



Allegheny County Department of Human Services

Request for Proposals

Peer-Run Respite as a Community Based Non-Clinical Crisis Support

RFP Posting:

Thursday, March 30, 2023

Information Session:

11 a.m. Eastern Time on Thursday, April 13, 2023

Office Hours:

1:30 p.m. Eastern Time on Tuesday, April 25, 2023

Questions Deadline:

3 p.m. Eastern Time on Friday, May 12, 2023

Submission Deadline:

3 p.m. Eastern Time on Wednesday, May 24, 2023

Estimated Award Decision/Notification:

July 2023

Allegheny County Department of Human Services
One Smithfield Street Pittsburgh, PA 15222

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Acronyms and Definitions

Unless the context indicates otherwise, the following capitalized words are defined as follows for purposes of this RFP. Other terms shall have the meaning or definition as stated in the RFP.

1. Agreement: A contract negotiated between Allegheny County and a Successful Proposer to provide the Contract Services
2. Allegheny County: A home rule county and political subdivision of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
3. Bonfire: The County's online procurement software. Proposers must have a Bonfire account to submit a Response to this RFP
4. Contract Services: The specific services that the Successful Proposer agrees to provide to the County in response to this RFP, as more particularly described in the Scope of Services in the Agreement
5. Crisis: a situation that requires an immediate outside response, such as an acute mental/behavioral health episode, a substance use-related incident or an instance in which an individual demonstrates urgent human service needs
6. Crisis Response System: A comprehensive continuum of behavioral health crisis care comprised of core services and best practices and informed by collaboration with law enforcement and emergency medical services. Allegheny County's current continuum of behavioral health services includes a 24/7 mental health crisis call center with a walk-in center, mobile teams and residential center; a 24/7 substance use walk-in and referral center; a short-term overnight program for individuals waiting for an inpatient treatment bed; and a variety of peer-focused services and programs.
7. Crisis Response Stakeholder Group (CRSG): A workgroup convened in September 2020 to address the inequities, racial and other, inherent in the existing emergency services system, as well as the over-reliance on that system for issues that are of a behavioral health or human service nature
8. Cultural Competence: The ability to provide services, supports or other assistance in a manner that is responsive to the beliefs, interpersonal styles, attitudes, language, behaviors and involvement of the individuals who are receiving the services
9. Cultural Humility: A dynamic and lifelong process in which one focuses on self-reflection and personal critique and acknowledges one's own biases
10. DHS: [Allegheny County] Department of Human Services
11. DHS Bonfire Portal: A Bonfire webpage specific to Allegheny County Department of Human Services where Proposers can view open, past and awarded solicitations released through Bonfire
12. Full-time Equivalent (FTE): 37.5 hours per calendar week of staff time
13. Guest: A person who stays at a Peer-Run Respite
14. Harm Reduction: A set of practical strategies aimed at reducing the negative consequences associated with a potentially dangerous activity, such as substance use
15. Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (OMHSAS): An office of the PA Department of Human Services (PADHS) that implements services and policies to support recovery and resiliency in the adult behavioral health system

16. Peer: In the context of behavioral health, a person in recovery who provides supports to another person with whom they share the experience of living with a mental health and/or substance use disorder
17. Peer-Run Respite Model: An alternative approach to residential crisis stabilization that focuses on peer-to-peer supports and engages individuals in leading their own recovery, thus giving them the opportunity to make meaning out of their crisis
18. Peer-Run Respite: A voluntary, short-term (7 days) residential program, staffed 24/7, that serves as a non-clinical alternative to hospitalization for people in crisis; offers community-based crisis support, provided by peer staff and leadership in a warm and non-judgmental setting
19. Pennsylvania Certification Board: A private, non-profit corporation that implements standards and testing for certification of addiction counselors, prevention specialists, clinical supervisors, auxiliary professionals, recovery and peer specialists, family recovery specialists, intervention professionals and community health workers
20. Person-Led: An approach in which a person is treated as an individual, not a condition or diagnosis, and is supported to lead their own care. Support focuses on achieving the person's goals and is tailored to their unique needs and circumstances.
21. Proposal: A completed Response Form, with specified attachments, submitted in response to this RFP
22. Proposer: The individual, non-profit organization, or for-profit organization or business submitting a Proposal in response to this RFP
23. Recovery: A process of change through which individuals improve their health and wellness, live a self-directed life and strive to reach their full potential
24. Response Form: The Word document in which Proposers respond to requested information about this RFP
25. RFP: Request for Proposals
26. RFP Opportunity Page: The Bonfire webpage where the RFP and all supporting documents are listed and where the RFP submission documents must be uploaded for a Proposal to be considered for review
27. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA): A part of the federal Department of Health and Human Services
28. Successful Proposer: The Proposer(s) chosen by the County as most suitable to provide the Contract Services
29. Social Justice and Inclusion: The systemic viewpoint that societies thrive when all people, no matter what their background, have equitable and sustainable access to power and resources in their communities
30. Trauma-Informed: An organizational structure and treatment framework that involves understanding, recognizing and responding to the effects of all types of trauma
31. Warmline: A free, confidential peer-support service that seeks to prevent crises by providing early intervention with emotional support

The RFP at a Glance

Purpose

The Department of Human Services (DHS), on behalf of Allegheny County, is soliciting Proposals from one or more qualified Proposers to provide Peer-Run Respite programming at two as-yet-undetermined locations within the County. In addition to developing and implementing services, the Successful Proposer(s) must secure (i.e., lease or buy) the Peer-Run Respite facility. Proposers may submit a Proposal to operate one or both Peer-Run Respites. At its discretion, DHS may contract with one or two Successful Proposers, depending on their plan and capacity.

Peer-Run Respite models have gained credibility and acceptance in recent years, along with an increased awareness of the value of peer-provided non-clinical supports, and are currently in operation at 22 centers across 14 states. Although Guests at Peer-Run Respites, or Respites, may also regularly use clinical services, Peer-Run Respite offers an alternative approach, focused on peer-to-peer supports, that helps people avoid hospitalization and other disruptive interventions and gives them an opportunity to make meaning out of their crisis and lead their own Recovery. Because choice and self-determination are foundational principles of Peer Respite, the model can provide a unique experience of dignity and autonomy to people who have been routinely marginalized and have had no voice in decisions about their behavioral health care. Peer Respite creates an opening for broader systemic change.

DHS does not currently contract with any provider for Peer-Run Respites. We expect that the Successful Proposer(s) will collaborate with DHS to augment the continuum of available services for managing and preventing crisis, while working to realize a more effective and equitable crisis response system overall. DHS expects Peer-Run Respites to serve approximately 400 individuals during the 2-year contract period.

Award Details

DHS intends to enter into an Agreement with one or more Successful Proposers to provide Contract Services for a term of 2 years. DHS expects the contracted amount for all expenditures in connection with the proposed services will not exceed \$1.25 million in the first year or \$1.6 million in the second year. We envision the sustainability of this project to be supported through Medicaid reimbursement. The future Medicaid reimbursement process will be determined in compliance with Medicaid regulations and in collaboration with DHS, Community Care Behavioral Health and the Successful Proposer(s).

Who Can Submit a Proposal

Non-profit organizations, for-profit organizations, grass-roots community organizations, small businesses and individuals are eligible to submit a Proposal in response to this RFP and/or may apply as the Lead Proposer in a collaborative partnership with organizations that have relevant and complementary resources, experience and expertise. Proposers are encouraged, but not

required, to develop creative cross-sector partnerships that will leverage their respective strengths to address all aspects of Contract Services; for example, a community-based organization with expertise in providing peer supports might submit a response to this RFP as Lead Proposer in collaboration with an entity that has an established track record in real estate development, property management and/or project management.

Proposers' budgets may also include fees for receiving specific contracted technical assistance from an entity that is not a collaborative partner in the project but that has clinical, housing or other relevant expertise.

Proposers do not need to have an existing contract with Allegheny County to apply, but they must meet and abide by all of Allegheny County's contractual requirements (see Section 6: Contract Requirements for Successful Proposers) and have the programmatic, financial and staffing capabilities to provide the Contracted Services.

Proposals must be submitted electronically by logging into or creating an account on [Bonfire](#) (See Section 4: How to Submit a Proposal).

What's Important to Us

DHS seeks a Successful Proposer(s) that:

- Functions independently or as part of a larger organization.
- Maintains an advisory group with at least 51% of the membership being individuals with lived experience with the behavioral health system.
- Is invested in fully implementing the Peer-Respite Model in an authentic way, with fidelity to its design and values.
- Has demonstrated the ability to hire and retain individuals as paid staff, including leadership, who identify as having lived experience of mental illness and who are trained and willing to strategically share some of that experience with others as part of their regular work.
- Has demonstrated an ability to hire and retain quality staff with diverse identities and/or staff that reflect the communities they serve.
- Has demonstrated an ability to provide trauma-informed person-led care to people in crisis who have had repeated experiences with systems that have told them what they need to do.
- Has demonstrated the ability to develop relationships that would legitimize perceptions of the Peer-Run Respite's place in the community and promote its potential as a community resource.

Timeline

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Last Website and Q&A Update	Thursday, May 18 at 6 p.m. Eastern
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Estimated Award Decision/Notification	July 2023

Who we are

On behalf of Allegheny County, DHS is the issuing department for this RFP.

DHS is the largest department of Allegheny County government and provides publicly funded services to more than 200,000 people annually, in areas including child welfare, behavioral health, aging, developmental supports, homelessness and community services.

More information about DHS is available at <http://www.alleghenycounty.us/human-services/index.aspx>

Section 1: Why We Are Issuing this RFP

"Crisis" is a term commonly applied to any situation in which an individual experiences an event or situation as an intolerable difficulty, beyond their capacity to handle or endure. Generally speaking, crisis intervention aims to reduce the intensity of an individual's reaction in a crisis, return them to a more functional state, and help them develop new coping skills to forestall another crisis in the future. In this RFP, we are addressing a particular subset of crisis, which we define as an instance when someone is presenting with circumstances that require an immediate outside response, such as an acute mental/behavioral health episode or any instance in which an individual demonstrates urgent human service needs.

In Allegheny County, as in most of the country, public emergency services are routinely called to deal with crisis situations involving people experiencing acute emotional or psychological distress, despite the fact that first responders are not always best suited to help and may have limited options for connecting people in acute crisis to the supports they need. Crisis, as defined here, rarely comes out of nowhere. But the helper's focus in such an acute emergency usually prioritizes doing something in the moment, rather than addressing the underlying cause of a crisis. Actions taken with the best of intentions can feel dehumanizing to the person in crisis and exacerbate, rather than mitigate, the underlying cause. This is particularly true for people whose crisis is due to the impact of poverty, trauma, lack of opportunity and/or behavioral health struggles that are rooted in systemic inequities.

The problems inherent in this issue surfaced in dramatic ways – both locally and nationally – as the pandemic and its after-effects taxed already stressed crisis response systems. In September 2020, DHS and Allegheny County Emergency Services co-convened the Crisis Response Stakeholder Group (CRSG). This work group was formed to address the over-reliance on emergency services for people with behavioral health and other human service needs, as well as

the racial inequities that persist throughout our crisis system. The CRSG developed a shared vision for an improved crisis system that, among other things, is coordinated to achieve a set of quality metrics; builds trust with communities of color; meaningfully integrates community work, voices, skills and expertise; and increases access to structurally competent, culturally humble and trauma-informed human services in the community. Since then, DHS and partners have been working to realize an improved system, guided by national best practices that call for a range of “places to go” for people experiencing crisis. The Peer-Run Respite will be among the core elements of the improved system and are expected to work collaboratively with other – existing and new – elements.¹

1.1 An Overview of Peer-Run Respite

A Peer-Run Respite is a voluntary, short-term (maximum of 7 days) overnight program that provides community-based, non-clinical crisis support to help people find new understanding of their situation and identify ways that they can move forward. It operates 24 hours per day in a home-like environment. Peer Respite are 100% staffed and operated by people with psychiatric histories who have themselves been hospitalized and/or who have experienced trauma and/or extreme states.² Peer-Run Respite provide a physical setting and environment in which people can safely rest, re-group and work through their crisis to a state of wellness, surrounded by people who have been in that situation themselves and who are available to provide one-on-one and group peer support. Guests at Peer-Run Respite are free to go to work, visit their children or pets, and get or remain connected with their chosen friends, family and providers in the community with no restrictions on their time or their movements except for limits on how long they can be gone from the Respite before they will lose their spot.

Telephone crisis services, walk-in crisis centers and mobile crisis teams are vital components of an effective Crisis Response System. Like Peer-Run Respite, they can help a person in crisis stabilize, solve problems and connect to supports in the community. They can help to avert the need for emergency psychiatric services and, due to their clinical orientation, they can also function as gatekeepers for inpatient hospitalization. As such, Peer-Run Respite function as hospital diversion programs, but they are firmly anchored in the community and people in crisis freely come to them. Hospitalization and/or calling emergency services or police are seen as alternatives of last resort. Peer-Run Respite emphasize personal responsibility and values such as self-determination, mutuality and the belief that everyone can heal and grow on their own terms. They provide an option for people who may shy away from clinical interventions due to the associated stigma, because their behavioral health issues have persisted despite repeated

¹ For more information about the Crisis Response Stakeholder Group and the County’s vision and strategies for an improved system, see *Improving Crisis Prevention and Response* on the DHS website at <https://www.alleghenycounty.us/Human-Services/News-Events/Accomplishments/Improving-Crisis-Prevention-and-Response.aspx>

² Live and Learn, Inc. operates a website that provides information and resources about peer respite in the United States, including a schematic diagram of Peer Respite Crisis Diversion Theory. See *Peer Respite: Action and Evaluation* retrievable at <https://www.peerrespite.com/>

hospitalizations, and/or because they have experienced psychiatric emergency rooms and inpatient hospitals as coercive, intrusive, traumatic or demeaning. Research shows that guests at Peer-Run Respite are less likely to use emergency psychiatric services after their stay.³ Peer-Run Respite aim to improve health outcomes and reduce the financial burden on emergency services. Beyond that, Peer-Run Respite seek to alter the framework of how we think about and address crisis and present an alternative to the established model of behavioral health care.⁴

1.2 Characteristics of Peer-Run Respite

Peer-Run Respite grew out of grassroots movements that emerged during the last half of the 20th century and were led by self-identified consumers, psychiatric survivors and ex-patients (c/s/x) who critiqued or rejected psychiatry, the label of "mental illness," and associated interventions such as involuntary confinement, drugging, isolation and use of restraints. By the 1980s, one faction of the c/s/x movement favored collaboration with mental health professionals and reform within the existing system, while the other remained solidly opposed to involuntary treatment and committed to noncompliance. This history accounts for some of the differences among peer respite centers and the way they are positioned within the modern movement. Respite can be fully peer-run (the most common model, in which staff and direct leadership have lived experience and the respite operates as an independent alternative to clinical treatment), hybrids (which may be operated by a clinical agency and may offer clinical services along with peer supports), or peer-integrated (which do not require all staff and leadership to have lived experience).⁵

The Peer Respite Charter, authored in 2014 by a conference of peer organizers intent on defining the model to preserve its integrity, outlined the characteristic approaches and practices of all peer-run respite. Its nineteen points are condensed and summarized below:

- All paid respite staff and direct leadership have lived experience of life-interrupting emotional distress and other significant life challenges, and are willing to share some of that experience with others as a part of their work.
- The philosophical underpinnings of the respite include: responding to crisis as a learning opportunity; self-determination; mutuality; transparency; and awareness of/healing from the trauma of systemic oppression related to race, gender, sexual orientation, etc.
- "Illness" is not assumed and "symptoms" are perceived as ways of coping; a wide variety of ways to make meaning out of distress is welcomed, and unusual or difficult experiences may be openly discussed.
- Routine person-specific paperwork is limited and led largely by the person seeking support.

³ Croft, B., & Isvan, N. (2015). Impact of the 2nd Story Peer Respite Program on Use of Inpatient and Emergency Services. *Psychiatric Services* 66:6, 632-637. <https://ps.psychiatryonline.org/doi/10.1176/appi.ps.201400266>

⁴ Centre for Public Impact. (2019, December 20). Peer Respite in the US. A BCG Foundation. <https://www.centreforpublicimpact.org/case-study/peer-respite-us>

⁵ Jacobs, O. B. (2022). 'Not Everything is Going to Work for Everybody:’ How Peers’ Understanding of Self-Determination Shapes Their Conceptualizations of Peer Respite Centers [master's thesis, University of Washington].

- Staff and volunteer training, support and development are provided from a peer-to-peer perspective.
- Language is non-clinical and people are not discussed unless they are present.
- Guests are supported in making or maintaining any connections in the community that they desire.
- Guests have freedom of movement to and from the respite.
- There is no required schedule of activities; guests may structure their time as they see fit.
- The respite avoids the use of force (e.g., calling police or crisis services) without consent, and requires a review process if force is ever used.
- The respite avoids house rules and practices that create power imbalances between staff and people staying at the respite.⁶

Peer-Run Respite may operationalize these characteristics in ways that accommodate their specific circumstances (e.g., payers and funders may require certain documentation, the Respite may be in a rural location with limited transportation options). The Successful Proposer(s) may also find, over time, that Guests highly value some feature of the Respite that heightens their experience of connection and acceptance but is not listed in the Charter. Every Peer-Run Respite is unique. The Successful Proposer(s) must demonstrate a firm understanding of the qualities that are essential to Peer-Run Respite and develop an implementation plan that adapts to local conditions while operating with fidelity to the model.

1.3 Target Population

Allegheny County residents who are 18 years of age and older and experiencing significant stressors or an increase in symptoms related to a mental health crisis or acute emotional duress are eligible to stay at a Peer-Run Respite.

Section 2: What We Are Looking For

In this RFP, DHS is seeking Successful Proposer(s) to develop and implement Peer-Run Respite at one or two properties that they will secure (i.e., lease or buy) and operate within Allegheny County. Proposers may submit a Proposal to operate one or both Peer-Run Respite. At its discretion, DHS may contract with one or two Successful Proposers depending on their plan and capacity. We envision Peer-Run Respite as having a four-fold mission:

1. hospital diversion for people who have frequently cycled in and out of psychiatric hospitals or who might be further traumatized by a first experience of hospitalization
2. an opportunity for people to learn from and find meaning in crisis, as opposed to the more common view that crisis is a bad thing that should never happen
3. an alternative approach for people in crisis that is focused on peer-to-peer supports

⁶ Davidow, S. (2017). Peer Respite Handbook: A Guide to Understanding, Developing and Supporting Peer Respite. Western Mass Recovery Learning community. Denver: Outskirts Press. 14-15.

4. an opportunity to address issues related to social justice and marginalization

According to a foundational document created by contributors associated with Afiya Peer Respite (<https://wildfloweralliance.org/afiya/>), currently the only peer-run respite in Massachusetts:

Ultimately, a peer respite combines these four concepts (and more) to create a space with the mission of supporting people who are struggling to learn from their experiences, grow, and stay connected to their worlds, based on the shared wisdom gained from their own lives and that of others who have faced similar challenges.⁷

2.1 Location and Environment

Successful Proposers must identify properties that are in appropriate locations for Peer-Run Respite; properties may be located anywhere in Allegheny County as long as they meet the criteria described throughout this RFP. The identified location must be a welcoming place where all people—particularly those who are most marginalized—can be comfortable, feel valued, and easily access supports and tools for their recovery on their own terms. Ideally, the identified locations will be easily accessible by public transportation from as many areas of Allegheny County as possible and in an area convenient to grocery shopping and other services and amenities. If the site will be rented or leased, the Successful Proposer(s) must have written permission from the owner to operate a Peer-Run Respite and must submit proof of this permission as part of their Proposal.

Peer-Run Respites must meet the PA Department of Human Services' (PADHS) licensure and facility requirements for Crisis Residential Services,⁸ and must comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act Standards for Accessible Design, all applicable zoning and occupancy regulations, and all health and safety codes. Successful Proposers must develop policies and procedures for handling repair issues, dealing with emergencies and maintaining a safe communal space. In the event that statutory or regulatory requirements appear to be inconsistent with, or seem inapplicable to, the Peer-Run Respite model, the Successful Proposer(s) must work with DHS to apply for formal waivers, some of which PADHS has preliminarily identified.

While the physical features of a building always influence the way people feel in the space, this aspect of design is of particular concern for Peer-Run Respites. Each Peer-Run Respite must be located on a site and in a structure that balances aesthetics, accessibility, cost-effectiveness, safety and security. Beyond that, Proposers must give thought to how a safe, home-like environment would look and feel, and how they will create that experience for Guests—bearing in mind that many Guests may have never felt safe or at home in any previous residence.

⁷ Davidow (2017) 10-11.

⁸ Revisions to 55 PA Code Chapter 5240, which governs Mental Health Crisis Intervention Services, are included in the Appendix to this RFP.

Proposers must be able to describe how each room in the house will be made to feel warm, comfortable and inviting, and how the house will promote wellness activities, allow Guests to remain connected with the outside world if they wish, and support Guests in meeting their basic everyday needs. Guests should feel as if the space is their own. For example, kitchens and bathrooms must be fully equipped and adequately stocked with staples and basic toiletries, with storage space for food, beverage and personal items that Guests might bring for their own use and consumption. Proposers must also consider how they will provide separate space where Peer staff can work with Guests, individually and in groups, and perform administrative tasks, without evoking or reinforcing systemic patterns of status and power.

2.2 Programmatic Expectations

Because Peer-Run Respite will be an integral part of the Crisis Prevention and Response continuum of services and programs, the Successful Proposers must work with DHS and other providers in support of our overall vision for the entire crisis system. We are looking for eager collaborators who appreciate the time and effort already invested in this undertaking and understand what it will take to maintain its momentum going forward. The Successful Proposer(s) must determine the referral pathways, welcome and assessment processes, and overall programmatic design of the Peer-Run Respite. Based on the essential characteristics of the Peer Respite model, the County has identified key parameters and policies that are described below and that should be incorporated into Respite programming and processes for the benefit of Guests and the system as a whole.

Referrals. A peer's role is to walk alongside another individual as they find what is true for them, without letting others influence that truth. This is especially meaningful for marginalized individuals whose voices have been routinely silenced, and why the core requirement of referrals is that all stays at Peer-Run Respite are voluntary. The prospective Guest must choose the stay and is free to leave at any time before their agreed-upon departure date. Individuals may self-refer or be referred by a friend, a family member, an outpatient therapist or a community provider. The Peer-Run Respite must be structured so that it has the capacity to accept all referrals (e.g., a bed should always be available unless the Respite is full, rooms must be readied again quickly after a Guest leaves) as long as the prospective Guest is voluntarily seeking support. Referral sources may contact the Peer-Run Respite to get general information about the program, but staff will never discuss identifying or other details about current, past or prospective Guests without their consent.

Word of mouth is one of the most effective forms of marketing, but many people who seek services—even if they have engaged with conventional services for years—will not be aware of alternatives. As part of the program design and implementation plan, Successful Proposers must explain how they will conduct outreach and build community recognition for the Peer-Run Respites.

Length of Stay. Unless the Successful Proposers identify a suitable site with greater physical capacity that can be staffed and maintained within budget, each home must offer overnight respite for 3-5 people at a time with a maximum allowable stay of 7 days.

While we recognize the critical shortage of affordable housing in Allegheny County, especially for renters of color, a need for shelter should not be the primary reason for a Respite stay.⁹ It's highly probable that a number of respite Guests will have insecure housing when they arrive and will still be unhoused at the end of their stay. Peer Respite staff should be knowledgeable and equipped to offer resources and connections to the County's homeless system to Guests who need and desire support around immediate or longer-term housing, but the reality is that Guests may reach the end of their stay without permanent housing secured. It is vital that the Successful Proposer(s) demonstrate the ability to communicate this reality early in the Guest's stay, with compassion and respect, so that Guests have accurate expectations.

Program Design. The Successful Proposers must design the Peer-Run Respite program so that staff are able to provide a holistic, individualized and caring experience for every Guest. Crucially, Guests decide what they need and choose how they will spend their time at the Respite. As a practical matter, this means that Respite staff must be prepared to offer Guests a standard menu of core services and activities and to accommodate Guests who express a preference for structure. But staff must also be flexible enough to support Guests in doing whatever they determine is right for them, as long as it is within the Respite's scope. The needs and strengths of the other Guests staying in the house will also shape what each Guest's experience looks like from day to day. For many Guests, the unprecedented dignity, tranquility and leisure of a Respite stay is an ideal backdrop against which they can navigate their crisis, learn from it and work through it. Within that framework, a Peer Respite offers non-clinical programming that allows Guests to experience:

- **Peace, privacy and autonomy.** Each Guest at the respite must have their own bedroom, lockable from the inside, and the ability to come and go as they please during their stay. The Respite must provide a secure storage place where Guests can store and secure their money, medication and other items of value. To protect the privacy of others, visitors must be allowed only in designated spaces. Guests must have the ability to set their own waking, sleeping and eating times, and must not be judged for their choices, including the ways in which they choose to spend their time.
- **No more or less than the desired level of interaction and support.** Guests must have access to one-on-one Peer support, Peer-run groups, and opportunities to connect individually and in groups with others staying at the Respite. Peer staff may provide Guests with educational resources and must be available to Guests for brainstorming their options and helping them plan their next steps. Peers may support Guests in accessing local resources, appointments and benefits, including providing guests with transportation options when they face barriers. This could include staff directly transporting, providing bus tickets, or utilizing other options such as Lyft or Uber. But peers must not assume that Guests—especially those who have rarely if ever had the chance to make decisions about their lives and their care, except under a provider's influence—came to the Respite seeking these supports or their assistance.
- **Wellbeing and creative expression.** Respite must offer a variety of activities for Guests to engage in during their stay, including but not limited to physical recreation, mindfulness

⁹ Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania. (2022). *Allegheny County, Pennsylvania Housing Needs Snapshot*. Retrievable at https://housingalliancepa.org/wp-content/uploads/County-Fact-Sheet_2022_Allegheny.pdf

practices, imaginative and artistic endeavors, and alternative healing practices. Activities should be inviting, but participation in any offered activity is not required.

- Safety and dignity. Peer-Run Respite must be a welcoming place where all people, particularly those who are most marginalized, can be comfortable, feel valued, and easily access supports and tools for their recovery on their own terms. Despite any appearance to the contrary, Guests are not vacationers; they are vulnerable people in crisis who have complex mental health issues, often experience the greatest social and economic barriers, and have consistently felt disconnected and disempowered within systems of care. Likewise, the Respite is not a hotel. All aspects of Respite programming must be designed and offered in a manner that elicits Guests' trust and builds their capacity, never replacing one imposed dependency with another. Policies and guidelines should be few, transparent and available; positive rather than punitive; and focus on community expectations. Peers must be willing to be open about their own experience and able to identify the circumstances in which sharing may or may not be appropriate or helpful. They must be able to safely respond to and de-escalate acute behavioral distress. If, at any time, staff assess that an individual is unsafe, they must engage with the Guest to develop a safety plan. If a Guest is not able to engage in safety planning and there is clear indication that the Guest is a danger to themselves or others, Peer staff will discuss options with the Guest before enlisting the assistance of others.

2.3 A Different Approach to Intervention

Peer-Run Respite is an intervention that challenges our usual understanding of that term, which implies that someone or something separate from an individual "steps in" and more competently manages the situation in that individual's best interests. By contrast, Peer-Run Respite clears the way for individuals to deal with their own crisis in a manner of their own choosing. Within the conventional model, for example, it might seem as if Guests who spend hours watching television are "doing nothing" when, in fact, they are intentionally distracting themselves from the disturbing voices they are hearing or using the downtime to recharge so they will have the energy to deal with a difficult challenge. In order to hold the way clear for guests, Peer-Run Respite leadership, staff and services must be:

- Consciously informed by the idea that crisis is a learning opportunity and that there is no one "right" way to be in crisis or work through it.
- Recovery-oriented, trauma-informed and aligned with the tenets of harm reduction.
- Committed to reducing racial inequities, maintaining cultural humility and promoting inclusivity.
- Able to establish strong ties to communities that mistrust, or have been failed by, formal systems, and be able to focus on serving these communities and regaining their trust.
- Attuned to the many ways people might choose to enhance their self-sufficiency, engage in self-advocacy and/or activism, develop social connections, attend to their physical and mental health, and improve their quality of life.
- Involved in larger efforts, including grassroots movements, that advocate for a more recovery-oriented mental health system.
- Open-ended in the sense that peers may still be available to former Guests on a limited basis so they can maintain the feeling of connectedness that made their stay so

meaningful. The Successful Proposers must consider how this could be accomplished without overburdening staff or encroaching on the needs of current Guests; for example, they might establish or partner with a WarmLine or devise a similar approach to maintaining informal support and reducing hospitalization.

2.4 Program Staffing

The Peer-Run Respite must be led, staffed and operated by individuals who have lived experience that may include experiencing extreme emotional states, having psychiatric diagnoses, experiencing trauma and/or navigating the mental health system. Because commonality can be a strong foundation for connection, peers must also be willing and able to speak to some of that experience with Guests. Successful Proposers must submit a detailed plan for recruiting and hiring individuals with lived experience who: understand the basic philosophy of Peer Respite; recognize the value of client voice; are culturally competent with diversity that reflects that of the Guests served; and are not still so focused on their own healing that they cannot be fully present to others. Successful Proposers that intend to utilize the services of volunteers must include in their plan a brief description of who can volunteer at the Respite, how volunteers will be recruited and managed, and what the expectations of their role will be. Recruitment and hiring plans should include a description of how Proposers will preserve the confidentiality of job applicants, and honor their preferences for self-disclosure during and after the hiring process.

Proposers must develop a staffing plan that has two 24/7 awake staff members who can respond to emergencies or other incidents at the house and at least two Peer staff members always present and available to provide one-on-one and group support. This is a mandatory requirement, although Proposers may determine the staff structure and schedules that are most feasible. Proposers must also be familiar with OMHSAS regulations pertaining to staffing of Peer Support Services¹⁰ and should address those requirements in their overall staffing plan or be prepared to explain why they should be waived in a Peer-Run Respite setting. Staffing plans must provide for one or more Program Supervisor(s) who will be responsible for overseeing peer support staff and overall program operations, including maintenance of the physical plant (i.e., house and grounds). Successful Proposers may already have an individual with lived experience on their current staff who can fill this supervisory role, or they may hire a new staff member who has the necessary lived and supervisory experience. Supervision can be flexibly configured (e.g., two part-time Program Supervisors, one at each location, one full-time Program Supervisor who is responsible for two locations or, in the case of a proposal to operate only one Respite, a Program Supervisor who is responsible for a single location) depending on what is most feasible for the Successful Proposer(s) and whether and with whom they choose to partner. Respite operations may also be supported by an Administrative Assistant, who will assist with data collection, organizing activities and workshops, program-related paperwork such as referral source correspondence, and other administrative tasks. The Successful Proposer(s) should indicate their desired levels of education and experience for each position, including any required or preferred certificates, licenses and registrations. It is DHS's current understanding that to comply with state licensing requirements, all peers must be (or become) either Certified Peer Specialists or Certified Recovery Specialists and that program oversight must be provided by a Mental Health

¹⁰ OMHSAS Bulletin Number 19-05 is included as an Appendix to this RFP.

Professional. In general, because state crisis regulations and licensing requirements are in flux, Successful Proposers must be amenable to working closely with DHS to comply with licensing requirements as needed and seek waivers as possible, while maintaining a commitment to upholding the core philosophical and programmatic aspects of a Peer-Run Respite. Staff may work in the Peer-Run Respite program even if they are not funded by this Project. The Program Budget should anticipate that senior staff will be involved in initial planning, hiring, start-up and marketing activities, and may project a point during the Project at which senior staff may be less directly involved in respite operations.

The staffing plan must include a corresponding training and development plan for each position that includes:

1. the baseline trainings staff will receive during the onboarding process as essential preparation for their work.
2. the process by which qualified peer staff will attain or maintain certification from the Pennsylvania Certification Board.
3. additional trainings staff may receive during their employment to improve and enhance their skills.

Successful Proposers must also clearly articulate their plan for including people with lived experience and consumer voices throughout the development and implementation of the Peer Respite Program. Successful Proposers must maintain an advisory group for the Peer-Run Respite program, with at least 51% of the membership being individuals with lived experience in the mental health system.

2.5 Data Collection and Reporting

Although strict adherence to the peer respite model requires that routine paperwork be kept to an absolute minimum, Successful Proposers must collect data about respite Guests so that DHS can monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the program, comply with the terms of OMHSAS funding and ensure the program's sustainability.¹¹ Data collected from the Peer Respite Program will also be used to monitor and evaluate whether, and how well, the County's overall plan for strengthening and improving the Crisis Prevention and Response System is accomplishing the goals articulated in 2020 by the CRSG. For example, basic demographic data will be needed to demonstrate demand for Peer-Run Respite services. Additional information on the services provided and the impact of those services (e.g., whether Guests feel welcomed, respected, safe and understood; whether a Respite stay does, in fact, allow them to be more able to decompress, use wanted services, learn wanted skills, and create supportive relationships with peers and other guests) will lead to the following desired long-term outcomes:

- Guests' mental, social, physical and emotional wellbeing will be preserved and possibly improved.
- Fewer suicides will occur or the suicide rate will be lower than the average rate in Allegheny County.
- Fewer mental health-related dispatches will be sent from 9-1-1.

¹¹ DHS will also work with OMHSAS and Community Care Behavioral Health to determine the best path forward for achieving sustainability through Medicaid billing, which is also addressed in OMHSAS Bulletin Number 19-05.

- Fewer/a reduced rate of people will utilize emergency psychiatric care or be hospitalized at a psychiatric inpatient facility, and fewer people with serious mental illness will be booked into the Allegheny County Jail.

As part of implementation, DHS will work with the Successful Proposers to identify all of the specific data points to be collected; the categories of questions used to collect the information may depend on the Successful Proposers' specific program model. Much of the information must be collectable from the Successful Proposers' data management systems during start-of-visit, end-of-visit and follow-up surveys, with the caveat that some Guests may be unable or unwilling to share some information and therefore some data will be missing or unknown.

The following is a representative list of the types of core data we anticipate that the Successful Proposers will collect, track and report to DHS, though DHS envisions working with the Successful Proposer to simplify and automate some of these measures via integration of individual-level data into DHS's data warehouse:

- Names of individuals referred/served
- Unique number of individuals served
- Demographic Information (including gender, age, race/ethnicity, sexual identity and orientation)
- Number of individuals who identified as a veteran or in active military service
- Number of individuals who were employed/unemployed
- Number of individuals who had co-occurring substance use disorder
- Number of individuals for whom this was their first mental health crisis
- Individual's suicide experience categories (e.g., loss survivor, attempt survivor, suicide ideation, suicide attempt in progress)
- Number of individuals who had received crisis services starting with a hospital Emergency Department visit or from another specific referral source
- Barriers to receiving services

Additional data may include these or other elements:

- Number of individuals who were referred to a psychiatric hospital
- Number of individuals who took part in each respite activity
- Length of stay
- Number of times an individual used the Peer-Run Respite
- Number of incidents in which police were and were not called
- Number of individuals who did and did not fill out a start-of-stay survey
- Number of individuals who did and did not fill out an end-of-stay survey
- Number of individuals who did and did not respond to a follow-up survey
- Mental/emotional/social/physical health outcomes
- Program and peer feedback

DHS will work with the Successful Providers to determine the method by which the data will be transmitted and shared.

Section 3: Proposal Requirements and Evaluation Criteria

DHS will evaluate Proposals based upon the evaluation criteria listed below. Proposers must address their qualifications in their Proposal by responding to the requested items or questions in the Response Form. Proposers should download and type their responses directly into the Response Form available on the Active Solicitations webpage at www.allegHENYcounty.us/dhs/solicitations. The maximum score that a Proposal can receive is 210 points, as outlined in the following sections.

Organizational Approach and Philosophy (45 points possible)

- Clear and concise statement of the Proposer's service delivery philosophy and a description of how Peer-Run Respite services are a good fit with the Proposer's mission (5 Points)
- Specific description of the Proposers' experience with approaches that inform Peer-Run Respite, including those below, and how those approaches will be incorporated within operations and services: (10 points)
 - Person-Led Care
 - Trauma-Informed Care
 - Harm Reduction
 - Intentional Peer Support
- Understanding of barriers that can prevent people experiencing emotional distress from accessing or engaging with behavioral health services, especially those from marginalized communities who have experienced harm from our behavioral health system, and a plan to address those barriers, including specific strategies that aim to reduce geographical, cultural, social and other barriers and that encourage access for people of color (10 Points)
- Examples of organizational commitment to reducing racial inequities, maintaining cultural humility and promoting inclusivity; policies for service provision and/or internal operations that reflect these values (10 Points)
- Experience providing non-clinical residential services in the community (10 points)

Meeting Program Standards (70 points possible)

- Process used to identify and acquire (if leased or rented) a location that meets all housing standards and requirements and a timeline for program implementation, including the completion of any necessary renovations and the relevant experience of involved project partners (10 points)

- Plan for meeting the housing standards and requirements, creating and maintaining a clean, safe, inviting, comfortable, warm, inclusive and functional space that accommodates all aspects of programming (5 points)
- Plan for developing a referral network, including strategies to reduce barriers and encourage access for people of color (5 points)
- Draft set of screening guidelines that will assist Peer staff in determining whether prospective Guests are eligible to stay at the Respite, including guidelines for managing a wait list and for determining exclusions (5 points)
- Plan for providing non-clinical supports and innovative, holistic wellness opportunities to support Guests during their stay, including guidelines for engaging Guests in relationships of trust and coordinating with their traditional providers, if appropriate (5 points)
- Draft set and explanation of proposed rules and expectations for Guests at the Peer-Run Respite, including a plan for addressing situations in which guests might be unable or unwilling to comply with the rules and expectations (5 points)
- Approach for the involuntary termination of a Guest's stay, including the grounds for termination, the process by which it would occur, the appeals process, if any, and DHS's involvement in the termination decision (5 points)
- Plan for community engagement, education and advocacy that addresses the stigma around mental health crisis and a process for responding to neighbors' specific complaints and concerns (5 points)
- Plan for dealing with the practical issues involved in the relatively constant yet staggered turnover of guests, including how staff will onboard and integrate new guests into the respite's ongoing operations and manage potential shifts in the degree to which guests have impact and influence on each other (5 points)
- Plan for implementing de-escalation practices as tools for security and safety, without force or coercion; a plan for avoiding the involuntary hospitalization of guests who are experiencing acute emotional distress; and guidelines for determining when and how to call police or emergency services (5 points)
- Plan to ensure seamless communication with the co-existing crisis providers in Allegheny County's Crisis Prevention and Response System, particularly first responders in the communities where the Respites are located (5 points)
- Plan for facilitating a continuing connection with Guests after their stay, without overburdening staff or diverting resources from current guests (5 points)
- Description of the types of technical assistance and/or training from DHS, if any, that would support the overall design and implementation of this project (5 points)

Staffing Qualification/Training Plan (35 points possible)

- Plan for attracting and retaining high quality staff with lived experiences at all levels of the Peer-Run Respite, including leadership, governance and staff (5 points)
- Job descriptions with responsibilities and expectations for all respite staff, including peer support staff, the part-time Program Supervisor and volunteer positions, if any (10 points)
- Sample staffing plan for providing sufficient coverage at all times with an appropriate number of staff who have appropriate responsibilities and levels of experience (5 points)

- Plan for onboarding, training and development that applies to all staff, including the development of individualized training plans that focus on staff members' specific areas for improvement (10 points)
- Description of the types of technical assistance and/or training from DHS, if any, that would be helpful in recruiting, retaining and developing staff with lived experience (5 points)

Data Collection & Reporting Requirements (20 points possible)

- Recent evidence (within last two years, with any anomalies explained) of participant satisfaction in Proposer's current programs (5 points)
- Plan to collect and use Guest feedback to improve program design, service delivery and evaluation efforts (5 points)
- Plan to balance state-required data collection with the preferred approach in respite, which keeps routine person-specific paperwork to a minimum and is led largely by the person who is seeking support (10 points)

Budget and Budget Narrative (10 points possible)

- A complete line-item budget and budget narrative that shows all planned expenses (including any one-time capital costs, ongoing utility and maintenance costs, and staff). The budget should reflect a realistic estimate of the costs associated with implementing Peer-Run Respite. If capital costs will entail more than minor renovations, these costs should be noted separately in the budget and described in detail in the budget narrative. Funding is limited for capital costs entailing more than minor renovations. If a collaborative partnership is being proposed, the budget and narrative justification should indicate how contract funds will be allocated between or among the partners. (5 points)
- A budget narrative that clearly and concisely explains the costs in each budget category, that provides supporting justification of each proposed line item, and that identifies the basis of the estimate for each cost element. The descriptions in the narrative must match the items in the budget table or spreadsheet. (5 points)

Addressing Implementation Challenges (15 points possible)

- Identification of challenges you expect to encounter during the development and implementation of this project, and outline your plan for overcoming them (10 points)
- Identification of licensing and regulatory criteria that may be in conflict with the Peer-Run Respite model including an explanation why (5 points)

Scenarios (15 points possible)

- Describe your strategies for handling the scenarios presented in the Response Form (5 points each)

Section 4: How to Submit a Proposal

4.1 Prepare

a. Information Session

- DHS will conduct an information session about this RFP from 11 a.m. to 12 p.m. Eastern Time on Thursday, April 13, 2023 via Microsoft Teams. It will include a presentation about the RFP and DHS staff will answer questions from attendees.
- Attendance at the information session is not required in order to submit a Proposal. Everything (video recording, slide deck, transcribed Q&A) shared during the information session will be posted afterwards on the DHS Solicitations webpage.
- Preliminary answers will be provided orally for questions asked during the conference. Final definitive answers will be posted in writing on the RFP Opportunity Page and the DHS Solicitations webpage.
- Prospective Proposers can join the information session by:
 - Calling (267)368-7515 and using Conference ID: 790 933 074#
 - Or following this link: [Click here to join the meeting](#)
 - Or copying and pasting this link: https://teams.microsoft.com/l/meetup-join/19%3ameeting_MjU0MTQ5ODAtMjU0MC00NDVILWFkZjAtNThjYjFiNWQyNjEz%40thread.v2/0?context=%7b%22Tid%22%3a%22e0273d12-e4cb-4eb1-9f70-8bba16fb968d%22%2c%22Oid%22%3a%22d14c6dca-47dd-45a0-a62e-11bf0cce95e0%22%7d

b. Office Hours

- DHS will hold a “RFP open office hours” from 1:30 to 2 p.m. Eastern Time on Tuesday, April 25, 2023 via Microsoft Teams. Anyone interested in the RFP and in submitting a Proposal may drop in at any time to ask questions.
- Attendance at the office hours is not required in order to submit a Proposal. Preliminary answers will be provided orally for questions asked during the office hours. Final, definitive answers will be posted in writing on the RFP Opportunity Page and the DHS Solicitations webpage.
- Prospective Proposers can join the office hours by:
 - Calling (267)368-7515 and using Conference ID: 831 655 094#
 - Or following this link: [Click here to join the meeting](#)
 - Or copying and pasting this link: https://teams.microsoft.com/l/meetup-join/19%3ameeting_NGI2MTE4NGEtYmEwNi00NzY1LTljYzEtODJiN2JjZDc1ZDA0%40thread.v2/0?context=%7b%22Tid%22%3a%22e0273d12-e4cb-4eb1-9f70-8bba16fb968d%22%2c%22Oid%22%3a%22d14c6dca-47dd-45a0-a62e-11bf0cce95e0%22%7d

4.2 Submit a Proposal

- a. Proposers should take time to review and understand the RFP in its entirety including:
 - The background (see Section 1: Why DHS Is Issuing This RFP)
 - The narrative (see Section 2: What DHS Is Looking For)
 - The requirements (see Section 3: Proposal Requirements and Evaluation Criteria)
 - The evaluation process (see Section 5: How DHS Will Evaluate Your Proposal)
- b. Proposers must use the Response Form to develop your Proposal. Type your responses to each requested item directly into the Response Form. It is available on the RFP Opportunity Page on our DHS Bonfire Portal and on our Active Solicitations webpage with the RFP announcement at www.alleghenycounty.us/dhs/solicitations.
- c. Collaborative Proposals
 - a. Collaborative Proposals, in which two or more entities partner to apply together, are permitted. Collaborative Proposals can include:
 - i. Lead Agency: The County can enter a contract with only one partner of a Collaborative Proposal. Therefore, a Collaborative Proposal must identify one entity as the Lead Agency that will be the contracting party with the County. The Lead Agency should be the Proposer.
 - ii. Partners: Partners must be committed to a role in carrying out the Contract Services and will be compensated for that role. Collaborative Proposals must attach a signed letter of commitment from each Partner that details and agrees to their role in the Contract Services.
 - b. Entities may participate in more than one Collaborative Proposal.
- d. Proposers must submit a complete Proposal that includes the following attachments that are available on our Active Solicitations website:
 - Response Form
 - Landlord's written permission to operate a Peer-Run Respite (if the property will be leased or rented)
 - At least one letter of support
 - Draft set of Guests' screening criteria
 - Draft set of Respite house rules and expectations
 - Job descriptions with responsibilities and expectations
 - Sample staff plan for providing sufficient coverage at all times
 - Partner commitment letters, if applicable
 - W-9
 - Minority, Women or Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (MWDBE) and Veteran Owned Small Business (VOSB) documents (see sections 6.1 and 6.2)
- e. Proposers should not send any attachments other than those listed either above or in the Response Form.
- f. Proposers must make sure to complete each section of the Response Form and to stay within any word counts or page limits that may be specified in the Response Form.
- g. **Proposals must be submitted electronically by logging into or creating an account on Bonfire at <https://alleghenycountydhs.bonfirehub.com> and uploading the required submission documents to the appropriate [RFP Opportunity Page](#) no later than 3:00**

p.m. Eastern Time on Wednesday, May 24, 2023, to be considered for review. If you are having trouble making an account or uploading your documents, please contact Bonfire Support. You can also reach out to the DHS Procurement Team at DHSProposals@allegHENYcounty.us or (412) 350-6352.

- h. All Proposals must be submitted before the deadline! Once the deadline has passed, the RFP Opportunity Page will no longer accept Proposals. If a Proposal is late, it will be rejected and will not be presented to the Evaluation Committee (as described in Section 5 below) for review and scoring.
- i. Proposers will receive an email acknowledging receipt of their Proposal. If a Proposer does not receive this notification within 48 hours of submitting their Proposal, please contact: DHSProposals@allegHENYcounty.us.

4.3 How to Contact DHS about this RFP and RFP Communications

- a. If you have any questions about this RFP, please use the Vendor Discussion feature through the DHS Bonfire Portal at <https://allegHENYcountydhs.bonfirehub.com> on the RFQ Opportunity Page, or email us at DHSProposals@allegHENYcounty.us.
 - a. All content-related questions must be submitted by the Questions Deadline at 3 p.m. Eastern Time on Friday, May 12, 2023.
 - b. You may submit technical or logistical questions at any time, even after the Questions Deadline.
- b. All information about the RFP, including answers to all content-related questions and any changes or amendments, will be posted on the Bonfire RFP Opportunity Page and on our Active Solicitations website at www.allegHENYcounty.us/dhs/solicitations. Through Bonfire, once you have created an account and indicated you are interested in this RFP, you will receive automatic email updates when any questions, changes or amendments are made available.
 - a. Please check our DHS Bonfire Portal and the website regularly for answers to questions, additional information and changes to the RFP or the RFP process.
 - b. The webpage will be updated only on Thursdays, with any new information visible after 6 p.m.
 - c. The last Q&A and website update for this RFP will be on Thursday, May 18, 2023 at 6 p.m. We will make every effort not to post any new information after this time; however, we reserve the right to post new information in emergency circumstances.

4.4 New Provider Requirements

Any Successful Proposer(s) who does not have current Allegheny County DHS contract must submit the DHS New Provider Application and its supporting documents upon Notice of Intent to Award. Proposers are not required to submit this documentation with their Proposal.

- a. The DHS New Provider Application is available at our Active Solicitations website under the “Required documents” bar at www.allegHENYcounty.us/dhs/solicitations.
- b. The DHS New Provider Application asks for audited financial reports for the last three years. If a Proposer does not have audited financial reports for the last three years, then

the Proposer may submit other financial documentation that attest to the Proposer's financial health of the organization. Tax returns are the preferred alternative. Please note that providing adequate financial documentation is a requirement of contracting through Allegheny County.

4.5 Other Information

- a. The issuance of this RFP does not obligate the County to accept any Proposal or enter into an Agreement with any Proposers. The County reserves the right to reject any and all Proposals and not to enter into an Agreement for the Contracted Services.**
- b. Any Agreement originating from this RFP is subject to all the Terms and Conditions specified in Section 6: Contract Requirements for Successful Proposers.
- c. Proposers are responsible for all costs related to the preparation and submission of a Proposal.
- d. Proposals become the property of the County and may become part of any subsequent Agreement between the Proposer and the County.
- e. Successful Proposal(s) will be posted online in the DHS Solicitations Archive after an Agreement has been fully executed by the County and the Successful Proposer(s).

4.6 Pennsylvania's Right-to-Know Law

Proposers should be aware that all documents and materials submitted in response to this RFP may be subject to requests for access to public records made pursuant to Pennsylvania's Right-To-Know Law (RTKL). Under the RTKL, records in the possession of a public agency like the County are presumed to be public records and the County may have to make documents and materials submitted by the Proposer available to a requestor after an award of an Agreement is made.

If the Proposer includes any information within its Proposal that the Proposer asserts is either a "trade secret" or "confidential proprietary information," as those terms are defined under the RTKL, the Proposer must include with its Proposal a written statement signed by an authorized representative of the Proposer identifying those portions or parts of its Proposal that the Proposer believes constitute a "trade secret" or "confidential proprietary information" and provide contact information to enable DHS to contact the Proposer in the event that the County receives a Right-To-Know request for the Proposal. The Proposer shall have five (5) business days from date of receipt of any notification from the County to provide a written statement signed by an authorized representative of the Proposer explaining why the Proposal or any portion thereof is exempt from disclosure as a trade secret, confidential proprietary information or other legal reason. The County shall consider this statement in either granting or denying a request for public access to the Proposal or any portion thereof. The County will notify the Proposer of its decision whether to grant or deny the request either in whole or in part.

Section 5: How DHS Will Evaluate Your Proposal

DHS will convene an Evaluation Committee to evaluate Proposals. The Evaluation Committee will assign scores to each Proposal by awarding points based on the evaluation criteria in Section 3: Proposal Requirements and Evaluation Criteria, by using the point scale listed in Section 5.1 b.

5.1 Evaluation of Proposals

The evaluation process will consist of the following steps:

- a. DHS will form an Evaluation Committee. The Evaluation Committee, which will be comprised of evaluators with expertise in the subject matter of this RFP, may include community members with lived experience, external subject matter experts or provider representative(s), representative(s) from key partners or funders and DHS internal staff.
- b. All Evaluation Committee members will individually review and score each Proposal. Each Evaluation Committee member will award points for each response on a Proposer's Response Form utilizing their personal expertise and best judgment of how the Proposal submitted by that Proposer meets the evaluation criteria in Section 3 using the following scale:
 - 0 – Not addressed in Proposal
 - 1 – Poor
 - 2 – Below expectations
 - 3 – Meets expectations
 - 4 – Exceeds expectations
 - 5 – Outstanding
- c. Each 0-5 score will be multiplied by the appropriate weight for the number of possible points noted after each evaluation criterion in Section 3. For example, for a criterion worth 15 points, the 0-5 score would be multiplied by three. An "Outstanding" response would receive 15 points, while one that "Meets Expectations" would receive nine points.
- d. DHS will tally the average scores of the members of the Evaluation Committee and report a list of average scores to the entire Committee. The Committee will meet, consider the average scores, and arrive at a consensus on which Proposer(s) can best provide the Contract Services in response to the RFP. The Committee will have the discretion to proceed as follows: (i) to recommend to the Director of DHS that a reduced number of Proposals be shortlisted for more extensive review through a formal oral presentation, interview or a site visit to the Committee; or (ii) to recommend to the Director of DHS that DHS request authorization for the County to enter into an Agreement(s) with the Successful Proposer(s).
- e. As described in d above, DHS, on behalf of the County, shall have the exclusive discretion to shortlist a reduced number of Proposals for more extensive review. In this case, DHS may request that shortlisted Proposers make a formal oral presentation to the Evaluation Committee. Each Committee member will individually score the oral presentation of the shortlisted Proposers using the following criteria and the scale outlined in 5.1b. The maximum score that a shortlisted Proposer's oral presentation can receive is 15 points:
 - Presentation demonstrates Proposer's ability to implement the Contract Services effectively (5 points)

- Proposer’s answers to Evaluation Committee’s questions demonstrate Proposer’s ability to implement the Contract Services (5 points)
 - Proposer’s presentation is thoughtful and professional (5 points)
- f. DHS will tally the average scores of the members of the Evaluation Committee to the shortlisted Proposer formal oral presentations and report a list of average scores to the entire Committee. The Committee will meet, consider the scores, and arrive at a consensus on which Proposer(s) can best provide the Contract Services in response to the RFP.
 - g. The Committee will submit its recommendation for award of an Agreement or Agreements to the Director of DHS for approval. The Director will, in turn, submit a request to the County Manager for approval for the County to enter into an Agreement or Agreement with the Successful Proposer(s).
 - h. At any time during the evaluation process, DHS may contact a Proposer to discuss any areas of the Proposal needing clarification or further explanation.
 - i. At any time during the evaluation process, DHS may contact a Proposer’s references.
 - j. As part of determining a Proposer’s eligibility to enter a contract with Allegheny County, all Proposers’ financial audits or other documentation will be reviewed by DHS fiscal analysts to ensure a Proposer’s financial stability.
 - k. The County is under no obligation to award or enter into an Agreement with a Proposer as a result of this RFP. The County reserves the right to reject any and all Proposals.**
 - l. All Proposers will be notified of the County’s final decision of which Proposer(s) will be awarded an Agreement.
 - m. Proposers that are not awarded an Agreement but who are interested in receiving feedback regarding their submission may request a phone call at DHSProposals@alleghenycounty.us.

5.2 Other Requirements

For a Proposal to be eligible for evaluation, it must be:

- a. Received by the due date/time.
- b. Properly formatted and include responses to all requested information.
- c. Complete with all required forms and attachments.

Proposals which do not meet the above requirements will be automatically rejected and will not be presented to the Evaluation Committee.

Section 6: Contract Requirements for Successful Proposers

In order to enter into an Agreement with the County, Proposers must comply with all contract requirements listed below and all standard terms and conditions contained in a County contract for provision of services to DHS and its offices. Additional details about contracting with

Allegheny County are provided in the [DHS Contract Specifications Manual](http://www.alleghenycounty.us/dhs/solicitations), available at www.alleghenycounty.us/dhs/solicitations.

6.1 Minority, Women or Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (MWDBE) Requirements

Allegheny County has MWDBE goals of 13% participation for Minority Business Enterprises and 2% participation for Women Business Enterprises and expects that Successful Proposers will make a “good faith effort” in assisting the County in meeting these goals.

- a. All Proposals must include a completed Allegheny County DHS Combined MWDBE Form and supporting documents. The Allegheny County DHS Combined MWDBE Form should be completed as follows:
 - All Proposers must complete Section 1 – Contact Information and attach their MWDBE Diversity Plan (see Section 4 – Sample Diversity Policy).
 - If the Proposer is able to meet the MWDBE contract goals, the Proposer should complete Section 2 – MWDBE Participation Statement. Proposers also must attach the MWDBE certifications of the firms cited in the Participation Statement.
 - If the Proposer would like to request a waiver from participating in the MWDBE contract goals, the Proposer should complete Section 2 – MWDBE Participation Statement and Section 3 – MWDBE Participation Waiver Request Form.
- b. MWDBE forms and resources can be found at www.alleghenycounty.us/dhs/solicitations:
 - [Allegheny County DHS Combined MWDBE Form](#)
 - MWDBE Resources
 - [MWDBE Contract Specifications Manual](#)
 - [MWDBE Guide for DHS Proposers](#)
- c. For more information about MWDBEs, visit the [Allegheny County Department of Equity and Inclusion website](#).

6.2 Veteran Owned Small Business (VOSB) Requirement

Allegheny County also has a goal of 5% participation for veteran-owned small businesses (VOSB) in all contracts. The County, therefore, expects that Successful Proposers will make a “good faith effort” in assisting the County in meeting this goal.

- a. A veteran-owned small business is defined by the County as a business having 100 or fewer full-time employees and not less than 51% of which is owned by one or more veterans, or in the case of any publicly owned business, not less than 51% of the stock of which is owned by one or more veterans, and the management and daily business operations of which are controlled by one or more veterans. The VOSB vendor **MUST** provide proof of veteran ownership including percentage and name and address of business.
 - For contracts under \$100,000, VOSB vendors shall be exempt from all bonding requirements.
- b. All Proposals must include either of the following:

- If the Proposer can meet the VOSB contract goal, a completed VOSB Participation Statement is required. You must also attach a copy of the VOSB vendor(s) DD 214 discharge form(s) cited in the Participation Statement.
 - If the Proposer requests a waiver from participating in the VOSB contract goal, a completed VOSB Participation Statement and VOSB Waiver Request are required.
- c. VOSB forms can be found at www.alleghenycounty.us/dhs/solicitations:
- [VOSB Participation Statement](#)
 - [VOSB Waiver Request](#)

6.3 HIPAA Compliance

DHS is a covered entity under the Health Information Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). Therefore, a Successful Proposer must comply with all HIPAA requirements.

6.4 Cyber Security

- a. Successful Proposers must meet the minimum computer specifications that begin on page 14 of the [DHS Contract Specifications Manual](#), available at www.alleghenycounty.us/dhs/solicitations.
- b. All electronic devices must have sufficient security software and settings to minimize the risk of an information breach.
- c. Successful Proposers must also have policies in place to ensure that electronic devices are physically secure when not in use (e.g., locked in a vehicle trunk, password protected).

6.5 Equal Employment Opportunity and Non-Discrimination Requirements

By submitting a Proposal, a Proposer agrees to not discriminate against any employee, applicant for employment, independent contractor, client or any other person on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin or ancestry, sex, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, disability, marital status, familial status, age (40 or over), or use of a guide or support animal because of blindness, deafness or physical disability.

6.6 Language Diversity Requirements

Successful Proposer(s) must assure resources are secured and/or made available for participants/consumers/clients with limited English proficiency or other communication barriers. Such actions shall include but not be limited to assessing the need for interpreters, evaluating the need for alternate language materials, identifying internal and external resources to meet identified needs, and accessing services contracted by DHS through their assigned contract monitor(s).