



**SYSTEMS IMPROVEMENT AND INNOVATION RESPONSIVE GRANTS (SIIRG)
PROGRAM**

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

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Program Purpose

Q: What does MeHAF mean by “System”?

A: For the purposes of this opportunity “system” is defined as the interconnected entities and structures--the people, policies, services, organizations--individuals interact with when seeking support for their health needs. This may include providers (large or small) of care and other health-related services.

Q: Would you explain what you mean by “systemic barriers to health equity”? Can you perhaps provide a concrete example of how to address this?

A: Another way of describing it is: Structural obstacles (maybe in the form of rules, costs, distance, language, stigma, bias) that prevent fair access to care/services or create an unjust disparity in health.

Example: Older adults may have limited income, minimal or no social support, and transportation challenges. This can mean that an older adult patient discharged from the hospital to their home may experience a slower more challenging recovery than others in their community may experience. A hospital, informed by their patients’ experiences and working in conjunction with their local area agency on aging, developed an approach to identify specific needs of their patients (such as food, heat, social support) prior to their discharge and addressed these issues by strengthening the coordination of existing services like meals on wheels and working with others to develop other needed supports, like a home visitor, increasing the chances for a smoother recovery for this group of patients.

Q: How are the social determinants of health different from health equity?

A: The social determinants of health are the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age. They include factors like socioeconomic status, education, neighborhood and physical environment, employment, and social support networks, as well as access to health care.

Health equity means everyone has the opportunity to attain their highest level of health. Health inequities, as distinct from health disparities, have been described as those differences in health outcomes that are unnecessary and unavoidable as well as *unfair and unjust*.¹

Q: What does MeHAF mean by children and child and maternal health? What population is being served?

A: Children in early childhood as well as mothers and infants. From the MeHAF Strategic Framework- *“Support efforts to improve the health of Maine children, focusing on early childhood and infant and maternal mortality.”*

Q: You describe SIIRG as a companion program to the Community Responsive Grants (CRG) program. Would you describe the difference in the purpose of the two programs?

A: The purpose of the SIIRG program is to support innovative community-informed projects to improve health and access to care in four strategy areas: rural health, aging/older adults, behavioral health, and maternal and child health. Projects will focus on organizational and systems changes to better serve consumers, clients, patients, especially those who experience the greatest barriers.

The CRG program was developed to fund community-led projects that change systems, policies, practices, and perceptions that create barriers to health care and good health and advance equity.

Q: What would MeHAF like to accomplish with these grants?

A: With this program we hope to provide a regular schedule of opportunities for organizations working to improve or innovate to make their services more responsive to the health needs of the communities they serve.

Eligibility

Q: What is fiscal sponsorship?

A: Fiscal sponsorship is an agreement between an established 501(c)(3) charity and an organization that lacks its own tax-exempt status. Often, this is an option used by relatively new, unincorporated organizations to enable donors and foundations to support their work. Under this arrangement, MeHAF will make the grant to the fiscal sponsor as the grantee. The fiscal sponsor agrees to accept and be responsible for all legal aspects of the grant and to be accountable to MeHAF for the programmatic and financial outcomes of the grant. The mission of the fiscal sponsor and the sponsored organization/project must be in alignment.

¹ Wyatt R, Laderman M, Botwinick L, Mate K, Whittington J. Achieving Health Equity: A Guide for Health Care Organizations. IHI White Paper. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Institute for Healthcare Improvement; 2016. (Available at ihi.org)

Organizations using a fiscal sponsor must include a Memorandum of Understanding between the two organizations defining the relationship as an attachment to their grant application.

Q: May we submit more than one application?

A: An organization may submit a single planning or project application. For government entities, universities, and large health care systems, a department or division may be considered a separate organization. If you have questions about how this may apply to your organization, please [contact Charles Dwyer](#) prior to submitting your LOI.

Q: I'm not sure if my project is eligible. How can I find out if I should apply for a SIIRG?

A: First, read through the Grant Guidelines/Request for Proposals carefully, including the scoring guidelines, and this complete list of Frequently Asked Questions. You may also find the recorded informational webinar helpful. If you still have questions, please [contact Charles Dwyer](#).

Program Information

Q: The focus of this program is on improving or innovating services. This implies services already exist. Is this an opportunity to develop new services that address one or more of the four strategy areas?

A: If the community has identified a gap that exists in services, then it is acceptable to propose developing a new service to fill the gap.

Q: Would you provide an explanation of the difference between a planning proposal and a project proposal?

A: Planning proposals may be up to one year in length and would be anticipated to begin with activities that might include forming partnerships, collecting additional information about the issue to be addressed, researching potential interventions, and developing strategies to test new approaches or implement changes.

Project proposals are more likely to reflect established partnerships, completed background research within and beyond the community in order to have a more comprehensive understanding of the issues to be addressed and the changes to be pursued, and at least a preliminary plan in place for the work that is being proposed. The organizations involved are ready to begin gathering the necessary resources to implement and evaluate their strategies.

Q: Can part of the work be developing mechanisms for collecting community input/creation of an advisory board or should that already be in place?

A: A planning grant may include these kinds of activities. However, proposals that reflect some existing engagement with the community will likely score more competitively.

Successful project proposals are likely to have these elements already in place. (See the scoring guidelines for Question #3)

Q: Might there be additional funding in subsequent years? If we apply for a planning grant, could we apply next year for project funding? If we receive project funds, could we apply for an additional one or two years of funding in future application cycles?

A: Specific plans including things like eligibility for continuation funding to grantees selected this year have not yet been developed. This is a pilot program in 2020, so its structure is likely to evolve as we learn from this initial round of grant-making. At present, we anticipate making future grants available through the SIIRG program, with details of the program's future direction still to be determined.

Q: Do you anticipate that grantees will spend some time up-front on planning, even if we apply for a project grant? What are the expectations around hitting the ground running for the project grants?

A: We understand that projects will need some time to prepare. While there is no hard and fast expectation, a general guideline would be that projects would begin implementation within 90 days of the award.

Q: Are there any specific expectations about the geographic scope of the project--statewide, regional, citywide? Our project serves a finite population. Are we still eligible to apply for the maximum amount of funding (\$50,000?)

A: You may request the maximum amount of grant funding regardless of the number of individuals or size of the population that you serve. We will seek full proposals from a range of geographic areas which serve different types of groups and populations and address one or more of the four strategy areas.

Q: About involving folks that are most impacted; if you have a population that is being served by direct service workers, could those workers be the ones that are informing the project since they have a direct sense of what the needs are of this population?

A: Yes, direct service workers have an important perspective and may be among the groups that help to inform proposed work. However, having their input is not a substitute for involving the people most impacted by the issue of focus and/or the services you may wish to improve. Pay close attention to the scoring guidelines for question 3. Achieving the highest range of points will require the active involvement of people most impacted by the issue in the design of the project or planning process.

Preliminary Budget

Q: If you are asking for the maximum grant award but your needs are expected to be different in years one and two, how do you reflect your needs in the preliminary budget?

A: The preliminary budget to be attached to the LOI is your own best estimate of what you anticipate your funding needs will be and the expenses you are expecting in order to do the proposed work for the entire project period you are proposing. You may break up a two-year preliminary budget to reflect each year separately. The maximum amount of your request in any single year is \$50,000 dollars. For example: Proposing \$40K in year one would not mean a \$60K request would be allowable for year two of the project. Each year's request is capped at \$50K.

Q: What is the matching requirement for project grants?

A: The matching requirements will vary based on the size of the applicant organization's budget. All of the details regarding MeHAF matching requirements can be found in Appendix C of the RFP. Matching funds are only expected from applicants seeking a project grant. Those applying for a planning grant are not required to contribute matching funds.

Q: If one of your partners is a for-profit (i.e. an EMS company), can they receive grants funds if within the use of grant funds guidelines?

A: They could receive funds through a vendor or contractor arrangement with the grant recipient. MeHAF funds may not be re-granted to another entity or individual.

Q: Does “no direct service costs” mean the program cannot cover cost of new staff?

A: Personnel costs are allowable, new staff or otherwise, when costs are directly associated with executing the proposed project. MeHAF funds may not be used to fund salary support for staff to fulfill their normal, ongoing job duties or to provide direct health care services to clients. Grants are intended to help grantees transform care and services in ways that are more efficient, coordinated, and cost-effective so communities can benefit for many years. Occasionally, a MeHAF grant program includes an opportunity to pilot new direct health care service delivery methods. Under limited circumstances MeHAF may consider support for pilot testing of these methods under a [set of specific guidelines found here](#).

Q: What is MeHAF's Accessibility Expense Policy and how should we incorporate this into our project budget given the range of funding provided in the grant guidelines (\$10,000-\$50,000)? Would this fund language barrier/translation services?

A: MeHAF's Accessibility Expense Policy supports requests for accessibility-related expenses to be included in project budgets. Accessibility expenses may not exceed 20% of the grant request amount. For example, if you are requesting a grant of \$25,000, you can request up to \$5,000 in additional funds to cover accessibility-related expenses. If you are

requesting a grant of \$50,000, you can request up to \$10,000 in additional funds to cover accessibility-related expenses. Translation services may be covered. See Appendix C of the Request for Proposals for additional information.

Online Process for Entering and Submitting an LOI

Q: Are there character limits per question or an overall limit?

A: Each question has its own character limit. For the Letter of Inquiry, responses to Questions 1-4 are each limited to a maximum of 3,500 characters. We anticipate this being adequate for the brief responses we are seeking during this first step in the application process. Character limits will be increased for applicants invited to provide more detailed responses in a full proposal.

Q: How do I submit my LOI/application?

A: MeHAF has an online system (known as Foundant) where all grant applications are submitted. Log in to the [Grants Portal](#) to review funding opportunities and apply. Resources are provided on the Help Videos page of the MeHAF website to help you create an account, if necessary, and navigate the portal. Please [contact Holly Irish](#) prior to creating a new account to avoid creating a duplicate record. Holly is also available to assist if you do not know your log in credentials.

Q: I submitted an LOI. Shouldn't I have received a confirmation?

A: Please be sure to confirm that our grants portal's sending email address (administrator@grantinterface.com) is marked as a "safe sender" so you receive all grant-related communications from our system.

Q: I'm having technical difficulties with the application. What should I do?

A: For starters, check your browser. We encourage you to use [Google Chrome](#) (available for free download) when completing your online application. While drafting your LOI and/or Full Proposal, please be sure to periodically save your work, especially if you are completing it over several work sessions. We suggest you consider first drafting your responses in a Word document, then copy and paste into the online application to avoid losing any work if you have an unexpected interruption or problem with your connection to the online grants portal.

If you continue to encounter technical difficulties, please [contact Holly Irish](#).

Q: If my organization has an account in the grants portal, but the contact person is not the lead on this project, should the project lead have their own account? Can we share login information? What if more than one person is putting together the proposal?

A: Accounts are maintained at the organizational level. People associated with an organization may request log in credentials from Holly Irish at MeHAF. The grants portal allows only a single point of contact per grant application process. That *grants contact* is the one that will receive information generated automatically through the grants system, like reminders when reports are due, or information related to grant agreements. Within the application there are fields that ask for the *primary contact for the application*. This person may be the same as or different from the grants contact. The primary contact for the application is the person most knowledgeable about the proposal's content. However, it is only the grants contact that has the ability to submit and receive documents within the online system. For this reason, they may wish to share their login information with others that may have a role in writing the application or reports. For assistance managing organizational accounts, modifying contact information or requesting log in credentials, please [contact Holly Irish](#).

Q: When responding to questions about geographic location, should we choose the general area of coverage of our organization's services or the area of focus for the specific project we are proposing, if they are different?

A: Please indicate the area where the work you are proposing will be focused.

Q: If we are invited to submit a full proposal, will we be able to edit our responses to Questions 1 – 4?

A: Yes. Applicants invited to submit a full proposal will complete a new application that includes the same questions and requests additional details. The responses to Questions 1 – 4 submitted at the LOI stage will be pre-filled, but applicants will have the ability to edit and expand upon their prior responses.

Q: If we submitted information like our Board list and 990s within the last 12 months, do we need to re-submit them for this application?

A: No. If the information remains current there is no need to submit it again within a 12-month period.

Q: Does pressing the "Submit" button automatically save and submit the application? You do not need to save, and then submit?

A: Correct. Use the save button to save your work during the writing process, prior to the final submission so you can return to your application to continue working on it. The system will auto-save the content as you move from field to field, but it's best to use the save button at the bottom to help ensure nothing you entered gets lost.

Q: Once submitted, can the application be reopened and modified?

A: Once submitted you will no longer be able to modify the application. You will be able to view and print your submission. If you need to access or modify an application after submitting, but prior to the application deadline, [contact Holly Irish](#) for assistance.

Proposal Review/Evaluation

Q: What are the numeric points for the Top/Middle/Bottom of the scoring rubric? Wouldn't that help to inform applicants and reviewers alike?

A: The scoring guidelines indicate the total number of points assigned to each question. Reviewers will be instructed to apportion points based on thirds. Responses in the bottom range will receive up to 1/3 of the available points for the question, those in the middle range-up to 2/3s and so on.

Q: If our letter of inquiry doesn't result in an invitation for us to submit a full proposal, is there a process to receive feedback?

A: Yes, MeHAF staff will offer you the option to receive feedback following each stage of application. The denial email will include information about how to arrange a debriefing call if desired.

Q: How many LOI applicants do you anticipate will be invited to submit full proposals?

A: As this is the first time the SIIRG program funding opportunity is available, MeHAF is unsure how many LOIs we will receive. Due to the open and responsive nature of this program, and the various community needs across the state, we anticipate it being a very competitive process and recognize that the demand may outpace the available resources. We will seek to invite full proposals from approximately twice as many applicants as the number of grants we expect to award.