

2017 MEAP RFP Inquiry Questions

1. At the top of page 3 it states that “All distributions to selected applicants will come from the LIEAF and the LIHEAP in shares proportionate to the total share of LIEAF and LIHEAP funds designated to the MEAP. . .” Will the federal and state contributions of the grant award be broken down on the cover page of the Grant Agreement? If not, will grantees be provided these numbers prior to the start of the grant, or are grantees to spend on a general percentage split basis (45% to TANF – 55% to non-TANF)?

Yes, the cover page of the Grant Agreement will have a break-down of the LIEAF and LIHEAP funds.

2. Section II-I – Are sole source contracts with partnering affordable payment plan (APP) intake agencies that are included in the utility’s proposal and budget considered *approved* by MAE if a grant is awarded?

Yes, however the grantee must document any procurement that will not be by full and open competition. When competitive selection is not feasible or practical, the Grantee agrees to obtain the written approval of the Grant Administrator before making a sole source selection.

3. Section II-II – Does this mean that State employees are not allowed to receive, and must be denied MEAP assistance?

No, State employees can receive MEAP benefits if they qualify. This statement pertains to State of Michigan employees applying for a MEAP grantee or contracting with MEAP grantees.

4. Section III-D (9) – Does this mean that grantees are expected to design their own appeal process (second review process), or will the appeal process be the same as in past years?

This is not a new requirement. Grantee should have their own appeal process. Grantees will be asked to provide us with your appeal procedure. MEAP applicants must be able to contest decisions for denials and other compliance issues (i.e. 10 day standard of promptness). In accordance with the LIHEAP State Plan, please include the following guidance: The applicant or their representative has 90 calendar days, from the date of the written notice to request a hearing.

5. Section III-D (13) – Does the 70/30% heating season spend requirement apply to each individual grantee award or to the total overall (\$110 M) awarded to grantees?

The MEAP program must meet this requirement; so the expectation is that grantees will budget to ensure that the program meets this requirement.

6. Section III-D (25) – Could you please provide additional information regarding this task?

This was an error; please omit task #25 within Section III-D of the 2017 MEAP RFP.

7. Section “II-T Website Incorporation” of the RFP contains the language from Section II-U about Debarment. Could we please get the correct language for the Website Incorporation?

The State is not bound by any content on Grantee’s website unless expressly incorporated directly into this Grant.

8. As part of “assisting participants in utilizing energy services to optimize energy savings,” in addition to direct assistance, can an organization use MEAP funds to provide home improvements such as insulation, appliances, and high-efficiency furnaces?

Improvement needs for insulation, appliances, and high efficiency furnaces should be referred to Community Action Agencies that provide weatherization services or DHHS for State Emergency Relief. MEAP EAP can cover services that encourage and enable households to reduce their home energy needs and thereby the need for energy assistance, including needs assessment, energy and financial counseling, low cost energy saving measures (kits) and assistance with energy vendors.

Please note that Assurance 16 pays for services not equipment.

Allowable A16 activities and services include the following:

- ***Needs assessment***
- ***Financial counseling***
- ***Assistance with energy vendors***
- ***Energy education and advocacy***
 - ***example: brochures with energy education and conservation tips***

9. Does MPSC have a default indirect rate for those organizations that do not have a federally approved indirect rate?

No, the Michigan Agency for Energy (MAE) doesn’t have a default indirect rate.

10. In the RFP it states- “Ensure that not more than 30% of the funds awarded are spent on home energy costs accrued outside the crisis season. Ensure that a reasonable amount, based on data from prior years, shall be reserved until March 15 of the program year by each grantee for energy crisis intervention.” P.23 # 13. If necessary are we to deny clients during the crisis season to ensure we have some funding available until March? Or are we to capitate the amount of assistance available throughout the grant year to ensure funds are available until March?

No, clients should not be denied assistance if they are eligible. If a grantee exhausts its MEAP funds prior to March 15, then the grantee should coordinate referrals with other MEAP grantees.

11. Will all energy providers need to re-register with C&PE for the coming year and resubmit paperwork?

No. Energy providers should only re-register if they are no longer included on the monthly provider list.

12. On page 28 #d-iii- It states under Household Metrics- The average household payment. Is this payment calculated as an average from our agency assistance payments or it is information we should collect from the client on how much they pay towards their energy bill on average?

This is referring to the average MEAP benefit issued by your agency.

13. The grant states an allocation of 8% administration. Federal regulations state the administration changes are now to be 10% allocation. May we change up to the federal allocation for administration?

Per PA 615, grantees are allowed 8% for administration. As a reminder, grantees are allowed program costs within the Energy Assistance Program (EAP) category of the budget.

14. When calculating Crisis/Non crisis it is our understanding that the state tracks this by the total amount reported as paid each month. Is this correct?

MAE tracks MEAP expenditures overall; in addition, MAE also monitors the monthly grantee expenditures.

15. If the client has already received one or more assists and has a remaining amount of assistance still available, how are we to handle the situation if the dollar amount available for the household not to exceed \$3,000 does not remedy the emergency for at least 30 days? Should this client be sent to the state for review or simply denied?

The amount exceeding the cap should be covered by the client as a co-payment. However, if there are extenuating circumstances then an Exception from the Grant Administrator should be requested. If an Exception isn't granted and the client cannot pay the co-pay then the client's application would be denied because the amount that could be paid would not resolve the emergency.

Further guidance around Exceptions will be provided in the policy manual. An example of a potential Exception, could be a high arrearage due to a bill transfer from another address or account. MAE would review the transfer to ensure it complies with MPSC rules and the Grant Administrator would determine if an Exception is warranted.

16. If we authorize a delivery of a deliverable fuel and the vendor discovers the clients tank as over 25%, are we allowed to authorize the payment of a travel/delivery fee for the vendor?

The client/ applicant is responsible for the travel/delivery fee if the tank is over 25% at time of delivery.

17. On page 34 (viii) the RFP states "Please provide the following information regarding Prevention of Loss of Home Energy Services. Imminent risk of running out of fuel." What is the definition of imminent risk? 5 days of fuel, 5% left in tank?

Imminent risk is a residential fuel tank with not more than 25% of its heating fuel capacity.

18. On Page 34 (vii) Please provide the following information regarding Restoration of Home Energy Services. Energy Service Restored after disconnect. We would assume this is 100% or the situation would not be remedied for 30 days correct? On page 22 of the 2016-2106 MEAP RFP, section (9) states that Grantees will be allocated State and Federal funds proportionally and that LIEAF funds should be used to assist TANF households. Does this mean that the LIEAF funds should be spent on households who actually receive TANF funds? Or do they simply have to have a qualifying child in the household (TANF eligible)?

LIEAF funds should be spent on TANF eligible households. If an agencies LIEAF funds are exhausted, TANF eligible households would then be covered by remaining LIHEAP funds.

19. Has a determination been made as to whether or not Categorical Eligibility will be an option for determining household eligibility?

Categorical Eligibility has not been approved for the 2017 MEAP grant year.

20. Has a determination been made regarding the use of Gross Income in cases where the household qualifies without using any eligible deductions?

Determine income eligibility and Federal Poverty Level for each household whether it appears that they're eligible or not.

21. On page 33, Program Metrics, can you provide additional information on what defines energy consumption reduction success? What is the timeframe that should be looked at to determine if consumption has been reduced?

For clients enrolled in utility Affordable Payment Plans either through a utility grantee or other grantee, reports (which reports are program metrics reported in? Just the final report?) should include information on clients success in reducing their energy consumption.

22. On page 29 and 35, (ix) there is reference to providing the number of households that were denied because their fuel level exceeded 25%. Should these households be included in the table provided, or should they be represented as a separate data point, or both?

It should be included in the table provided.

23. In the Interim Report, the only electric category is "Non-Heat Electricity." Should "Electric Heat" be added to the Interim Report? We currently include Electric Heat customers under "other," but are wondering if "Electric Heat" should be included as a separate category?

Electricity Heat should be reported in the Non-Heat Electricity category.

24. Now that there is a cap of \$3,000, are we able to assist customer that have fallen off an Affordable Payment Plan if we do not exceed the cap?

Assists for these customers should be considered an Exception and sent to the Grant Administrator for approval. Customers that have enrolled in an APP should have signed a statement of understanding that they are accepting the terms that they will not receive SER or any additional MEAP benefit from another MEAP agency within the grant term.

25. Are letters of support required?

No.

26. Is this a one year proposal?

Yes.

27. Table of Contents: Only four Attachments are listed as required. In the RFP we are asked to attach our Customer Satisfaction Survey, provide a copy of the client income form and our most recent Audited Financial Statement. Are there other attachments we should plan to include?

Please include any required attachments referenced within the RFP or that support your work plan.

28. Throughout the RFP the language "optimize energy efficiency" has been changed from the previous RFP to read "optimize energy savings." Is this to measure success in a different way?

No.

29. P. 44 Sensitive Personal Information confidentiality agreement: is this to be completed, signed and submitted as an attachment to the proposal?

Agreements should be available upon request if applicant receives an award.

30. How does the 10 day standard of promptness correspond to Objectives under III-C(8)? Are we held accountable to 48 hours or 10 days?

Take action in the first 48 or 18 hours to prevent a life-threatening situation from occurring. This may be ensuring that the household has somewhere safe to stay if they are without household heat, for example. It may also be placing a hold on a natural gas or electric account

to prevent disconnect to allow the client time (8 days) to return any necessary information to determine eligibility.

LIHEAP Statute requires the following: 1) not later than 48 hours after a household applies for energy crisis benefits, provide some form of assistance that will resolve the energy crisis if such household is eligible to receive such benefits; 2) not later than 18 hours after a household applies for crisis benefits, provide some form of assistance that will resolve the energy crisis if such household is eligible to receive such benefits and is in a life-threatening situation.

Applicant has 8 days to return any required supporting documentation.

More guidance to be provided in the MEAP Manual. To meet 48 hour, determination hold.

31. What type of work regarding validations can be done before October 1, 2016?

Any work done prior to October 1st would not be reimbursed.

32. Can grantees set up secure FTP to provide monthly and quarterly data to the state?

No, however, MAE is creating an online portal to securely submit files. More information to come.

33. When will the template be provided for the monthly FSR and the Client List?

A template will be provided to grant awardees before the grant term begins.

34. Please elaborate on the requirements for item (27) on page 25.

Grantees are required to issue a 1099- Misc Tax Form to any vendor/ payee who received \$600 or more in MEAP funds.

35. III-C Objectives (9) p. 22: Do we have to submit separate reports for LIEAF and LIHEAP funding? Can LIEAF funds be used for Non-TANF households? If not, can we deny Non-TANF households if we run out of LIHEAP funds?

Grantees will not be required to submit separate reports for LIEAF and LIHEAP funding. Grantee cannot deny Non-TANF households if you no longer have LIEAF funds.

36. III-C Objectives (9) p. 22: Since every direct assistance payment made is comprised of both LIEAF and LIHEAP funds which are paid out in the same ratio as received, do we have to track these two funds separately?

Direct assistance payments will not be compromised of both LIEAF and LIHEAP as in previous years. LIEAF funds will be used to assist TANF eligible households and LIHEAP funds will be used to assist non-TANF eligible households. MAE will provide a tracking mechanism.

37. III-D Tasks (8) p. 23: How should denial letter be worded in this case – what should be given as reason for denial?

Failure to provide required documentation.

38. III-D Tasks (11) p. 23: “Using the MAE implemented database system...” What database is this? Please provide more information

The MAE database system will allow grantees to securely submit reporting files.

39. How will grantees interface with it (MAE database system)?

Grantees’ current system will not interface with MAE database system. The MAE database will accept files (i.e. the Client List).

40. III-D Tasks (12) p. 23: MAE Shared Database Values – please provide more information

This information will be provided to grant awardees.

41. Will the MAE database system require manual data entry or will it allow for a data file import process?

It will allow data file import.

42. How frequently will the information be updated?

Data will be uploaded on a monthly basis initially. MAE will work with grantees to determine if weekly submissions would be beneficial.

43. III-D Tasks (13) p. 23: What is a reasonable amount?

A reasonable amount is based on past trends.

44. III-D Tasks (21) p. 25: Do we need approval from the Grant Administrator for exceptions?

Yes, ALL exceptions.

45. IV-B (4) Final Project Report (d) Program Metrics (iii) p. 33: Explain Benefit Targeting Index

The Benefit Targeting Index will tell whether the high energy burden households receive higher LIHEAP benefits than average households. Grantees are reporting information necessary for MAE and DHHS to calculate the Benefit Targeting Index. Additional information will be provided to grantees within the MEAP Policy Manual.

46. Attachment A, Eligibility Requirements (E.) p. 4: Please provide list of all documents that are acceptable proof of SS number in lieu of actual SS card.

An SSI award letter (only if the full social security number is listed), Medicare Card, -or any government issued document with the full number listed can be used in lieu of a SS card. The agency should work with the applicant to request a new one and the client must provide proof of application.

47. Attachment A, Income Guidelines (F) Countable Earned Income p. 7: If a Self-Employment Affidavit is used for a self-employed person what additional documents are needed for proof of income if any?

None, the affidavit is sufficient.

48. Attachment A, Income Guidelines (F) Countable Unearned Income p. 8: Adoption Subsidy Payments – How often does a household receive a letter stating the amount they receive in adoption subsidy? Or are they only notified once because the amount never changes?

When parent(s) are determined to be eligible for adoption benefits, our office will send an opening letter to parents. This letter informs parents the benefits that child will receive from our office.

The monthly rate for child will change when child reaches 13 years or when there is increase in Foster Care rates (does not happen often).

Parents that receive a paper check will have stub that provide information on child's subsidy. Parents with direct deposit, the monthly benefit amount is posted on their bank statement.

49. Attachment C, MEAP Application p 2: If the applicant's electricity has already been turned off how should they answer the question "Have you received a past due or shut off notice for your electricity?" "Yes" because they obviously received a shut off notice prior to being shut off or "No" because being shut off takes precedence in the reporting.

Applicant should answer "Yes" to question "Has your heat been turned off or have you run out of your heating fuel source?".

50. Attachment C, MEAP Application p. 2 under Household Income: Please explain what is meant by Energy Assistance/LIHEAP as part of Tribal Payments source of income

There are Tribes in Michigan that receive a LIHEAP Block Grant to assist their members. When a member of a Tribe receives a Tribal LIHEAP benefit, it must be deducted from the amount available through MEAP (and SER).

51. V-H Budget (5) (c) Contractual Services: We pay a fee for using a proprietary, internet-based energy assistance database to process, store, track all clients information necessary to meet MEAP reporting requirements. Are these fees direct program costs covered under the 92%?

Yes.

52. V-H Budget (5) (e) Other Expenses: We will be using a third party non-profit to provide energy self-sufficiency services and will be paying fees on a per-case basis. Are these fees covered under the 92% direct program costs? Could we extend this program to low-income, high burden households who may not apply for energy assistance, but is a great preventative to reduce their energy bills?

Yes, they are covered by the 92% direct program costs as EAP Contractual Services.

No, Grantee should encourage customers to apply for MEAP assistance if they are low-income; however, client must meet program requirements.

53. V-H Budget (4) Is salary of "EAP Personnel Intake Staff" covered under 92% direct program costs?

Yes.

54. V-H Budget (4) The budget format has a new line item for "EAP Personnel Self-Sufficiency Staff". Is salary of this staff covered under 92% direct program costs?

Yes.

55. In order to make funds stretch to March 15, organizations may be required to limit outreach and intake hours given that the population that is income eligible is so vast compared to available funds. How can grantees help MAE and 211 manage clients' expectations that all eligible clients will get immediate access to the program all the time yet make the money stretch?

Please provide timely updates regarding MEAP fund balances to ensure that MAE and 211 has the most up to date information.

56. Is there a methodology you would like grantees to unduplicated households for characteristics that might overlap? For example, one household might have one child under age two, a child age 3 to 5 and a person with a disability as part of the household. Households may easily have both people who are age 60 and older and people who are disabled. Or will you create categories that we can put households in so that we can capture the data?

MAE will provide grantees with the new Client List template that will allow grantees to capture all categories applicable to household.

57. If a grantee has too many TANF eligible clients for its MEAP allocation, what would be the protocol? Would a grantee need to turn the client away/refer to another provider? This could be problematic if the grantee still had funds and the client was eligible in all other ways.

Grantee should use LIEAF funds to assist TANF eligible households. After the grantee has expended all of their LIEAF funds then LIHEAP funds should be used to assist TANF eligible households.

58. Does MAE have a sample data security plan that they feel is appropriate as a template for MEAP grantees? If so, can it be shared?

Grantee should develop a security plan to ensure that Personal Identifiable Information (PII) is protected. The data security plan should be specific for your organization. During the grant proposal review process, applicant may be asked to provide additional information if data security plan isn't detailed.

59. If a grantee provides assistance to a client that has already been assisted by a different grantee will the assist be considered a disallowed cost?

No, however the total MEAP benefits received by the household should not exceed the \$3,000 MEAP cap.

60. The eligibility references clients that are $\leq 150\%$ FPL yet the Interim Report requirements ask to report the number of households receiving assistance that are $> 150\%$ FPL. Are exceptions going to be allowed for clients in special circumstances that exceed the 150% FPL? If so, what is the process and what documentation is required?

Exceptions may be made based on extenuating circumstances including households that have medically fragile members. Information will be provided in the MEAP Policy Manual.

61. What is MAE's expectation on the amount available for "intake" expenses?

A reasonable amount should be available for "intake" expenses.

62. What is MAE's expectation on the amount available for "self-sufficiency"?

A reasonable amount should be allocated for self-sufficiency services.

63. Is there a way to avoid the administrative burden of rounding to 6 decimal places? (page 48)

Only the indirect cost RATE needs to be rounded to 6 decimal places. Any budget line item should be rounded to the nearest whole dollar to ensure that the budget categories can be totaled accurately using a calculator.

64. Is the 4% cap on pensions going to be enforced? Or will the 35% fringe benefit cap be allowable?

Yes, the 4% cap on pensions will continue to be enforced as previously described in the MEAP Grant Expenditure Guidelines on page 1. The cap on fringe benefits is 35% for allowable actual expenses. However, if an employee's pension benefit is 10% and their actual fringe benefit total is still under 35%, the pension benefit would not be allowed to exceed the 4% cap. This will be explained more in the MEAP Grant Manual.

65. Section II-S discusses needing approval for Media Releases, in the past we have sent postcards and letters to customers for program information. Will this information need approval prior to sharing?

Media Releases must be approved by MAE. Postcards and letters sent to customers with program information do not require pre-approval but may be requested for monitoring purposes.

66. Section II-V states each grantee shall include this certification in contracts. Exactly what information should we be including with our partners/agreements?

Please consult with your organization's legal office.

67. Section III-D (3) discusses the 2017 guidelines and MEAP Policy Manual. At what time will we have access to this information and should we anticipate additional changes beyond the updated RFP?

The MEAP Policy Manual will be distributed to prospective grantees before grant agreements are signed.

68. Section III-D (8) discusses an 8-day timeframe to allow customers to submit any pending documentation. In past years we developed a follow up process to allow up to 30 days for clients to provide any remaining verification documentation. Would we have the ability to continue with this practice or will the 8-day timeframe be considered the maximum allowed?

Grantee cannot allow 30 days to return verifications in order to meet the 10 day standard of promptness, which is required for all MEAP applications.

69. Section IV-B (3) (viii) footnote states to report the FPL of the first assist if more than one assist is provided. Attachment A (D) (7) discusses needing to re-verify eligibility in the event of a

household change or change of address. When we are notified of such a change what is the preferred method to satisfying each of the stated requirements?

A household's eligibility should be re-verified if there is a change in the household composition; the FPL should be documented in the client file. In regards to reporting, the grantee should report the first FPL recorded for the household during the grant term.

70. Section IV-B (4) (d) (iii) discusses Benefit Targeting Index and High Burden Households. What would be the best way to define these metrics?

Burden Reduction Targeting Index –Measures whether high energy burden households have a larger share of their energy bill paid with LIHEAP than average households.

The level of energy burden is ([Annual main heating fuel bill + annual electricity bill]/gross annual income). High, moderate, and low energy burden households will be determined by sorting all assisted households by energy burden. The top 25% of households will be placed in the high energy burden category, the middle 50% of households will be placed in the moderate energy burden category, and the bottom 25% of households will be placed in the low energy burden category. Grantees are reporting information necessary for MAE and DHHS to calculate the Energy Burden and Burden Reduction Targeting Index.

71. (2016 Household Eligibility Verification Guidelines, pg. 12) In past years we utilized a separate document included in each client file to support the household income. Does the household FPL have to be listed somewhere on the application or will the supporting documentation meet this requirement?

Supporting documentation meets this requirements.

72. Are non-regulated utility companies subject to the 2% late fee rule? Does this mean agencies are allowed to use MPSC dollars to pay these amounts? Or does it mean customers' late fees can go over 2%? Can an agency still use the 2% late fee rule if late fees are not clearly identified?

MEAP funds can be used to cover late fees associated with non-regulated utilities. Deliverable fuels – any fees on the invoice must clearly identify what they are for. Administrative fees (fees for processing paperwork for a MEAP recipient) are not allowed and should be reported to MAE.

73. What should happen at the end of the 10-day Standard of Promptness? Specifically, should the application be marked approved and a notification letter go out to the customer, or should it be paid?

Within 10 days from the date the client submitted the MEAP application, the client must be informed of approval or denial. If approved, the communication must indicate the benefit amount and if denied, a reason for denial must be included. Communication must contain paperwork informing clients of their right to Request a fair hearing/review.

74. Sometimes Direct Assistance payments are refunded for a variety of reasons. How are those refunds to be handled if they cross grant years?

Prior year's Direct Assistance payment refunds should be returned to the State of Michigan. Grantees will be provided with the address and directions in the MEAP Policy Manual.

75. Paragraph 4 of Section V-G Personnel requests that selected applicants provide a list of personnel who have signed the agency's confidentiality/security standards agreement. Should grant applicants include this list of personnel with the grant proposal or after selection for the grant?

List of personnel who have signed the agency's confidentiality/security standards agreement should be provided with the signed grant agreement.

76. What if a household has a SER decision notice that states DHHS will pay \$850 if the client pays \$1000- can a MEAP grantee pay the \$1000 co-pay?

If a MEAP grantee and DHHS are working together, DHHS will issue the SER payment once the MEAP agency has confirmed the amount of they are paying on behalf of the household. However if the client first receives MEAP assistance and subsequently applies for energy assistance through SER, the application would be denied by DHHS.

77. If a household falls off of an affordable payment plan (LSP, CARE, MAP) after Oct 1 can we then assist with MEAP provided we take into account the amount of assistance already received so as to not exceed the cap? What if they have been terminated from the program prior to the MEAP season (prior to Oct 1)?

An Exception request must be sent to the Grant Administrator if the household fell off the APP during the current grant term/ fiscal year (after October 1st). If the household was terminated from the APP before the current grant term (before October 1st) then the MEAP agency can assist the household.

78. Please explain item #21 on page 25.

MEAP grantees should attempt to determine if the household received SER during the current grant term/fiscal year by asking the household during intake, looking in CE PASS, ORA, or by confirming with the provider.

79. Will there be a new MAE database system- especially needed for tracking the \$3,000 cap?

Yes. Information regarding the MAE database system will be provided to grantees.

80. If a client is on an affordable payment plan for heating fuel can they still receive MEAP assistance for electric?

Yes.

81. 10-day Standard of Promptness is 10 business days or calendar days?

Business days.

82. Regarding the LIHEAP Performance Metric, prevention of energy loss is a past due notice or shut-off noticed?

Both. All MEAP recipients must fall within "Prevention of Loss of Home Energy Service" or "Restoration of Home Energy Service."

83. Assurance 16 should be recorded in the EAP section of the budget?

Yes.