

2019 MEAP Request for Proposals: Response to Inquiries

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Due to the quantity of questions, we attempted to consolidate similar questions.
If you feel your questions were not covered, please let us know.

Part I: General Grant Information

1. I-A Statement of Purpose, Page 4 indicates that \$50 million is available from LIEAF and LIHEAP Assurance 16. Since the LIEAF funding factor collects \$50 million annually, will the Assurance 16 funds be a separate amount or are they included in the total \$50 million to be distributed?

Assurance 16 funds will be a separate amount, though the amount has not yet been determined.

Part II: General Provisions

1. Will you provide a clearer definition of “promotional literature and commercial advertisements”? Does this include CAD flyers, social media posts (Facebook, Twitter, etc.), other print material?

While the MPSC and MDHHS reserve the right to review such material for accuracy at any time, CAD flyers, social media posts, and other print material do not necessarily need to receive prior approval, though it is strongly encouraged. Anything specifically mentioning MEAP, MPSC, or MDHHS and/or containing MPSC or MDHHS logos must be reviewed prior to distribution.

2. V-H Budget, (5) Budget Requirements (c) Contractual Services, Page 32 Do agencies have to submit new bids this year?

When competitive selection is not feasible or practical, the selected applicant agrees to obtain the written approval of the Grant Administrator before making a sole source selection.

Part III: Work Statement

1. Will the 2019 program offer both APP and one-time payment assistance? If not, how can agencies provide direct payment assistance for propane or wood if the supplier doesn't offer an APP?

While APP enrollments are a part of the 2019 MEAP program, the emphasis remains on providing services to encourage self-sufficiency. Yes, the program will offer both APP and other direct payment assistance.

2. Is it acceptable for our organization to refer clients to grantees that provide fuel types (such as propane) and not directly provide that assistance?

No, grantees must be prepared to assist households with assistance for any fuel type, from any approved provider.

3. Will all grantees be required to provide direct bill payment assistance? Can grantees refer clients to MDHHS for payment assistance?

Grantees must be prepared to assist households with payment assistance for any fuel type, from any approved provider. Households who present with an energy crisis will initially apply for the State Emergency Relief program, either directly with MDHHS or with assistance from a grantee/MI Bridges Navigator and MDHHS will determine eligibility for LIHEAP assistance. SER applicants will be eligible to receive self-sufficiency services, including case management through MEAP grantees. Households who qualify for SER energy services will be eligible for MEAP direct payment assistance, including enrollment in an affordable payment plan.

4. *On page 20 of the RFP, "MEAP strives to incorporate customer accountability or provide incentives for positive actions by the customer for more responsible bill payment and energy usage."* What types of incentives are allowable?

Incentives for positive actions would include a subsidy on their monthly bill via an affordable payment plan, bill credits for self-sufficiency plan goals met, and other energy-related items. Incentives not allowable include gift cards or other monetary gifts. Please seek additional guidance from MEAP section staff for specific items not mentioned above.

5. Will DHHS be determining eligibility outside of the heating season?

Yes, DHHS will be determining eligibility year-round. DHHS is making system changes to eliminate the crisis season for SER.

6. Does a household have to be re-evaluated for eligibility once they are approved for SER if requesting another assist? If so after what period of time? If a household receives SER and at a later date presents for another assist must they apply again for SER or could they receive MEAP directly? Once eligibility is determined by DHHS, will that eligibility determination be valid for only 30 days or for longer?

If the group composition and income has not changed, SER eligibility determinations for energy services can be used for the fiscal/program year. The first direct energy assistance payment for each heat and electric should always be issued through SER, up to the fiscal year cap.

7. If a customer completes a paper application for SER can they submit it at a DHHS office or must it be entered into Bridges by the grantee?

Applications can be submitted to DHHS electronically through MI Bridges, by mail, in-person or via fax. Grantees should not be completing the application for the client. Grantees can assist with the completion of the online or paper application, but the client must be there to sign the paper application or provide consent electronically.

8. What are the requirements for coordinating payments with utilities and MDHHS?

Grantees make payments to registered home energy suppliers. All home energy suppliers must be registered in the [State of Michigan's SIGMA Vendor Self-Service System \(VSS\)](http://www.michigan.gov/VSSLogin) (www.michigan.gov/VSSLogin) and also be enrolled as an eligible supplier by MDHHS. An energy-related SER crisis payment automatically qualifies a household for MEAP self-sufficiency services, which includes enrollment in an Affordable Payment Plan or additional direct payment assistance, for the fiscal year.

9. Please clarify: "Promote the discovery of innovative, cost-efficient, evidence-based methods for providing energy assistance to low-income households in Michigan."

This objective has not changed. Grantees should demonstrate efforts toward this by developing a program that takes into account existing methods for providing services to enable households to move toward self-sufficiency as well as innovate to provide efficiencies without detriment to the level of services provided.

10. Will MDHHS be responsible for all client eligibility verification? If not, what role will grantees play?

MDHHS will be responsible for SER eligibility verification. Grantees' role will be to provide self-sufficiency services and provide additional direct energy payments if necessary. In order to receive direct energy payments through MEAP, a household must be determined eligible for an energy-related SER.

11. Who will handle complaints, appeals, and customer communication? MDHHS? MEAP agencies?

SER determinations, complaints, appeals, and customer communication will be handled by MDHHS. Agencies should have internal procedures in place for such situations as they relate to MEAP assistance. The MPSC will support decision reviews if escalation is necessary and no mutual resolution can be agreed upon.

Customer communication related to SER will be handled by MDHHS. Customer communication related to MEAP will be handled by the MEAP grantees.

12. Will the grantee work directly with new vendors to help them get set-up (like the current year) or will they contact DHHS only?

New vendors can be provided information regarding SIGMA enrollment and LIHEAP Provider enrollment, but grantees are not required to work with them to help get them set up. This is not currently a requirement, either.

13. What information is required for an agency's Michigan 2-1-1 Profile/Database Listing?

Information regarding including a resource or updating a resource is available at Michigan 2-1-1's website [here](#).

MDHHS Navigator and Referral Partner

1. Is there an MDHHS communication plan regarding agency Navigators for clients/customers?

MDHHS has been communicating with clients since the inception of the ISD platform. The landing platform indicates the existence of Community Partners and allows users to search for a Navigation Partner. Customers will have an opportunity to choose a Navigator during the SER application process on the MI Bridges platform.

2. How does a MEAP agency become a Navigator/Referral Partner?

Information regarding the process as well as training dates, tools, and resources is available on the [MDHHS website](#).

DHHS is working to schedule trainings for MEAP grantees as well.

3. Please indicate the process and timeline for Grantees to become a Bridges Navigator/Referral Partner.

It's a good idea to start preparing now by documenting the information needed to register your organization as a partner. Some helpful things you can do to prepare for registration are:

- ✓ Confirm your organization information is accurate in Michigan 2-1-1
- ✓ Document all organization locations that will serve clients and the addresses of those locations
- ✓ Create a list of staff who will serve as MI Bridges partners, including their first name, last name, partner type, and email address

Additional information regarding the process as well as training dates, tools, and resources is available on the [MDHHS website](#).

4. Will this process take place before or after the start of the grant year?

It's a good idea to start preparing now by documenting the information needed to register your organization as a partner. Some helpful things you can do to prepare for registration are:

- ✓ Confirm your organization information is accurate in Michigan 2-1-1
- ✓ Document all organization locations that will serve clients and the addresses of those locations
- ✓ Create a list of staff who will serve as MI Bridges partners, including their first name, last name, partner type, and email address

Additional information regarding the process as well as training dates, tools, and resources is available on the [MDHHS website](#).

5. Can it be clarified whether MEAP grantees are required to be both navigator and referral partners or can they be solely referral partners?

MEAP grantees are required to be both Navigation and Referral Partners.

6. Is the process of becoming a Navigator separate or part of this RFP?

The process is separate but required in order to be a MEAP grantee. Selected applicants must become both Navigation and Referral Partners.

7. What is involved in the Navigator role? Will we be required to help with navigation services other than assisting the client with filling out an application and the self-sufficiency services and referrals we provide?

A Navigation Partner is an agency that agrees to promote MI Bridges by displaying promotional materials, providing a computer(s), tablet(s), or mobile device(s) to be utilized to access MI Bridges and providing one-on-one technical and navigation assistance to potential MI Bridges applicants. The assistance provided may vary from simply answering applicant questions to helping them complete a needs survey and application online. This typically includes teaching persons how to use the system themselves, such as those without computer knowledge or literacy skills. Additional information regarding the Navigator and the Referral Partner Roles is listed in the MEAP Policy Manual as well as on the [MDHHS website](#).

8. Is the scope of the Navigation Partner: 1.) to ensure that all clients assigned to them are able to navigate MiBridges? 2.) enroll customer in an APP? And, 3.) if validated, referred to self-sufficiency resources? What is involved in the Navigator role? Will we be required to help with navigation services other than assisting the client with filling out an application and the self-sufficiency services and referrals we provide?

A Navigation Partner is an agency that agrees to promote MI Bridges by displaying promotional materials, providing a computer(s), tablet(s), or mobile device(s) to be utilized to access MI Bridges and providing one-on-one technical and navigation assistance to potential MI Bridges applicants. The assistance provided may vary from simply answering applicant questions to helping them complete a needs survey and application online. This typically includes teaching persons how to use the system themselves, such as those without computer knowledge or literacy skills. Additional information regarding the Navigator and the Referral Partner Roles is listed in the MEAP Policy Manual as well as on the [MDHHS website](#).

9. Is the MEAP grantee expected to assist households in applying for other services?

Navigation partners are not expected to manage status updates or be responsible for understanding and explaining every MDHHS program or policies to clients. We would expect a grantee to assist a client who is in need of help or requests help navigating to the view benefits/letters pages, uploading documents, etc. Grantees are expected to assist households in becoming energy self-sufficient. In some instances, this may include assisting them in applying for other available benefits.

10. Can utilities sign up to be Navigation Partners?

Any organization who agrees to assist clients with MI Bridges is able to become a navigation partner and must fulfill the outlined role, below. Referrals for MEAP self-sufficiency services will only be made to selected grantees.

A Navigation Partner is an organization which provide assistance in using MI Bridges to help residents identify and connect to resources, apply for benefits, and manage their ongoing cases. Clients can consent to allowing these partners to view their benefit information and speak with caseworkers on their behalf. In MI Bridges, Navigation Partners have access to a client directory and can message directly with clients.

11. Can agency volunteers serve as office “navigators” to assist customers with MI Bridges”?

Yes; volunteers who are utilizing MI Bridges are registered as users and must complete all required MI Bridges training(s) provided by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services for their community partner role/permission level prior to providing MI Bridges assistance.

12. When a client comes to a grantee looking for assistance because their application is somewhere in process in the DHHS system, will we have access to a DHHS staff person (or have some other point of communication) and/or will we be able to see the client’s status in the MI Bridges system so we can advocate for the client?

Clients can elect to connect to their Navigation Partner in MI Bridges and can also consent to sharing contact details and case information with their Navigator. Navigation Partners can view these clients on a Client Directory in MI Bridges, and if the client consents, can view the same case information as the client – from detailed benefit information to organizations the client has sent electronic referrals too.

13. In regard to the MI Bridges Navigation portal, once the applicant leaves the offices of a grantee, will there be a way for both navigators and applicants to check the status of the application?

Clients can elect to connect to their Navigation Partner in MI Bridges and can also consent to sharing contact details and case information with their Navigator. Navigation Partners can view these clients on a Client Directory in MI Bridges, and if the client consents, can view the same case information as the client – from detailed benefit information to organizations the client has sent electronic referrals to. Both clients and their Navigators will be able to see the View My Benefits/View Letters page. The ability to view DHHS correspondence will assist in knowing if the client has to return verifications, if a copay is required and if a payment was approved.

14. Is the MEAP grantee expected to manage client requests for MI Bridges status updates?

Navigation partners are not expected to manage status updates or be responsible for understanding and explaining every MDHHS program or policies to clients. We would expect a grantee to assist a client who is in need of help or requests help navigating to the view benefits/letters pages, uploading documents, etc.

15. When point of contact is made, can self-sufficiency services (or screening) begin prior to them being qualified for SER?

Grantees can begin working with a household immediately on their self-sufficiency plan and can discuss the option of APP/get consent to enroll at the time application is made.

16. What type of consent is needed from the client for them to give our organization permission to be their Navigator? Can they give it verbally over the phone (after a lengthy statement is read to them)?

Clients can elect to connect to their Navigation Partner in MI Bridges and can also consent to sharing contact details and case information with their Navigator. Verbal permission is not acceptable.

17. How does the MI Bridges system determine which grantee receives the referral? We understand that there has been mention that the system picks the three organizations with the zip code closest the client? How does this work for organizations that have only one address but serve the whole state?

The logic is still being developed but here is the proposed solution:

- ✓ Show each of the MEAP grantees and their closest location to the user
- ✓ 5 organizations will display first and if a user selects 'show additional organizations,' 5 more organizations will appear. These organizations will appear on the modal in order of the closest organization to the user
- ✓ The miles away indicator will be removed and only the organization name and address will be displayed. This will help in situations when a grantee only has one address but provides services in multiple locations.

18. How do agencies receive referrals from MDHHS/MI Bridges?

As Referral Partners, the Grantees will have a MI Bridges ISD Dashboard. Referral information will appear on the agency's dashboard in real time for clients who are applying online through the MI Bridges application. Once a client consents to send a referral to an agency, that agency's users who manage referrals will see a notification on their dashboard indicating they've received a new referral when they sign in. They also have the option to sign up for email notifications that will let them know when they've received a referral.

19. What is the MI Bridges established referral timeframe?

The Referral Partner will receive referrals on their MI Bridges dashboard in real time. The expectation is that referral partners will attempt to contact the client within two business days of receiving the referral.

20. How much household data will be available to view in MI Bridges?

The Client Directory provides the following details:

- **Household Info** tab – provides the names, address and birthdates of household members along with their relationship to the Head of Household (applicant).
- **Needs & Resources** tab – lists the resources that the client has added to their 'My Resources' page.
- **Benefits** tab – provides an overview of the program benefits the household is receiving (Healthcare, Food Assistance, Cash Assistance, Child Development & Care and SER). Selecting 'Show More' takes the navigator to the View Benefits page which provides more detailed information about benefits; benefit amounts, SER copay amounts, program renewal dates, etc.
- **Case History** tab – provides an overview of actions taken by the client. Selecting 'Show More' brings the navigator to a detailed view of all applications, renewals, and report changes a client has submitted.
- **Docs Needed** tab- provides a list of documents, and their due dates, which has been requested by DHHS. Selecting 'Show More' brings the navigator to a detailed view of the client's Verification Checklists and verification due dates.

21. Will agencies be able to export any MI Bridges data into our own systems?

No. There is no export function for client information in MI Bridges. The navigator agreement states that information shared in MI Bridges is for MI Bridges navigator assistance responsibilities only.

Organizations will still go through their normal business processes of client consent if they're working with clients in a capacity outside of/in addition to being a MI Bridges Navigator.

Assistance Caps

1. Does the \$2,000 MEAP cap include any SER payment that a customer has received?

The SER/LIHEAP payment is not included in the \$2,000 direct assistance payment cap through MEAP.

2. Is it correct that there are no commodity caps for MEAP in FY 2019?

Yes, there are no commodity caps for MEAP in FY 2019.

3. What will SER caps be for FY 2019?

SER will continue to pay the amount needed to resolve the emergency for the next 30 days, up to the fiscal year cap (dollar amount has not yet been determined). Eligibility for SER (LIHEAP crisis) automatically qualifies a household for MEAP self-sufficiency services, which includes enrollment into an Affordable Payment Plan. Currently (FY 2018) the SER caps are:

- ✓ Natural Gas and Wood: \$850
- ✓ Deliverable fuel (fuel oil, propane, coal): \$1,200
- ✓ Other fuel (kerosene, corn pellets, cherry pits): \$850
- ✓ Residential electric (not used for heat): \$850
- ✓ All-electric home (combined heat & residential use): \$850
- ✓ Security deposits/fees for energy service: \$200 per occurrence

4. Consider this scenario: Customer applies for SER and is given conditional approval with the stipulation a co-pay must be made. Customer approaches a grantee for said copayment. Customer also wishes to enroll in an APP. Can grantee pay copayment and enroll in APP as long as \$2,000 cap is not exceeded? If grantee realizes paying copay plus enrolling in APP will cause the \$2,000 cap to be exceeded can they enroll in APP even though SER payment may not be received due to copay not made? In other words is a conditional SER approval sufficient or must an SER payment be made to be considered approved?

The MEAP Policy manual will provide guidance on which SER co-pays can be paid using MEAP funds.

If the client is eligible for assistance with their SER co-pay and will still have sufficient MEAP cap to be enrolled in an APP, that would be allowed.

If the agency assists with the SER co-pay and the household is then at the \$2,000 cap already, they cannot be enrolled in an APP. However, the agency could assist by getting them on a payment plan in this type of situation.

SER payment should be made to be considered approved.

5. Is it correct to assume that the first SER crisis payment does not flow through the MEAP partner? Please clarify, if that is the case, does the MEAP partner monitor only caps issued by their grant, and not combined SER and APP caps?

Correct, SER (LIHEAP Crisis) payments do not flow through the MEAP grantees. The MEAP cap is separate from the SER/LIHEAP cap and MEAP grantees will only be responsible for monitoring the MEAP cap.

6. How does the required SER co-payment work with the APP's? Can the APP's be the required co-payment for SER?

If the client has a co-payment that results from an asset co-pay or alien proration, MEAP funds cannot be used to assist with that amount.

If the client has a co-payment that results from a shortfall in required payments, MEAP funds can be used to assist with that amount. The payment cannot be released until a self-sufficiency plan document has been completed and the client has completed a self-sufficiency activity as agreed upon by both the agency and client. A copy of the household budget/proof that the activity has been completed must be retained in the client file.

If the client has a co-payment that results from an amount that is over SER cap, MEAP funds can be used to assist with that amount.

Examples of different decision notices will be attached to the MEAP Policy Manual.

Affordable Payment Plans

1. Will customers still need to be considered “in crisis” in order to get on an Affordable Payment Plan? Will customers need to have arrears to enroll? How will this work with SER making the first crisis payment?

Issuance of an SER (LIHEAP crisis) energy payment automatically qualifies a household for MEAP self-sufficiency services, which includes enrollment into an Affordable Payment Plan. Since SER will pay only the amount needed to resolve the emergency for the next 30 days, up to the fiscal year cap, most households will have arrears at the time of enrollment.

2. Will a client be eligible for an APP if their account is current after receiving a crisis payment?

Issuance of an SER (LIHEAP crisis) energy payment automatically qualifies a household for MEAP self-sufficiency services, which includes enrollment into an Affordable Payment Plan.

3. Is there a new list of utilities that will offer an APP in 2019? If so, can MAE share it with agencies now?

The list of utilities that will offer an APP in 2019 are as follows:

- ✓ Consumers Energy, CARE Program
- ✓ DTE Energy, LSP Program
- ✓ SEMCO Energy, MAP Program

4. Is there a uniform APP?

Not yet, though some effort has been made to align the three existing programs. Full alignment is not expected until FY 2020.

The common points for next year are:

- ✓ **Income Buckets:** The three utilities agreed to have 2 income buckets: 1-110% FPL and 111-150% FPL
- ✓ **Program Life:** 2 years for all utilities. Arrears will be forgiven in 2 years for each utility (current state: DTE Energy – 4 years; Consumers Energy – 2 Years; SEMCO Energy – 1 year).

MPSC and MDHHS are working with the three energy providers to provide a training specifically on the parameters of the affordable payment plans.

5. In the past we have only enrolled clients into one utility’s APP. Is it acceptable to refer clients to grantees who administer one of the other APPs instead of administering it ourselves?

Referrals to other grantees for any category of customer is not acceptable. Grantees must be prepared to assist households with direct energy payment assistance for any fuel type, from any approved provider.

6. If utilities do not develop one consistent Affordable Payment Plan, will grantees still be required to administer and enroll customers in all major APPs? Or will a partnership/referral agreement work?

Referrals to other grantees for any category of customer is not acceptable. Grantees must be prepared to assist households with direct energy payment assistance for any fuel type, from any approved provider.

7. What now are the eligibility criteria for APPs?

Any MEAP household enrolled in an APP must first be determined eligible for an energy-related SER. Depending on the company's specific APP, other enrollment criteria, including usage criteria, may apply.

The eligibility criteria for APPs are partially determined by SER eligibility and partially determined by the energy companies in their development of the programs which will be outlined in the MEAP Policy Manual.

Customers with zero income will not be eligible for APP enrollment. Additional information regarding exceptions to this policy will be included in the MEAP Policy Manual.

8. What are the guidelines for the APP's? Do we need agreements in place with the utilities?

Any MEAP household enrolled in an APP must first be determined eligible for an energy-related SER. Depending on the company's specific APP, other enrollment criteria, including usage criteria, may apply.

The eligibility criteria for APPs are partially determined by SER eligibility and partially determined by the energy companies in their development of the programs which will be outlined in the MEAP Policy Manual.

The MPSC and MDHHS are not requiring agreements in place between the grantee and the energy providers. It is important for the grantees to dialogue with the utility companies to ensure understanding of the program, reporting, and payment information. Grantees are responsible to ensure that the funds are appropriately applied to enrolled households' accounts according to the parameters set forth in each APP.

9. How will agreements with Vendors be determined, individually with each grantee or on a whole? How much guidance will the state provide regarding APP agreements between grantees and vendors?

The MPSC and MDHHS have been working with the energy providers to better understand the programs offered. It is important for the grantees to dialogue with the utility companies to ensure understanding of the program, reporting, and payment information. Grantees are responsible to ensure that the funds are appropriately applied to enrolled households' accounts according to the parameters set forth in each APP. The State is available to assist in any discussions or provide guidance upon request.

10. Is there going to be a standard schedule for allocations to APP vendors or might we address this as a monthly accounts payable issue to maintain adequate cash flow for bill payment assistance?

There is not a standard schedule for allocations to APP vendors. Maintaining adequate cash flow for other forms of direct payment assistance will be imperative and a monthly accounts payable process may be one way to address this issue.

11. How will we be able to project our Gap/Arrearage payments when DHHS is making the first payment, (which at this time is variable by bill)? Could/will this be standardized? If so, what might it look like, and what would be the process for indicating and communicating that an SER payment is the first APP payment rather than a simple crisis assistance?

MDHHS will not be making the “first” APP payment for customers. Rather, MDHHS will be providing assistance to resolve the household’s presenting crisis for the next 30 days. Grantees can work with the energy providers to determine estimates and projections, with support available from MPSC and MDHHS as needed/requested. While the amount is variable by bill, there will be a fiscal year cap.

12. How, in what form, will grantees receive the referrals for APP enrollments from DHHS?

Grantees will receive referrals from DHHS through the MI Bridges portal for applicants completing the SER application online, through MI Bridges. Those completing paper applications will be self-referred and will not show up in the MI Bridges ISD portal as an energy self-sufficiency referral. Grantees will create a self-sufficiency plan for each MEAP applicant, which may include enrollment in an Affordable Payment Plan. Grantees can begin working with a household immediately on their self-sufficiency plan and can discuss the option of APP/get consent to enroll at the time application is made. However, enrollment cannot occur until the SER payment has been authorized.

13. How will a client know if they are eligible for an APP when they are filling out the MEAP Self-Sufficiency Plan? Should the question on the "MEAP Self Sufficiency Plan" which reads, "I have been informed if my energy provider offers APP and understand whether or not I am eligible," be broken into two questions? It would be ideal to work on the Self-Sufficiency Plan and needs assessment at the time of assistance navigation, at which point eligibility has not yet been validated.

Conditional eligibility for APP enrollment can be determined at the time of assistance navigation. The enrollment criteria for each provider’s plan is available in the MEAP Policy Manual. Households that do not have income will not be eligible. The question will be reviewed and may be revised as the Self-Sufficiency Plan is still in draft form.

14. Can clients dictate the APPs they are enrolled in, i.e. choose an APP for their natural gas and not their electric or vice versa? Should the "MEAP Self Sufficiency Plan" form allow for the selection of an APP for one commodity/vendor and not the other?

Clients can choose to participate (or not) in an APP for each commodity independently. The MEAP Self-Sufficiency Plan will be updated to allow for the selection of an APP for individual programs.

15. What is the mechanism for enrollment in an APP?

Existing mechanisms for enrollment in an APP will continue for FY 2019; this varies by provider.

16. Can we prequalify applicants into an APP while their eligibility is being determined by DHHS?

Grantees can begin working with a household immediately on their self-sufficiency plan and can discuss the option of APP/get consent to enroll at the time application is made. However, enrollment cannot occur until the SER energy payment has been made.

17. Assuming clients enrolled in an APP in FY18 will need to revalidate through DHHS, will there be a time frame for APP revalidation? If so, what will the time frame be, and will it be consistent between all APP plans?

Households will be revalidated during the month of the household's enrollment anniversary date.

18. Who, DHHS or grantee, will handle any APP enrollment discrepancies?

APP enrollment discrepancies should be handled initially by the enrolling agency and the customer, with assistance from the energy provider where applicable. Should the discrepancy remain unresolved, support from the State is available.

Part IV: Project Control and Reports

1. What needs to be reported on in terms of referrals provided? What specific data fields are required?

If a grantee is making a referral to another organization for self-sufficiency activities, documentation must be in the client file that indicates which organization and for what service(s) the client was referred to.

2. How do we demonstrate that we have completed a self-sufficiency service to the state? What evidence is required in the file?

The evidence will vary by type of service, but some proof must be maintained in the client file. The documents must contain a date on which the activity occurred, what the activity included, and documentation of that activity on paper or in the grantee's database.

Part V: Information Required from Applicant

1. Reference V-F Current and Prior Experience and Funding Disclosure – the 2018 RFP allowed for previous grantees to omit this section. Must this section be completed for 2019 proposal if we were a 2018 grantee?

This section must be completed for 2019 by all grantees. Responses should be direct and concise, keeping in mind the economy of preparation as well as the total page limit for responses.

2. Can the Single Audit Fee be included in the 2019 budget?

Yes, for the charges proportionally allocated to the program.

3. As we plan to help our locations become MI Bridges Access Partners, will we be able to offer a stipend, possibly up to \$500/location for a refurbished computer that clients could use to complete the application process?

This expense is allowable as long as the budget guidelines are followed and equipment is purchased in order to carry out MI Bridges Navigation Partner responsibilities.

4. Is helping the client complete their application in MI Bridges (Navigation role) a fundable grant activity?

Assistance with application completion could be budgeted in MEAP administrative or program costs. If the “intake” process includes self-sufficiency services, those hours can be paid out of A16 funding. Please see the MEAP Policy Manual for additional information regarding allowable expenses in each budget category.

5. Please provide more detail on how grantees would be required to use Salesforce. Will grantees be expected to procure their own Salesforce software and licenses? Can any of the grant budget be used for this purpose?

Grantees currently use Salesforce primarily for reporting purposes. Additionally, front line staff have a limited view-only access that allows them to view assistance previously received by the household. Salesforce is a web-based software and there are not any costs associated with accessing the site. The MPSC provides the licenses needed for the specific access. Generally, two or three individuals per grantee have full access, meaning they can upload financial documents and client lists as well as view assistance history for households. The number of view-only licenses varies by the size of the organization.

6. How will the two types of funds be designated; should we request the split or will that be predetermined by MPSC?

Please request the funding as you plan to implement in you program. Additional information regarding the allocation of time to Assurance 16 activities is included in the MEAP Policy Manual.

7. Is there a minimum amount or percentage of the total grant that must be used for direct payment assistance?

MEAP legislation states that an entity with which the department contracts under subsection (1) shall use not less than 92% of the funds received from the department for energy assistance. An entity with which the department contracts under subsection (1) may, upon approval from the department, use less than 92% but not less than 90% of the funds received for the program for energy assistance.

8. Will the 2019 program allow grantees to provide Home Energy Assessments and the installation of energy saving measures in qualified client homes?

These would be allowable under the Assurance 16 category or in the EAP category. Please review the reporting requirements for Assurance 16 in the MEAP Policy Manual for additional information.

Assurance 16

1. What total dollar amount will be available for Assurance 16 activities?

A specific dollar amount has not yet been determined. MDHHS can allocate up to 5% of its total LIHEAP allocation to Assurance 16 and plans to do so for FY 2019. The majority of Assurance 16 funding will be distributed to MEAP grantees, with a small portion allocated to the Weatherization program implementation.

2. What is the difference between Assurance 16 services and self-sufficiency services?

Assurance 16 services are specific self-sufficiency services that are allowable to be billed to the LIHEAP Assurance 16 funding. The policy manual distinguishes the costs allowable under Assurance 16 and the costs allowable under program administration and direct program costs (not allowable under A16).

3. We are considering offering workforce activities such as resume building, linking clients to job training and job opportunities. Would these types of activities be covered under Assurance 16, and if that is not the case, can they be covered by other MEAP Funding?

In the context of the following, these activities would be allowable under Assurance 16:

- ✓ Needs assessment to identify the most appropriate services and referrals
- ✓ Vendor Advocacy
- ✓ Financial education or budget conversation
- ✓ Energy education or conservation conversation
- ✓ Short term case management
- ✓ Longer term case management

4. What is the difference between “Needs assessment and referrals” and “Short term case management”?

A needs assessment with referrals could be used in conjunction with other services as a part of short-term case management. Short term case management involves not only understanding the needs of the client, but also offering a form of counseling during the MEAP appointment—this could be something like financial education and/or energy education.

5. Would it be possible for the MEAP RFP to include HHC prep as part of Assurance 16 or in another part of the reimbursable activities?

Though not allowable under Assurance 16, HHC prep may be an allowable program cost as long as the budget guidelines are followed.

The RFP will not be updated to reference the Home Heating Credit (HHC), however the manual will include language that encourages grantees to educate households about the HHC as another resource to help make their energy costs affordable.

6. For budgeting purposes approximately what percentage of a Grantee's award will be Assurance 16 funds?

Since the Assurance 16 amount has not yet been determined, it would be difficult to determine this. Additionally, the amounts awarded to provide Assurance 16 services will be varied as programs vary by grantee.

Part VI: Evaluation and Selection Criteria – No questions

Attachments

1. The MEAP Self Sufficiency Plan (pp. 39-40, Attachment C) resembles a client application for assistance and leaves very little room to describe the actual steps a client would take to move toward energy self-sufficiency. When the RFP mentions self-sufficiency plans, is this form what it is referring to or are grantees expected to create a more detailed, holistic tool or template?

A signed Self-Sufficiency Plan/MEAP Application is required to be in each client file. Grantees are not limited to using only this form but should develop/implement any additional tools that may be suited to the individual grantee's MEAP program.

2. Can we edit the Self-Sufficiency Plan as long as it is approved by MPSC prior to use?

A signed Self-Sufficiency Plan/MEAP Application is required to be in each client file. Grantees are not limited to using only this form but should develop/implement any additional tools that may be suited to the individual grantee's MEAP program. Any edits to the Self-Sufficiency Plan should be approved by MPSC prior to use.

3. Are we allowed to mail out applications to people?

The MEAP Self-Sufficiency Plan could be mailed to households. It is expected that a Grantee will work with the client in order to complete the application and explain the option of the Affordable Payment Plan, if applicable as well

Requests for energy assistance will be submitted to DHHS via one of the following SER applications:

- ✓ MI Bridges online application
- ✓ MDHHS-1171, Assistance Application & MDHHS-1171-SER Supplement
- ✓ DHS 1514, Application for State Emergency Relief

Completion of the online application through MI Bridges is most desirable since there is an opportunity for the client to assign a Grantee as their Navigation Partner as part of the application process. This will allow the Grantee to have access to DHHS benefit information and communication/correspondence to the household.

4. III-D Tasks, Page 21, #4 What is “the MEAP Agreement”?

The MEAP Agreement refers to the MEAP Self-Sufficiency Plan/MEAP “Application”.

Additional Questions

1. Will Navigation training occur before October 1?

Yes, general training sessions are available for registration currently as well as for online Referral Partner training courses. Training sessions for MEAP grantees will be available prior to October 1 and dates will be determined once awards are made.

2. Does the grantee need to obtain a physical signature from the client for the Self-Sufficiency Plan document?

The Self-Sufficiency Plan document can be consented to via phone or electronically.

3. Where in the MEAP budget should Non-A16 staff expenditures be allocated?

Intake staff that are not involved in A16 activities can be budgeted either under the Administrative Personnel category or under the EAP Personnel category. These begin on Lines 1 and 35 in the sample budget included with the RFP.

4. What is the eligibility determination time frame from MDHHS? We are specifically concerned about clients that are disconnected or empty during crisis season.

The eligibility determination time frame for MDHHS remains in compliance with the 18-48 hour timeframe required by LIHEAP statute.

5. When we are enrolling a client in an "APP" is that a program agreement with the grantee or with the utility provider? We predominantly serve Consumers Energy clients and they currently offer, BPP, WPP and SPP as well as CARE... but they are not always eligible because of payment history and such.

Enrollment in an APP with Consumers Energy would only include enrollment in CARE—the other protection programs are not considered Affordable Payment Plans. The client would need to be eligible based on the criteria to enroll in the CARE program.

6. Last year we had to choose whether we would provide one-time payment or APP, are we able to provide both this year depending on situation? Along those same lines, we had to determine intervention vs prevention in our budget. Does this mean that all direct assistance will be prevention now since MDHHS is providing the initial assist?

While APP enrollments are a part of the 2019 MEAP program, the emphasis remains on providing services to encourage self-sufficiency. Yes, the program will offer both APP and other direct payment assistance.

7. Do applicants need to complete another self-sufficiency plan document if they come in for subsequent assistance?

Not necessarily. A document for self-declaration of no changes can be signed. This document will be available prior to the start of the program year.

8. What kind of compliance training will be held before the start of the program year?

Training for the following will be held:

- ✓ General grant training
- ✓ Affordable Payment Plan training
- ✓ MI Bridges Community Partner training

9. Do customers have to be enrolled in an APP if they have an account at DTE, CE or SEMCO or can they receive other direct payment assistance?

While APP enrollments are a part of the 2019 MEAP program, the emphasis remains on providing services to encourage self-sufficiency. A customer of a utility that has an Affordable Payment Plan is not required to be enrolled.

10. Can an individual have more than one navigator?

An individual can be connected with up to 10 navigators in MI Bridges.

11. Will one navigator be able to see what other navigators the customer has?

Navigators cannot see this information but referral partners can. Since MEAP grantees will be registered as both Referral and Navigation Partners, users with the referral permission will be able to see this information.

12. I heard some discussion about paying arrearages once enrolled in APP with the expectation that SER is paying the shut-off amount... are we then able to pay the balance of the account to zero it out as we have in the past to give them a fresh start? Or are we only able to assist with the co-pay portion?

MEAP grantees are able to assist with the allowable SER copays. Additional assistance may be provided if the client is actively engaging in self-sufficiency activities as agreed upon in the Self-Sufficiency Plan and are facing another crisis situation.

13. Can grantees contract with outside agencies to be navigators for their clients?

It is expected that the selected grantees will serve as the MEAP Referral and Navigation Partner for the household. A client can elect to have up to 10 navigators, so navigation need not be exclusive.

14. Can grantees contract with 2-1-1 for performing a self-sufficiency assessment?

It is expected that the selected grantees will serve as the MEAP Referral and Navigation Partner for the household. The expectation of the grantees is to be the case manager or coach for the client. Decisions for the self-sufficiency plan should be made by assessing the strengths of the family and should be tailored to each family's situation. While contracting self-sufficiency assessment services is not prohibited, scoring may be affected by the lack of provision of such self-sufficiency services in-house.

15. Will agencies be distinguished as a MEAP partner on 2-1-1?

The MEAP agencies are responsible for maintaining their own 211 record. When updating their 211 information agencies may choose to indicate they are a MEAP grantee.

16. Please provide clarification of the co-payment process and whether enrollment in an APP can suffice in lieu of making the actual co-payment prior to releasing the SER funds?

There has been no system change for SER/Bridges that would allow the worker to authorize a payment without having proof of the co-pay. The client seeking co-payment helps engage the household in the self-sufficiency component. APP enrollment is seen as a part of the self-sufficiency measures a household should be taking and not a sole self-sufficiency measure on its own. Please see Assistance Caps Question #4 for more detail.

18. Can you please provide some details on the concern of soliciting customer engagement prior to the program year and through the enrollment period?

This year, households that were enrolled in FY18 will be grandfathered into the FY19 program year and reenrollment will occur in their anniversary month. Without the need to solicit re-enrollments, and with the goal of providing a year-round program with rolling enrollments—mass customer solicitation at the outset of the program year seems unnecessary. More strategic targeting as the year progresses so as not to inundate grantees or MDHHS with applicants may be more appropriate. Any expenditures prior to the start of the program year (October 1) may not be charged to the grant.

17. Can customer consent through a paper form in addition to the ISD based process to minimize the issue of paper applications for re-enrollment?

No. Again, without the need to solicit re-enrollments, and with the goal of providing a year-round program with rolling enrollments—mass customer solicitation seems unnecessary. If the client hasn't created an online profile and selected a navigation or referral partner, the grantee may walk them through that process over the phone with the client completing the electronic consent. MDHHS does not accept phone applications.

19. Please clarify for MEAP APP customers that enrolled this year, when their anniversary date comes, and they need to be revalidated what is the process/how does this work since they are not in crisis as some will not have a past due or arrears?

We are finalizing a process for that for this year, with the FY18 enrolled households grandfathered in to FY19 program year and reenrollment occurring in their anniversary month. There will be some language added to the manual regarding the allowance of re-enrolling households for this transition year despite not necessarily having arrears remaining on their account. Our goal is to make this process as customer and grantee friendly as possible while maintaining compliance.

20. I understand from the meeting last week that we will not have access to FPLs in MI Bridges. Are you putting a different identifier into MI Bridges, so we can make sure we get them enrolled in the right program?

We are working on a solution to ensure that MEAP grantees will have access to the client's income level/FPL.