



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

**Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)
Posted: 11.21.2022**

Program Purpose

1. Would you explain what you mean by “systemic barriers”?

Obstacles such as policies, costs, distance, language, stigma, and bias that prevent fair access to care/services or create an unjust disparity in health.

2. How are the social determinants of health different from health equity?

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

3. What does MeHAF mean by children and child and maternal health? What population is being served?

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.”*

4. 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?

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,

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)

behavioral health, and maternal and child health. Projects will focus on systems level 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.

5. What would MeHAF like to accomplish with the SIIRG grants?

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 defined by the communities they serve.

6. Can you provide examples of past SIIRG grantee projects to give a sense of what was funded under this program?

You can find the project profiles of grantees funded in the two previous rounds of the SIIRG program [here](#). Because of the types of projects proposed in every round, 2023's grantees projects could and may well look very different.

Eligibility

7. My organization does not have tax-exempt status or our tax-exempt status is pending. Do I need a fiscal sponsor?

Yes. If your community/organization would like to apply but your do not have tax-exempt status, please consider establishing a relationship with an eligible non-profit entity that is aligned with your mission that may be willing to support your organization's goals by acting as a fiscal sponsor.

A fiscal sponsor is another organization that has 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status that has a similar mission. As sponsor, that organization must agree, in writing, to provide certain fiduciary and financial management functions and to seek grants under its exempt status to support your organization's work. If you are working with a fiscal sponsor, you are responsible for having that relationship in place before an application is submitted. **The fiscal sponsor will be the organization that submits the LOI and the application and that ultimately receives the grant.** A Memorandum of Understanding that details the fiscal sponsorship relationship will need to be attached/uploaded to the application. The grant check will go to the fiscal sponsor, which will distribute the grant on your behalf and will retain all fiduciary responsibility for ensuring grant funds are properly spent and other grant requirements are met.

8. Is a Church or Religious Organization considered an eligible entity?

If a church has met the requirements of IRS Section 501(c)(3), they are eligible to apply for MeHAF funding. Religious organizations with income that exceeds \$5,000 annually must obtain

recognition of tax-exempt status from the IRS to be eligible. Source:
<https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p1828.pdf>.

MeHAF funding cannot be used to support projects that espouse any particular religious belief, require membership in any denomination, proselytize, or otherwise place religious conditions or constraints on participants/individuals to be served.

9. May we submit more than one LOI/application?

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 Senior Program Officer [Charles Dwyer](#) prior to submitting your LOI.

10. We have a collaborative program that we would like to undertake with a fellow nonprofit organization and/or community members. Is that eligible?

Yes. MeHAF encourages collaboration. One organization should submit the application as the lead organization on behalf of the collaborative partners. Please note that there is an expectation that resources (funding) will be shared among all of the partners.

11. I'm not sure if my project is best suited to this opportunity or the Community Responsive Grants (CRG) Program. How can I find out if I should apply for the SIIRG program?

First, read through the Request for Proposals (RFP) carefully, including the program criteria and rating information, and this complete list of Frequently Asked Questions. Also make sure to check out the [Choosing the Best Responsive Grants Program for Your Organization](#) tool. If you are still unsure, contact Senior Program Officer [Charles Dwyer](#) for any needed clarification regarding whether a project you are considering may be eligible.

Program Information

12. 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?

If the community has identified an access barrier due to a lack of available services, then it is acceptable to propose developing a service to address the access barrier.

13. Would you provide an explanation of the difference between a planning project and an implementation project?

Planning 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.

Implementation would more likely 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 take action and evaluate their strategies.

14. 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 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.

15. 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 implementation funds, could we apply for an additional one or two years of funding in future application cycles?

Specific plans including things like eligibility for continuation funding to grantees selected this year have not yet been developed. This is a pilot program, so its structure is likely to evolve as we learn from each 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.

16. Do you anticipate that grantees will spend some time up-front on planning, even if we apply for an implementation grant? What are the expectations around hitting the ground running for the implementation grants?

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.

17. Can one apply for one year of planning and a second year of implementation?

An organization can apply for planning and then potentially implementation grant in future years. However, an organization cannot apply for "hybrid" funding of both.

18. 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 annual funding (\$50,000?)

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.

19. About involving folks that are most impacted; if the community of focus 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?

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. Achieving the highest range of points will require the active involvement of people most impacted by the issue in the design of the planning or implementation project.

20. Can my organization apply for general operating support or for funds to support capacity-building?

No. The SIIRG program provides project-specific funding and will not make grants for general operating support. Other exclusions are: direct care costs, clinical, academic or graduate research, capital expenditures, fundraising and endowments, legislative lobbying efforts or political campaigns, scholarships, sectarian or religious purposes, or for projects that do not benefit people living in Maine.

21. Are there examples of previous SIIRG projects I can look at?

You can [click here](#) and scroll down to find profiles of the previous SIIRG grantee projects.

22. Are there lessons learned from MeHAF's first year of funding that could be shared with applicants?

There were a number of edits and changes made to the RFP to better clarify expectations and definitions for the third year of SIIRG funding. We also encourage you to review the recording of the [information session](#) or reach out to [Senior Program Officer Charles](#) Dwyer with any specific questions as you prepare your application.

[Preliminary Budget \(Narrative\)](#)

23. 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?

The preliminary budget requested in 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 period of your project. 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.

24. Does the LOI budget and full proposal budget (if invited) need to be the same? Or will a change result in a “ding” (a negative) against you?

At the LOI stage no budget is required, though a preliminary budget narrative is as part of the application. We only need a brief description of the types of expenses you intend to use MeHAF grant funds to support. The total requested grant amount should not change from the LOI to the Full Proposal stages. However, the details may shift. Part of the reason we are requesting budgetary information at this phase of the process is to ensure that the types of expenses align with MeHAF budget guidance (e.g., capital expenses are not supported). If the intended uses of funds change significantly from the LOI to the Full Proposal phase it may prompt clarifying questions and a follow-up conversation between MeHAF and the applicant.

25. What is the matching requirement for project grants?

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.

26. 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?

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.

27. Can you define direct care costs?

Essentially, direct care costs are anything that involves paying for the provision of health care services for an individual or group. The rationale for this is two-fold. First, MeHAF’s funds are not intended to supplant other sources of funding/payment (government, insurance, etc.). Second, 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, rather than to support delivery of service for a temporary time period to a limited group of individuals with no means of continuing those services once the grant funds are depleted.

28. 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?

MeHAF’s Accessibility Expense Policy supports requests for accessibility-related expenses, in the full proposal they will be documented separately, on the worksheet at the bottom of the MeHAF Budget Form. 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.

Online Process for Entering and Submitting an LOI

29. Are there character limits per question or an overall limit?

Each question has its own character limit. For the Letter of Inquiry, responses to Questions 1-3 are each limited to a maximum of 2,000 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.

30. How do I submit my LOI/application?

Log in to the [Grants Portal](#) to review funding opportunities and apply. 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.

31. When I submit the LOI, will I receive a confirmation?

If you are the designated grants contact person, you will receive a confirmation. 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.

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

Begin by checking your browser. We encourage you to use [Google Chrome](#) (available for free download) when completing your online application. If you continue to encounter technical difficulties, please contact [Holly Irish](#).

33. 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?

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. Only the *grants contact* has the ability to submit or receive documents within the online grants management system. The grants contact may share their login information with others that have a role in writing the application. However, only the grants contact will receive information generated automatically through the grants system, like acknowledgement of the submission. Within the SIIRG application there are fields that ask for an *additional contact*. This person will be added as a secondary contact to the SIIRG email group of grant contacts maintained by the program officer. For assistance managing organizational accounts, modifying contact information, or requesting log in credentials, please contact [Holly Irish](#).

34. 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?

Please indicate the geographic area(s) where the work you are proposing will be focused.

35. If we are invited to submit a full proposal, will we be able to edit our responses to Questions 1 – 3?

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 – 3 submitted at the LOI stage will be pre-filled, but applicants will have the ability to edit and expand upon their prior responses.

36. 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?

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

37. Our organization hasn't had our financial records audited, what should we do?

We ask all applicant organizations requesting \$25,000 or more, to submit either the organization's most recent Audited Financials, IRS Form 990 or confirmation of filing of form 990-N (for organizations with gross receipts of \$50,000 or less). However, for applicant organizations that do not have an audit or IRS Form 990, including those that submit proof of filing a form 990-N, we ask that you submit a current balance sheet and your organization's operating budget, including current fiscal year revenue and expenses and previous fiscal year budgeted and actual revenue and expenses.

38. Does the MeHAF grants portal auto-save my draft application?

Yes, the grants portal will auto-save your application, but it is always a good idea to save it periodically as you work on your draft. When writing your responses to the two narrative questions, we recommend first drafting it in Word or other word processing software, and then copying and pasting your response into your on-line application. This may help to avoid the loss of unsaved written work if your internet connection goes down unexpectedly or you have other technical issues while working on your application.

39. Once submitted, can the application be reopened and modified?

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 at for assistance.

Proposal Review/Evaluation

40. 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? Will we learn who received invitations or awards?

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. All applicants (LOI and full proposals) will receive email notification of the final list of awards.

41. How many LOI applicants do you anticipate will be invited to submit full proposals?

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.