

## Justifications

### **Teaching Environment:**

We ask about community and/or employer support because Mental Health First Aid Instructor training is a significant time and resource commitment, both during the training itself and afterward. The training requires instructors to facilitate at least three classes per year to maintain certification, which involves ongoing costs such as participant materials. Having support from your community or employer can help maintain the necessary infrastructure, resources, and opportunities to successfully implement and sustain this training over time.

### **Language:**

We are prioritizing instructor candidates who can speak and teach in another language because language accessibility is crucial for expanding the reach of Mental Health First Aid. Many underserved communities face language barriers that prevent them from accessing vital mental health resources. By training bilingual or multilingual instructors, we can ensure that more individuals receive culturally relevant and effective support in their native language, fostering greater understanding, reducing stigma, and ultimately improving mental health outcomes in diverse populations.

### **Community affiliation:**

We are prioritizing candidates who are part of and able to teach within the National Council for Mental Wellbeing's community-focused areas—such as Corrections Professionals, Fire/EMS, Higher Education, Military/Veterans, Older Adults, Public Safety, Rural, and Tribal/Indigenous Groups—because these communities often represent underserved or vulnerable populations with unique mental health needs. By training instructors embedded within these groups, we foster more culturally competent instruction, ensuring that the content is tailored to specific lived experiences. This approach not only increases accessibility but also allows for deeper community engagement, creating stronger connections and more effective mental health support.

### **Educational Institutions:**

We are prioritizing candidates working within Maryland's education system—K-12, community colleges, and 4-year colleges and universities—because of the critical role school staff play in supporting young people, their families, and their colleagues.

Educators and school personnel are often on the front lines of mental health challenges, directly impacting students' well-being and academic success. By training instructors within educational settings, we can provide front line mental health awareness where it is most needed, creating a supportive environment for students and equipping staff to better assist their peers and communities. This approach strengthens mental health literacy and early intervention in schools, fostering a more resilient and supportive educational ecosystem.

### **Location & Reach:**

We are prioritizing candidates working within HUD-identified jurisdictions and rural and frontier communities because these areas often face significant barriers to accessing behavioral health services. Mental Health First Aid training is a vital tool for increasing awareness, reducing stigma, and providing early intervention in communities where resources are limited. By focusing on these underserved regions, we aim to address disparities in mental health support and ensure that residents in these communities have access to life-saving tools and information. This targeted approach enhances the availability of culturally relevant, community-based mental health resources, ultimately improving behavioral health outcomes in areas that are often overlooked.

### **Financial State**

We ask about financial need and ongoing support to ensure that our grant funding goes to those who need it most and to make sure training programs are sustainable. By understanding your current financial situation and how you plan to cover participant costs (like manuals and processing guides), we can better assess how prepared you or your organization is to successfully maintain the program after funding is provided. This helps ensure that the grant supports programs that will continue to thrive in the long term, maximizing impact. Clear financial planning also shows accountability and responsibility, both key to making the most of the resources provided. Our goal is to support programs that are effective, sustainable, and bring lasting value to communities.

### **Capacity**

We ask these capacity questions to ensure that candidates can realistically commit to the time and effort required for Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) instruction. Teaching MHFA is a significant responsibility, with each class involving 5-8 hours of content, plus preparation and wrap-up time. Many instructors, despite their passion for mental health, find that their existing roles and responsibilities make it challenging to meet the three-class annual

requirement for maintaining certification. By encouraging candidates to reflect on their capacity, we aim to set them up for success rather than overextending them.

Additionally, to ensure proficiency and confidence in delivering the material, we ask if candidates can commit to a recommended 40 hours of review prior to teaching their first class. This preparation is key to ensuring the quality and impact of the training for participants. These questions help us identify candidates who are fully ready to commit to both the immediate and long-term demands of being an MHFA instructor.

### **Technical Ability**

We ask about technical ability to ensure that instructors are prepared for the technological demands of teaching Mental Health First Aid. Even if you plan to teach exclusively in-person, you'll still need to navigate essential tools like PowerPoint, PDFs, projectors, and the online learning management system used for managing course materials and certification. For those teaching virtually, confidence with platforms like Zoom and video sharing is critical to delivering engaging, effective training. Additionally, instructors may need to assist participants with technology issues during both in-person and virtual sessions. Your comfort with these tools helps ensure a smooth learning experience for everyone and sets you up for success in delivering high-quality training.

### **Entrepreneurship**

We ask about entrepreneurship, marketing, and promotion skills because independent Mental Health First Aid instructors often need to take on the role of organizing and promoting their own training sessions. Unlike instructors supported by an employer, independent instructors are responsible for building their own client base, managing logistics, and ensuring attendance. A background in entrepreneurship helps ensure candidates have the skills to successfully market and promote their sessions, manage registrations, and maintain the financial and operational aspects of running classes. These skills are key to ensuring the sustainability and success of their independent training efforts. By assessing this experience, we can better support instructors who are prepared for the unique challenges of working independently.