

Supporting Municipalities for Asylum Seeker Services (SMASS) Round II

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Updated 1/24/2024

1. What is the Supporting Municipalities for Asylum Seeker Services (SMASS) Round II Grant opportunity?

On August 31, 2022, without notice, the State of Illinois started to receive buses sent by the State of Texas, transporting migrants seeking asylum in the United States. Since then, Illinois has received at least 38,000 new arrivals from primarily Central and South America.

In the interest of aiding the people of Illinois and the local municipalities impacted by the arrivals of asylum seekers, \$42,500,000 was appropriated from the General Revenue Fund to the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) in the State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2024 budget to provide support to local municipalities for the provision of basic services to new arrivals.

On August 23, 2023, in partnership with IDHS, the Metropolitan Mayors Caucus (the Caucus) administered a competitive Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) for grant funding through Supporting Municipalities for Asylum Seeker Services (SMASS) Round I. In Round I, five municipalities were awarded grants to assist in the provision of basic services to new arrivals.

On January 16, 2024, in partnership with IDHS, the Caucus released a Request for Information (RFI) for a second round of SMASS funding. In Round II, municipal governments (with or without sub-recipient partners) who are interested in receiving funds to provide basic services to new arrivals are eligible to submit a response to the RFI on a rolling basis, up to January 31, 2024.

2. How much funding is available through SMASS II, and for what time period?

The total funding available for SMASS Round II is \$11,000,000.

The funding period for this opportunity is January 16, 2024 – June 30, 2024.

3. When is the RFI deadline and when will awards be announced?

The RFIs can be submitted on a rolling basis up to 5 p.m. January 31, 2024, by 5:00 pm CST. Grant award decisions will be announced on or before February 15, 2024.

The sooner municipalities submit the RFI, the sooner the review and grant award determination will be made.

4. How will RFI responses be reviewed and evaluated?

The Caucus is conducting a two-part process to review and evaluate funding requests from municipalities to support asylum seekers:

- a) **Request for Information (Part 1)** - Interested municipalities will need to complete a brief [Request for Information](#) to establish municipal interest, eligibility, budget request, partner participation, service objectives and documentation of leadership support of respondent's and overlapping jurisdictions. Within 5 days of the receipt of the RFI, the Caucus will review and notify the municipality if it is eligible to participate in Part II of this process, and to be considered for funding.
- b) **Completion of detailed work plan and budget proposal, including measurable service outcomes and sub-recipient MOUs (Part 2)** – The Caucus will work with municipalities eligible for funding consideration during this process to complete various grant documents and ensure that terms and conditions for the grant awards can be met.

Grant awards to eligible municipalities will be based on a variety of factors, including but not limited to available funding, number of asylum seekers served, viability of proposed services and work plan, and the experience and capacity of both the Lead Municipality and its partners, if applicable, to carry out the plan.

5. Does this opportunity suggest minimum or maximum funding amounts allowable?

No, funding requests must be justified by the number of asylum seekers served and services provided.

6. Are there SMASS funding restrictions?

Municipalities who receive SMASS funding will be restricted to services meeting the basic needs of asylum seekers through the “eligible service” areas specified in this Request for Information (RFI) including Shelter and Transitional Housing, Food, Wraparound Services, Legal Assistance, and Health & Wellness.

For the purposes of SMASS funding, asylum seeker is defined as “an individual who crossed the Mexico/U.S. border on or after August 1, 2022, with the intent to stay permanently, and who

does not possess any permanent or interim U.S. legal status (which does not include being in parole status), such as legal permanent residency, a student or work visa, etc.” (This eligibility definition may differ in other contexts.)

Funds are not available for transportation of asylum seekers from the lead municipality’s jurisdiction to another municipality, indirect support of asylum seekers, administrative services, or overhead costs.

Funds must be spent by June 30, 2024, and be approved by the Lead Municipality’s Council/Board, so interested municipalities are encouraged to begin pursuing Council/Board approval now. Delays in this process could impact award decisions.

7. Are municipality administrative costs considered “eligible expenses” and thus reimbursable with grant funds?

Municipality staff's time dedicated to coordinating direct service provision to asylum seekers can be considered eligible expenses and included in budget requests. These expenses are expected to be kept to the minimum amount necessary to support SMASS II operations, and priority will be given to funding for direct services.

8. Who is eligible to benefit from this funding opportunity?

All municipal governments outside the City of Chicago are eligible for this opportunity. For SMASS funding purposes, municipal governments are defined as any level of public government in Illinois.

While grants will be made directly to lead municipalities, these funds may be made available to other municipalities with overlapping jurisdictions and/or organizations (e.g., non-profit organizations, academic institutions, community health centers, etc.) that are working together as partners to the lead municipality. Disbursement of funds to sub-recipient partners will be at the discretion and responsibility of the lead municipality. Lead municipalities are not limited in the number of sub-recipient partners with whom they choose to work.

In advance of the RFI submission, municipalities must notify any local “overlapping” unit of government (e.g., a county and a town within that county) to ensure that RFI responses for duplicative services are not submitted and that lead municipalities have buy-in from any other governmental bodies overseeing areas where asylum seekers will receive services.

If municipalities choose to pursue this funding in partnership, any municipality involved can serve as the lead municipality. There will be no additional funding or administrative overhead provided for lead municipalities. Lead municipalities will be responsible for overseeing the work and spending of their partners.

9. What services are eligible for funding?

- Shelter & Transitional Housing:
 - Safe and stable temporary housing options for asylum seekers, including emergency shelter and transitional housing.
 - Note—funds can be used toward shelter operating expenses and/or minor capital repairs necessary to make shelters operational
 - Short-term rental assistance
 - Note – funding cannot be used past June 30, 2024, and any rental assistance provided via grant funds must be paid out by then.
 - Case management services to secure more permanent housing
- Food
 - Healthy and nutritious food options
 - Note—funds can be used for direct provision of food services and/or to obtain cold storage units (e.g., refrigerators) to increase availability of fresh produce and protein
- Wraparound Services
 - Coordinated case management services and connection to support that increase self-sufficiency, including addressing urgent client needs, non-legal immigration support and referrals, early childhood education and school enrollment, ESL and adult education, informational workshops, interpretations and translations services, transportation, and health and wellness services, etc.
 - Assistance in screening for eligibility and applying for eligible public benefits
- Legal Assistance
 - Provide legal training, workshops, services, and/or representation
 - Services to help asylum seekers navigate the complex legal processes related to their asylum applications and other legal needs
 - Assist with the cost of applications for asylum seekers
- Health & Wellness
 - Access to physical, behavioral, and/or mental healthcare, and crisis services to address the trauma and stress often experienced by asylum seekers

10. Do sub-recipient partners of RFI respondents need to be a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization?

No. Eligible sub-recipient partner respondents can include other municipalities, nonprofits, or for-profit organizations. The lead municipality applying can also be a sub-recipient if they intend on providing services directly.

11. Am I required to respond with a partner?

No, single municipality respondents may choose to provide services directly, without including any partners. [OBJ]

12. Will there be limits on the number of partner organizations?

No, for lead municipalities that respond with partners, there are no limits on the number of sub-recipient partner municipalities and/or organizations.

13. Can SMASS funds cover rehab or other capital expenses related to shelter facilities needed to provide temporary housing to asylum seekers?

SMASS funds can only be used on minor capital repairs or renovations necessary to make shelters operational. For example, fixing door locks or installing security cameras may be allowable expenses. Putting a new roof on a building is not a minor repair and would not be allowable. IDHS will approve expenses that reflect the cost of use for the duration of the SMASS II funding.

Additionally, rehab or other capital expenses will have to follow the terms and conditions of the award and all applicable regulations.