

Inquiries

Michigan Energy Assistance Program Grant (Request for Proposals dated July 1, 2014)

Potential applicants are encouraged to carefully read the Request for Proposal (RFP) and the questions and answers below prior to submitting a proposal to ensure that all requirements of the grant can be met.

1. With the new two year grant program, will selected applicants be able to spend grant funds year around?

The anticipated Year 1 grant term will be October 1, 2014 through September 30, 2015, and the Year 2 grant term will be October 1, 2015 through September 30, 2016. Selected applicants will be able to spend grant funds within the respective grant terms, i.e., Year 1 grant funds can only be spent between October 1, 2014 and September 30, 2015. Grant funds remaining at the end of Year 1 must be returned to the State and cannot be rolled over into the Year 2 grant term.

2. Are matching funds required?

Matching funds are not required.

3. Many of the items listed under Section V-E of the RFP (Work Plan) are common for Year 1 and Year 2. For common items would it be acceptable to indicate for Year 2 “same as Year 1,” especially in view of the fact that the proposal is limited to only 60 pages.

Applicant must submit two separate detailed Work Plans, one for Year 1 and one for Year 2.

4. The “Program Metric” data requested in the Final Project Report would not be available to agencies, but would only be available through the utility companies. Will utility companies make this information available to the service agencies for reporting purposes?

It is anticipated that utility companies will work with selected applicants to make program metric information available.

5. Will local DHS offices evenly/equally refer clients to all Michigan Energy Assistance Program (MEAP) providers?

DHS has instructed staff to make referrals to 211 or to the MEAP provider(s) servicing their county.

6. Will local DHS offices actively encourage citizens to seek assistance from MEAP providers first, before receiving State Emergency Relief (SER) assistance?

A formal communication has not been issued to DHS clients directing them to seek out MEAP assistance prior to seeking SER assistance. DHS is required to process any application received, at which time DHS staff may recommend a MEAP provider given the self-sufficiency component offered through MEAP providers that is not available through DHS.

The goal of MEAP is for a household to work with one MEAP provider throughout the entire crisis season.

7. Will DHS add staff to ensure that MEAP providers can get timely answers to SER questions or to work on coordination of awards when that is in the client’s best interest for self-sufficiency?

DHS is not expecting to add staff. However, the anticipated release date for the Heat Energy Solutions Project (HESP) database is August 29, 2014, therefore, it can reasonably be expected that SER information will be available by the next crisis season. Agencies should use email as the primary source of contact with DHS staff as they already receive an overwhelming number of telephone calls each day.

8. Are letters of commitment required to document and confirm participation of sub-contractors or partners?

Letters of commitment are not required, but may be included if the applicant has received this type of documentation prior to submission of the applicant’s proposal. Applicants must provide a detailed explanation in the proposal regarding the services that will be provided by partners and/or sub-contractors, including whether the applicant has a pre-existing contractual relationship with the partnering organization/sub-contractor.

9. Is there a recommended amount that should be focused on self-sufficiency support? Does 10% seem reasonable? How important is the self-sufficiency concern?

Each applicant must determine the amount of self-sufficiency support that will be included in its proposed program. Proposed programs must include services that will enable participants to become or move toward becoming self-sufficient. Section 3(2) of the Michigan Energy Assistance Act (PA 615 of 2012) states: “Energy assistance must include services that will enable participants to become or move toward becoming self-sufficient, including assisting participants in paying their energy bills on time, assisting participants in budgeting for and contributing to their ability to provide for energy expenses, and assisting participants in utilizing energy services to optimize on energy efficiency.”

10. Can MEAP funds be used for weatherization programs that would help with a home’s energy efficiency?

Section 3(2) of the Michigan Energy Assistance Act (PA 615 of 2012) states: “Energy assistance must include services that will enable participants to become or move toward becoming self-sufficient, including assisting participants in paying their energy bills on time, assisting participants in budgeting for and contributing to their ability to provide for energy expenses, and assisting participants in utilizing energy services to optimize on energy efficiency.”

11. Is there a dollar limit or percentage cap on the amount of client education?

No caps have been imposed in the RFP; however the main focus should be on energy assistance program services that will help eligible low-income households meet home energy costs for their primary residence. Energy assistance programs can include services that will assist low-income households in utilizing energy services to optimize on energy efficiency.

12. Please reconsider disallowing pay for holidays, vacation and sick leave. With the additional eligibility requirements to determine eligibility, the backing out of holiday, vacation and sick leave appears to be an unnecessary administrative burden that does not contribute to the goals of the program.

State grant funds cannot be used to pay for hours that were not actually worked on the grant.

13. The RFP states that an applicant can spend no more than 8% on administrative expenses. Can applicants request an exception to this rule?

PA 615 of 2012 states: “Except as provided in this subsection, 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.”

Applicants must include a detailed explanation for any requested exception to the cap on administrative expenses.

14. Section V-E(1)(k) of the RFP states: “Provide the geographic area of the State that will be covered. Include counties that will be served, service locations and addresses within each county, staffing levels, hours of operation, and contact information.” Is this information required and how detailed must it be?

Applicants must provide all information requested in Section V-E of the RFP. Applicants should include the name of each county in which the applicant intends to serve low-income households; the name and address of each branch, unit, partner agency, etc. of the applicant within that county that will serve low-income households; the number of staff at each location that will provide intake and other MEAP related services for low-income households; the hours of operation, including the days of the week that the applicant/agency is open; and a telephone number for each location.

15. Can MEAP funds be used to pay for reconnection fees?

MEAP funds can be used to pay reconnection fees. Section G of the Household Eligibility Verification Guidelines sets forth services that are covered by MEAP.

16. Can a low-income household be assisted with an electric crisis whose home is not heated with electricity?

Yes, the intent of the grant is to provide energy assistance program services that will help eligible low-income households meet home energy costs for their primary residence through payment or partial payment of bills for one or more of the following: 1) electricity; 2) natural gas; 3) propane; 4) heating oil; or 5) any other deliverable fuel used to provide heat.

17. Can MEAP funds be used to pay a water bill when the household is heated with steam?

No, households that have received a water shut-off can be referred to DHS for SER assistance. Water, sewer and cooking gas are services covered by SER.

18. May a selected applicant start to prescreen/enroll clients prior to the October 1, 2014 expected start date if MEAP funds are not used to cover enrollment costs and energy assistance dollars are not distributed until the 2015 grant period has begun?

Selected applicants can prescreen/enroll clients in programs prior to October 1, 2014; however, expenses incurred prior to October 1, 2014 cannot be charged to the grant.

19. Are agencies required to implement the Application for Michigan Energy Assistance Program (MEAP Application) and the MEAP Client Intake Form attached to the RFP?

The MEAP Application is based on a State Emergency Relief application. The MEAP Application and MEAP Client Intake Form attached to the RFP are examples intended to assist applicants if they choose to design or develop their own application based on the specifics of their own program. Applicants should keep in mind that all components of the MEAP Client Intake Form must be included if applicants choose to develop their own application.

20. When submitting a proposal, are agencies required to include a copy of the MEAP Application and MEAP Client Intake Form that will be utilized during the intake process?

Yes. Section V-D(1)(d) of the RFP that states: “Provide a copy of the client intake form utilized by selected applicant **and any other documentation that will be utilized during the intake process.**”

21. Are agencies required to develop an application and client intake form that mirror the MEAP Application and MEAP Client Intake Form that are attached to the RFP?

The MEAP Application is based on a State Emergency Relief application. The MEAP Application and MEAP Client Intake Form attached to the RFP are examples intended to assist applicants if they choose to design or develop their own application based on the specifics of their own program. Applicants should keep in mind that all components of the MEAP Client Intake Form must be included if applicants choose to develop their own application.

22. Can a proposal provide modifications to the data gathering requirements included in the MEAP Application and MEAP Client Intake Form?

The MEAP Application and MEAP Client Intake Form attached to the RFP are examples intended to assist applicants if they choose to design or develop their own application based on the specifics of their own program. Applicants should keep in mind that all components of the MEAP Client Intake Form must be included if applicants choose to develop their own application.

23. Will the completeness of data gathering, i.e. proposal’s inclusion of capturing all data requirements in the MEAP Application and MEAP Client Intake Form F, impact the State’s scoring of that proposal?

All proposals will be reviewed and scored based on the evaluation and selection criteria set forth in Section VI of the RFP.

24. Can an applicant document an implementation timeline in its proposal on how and when it will gather all the data requirements specified in the RFP (i.e. Attachments A, E and F)? Will this be acceptable to the State and would this impact the State’s scoring of applicant’s proposal?

It is up to each applicant to determine the components that will be included in its program and develop a proposal that satisfies the requirements of the RFP. All proposals will be reviewed and scored based on the evaluation and selection criteria set forth in Section VI of the RFP.

- 25. If the agency captures all of the requested information on the MEAP Application, but the client chooses not to answer all of the questions, would the application be considered incomplete.**

It will depend on whether all of the components contained in the MEAP Application and Client Intake Form are required for a client to be eligible under the applicant's proposed program. Proposals should outline the applicant's process for determining eligibility, including the information that is looked at and required when determining a client's eligibility.

If a client does not complete a portion of the application that contains information that **is utilized** by the applicant's proposed program when determining eligibility, then the application could be considered incomplete. Likewise, if a client does not complete a portion of the application that collects information that **is not utilized** by the applicant's proposed program when determining eligibility, then the application would not necessarily be considered incomplete.

Applicants are responsible for ensuring that all clients are eligible to receive MEAP assistance. The MPSC is not asking agencies to do additional work, but rather asking that the agencies collect all of the required eligibility information and documentation at the time of client intake to ensure that eligibility documentation is readily available if requested during an audit. An agency should not put itself in a situation where it has to contact a client to request additional documentation that should have been requested during the intake process.

- 26. The MEAP Application requests information regarding household assets. What type of proof must be requested and collected from the household?**

Documentation that provides proof of the current value of the assets such as bank statements.

- 27. Will agencies be required to report on the data collected in the MEAP Application?**

Not specifically; agencies must collect and provide the data requested under Part IV of the RFP, Project Control and Reports.

- 28. Are agencies required to collect and include the asset information that is included on the MEAP Application when determining a household's eligibility?**

The asset information on the MEAP Application must be collected if it is a component of the agency's proposed program and process for determining client eligibility. As funding for energy assistance declines, it is important to ensure the availability of those funds for individuals and households who are most vulnerable. In order to assist those who have limited resources, grantees may want to consider collecting asset information to be used as part of the eligibility determination. Requiring a household to use the potential resources may also align with the self-sufficiency component while allowing a grantee to assist more households during the grant cycle.

- 29. Can agencies combine the MEAP Application and MEAP Client Intake Form into one agency form?**

Yes.

- 30. Will agencies be required to report the number of households assisted that claimed to have assets?**

No.

31. Do agencies have to capture all of the data collected on the MEAP Application and MEAP Client Intake Form electronically?

Only data required to be captured for the HESP database must be captured electronically.

32. What is required for revalidation support if a customer moves?

If a client moves the agency must re-determine the FPL of the household based on the new circumstances or household changes that may have occurred.

33. What are the expectations regarding the timeframe for recertifying clients as we transition from the 2015 to the 2016 grant year?

The RFP does not set forth expectations regarding the timeframe for recertifying clients. It is up to each applicant to make this determination when developing their proposed program.

34. What are the expectations regarding the recertification process (timing, documentation, unduplicated count, etc.) for clients that relocate while enrolled in a grant program?

The RFP does not set forth expectations regarding the recertification process for clients that relocate. It is up to each applicant make this determination when developing their proposed program.

35. Given this is a multi-year grant, at what frequency is eligibility required (e.g. within 12 months from prior eligibility determination)?

Household eligibility must be verified each grant term. Household eligibility must be also be verified each time energy assistance is requested, or if a change in the household is reported. Household changes include but are not limited to the following: change of address, income, or household composition.

36. Can an eligible low-income household go to DHS and receive an energy payment through SER, and if the household remains in crisis then go to a MEAP service provider for the remainder of the crisis season?

It may not be a conflict for a household to receive SER assistance and subsequent assistance from a MEAP provider, depending on an applicant's proposed energy assistance program. The DHS-established cap amount for FY 2015 may not be sufficient to solve the household energy crisis.

If the MEAP provider has established a cap on the amount of energy assistance that a client may receive during the crisis season, the sum of the SER Assistance payment and the MEAP assistance payment should not exceed the MEAP provider's cap.

It is anticipated that if a household works first with a MEAP service provider, the household will continue working with that provider for any energy assistance needed during the 2015 crisis season.

The ultimate goal is that one MEAP service provider will resolve a low-income household's energy crisis in full resulting in a convenient, customer-friendly system for distributing energy assistance to eligible low-income households.

37. Are MEAP providers allowed to work together to assist one client?

It is anticipated that eligible low-income households will work with a single MEAP provider throughout the entire crisis season. This, however, does not prevent MEAP providers from working together to resolve a low-income household's crisis/emergency. Any payment made on behalf of an energy customer must resolve the crisis/emergency for at least 30 days.

38. Are MEAP funds allowed to be spent by two or more agency for one household? Is a household only allowed to receive one payment? Are households allowed to be assisted by more than one agency with MEAP funds during the grant cycle if it is a separate crisis?

It is anticipated that eligible low-income households will work with a single MEAP provider throughout the entire crisis season. This, however, does not prevent MEAP providers from working together to resolve a low-income household's crisis/emergency. Any payment made on behalf of an energy customer must resolve the crisis/emergency for at least 30 days.

The RFP does not set a limit on the number of payments that a low-income household can receive. It is up to each applicant to make this determination when developing their proposed program.

A household can receive assistance from more than one MEAP agency during the grant cycle if it is for two different energy types, e.g., one MEAP agency assists with an electric bill and another MEAP agency assists with a propane bill.

39. If low-income households cannot receive combined SER and MEAP assistance over and above the cap implemented by the MEAP provider that is assisting the household, should low-income households that have received SER assistance be precluded from enrollment in utility programs such as LSP, CARE and MAP?

The RFP does not impose a cap on the amount of energy assistance that can be provided to an eligible low-income household. Each applicant is responsible for determining and establishing its own cap on the amount of MEAP energy assistance available to low-income households.

40. If a household receives assistance from both SER and MEAP, how far back should agencies look to determine if a client has received SER assistance?

The beginning of the State fiscal year which runs October 1 through September 30 each year.

41. How will an agency know or verify if a client has received SER assistance?

Agencies can contact the energy provider or vendor to determine if a SER payment has been made on behalf of the client, and/or the client can access his/her MI Bridges account and provide a screen shot of his/her account history. The anticipated release date for the (HESP database is August 29, 2014, therefore, it can reasonably be expected that SER information will be available prior to the start of the crisis season.

42. If an agency's energy assistance payment combined with a previous SER assistance payment exceeds the agency's cap, is the agency responsible for recouping the overpayment.

If an agency does not exercise due diligence during the eligibility process to determine if a SER payment was previously made on behalf of a client, the agency may be responsible for recouping any overpayment.

43. Are agencies responsible for overpayments if due diligence is exercised during the eligibility verification process, and all efforts are made to ensure that an overpayment does not occur?

Consideration will be given to those situations where an agency would have no way of knowing that they are making an overpayment at the time they commit to the client assist.

44. If a client goes to a MEAP provider first and receives assistance, assuming DHS will not assist a client that has already received a MEAP payment, how is DHS going to determine whether a client has received a MEAP payment?

DHS will make internal system and policy changes that will address this situation prior to the start of the crisis season. It is anticipated that implementation of the HESP state shared database will resolve this issue.

45. If a client receives MEAP assistance does that mean that the client is precluded from receiving SER assistance?

The RFP does not preclude a client from receiving both MEAP assistance and SER assistance.

46. Will DHS SER data be included in the HESP state shared database?

It is anticipated that the HESP state shared database will include data flow from MI Bridges that will include SER data.

47. Will DHS communicate program changes to clients?

MPSC and DHS will continue their efforts to educate agencies and clients on programs and services available to low-income households, and the goal that clients work with one MEAP service provider for all of his/her energy assistance needs through the crisis season.

48. If a client is entitled to \$850 in SER benefits, receives \$450 in benefits in November, then subsequently receives assistance from a MEAP provider, will DHS advise the client that he/she is no longer eligible for the remaining \$450 in SER assistance

DHS is addressing this issue and anticipates that policy changes will take place prior to the start of the crisis season.

49. Why doesn't the RPF establish a cap on the amount of energy assistance a household can receive?

The sentiment has always been that the agencies have a better understanding of the low-income household demographics in their geographic service areas, and therefore should have the ability and control to create their programs in a way that best meets the needs of their clients. However, established caps must be reasonable.

50. For energy assistance and/or program maximum benefits to a client (dollar caps), are they to be provided by household or energy type? For example, do we provide a maximum dollar amount per energy source and the sum is the maximum per household, or do we provide a maximum per household and have the flexibility to use all of it on one energy source?

It is up to each applicant to establish reasonable cap(s) that will best meet the needs of the low-income households in their geographic service area.

- 51. Section V-E(3) requests that applicants ensure that late payment fees assessed by regulated utilities and included on clients' monthly heating bills in compliance with R460.122(2) of the Michigan Administrative Rules. If a client seeks help with arrearages on a utility bill, how will the agency know the dollar amount of late fees that have been assessed on the arrearage?**

Rule 22(2) of the Michigan Administrative Rules states:

“(2) A [regulated] utility may assess a late payment charge that is not more than 2%, not compounded, of the portion of the bill, net of taxes, that is delinquent. A [regulated] utility shall not assess a late payment charge against a customer whose payments are made by the department of human services or who is participating in a shutoff protection program described in Part 9 of these rules.”

If it is unclear from the client's bill how much of the arrearage is late fees, agencies are encouraged to work with the regulated utility to make that determination. The MPSC will continue to work with the utilities regarding this rule and provide guidance to selected applicants prior to the start of the grant term.

Information regarding Michigan regulated electric and natural gas utilities is available on the MPSC web site as follows: regulated electric utilities - <http://www.dleg.state.mi.us/mpsc/electric/address.htm> ; regulated natural gas utilities - <http://www.dleg.state.mi.us/mpsc/gas/address.htm>.

- 52. How will an agency know if a propane vendor has assessed late fees?**

Rule 22 of the Michigan Administrative Rules only pertains to regulated utilities. Propane vendors are not regulated by the MPSC.

- 53. If an agency makes a MEAP payment of \$900 to a regulated utility on behalf of a client, leaving a balance \$100 in late fees, will the customer still be in shut-off?**

No.

- 54. Are agencies required to deduct the late fees assessed on the utility bill that the client presents at the time of intake, and are agencies responsible for determining the amount of late fees that may have been assessed on arrearages included on the client's bill?**

Agencies can deduct the late fees assessed by the regulated utility that are showing on the bill presented at the time of intake. If the bill includes arrearages the agency can deduct 2% from the arrearages to account for late fees. It is anticipated that regulated utilities will work with agencies to ensure that any remaining balance on a client's bill that equates to late fees is reduced to zero.

- 55. Will the utility companies be responsible for providing information regarding charges for unregulated services on a client's utility bill? If not, what is the grantee's responsibility (assume grantee is not a utility) in obtaining this information?**

Agencies can deduct charges for unregulated services that are showing on the bill presented at the time of intake. It is anticipated that regulated utilities will work with agencies to ensure that any remaining balance on a client's bill that equates to charges for unregulated services is reduced to zero.

56. Will utilities be required to add additional capacity to answer providers' inquiries about what portions of clients' bills are ineligible fees or services?

No.

57. If a client is currently receiving DHS benefits and has been income verified by DHS, do agencies have to re-determine the income eligibility of the client?

All MEAP applicants must be income verified regardless if they were previously income verified by DHS.

58. What is considered to be acceptable identity verification documentation?

See the examples provided in the Household Eligibility Verification Guidelines under Section D. The examples are listed in order of preference, e.g., a driver's license would be the ideal form of identity verification. If the client cannot provide a driver's license, the agency would then request a copy of a state-issued identification, and so on.

Agencies are responsible for verifying the identity of all clients and should exercise due diligence when reviewing and accepting identity verification documentation provided by a client.

59. Is the agency required to verify the identity of all members of the household or just the applicant?

Only the identity of the applicant must be verified.

60. Is the agency required to collect the ID for just the applicant or every member in the household, including minors?

Only the identification of the applicant must be verified. Social Security numbers can serve as identification for all other household members.

61. Are agencies required to retain a copy of the Society Security card for the applicant only, or for all members of a household?

Agencies must retain a copy of the Social Security card for the applicant only, but must collect the social security numbers of all members of the household. The agency must exercise due diligence; if the agency has reason to believe that a social security number does not belong to a household member the agency should take steps to verify that the social security number is correct.

If agency policy does not allow the retention of a copy of the Social Security card, the agency can develop a document to be signed by the agency representative during intake certifying that he/she requested that the applicant present a copy of the Social Security card, that the Social Security card was reviewed to confirm the applicant's identity, but a copy of the Social Security card was not retained in the client's file.

62. What are the requirements for validating the Social Security Number of minors in a household?

Selected applicants are required to document the Social Security Number for all members of the household. It is anticipated that the HESP state shared database will be able to validate the social security numbers of all household members.

63. Would identification for health benefits, voter registration card, and birth certificate/record be collected for an adult or a child?

Identification for health benefits for an adult or child; voter registration card for an adult; and birth certificate/record for an adult or child.

64. Is an out-of-state driver's license an acceptable form of identification?

Yes, as long as the applicant can provide additional support such as a utility bill in the applicant's name, lease agreement, etc.

65. Can an agency use an expired identification card, for example an expired driver's license, to verify identity?

An agency can accept an expired identification card as long as there is no question that the picture on the identification card is the individual that is applying for MEAP assistance. In these situations agencies should exercise due diligence and take additional steps to verify an individual's identity if necessary.

66. Is a school identification card acceptable identification for an adult and a child?

Yes.

67. What would be acceptable identification for a qualified alien?

If the applicant is a qualified/legal alien, he/she should be able to provide proof such as a Social Security card.

68. What is considered to be acceptable income verification documentation?

See the examples provided in the Household Eligibility Verification Guidelines under Section F, paragraph 7 (Documentation of Income). The documents are listed in order of preference, e.g., copies of checks or check stubs dated within the last 60 days would be the ideal form of income verification. If the client cannot provide checks or check stubs, the agency would then request a copy of the W-2, and so on.

Agencies are responsible for ensuring that clients are eligible to receive MEAP assistance, and should exercise due diligence when reviewing and accepting income verification documentation provided by a client.

69. Please elaborate on the 30-day computation period discussed on page 9, paragraph 6 of the Household Eligibility Verification Guidelines.

The 30-day computation period is the 30-day period that the agency utilizes when determining a household's income. Applicants should include in the proposal the organization's process for determining income, and the 30-day computation period that will be used; whether it is 30 days prior to the date the application is signed or 30-days after the date the application is signed.

The SER program looks at 30 days going forward, or the household's expected income for the next 30 days, to ensure that the household income determination is most reflective of the household's income situation at the time of the application.

70. What is countable earned income, as referenced on page 6 of the Household Eligibility Verification Guidelines?

Income that a household receives from employment or self-employment.

71. What is countable unearned income, as referenced on page 7 of the Household Eligibility Verification Guidelines?

Income that a household receives from sources other than employment or self-employment, e.g., social security, supplemental security income, pension, unemployment benefits, child support, etc.

72. What is the purpose of the “allowable expenses for earned income” and “allowable expenses for unearned income” sections, as referenced on pages 6 and 8 of the Household Eligibility Verification Guidelines?

Allowable expenses are expenses that can be deducted from a client’s gross earned or unearned income before calculating the FPL of the household.

73. What does “excluded income” refer to, as referenced on page 8 of the Household Eligibility Verification Guidelines?

Excluded income is income from sources that should not be included when calculating and verifying a household’s income.

74. When calculating a household’s income for purposes of determining the household’s federal poverty level should an agency use gross or net income?

When calculating a household’s income, the agency should determine the household’s gross income and take deductions based on the allowable expenses included in the Household Eligibility Verification Guidelines, Section F, Income Guidelines.

For example: a client’s weekly gross income is \$500, and the client has \$50 a week deducted in court ordered child support. The agency would deduct 25% for mandatory withholding taxes and the \$50 in court ordered child support, leaving a weekly income amount of \$325.

75. Can an agency choose to use either gross or net income when determining the federal poverty level of a household? Would this be a parameter that the agency can set forth in its proposal as a component of its eligibility verification process?

No. When calculating a household’s income, the agency should determine the household’s gross income and take deductions based on the allowable expenses included in the Household Eligibility Verification Guidelines, Section F, Income Guidelines. For consistency in reporting, the actual FPL based on gross income, minus deductions, must be reported.

76. Page 9, paragraph 7 of the Household Eligibility Verification Guidelines indicates that acceptable documentation of income can be “Recipient award letters if dated within 60 days.” Does this refer to Social Security and State Supplemental Income (SSI)? Social Security and SSI benefits are the same for an entire calendar year, why must the letter be dated within the last 60 days?

This refers to Social Security and SSI award letters. Agencies are responsible for ensuring that clients are eligible to receive MEAP assistance, and should exercise due diligence when reviewing and accepting

income verification documentation provided by a client. If the agency feels that a recipient award letter presented by a client is questionable, the agency should request that the client provide a copy of a bank statement that will verify the amount of the benefit that was received.

77. For the income guidelines in Attachment A of the RFP, is the income verification to be gathered for all household members, including minors?

Yes, household income refers to total cash receipts before taxes from all sources and for all household members. See Section F (Income Guidelines) of the Household Eligibility Verification Guidelines.

78. Can agencies use 2014 W-2 or 1040 tax forms for the entire program Year 1 and 2015 W-2 or 1040 tax form for the entire program Year 2?

Yes, but agencies should exercise due diligence when reviewing and accepting income verification documentation provided by a client.

79. Are food assistance benefits counted as income?

No, see Section F, paragraph 5 of the Household Eligibility Verification Guidelines (Excluded Income).

80. In Attachment A, page 9, under Income Guidelines, Excluded Income: If a utility allowance is part of State or Federal housing assistance, is that utility allowance considered countable income or excluded from the income calculation?

A utility allowance that is part of a state or federal housing assistance program would be excluded from the income calculation.

81. With regard to Section E, paragraph 4 of the Household Eligibility Verification Guidelines, how would an agency know if a client is a fugitive felon?

The client would have to disclose that he/she or a member of the household is a fugitive felon. Agencies would not necessarily have that information and are not required to ask each client during intake if he/she or a member of the household is a fugitive felon.

82. Are address changes on the back of driver's licenses required?

An address change on the back of the driver's licenses is not required. Agencies are required to include an explanation in the client's file if the address on the client's driver's license is not the same as the address on the client's utility bill.

83. Are agencies allowed to make exceptions when verifying identity and income?

Agencies must feel comfortable with the documentation that is provided by the client. Agencies are allowed to use their discretion and make exceptions if needed and justified.

If the client eligibility documentation is randomly selected for audit, it will help to eliminate questions if agencies routinely include a written explanation in the client's file any time an exception is approved by the agency.

- 84. Can you define denied? Is this a person that is denied for eligibility requirements (e.g. over income, current bill, excessive balance), or is it if a customer has been seen by a case worker and has not provided all the required documentation? Is this a requirement?**

A denied household is one that seeks MEAP assistance but is determined ineligible for any number of reasons, e.g., over income, current bill, applicant is unable to provide all of the required documentation, etc.)

Yes, this is a federal LIHEAP reporting requirement. The MPSC must collect the data and provide it to DHS for reporting to the federal government.

- 85. In the Household Eligibility Verification Guidelines, what is the difference between Child Development and Care services payments to providers under countable earned income (page 6), and Child Development and Care payments under excluded income (page 8).**

Child development and care services payments under countable earned income refers to an individual who is a day care provider that receives payment from DHS for those services.

Child development and care payments under excluded income refers to a client whose child care expenses are paid for by DHS.

- 86. Section B, paragraph 8 of the Household Eligibility Verification Guidelines states that agencies should “ensure” that households applying for assistance between January 1 and September 30 have applied for the Home Heating Credit. How will agencies verify that a client has applied for the Home Heating Credit?**

Agencies should inform households that apply for MEAP assistance about the Home Heating Credit and encourage them to apply between January 1 and September 30. Agencies may wish to include this as a component when developing eligibility verification criteria that will be included in their proposed programs. Agencies may wish to include this as a component when developing eligibility verification criteria that will be included in their proposed programs.

- 87. Is a bill from a deliverable fuel vendor required? Can the agency utilize a telephone verification form?**

A payment for a deliverable fuel should not be issued until the agency receives an invoice/bill from the vendor. An agency can utilize a telephone verification form when the agency is asking a vendor to provide an estimated amount needed to resolve the crisis.

- 88. Can an applicant self-report if he/she has received energy assistance services from the agency, or any other service provider, in the past 12 months?**

Yes.

- 89. What is Contract and Payment Express?**

Contract and Payment Express (C&PE) is a web site is for the exclusive use of the vendors and individuals intent on doing business with the State of Michigan. Individuals and businesses must register as a vendor with the State of Michigan through C&PE in order to receive bids and/or payments for services.

Applicants selected to receive a grant, and energy providers and vendors the will receive payments from selected applicants on behalf of low-income households, must be registered in C&PE.

90. How do selected applicants, energy providers and vendors sign up with C&PE? Is there a fee to register?

There is no fee associated with registering in C&PE. Selected applicants, energy providers and vendors can access C&PE by clicking the following link: http://www.michigan.gov/budget/0,1607,7-157-13404_37161-179392--,00.html

91. Does registration in C&PE have to be renewed annually?

Renewal is not required; however vendors are responsible for making changes when needed, such as updating a tax identification number, address, or signing up for EFT payments.

92. How will agencies know if an energy provider or vendor is registered in C&PE?

The anticipated release date for the HESP state shared database is August 29, 2014, therefore, it can reasonably be expected that this information will be available at the start of the grant term. If the database is not available, DHS will work to provide an electronic list of vendors that will be shared with selected applicants.

93. Will agencies be required to upload all MEAP data to the HESP shared database on a daily basis?

Yes. This will ensure that accurate household MEAP household information is available to all agencies.

94. Will agencies be required to access the state database and then the utility's system during the course of determining the client's eligibility?

Yes.

95. Regarding page 14 (b) and the use of State Data for selected applicant's own purposes, etc. Since we are first entering this data onto our own data platform, how is it possible for a selected applicant to comply with this requirement? Or does this refer to data collected by other grantees? The purpose for which our organization would use this data is to assess for prior services and offer additional services to the applicant.

This refers to data that the selected applicant will collect from the HESP state shared database, not the selected applicant's data that was initially entered into its own system.

96. For Energy Type classifications in the HESP state shared database, if a customer has both gas and electric service from the same utility, can a new code be added for "combo" whereby the MEAP assistance / program is applied to the customer's combined energy account?

Similar to SER, some programs may have payment maximums per type of service; therefore, we need to know what amount of the payment was for non-heat electricity and natural gas separately. The payment information must reflect the actual amount paid toward each type of service, not just a 50/50 split.

EXAMPLE: Client has a bill for combined services in the amount of \$400, the amount needed for the heat portion is \$250 and the non-heat electricity bill amount is \$150. The payment amounts that should

be reflected in the database are natural gas - \$250 and non-heat electricity - \$150, (not \$200 for each service).

- 97. If MEAP assistance to a combo utility customer (i.e. gas and electric from same provider) is required to be separated, is the HESP state shared database expecting two assistance records for that household or a single, combined assistance record, provided assistance was provided for both the customer's gas and electric service?**

Please see response to the question above. We are expecting to see two separate records; one for gas service and one for the electric service.

- 98. Will there be a "rebid" process before the second year of the MEAP starts?**

No.

- 99. What is the MPSC's plan if Year 1 awardees withdraw or are removed thereby freeing up additional funding for Year 2?**

It is anticipated that the total amount of grant funds requested by applicants will exceed the amount of grant funding available for each Year 1 and Year 2.