Request for Proposal (RFP)

Focus Groups: Barriers to Participation in the Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP)
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Purpose of RFP
MaineHousing is seeking an experienced and qualified research and analysis firm to conduct a least 5 focus groups aimed at providing MaineHousing’s Energy and Housing Services Program staff with insight as to what barriers there are to applying for Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) benefits.

The focus group findings will provide specific information and insight as to:

1. What barriers do those who may be eligible for the program and would like to apply for HEAP benefits face that either keeps or delays them from applying for the benefits and why; and,

2. What barriers do those who have applied for HEAP benefits face that either keeps or delays them from completing the application and why.

Focus group participants will include HEAP clients, potential HEAP clients, and program administrators from the local Community Action Agencies (CAA).

The focus group findings will be used to make adjustments in the day-to-day operations of HEAP program application activities that will alleviate or remove barriers.

About MaineHousing

MaineHousing is an independent quasi-state agency that also is one of the top mortgage and affordable housing development lenders in the state. The authority is a $1.8 billion financial institution with a staff of 160+ whose mission is to assist Maine people in obtaining and maintaining quality affordable housing and services suitable to their housing needs.

On an annual basis the agency assists more than 90,000 Maine households and invests more than $300 million in Maine’s economy, most of it from the sale of tax-exempt revenue bonds, private capital generated by the low income housing tax credit, and federal funds.

MaineHousing provides financing and administers programs to: assist first-time homebuyers; to develop affordable rental housing; to create housing for people with special needs; to provide housing for people who are homeless; to provide low income households with rental assistance and heating assistance; and to repair or weatherize homes of low-income homeowners.

The Communications and Planning Department (CPD) provides communication, marketing, research and analysis, professional development and strategic planning support to all MaineHousing program and administrative departments. Additionally, CPD works with external partners, customers, interested parties, and the public by providing policy analysis, housing needs assessments, and market analysis. The funding source for this project is Federal LIHEAP Administrative funding.
Selection Process
Each firm will be evaluated using the following criteria with percent weights:

- The level of training and qualifications of the staff who will be developing and leading the focus group discussions - 20%
- The firm’s experience developing, recruiting and leading focus group research as demonstrated in the three examples described below under Firm/Organization Capabilities 25%
- Responsiveness to the proposed scope of work and ability to meet MaineHousing’s timeline - 30%
- Cost of proposed project - 25%

Contract Duration
8 weeks.

Information Contact
All questions and inquiries relating to this RFP must be submitted to MaineHousing by e-mail and include the name of the questioner and his/her telephone number, fax number and/or e-mail address. The MaineHousing contact for all questions about the RFP is:

Name: Richard Taylor
Title: Research Analyst
Address: MaineHousing, 353 Water Street, Augusta, ME 04330-4633
Telephone: 207-624-4644
Fax: 207-624-0856
E-mail: rtaylor@mainehousing.org

Submission Timeline

March 16, 2020 All questions regarding the RFP are due no later than 5:00 PM EST and should be e-mailed to rtaylor@mainehousing.org

March 23, 2020 All questions and answers regarding this RFP will be posted on the MaineHousing website no later than 5:00 PM EST.

April 13, 2020 Proposals are due to MaineHousing, rtaylor@mainehousing.org by 5:00 PM EST.

Submissions
If your organization is interested in working with MaineHousing, please provide the following:

- General firm information
  - Firm name and contact information (address, phone, email)
  - Name of principal(s) of the firm/organization
  - Name, telephone number and email address of a representative of the firm/organization authorized to discuss this proposal
Equal employment opportunity and affirmative action policy  
Current documentation regarding firm’s liability insurance

**Firm/Organization Capabilities**
- Resume and work samples from person specifically identified in your agency to manage the account, as well as contact information.
- Resume(s) of key staff who will work with MaineHousing
- Description of your capacity to perform the work.
- Specific examples (at least three) demonstrating the firm’s experience using modern quantitative and qualitative social science survey methods.

**Scope of Work Proposal**
A proposal that outlines the scope of work and a schedule for its accomplishment to include:

- The location, number and demographic make-up of a minimum of 5 focus groups. One focus group will include Community Action Agency program application specialists; the client focus groups should be regionally located or representative.
- How focus group participants composed of HEAP clients, potential HEAP clients will be recruited, including any incentives that will be offered for participation.
- Logistics for holding the focus groups including meeting sites, staffing, recording of discussion.
- The methodology to be used to conduct or run the focus groups. For example: Will an agenda be provided? How will a setting conducive to fruitful discussion be created? How will you start, continue, and end? What strategy will be used to motivate participants to provide substantive comments? What will be the duration of the discussion and why? Other details.
- A draft report for review by MaineHousing and a Final Report on the findings of the focus groups.
- Timelines and Schedules: A timeline and schedule of events and work products. MaineHousing is requesting that the timeline reflect a deadline of June 15, 2020 for producing the report.

The successful vendor will work with MaineHousing to develop a thorough understanding of what are already perceived barriers, why this is happening, and how you will work with MaineHousing to identify focus group participants.

All supporting written materials/notes and findings and other relevant materials will be handed-over to MaineHousing.

**Your Relationship to MaineHousing**
- Identify any conflict of interest that may arise as a result of business activities or other ties of your firm, its associates, employees, or subcontractors, with MaineHousing, its lenders, and other industry-related partners by completing the Conflicts of Interest questionnaire attached as Attachment A of the RFP.
- Does your firm or any principal or affiliate of the firm, or anyone who will be paid for work on the contract have business ties, familial relationships, or other close
personal relationships with a current MaineHousing employee or commissioner or anyone who was a MaineHousing employee or commissioner within the past year?

If yes, describe.

- **Sample Work Products and References**
  - Up to three samples of work products, qualitative and quantitative research or focus group research.
  - Client list three references including government and nonprofit clients and contact information.

- **Availability Timeframe**
  Once a proposal has been accepted, MaineHousing will request an onsite or online meeting with the awardee to discuss the project to assist the awardee in developing a script to lead the focus groups. The meeting will take place within one week, preferable as soon as possible, of the award.

- **Fee Structures**
  Please provide a list of fees individually for each service including:
  
  - Planning for the focus groups and the methodology to be employed such as content development, questions, the recruitment of participants;
  - Holding the focus groups including the logistical costs such as meeting facilities, and incentives for focus group participation.
  - Rates for staff members assigned to the project
  - Preparing the results and producing a report based on those results

  Depending on the fee structure, MaineHousing may choose to increase or decrease the number of focus groups.

**Submission Due Date**
Completed Project is due to Richard Taylor at rtaylor@mainehousing.org June 15, 2020 at or before 5:00 PM EST.

**Total Funds Available**
MaineHousing has a reasonable budget for this project. Cost will be a scoring factor and the ability to deliver a quality and timely product will be weighed more favorably during scoring.

**Additional Terms and Conditions**
This RFP is subject to the following terms and conditions:

- MaineHousing expressly reserves the right to modify or withdraw this RFP at any time, whether before or after any responses have been submitted or received.
- MaineHousing reserves the right to adjust the timetable for this RFP as MaineHousing deems necessary.
• In the event the respondent selected does not enter into the required contract to deliver the services described in this RFP, MaineHousing reserves the right to reject the respondent and to offer a contract to another respondent.

• In no event will any obligations of any kind be enforceable against MaineHousing unless and until a written agreement is entered into.

• MaineHousing reserves the right to waive informalities and minor irregularities in proposals received.

• MaineHousing reserves the right to negotiate price or other factors included in any proposal submitted to MaineHousing. If MaineHousing is unable to negotiate a mutually satisfactory arrangement with the successful respondent under this RFP, MaineHousing may, in its sole discretion, negotiate with another respondent or cancel this RFP and not select any proposal or MaineHousing may select another proposal.

• Each respondent bears all costs and expenses of its response and there will be no reimbursement for any costs and expenses relating to the preparation of responses submitted or for any costs or expenses incurred during any negotiations.

• Information submitted in any proposal becomes public information, and is subject to disclosure in accordance with the Maine Freedom of Access Act, 1 M.R.S.A. Section 401 et seq. ("FOAA").

MaineHousing does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, national origin, ancestry, physical or mental disability, age, familial status or receipt of public assistance in the admission or access to or treatment in its programs and activities. In employment, MaineHousing does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, national origin, ancestry, age, physical or mental disability or genetic information. MaineHousing will provide appropriate communication auxiliary aids and services upon sufficient notice. MaineHousing will also provide this document in alternative formats upon sufficient notice. MaineHousing has designated the following person responsible for coordinating compliance with applicable federal and state nondiscrimination requirements and addressing grievances: Louise Patenaude, Maine State Housing Authority, 353 Water Street, Augusta, Maine 04330-4633, Telephone Number 1-800-452-4668 (voice in state only), (207) 626-4600 (voice) or Maine Relay 711.