



Legislative Report

Family, Friend and Neighbor Grant Program

[Child Care Services Division](#)

February 2024

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Minnesota Statutes, Chapter 3.197, requires the disclosure of the cost to prepare this report. The estimated cost of preparing this report is \$1,834.

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I. Executive summary

The Family, Friend and Neighbor (FFN) grant program was signed into law in May 2023, providing Minnesota with additional funds to help children thrive. This is the first legislative report for the new program and includes information from July to Nov. 2023. The report describes the Department of Human Services' (DHS) efforts to:

- Develop and implement an RFP process to disburse state general fund allocation, in conjunction with existing federal Child Care and Development Block Grant investments in FFN grant program funding,
- Sustain and expand the FFN grant program given the 2023 legislative investment, and
- Proceed with implementation activities for the remainder of the program's first year.

II. Legislation

Family, Friend and Neighbor (FFN) grant program, Laws of Minnesota 2023, Chapter 70, Article 13, Section 20

Subd. 9 (119B.196). Report. By February 1, 2024 and every two years thereafter, the commissioner must report to the chairs and ranking minority members of the legislative committees with jurisdiction over child care on program outcomes. The full statute appears in Appendix One.

III. Introduction

The Family, Friend and Neighbor (FFN) grant program was signed into law in May 2023. It provides Minnesota with additional funds to promote children's social-emotional learning and healthy development, early literacy, and other skills that will help children thrive in school and life. This ongoing program issues grants to community-based organizations to:

- Provide culturally and linguistically appropriate training, support and resources to FFN caregivers and children's families to improve and promote children's health, safety, nutrition and learning;
- Connect FFN caregivers and children's families with community resources that support the families' physical and mental health, and their economic and developmental needs;
- Connect FFN caregivers and children's families to early childhood screening programs and facilitate referrals to state and local agencies, schools, community organizations, and medical providers, as appropriate;
- Provide FFN caregivers and children's families with information about high-quality, community-based early care and learning programs and financial assistance available to the families, including but not limited to the Child Care Assistance Program;
- Provide FFN caregivers with information about registering as a legal nonlicensed child care provider, and establishing a licensed family or group family child care program;
- Provide transportation for FFN caregivers and children's families to educational and other early childhood training activities;

- Translate materials for FFN caregivers and children's families and provide translation services to FFN caregivers and children's families;
- Develop and disseminate social-emotional learning, health and safety, and early learning kits to FFN caregivers; and
- Establish play and learning groups for FFN caregivers.

Purpose of report

This report responds to a legislative requirement included in the law enacting the Family, Friend and Neighbor (FFN) grant program. Laws of Minnesota 2023, Chapter 70, Article 13, Section 20, Subdivision 9 (119B.196) requires a report to the chairs and ranking minority members of the legislative committees with jurisdiction over child care on program outcomes by Feb. 1, 2024 and every two years thereafter.

This is the first report for the new program and includes information from July to Oct. 2023. The report describes the Department of Human Services' (DHS) efforts to:

- Develop and implement an RFP process to disburse state general fund allocation in conjunction with existing federal Child Care and Development Block Grant investments in FFN grant program funding;
- Sustain and expand the FFN grant program given the 2023 legislative investment; and
- Proceed with implementation activities for the remainder of the program's first year.

IV. History and Background

FFN caregivers are home-based caregivers working outside the formal child care system. Relatives, friends, and other community members serve as FFN caregivers. These child care arrangements vary in terms of unpaid and paid, part time and full-time, and hours of care. FFN caregivers often cover nontraditional work shifts. FFN child care is a frequent choice of many families, and arrangements are designed to meet the needs and preferences of those involved.

While the term "FFN" is not part of day-to-day conversation for Minnesota families, most know a family who receives FFN care or a caregiver who provides that type of care. Consider new parents who turn to their children's grandparents for child care once a week; an aunt who watches her nephews while home with her own children; or the neighbor who provides after-school care to another neighbor's young ones. The informal nature of FFN means many caregivers are unaware they fall into this category as they do not consider themselves part of the child care workforce. Nevertheless, like any other child care provider, FFN caregivers are a target audience for state's efforts to support caregivers of young children.

In 2019, there were 82,700 FFN caregivers in Minnesota.¹ During the COVID-19 pandemic, even more families began using FFN caregivers because their typical care provider closed, or they didn't feel safe having their child cared for in a congregate setting.

¹ Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. National Survey of Early Care & Education. [Characteristics of Minnesota Home-based ECE Providers in 2019](#). "Unlisted individuals did not appear on state or national lists but were identified in households through the household questionnaire screener, when someone

Given this, the state directed \$5.5 million in funding from the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES; May 2020), Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSA; Dec. 2020) and American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA; March 2021) funds, to develop and implement an FFN grant program, hire a full-time FFN project manager, and conduct outreach and evaluation activities.

The first FFN grant program operated between Jan. 2021 and Sept. 2023 and provided grant funding to 23 community-based organizations. The program prioritized organizations that serve Somali, Latinx, Hmong, African American, American Indian, immigrant, refugee and rural communities in Greater Minnesota. Grantees served over 2,800 FFN caregivers during this period, providing access to culturally and language specific training, resources, technology, networking, education and transportation. For more information on grant activities during this program period, please review this [report](#) of FFN grant activities conducted in 2021. A new report of grant activities from the 2022-23 grant period will be released in early calendar year 2024.

In addition to training and resources, a central goal of the FFN grant program is to assist FFN caregivers in becoming [legal nonlicensed \(LNL\) providers](#). Minnesota FFN grantees were able to support twelve FFN caregivers to become LNL providers. Barriers that were identified in becoming a LNL include training requirements, background study requirements, challenges navigating the state's early childhood professional development process, and a lack of trust/hesitancy to interact with the government.

V. FFN Grant Program

In the 2023 legislative session, additional funding was awarded to the Family, Friend and Neighbor (FFN) grant program (Laws of Minnesota 2023, Chapter 70, Article 13, Section 20). A Request for Proposals (RFP) was developed and issued to layer in these state general funds with existing Child Care and Development Block Grant investments to sustain the FFN grant program and FFN network building efforts that had occurred previously. The goals of this RFP process was to ensure no gap in funding for previously successful FFN grantees and to expand grantee service area to ensure all geographic areas of the state have active FFN grant program support. DHS successfully accomplished these goals, launching the current FFN grant program on October 1, 2023.

The FY24 FFN grant program awarded 20 grants to organizations serving Somali, Latinx, Hmong, African American, American Indian, immigrant and refugee communities. All previous grantees who submitted proposals received funds to continue their work, and four of those grantees were awarded additional funds to expand their services geographically. With this disbursement, the entire state and 11 Tribes now have access to FFN supports. For more information on Minnesota's new cohort of FFN grantees please see the map of service coverage area and grantee summary found on the state's [FFN website](#).

The new grant program sustains and expands previous grant work with grantees providing the services summarized on page 4 of this report to FFN caregivers in their service area.

reported regularly caring for children not their own at least five hours per week in a home-based setting. This category includes providers who may or may not be paid for the care they provide, as well as family and friends who may or may not live in the same household as the children they regularly look after."

VI. FFN Grant Program Supporting Activities

Prior to the launch of the new grant program, DHS invested federal resources in a range of activities to support the FFN grant program. The new grant program and its grantees will continue to benefit from these investments.

Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Coaching Supports for FFN Caregivers

Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (IECMH) is a process in which trained consultants indirectly support children by building the capacity of child care providers to promote children’s social-emotional development. Consultants provide a range of services to child care providers, from supportive coaching to capacity building in skills needed to address children’s social and emotional needs. Early childhood mental health consultation benefits young children as well as child care providers by reducing stress and turnover. These supports are offered to the new cohort of FFN grantees that began Oct. 2023.

Previously, Family, Friend and Neighbor IECMH consultation was provided to select groups or individual FFN navigators. Those who participated reported that the consultation group provided a comfortable and culturally responsive environment to share their experiences and gain practical resources to help provide child care. Participants also reported that because of their participation, they made changes in their care practices, felt better able to support children and families, and better able to cope with stress.

FFN Environmental Scan

To better understand and support FFN providers, DHS designed and implemented an [environmental scan of FFN child care in Minnesota](#) between Sept. 2022 and June 2023, in partnership with evaluation firm The Improve Group. The study used two surveys: one for FFN caregivers and one for the parents/guardians who use FFN care. Caregivers and parents/guardians described their FFN care arrangements, who is involved, the motivations that drew them to FFN care and how the state can best support them.

Results from this study emphasize there is no “typical” FFN caregiver, family or arrangement. In fact, customization is exactly why many families choose FFN—formal child care systems may not meet their specific child care needs and preferences. The report contains descriptive analysis of a myriad of factors related to FFN caregiving issues impacting providers and families. The report highlights four key policy recommendations:

1. Consistently fund community-based organizations to do community-specific outreach related to FFN child care;
2. Include FFN care in resource and benefit programs available to those who use or provide center or in-home child care;
3. Recognize FFN care as an important form of child care—but use caution when pursuing it as an entry point into child care careers; and
4. Consider FFN caregivers’ unique and diverse motivations when designing, publicizing and conducting training.

Results of the environmental scan informed the design of the Request for Proposals for the new cohort of FFN Support grantees and the technical assistance DHS will provide to this new cohort.

Outreach and Communication

The department also invested in a communication and outreach campaign to Family, Friend and Neighbor (FFN) caregivers to raise community awareness of the role of FFN caregivers in the early childhood care and education landscape, the state and local resources available to support FFN caregivers, and to increase the number of FFN caregivers registered with the state to become legally nonlicensed providers.

A state-sponsored [website](#) was developed in Sept. 2022 to provide information and resources for FFN grantees, as well as direct families and FFN providers to supports and grantee organizations. The campaign also provided grantees in the previous cohort with marketing materials and community-tailored social media ads to support their marketing, outreach and communication efforts in their communities. Per the grantees' recommendations, the FFN website is translated in Spanish, Somali, Hmong, Oromo, Arabic and Karen. The advertising campaign resulted in over five million impressions and nearly 2,000 clicks to the organizations' website. Additionally, while campaign ads were running, website views increased from an average of 200 per month to over 8,000 per month. The state intends to support 2023 grantees with translated marketing materials.

FFN Design Sprint

The FFN Environmental Scan and community input, provided through the FFN Advisory Committee and other avenues, identified specific barriers to supporting Minnesota's FFN population.

As a result, the department is investing in a targeted FFN design sprint. The goal of the design sprint is to identify strategies for improving access, participation, and engagement by culturally, racially and language diverse FFN caregivers and LNLs in Minnesota's early care and education system of supports. Through a Human Centered Design methodology, DHS partnered with a local research firm to pinpoint how to match caregiver unmet needs to program design to increase engagement and improve outcomes. The results of this design sprint are anticipated to inform a new research partnership focused on Minnesota's FFN Grant Program with the federal Administration for Children and Families' Office of Planning, Research & Evaluation's (OPRE) Behavioral Interventions to Advance Self-Sufficiency Next Generation ([BIAS-NG](#)) project which will launch in early 2024.

VII. Program Implementation Milestones

Table 1 outlines significant implementation milestones for the program since legislation was passed in May 2023. This includes both milestones that have been completed and future milestones.

Table 1. Family Friend and Neighbor Grant Program Milestones

Milestone	Date	Status
FFN Grant Program (SFY 24-25) RFP released	5/25/2023	Complete
FFN Grant Program (SFY 24-25) grantees selected and contracts fully executed	10/1/2023	Complete
FFN Grant Program evaluation measure consultation with Minnesota Management and Budget	10/6/2023	Complete

Milestone	Date	Status
FFN Environmental Scan report publicly released, including Spanish , Hmong , Oromo , and Somali translations	11/1/2023	Complete
FFN Grant Program (SFY 24-25) grantee kickoff	11/21/2023	Complete
FFN Design Sprint Report Release	TBD	Not Yet Completed
FFN Advisory Committee Convenings	Quarterly starting 1/1/2024	Not Yet Completed
MDRC BIAS-NG project launch	January, 2024	Not Yet Completed
FFN Grant Program evaluation	Conducted annually with next legislative report due Feb. 1, 2026	Not Yet Completed

VIII. Appendix One

Sec. 12.

[119B.196] FAMILY, FRIEND, AND NEIGHBOR GRANT PROGRAM.

Subdivision 1.

Establishment.

The commissioner of human services shall establish a family, friend, and neighbor (FFN) grant program to promote children's social-emotional learning and healthy development, early literacy, and other skills to succeed as learners and to foster community partnerships that will help children thrive when they enter school.

Subd. 2.

Grant awards.

The commissioner may award grants under this section to the following entities working with FFN caregivers: community-based organizations, nonprofit organizations, local or regional libraries, local public health agencies, and Indian Tribes and Tribal organizations. Grantees may use grant money received under this section to:

(1) provide culturally and linguistically appropriate training, support, and resources to FFN caregivers and children's families to improve and promote children's health, safety, nutrition, and learning;

(2) connect FFN caregivers and children's families with community resources that support the families' physical and mental health and economic and developmental needs;

(3) connect FFN caregivers and children's families to early childhood screening programs and facilitate referrals to state and local agencies, schools, community organizations, and medical providers, as appropriate;

(4) provide FFN caregivers and children's families with information about high-quality, community-based early care and learning programs and financial assistance available to the families, including but not limited to child care assistance under this chapter and early learning scholarships under section 124D.165;

(5) provide FFN caregivers with information about registering as a legal nonlicensed child care provider as defined in section 119B.011, subdivision 16, and establishing a licensed family or group family child care program;

(6) provide transportation for FFN caregivers and children's families to educational and other early childhood training activities;

(7) translate materials for FFN caregivers and children's families and provide translation services to FFN caregivers and children's families;

(8) develop and disseminate social-emotional learning, health and safety, and early learning kits to FFN caregivers; and

(9) establish play and learning groups for FFN caregivers.

Subd. 3.

Administration.

Applicants must apply for the grants using the forms and according to timelines established by the commissioner.

Subd. 4.

Reporting requirements.

(a) Grantees shall provide data and program outcomes to the commissioner in a form and manner specified by the commissioner for the purpose of evaluating the grant program.

(b) Beginning February 1, 2024, and every two years thereafter, the commissioner shall report to the chairs and ranking minority members of the legislative committees with jurisdiction over child care on program outcomes.