequities by removing structural barriers to services meant to support health.

The goal of our grantmaking is to advance changes in policies, practices, and perceptions at a system or organizational level that result in fair access to services that are tailored to the needs of the community. The SIIRG program design emphasizes ensuring that the community has a meaningful and ongoing voice that helps to inform and shape improvements and innovations in one or more of four MeHAF strategic priority areas:

- | | |
|-------------------------|---|
| (a) rural health, | (c) behavioral health/substance use disorder, |
| (b) aging/older adults, | (d) maternal & infant health |

Applicants may apply for one-year planning grants of up to \$30,000 or one-or-two-year implementation grants of up to \$50,000 per year.

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 play a meaningful role throughout the project, by informing project activities and identifying indicators of the project's success.

MeHAF experience suggests that the most successful projects are designed to leverage local resources, talents, and opportunities. We are unlikely to fund projects that propose education, research, or simple replication of models. We especially encourage new applicants to review the resources on the [SIIRG webpage](#) and contact staff with questions.

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 SIIRG 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 SIIRG program, **either** a planning **or** implementation proposal. The table on top of page four 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 in the community to identify and address an issue or need may be just beginning. It requires a deeper exploration with community members and organizational partners to fully understand the issue/needs and more information to flesh out what you will do in order to respond in necessary detail.	<u>Stage of Development:</u> Groundwork for your project is well underway, based on significant input from the community members and system/organizational partners. You have an adequate understanding of the issues/needs your project will work to resolve, and are prepared to describe in detail how the project will address them.
<u>Relationships:</u> A significant part of your work will be establishing and/or deepening connections with community members and other people or organizations that are key to accomplishing the systems change work you want to do.	<u>Relationships:</u> You have communications and relationships with or within the community and the organization or system. Community members and cooperating organizations are committed to be actively involved with the proposed project.
<u>Readiness:</u> You need to gather more resources, information and input from organizations or community members that will be important to informing your strategies and activities in order to move forward.	<u>Readiness:</u> You have a clear and specific plan of action and the commitment and trust among members of the community and cooperating organizations to begin putting your plans into action once you receive the grant.
<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 or implementation 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 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 identified as problematic, etc.

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,
 - (d) Maternal & infant 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.
4. Involve members of the community throughout the entire project period.
5. Clearly define what success looks like and ensure the community 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? If yes, you must submit a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) outlining the 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 or more of four strategic priority areas:
 - (a) rural health,
 - (b) aging/older adults,
 - (c) behavioral health/substance use disorder,
 - (d) maternal & infant health.
- 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 6/1/2026 and be scheduled to end on 5/31/2027 or 5/31/2028.)
- Describe the community(ies)
- Project 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 Draft Budget 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. Include how this work is new or different from your ongoing work and be sure to describe the project’s fit with the purpose of the SIIRG program. 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.

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 five 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 partner organizations and/or community members that are involved.

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

Full applications are due four weeks after the date of the invitation.

A. Full Proposal Narrative Questions

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

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

Responses to each question 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: Tell us about the community that is most significantly affected or being harmed by the problem (i.e., whose health will directly benefit from your project)?

Question 2: Describe problem or need. Tell us how you learned about this from the community and what systemic or organizational policies, practices, or perceptions cause or contribute to the problem?

Question 3: Describe in detail what you intend to do about the problem during the period of the project?

Question 4: What role(s) will members of the community have informing and shaping this project throughout the grant?

Question 5: What will be different for the system/organization, and the community by the end of the project?

In addition, the full proposal must 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 from within the budget section of the SIIRG application. We encourage you to read all of [MeHAF's funding policies and guidance](#) before completing the budget form.

For those who have applied for other MeHAF grants in the past, please note this form changed in 2024 and be sure to use the current form. The form combines the budget and budget narrative into one document. Your budget is expected to detail the income and expenses for the

proposed work for **one year**. If the application is for a two-year grant, and awarded, you will be asked to develop and submit a second-year budget near the end of your first grant year.

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

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

Include the following information (as applicable) about the project 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 SIIRG 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**. SIIRG applicants have the opportunity to request additional funds to off-set some 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. 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 Charles Dwyer.

Once the budget form is completed, you will submit the 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. Governance

If you have not already submitted 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 communities(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 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 to be invited to submit full proposals that fit best with the SIIRG program purpose, described on page 2 and the program criteria that is listed on page 4. Applicants will be notified about the status of their LOIs on **Thursday, February 26**.

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.

MeHAF’s Program & Grants Committee makes final funding decisions. 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, May 12**. 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 initial visit with the Program Officer within the first three months of funding.

- Schedule additional check-ins with the Program Officer at six-month intervals. The Program Officer will document grantee conversations about their work and learning. These conversations, including a final wrap-up conversation, take the place of written financial and narrative reports.

We encourage grantees to learn from each other and connect with other organizations and communities doing similar or related work. We expect all grantees to participate in a MeHAF-hosted **annual educational session** on identifying and mitigating systemic inequities, including racism. Other topics for peer learning may be developed collaboratively with MeHAF during the grant period.

We expect 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](#) 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.

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 grantees individual project objectives and the overall purpose of the SIIRG 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, identifying 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 [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.

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 log in during the SIIRG LOI Drop-In Sessions via Zoom hosted by the program lead, Charles Dwyer, to address questions during the following times:

- January 13, 11:00 am – 1:00 pm
- January 15, 10:00 am – Noon
- January 15, 2:00 pm – 4:00 pm
- January 20, 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 Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) may be updated and reposted. Applicants are advised to read FAQs and check the SIIRG webpage for FAQ updates prior to application submission.

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 – 19**. Contact him to schedule an appointment.

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