



STATE OF MARYLAND

Community Health Resources Commission

45 Calvert Street, Room 336 • Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Larry Hogan, Governor – Boyd Rutherford, Lt. Governor
Edward J. Kasemeyer, Chair – Mark Luckner, Executive Director

November 18, 2021 - UPDATE

Maryland Community Health Resources Commission Pathways to Health Equity, Frequently Asked Questions

1. Is there a limit to the number of applications that can be submitted by a single entity?

No, there is no limit to the number of applications submitted by a single entity; however, applicants should be very clear about the differences between each proposal submitted.

2. Does it matter if an applicant is a current and/or former grantee? Does that weigh in their favor?

Former/current grantees of the CHRC are welcome to submit proposals if they meet the eligibility requirements stated in the Pathways Call for Proposals.

3. Are current grantees eligible to submit new grant applications?

Yes, current grantees are welcome to apply for this grant funding if their current project is under implementation and meeting reporting requirements and they meet the eligibility requirements stated in the Pathways Call for Proposals. However, applicants are advised that the proposal must be wholly separate and distinct from the current CHRC grant under implementation.

4. May out-of-state entities submit grant applications.

Out-of-state lead or coordinating organizations are permitted to submit grant applications if the entity provides services primarily to Maryland residents from service sites located within the State, and the organization meets all of the eligibility requirements defined in the Call for Proposals (e.g., a non-profit hospital or non-profit community-based provider). The application must meet the geographic definition in the Call for Proposals, and clearly serve Maryland residents in the identified zip codes.

5. How would the Commission respond to two independent applications from sources offering complementary services in the same geographic area?

Applicants offering complementary services in the same geographic area should consider a collaboration before submitting grant applications.

6. Can there be multiple applicants from a zip code, jurisdictional boundary and/or geographic area?

The Commission will consider multiple applications from a single zip code, jurisdictional boundary and/or defined geographic area that meets the requirements stated in the Call for Proposals. However, applicants are encouraged to explore project partnerships with other

eligible entities within the same area(s) to avoid duplication of services and efforts to address the broader health and social needs of the target population.

7. How many project years can a grant submission cover?

The Pathways Program is a two-year grant funding opportunity. Applicants should submit proposals that reflect a two-year project period and budget request.

8. Can a single program address more than one health disparity?

The full grant application should select and clearly state at least **one** specific health disparity for intervention, but applicants are free to select more than one disparity.

If more than one health disparity is being considered, the project proposal should clearly differentiate the strategies and interventions to be used in addressing each health disparity selected.

9. Should individual projects address all strategic goals/priorities detailed in the Call for Proposals?

Applicants are strongly encouraged to address all strategic goals of the Maryland Health Equity Resource Act in their grant proposals. These strategic goals will apply to all proposals that are submitted.

10. How many Pathways grants will be awarded? Do you have a preliminary estimate of the amount for each award?

The CHRC has a potential total of approximately \$13 million to award in new grant funding to support the two-year Pathways projects. Applications must include a budget proposal that covers the full two-year grant, with expenditures calculated annually using the budget form provided by the CHRC.

Regarding an estimate of the projected grant award amounts, the Pathways RFP is modeled after the prior Health Enterprise Zone (HEZ) Initiative (2013-2017), which involved a total of five grantees awarded over a four-year period. The prior HEZ budget awards ranged from \$675,000 to \$1 million per year (times four years). Based on this prior experience, we anticipate that grants awarded under the Pathways RFP will range from approximately \$500,000 to \$1 million or more per year (over a two-year period).

11. Since the Pathways grants are awarded for two years, is it necessary to re-apply for funding for the second year of the grant?

Grantees do not need to re-apply during the two-year project period under the Pathways Call for Proposals. However, the program needs to demonstrate performance and progress toward meeting the overall strategic goals of the project, as reflected in regular grantee project status reports that are submitted and reviewed by the CHRC. Grantees that do not comply with these requirements (e.g., not submitting complete reports when due) or do not meet agreed project performance goals may be subject to the withholding of grant funds during the grant period and may be subject to discontinuation or termination of the grant.

NOTE: Pathways grantees will need to apply for a Health Equity Resource Community (HERC) designation and grant funding under a future, separate HERC Call for Proposals.

12. Does the full Year One budget need to be expended before the end of FY 2022 (i.e., June 30, 2022)?

No. CHRC funds are special funds and do not need to be expended before the end of the fiscal year (June 30, 2022).

13. How will procurement roll out? Once the funds are awarded and start dates are determined, how much lead-time will be required?

Once the CHRC makes its grant awards at the February 2022 Commission meeting, grantees are notified that they need to: (1) sign the grant agreement; (2) review and approve performance metrics and grant reporting schedule; and (3) if requested by the Commission, provide an updated line item budget for the grant award amount. Grantees are expected to launch project implementation within the first 60-90 days of the grant award.

14. Is the requirement to submit a financial audit mandatory?

Yes, submission of the most current financial audit for the lead or coordinating organization is mandatory. The CHRC uses the financial information of the applicants to evaluate the long-term financial solvency of potential grantees and to ensure that limited public grant funding is invested in financially sustainable organizations. If the audit is determined to be “aged,” CHRC staff will contact the applicant to request an updated financial audit. If the applicant does not have a current financial audit available, the CHRC will also accept other financial information such as tax returns or a profit and loss statement. However, submission of tax returns or a profit and loss statement in lieu of a formal, independent financial audit will result in the applicant being flagged as high risk.

15. Are local health departments required to submit the financial audit?

No, this requirement does not apply to local health departments.

16. Are grant funds able to support the costs of addressing social determinants of health (e.g., transportation)?

Yes, the CHRC aims to support Pathways projects that address the identified social determinants of health needs of the proposed geographic area/target population. The proposal should be **very clear** on what SDOH will be addressed, how grant funds will be used to address these SDOH, what health disparities and health outcomes will be improved by addressing these SDOH, and how the impact on the targeted health disparities and health outcomes will be measured. Proposals that utilize a holistic approach to address social determinant of health needs such as community health workers, patient navigators, multisectoral partnerships, and community-based participatory approaches are reviewed favorably by the Commission. Interventions that propose collaborations with multiple entities and community-based partnerships that create social, political, or economic support systems to address the social determinants of health for the proposed geographic area/target population are strongly encouraged.

17. Is the budget a scored criteria in review of the applications?

The proposals will be reviewed based on the selection criteria cited in Section 9 of the Call for Proposals. The budget request should be commensurate with the scope and intended impact of the proposed Pathways project.

18. In light of prior legislation approved by the General Assembly, the CHRC is required by the State to honor certain rates for indirect costs on certain State-funded grants and contracts with nonprofit organizations, will the Commission accept rates for indirect costs that exceed 10%?

Yes, in limited circumstances. In accordance with MD Code Ann., State Finance and Procurement § 2-208, the CHRC will allow for reimbursement of indirect costs to nonprofit organizations in an amount equal to the rate the nonprofit organization has negotiated and received for indirect costs under a direct federal award, or from a nonfederal entity based on the cost principles in Subpart E of OMB Uniform Guidance.

19. What are permissible expenses incurred as part of indirect costs?

Indirect costs include items that are associated with running the organization as a whole and benefit more than one project/program. Allowable indirect costs include items such as administrative staff salaries, rent, utilities, office supplies, insurance, etc. No more than 10% of the total budget can be requested for indirect costs.

20. What is not allowable under indirect costs?

Noncash transactions such as depreciation are not allowable indirect costs.

21. Payroll fringe costs are limited to 25%. Will fringe costs exceeding 25% be considered?

The Commission advises that the fringe rate be calculated at no more than 25%. If the grantee requests more than 25%, the applicant will be required to provide a compelling rationale for exceeding this amount. The Commission is willing to consider fringe requests above 25% on a case-by-case basis.

22. Are the Grant Application Cover Sheet and Contractual Obligations forms available as a template?

Templates for the Grant Application Cover Sheet and the Contractual Obligations are available on the CHRC website at:

<https://health.maryland.gov/mchrc/Pages/notices.aspx>

23. What is the overall page limit for the proposals?

Applicants are advised to limit the project proposal section of their application (as defined in Section 8 of the Call for Proposals) to **25 pages** in length.

24. Is there a preferred database to be used in discussing the metrics?

No. The CHRC suggests starting with the public use health and SDOH data files prepared by the Chesapeake Regional Information System for our Patients (CRISP). Applicants may wish to consult other data sources from the State (e.g., State Health Insurance Program) and are free to propose other data sources that provide the information necessary to identify and characterize the health and social needs of the intended target population as long as these sources are clearly described in the application.

The Commission will also seek a level of specificity in the project design sufficient to justify the selection of the data measures to be used to demonstrate the impact of project activities and interventions in achieving the strategic goals of the Resource Act. Applicants should be very specific in what data will be used to measure the key project outcomes prior

to initiating the project, and how the proposed process and outcome measures collected during the project will demonstrate the impact of activities and interventions when compared to baseline data. The project work plan and logic model must be concise and should demonstrate that the applicant has the capacity to access and collect the relevant data necessary to evaluate and report progress in terms of specific measures, baselines, etc.

25. Can grantees hire a third-party evaluation company/consultant to perform program evaluation?

Yes. Notwithstanding the requirement stated in the Call for Proposals to hire (or formulate a plan to hire) a full-time employee or contractor, the applicant may contract with a Historically Black College or University (HBCU) in Maryland to provide these evaluation services.

26. Is there an implicit expectation that grantees will publish the impact and/or outcome of their project in peer-reviewed journals?

No, but the Commission encourages grantees to disseminate their results to a wider audience. Programs that present sound evaluation plans, the capacity to collect data, and document project impact/ROI, etc. will be favorably reviewed.

27. Is CRISP able to perform statistical analyses of data collected by individual grantees during or at conclusion of the Pathways grant?

CRISP is unable to provide statistical analysis services to individual Pathways grantees during or at conclusion of the program. As noted below under Question 31, the CHRC may elect to use an external evaluator for the Pathways Program, but this would be for statistical analysis of data collected and aggregated from across Pathways projects based on common data variables provided by each project over the two year Pathways grant period.

28. Are applicants permitted to request that CRISP provide data on specific diseases not currently captured in the public use health data files posted on the CHRC website?

CHRC staff and CRISP will address all questions related to the availability of data for specific diseases not represented in the public use health data files. When other potential data sources for a specific disease are known to CRISP/CHRC staff, this information will be offered to applicants. CRISP is not in a position to provide additional analysis for applicants beyond what is provided in the public use health data files. Applicants are welcome to use data from other verifiable sources including qualitative data to supplement their application and show health disparities.

29. Is CRISP able to provide targeted data for residents from racial and ethnic sub-populations within a geographic area who may not seek care at hospitals or from community health care providers and may not be represented or discernable from the public use health and/or SDOH data files?

CHRC recommends that applicants start their search at the zip code level, using the health and SDOH data files provide by CRISP to the extent possible to identify the needs of the proposed target subpopulations, with the understanding that there are inherent limitations to the publicly available source data. For this reason, the CHRC strongly encourages applicants to seek out **partnerships** and **collaborate** with public/private non-profit community-based organizations that have a strong presence and history of trusted service

in these communities, such as advocacy groups, faith-based organizations, agencies that provide refugee and other resettlement services, safety net providers and local government agencies that help to address the needs of these communities. These groups, organizations and agencies may have access to supplemental quantitative and qualitative data that helps to better identify the specific needs of the vulnerable, hard-to-reach communities you seek to serve.

30. Are letters of support required or desired in addition to the letters of commitment or MOUs with partners and collaborators?

A letter of support from parties to an executed MOU or letter of commitment is not required per se. When a lead or coordinating organization submits an application on behalf of a coalition of community partners, the CHRC **strongly encourages** the lead applicant to define a clear governance or other organizational structure that ensures a clear line of accountability between the lead or coordinating organization and each community partner providing grant funded services. In addition, applications that demonstrate projects deeply rooted in community-based solutions will be favorably reviewed by the CHRC, so local support letters, while not required, are encouraged.

The CHRC does require that MOUs between the lead or coordinating organization and the coalition partners and/or partner organizations providing direct services or organizational support under the Pathways project be executed prior to and included with submission of the proposal. A letter of commitment would be viewed as a less acceptable alternative to MOUs as these are generally considered to be a less binding agreement between parties.

31. Can one organization serve as the lead for multiple Pathways proposals?

If a lead or coordinating organization decides to pursue this approach, it would need to clearly demonstrate the capacity and capability to oversee more than one Pathways project and would need to clearly differentiate the projects from each other in terms of scope and type of services, target population and geographic service area to avoid duplication of effort and the co-mingling of grant funding. In addition, **each** project proposal would need to meet all requirements set forth in the Call for Proposals.

32. How are matching private funds or other sources scored?

CHRC review of other sources of project funding is not a discrete selection criteria listed under Section 9 of the Call for Proposals and would not be directly scored. However, the Call for Proposals does state under Section 8.2.7, that the applicant should describe feasible strategies for long-term sustainability that include acquisition of resources beyond State funding, including generating fee-for-service revenue or in-kind contributions from local community partners and stakeholders as part of a strategic resource mix. Therefore, the inclusion and review of a sustainability plan would fall under the “Other Selection Criteria” category 9.3 (B), when the CHRC reviews proposals for quality and completeness, and would be a potential indicator of self-sustainability as a future HERC. Proposals that present evidence of other funding to support self-sustainability as a future HERC will be viewed more favorably by the Commission.

The use of matching funds should be clearly described and differentiated from CHRC grant funding in the proposed project budget. **NOTE:** A specific amount or percentage of matching public/private funding is not required.

33. How will internal evaluators hired by grantees work with the CHRC’s external evaluator to ensure avoiding duplication?

The responsibilities of an internal evaluator hired or contracted by each Pathways project shall include monitoring the operation, effectiveness, and impact of each project, and “coordinating” with the Commission to obtain the data, statistics, and analysis necessary for the Commission to comply with reporting requirements to the Governor and General Assembly. CHRC staff will work closely with the internal evaluators, and we believe this coordination will obviate duplication of effort unless there are questions about the data sets submitted to the Commission. If the CHRC elects to use an external evaluator for the Pathways Program, this would be for statistical analysis of data collected and aggregated from across Pathways projects based on common data variables provided by each project over the two year Pathways grant period.

34. If there are multiple partner organizations coordinating together to work on the proposed project, should we list all participating organizations?

Yes. CHRC recommends that the lead or coordinating organization identify **all** partners that intent to provide any grant funded services and/or provide substantive support to the project during planning and implementation. The proposal should present a clear accountability or management plan that delineates the role and responsibilities of each project partner/service provider and how the lead or coordinating organization will oversee these services and activities. Applicants should also describe how grant funds will be used in relation to services provided by each partner organization. This plan should describe which outcomes will be impacted by the activities of each partner.

35. If we aren’t one of the five types of organizations eligible to apply for a Pathways grant, how can we address the strategic goals and be a competitive applicant for this grant?

As noted in the RFP, the Resource Act specifies the types of organizations eligible to apply for and receive a Pathways Program grant. The **lead** applicant must be a nonprofit community-based organization; nonprofit hospital; institution of higher education; Federally Qualified Health Centers; or a local government agency (e.g., local health department). However, to effectively address the strategic goals of the Act and achieve meaningful and measurable impact, a collaborative, collective community-wide approach involving a coalition of health care and community support service providers, other community-based organizations (e.g., non-profit social service agencies, faith-based institutions, charities, schools, local businesses), municipal and local government entities, and members of the proposed geographic area is necessary. For this reason, the CHRC **strongly encourages** each lead applicant to adopt a collective impact approach, involving a broad coalition of community partner organizations and community members when developing their Pathways project plan.

36. If the project proposal involves provision of grant services through a partner organization, is a MOU with the partner organization required with submission of the application?

Yes. As noted above, the CHRC does require that MOUs between the lead or coordinating organization and the coalition partners and/or partner organizations providing direct services or organizational support under the Pathways project be executed prior to and included with submission of the full grant application.

The project proposal will need to clearly define the role(s) and responsibilities of partner organizations in providing grant funded services. The scope and type of services, and the formal nature of the relationship between the lead or coordinating applicant and partner organization(s) will determine whether a Letter of Collaboration or MOU (or other legal agreement) is appropriate. However, a letter of commitment would be viewed as a less acceptable alternative to MOUs as these are generally considered to be a less binding agreement between parties.

37. How quickly will applicants be notified if they will be invited to present their grant proposal?

CHRC staff will notify applicants of their eligibility to present their grant proposal in mid-January 2022.

38. Are behavioral health service providers eligible to submit an application?

Yes, if the applicant is a non-profit community-based organization.

39. Is the CHRC able to provide contact information for the HBCUs to explore options for contracting an evaluator?

When the CHRC has access to publicly available contact information for these institutions this will be provided on request.

Potential Pathways applicants and partners are encouraged to make best use of the community engagement forums scheduled over the next several weeks to connect with other interested entities and meet individuals from other local community organizations.

40. Are incentives paid directly to individuals from the target community permitted when these are used to address SDOH and/or facilitate access to health and social services?

Yes, non-tax based incentives are permitted when used for community-based activities or programs that help address health disparities and social determinant of health needs. Examples include food pantry vouchers, passes to facilities that support increased physical activity and fitness, transportation access, etc. However, cash payment incentives should be avoided.

41. Permissible grant expenses may include:

- a) Salaries and employment benefits for project staff;
- b) Subcontracting and consultant fees;
- c) Data collection and analysis;
- d) Project-related travel, conference calls, and meetings;
- e) Office supplies, expenses, and other indirect costs as approved by the Commission; and

- f) A limited amount of essential equipment and minor infrastructure improvements required by the project.

Funds from operating grants awarded under this subtitle may not be used for:

- a) Major equipment or construction projects;
- b) Support of clinical trials;
- c) Medical devices or drugs that have not received approval from the appropriate federal agency; or
- d) Lobbying or political activity.

42. Are capital expenditures a permissible use of grant funds under the Pathways Call for Proposals?

The Commission will consider reasonable capital expenditures on a case-by case basis when requested to support interventions proposed by the applicant to address and demonstrate progress toward achieving the strategic goals of the Resource Act. However, large-scale construction projects (as determined by the type and budget amount proposed) will not be considered under the Pathway Program. As noted in the Call for Proposals, grant funds may also be expended for a limited amount of essential equipment and minor infrastructure improvements required by the project. In each case, the applicants will need to clearly demonstrate how the proposed use of grant funding relates to the strategic goals of the Act. Examples of reasonable expenditures include purchasing medical or dental equipment needed to improve or expand the provision of direct services.

43. Can Pathways grant funds be used for home modifications?

As stated under Question 44, the Commission will consider reasonable expenditures for home modifications (i.e., capital expenditures) on a case-by case basis when requested to support the interventions proposed by the applicant to address and demonstrate progress toward achieving the strategic goals of the Resource Act.

44. Would an entity be precluded from applying to the HERC grant if it did not apply to the Pathways to Health Equity grant?

Entities that do not apply for a Pathways to Equity grant will not be precluded from applying for designation as a HERC when the HERC RFP is issued.

45. What advice do you have for smaller organizations to proactively find partner organizations (and the right people to speak with within the partner organizations) ahead of the regional meetings?

We encourage interested organizations, community groups and community members to register for and attend one of the regional in-person or virtual Pathways public forums held in October and November as these events offer opportunities for attendees to meet representatives from local health departments, municipal and local government agencies, hospitals, FQHCs, and community-based health providers to explore partnership opportunities for the Pathways project. Also, parties interested in serving as the lead or coordinating Pathways applicant are encouraged to seek out and engage smaller community organizations and community partners which could include non-profit social

service agencies, faith-based institutions, charities, schools, and local businesses with demonstrated experience working in the target population and communities. In hosting these public forums the CHRC and HERC Advisory Committee are allowing individuals to provide their contact information and are making this information available on the CHRC website after the events. However, to avoid potential conflicts of interest, the CHRC and HERC Advisory Committee are not able to facilitate connections between potential applicants and partner organizations.

46. What is the anticipated start date of the Pathways award and what are the dates of the two-year grant period?

The two-year Pathways grant period is expected to begin in March 2022, once grant agreements are fully executed. The anticipated Pathways grant end date will be February 2024. It is expected that all Pathways programs will be fully implemented and operational within 60-90 days of the grant agreement date.

47. Are expenses incurred prior to the execution of the grant agreement eligible for reimbursement under the grant?

Expenses incurred by Pathways applicants prior to full execution of the grant agreement are not eligible for reimbursement under the Pathways grant budget.

48. If my organization is planning on filing or has recently filed for non-profit status, are we eligible to apply?

No, the lead applicant must provide a copy of their IRS determination letter indicating 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status with their application.

49. Please clarify the process and requirements for submitting the financial audit, MOU, and full grant application.

The financial audit and eligibility documentation need to be submitted electronically to mdh.chrc@maryland.gov, no later than **12:00 noon on December 7, 2021**. The CHRC requests that the electronic file containing all financial audit and disclosure documentation be submitted as part of the full grant application.

For submission of the **full grant application**:

- a) the full grant application, appendices, and attachments, must be submitted electronically no later than **12:00 noon on December 7, 2021**, to mdh.chrc@maryland.gov.
- b) CHRC requests that the Executive Summary and Project Proposal sections of the application be submitted in MS Word (Word 2010 or later preferred) **and** Adobe Acrobat .pdf formats.
- c) **one hard copy original** of the entire full grant application, clip bound and stamped "ORIGINAL" on the face page must also be submitted. If the documents are submitted by USPS, the package must be post-marked no later than **December 7, 2021**. If UPS, FEDEX or other express delivery service is used, the shipping documentation must indicate that the "package" was picked up for delivery by the courier no later than COB on **December 7, 2021**.

- d) all applicants will receive confirmation that their application has been received; likewise, applicants will be notified of any omissions or other issues with the application.

50. The Project Budget and Budget Justification are listed as components of the Project Proposal, are these included in the 25-page Proposal limit?

The Project Budget and Budget Justification are listed as a topic heading for the Project Proposal. Under this heading of the Project Proposal section, the applicant can provide a **brief** overview of their requested budget with justification. The **full project budget, budget narrative and budget justification** referenced under this heading are to be provided separately as appendices to the full proposal (see Section 13, page 32 of the Call for Proposals).

51. The two page Executive Summary is listed as a heading/section of the Project Proposal, is this included in the 25-page Proposal limit?

The full two page Executive Summary can be included as a separate introductory section to the full grant proposal, with a **condensed** version of the Executive Summary provided under this heading of the Project Proposal to avoid being counted toward the 25-page limit of the Project Proposal section.

52. If a zip code identified by the applicant using the public use health and/or SDOH files falls short of the minimum population requirement of 5,000 residents by a small margin (e.g., 50-100 residents) would this prevent the applicant from using this zip code as the basis for their Pathways application?

No. If the applicant has access to more recent population statistics or another verifiable data source to demonstrate that the target zip code exceeds the 5,000 resident threshold, this would be acceptable for the application.