

New York State Department of Health

Health Equity Impact Assessment Template

Refer to the Instructions for Health Equity Impact Assessment Template for detailed instructions on each section.

SECTION A. SUMMARY

1. Title of project	River Hospital Environment of Care Transformation Project
2. Name of Applicant	River Hospital, Inc. (CON# - pending issuance from NYS DOH)
3. Name of Independent Entity, including lead contact and full names of individual(s) conducting the HEIA	Research and Marketing Strategies, Inc. (RMS) <ul style="list-style-type: none">- <i>Mark Dengler, MPA – President</i>- <i>Susan Maxsween, MSHA – Vice President, Healthcare Operations and Consulting</i>- <i>Patrick Fiorenza, MPA – Director of Research Analytics</i>- <i>Molly Burke, MPH – Research Analyst</i>
4. Description of the Independent Entity’s qualifications	Research & Marketing Strategies, Inc. (RMS), the <i>Independent Entity</i> , is a professional market research firm located in Central New York and has been in business since 2002. RMS has a dedicated Healthcare Division with proven experience in guiding Hospitals, healthcare systems, nursing homes, diagnostic and treatment centers – including ambulatory surgery centers – with strategic planning. The firm has assisted health departments in conducting Community Health Assessments (CHA) as well as partnered with Hospitals in conducting Community Health Needs Assessments (CHNA) and preparing Community Health Improvement Plans (CHIPs) to achieve established goals based upon identified priorities. The RMS team is experienced with profiling population demographics and looking at healthcare access and service delivery issues, including monitoring and addressing health equity issues among communities.
5. Date the Health Equity Impact Assessment (HEIA) started	July 24, 2024
6. Date the HEIA concluded	September 24, 2024

7. Executive summary of project (250 words max)

River Hospital, a 501(c)(3) Critical Access Hospital, located in Alexandria Bay, NY, requests approval to bring the facility current with healthcare design by upgrading the aged physical plant as part of the River Hospital Environment of Care Transformation project.

The Hospital's objective for this project focuses on ensuring those in the local community have access to exceptional healthcare close to home, while maximizing critical and limited inpatient resources within River Hospital's system of care.

The mission is to modernize the space and create additional square foot capacity of the inpatient rooms to meet healthcare design guidelines. The Hospital plans to reduce the number of licensed inpatient beds from 22 to 17 based upon inpatient census data. It is anticipated that there will be no changes to the inpatient services or staffing.

The benefits of this project will properly align with more appropriately-sized inpatient rooms, including semi-private accommodations with accessible showers, adding negative pressure/isolation capabilities to address the increased demand for caring for patients with infectious disease, improving ability to care for handicapped and bariatric-size patients, refining accommodations for sub-acute rehab patients who remain for longer stays, and providing a more updated floor plan which will mean more efficient workflows and enhancing patient care.

This project will support upgraded information technology infrastructure to support nurse call system and patient notification system, and will improve patient, staff, and visitor safety, in addition to a more efficient use of the IT Server Closet – which will contribute toward cost-efficiency and improved patient outcomes.

8. Executive summary of HEIA findings (500 words max)

River Hospital enlisted Research & Marketing Strategies, Inc. (RMS) to serve as an Independent Entity to conduct the Health Equity Impact Assessment (HEIA) – a key, required component of River Hospital's CON project: River Hospital's Environment of Care Transformation Project. River Hospital is located in the Village of Alexandria Bay, NY, with a rural population of 1,750 residents. River Hospital's service area (SA) encompasses the village of Alexandria Bay and the surrounding rural towns in Jefferson and St. Lawrence Counties. River Hospital's SA includes the following 16 ZIP Codes: 13607, 13608, 13614, 13618, 13622, 13624, 13634, 13640, 13641, 13646, 13656, 13664, 13673, 13675, 13679, and 13691 RMS focused on detailing the impact on the medically underserved population within these ZIP Codes.

RMS analyzed secondary demographic data across the region based upon River Hospital's discharge data, defining this project's service area. Analysis was conducted surrounding key factors including age, gender, race, ethnicity, health insurance coverage, disability status, poverty level, number of households with SNAP benefits, household income, employment status, educational attainment, and vehicle ownership. Analysis shows that the service area has a higher-than-average proportion of older-aged individuals; the median age of the service area is 45.7 compared to 40.2 years-old across the state of New York. Some analyzed ZIP Codes show above-average levels of poverty in the region (greater than the New York State average of

14.2%) with the median household income of the service area falling below the state (\$70,935 compared to \$82,095). Overall, the service area contains a primarily White, Non-Hispanic, older-aged population with some more impoverished areas in the rural towns surrounding Alexandria Bay. Further, the area is a summer tourist destination, and the population fluctuates significantly with part-time summer residents from May through September.

RMS conducted ten (10) In-Depth Interviews (IDIs) to gather primary qualitative data about low-income, racial, and ethnic minorities, and other medically underserved populations in the project's service area. The IDIs were conducted with leaders and community members who spoke on behalf of the impacted community residents and the medically underserved populations.

Findings from the IDIs provided insights to identify positive and negative impacts of the proposed project, with particular attention to the medically underserved populations. The interviews reinforced the demographic data analysis, which revealed a large aging population and justifies a need for an updated, higher-quality inpatient department as most adults over the age of 65 are living with one or more chronic conditions and/or disabilities putting them more at-risk to require Hospital admittance. Data also revealed the need for higher quality, upgraded medical services closer to home for much of the project's impacted ZIP Code areas that comprise a very rural population.

As part of the HEIA work, RMS requested that River Hospital detail its mitigation plan to foster effective communication about the resulting impact(s) to service or care availability to people with limited English-speaking ability and people with speech, hearing, or visual impairments. RMS also recommended that River Hospital expand its employee training in providing care to the medically underserved populations.

SECTION B: ASSESSMENT

For all questions in Section B, please include sources, data, and information referenced whenever possible. If the Independent Entity determines a question is not applicable to the project, write N/A and provide justification.

STEP 1 – SCOPING

1. Demographics of service area: Complete the “Scoping Table Sheets 1 and 2” in the document “HEIA Data Tables”. Refer to the Instructions for more guidance about what each Scoping Table Sheet requires.

Please reference excel document – River Hospital Completed HEIA Data Tables.

2. Medically underserved groups in the service area: Please select the medically underserved groups in the service area that will be impacted by the project:
 - ✓ Low-income people
 - ✓ Racial and ethnic minorities
 - Immigrants
 - ✓ Women
 - ✓ Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or other-than-cisgender people
 - ✓ People with disabilities

- ✓ Older adults
- ✓ Persons living with prevalent infectious disease or condition
- ✓ People who are eligible for or receive public health benefits
- ✓ People who do not have third-party health coverage or have inadequate third-party health coverage
 - Other people who are unable to obtain healthcare
- ✓ Not listed (specify): Amish population; military/family (Fort Drum Army Base)

Not listed: Amish population – *There is a growing Amish population that settled and is established in the greater Alexandria Bay area. This population receives mail delivered by the US Postal Service and therefore are kept abreast of services provided by the Hospital through mailed notices and other various communication platforms. Currently, the Amish population receives care and service through River Hospital when necessary, and they regularly travel throughout the town by horse and buggy.*

Not Listed: Military personnel & their families (Fort Drum) – *Within the River Hospital service area is the expansive United States Army’s 10th Mountain Light Infantry Division at Fort Drum and the influx of their family and associated population. This situation is unique because the regional community healthcare system supports Fort Drum, as this is the only US Army installation with a division of soldiers and families without its own on-post Hospital.*

3. For each medically underserved group (identified above), what source of information was used to determine the group would be impacted? What information or data was difficult to access or compile for the completion of the Health Equity Impact Assessment?

IDIs were conducted with ten (10) individuals – six (6) key organization leaders representing the greater Alexandria Bay community as well as organizations that serve and speak on behalf of the impacted community residents and the medically underserved populations regarding the project and four (4) community members from the Applicant’s service area. The organization leaders interviewed included 6 individuals who were from (1) the Jefferson County government and (2) River Hospital. These key organizational leaders were asked if their organizations serve medically underserved groups, and if yes, which of the above aforementioned groups do they serve. Community members were residents of the greater Alexandria Bay, NY community were interviewed regarding the impact this proposed project would have on medically underserved groups within their community. When consolidated (in aggregate), the proposed construction is projected to impact all of the medically underserved groups identified above.

4. How does the project impact the unique health needs or quality of life of each medically underserved group (identified above)?

For each group, the reduction in licensed inpatient beds will allow for implementation of the complete River Hospital Environment of Care Transformation Project, facilitating an improved level of care by providing more space for clinical staff to provide high-quality Hospital services with upgraded

technology to support patient call system infrastructure. The proposed construction project will enhance the experience for patients and their families while supporting the care team in delivering improved quality medical care for all patients, including the identified medically underserved groups. Semi-private rooms will be large enough to accommodate the inpatient care team and all the modern technology, while also providing space for families to remain present and be involved during the patient’s care plans and treatment. A private, handicapped-accessible restroom equipped with an individual shower will be implemented in each inpatient room. The proposed inpatient rooms will also better address the unique needs of patients of size by improving the floorplan layout, enhancing both patient and staff safety. Key stakeholders further discussed the benefit of the new inpatient floor as it pertains to positioning River Hospital to provide higher quality of care in the local region. Higher quality, patient-centered care provided locally will benefit the medically underserved populations identified, especially low-income households, those without transportation, persons with disabilities, and the frail elderly – the medically underserved groups who are traditionally more likely to require admittance to the Hospital’s inpatient floor.

Medically Underserved Group	Impact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low-income people 	<i>River Hospital serves all individuals regardless of their ability to pay and whether or not they have insurance coverage.</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Racial and ethnic minorities 	<i>More floor and room space provides increased comfort for family members, which can provide a source of comfort for and adherence to cultural traditions for patients in need of more serious, inpatient medical care. Additionally, River Hospital hosts a Cultural Diversity training at the time of hire and ongoing annually thereafter that focuses to train staff to be responsive to the unique needs of its patients and their families.</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Women 	<i>Private showers in each inpatient room will further provide more privacy for this patient population.</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or other-than-cisgender people 	<i>Cultural sensitivity training is provided every year for staff to address the unique needs of this patient population. Note: Additional information regarding the Cultural Diversity training program can be provided upon request.</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> People with disabilities 	<i>More floor and room space provides increased comfort for this unique patient population, which can help improve patient outcomes and staff safety.</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Older adults 	<i>More floor and room space provides increased comfort for this unique patient population, which</i>

Medically Underserved Group	Impact
	<i>can help improve patient safety, health outcomes and staff safety.</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persons living with a prevalent infectious disease or condition 	<i>The proposed project includes plans to add isolation capabilities for patients with an infectious disease or condition, which will improve the quality of care provided locally for this population. Negative pressure/isolation capabilities will also be available as needed to ensure quality of care and positive health outcomes.</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persons living in rural areas 	<i>Improving the quality of care locally will help improve access to care for this population, who often times do not have the resources to travel further distances (out of the area) for medical care.</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People who are eligible for or receive public health benefits 	<i>An individual's eligibility status for public health benefits has no impact on whether River Hospital provides services. Per the Hospital's website, "At River Hospital, no one will be denied access to services due to inability to pay."</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People who do not have third-party health coverage or have inadequate third-party health coverage 	<i>River Hospital has no requirements for an individual to have health insurance to receive care. Per the Hospital's website, "At River Hospital, no one will be denied access to services due to inability to pay."</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not listed (Amish population & Military personnel and their families) 	<i>River Hospital accepts any patient in need. Additionally, River Hospital is available to Fort Drum military members and family, should they require medical care as this military base does not have its own on-base hospital and they rely on community-based hospitals for their medical care.</i>

5. To what extent do the medically underserved groups (identified above) currently use the service(s) or care impacted by or as a result of the project? To what extent are the medically underserved groups (identified above) expected to use the service(s) or care impacted by or as a result of the project?

River Hospital will maintain its preparedness to respond to the health needs of the local community to which it provides care. As a result of the project, medically underserved populations are not expected to utilize the inpatient services any more or less than they currently do. All identified medically underserved populations will benefit from the newly upgraded inpatient unit.

6. What is the availability of similar services or care at other facilities in or near the Applicant's service area?

There are two hospitals relatively equal distance from River Hospital which provide similar services to the Applicant. The nearest Hospital and Emergency Room to the northeast with many of the same services is 36 miles to Claxton-Hepburn Medical Center situated in Ogdensburg, NY, and the other is Samaritan Medical Center, 30 miles to the southeast in Watertown, NY.

7. What are the historical and projected market shares of providers offering similar services or care in the Applicant's service area? SSM

The project is not expected to impact on market share as the result of the Environment of Care Transformation Project with the reduction in beds from 22 beds to 17 beds, which appropriately reflects in River Hospital's inpatient utilization data. The average daily census has remained well below the reduced 17 bed threshold since 2020. The following table provides a breakdown of average inpatient daily census by year.

Year	Average Inpatient Daily Census
2020	12
2021	14
2022	9.7
2023	8
2024 – (January – July)	6.1

8. Summarize the performance of the Applicant in meeting its obligations, if any, under Public Health Law § 2807-k (General Hospital Indigent Care Pool) and federal regulations requiring the provision of uncompensated care, community services, and/or access by minorities and people with disabilities to programs receiving federal financial assistance. Will these obligations be affected by implementation of the project? If yes, please describe.

Implementation of this project will not affect stakeholder segments from receiving financial assistance. Per the [Hospital's financial assistance webpage](#), no one will be denied access to medical services due to inability to pay.

The Hospital has joined forces with United Healthcare, Fidelis, and MVP Healthcare to help uninsured/underinsured patients apply for Medicaid, Family Health Plus, and Child Health Plus and will provide assistance with enrollment into free or low-cost insurance plans.

In 2021, the Hospital's bad debt and charity care totaled \$564,760, followed with \$714,801 in 2022. The reduction of inpatient beds from 22 to 17 will not impact the provision of uncompensated care.

The Hospital remains committed to providing care for those who cannot afford it, and this project will not impede the Hospital's continued commitment to providing quality-driven patient care to those in need regardless of financial status.

9. Are there any physician and professional staffing issues related to the project or any anticipated staffing issues that might result from implementation of project? If yes, please describe.

River Hospital's Environment of Care Transformation Project will not have any impact on staffing as the Applicant does not anticipate any provider or professional staffing issues related to this project.

10. Are there any civil rights access complaints against the Applicant? If yes, please describe.

There are no civil rights access complaints against the Applicant, River Hospital.

11. Has the Applicant undertaken similar projects/work in the last five years? If yes, describe the outcomes and how medically underserved group(s) were impacted as a result of the project. Explain why the Applicant requires another investment in a similar project after recent investments in the past.

The last major or similar construction project was completed in December 2020. This project involved the new construction of a 2-story Medical Office building to house outpatient primary care, convenient care (a non-emergent type 'urgent' care), behavioral health, and physical therapy services. In addition, the Hospital underwent significant renovations to its first floor with expansions made to the emergency department space accommodating a separate ambulance entrance to improve patient privacy. First-floor renovations also impacted the laboratory, cardiopulmonary, registration, and support services spaces. In that same project, second floor renovations expanded the ambulatory surgical unit (ASU) and central sterile services. Renovations to the lower level of the Hospital impacted the radiology/imaging service space. Through this extensive renovation, there were infrastructure repairs to the existing facility as well as capital equipment purchases. Aside from the renovations to the Hospital and construction of the Medical Office Building, River Hospital was gifted an adjacent four-floor property, with usable space dating back to the 1940's. The older building was abated and sprinklered, and the main level was renovated, currently housing the administrative and some non-clinical support services.

STEP 2 – POTENTIAL IMPACTS

1. For each medically underserved group identified in Step 1 Question 2, describe how the project will:
 - a. Improve access to services and health care
 - b. Improve health equity
 - c. Reduce health disparities

Medically Underserved Group	A. Improve Access to Services and Health Care	B. Improve Health Equity	C. Reduce Health Disparities
<p><i>Low-income people</i></p> <p><i>People who are eligible for or receive public health benefits</i></p> <p><i>People who do not have third-party health coverage or have inadequate third-party health coverage</i></p>	<p><i>River Hospital provides services to everyone regardless of ability to pay. For these identified populations, access will be improved through the upgraded facilities and modifying the layout of the inpatient floor. There will be improved access to services since the new inpatient floor will be a significant upgrade from the current unit. During interviews, community stakeholders shared that low-income individuals who typically cannot travel outside of their community for care will now have access to an improved facility locally.</i></p>	<p><i>There is anticipated improved health equity, as patients within this group are often restricted by their ability to travel. Upgrading the inpatient floor at a facility that is closer to their home will improve health equity for these lower socioeconomic subpopulations.</i></p>	<p><i>This project will continue to reduce health disparities for these lower-income subpopulations as River Hospital provides care regardless of ability to pay with no change to the current financial assistance programs in place at the Hospital.</i></p>
<p><i>Racial and ethnic minorities</i></p>	<p><i>The project will provide improved services and upgrade to an aging facility. Racial and ethnic minorities living in and around the Alexandria Bay community will benefit from improved access to services and health care.</i></p>	<p><i>With the improvements made to the inpatient unit, River Hospital will continue its effort to enhance communication between patients and doctors, through translation services and interpreters. In addition, the new inpatient room layout</i></p>	<p><i>By upgrading the facility, racial and ethnic minorities will have access to improved facilities and will not require travel to obtain care. In addition, there are currently bilingual employees on staff at River Hospital and there will be no changes to</i></p>

Medically Underserved Group	A. Improve Access to Services and Health Care	B. Improve Health Equity	C. Reduce Health Disparities
		<p><i>makes it more accessible for family members to be present, which will also help to provide additional support for patients during their inpatient stay. Family presence during the stay supports the patient’s healing/recovery.</i></p>	<p><i>staffing as a result of this project when the renovations are complete.</i></p>
<p><i>Women</i></p> <p><i>Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or other-than-cisgender people</i></p>	<p><i>It is not anticipated that there will be any negative impact on women or lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or other-than-cisgender people with regard to this project. For this population segment, they will benefit from improved access to healthcare through the upgraded facilities.</i></p>	<p><i>Hospital enhancements will provide improved health care through the use of modern technologies and updated equipment in the greater Alexandria Bay community for all persons regardless of sexual orientation and/or gender identity.</i></p>	<p><i>River Hospital will continue to host cultural diversity trainings which includes topics on sexual harassment awareness and LGBTQ+ awareness/sensitivity annually. The Applicant is committed to ensuring a safe and healthy work environment.</i></p>
<p><i>People with disabilities</i></p> <p><i>Older adults</i></p>	<p><i>Of all the stakeholder groups, people with disabilities and older adults will be some of the major beneficiaries of this initiative. The upgraded facility has specific design elements, and features that will improve access and equity for those living with a disability or those who have difficulties with activities of daily life. Unlike the current facility, the new inpatient rooms will include a private, ADA-compliant restroom with an</i></p>	<p><i>With the updated services and functionality of the rooms for individuals with disabilities, the Hospital will provide more equitable care to those with disabilities. Many older adults living in the service area will not have to travel to other facilities for care to access the latest equipment – often a</i></p>	<p><i>With the upgraded facility, River Hospital is improving the quality of care for individuals with disabilities as well as older adults. In addition, the facility will continue to provide training to staff on working with individuals with disabilities and providing specialized care for those individuals and reducing health</i></p>

Medically Underserved Group	A. Improve Access to Services and Health Care	B. Improve Health Equity	C. Reduce Health Disparities
	<p><i>accessible shower in each room. The upgraded facility will provide higher level care through new technological upgrades, and the updated room layout is designed in such a way as to make it easier for individuals with mobility issues to move throughout the room as needed, reducing fall risks for this population. Furthermore, the increased rooms sizes will allow for the presence of a family members to remain present to be involved during patient's care plans and treatment, which can help improve patient health outcomes for this vulnerable population.</i></p>	<p><i>burden to this population. This newly improved facility will improve health equity for persons with disabilities and older adults by providing higher quality care closer to home.</i></p>	<p><i>disparities that this population often faces. The River Hospital inpatient floor will now be on par with other nearby facilities in terms of advanced features in the patient rooms, reducing the need to travel further for advanced care and thus reducing health disparities faced by this population.</i></p>
<p><i>Persons living in rural areas</i></p> <p><i>Not listed (Amish population & Military personnel and their families)</i></p>	<p><i>Those living in rural communities within the service area, including the Amish population, will have access to an upgraded facility, and will limit their need to travel to other, farther away Hospitals for care. The Amish population will be made aware of these upgrades through regular postal mailings by River Hospital.</i></p> <p><i>River Hospital is available to Fort Drum military members and family, should they require medical care as they rely on community-based</i></p>	<p><i>Rural populations will have access to an improved facility with higher quality care closer to home. Also, the larger rooms will allow the family to remain present to be involved during the patient's care plans and for a patient's support network. Family presence during Hospital stays is essential for healing and better health outcomes.</i></p>	<p><i>River Hospital's key inpatient ZIP Code utilization statistics have been from primarily rural areas, confirming the facility's importance as part of a rural healthcare delivery network. Location should have no impact on the quality of care received; the upgraded facilities will allow for better accommodations to care for rural populations.</i></p>

Medically Underserved Group	A. Improve Access to Services and Health Care	B. Improve Health Equity	C. Reduce Health Disparities
	<p><i>hospitals for their medical care. . This project initiative will improve access to higher quality inpatient care for this identified population.</i></p>		
<p><i>Persons living with a prevalent infectious disease or condition</i></p>	<p><i>Persons living with a prevalent infectious disease or condition will have improved access to quality health care closer to home should their condition become exacerbated and the need for inpatient care arises. The remodeled inpatient floor, with semi-private patient rooms is designed to keep patients safe; there will be an updated air filtration capabilities used throughout the unit for infection control to protect fragile patients from airborne contaminants.</i></p>	<p><i>There will be no change to health equity as River Hospital already provides equitable healthcare services to these identified populations.</i></p>	<p><i>River Hospital continues to strive to reduce health disparities faced by all segments of the populations they serve.</i></p>

1. For each medically underserved group identified in Step 1 Question 2, describe any unintended positive and/or negative impacts to health equity that might occur as a result of the project. **See detailed chart below.**
2. For each medically underserved group identified in Step 1 Question 2, describe any unintended positive and/or negative impacts to health equity that might occur as a result of the project. **See detailed chart below.**

The data collected in this research suggests positive impacts to health equity as a result of the renovation and reduction from twenty-two (22) to seventeen (17) upgraded inpatient rooms. There are no negative impacts anticipated as a result of this project for any of the medically underserved groups identified. However, the project will not fix existing equity issues or challenges these populations face in obtaining healthcare. This project will improve the quality of care provided locally to all individuals who require inpatient care at River Hospital.

Given the nature of this project, the unintended positive impacts are similar for all medically underserved groups identified. Since the project is an upgrade of a facility, some potential benefits may occur (outlined in the chart below).

Medically Underserved Group	Positive Impacts	Negative Impacts
Low-income people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The upgraded facility will provide better information technology infrastructure and services for the patients requiring inpatient care.</i> • <i>The new inpatient room layout will improve staff workflow efficiencies.</i> • <i>River Hospital is implementing mitigation strategies regarding language access and caring for those who are disabled.</i> • <i>There is a potential to improve the facility's care reputation and outcomes for patients, building more trust in the River Hospital brand within the community.</i> • <i>The new facility could help River Hospital retain and attract key clinical staff.</i> • <i>The new room layout and proposed upgrades in technology infrastructure suggest that improved</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Primary and secondary research and analysis did not reveal any negative unintended consequences to health equity as a result of this project.</i>
Racial and ethnic minorities		
Women		
Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or other-than-cisgender people		
People with disabilities		
Older adults		
Persons living with a prevalent infectious disease or condition		
Persons living in rural areas		
People who are eligible for or receive public health benefits		
People who do not have third-party health coverage or have inadequate third-party health coverage		
Not listed (Amish population & Military personnel and their families)		

Medically Underserved Group	Positive Impacts	Negative Impacts
	<p><i>communication may occur between the patient and care team resulting in improved health outcomes and satisfaction for inpatients.</i></p>	

- How will the amount of indigent care, both free and below cost, change (if at all) if the project is implemented? Include the current amount of indigent care, both free and below cost, provided by the Applicant.

Implementation of this project will not affect stakeholder segments from receiving financial assistance. Per the [Hospital's financial assistance webpage](#), no one will be denied access to services due to inability to pay.

The Hospital has joined forces with United Healthcare, Fidelis, and MVP Healthcare to help uninsured/underinsured patients apply for Medicaid, Family Health Plus, and Child Health Plus and will provide assistance with enrollment into free or low-cost insurance plans.

River Hospital offers a Financial Counselor to assist uninsured/underinsured patients in arranging appointments for the Facilitated Enrollment Program to determine alternative options for healthcare coverage. River Hospital also provides a facilitated enroller who will be available to answer eligibility questions, help families gather needed documentation, and will complete a Medicaid, Family Health Plus, or Child Health Plus application for anyone. It is River Hospital's intent to minimize the need for their patients to travel outside of the area for an appointment for appropriate services.

In 2021, the Hospital's bad debt and charity care totaled \$564,760, followed with \$714,801 in 2022. The reduction of inpatient beds from 22 to 17 will not impact the provision of uncompensated care.

- Describe the access by public or private transportation, including Applicant-sponsored transportation services, to the Applicant's service(s) or care if the project is implemented.

The secondary demographic data suggests that many within the service area do not own a car or have reliable transportation (an average of 4.2% of households do not have at least 1 vehicle).

Alexandria Bay, located in northern NY situated on the shore of the St. Lawrence River, is a tourist location with many seasonal residents. Due to being a small town, there is no public transit available. However, seasonal ride share programs are more readily available during the summertime with much more limited availability throughout the rest of the year.

While public transportation is not available within the service area, various ride share programs are present in the greater service area (over 30 minutes away) but with very limited availability.

Additionally, volunteer firefighting departments and ambulance services with the Alexandria Bay Fire Department have and continue to provide free transportation to respond to and accommodate emergency patient transportation needs.

Yellow Cab company from Watertown is utilized on an 'as needed' basis for patient transportation source upon discharge for patients who do not have their own means of transportation. River Hospital pays for these transports out of a "petty cash fund."

5. Describe the extent to which implementation of the project will reduce architectural barriers for people with mobility impairments.

The reduction of inpatient Hospital beds will enhance the experience for patients and their families while supporting the care team in delivering high-quality medical care. The newly renovated, semi-private rooms will be 275-to-300 square feet with private restrooms, and offer the following features:

- *Remodeled patient rooms comply with most recent ADA requirements*
- *Accessible restrooms with showers in the patient room*
- *Provide ample space for bedside physical and ease in access/use of medical equipment for patient care*
- *Addition of negative pressure/isolation capability to more rooms to address the increased demand for caring for patients with infectious disease*
- *Improve ability to care for handicapped and bariatric-size patients*
- *More accommodations for sub-acute rehab patients who remain for longer stays*
- *More updated floor plan will allow for improved, more efficient workflow*
- *Upgraded information technology infrastructure to accommodate nurse call system and patient notification system for care givers*

6. Describe how implementation of the project will impact the facility's delivery of maternal health care services and comprehensive reproductive health care services, as that term is used in Public Health Law § 2599-aa, including contraception, sterility procedures, and abortion. How will the project impact the availability and provision of reproductive and maternal health care services in the service area? How will the Applicant mitigate any potential disruptions in service availability?

River Hospital is a Critical Access Hospital, and as such, does not provide any provisions for comprehensive reproductive healthcare services. Therefore, this question/response is not applicable.

Meaningful Engagement

7. List the local health department(s) located within the service area that will be impacted by the project.

The local health departments that interface with River Hospital include Jefferson County and St. Lawrence County.

8. Did the local health department(s) provide information for, or partner with, the Independent Entity for the HEIA of this project?

None of the departments of health provided information or partnered with RMS as part of the HEIA for this project.

9. Meaningful engagement of stakeholders: Complete the “Meaningful Engagement” table in the document titled “HEIA Data Table.” Refer to the Instructions for more guidance.

Please reference excel document – River Hospital Completed HEIA Data Tables.

10. Based on your findings and expertise, which stakeholders are most affected by the project? Has any group(s) representing these stakeholders expressed concern the project or offered relevant input?

All key stakeholders will be directly impacted by this project as all identified themselves as residents of River Hospital’s service area. None of the stakeholders consulted expressed negative concerns about the project. A few of the community members and organizational leaders spoken with expressed ideas for how River Hospital can communicate this proposed project with the public, including providing emphasis on the upgrades and modernization while not excluding or hiding the reduction in licensed beds from 22 to 17 from the community. Rather, the applicant should focus on publicizing the daily patient census numbers the Hospital has experienced over the past several years so that residents can understand that the reduction in beds is not anticipated to be an issue as the Hospital has never reached full capacity (22), even during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, the reduction in beds will be more cost-effective for the hospital, and the entire proposed construction project will help create vast improvements to the hospital’s workflows, resulting in better healthcare provided locally to help River Hospital continue to provide quality healthcare services to the community it serves.

11. How has the Independent Entity’s engagement of community members informed the Health Equity Impact Assessment about who will benefit as well as who will be burdened from the project?

Key stakeholders were directly contacted to participate in the assessment by the Independent Entity. River Hospital also supported this initiative by further informing the key stakeholders of their proposed via email prior to RMS contacting the key stakeholders as part of the primary qualitative data collection.

River Hospital also informed community members of the project via the Hospital’s [“Current News”](#) section on its website. The Hospital also hosted an interview with the local [7 News \(wwnytv.com\)](#) television station regarding the renovation, in

which the interim CEO, Kelley Tiernan, was interviewed. Lastly, [Governor Kathy Hochul](#) announced the grant funding that supported the [River Hospital initiative](#) in her press release.

This remodeling project, including expansion of the floor plan for remodeled inpatient rooms, does not anticipate any burden to the community as the inpatient census has remained below the allotted capacity (22) since 2020 and if the trend continues, will remain below the anticipated reduction to 17 beds.

Year	Average Daily Inpatient Census
2020	12
2021	14
2022	9.7
2023	8
2024 – (January – July)	6.1

12. Did any relevant stakeholders, especially those considered medically underserved, not participate in the meaningful engagement portion of the Health Equity Impact Assessment? If so, list.

All key stakeholders identified as participating in the project were able to provide valuable insights.

STEP 3 – MITIGATION

1. If the project is implemented, how does the Applicant plan to foster effective communication about the resulting impact(s) to service or care availability to the following:
 - a. *People of limited English-speaking ability*
 - *River Hospital currently contracts with [Language Line](#) for foreign language interpretation and American Sign Language interpretive services.¹*
 - *Staff are trained to utilize available services to ensure communication with patients. Translation services and resources are a discussion topic that is part of the employee orientation. Unit-specific training is conducted at new hire orientation to provide the necessary information to provide assistance through language audio and video interpretation and sign language services for patients with limited English and/or verbal proficiency.*

¹ Based upon annual data from *The Language Line* for 2023, the number of times interpretation services were accessed for over-the-phone and video services were forty-six: Thirty-one were for American Sign Language, and the remaining fifteen for foreign languages.

- *River Hospital employs staff that speak the following languages who are available to assist patients/family members/community if language barriers are identified:*
 - *French*
 - *Tagalog (Philippines)*
 - *Ilonggo/Hiligaynon (Philippines)*
 - *Creole*
 - *Spanish*
- b. *People with speech, hearing, or visual impairments*
 - *When there are communication barriers, River Hospital utilizes the Language Line to provide assistance for patients who may have speech, hearing, or visual impairments. River Hospital routinely reviews the Limited English Proficiency (LEP) and Language Assistance Plan (LAP)² to eliminate potential communication barriers. If patients present questions while hospitalized, staff will address and respond to patient/caregiver questions regarding the project while working closely with Hospital stakeholders.*
 - *River Hospital utilizes bedside iPads to connect with the Language Line as a communication tool for patients and healthcare providers to interact with one another if needed.*
 - *River Hospital also posted press releases as well as recorded interviews pertinent to this project on the Hospital’s website for community reference. This information can be found on the [“Latest News”](#) section of the main page of the website.*
 - *Additionally, the Hospital published a community newsletter, “River Hospital Care Connection,” that had an article about the project. This newsletter, delivered via United States Postal Services serves as a vital resource for not only those with speech and hearing impairments, but also, for the local Amish population. The Amish population do not have electronics or use any form of social media.*
 - *The Hospital also employs use of its Facebook³ page to promote key activities/updates with the community. The project was promoted on July 10th, 2024. Cultural competency and understanding/managing diversity are essential components of training that fosters communication. River Hospital offers training for new hires, ‘Providing Culturally Competent Care,’ and annual training on ‘Diversity in the Workplace’ – both of which are essential to promote communication mechanisms throughout the Hospital.*
 - *River Hospital maintains commitment to investing in staff training to better respond to patient needs through ongoing training. The*

² The LEP/LAP was developed in compliance with USDA Emergency Rural Healthcare: America Rescue Plan; Track 1 Recovery Grant ([Emergency Rural Health Care Grants Track 1: Recovery Grants Application Guide \(usda.gov\)](#))

³ Source: [River Hospital - Have you seen the news? We are excited to... | Facebook](#)

Hospital utilizes [HealthStream](#), which is a web-based education platform.

- c. If the Applicant does not have plans to foster effective communication, what does the Independent Entity advise?
- *River Hospital has established procedures in place to foster communication and regularly revisits opportunities to strengthen communication.*
 - *River Hospital staff continue to use available resources, which are provided and promoted by the Hospital's leadership team and will seek to offer enhanced staff training when added resources and platforms are identified.*
 - *River Hospital also has a communication plan for community members to gain access/understanding of the project. Community members who call the Hospital to inquire will be directed to the Director of Marketing and Community Relations. This defined path will provide a centralized location for communication that will provide insights with clarity and reflect the Hospital's message and mission.*

2. What specific changes are suggested so the project better meets the needs of each medically underserved group (identified above)?

As the Independent Entity, RMS suggests that River Hospital add detailed language to the Hospital's website that outlines the various translation services that are available for patients, families, and visitors. RMS also suggests that the Hospital staff take prudent measures to ensure materials are prepared in other languages, with particular attention to Spanish. Additional staff training is also recommended for the aging population, with specific attention to assisting patients with hearing/vision impairment as well as memory loss. RMS acknowledges that River Hospital has maintained commitment to cultural competency and diversity with established new employee training as well as ongoing annual training to ensure staff education and empowerment.

3. How can the Applicant engage and consult impacted stakeholders on forthcoming changes to the project?

Each of the eight community key stakeholders interviewed for this assessment were supportive of this project and River Hospital's commitment to improve patient care delivery. Should the Applicant need to further engage and consult with these key stakeholders, it is recommended that additional interviews and dialogue be conducted. All of the key stakeholders interviewed by RMS agreed to continue to provide input/feedback if needed or requested by the Applicant. They can be reached via email or phone for further information. Several, in fact, indicated that River Hospital is a key community partner that they often refer their constituents to for healthcare services if/when needed.

4. How does the project address systemic barriers to equitable access to services or care? If it does not, how can the project be modified?

In general, project execution will not have any impact on systemic barriers to equitable access to services or care. River Hospital's mission is "to deliver vital patient-centered healthcare, which ensures access to compassionate, comprehensive health and wellness for our Northern New York Community. It is our vision to lead the advancement of rural healthcare, creating a healthier future of our community." River Hospital, accessible by both boat and car, prides itself on delivering high quality inpatient care, emergency services, and outpatient services for routine and diagnostic testing. River Hospital continues to be a collaborative partner of the region and the North County, and as such River Hospital understands the value of collaboration.

STEP 4 – MONITORING

1. What are existing mechanisms and measures the Applicant already has in place that can be leveraged to monitor the potential impacts of the project?

River Hospital has existing mechanisms in place to measure and monitor the impacts of the project including: (1) Daily Census, (2) Diagnosis Data, (3) Length of Stay, (4) Demographic Data of Patient Mix, (5) Staff Training (upon hire and annually thereafter), and (6) Patient Satisfaction measured through the HCAHPS (Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems) patient satisfaction survey. The Hospital regularly monitors utilization data to assess the average daily census to identify and respond to key trends. The Hospital also regularly monitors payor data to determine the payor mix of patients who are hospitalized.

Demographic data for the project's service area is used to better understand the unique demographic mix of the population served in Jefferson County in comparison to surrounding counties as well as compared to New York State at-large.

River Hospital continues to monitor the breadth and scope of staff training at the time of onboarding as well as through annual training.

River Hospital will continue to review their monthly HCAHPS survey results. HCAHPS is the first national, standardized, publicly reported survey of patients' perspective of hospital care. The HCAHPS survey is administered to a random sample of adult patients (over 18 years of age) across medical conditions monthly. The hospital's performance is also available to the public online, allowing patients to assess key quality indicators.

2. What new mechanisms or measures can be created or put in place by the Applicant to ensure that the Applicant addresses the findings of the HEIA?

River Hospital staff have taken lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic, enhancing patient care delivery and infection prevention and control. The Hospital's navigation of COVID-19 has further amplified the vital importance of a safe and efficient environment of care. The modernization of the inpatient unit (and the previously renovated ground level of the Hospital) will maximize the

patients experience of care while also prioritizing patient and staff safety and operational efficiencies. As a Critical Access Hospital, inpatient acute care admissions are limited to those individuals that the Hospital has reason to believe can be treated and discharged from acute services within 96 hours from the time of admission. It has been able to identify enhancement opportunities that would improve the day-to-day activities of its patients as well as the working environment and skill development for their staff.

With this CON application and HEIA, River Hospital will also be positioned to increase the density distance between patients in the semi-private patient rooms. The increase in room size will allow for ample space to increase the distance between patients and the ability to provide a more comfortable visiting area for patients and their relatives, while also providing a more comfortable and safe area for the staff to provide direct patient care.

STEP 5 – DISSEMINATION

The Applicant is required to publicly post the CON application and the HEIA on its website within one week of acknowledgement by the Department. The Department will also publicly post the CON application and the HEIA through NYSE-CON within one week of the filing.

OPTIONAL: Is there anything else you would like to add about the health equity impact of this project that is not found in the above answers? (250 words max)

River Hospital is a Critical Access Hospital that promotes itself as a safe harbor for health. Accessible by boat and car, it prides itself on delivering high quality inpatient care, emergency services, and outpatient services for routine and diagnostic testing.

River Hospital serves a population of patients who fall at or under the poverty line and above the average age of the service area population, as Alexandria Bay is home to transient “snowbirds” who travel to this beautiful landscape and backdrop for the summer months.

It is the mission of River Hospital “to deliver vital patient-centered healthcare, which ensures access to compassionate, comprehensive health and wellness for our Northern New York Community.” Public funding and private philanthropy are the cornerstone and foundation for River Hospital’s Environment of Care Transformation Project. This project will be funded through the New York State Health Care Facility Transformation Program III.

River Hospital has well-established relationships with regional Hospitals and community-based organizations through active involvement in the North Country Health Compass Partnership, which is a collaborative approach with the Fort Drum Regional Health Planning Organization, area Hospitals, local public health offices, and other health agencies in the Jefferson, Lewis, and St. Lawrence County region.

River Hospital garnered unwavering support from community leaders and key stakeholders with regard to this project. The rigor and attention to the needs of the medically underserved population to ensure equity in healthcare delivery deserves significant merit in the development and execution of River Hospital’s Environment of Care Transformation project.

----- SECTION BELOW TO BE COMPLETED BY THE APPLICANT -----

SECTION C. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND MITIGATION PLAN

Acknowledgment by the Applicant that the Health Equity Impact Assessment was reviewed by the facility leadership before submission to the Department. This section is to be completed by the Applicant, not the Independent Entity.

I. Acknowledgement

I, (APPLICANT), attest that I have reviewed the Health Equity Impact Assessment for the (PROJECT TITLE) that has been prepared by the Independent Entity, (NAME OF INDEPENDENT ENTITY).

Kelley Tiernan

Name

Chief Executive Officer

Title

Signature

01/20/2025

Date

II. Mitigation Plan

If the project is approved, how has or will the Applicant mitigate any potential negative impacts to medically underserved groups identified in the Health Equity Impact Assessment? (1000 words max)

Please note: this narrative must be made available to the public and posted conspicuously on the Applicant's website until a decision on the application has been made.

Health Equity Impact Assessment Mitigation Plan

River Hospital strives to be equitable in meeting the needs of ALL patients seeking healthcare services at this facility. In an effort to mitigate any potentially negative impact or barrier to seeking healthcare services, there are a number of existing practices in place to meet the needs to enable adequate communication between patients and medical professionals through the use of Language Line services. This service provides interpretive services for a wide range of worldwide languages, as well as American Sign Language through use of iPad technology. In addition to the Language Line, some River Hospital staff members have multi-lingual capabilities, who can assist with communication efforts if necessary.

River Hospital does not deny services based on patients' inability to pay. Rather, there are practices in place to connect patients with facilitated enrollers to assist with connecting uninsured patients with medical coverage solutions. This removed the access to care barrier for individuals living at, or below, the poverty guidelines.

As it relates specific to this Environment of Care Transformation Project, there are no known or perceived negative impacts expected to result from this renovation for any patients, including the medically underserved population. It will in-fact offer improved accommodations to all patients with a more modern environment, increased inpatient room size with bathroom and showers for each room, modernized improvements to the ground floor where imaging and other support services are located. This project allows for additional room capacity to more adequately accommodate patient family members to be present to participate in the patient care plan and treatment. This will also lead to improved patient and staff safety and satisfaction, which will lead to better care and outcomes.

As part of this HEIA work, the following mitigation strategies will address potential health equity concerns identified in this Impact Assessment:

- **MEDIA:** Increase awareness and better inform the community about this and despite the reduced number of available patient rooms, capacity will not be negatively impacted based on daily census data from recent years. But rather, the upgrades will better utilize the space available.
- **WEBSITE:** Place a description of the project scope on Hospital website in Spanish.
- **WEBSITE:** River Hospital will continue to post relevant project related information on the hospital's website (www.riverhospital.org), in mailing publications, and press releases for the groundbreaking announcement and conclude with a ribbon cutting upon the completion of the project. Other publicity will take place as opportunities are identified.
- **WEBSITE:** Raise awareness on the Hospital website that translation services are in place and accessed when needed available to navigate communication barriers for patients needing to seek care

- **EDUCATION:** There is a continued focus on annual cultural diversity training for staff. Annual training includes Diversity in Healthcare, Fall Prevention which discusses aging, vision impairment and falls. And additional staff training will be incorporated to increase knowledge of dementia disorders.
- **ENGAGEMENT:** An internal Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Committee is being established, with the first meeting scheduled for November 2024. This DEI Committee mission will work to advance health equity and welcome all who work and seek healthcare services at River Hospital, in a supportive environment where they feel valued and respected. True health equity is present when access to care is not hindered by biases of race, ethnicity, language, sexual orientation, gender identity, or any sense of unbelonging or unwelcomeness.
- **PATIENT CARE RESOURCE:** Additional awareness and training for all staff will be implemented to raise awareness about the availability of the language interpretation services for wide range of non-English languages, including access to American Sign Language to address communication barriers.
- **PATIENT CARE RESOURCE:** In addition, patient care plan and discharge instructions for inpatient and emergency services are available in Spanish through the hospital's electronic medical record system.
- **COMMUNICATION:** River Hospital is planning to re-engage Patient Family Advisory Committee (PFAC), which has not been active since prior to COVID-19 pandemic. This committee will help inform where there are needed improvements, including areas such as cultural diversity, medically underserved populations, and other health equity related matters to ensure access to care is not impeded for anyone. The PFAC will have an important role as an external committee who will bring their perspectives to engage and evaluate other areas of improvement that might not otherwise be apparent.
- **COMMUNICATION:** General public inquiries generated by public relations pertaining to this construction project will be directed to River Hospital's Director of Marketing & Community Relations who will respond to or field the inquiries as deemed appropriate.

River Hospital will continue to evaluate mitigation strategies as this construction project moves forward and into the future, in an effort to keep health equity at the forefront of care delivery.