Cash Assistance Overview

Overview:

Cash assistance, sometimes called "cash transfers," offers a direct, reliable, unrestricted stream of financial support to a consistent cohort of participants for a set period of time.

The goal of cash assistance is to promote health and well-being among participants and their families. It also seeks to honor participant autonomy and support conditions necessary for personal, family, and community-level upward economic mobility.

Funding for cash assistance through this RFP is for 60 months to include a one-year organizational pre-implementation preparation and planning period, engagement of recipients, a post-cash distribution transition period, and evaluation. MHM recommends consistent, regular cash disbursements to participants for a **period of 24-36 months.**

Available Support and Technical Assistance:

To support your organization in developing an impactful cash assistance initiative that aligns with your community and national best-practices, this grant will include resources and technical assistance such as the following:

- **Peer Learning Collaborative:** Regular online meetings to share insights and navigate challenges with fellow grantees moderated by a facilitator experienced in cash assistance implementation
- **Cash Administration Partners:** Connection to a trusted cash disbursement partner offering a secure cash administration platform with multilingual customer support
- **Benefits Preservation Toolkit:** Specialized tools including considerations and templates to support participants in making informed decisions related to protecting public resources
- **Training on CLIFF tool:** An interactive dashboard to support staff members in mapping out potential impacts of cash assistance or other increases in income on public benefits eligibility

Technical support will be available, but the specific types and frequency of technical support will continue to be refined during the initial planning year to align with grantee needs.

Program Components:

The figure below illustrates common components of a cash assistance program. This is included for guidance on high-level design considerations, not as a list of specific proposal or program requirements.

Partnership & Coordination	Recrutiment & Enrollment	Benefits Preservation	Cash Distribution	Engagement (optional)	Transition
• Identify cash distribution method and partners • Build application and data infrastrucure • Identify and train staff	• Develop application and support plan • Conduct outreach and recruitment • Deploy equitable and transparent selection process • Verify participant eligibility and contact information	• Analyze public assistance and benefits landscape (local, state, national) • Create participant education plan to safe-guard benefits • Implement benefits protection and loss mitigation support	• Administer regular cash transfers • Maintain participant contact information • Monitor receipt of cash • Offer support services (i.e. replacement or activation of debit cards)	• Co-plan and host participant events • Plan and offer peer support groups • Create storytelling opportunities	• Communicate final transfer dates • Identify and share community resources • Refine and implement sustainability plans

Required Components:

MHM will require that cash assistance programs implemented by grantees include the following. Grantees may use the technical assistance and support provided throughout the planning year to meet these requirements.

- **Cohort Selection**: Clearly defined eligibility, selection, and enrollment criteria
- **Implementation Structure:** Secure disbursement of a set amount of cash on a defined regular basis (e.g., monthly) for a set time (e.g., 24-36 months) to a consistent group of participants *who remain eligible the entire disbursement period*
- **Community Inclusion:** Feedback from potentially eligible participants on preferred cash distribution timing (e.g., beginning versus end of the month, etc.) and methods (e.g., pre-paid debit cards, digital wallet, bank account, etc.)
- **Disbursement Partners:** Careful assessment of cash disbursement partners to understand fees, logistics, requirements, and customer support options
- **Financial Agreements:** Attorney review of proposed disbursement structures and agreements
- **Benefits Preservation:** Comprehensive benefits/government assistance preservation education, counseling, and support plan
- **Monitoring**: Maintenance of participant contact information and mechanisms to ensure cash is received by intended participant

- **Attrition:** Process and criteria for determining discontinuation or pause of cash assistance, not tied to participation in program or service (e.g., unable to confirm intended recipient will receive the cash)
- **Participant Services:** A plan of resources to support the organization and participants with questions and challenges (e.g., lost debit cards, forgotten PINs, stolen funds, etc.)
- **Transition Support:** A plan to reduce setbacks and assist participants in preparing for the end of the disbursement period
- **Evaluation and Data**: Collaboration with external evaluation team to track outputs, outcomes, and other program metrics, including:
    - Dollar amount, frequency, methods, and number of recipients of cash assistance provided
    - Types and duration of government assistance / benefits preservation services and number of recipients
    - Aggregate participant spending data (not individual transactions)
    - Types of distribution assistance provided and number of recipients

Budget Guidance:

The following table provides examples of budgeted items and associated guidance for the Cash Assistance approach that may be helpful for developing a proposed annual budget in MHM's budget template. ***The information provided here is not exhaustive, and not all line items are required.***

Example Line Items	Description/Guidance
Recruitment & Enrollment	This may include marketing and advertising, outreach in conjunction with other programs or specifically for Cash Assistance. This may also include development of a secure online application process.
Cash Assistance/ Transfers	Applicants may propose a regular cash assistance/transfer time and amount to be distributed over a period of 24-36 months. For general budget guidance, an amount to consider is $6,000 per active participant per implementation year or a total of $12,000- $18,000 per participant over the grant period. **The amount requested should match the proposed number of participants and distribution schedule.**
Disbursement Administration	Cash distribution partners may charge set-up fees, debit-card fees, and/or customer support fees. If an administration partner has not yet been selected, **the recommendation is to budget approximately 3% of the total amount of cash proposed to distribute to participants.**
Benefits Counseling/Support	The recommendation is to **include a minimum of $5,000** for professional service fees in the planning year for attorney review fees and additional support in designing a government assistance/benefits preservation strategy.

Participant Engagement and Incentives	While ongoing participant engagement activities are optional, **community-informed planning and a post-cash assistance transition plan for participants is required.** To support these activities and sustainability, it is recommended to include support for focus groups, participant storytelling activities, participant events, and communication materials.
Data Management	If the applicant does not currently have a secure means of tracking participant contact information and program activities, **the project may require the purchase of a data system.**
Staffing	Applicant should propose a staffing model that aligns to the proposed number of participants and processes**. It is strongly recommended that at least one staff member be dedicated to benefits preservation and ongoing participant support.**

Sample Cash Assistance Specific Budget Line Items:

The following table provides additional information to support the development of the proposed annual budget for the five-year grant. ***While these samples may be used as guidance, they are not meant to be comprehensive or replicated within the application budget section.*** Please refer to the guidance in the application's budget to ensure full and accurate completion.

Sample Item	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Salaries & Wages/Fringe Benefits (enter position title):					
Cash Assistance Program Manager .5 FTE + Fringe	$45,000	$46,350	$47,740	$50,000	$51,000
Benefits Counselor and Support Specialist + Fringe	$30,000	$60,000	$61,800	$63,654	$31,827
Communications and Events Specialists .25 FTE + Fringe	$15,000	$15,450	$15,914	$16,391	$16,883
Program Expenses:					
Cash to Participants		$100,000	$300,000	$200,000	
Disbursement Administration		$3,000	$9,000	$6,000	
Benefits Preservation Material Review	$5,000	$5,000	$1,000	$1,000	
Participant Events	$3,000	$3,000	$3,000	$3,000	$3,000
Co-Planning Incentives	$5,000	$1,500	$1,500	$1,500	$1,500

Examples of Activities for Implementing Cash Assistance:

Partnership and Coordination:

- Invite potentially eligible participants to share preferred cash distribution timing and methods.
- Meet with potential cash distribution partners to understand fees, logistics, requirements, and customer support options.
- Contract with an attorney to review proposed disbursement structures and agreements.
- Conduct a comprehensive review of local, state, and federal public and private assistance and benefits with eligibility requirements that proposed participants may be receiving.
- Refine eligibility criteria and procure participant and application management system.
- Recruit, hire, and train staff to support cash assistance implementation.

Recruitment and Enrollment:

- Develop and pilot an application process and webpage.
- Distribute application and program information to participants in existing programs.
- Launch a bilingual, bicultural outreach campaign.
- Attend outreach events hosted by partner agencies to recruit participants.
- Develop and publish a clear and equitable attorney-reviewed process for participant selection.
- Verify participant identities and eligibility to prevent duplication and/or fraud.

Benefits Preservation:

- Establish agreements with local partner agencies and case managers to mitigate potential benefits loss, especially when the entities are known to be supportive and collaborative.
- Offer 1:1 benefits counseling with participants prior to cash disbursement to review potential impacts on eligibility for government assistance / benefits programs to support participants in making an informed decision prior to enrollment.
- Offer attorney-supported communications/letters outlining the program structure and unrestricted nature of the cash assistance.
- Provide 1:1 support and resources as requested throughout the program to assist participants in making informed decisions and preserving benefits.

Cash Distribution:

- Distribute debit cards to participants at benefits counseling appointments.
- Develop participant materials in English and Spanish with instructions on debit card activation.
- Walk participants through card activation, as needed.

- Complete wire transfer to debit card provider and load cards bi-monthly.
- Call or email participants every 2 months to ensure that they still have access to their debit card and cash assistance.

Participant Engagement and Sustainability Planning:

- Invite participants to tell their own stories through interviews, videos, and creative expressions.
- Invite participants to complete optional annual surveys to share their experiences and offer feedback.
- Recruit participant volunteers to co-plan an event for all participants to share experiences with peers.
- Co-plan a topic-specific event for participants based on shared experiences.

Transition from Cash Assistance:

- Create a curated list of community resources pertaining to the participants' circumstances.
- Create a series of communications to include final cash disbursement date reminders and resources for participants.
- Host a community resource fair prior to the participants' final cash disbursement.