Workgroup on Expediting Rental Assistance

Report to the Legislature
February 29, 2024

Alternative formats

To request a reasonable accommodation and/or alternative format of this document contact Management Analysis and Development (MAD) at 651-259-3800, Management.Analysis@state.mn.us, or accessibility.mmb@state.mn.us.

About this report

This report is required under Minnesota Session Laws 2023, chapter 69, section 14 (correcting Laws of Minnesota 2023, chapter 37, article 6, section 14). The Minnesota Legislature appropriated $200,000 to Minnesota Management and Budget (MMB) and directed Management Analysis and Development (a section of MMB) to facilitate the Workgroup on Expediting Rental Assistance. This is not a Minnesota Management and Budget report.

Table of contents

Acronyms and definitions

Acronym	What it means
DCYF	Department of Children, Youth, and Families
DHS	Minnesota Department of Human Services
MHFA	Minnesota Housing Finance Agency (referred to in report as "Minnesota Housing")
EA	Emergency Assistance is a cash-grant program for families with low incomes experiencing household emergencies.
EGA	Emergency General Assistance is a cash-grant program for adults, and in limited cases, families with low incomes experiencing a household emergency.
FHPAP	The Family Homeless Prevention and Assistance Program provides supportive services and financial assistance, such as rent deposits, rent payments, or utility payments, to eligible households that are homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness.
HMIS	The Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) is a local information technology system used to collect client-level data and data on the provision of housing and services to individuals experiencing homelessness and families and persons at risk of homelessness.
MAXIS	MAXIS is a computer system used by state and county workers to determine eligibility for public assistance and health care, hosted by DHS.
MACSSA	Minnesota Association of County Social Service Administrators is a professional association of human service administrators committed to providing advocacy for meaningful system improvement, for policy and legislation, and to promote quality human services that positively impact Minnesotans.
MNIT	Minnesota IT Services.

Workgroup vision and narrative statement

This statement was written by workgroup members to describe the foundation on which recommendations were developed.

Every Minnesotan deserves a safe and stable home. Yet every year, tens of thousands of Minnesotans face a housing crisis that threatens their security. Emergency rental assistance can prevent a family from being evicted, helping them stabilize and eventually thrive.

Dedicated state and local workers administer a variety of emergency rental assistance programs that provide vital support to Minnesotans. Still, many Minnesotans facing housing crises have told policymakers that they have not been able to access timely financial support.

The Minnesota Legislature charged the workgroup on expediting rental assistance with identifying processes, procedures, and technological or personnel resources that would enable state and county agencies to deliver emergency rental assistance more quickly. This group, formed of experts from across the state, has worked diligently to produce recommendations that will have a tangible impact on delivering timelier and more effective rental assistance to Minnesotans.

We developed broad principles to guide our work. First and foremost, we believe that all Minnesotans deserve stable housing. We believe that when housing stability is challenged by a crisis, people-centered systems can provide easy-to-navigate support and timely assistance that prevents severe disruptions such as eviction or homelessness for those Minnesotans. We also acknowledge that rental assistance does not exist in a vacuum; these programs exist as part of a larger ecosystem of institutions, laws, policies, and practices.

The workgroup gathered perspectives from Minnesotans to learn more about the experiences of applying for emergency rental assistance. Additionally, the workgroup benefited from presentations and information developed through visioning and co-design work by Family Housing Fund and Research in Action, as described in the External Consultation section of this report. These complementary stakeholder engagements confirm the workgroup's recommendations are well grounded and have a broad base of support.

We recognize that insufficient funding for the programs and systems that administer emergency rental assistance contribute to a scarcity mindset that limits access to resources and challenges the efficiencies of delivering assistance. Minnesotans face barriers to emergency assistance for a variety of reasons. Multiple programs are administered by multiple entities with different eligibility rules and requirements. Lack of funding contributes to the pressure on administrators to establish criteria to target limited resources. This can be a challenging process for anyone to navigate, let alone someone facing a housing crisis. In addition, technology barriers, language barriers, and documentation requirements can all inhibit timely submission and processing of applications.

After identifying these barriers, our workgroup set out to explore solutions that aligned with our values of a people-centered rental assistance ecosystem that would provide timely emergency rental assistance to Minnesotans in need. We developed a series of recommendations, some that require changes in state laws and others that can be implemented through administrative changes. We believe the recommendations will greatly

improve our collective ability to deliver emergency rental assistance on a timelier basis. Our recommendations include ways to:

- Reduce barriers and improve access for Minnesotans applying for emergency rental assistance.
- Improve access through simplifying language and verification processes, proactively engaging rental property owners and local administrators, and expanding what languages are available.
- Pursue technology improvements to enhance the experience for applicants and integration among emergency rental assistance programs and resources.
- Develop an annual assessment of need to align funding to meet actual needs of Minnesotans who are experiencing housing crises.
- Enhance data collection and develop criteria to measure timeliness of processing and payments.

A few more words about our recommendations: First, these recommendations are just the start of what we hope will be an ongoing, iterative process that continuously improves the experience of program participants and the overall efficacy of the state's investment in these programs. We want to be clear that while each of these recommendations can help move the needle, they are most valuable when implemented together. The sum of the whole is greater than its parts if we are to make significant change in meeting the legislative charge of timelier emergency rental assistance.

We recommend that the legislature and a broad set of partners, including community members, continue to assess related laws and policies, especially Minnesota's eviction laws and funding opportunities for housing initiatives, to ensure these recommendations will make an impact toward our ultimate goal: creating a Minnesota where everyone has access to a safe and stable home.

Executive summary

In 2023, the Minnesota Legislature authorized a workgroup on expediting rental assistance. The legislature charged the group with identifying what processes, procedures, and technological or personnel resources would be necessary to enable the state, county, or nonprofit agencies responsible for administering government emergency rental assistance funds to meet the following goals:

- Within two weeks of receiving a completed application for rental assistance, make and issue a determination on the application.
- Within 30 days of receiving a completed application for rental assistance, issue payment on an approved rental application to the landlord.

The programs in scope included:

- Family Homelessness Prevention and Assistance Program (FHPAP)
- Emergency Assistance (EA)
- Emergency General Assistance (EGA)

The workgroup consisted of sixteen members, including representatives from state agencies, counties, advocacy and nonprofit organizations, and the legislature. The workgroup studied the programs in scope and consulted with experts, including people with lived experience and program administrators. Members also gained insights from research and engagement conducted by two organizations, Family Housing Fund and Research in Action. With this common knowledge of issues and opportunities, the workgroup then brainstormed options and determined which options had broad support from the workgroup to develop as draft recommendations. The workgroup endorsed twelve final recommendations on page 16 with no dissenting votes for inclusion in this final report.

Introduction

In 2023, the Minnesota Legislature authorized a workgroup on expediting rental assistance. The legislature charged the group with identifying what processes, procedures, and technological or personnel resources would be necessary to enable the state or county agencies responsible for administering government emergency rental assistance funds to meet the following goals:

- Within two weeks of receiving a completed application for rental assistance, make and issue a determination on the application.
- Within 30 days of receiving a completed application for rental assistance, issue payment on an approved rental application to the landlord.

The programs in scope included:

- The Family Homelessness Prevention and Assistance Program (FHPAP)
- Emergency Assistance (EA)
- Emergency General Assistance (EGA)

The workgroup consisted of sixteen members, including representatives from state agencies, counties, advocacy and nonprofit organizations, and the legislature. See Appendix A: Authorizing legislation on page 27 for the draft legislation, and Appendix B: Workgroup members on page 29 for a list of workgroup members.

The legislation designated Management Analysis and Development (MAD) to facilitate the workgroup. MAD is Minnesota government's in-house fee-for-service management consulting group. Consultants provide management consultation services to local, regional, state, and federal government agencies and public institutions.

About FHPAP, EA, and EGA

The state programs in scope engage a range of administrators. The program comparison table below provides insight into how the funding, eligibility, administration, and application processes work with the three programs.

Program comparison

Program detail	Family Homelessness Prevention and Assistance Program (FHPAP)	Emergency Assistance (EA) and Emergency General Assistance (EGA)
State agency involved	Minnesota Housing	Minnesota Department of Human Services Note: EA program will move to DCYF after July 1, 2024.

Program detail	Family Homelessness Prevention and Assistance Program (FHPAP)	Emergency Assistance (EA) and Emergency General Assistance (EGA)
Funding source	State funding	EA: Federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funding EGA: State funding
Funding available	Typical base funding of $10,269,000 per year 55 percent awarded to Twin Cities metropolitan area; 45 percent awarded to Greater Minnesota and Tribal Nations $95 million additional one-time funding for 2024–2025	EA: Amount allocated by county, if any EGA: $6,729,812 per fiscal year allocated to counties and tribes based on a formula established by the legislature
Local administrators	Tribal Nations, metro counties, and nonprofits in Greater Minnesota serve as providers. Those providers often contract with subgrantees to help deliver assistance and supportive services. For 2023–2025, Minnesota Housing currently has twenty-two program administrators, who in turn have seventy subgrantees.	Minnesota's eighty-seven counties and eleven Tribal Nations can serve as local administrators. Some choose not to offer EA/EGA programs.
How entities become local administrators	Minnesota Housing chooses providers through a periodic request for proposals (RFP) competitive process.	Statute dictates which entities can become local administrators.
Program eligibility oversight	Minnesota Housing sets minimum program eligibility criteria. It also offers a few criteria local administrators can choose to implement. Local administrators can add more criteria only with approval from Minnesota Housing.	Minnesota state law sets program eligibility criteria that administrators follow. Local administrators can add more eligibility criteria at their discretion.

Program detail	Family Homelessness Prevention and Assistance Program (FHPAP)	Emergency Assistance (EA) and Emergency General Assistance (EGA)
State or federal eligibility minimum criteria	- Household income must be at or below 200 percent of federal poverty guidelines ($60,000 for a family of four). - Be a Minnesota resident or a household otherwise approved by Minnesota Housing. - Be homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness and in need of services and/or financial assistance due to a housing crisis.	EA: - Be a pregnant person or a family with minor children. - Have income below 200 percent of the federal poverty guidelines. EGA: - Be a household without minor children in an emergency facing loss of a basic need item. - Household income must be at or below 200 percent of federal poverty guidelines. - Have not received this or other types of assistance within certain time frames. - Lived in Minnesota for 30 days.
Eligible expenses	- Rental deposit - Rent payment - Mortgage payment - Utilities - Other expenses that keep people in housing - Services, such as case management, renter/property owner mediation, or housing navigation	- Rental deposit - Rent payment - Mortgage payment - Utilities - Other expenses approved by the administrator
Application form	Local administrators create their own application form.	Local administrators use DHS's application methods (Combined Application Form or mnbenefits.mn.gov).
Verification requirements	Set by Minnesota Housing. They include: - Income documentation - Rental payment, deposit, or utilities documentation - Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) demographics (entry of application information into HMIS is required)	Set by local administrators.

Program detail	Family Homelessness Prevention and Assistance Program (FHPAP)	Emergency Assistance (EA) and Emergency General Assistance (EGA)
Electronic system used	HMIS	MAXIS
Metrics: Two weeks from application to determination	Data not currently tracked centrally. Applicant information is entered into HMIS only after an application has been approved.	EA: 34 percent of applications decided within seven days, 88 percent within thirty days in CY2019 EGA: 29.7 days in FY2023, for all applications statewide There are no state-set requirements to process these applications within particular time frames. After thirty days of a pending application, MAXIS auto-denies the case.
Metrics: Thirty days from application to payment	For "Fast Track" funds, provided in a one-time state appropriation, administrators must track whether payments are made within thirty days from receipt of all required documentation. This is not tracked for "Standard" funds. In August, Minnesota Housing informally asked providers if they were meeting the thirty-day expectation. About half of providers responded, representing 3,500 households. There were no payments beyond thirty days, except one that was returned in the mail and one that was lost in the mail.	EA: 63 percent within thirty days in SFY2023. EGA: 59 percent within thirty days in SFY2023.

Program processes overview

The table below provides a general outline of the program processes, using information from the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) and Minnesota Housing subject matter experts. The exact process varies by local administrator and how a person learns about options for help.

Process step	Family Homelessness Prevention and Assistance Program (FHPAP)	Emergency Assistance (EA) and Emergency General Assistance (EGA)
Person connects with local administrator	Applicants must connect with a local administrator. Select Tribal Nations, counties, and nonprofits serve as local administrators.	Applicants can contact a local administrator, or they can apply online, and the system will send the application to a local administrator. The local administrator is the person's Tribal Nation or county.
Person completes an application	A person fills out the local administrator's application form.	A person fills out the Combined Application Form on mnbenefits.mn.gov, by phone, or on paper.
Administrator verifies information	A local administrator reviews the application. The person provides documents to prove information on their application.	A local administrator reviews the application and enters the information into MAXIS. The person provides documents to prove information on their application. The local administrator interviews the person.
Administrator approves or denies assistance	A local administrator determines whether the person is eligible for the program. The local administrator enters the person's information into HMIS if they are approved.	A local administrator determines whether the person is eligible for the program based on their local EA/EGA policy.
Administrator pays for rental assistance	A local administrator collects vendor payment information if needed. The local administrator pays the vendor.	A local administrator collects vendor payment information if needed. The state pays the vendor.

Recommendation development process

Workgroup structure, roles, and process

Workgroup: The workgroup of sixteen members met every month between August 2023 and February 2024. Workgroup members or their proxies actively participated in workgroup meetings and completed tasks between meetings.

Program subgroups: Members formed two program subgroups (FHPAP and EA/EGA) that met separately three times in September, October, and November between workgroup meetings. The subgroups explored challenges and solutions specific to the two program streams. Several subject matter experts from state agencies also attended the subgroup meetings to answer member questions.

Operations subgroup: Six members volunteered to join the operations subgroup. Subgroup members helped plan meeting agendas and ensured that the workgroup path led to clear recommendations and content for the legislative report.

Management Analysis and Development (MAD): MAD facilitated workgroup and subgroup meetings, documented workgroup and subgroup meetings, and provided research support. MAD provided communications support, including maintaining the workgroup website and serving as the point of contact for interested members of the public. MAD also drafted this legislative report.

How recommendations were developed: The recommendations were developed through a process outlined in the "Workgroup meetings" section below. From August 2023 to January 2024, the workgroup met monthly to analyze issues, brainstorm options, and determine which options had broad support from the workgroup to develop as draft recommendations. In addition, the program subgroups met monthly in September, October, and November to ensure program-specific considerations were reflected. From thirty-four options for recommendations (see Appendix E), the workgroup endorsed twelve final recommendations with no dissenting votes for inclusion in this final report.

Legislative language development: Following workgroup approval of final recommendations on January 11, professional staff in the nonpartisan House Research Department and Senate Counsel, Research and Fiscal Analysis Office, prepared draft legislation required to implement the recommendations. Workgroup members reviewed the draft language between January 31 and February 8. Members considered technical edits proposed by DHS and Minnesota Housing and voted on the draft legislative language at the final WERA meeting on February 8. The draft legislative language is included below, following the Recommendations section.

Workgroup meetings

The list below describes the primary topics of the workgroup and program subgroup meetings. For more detailed meeting summaries, see Appendix E: Workgroup Meeting Summaries on page 34.

August

- Introductions and workgroup overview
- Presentations from:
    - DHS—background information on Emergency General Assistance (EGA) and Emergency Assistance (EA)
    - Minnesota Housing—background information on Family Homeless Prevention and Assistance Program (FHPAP)
    - Family Housing Fund—engagement plan for "Reimagining Emergency Assistance" project

September

- Build common knowledge
    - Explore group interests
    - Brainstorm challenges and hurdles to meeting the timeliness goals
- Further analyze brainstormed challenges and hurdles

October

- Presentations from:
    - Family Housing Fund—Strengthening the Safety Net for Housing Stability: Insights from Community Engagement
    - Research in Action—Research Overview and Data Walk
- Brainstorm options for solutions
- Refine brainstormed options for solutions

November

- Presentation from Research in Action—Report on Community Convene Session
- Assess feasibility and impact of options
- Select options to turn into recommendations
- Prepare to draft recommendations

December

- Refine draft recommendations

January

- Finalize and vote on recommendations

February

- Finalize and vote on draft legislative language
- Discuss final report

External consultation

The legislation required the workgroup to engage external parties:

The workgroup shall consult with other individuals and organizations that have expertise and experience that may assist the workgroup in fulfilling its responsibilities, including:

- *Entities engaging in additional external stakeholder input **from people with lived experience***
- *Administrators of emergency assistance **not named to the workgroup, including Minnesota's Tribal Nations***

Member-initiated consultation

Members primarily conducted external consultation individually between workgroup meetings. Members met with fifty-three groups that fall into the following categories: nonprofit organizations, advocacy groups, community groups, Tribal governments, and state agencies. Members shared details on who they engaged with, what insights were shared, and key takeaways with other members on a collaborative platform after their engagements. In the member-initiated external consultation tracking, members:

- Included estimates of how many people they contacted
- Summarized the types of people and groups engaged
- Specifically mentioned Tribal engagement efforts

Tribal engagement

Early in the workgroup process, MAD consulted with the Tribal liaisons at DHS's Office of Indian Policy and Minnesota Housing. Six of Minnesota's eleven federally recognized Tribal Nations currently administer one or more of the three programs in scope for the workgroup's study. These nations also comprise the voting membership of the [Minnesota Tribal Collaborative to Prevent and End Homelessness (MTC)](#), which supports the administration of FHPAP for those members. The MTC strives to address historical barriers and unique needs of Tribal members and their families to prevent and end homelessness. Tribal liaisons recommended a multi-faceted approach:

- For tribes administering FHPAP only, workgroup members engage in outreach to the Minnesota Tribal Collaborative.
- For tribes administering FHPAP and EA/EGA, workgroup members engage in outreach to specific Tribal staff as recommended by DHS's Office of Indian Policy.
- For Tribes not presently administering FHPAP, EA, or EGA, MAD consultants send an invitation via email to Tribal human services directors to share feedback with the workgroup.

Workgroup members engaged as recommended.

Two workgroup members met with the Minnesota Tribal Collaborative chairperson and a staff member in late November. The conversation was an opportunity to learn from the Collaborative's experiences with the programs, share draft workgroup recommendations, and receive feedback on the recommendations. The workgroup members specifically sought input on whether the Collaborative felt the recommendations will help achieve the goal of expediting processing and payments. The Collaborative representatives responded that they felt the recommendations would do so.

Workgroup members did not receive other responses.

Entities engaging in additional external stakeholder input

Two organizations shared the results of their community engagement efforts with the workgroup:

Family Housing Fund

Family Housing Fund (FHFund) was a member organization of the workgroup. Prior to the workgroup's legislation, FHFund had started a strategic engagement effort to re-imagine Minnesota's emergency financial assistance system and strengthen the safety net for housing stability. The project involved community engagement (phase 1), a series of co-design workshops (phase 2), and a final report. FHFund partnered with Imagine Deliver, a strategy consulting firm, in this work and engaged government partners, community organizations, renters and people with lived experience, and rental property owners in a process to reimagine emergency financial assistance and transform the system.

FHFund presented at the October workgroup meeting on their community engagement findings. This information was also compiled into a public report, *Strengthening the Safety Net for Housing Stability: Insights from Community Engagement.* A final report that includes a synthesis of the series of co-design workshops was completed in February 2024 and may be accessed online here: https://www.fhfund.org/strengthening-the-safety-net/.

Research in Action

On the workgroup's behalf, the Pohlad Foundation engaged and funded a research organization, Research in Action (RIA), to summarize and conduct research and community engagement. RIA analyzed several existing reports, including a few that center community expertise of individuals with lived experience. They shared the results of their literature review at the October workgroup meeting.

RIA also hosted an in-person "Community Convene" roundtable with people with lived experience from around Minnesota in October, including members of the Stable Housing is the Priority (SHIP) Collaborative. Five themes emerged: communication, eligibility, technology, time, and dehumanization. RIA presented on their preliminary roundtable findings and recommendations generated by participants at the November workgroup meetings. In early January, they shared a learnings report summarizing all their work to date.

As a final step, RIA hosted a second community roundtable in January. They invited previous participants to a meeting, where they reviewed the workgroup's recommendations. RIA summarized participant reactions to the recommendations and shared the results as an appendix to the final report published on the RIA website: Workgroup on Expediting Emergency Assistance — Research in Action.

Recommendations

This section of the report lists twelve recommendations from the workgroup on expediting rental assistance. The recommendations identify what processes, procedures, and technological or personnel resources the workgroup determined would be necessary to enable the state or county agencies responsible for administering government rental assistance funds to meet the following goals:

- Within two weeks of receiving a completed application for rental assistance, make and issue a determination on the application.
- Within 30 days of receiving a completed application for rental assistance, issue payment on an approved rental application to the landlord.

The twelve recommendations represent a thorough and balanced consideration of the issues the legislature directed the workgroup to address. In addition, two recommendations focus on improving data measurement and aligning the recommendations with related statutes.

During recommendation development, workgroup members discussed implementation considerations. The considerations listed below each recommendation are not an exhaustive list of all concerns or potential barriers. Instead, they reflect considerations that emerged during discussions. Members may not have outlined obvious considerations.

The workgroup recognizes that the creation of the new Department of Children, Youth, and Families as of July 1, 2024, will require consideration of how to adjust recommendations currently focused on the Department of Human Services.

The recommendations are split between two sections: expediting rental assistance and access to rental assistance. The recommendations in the "Expediting rental assistance" category are foundational recommendations directly related to the workgroup scope of improving timeliness. The recommendations in the "Access to rental assistance" category would support increasing outreach, building awareness of the programs, addressing barriers to access to programs, and strengthening systems. The implementation of the access recommendations is conditioned on implementation of the "Expediting rental assistance" recommendations. As such, implementation of "Access to rental assistance" recommendations requires sequencing after implementing "Expediting rental assistance" recommendations. Additional information and context for the recommendation for a centralized or integrated technology system can be found in Appendix C, and all options explored can be found in Appendix D on page 32.

Expediting rental assistance

1. **Increase funding to match real-time assessment of need.**

The workgroup recommends that Minnesota Housing and DHS, in partnership with various agencies, counties, and local partners, develop an Annual Projection of Emergency Housing Assistance Needs in Minnesota. Minnesota Housing shall submit this report yearly to the Minnesota House and Senate Housing Committees. The workgroup recommends that the legislature appropriates funds to the various and relevant programs to meet the actual needs of Minnesotans who are experiencing emergency housing crises.

Implementation considerations:

- Limitations with availability of relevant data
- Costs associated with increased staff capacity demands at Minnesota Housing, DHS, and DCYF
- Costs associated with developing and maintaining the annual projection of need
- Costs associated with compensating people with lived experience for their consultation work

2. **Simplify language and improve timeframe flexibility.**

The workgroup recommends that DHS and Minnesota Housing, in coordination, pursue program rules that have the flexibility to provide relief to crises in a time frame corresponding to the emergency and are simple enough for applicants to understand across emergency rental assistance programs as applicable, including:

- Recognizing differences in administrative and legislative authority, explore legislative changes to EGA program requirements
- Adopt policies and practices that prioritize easy-to-understand eligibility criteria and definitions to allow for accessible, humanizing approaches to assisting people who are going through a crisis
- Develop guidance that strongly encourages program administrators to be flexible with the required forms of documentation for the program and to avoid establishing documentation requirements that are likely to be barriers to participation for eligible households

    Implementation considerations:

- State programs' authority to mandate changes in certain aspects of the program administrators' policies and procedures without legislation
- Costs associated with increased staff capacity demands at Minnesota Housing, DHS, and DCYF
- Costs associated with compensating people with lived experience for their consultation work
- Insufficient funding may cause more problems than are solved

3. **Simplify verification process to remove barriers for applicants.**

The workgroup recommends that the legislature direct Minnesota Housing and DHS, in consultation with local officials, to develop recommendations to simplify the verification process, which will reduce barriers to entry for applicants for emergency rental assistance.

DHS and Minnesota Housing will provide technical assistance to counties, tribes, and local agencies to implement the recommendations. DHS and Minnesota Housing shall prepare recommendations by January 1, 2025, with the goal of adoption by July 1, 2025.

Recommendations development must consider the following: self-attestation of emergencies, assets and/or income, verbal authorization for rental assistance administrators to communicate directly with landlords and utility providers, and application by property owner on behalf of tenant. This list is not exhaustive; other tools and simplification options will also be explored.

    Implementation considerations:

- July 2026 may be more feasible (Biennial Service Agreements typically go into effect January 1 of the relevant year)
- Rule differences by program:
    - FHPAP: administrator, county, and Tribal government rules may conflict
    - EGA: has authority to set rules (per Minnesota Rules 9500.1261)
    - EA: authority is with county/Tribal administrator (per 256J.626)
- Costs associated with increased staff capacity demands at Minnesota Housing, DHS, and DCYF
- Costs associated with compensating people with lived experience for their consultation work
- Insufficient funding may cause more problems than are solved

- Additional engagement of people with lived experience and a process open to including other partners

4. **Increase or start state funding for staff.**

The workgroup recommends that in partnership with county and Tribal human services agencies, DHS initiate a committee to explore and identify strategies that promote adequate funding for processing emergency rental assistance applications. The scope of this committee will include evaluating what state and federal reimbursement will be provided for administrative support staff, what compensation for processors is adequate based on objective markers such as market studies or livable wage markers, and how to implement funding increases. State agencies and program administrators should consult with key stakeholders and experts, including MACSSA and Minnesota Tribal Collaborative, in planning and implementing this recommendation. The committee will develop a report on its work by January 1, 2026.

Implementation considerations:

- Administrative staff in some counties are funded solely through county resources with no state funding attached and would thus not be eligible for random moments reimbursement[1]
- Legislative language should be designed to ensure commitment to follow through on what that exploration will find and that it does not become a "commitment to fund" without actual funding
- Costs associated with increased staff capacity demands at DHS and DCYF
- Costs associated with compensating people with lived experience for their consultation work.
- DHS may be open to discussion about accelerating work
- Report would identify funding needs and requests

5. **Maximize use of uniform electronic signature options.**

The workgroup recommends maximizing the use of electronic signature options compliant with uniform available options across programs and program administrators by providing technical assistance and funding as available.

State agencies will require EA/EGA/FHPAP program administrators to incorporate and implement uniform e-signature options in EA/EGA/FHPAP program documents within two years of passed legislation.

Implementation considerations:

- The workgroup did not specify implementation considerations during recommendations development.

6. **Modify MAXIS.**

The workgroup recommends DHS modify the MAXIS system for greater flexibility in issuing assistance payments while maintaining controls to monitor and prevent inaccurate, unnecessary, or fraudulent payments. DHS should identify gaps and plan modifications as needed to fulfill stated goals.

---

[1] Per DHS, random moments reimbursement is a process by which county and Tribal agencies are periodically monitored by DHS to determine how long it takes them to perform certain case-related work. The results are used to determine how much administration funding the agencies receive.

Implementation considerations:

- Need estimated IT costs from MNIT to make MAXIS modifications via a Level of Effort (LOE) analysis.
- Partnership with counties and tribes to gather more detail about impact of current programming

7. **Centralize or integrate technology systems.**

The workgroup recommends that Minnesota Housing, DHS, and MNIT collaborate to develop requirements for a new centralized system, or integration between existing systems, that is flexible, scalable, customizable, and interfaceable. This would be a "one-stop" statewide rental assistance portal providing greater access to information for all administrators to better support applicants, facilitate communication, improve tracking, and leverage other existing technology. The system should serve as a single source for agency staff to view applications and supporting documentation and should allow applicants to view their documentation and application status and engage with housing assistance staff. The agencies will develop a report of findings and recommendations by January 2027, assuming adequate funding is in place to conduct the work.

(See Appendix C: Additional detail related to centralized or integrated technology systems recommendation for details on this recommendation provided by the workgroup.)

Implementation considerations:

- DHS should consider opportunities to accelerate the report deadline
- Challenges include the necessary time required to work with MNIT and consult with partners
- Collaboration should include consultation with local administrators and program recipients
- Costs associated with increased staff capacity demands at MNIT, Minnesota Housing, DHS, and DCYF
- Costs associated with compensating people with lived experience for their consultation work

8. **Develop criteria to measure conditions and timeliness of processing applications.**

The workgroup recommends that Minnesota Housing and DHS develop a set of criteria to measure the current conditions and timeliness of the processing of emergency rental assistance, including FHPAP, EGA, and EA.

In addition, by January 15, 2027, Minnesota Housing and DHS will submit a report to the Minnesota House and Senate Housing Committees, in which they have collected both qualitative and quantitative data from state and local agencies, to help assess which of the workgroup recommendations have been implemented as recommended and whether they have achieved the goals and charge of the task force to process emergency rental assistance more expeditiously.

Implementation considerations:

- Existing limitations in data collection and processing
- Costs associated with increased staff capacity demands at Minnesota Housing, DHS, and DCYF

9. **Review of related statutes.**

The workgroup recommends the legislature work with Minnesota Housing and DHS to examine interactions between these recommendations and related housing laws to determine where there is synergy between policies and where alignment is needed to ensure maximum positive impact on preventing homelessness.

This review should include housing advocates in the development of questions and work plan and the development of recommendations.

Implementation considerations:

- Costs associated with increased staff capacity demands at Minnesota Housing, DHS, and DCYF

Access to rental assistance

1. **Provide access in multiple languages not currently available.**

The workgroup recommends the following:

- Research current requirements under state law or regulation and what is already being provided.
- Require EA, EGA, and FHPAP to maintain or meet federal language access standards.
- Require Minnesota Housing to support program administrators in ensuring program access in multiple languages.
- Identify specific languages for which translation is needed.
- Identify funding needs and sources to conduct translation.
- Implement a plan to have multilingual translated tabs and navigation on website applications such as benefits.mn.gov, where it already exists in Spanish. Website administrators should consider adding Somali and Hmong.

Implementation considerations:

- Costs associated with increased staff capacity demands at Minnesota Housing, DHS, and DCYF

2. **Proactively engage rental property owners and critical partners in housing stability.**

The workgroup recommends that Minnesota Housing identify and implement ways to direct current program providers to develop strong relationships with rental property owners and ensure these owners have relevant information to help renters connect to the resources they need to stay stably housed. Minnesota Housing will leverage existing programs, including the Landlord Risk Mitigation Program, in doing so.

Implementation considerations:

- Ensure consultation by Minnesota Housing with local providers
- Local partners are key to doing this in a way that works in different parts of the state
- The workgroup's expectation is that the next update to the FHPAP program guide will provide guidance to service providers on how they can reach rental property providers, engage with them, and make them part of the process in a timelier fashion
- According to Minnesota Housing, the FHPAP program guide already provides some best practices for this type of work
- Minnesota Housing must make it clear that the Landlord Risk Mitigation Program needs to engage deliberately with landlords

3. Expand outreach and consolidate a list of all programs' eligibility criteria for early intervention.

The workgroup recommends expanding and increasing effective outreach: DHS and Minnesota Housing, in consultation with nonprofit community partners and counties, will develop and implement strategies to increase outreach to community members to expand awareness of emergency rental assistance availability and how to apply for assistance.

Consolidate a list of all programs' eligibility criteria for early intervention: DHS and Minnesota Housing will create a resource that consolidates program requirements for EA, EGA, and FHPAP assistance in one location that potential applicants can access to apply for assistance as early as possible. A process will be in place to ensure updates are made as program changes are implemented.

Implementation considerations:

- Requires funding for outreach and investing in infrastructure to do it
- Consider outreach costs and how much staff capacity would be required
- Agencies need to understand and prioritize use of existing resources for making program information available in a central location and easy to understand
- An increase in applications resulting from greater outreach could exacerbate challenges:
  - As more applications come in, insufficient funding would lead to an inability to approve them
  - Lack of funding for sufficient staff would delay processing times
- Unifying all programs' eligibility criteria should be a goal for future, better consistency

Draft legislative language

Following workgroup approval of final recommendations on January 11, professional staff in the nonpartisan House Research Department and Senate Counsel, Research and Fiscal Analysis Office, prepared draft legislation required to implement the recommendations. The draft legislative language is included below. Draft legislative language presented in this report does not include specialized formatting that may be incorporated as part of the legislative process.

Section 1. [462A.2096] Annual Projection of Emergency Rental Assistance Needs

Minnesota Housing must develop a projection of emergency rental assistance needs in consultation with the commissioner of human services and representatives from county and Tribal housing administrators and housing nonprofit agencies. The projection must identify the amount of funding required to meet all emergency rental assistance needs, including the family homelessness prevention and assistance program, the emergency assistance program, and emergency general assistance. By January 15 each year, the commissioner must submit a report on the projected need for emergency rental assistance to the chairs and ranking minority members of the legislative committees having jurisdiction over housing and human services finance and policy.

Section 2. [462A.2098] Providing Information on Rental Housing

Minnesota Housing shall regularly provide information to emergency rental assistance program providers and to rental property owners that connect renters to state and federal programs that help renters stay stably housed. The agency shall leverage existing programs and resources in providing information under this section.

Section 3. Data Collection to Measure Timeliness of Rental Assistance

The commissioner of the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency, working with the commissioner of human services and county housing administrators, must develop criteria for measuring the timeliness of processing emergency rental assistance applications, and collect data to monitor application processing speeds. Programs to be monitored include family homelessness prevention and assistance, emergency assistance, and emergency general assistance. The commissioners of the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency and human services must use the data collected to inform improvements to emergency rental assistance application processing systems. By January 15, 2027, the commissioner must submit a report to the chairs and ranking minority members of the legislative committees having jurisdiction over housing and human services finance and policy. The report must include analysis of the data collected and whether goals have been met to (1) process an emergency rental assistance application within two weeks of receipt of a complete application, and (2) if approved, make payment to a landlord within thirty days of receipt of a complete rental assistance application.

Section 4. Direction to Commissioners of Human Services; MAXIS Modifications

The commissioner of human services must make modifications to the MAXIS system to ensure it has greater flexibility in issuing assistance payments while maintaining controls to monitor and prevent inaccurate, unnecessary, or fraudulent payments. The commissioner must identify gaps and plan modifications as needed to fulfill the stated goals in this bill.

Section 5. Direction to Commissioners of Human Services and Housing; Emergency Assistance Program Modifications

The commissioners of human services and the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency must develop program recommendations for emergency rental assistance that have the flexibility to provide relief for crises within a time frame that corresponds to the emergency and that are simple enough for applicants to understand across all emergency rental assistance programs. In the development of these recommendations, the commissioners must:

1. recognize differences between administrative and legislative authority and propose legislative changes to the definition of emergency general assistance;
2. adopt policies and practices that prioritize easy-to-understand eligibility criteria and definitions that prioritize accessible, humanizing approaches when assisting persons through a crisis; and
3. develop guidance to emergency rental assistance program administrators that encourage the program administrators to be flexible with the required forms of documentation for the program and to avoid establishing documentation requirements that are likely to be barriers to participation in emergency rental assistance for eligible households.

Section 6. Direction to Commissioners of Human Services and Housing; Expand Outreach and Consolidate Program Information

a) The commissioners of human services and the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency, in consultation with counties and nonprofit community partners, must develop and implement strategies that expand outreach to community members to increase awareness of emergency rental assistance availability and how persons can apply for assistance.
b) The commissioners of human services and the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency must create a resource that consolidates program requirements for emergency assistance, emergency general assistance, and family homeless prevention assistance in one location that potential applicants can utilize to ensure they are able to apply for assistance as early as possible. The commissioners must develop a process to ensure updates are made to the resource created under this section as program changes are implemented.

Section 7. Electronic Signatures for Rental Assistance

The commissioner of the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency and the commissioner of human services shall develop uniform e-signature options to be used in applications for emergency general assistance, emergency assistance, and family homeless prevention and assistance program assistance. No later than June 30, 2026, the commissioners shall require administrators of the emergency general assistance, emergency assistance, and family homeless prevention and assistance program to incorporate and implement the developed e-signature options.

Section 8. Language Access in Applications for Rental Assistance

The commissioner of the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency and the commissioner of human services shall research state and federal laws and regulations to determine language access standards applying to the organizations' emergency general assistance, emergency assistance, and family homeless prevention and assistance programs and shall ensure compliance with all applicable language access requirements. The commissioners shall identify specific languages into which program materials could be translated to improve

access to emergency general assistance, emergency assistance, and family homeless prevention and assistance program assistance and shall translate the materials into the identified languages. The commissioners shall develop and implement a plan to translate any website applications for emergency general assistance, emergency assistance, and family homeless prevention and assistance program assistance into multilingual website applications. The commissioners shall identify funding needs to improve their organizations' language access and any available funding sources. The commissioner of the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency shall provide technical assistance and support to family homeless prevention and assistance program grantees to ensure grantees meet language access standards.

Section 9. Promoting Adequate Funding for Processing Emergency Assistance Applications; Direction to the Commissioner

a) The commissioner of human services, in consultation with county and Tribal human services agencies, the Minnesota Association of County Social Services Administrators, the Minnesota Tribal Collaborative, and other stakeholders, shall identify and evaluate strategies to promote adequate funding for processing emergency rental assistance applications. The commissioner shall:
   (1) evaluate state and federal reimbursement for administrative support staff;
   (2) determine adequate compensation for processors based on objective data such as market studies or livable wage markers;
   (3) determine if state funding increases are necessary to process emergency rental assistance applications in a timely manner; and
   (4) establish a process to determine an equitable funding formula that is adjustable as needed.
b) The commissioner shall report the results of the evaluation of funding for processing emergency assistance applications and any related recommendations to the chairs and ranking minority members of the legislative committees with jurisdiction over emergency assistance by January 1, 2026. The report must also include any draft legislation necessary to implement the recommendations.

Section 10. Recommendations for a Centralized Rental Assistance Application System

Subdivision 1. Development of new emergency rental assistance application system. The commissioner of human services, in collaboration with the commissioner of the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency and the commissioner of information technology services, must develop a recommendation for a new centralized emergency rental assistance application system that will be administered by the state and be available statewide to all emergency rental assistance providers to process emergency rental assistance applications. The commissioner shall consult with various emergency rental assistance providers throughout the state in making recommendations under this section.

Subdivision 2. New system requirements. The emergency rental assistance application system must have the following requirements:

1. is a centralized system operated by the Department of Human Services;
2. is able to integrate with existing emergency rental assistance application systems;
3. serves as a single application portal into multiple state emergency rental assistance programs;
4. is flexible, scalable, and customizable;
5. serves as a single source for agencies to view applications and supporting documentation; and
6. allows applicants to view their documentation and the status of their application.

Subdivision 3. Cost estimate. The commissioner of human services shall consult with other individuals that have expertise in statewide data systems and shall put together a cost estimate for the emergency rental assistance application system.

Subdivision 4. Report to the legislature. The commissioner of human services shall submit a report by January 15, 2027, to the chairs and ranking minority members of the legislative committees with jurisdiction over housing and human services finance and policy. The report shall include proposed timelines, a sample request for a proposal with technical specifications, and cost estimates for a new emergency rental assistance application system under this section. The report must also include any draft legislation necessary to implement the application system.

Section 11. Verification Procedures for Rental Assistance

a) The commissioner of the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency and the commissioner of human services shall consult with local officials to develop recommendations aimed at simplifying the process of verifying the information in applications for emergency general assistance, emergency assistance, and family homeless prevention and assistance program assistance. In developing recommendations, the commissioners must consider:
   (1) allowing self-attestation of emergencies, assets, and income;
   (2) allowing verbal authorization by applicants to allow emergency rental assistance administrators to communicate with landlords and utility providers regarding applications for assistance; and
   (3) allowing landlords to apply for emergency rental assistance on tenants' behalf.
b) The commissioners must:
   (1) prepare recommendations by January 1, 2025;
   (2) adopt any recommendations by July 1, 2025; and
   (3) provide technical assistance to counties, Tribes, and other emergency rental assistance administrators to implement these recommendations.

Appendix A: Authorizing legislation

Minnesota Session Laws 2023, <u>chapter 69, section 14</u> (correcting Laws of Minnesota 2023, chapter 37, article 6, section 14).

Workgroup on expediting rental assistance.

Subdivision 1. Creation; duties.

A workgroup is created to study how to expedite both the processing of applications for rental assistance and for emergency rental assistance and the distribution of rental assistance funds to landlords, in order to identify what processes, procedures, and technological or personnel resources would be necessary to enable the state or county agencies responsible for administering government rental assistance funds, including the family homelessness prevention and assistance program, the emergency assistance program, and emergency general assistance, to meet the following goals:

1) within two weeks of receiving a completed application for rental assistance, make and issue a determination on the application; and
2) within 30 days of receiving a completed application for rental assistance, issue payment on an approved rental application to the landlord.

Subdivision 2. Membership.

The workgroup shall consist of the following:

1) the commissioner of the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency or a designee;
2) the commissioner of the Department of Human Services or designee;
3) a representative from the Minnesota Multi Housing Association;
4) a representative from Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid;
5) a representative from HOME Line;
6) a representative from the United Way;
7) a representative from the Salvation Army;
8) a representative from the Community Action Partnership;
9) a representative from Community Mediation Minnesota;
10) a representative from the Family Housing Fund;
11) four county administrators of emergency rental assistance, including two county administrators who work for metropolitan counties, as defined by Minnesota Statutes, section 473.121, subdivision 4, and two county administrators who work for nonmetropolitan counties, with one member from each category appointed by the speaker of the house of representatives and one from each category appointed by the senate majority leader;
12) one member from the house of representatives appointed by the speaker of the house; and
13) one member from the senate appointed by the senate majority leader.

Subdivision 3. Facilitation; organization; meetings.

a) The Management Analysis Division of Minnesota Management and Budget shall facilitate the workgroup and convene the first meeting by September 15, 2023.
b) The workgroup must meet at regular intervals as often as necessary to accomplish the goals enumerated under subdivision 1.

c) Meetings of the workgroup are subject to the Minnesota Open Meeting Law under Minnesota Statutes, chapter 13D.

Subdivision 4. External consultation.

The workgroup shall consult with other individuals and organizations that have expertise and experience that may assist the workgroup in fulfilling its responsibilities, including entities engaging in additional external stakeholder input from those with lived experience and administrators of emergency assistance not named to the workgroup, including Minnesota's Tribal Nations.

Subdivision 5. Report required.

The workgroup shall submit a final report by February 29, 2024, to the chairs and ranking minority members of the legislative committees with jurisdiction over housing finance and policy. The report shall include draft legislation required to implement the proposed legislation.

Appendix B: Workgroup members

Members of the workgroup on expediting rental assistance are listed below. The list notes the role each member had based on the legislature's requirements for the workgroup.

- Cassandra Barden, a member representing Minnesota Multi Housing Association.
- Theresa Dahlheimer, a member representing county administrators of emergency rental assistance (nonmetropolitan county, St. Louis County).
- Cindy Fahland, a member representing county administrators of emergency rental assistance (metropolitan county, Hennepin County).
- Jen Frisbie, a member representing Community Mediation Minnesota.
- Jeremy Galley, a member representing Minnesota Department of Human Services.
- Rebekah Grimm, a member representing Salvation Army.
- Representative Mike Howard, a member representing the Minnesota House of Representatives.
- Mary Kaczorek, a member representing Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid.
- Julie Ogunleye, a member representing United Way.
- Andrea Palumbo, a member representing HOME Line.
- Senator Lindsey Port, a member representing the Minnesota Senate.
- Rinal Ray, a member representing Minnesota Housing.
- Ellen Sahli, a member representing Family Housing Fund.
- Lori Schultz, a member representing Community Action Partnership.
- Kristyn Stephens, a member representing county administrators of emergency rental assistance (metropolitan county, Washington County).
- Nicole Worlds, a member representing county administrators of emergency rental assistance (nonmetropolitan county, Human Services of Faribault and Martin Counties).

Member who served on the workgroup until a job change to a new organization:

- Annie Shapiro, a member representing Community Action Partnership.

Appendix C: Additional detail related to centralized or integrated technology systems recommendation

This information was compiled by the workgroup to guide implementation of recommendation 7.

Develop and create a centralized application, communication, and processing system that is flexible, scalable, customizable, and interfaceable. This would be a "one-stop" statewide rental assistance portal providing greater access to information for all administrators to better support applicants, improve tracking, and leverage other existing technology.

Flexible and scalable: The state owns the contract for the software. Counties and tribes would be able to opt in to different portions of the system (application, communication portal, EDMS, processing system, case management system) for EA/EGA and/or FHPAP. If a jurisdiction chose to opt out of using the system the state would process eligibility for EA/EGA, and FHPAP providers could process following their current processes and procedures. Applicants could choose their preferred providers and exclude local government if that is their preference. Applications could be completed online, on paper, or by phone and would be available in multiple languages.

Customizable:

- Optional screening questions customized by each jurisdiction
- Optional chat feature or state will fund resources to offer extended phone hours and online chat features
- Different access roles for different processors/providers
- Notices/communications to applications—jurisdictions should be able to add templates
- Statuses viewable by clients with detail about what might be needed
- Ultimate flexibility would allow for current funding streams and use (example: EA/EGA for car repairs) and processing of other programs (CDBG, other grants, other county-funded programs, etc.).

Interfaceable:

- Verification of income, assets, and Xcel account status and billing history
- Multiple EDMSs for information sharing/reporting to other programs (specifically OnBase, Laserfiche and CaseWorks)
- HMIS for FHPAP tracking
- Accounting systems for check issuances, W-9s, and payment tracking
- Allow for workflows and communication between providers
- MAXIS for previous use and confirmation/verification of other existing information

Other:

- Documents and information would be readily available to all program administrators to view and upload

- Applicants will have secure access to view and upload documents, communicate with providers, and view their case status
- System tracking using one case number per household
- Application requests releases for other organizations, landlord/shelter providers, and utility companies as needed
- Client could select mail, text, or email as preferred method of communication, and system would comply
- Print to mail
- Plain language especially for screening, provider selection, and releases
- Editable case notes for up to 24 hours
- Read receipts on client electronic communications
- Approve/deny documents
- Ability to add notes/comments on documents
- FHPAP providers will need to be able to turn applications "off" and back "on" to control volume
- Ability to forward/exchange communications to specific agency representatives

Appendix D: All options developed by the workgroup

Below is a list of all the options developed by the workgroup, starting at the October workgroup meeting, where members brainstormed options for solutions. These options were either (1) developed as recommendations, (2) combined into another recommendation, or (3) were not voted to proceed as a recommendation. The options fall into seven categories: processes and procedures, communications, program rules, funding, technology, personnel, and miscellaneous.

- Simplify verification process/Allow for self-attestation.
- Utilize inclusive electronic signature process/Require universal adoption of electronic signatures.
- Revise existing application or create an emergency-specific application.
- Create unified application with same eligibility criteria and database/Create a single application with multiple options to apply.
- Develop a pre-screen for eligibility and prioritization/Triage emergency timeline.
- Intra-program process alignment/Develop and align intra-program standards.
- Centralize tasks for specialization/efficiency.
- Provide application support.
- Align rent assistance and eviction process to support housing stability.
- Invest in infrastructure for flexible communication options/Offer a variety of accessible communication options.
- Provide access in multiple languages.
- Build landlord trust/Proactively engage rental property owners as critical partners in housing stability.
- Increase effective outreach for people who do not know about the programs.
- Expand and unify all programs' eligibility criteria to allow more households to be eligible and for early intervention.
- Allow for proactive identification of emergency to provide assistance before renters are in deep crisis.
- Expand program rule flexibility and clarify requirements.
- Reduce amount of requirements/Identify restrictive requirements that could be removed.
- Increase maximum issuance to $6,000 total combined or $4,000 per check.
- Stay eviction while pending application—could still include a cap.
- Increase or start state funding for staff.
- Increase funding to match real-time assessment of need/Size funding to match need and provide for nimble process to consistently evaluate changing needs.
- Risk-sharing when counties overspend.
- Invest in a user interface to improve customer experience/Develop system with accessible and user-friendly interface.
- Modernizing the processing system to improve the application, communication, training timelines, etc.
- Create easy-to-navigate public website to explain eligibility process and criteria for each program.
- Create clear and easy-to-understand guide to process and rules that is easily accessible online for households and landlords.
- Invest in and implement a statewide EDMS (electronic document management system).

- Establish an online system for uploading, storing, and sharing documents/Implement a tool for immediate worker visibility when documents are uploaded.
- Integrate systems/Develop communication system that integrates all programs seamlessly to benefit all stakeholders.
- Ensure accessibility and technology matches the user's skills and technology access/Create a balance with accessibility and technology.
- Create an EA/EGA specialized training track.
- Streamline staff training and engagement.
- Define roles and make sure gaps are filled/Create specialized and responsive staff roles.
- Ask questions.

Appendix E: Workgroup Meeting Summaries

Each meeting summary lists participants at the end. The list reflects only people who were in the online meeting space, not those who may have been watching on the livestream.

Workgroup on Expediting Rental Assistance meeting summary, August 28, 2023

Main meeting topics

The workgroup met for the first time. The meeting consisted of introductions of workgroup members and Management Analysis and Development (MAD) consultants supporting the workgroup. a walkthrough of organizational and process information, and signing up for subgroups.

In addition, Diane Elias from Minnesota Housing presented information on the Family Housing Prevention and Assistance Program (FHPAP), and John Petroskas from the Minnesota Department of Human Services presented information on the Emergency General Assistance (EGA) and Emergency Assistance (EA) programs. There was brief time for questions and answers after each presentation, which are listed below.

Workgroup members were asked to sign up for one or more of three subgroups via Zoom poll: Operations; EA/EGA; and FHPAP.

The workgroup was asked to do the following ahead of the next meeting: 1) Share existing reports and materials from engagement efforts and other background information; and 2) Continue to add questions to the list beyond those posted in the chat or asked of presenters today.

Key agenda items

- Review legislative charge
- Member introductions
- Overview of workgroup—roles and responsibilities, proposed decision-making process, etc.
- Background information on programs in scope (FHPAP, EA, and EGA)
- Wrap up and next steps

Presentations to the task force

Presentation 1: Karen Gaides and Kristina Krull, MAD—Overview of Workgroup on Expediting Rental Assistance

Kristina Krull reviewed the legislative charge for the workgroup.

Commissioner Jennifer Ho requested precise language in the terminology the workgroup uses for different types of assistance. She proposed the following definitions:

- Emergency assistance: financial assistance to resolve a crisis.
- Emergency rental assistance: financial assistance to help with being behind on rent.
- Rental assistance: ongoing financial help with rent.

Kristina highlighted that the scope for this group is specific to two timeline components: (1) determination of approval on completed applications for emergency assistance and (2) issuance of payments to landlords. The group is required to submit a final report with recommendations to the legislature by February 29, 2024. The report is required to include draft legislation required to implement any proposed recommendations.

Representative Mike Howard provided brief context on discussions during the legislative session on this topic, and the move to create the workgroup as a forum for deeper-dive discussions and developing recommendations specific to the timing pieces.

Following workgroup member introductions, Karen Gaides from MAD introduced proposed operating agreements for the workgroup. Following discussion, the workgroup agreed on the following list of agreements:

- Workgroup meetings start and end on time.
- Be present, respectful and open.
- Participate actively while practicing "step back/step up."
- "Host yourself"—honor your needs throughout the meeting.
- Support and encourage each other's participation.
- Ensure recommendations are practical for implementation.

Kristina Krull reviewed a high-level schedule for workgroup meetings between now and February 2024. Full workgroup meetings will be held once per month with an anticipated duration of three hours per meeting. Topics for each full workgroup meeting are envisioned as follows:

- August: Overview, background information
- September: Build common knowledge
- October: Brainstorm options
- November: Select options to turn into recommendations
- December: Refine draft recommendations
- January: Finalize and vote on recommendations; review draft legislation
- February: Finalize and vote on legislation; discuss final report; wrap up and celebration

Kristina introduced proposed decision-making protocols:

- Consensus is ideal (everyone agrees).
- There may be times without 100% agreement.
- In these instances, MAD proposes when 75% of members present are in favor of an action, the workgroup will advance that action.

Workgroup meetings are subject to requirements under the Minnesota Open Meeting Law. As such, all votes will be public record, and will be included on meeting summaries posted to the workgroup website. A workgroup member raised a question about voting, specifically instances where a workgroup member would

need to take back information and solicit guidance from their organization or agency ahead of casting a vote or votes. MAD anticipates that workgroup members will be able to review content that may be voted upon ahead of meetings. If this is not the case, the group will consider what can be worked out.

Kristina highlighted language in the statutory language creating the workgroup that requires external consultation. This will be discussed in more detail at the September workgroup meeting. Ahead of this next meeting, MAD asked workgroup members to share existing reports and other materials from engagement efforts with people who have lived experience seeking emergency assistance. MAD will reach out to state Tribal liaisons at the Department of Human Services and Minnesota Housing as a first step toward engaging Tribal Nations. Additionally, MAD asked Ellen Sahli to preview relevant work the Family Housing Fund is leading.

A workgroup member asked about opportunities to plug in or otherwise engage. Kristina noted that having groups present to the workgroup is a possibility, along with the potential to consider specific engagement on recommendations or options, depending on timing. The workgroup was created with representation for experts and organizations who work both directly with individuals with lived experience and with other providers of services. As administrators and experts, workgroup members will need to provide insights and input. External input will supplement what workgroup members bring to the table.

Presentation 2: Ellen Sahli, Family Housing Fund—Reimagining Emergency Financial Assistance overview

Ellen Sahli, president of the Family Housing Fund (FHF) and a workgroup member, provided an overview of FHF's outreach, engagement, and policy development work centered on emergency assistance. It builds on work FHF did before the COVID-19 pandemic on court-based eviction prevention work. It is also informed by expertise gained working on three COVID-related emergency assistance programs.

FHF's current work is focused on the broader realm of emergency financial assistance which includes rental assistance along with other needs such as utilities and automobile repairs. The work is envisioned in two phases:

- **Phase 1: Outreach and engagement (April–September):** FHF is working in partnership with local firm Imagine Deliver to develop and implement a plan which includes interviews with government stakeholders; listening sessions with varied groups including rental property owners, community-based service providers, and people with lived experience; a pop-up at the MN Coalition on Homelessness state conference; and a survey on the FHF website.
- **Phase 2: Reporting on findings and recommendations (October–December):** FHF will develop a synthesis report from learnings gained through work in Phase 1. FHF will also host a public webinar and convene multi-day co-design workshops. A final report is expected in December 2023.

Commissioner Ho asked if the FHF work integrates work that the Pohlad Foundation and work that Dr. Brittany Lewis are doing in this space. Ellen responded that these are some of the inputs, along with other national resources.

Presentation 3: Diane Elias, Minnesota Housing—Family Homeless Prevention and Assistance Program (FHPAP)

Diane Elias, Program Manager at Minnesota Housing, provided an overview of the Family Homeless Prevention and Assistance Program (FHPAP). FHPAP is administered by Minnesota Housing and is part of the new Housing Stability division at the agency.

Program guidelines:

- Eligible expenses include rental deposit, rent payment, mortgage payment, utilities, other expenses that help keep people in housing, as well as services such as case management.
- In the context of FHPAP, "family" means all eligible households are able to be served, contingent on availability.
- To be eligible, applicants must:
    o Have household income below 200% of federal poverty guidelines.
    o Be a Minnesota resident or household otherwise approved by Minnesota Housing.
    o Be homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness and in need of services and/or financial assistance during a housing crisis.

Program administration and funding:

- FHPAP currently has 20 administrators across the state; this will increase to 22 as of 10/1/2023
- There are 80 subgrantees[2]
- Administrators include Tribal Nations, counties, and nonprofits.
- Each administrator is required to have an advisory committee made up of housing providers, advocates, renters, and sometimes rental property owners.
- Funding is allocated to administrators through a request for proposals (RFP) process.
- Base funding for FHPAP is $10.269 million.
- Funding is typically allocated 55% to the metro area and 45% to greater Minnesota and Tribal Nations.
- In the 2023 legislative session, the legislature allocated an additional $95 million for 2024–25.
- Some of the new funding has already been advanced per legislative directive, ahead of the start of the new program year on October 1.

Diane provided a high-level overview of application processing steps. Households seeking resources must find the access point to apply (either administrator or subgrantee). There is minimal marketing due to demand versus resources. Paperwork required from households may vary by administrator and can include income documentation, rental payment or utilities documentation, and providing demographic information to the Homelessness Management Information System (HMIS).

Diane noted that for the two specific metrics the legislative directive asks the workgroup to address, the first (determination within fourteen days of completed application) is not being measured or reported, and there is no tracking mechanism in place. For the second (funding sent to landlord within 30 days of a completed application for approved households), it varies based on the type of FHPAP funding. "Fast Track" funds carry a requirement that grantees and subgrantees process payments with 30 days from the receipt of all required documentation. For "Standard" funds, this is not being tracked.

Diane concluded the presentation with a snapshot of program outcomes, including:

- FHPAP served 4,535 households in 2022.
    o Prevention and Rapid Rehousing Assistance: 86% of households.
    o Coordinated Entry and Street Outreach: 14% of households.
- FHPAP served 59% households of color.
- Slight majority of households in greater MN (53%).

---

[2] Per Minnesota Housing, there were 80 subgrantees as of 2023. In 2024 there are 72.

- People are not typically in program for very long – less than 30 days for emergency assistance.
- Some shelters do not participate in HMIS.

A brief question-and-answer period followed the presentation. A separate document will be posted on the WERA website which summarizes the Q&A from the meeting as well as questions and answers collected after the meeting.

Presentation 4: John Petroskas, Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) —Emergency Assistance (EA) and Emergency General Assistance (EGA)

John Petroskas, GA/MSA Policy Lead from the Minnesota Department of Human Services, provided overviews of the Emergency General Assistance (EGA) and Emergency Assistance (EA) programs. John is directly involved in the EGA program, and was presenting on the EA program overview for a colleague who was unable to attend the workgroup meeting.

Emergency General Assistance (EGA):

- DHS gives a lot of space to local administrators (counties and tribes) in how they administer the program.
- Agencies aspire to process as quickly as possible, but delays can occur in various ways.
- EGA funds are provided annually to counties and tribes based on direct allocation from the state legislature.
- The most amount for the statewide allocation was approximately $6.7 million, which is then split up.
- Some counties do not claim their allocation due to the small amount they receive.
- It is up to counties whether they spend funds all at once, or allocate throughout the year.
- Just over half of the statewide funds go to Hennepin County, and approximately 80% goes to the five-county metro area (Anoka, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey, and Washington).
- DHS maintains online sites which list allocation by agency/county/tribe.
- Utilization of funding summaries are updated periodically online at CountyLink.
- EGA has a high utilization rate, at 98% in recent years.
- Agencies track their real-time EGA use on the MAXIS eligibility system.

EGA eligibility and application process:

- DHS minimum requirement is that an applicant may receive funds once every twelve-month period.
- Administrators (counties and tribes) may implement stricter limits; some have limits of once every three years or five years.
- Standard of "loss of basic need item": this is also an area where administrators have latitude to interpret broadly or narrowly; as an example, some include car repairs as eligible and others do not.
- People may apply online, in person at a human services agency, via mail, via delivering a paper application, or calling a human services agency.
- Applicants do not need to be receiving general assistance to receive emergency assistance.

Emergency Assistance (EA):

- Part of Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP), the state's income support program for families with children.
- Purpose of EA is to stabilize families in financial crisis. It is not limited to housing.

- MFIP is funded by the federal government via a Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant.
- Counties have the option to use the MFIP consolidated fund process to offer EA to their residents, and nearly all do so.
- In Minnesota, the White Earth tribe directly administers funds to its members.
- Counties and tribes may set local guidelines.

EA eligibility and application process:

- To be eligible, applicants must:
  - Be a family with children.
  - Have income at or below 200% of federal poverty guidelines (FPG).
  - Not have received EA within the preceding twelve months from the date of application.
- Application process works the same as EGA.
- Applicants do not need to specify which program they are applying for (EGA or EA); they need only indicate what emergency assistance category or categories they are seeking (food, housing, cash assistance, etc.).

EA outcomes:

- Recent annual snapshot: 8,700 families received an average payment of $1,792.
- Payments were used to stabilize permanent housing, avoid utility shut-off(s), and cover damage deposits. Payments were also made to cover shelter costs and transportation costs.
- 40% of families receiving EA were enrolled in MFIP.
- Many adult recipients who received EA experience generational poverty—they grew up in families that received emergency assistance.

A brief question-and-answer period followed the presentation. A separate document will be shared with members that summarizes the Q&A from the meeting.

Workgroup updates

Workgroup members self-selected which of three subgroups they will also participate in. Subgroups will meet outside of full workgroup meetings.

The subgroups are:

- EGA/EA subgroup
- FHPAP subgroup
- Operations subgroup (review workgroup agendas, help work move forward)

One more subgroup, focused on drafting recommendations as proposed legislation, will be organized and convene later in the workgroup process.

Meeting participants

Workgroup members

- *Andrea Palumbo, HOME line*
- *Annie Shapiro, Minnesota Community Action Partnership*

- *Cassandra Barden, Minnesota Multifamily Housing Association*
- *Commissioner Jennifer Ho, Minnesota Housing*
- *Cynthia Fahland, Hennepin County*
- *Ellen Sahli, Family Housing Fund*
- *Jennifer Frisbie, Community Mediation Minnesota*
- *Jeremy Galley, Minnesota Department of Human Services*
- *Julie Ogunleye, Twin Cities United Way*
- *Kristyn Stephens, Washington County*
- *Mary Kaczorek, Legal Aid*
- *Nicole Worlds, Human Services of Martin and Faribault Counties*
- *Rebekah Grimm, Salvation Army*
- *Rep. Mike Howard, Minnesota House of Representatives*
- *Sen. Lindsey Port, Minnesota Senate*
- *Theresa Dahlheimer, St. Louis County*

Others

- Karen Gaides, MAD
- Kristina Krull, MAD
- Katie Hatt, MAD
- Rinal Ray, Minnesota Housing
- Diane Elias, Minnesota Housing
- John Petroskas, Minnesota Department of Human Services

Workgroup on Expediting Rental Assistance Meeting summary: September 14, 2023

Main meeting topics

The second workgroup meeting began with an overview of process information. This included an update on subgroups and membership, proposed focus areas for upcoming workgroup and subgroup meetings, and responses to a few outstanding policy questions which were raised at the first meeting on August 28.

The meeting then shifted to a set of facilitated conversations and small group work focused on two subject areas: 1) defining interests and 2) challenges and hurdles. Members and consultants used an online whiteboard tool, Mural, for the group work.

The workgroup was asked to do the following ahead of the next meeting: 1) Share strengths, successes on learnings via Mural, and 2) Complete at least one external consultation activity on their own, and document consultation work in Google Drive.

Key agenda items

- Workgroup business
- Define interests

- Challenges and hurdles
- Update on external consultation approach
- Wrap up and next steps

Presentations to the task force

Presentation 1: Kristina Krull, MAD—Overview of Workgroup on Expediting Rental Assistance

Kristina Krull provided additional information related to discussion and information presented at the workgroup's previous meeting. Some of the data shared included:

- Emergency General Assistance (EGA) application processing time: in Fiscal Year 2023, the statewide average time to process EGA applications was 29.7 days. There were a total of 51,052 applications.
- Only 12.36% of EGA applications were approved.

Presentation 2: Kristina Krull, MAD—Update on external consultation approach

Kristina Krull shared updates on the work around external consultation requirements as outlined in the statutory language establishing the work group. Kristina noted that MAD is helping initiate some things, but the bulk of responsibility lies with workgroup members.

At its first meeting, the Operations Subgroup recommended that each workgroup member do one external engagement each month. Some ideas for consultation activities include:

- Having one-on-one or group discussions with relevant people and organizations.
- Asking for discussion time at existing meetings with other people/organizations.
- Emailing WERA work to others and asking for feedback.
- Asking organizations to share the results of their own engagement efforts

The upcoming Minnesota Coalition for the Homeless (MCH) conference would be an option to conduct external consultation.

Kristina suggested that the following types of consultation will be most useful at various stages of workgroup process:

- Immediately: general input and collecting information on existing engagement efforts
- September and October: input on known issues and successes
- October through December: input on draft options and recommendations

Kristina shared information with members about how to document consultations using a Google Doc tracking form for brief information and a notes template for instances where there is a more detailed record of the consultation(s).

Kristina concluded with an overview of what work is underway on external consultation. This includes initiatives led and/or supported by the Family Housing Fund; the Pohlad Foundation in partnership with Research In Action; a roundtable with people with relevant lived experience; and Tribal consultation.

A workgroup member appreciated learning information about initiatives underway or in the planning stages. The member asked if there could be a way to generate a shared data chart of various events and groups that

members are aware of and would want to consult, to help ensure there is a workgroup presence. MAD will add a spreadsheet in the project Google Drive to track this.

Facilitated discussions and small-group work

Topic 1: Defining interests

Question: What are key interests to consider (needs, desires, concerns and fears) as we address timely application determinations and payment of rental assistance?

Workgroup members took a few minutes to jot down initial thoughts, and then went to various breakout rooms in Zoom in pairs for discussion and recorded responses on the Mural online workspace. The full group reconvened following the small groups and worked together to organize the responses into themes as follows:

People first, human-centered

- Reducing barriers for applicants completing applications.
- People who need the help get it when they need it.
- Great opportunity to look at the system and fix the problems.
- Combating bias/assumptions about applicants, recognize barriers applicants face (LEP, disability, etc.).
- Reducing barriers and improving access.
- Improving access and having the programs be human centered.
- FHPAP and EGA/EA partnering to meet client needs.

Broader goals and interests—legal system, tenant/landlord relationship, program integrity, reliability

- Eviction prevention.
- Keep people safely housed.
- Imagine possibilities within existing eviction laws/broader system.
- What current laws create barriers to the changes the charge will make.
- Trust is critical; both tenants and landlords.
- Bridge communication between renters and rental property providers about status of applications to prevent eviction.
- Faster process needed but still needs to be accurate.
- Changing EA/EGA will affect how other programs are processed – how balance that.

Funding

- Without sufficient funding, people won't have access and there won't be enough payments (cliff after one-time funding ends in '25).
- Funding allocations direct what can be done. We run out of money too soon.
- FHPAP real time balance of funding.
- How funding impacts program administration and prioritization.
- Success of the programs is critical to continued funding and capacity support.
- Matching resources to the demand (faster spend results in running out of funds mid-year).

Feasibility

- Are the changes feasible for our administrators.
- Political feasibility.

- Existing stress/bandwidth with program staff – a lot of time applications include other supplements.
- Training for staff turnover to avoid client funding delays.
- Reducing staff negative impact/burnout with implementation.
- Staffing limits what we can do. Time limitations, too.
- Realistic staffing models.
- Getting staff buy-in for systems change.
- Cost and financial considerations to build capacity and fitting the agency's budgeting timeline.
- Can we do this? The system doesn't work too well.

Other/non-categorized

- A lot of people apply in emergencies that don't qualify for these emergency programs.
- What's getting in the way of completed applications.
- Defining what "complete" means for applications, especially with EGA.
- Lots to take in! Multiple programs, different funding sources, procedures.

Some discussed interests were ideas for what to potentially recommend, and will be used at the October meeting for the options discussion.

Initial observations from workgroup members to the results were:

- Many ideas are solutions.
- Looking at this, a lot of the solutions may lead to different reasons for denials (e.g., no funds available) rather than current issue of incomplete applications.
- Feasibility and capacity needed to do what needs to happen is another general theme for several responses.
- Implementation.
- Prioritization/Feasibility.
- Technical solutions—this is a technical problem we're talking about (expediting) —thinking more broadly around streamlining, what are people's experiences while they are trying to navigate systems? This is harder to assess, but thinking about how we tie together technical solutions with reality of people in crisis navigating systems. Blending these well together.
- As we talk technical solutions, don't lose sight of adaptive issues.
- Changing EA and EGA by themselves will impact how other programs are processed – SNAP given as one example. Not coordinating changes could actually lead to delays.
- With a combined application, some people apply for EA who don't have a housing need and are seeking other supports and assistance. Many applicants are people whose needs are outside this workgroup's scope.

Topic 2: Defining challenges and hurdles

Question: What are the known challenges and hurdles to timely application determinations and payment of emergency assistance?

Workgroup members were split into four small groups of three or four people. Using Mural as a workspace, each small group considered the question in the context of five categories. They described the following challenges and hurdles.

Processes/procedures

- Staff turnover—training on policies and procedures in order to stay within timelines.
- County requirements are specific to each County—standardized.
- Inconsistent applications and processes throughout the state (FHPAP and EA).
- We don't track the actual payments.
- What information is needed for applicants? What do they need to gather in order to fully complete the application?
- FHPAP (also EA EGA) people may need to access programs through Coordinated Entry.
- Lack of clarity around what verifications are required and the time required to submit and gather verifications.
- Limitations around who can initiate the process of requesting assistance.
- Linking of EA/EGA processing to other program processing.
- Constraints created by institutional expertise and program history.
- Different processes/procedures by program and service area.
- Lack of uniformity.
- Manual determination—a worker needs to do eligibility analysis.
- Obtaining verification.
- Agency budgeting timelines.
- Resident preference/requests.
- Phone tag.
- Application process burdensome, especially for people in crisis.
- County structures vary. centralized v. decentralized.
- EDMS systems, various standards and processes across counties.
- Unclear for renters as to where to go with questions or appeals (and expectations of timing).

Technology

- Lack of ability to expedite needed client signatures.
- Can we build the technology to cross programs so the user only has to go to one place?
- Checks not being cashed more than one a week.
- Systems not communicating with each other.
- Some ways for providers to be able to see what individuals have been served.
- Barriers resulting from over-reliance on one form of application over another.
- Questions about how EGA/EA are represented in the MNbenefits process.
- Availability of electronic signatures.
- NOTE: tech is not the fundamental issue—program design is most important.
- LL and T ability to access and use technology.
- Challenging systems.
- Systems not the same for different programs.
- Outdated technology.
- Retain partnerships in systems for SNAP and cash (MNbenefits app).
- Remembering to consider possibilities in technology.
- User interface, accessibility, and plain language.
- Ability to text.
- Unequal access to technology. Need offline options too.

- MNbenefits not efficient on backend for counties.
- Has to be scalable for large and small counties.
- Easiest if renters can directly upload their own documents as able (i.e., RentHelpMN/Allita).
- Interagency communication tools. EA/EGA working with FHPAP etc.
- A lot of time is spent tracking down people.
- Track and share quality data for decision making.
- Allow for easier document uploads via cell phone/text photo.
- Need good data.

Personnel

- Ability to cut checks same day.
- Staff turnover which increases training time which decreases ability to process applications.
- Competing priorities.
- Increased oversight responsibilities.
- Change fatigue.
- Staff determining eligibility frequently have "tunnel-vision" for the single program.
- Programs expected to expand rapidly—sustainable staffing plans are challenging.
- Historical challenge—programs bult on implicit bias.
- County size and staffing impact both processing time and equitable program availability.
- Little administrative capacity to move faster or prioritize (more admin funding?).
- Turnover, attrition, onboarding, training.
- Having enough funding to adequately staff.
- Balancing burden on resident v. burden on staff.
- Long hold times due to staffing limitations.
- Often multiple workers on app.
- Staff wellness and burnout
- Compensation.
- Turnover.
- Burnout.
- 6 months–12 months to fully onboard.
- May not see the value in investing in admin staff.

Program rules

- Board and Lodge individuals aren't able to access certain FHPAP funds.
- People are forced to be on the edge of crisis in order for the funds to be available.
- Where are the rules coming from? Is it statewide? Is it administrators making those decisions? Scarcity of funds?
- More system flexibility.
- Timelines associated with different funding sources.
- Inconsistency between local agency program rules.
- The fact that we have often set the line for "help is available" too high—don't wait for eviction notices.
- FHPAP—assessment required that dictates who can be served.
- Reactive versus proactive rules.
- Rules over-focus on sustainability of assistance.
- Cross-program duplication of efforts—warm handoffs are limited.

- State or other statutory limitations.
- Funding allocation limitations.
- Funding needs to last the year.
- The extent to which rules are maintained or created due to resource limitation.
- County-applied verification requirements/admin rules added on.
- Counties introduce rules to slow funds out the door. May be better to just run out of funding.
- Rules are based on funding available, not needs, or other priorities.
- Funding available may not align to the need across jurisdictions.

Other

- Allowing the program to ensure payments in a timely manner to encourage positive relationships with partners.
- Lack of consistent funding and flexible funding.
- Multiple application points for different programs.
- No place to collaboratively document and share gaps in program coverage.
- Landlord unwilling to participate.
- Building trust with landlords.
- Accuracy.
- Implicit bias and systemic racism
- Discrepancies about amounts owed.

Workgroup updates

The next workgroup meeting is Thursday, October 12, 9:00 am–12:00 pm.

The next subgroup meetings are:

- Operations subgroup: September 29, 1:00–2:00 pm
- FHPAP subgroup: October 3, 1:00–3:00 pm
- EA/EGA subgroup: October 4, 1:00–3:00 pm

Meeting participants

Workgroup members

- *Andrea Palumbo, HOME line*
- *Annie Shapiro, Minnesota Community Action Partnership*
- *Rinal Ray, Minnesota Housing*
- *Cynthia Fahland, Hennepin County*
- *Kirstin Burch, Family Housing Fund*
- *Jennifer Frisbie, Community Mediation Minnesota*
- *Jeremy Galley, Minnesota Department of Human Services*
- *Julie Ogunleye, Twin Cities United Way*
- *Kristyn Stephens, Washington County*
- *Mary Kaczorek, Legal Aid*
- *Rebekah Grimm, Salvation Army*

- *Rep. Mike Howard, Minnesota House of Representatives*
- *Sen. Lindsey Port, Minnesota Senate*
- *Theresa Dahlheimer, St. Louis County*

Members Absent

- Cassandra Barden, Minnesota Multifamily Housing Association
- Nicole Worlds, Human Services of Martin and Faribault Counties

Others

- Karen Gaides, MAD
- Kristina Krull, MAD
- Katie Hatt, MAD
- Davin Sokup, Committee Administrator, Minnesota Senate
- Courtney Schaff, Committee Legislative Assistant, Minnesota Senate

Workgroup on Expediting Rental Assistance meeting summary, October 12, 2023

Main meeting topics

The third workgroup meeting began with a discussion about scope in terms of application completion. This discussion was followed by a conversation about work that has been done since the second workgroup meeting on engaging tribes and external consultation activities. Two presentations followed, from Family Housing Fund and Research in Action.

Workgroup attendees reviewed the outputs from the second workgroup meeting on the online whiteboard tool, Mural, and indicated their perception of the top challenges. The meeting then shifted to small group discussions about those challenges and possible solutions. Following those discussions, each group reported out themes from their discussions.

The workgroup was asked to do the following ahead of the next meeting: 1) Add any additional thoughts on solutions to Mural within the next day, and 2) Complete at least one external consultation activity on their own, and document consultation work in Google Drive.

Key agenda items

- Workgroup business
- Family Housing Fund presentation "Re-imagining the Safety Net"—key learnings from engagement
- Research in Action presentation on key learnings on engagement report review
- Group discussion on Family Housing Fund and RIA presentations
- Groupwork on developing options for solutions

Presentations to the task force

Presentation 1: Ellen Sahli, Family Housing Fund—Safety Net Project Engagement Work

Ellen Sahli presented on Family Housing Fund's (FHF) strategic engagement efforts to re-imagine Minnesota's emergency financial assistance system and strengthen the safety net for housing stability. This engagement project centers around a key question: How might we collaboratively design and implement a transformative emergency financial system that promotes housing stability and responds to the needs of all Minnesotans?

The presentation opened with data about housing instability and racial disparities, including that there have been 24,142 eviction filings in the past year, which is 43 percent more when compared to an average year before the COVID-19 pandemic. FHF provided some definitions used in the engagement work, the organizations with which they collaborated, and engagement methods.

The three themes that emerged in the research were:

1. Increase funding to move beyond a model of scarcity.
2. Move at the speed of the emergency and tackle process improvements.
3. Center people and activate community genius.

Insights within each of these themes were shared. Next steps include publication of a report this month, a report of recommendations in December, and continued partnership.

Several workgroup members expressed appreciation for the engagement work discussed in the presentation. One member asked who the audience was for the upcoming recommendations report, and Ellen responded that the audience would include government administration through a co-design process with stakeholders, which would help facilitate broad-based community support. Another member asked how the work would intersect with the work of this workgroup, and Ellen responded that FHF sees this work as complementing and supporting the workgroup.

Presentation 2: Emma Wu, Tsion Tulu, and Dr. Brittany Lewis, Research in Action—Research Review and Community-Based Solutions

The presenters gave an overview of Emergency Assistance (EA) and Emergency General Assistance (EGA) issues and provided context on some challenges with staffing and trust regarding Family Homelessness Prevention and Assistance Program (FHPAP). They then defined some key terms in their research before presenting their analysis of the literature they selected to review.

Themes that came out of the literature review included:

- Communication, including language/literacy, status updates, and outreach
- Eligibility
- Technology
- Time
- Dehumanization

Presenters went over each of these themes in more detail and identified key learnings from each of them:

- Written instructions on outreach material and language used to guide applicants through the process was not accessible.

- The length of time an applicant has to wait for a status update on their application negatively impacts applicants' experience.
- Eligibility criteria for EA/EGA programs are too restrictive.
- Applicants (especially in greater MN) who have to rely on mailing system to send in required documents find the application process for EA/EGA difficult.
- Technology challenges hinder some applicants from finishing their application.
- The need for technology assistance not being met can make the process more difficult.
- The current EA/EGA application timeline is not aligning with the eviction action process.
- The general application process time creates frustration for applicants experiencing rental assistance emergencies.
- Attitude of county staff providing service negatively impacts applicants' experience.
- Feeling dehumanized in the application process deters applicants from trusting service agencies.

RIA shared a solutions document: Community-Based Recommendations—Google Docs.

Lastly, presenters went over RIA's recommendations versus best practices.

Workgroup attendees expressed appreciation for the work done by RIA. Themes from both presentations were discussed, especially the concept of moving at the pace of the emergency (from FHF's presentation) and a culture shift needed from government employees that would require changes in funding and training (from RIA's presentation).

Small-group work

Workgroup members went to various breakout rooms in Zoom in groups of three to four members for discussion and recorded responses on the Mural online workspace. They discussed solutions to the challenges identified in the second workgroup meeting. The full group reconvened following the small groups and each group reported out the areas of solutions that their group felt the highest energy around. These areas were:

- Person-centered thinking around transparency with processes and procedures.
- In terms of technology, there needs to be online and in-person options.
- For verification parts of applications, move toward attestation with less document requirements.
- Reframe to screen people in rather than screening them out for emergency funding.
- Increase administrative funding to improve staffing situation and customer service.
- Dedicate people to hand-holding through the application process, including 24-hour assistance.
- Make the applications easier, more clear, in plain language, and available at a single access point in multiple languages.
- Make the income standards more consistent so people can advocate for themselves and make decisions about whether they qualify for a program before proceeding with application process.
- Create an application checklist that is accessible.
- Change state statute so there is a pause on eviction while an application is pending.
- Allow landlords to apply on behalf of tenants and/or otherwise involve landlords in the process.
- Technology systems should speak to each other so things like income verification only need to be done one time.
- Remove restrictions from funding in order to get to people before they get to the eviction process.
- Align the eviction and application process.

- Create consequences or prevent landlords from refusing to participate in the process.

Question: What are the "Options for Solutions" as we address timely application determinations and payment of rental assistance?

Note: some of the options for solutions were moved out of this section and into the "themes with options for solutions" section below.

Processes/Procedures

Group 1

- People-centeredness approach
- Multiple application options
- Centralize tasks for specialization/efficiency
- Transparency around program rules

Group 3

- Application checklist
- More language access

Group 4

- No wrong door
- Identify the minimum amount of info
- Self-attestation as an option
- Different ways to self-attest
- Flexible access points—phone, online, in person,
- Rental property owner can initiate

Technology

Group 1

- System that balances technology and accessibility
- Sharing data across programs / systems
- Route people toward the best possible outcome
- Flexible communication options

Group 3

- One statewide administrator/portal (can then refer to counties)
- Centralized website with centralized contact information

Group 4

- Leverage existing systems
- Have assistance programs speak to one another
- No duplicate applications
- Verification carries over between systems
- Type of technology—best design practices
- Plain language

- Easy navigation
- Good experience regardless of device
- Better support for LEP
- Use examples in other spaces—e.g., can deposit a check with a photo

Personnel

Group 1

- Reduce training time

Group 3

- Navigators with a variety of expertise
- Staff that works specifically with clients with an active eviction case

Group 4

- Universal standards for service
- How do we retain staff?
- How do we attract staff to work?
- Reimagining scale of what adequate compensation looks like
- Compensate and recognize navigators and assist organizations

Program Rules

Group 1

- Funding scarcity
- Early intervention

Group 3

- Unified definition of "crisis" and "emergency"
- Expand program rules to stay ahead of the crisis

Group 4

- Make less restrictive
- Expand available money so restrictions can be relaxed
- Remove scarcity mindset—don't wait till eviction filing to give assistance
- Reward/incentivize asking for help early in the process
- Remove 2 month per year restriction
- Partner with state supplemental funding
- Different funding for EA to remove connection to TANF cap

Other

Group 4

- Acknowledge broader context of eviction laws and timelines
- Tie rental assistance to eviction laws
- Match pace of emergency/eviction process
- Give programs breathing room by relaxing eviction timelines

- Pause eviction while rent assistance application is pending
- Include LL's refusal to participate as an affirmative defense to a nonpayment eviction
- Align rent assistance and eviction process

Themes with Options for Solutions—the options group members have the most energy around and are most excited about

Processes/Procedures

- Person-centered thinking should carry through all recommendations (example: transparency)
- Overlaying local options with statewide options to fill gaps
- Balancing technology with accessibility/support for applicants
- Moving program rules/policy toward fewer requirements
- Modernizing the processing system to improve the application, communication, training timelines, etc.
- Early identification of who qualifies/doesn't qualify
- Screening people in not out
- Transparency around program rules
- Updated application designed for EA/EGA/FHPAP
- More uniformed process across FHPAP partners
- An application that is leads client to programs (not client applying for programs)
- One statewide application/access point
- 24-hour application assistance
- Effective outreach for people who do not know about the programs

Program Rules

- Decreased program complexity made possible by increased funding
- Uniform income qualifications for all EMERs
- Reduce mandatory verifications either through automation or self-attestation
- Transparency around rules

Technology

- FHPAP data: timelines, processes
- System that communicates with FHPAP/EGA& EA (would not separate from current systems)
- One database holds applicant info making any new applications easy to update info.

Personnel

- State to fill staffing gaps
- Built in Admin funding (EGA- FHPAP- EA) for the RIGHT personnel
- Supportive training (engagement, morale, humanizing processing)

Other

- Paused on eviction while there is a pending application

Workgroup updates

The next workgroup meeting is Thursday, November 9, 9:00 am–12:00 pm.

The next subgroup meetings are:

- Operations subgroup: October 23, 12:00–1:00 pm.
- FHPAP subgroup: October 16, 9:00–11:00 am.
- EA/EGA subgroup: 9:00–11:00 am.

Meeting participants

Workgroup members

- *Andrea Palumbo, HOME line*
- *Joel Salzer (proxy for Rinal Ray, Minnesota Housing)*
- *Cynthia Fahland, Hennepin County*
- *Ellen Sahli, Family Housing Fund*
- *Jennifer Frisbie, Community Mediation Minnesota*
- *Jeremy Galley, Minnesota Department of Human Services*
- *Julie Ogunleye, Twin Cities United Way*
- *Kristyn Stephens, Washington County*
- *Mary Kaczorek, Legal Aid*
- *Allison Uthke-Scaletta (proxy for Rebekah Grimm, Salvation Army)*
- *Abdullahi Abdullahi (proxy for Rep. Mike Howard, Minnesota House of Representatives)*
- *Theresa Dahlheimer, St. Louis County*
- *Cassandra Barden, Minnesota Multi Housing Association*

Others

- Karen Gaides, MAD
- Kristina Krull, MAD
- Marian Potter, MAD
- Lucy Thao, MMB

Workgroup on Expediting Rental Assistance meeting summary, November 9, 2023

Main meeting topics

The third workgroup meeting began with an introduction of Lori Schultz from Minnesota Community Action Program, who joined the workgroup this month in place of a former colleague at MinnCAP.

Workgroup attendees heard an overview of how previous meetings' outputs related to potentials solutions to top challenges were synthesized and categorized to prepare the current summary on the online whiteboard tool, Mural.

Workgroup attendees then shifted into small group discussions of solution options' feasibility and impact, and whether options were short-term or long-term solutions.

Following the small group work, the workgroup came together for a brief discussion, and then shifted into individual voting on which solution options should be developed into recommendations.

Workgroup attendees had a closing discussion about looking at solution options and recommendations and their combined impact as well as individual impact.

Key agenda items

- Workgroup business
- Research in Action presentation on findings from Community Convene
- Review of summarized solution options
- Groupwork on prioritizing solution options
- Individual voting task
- Group discussion

Presentation to the workgroup

Emma Wu and Tsion Tulu, Research in Action—Report on Community Roundtable

The presenters gave an overview of their outreach process and registration/informed consent process (consent to being recorded), and reported participant demographics.

Themes that came out of the community roundtable were consistent with themes from the report RIA previously presented to this workgroup: Time, eligibility, technology, dehumanization, and communication. Additional observations included:

- Immigrant Experience: Challenge due to the need for housing to get a work permit, but need work to pay for housing, creating a dead-end loop
- Provider perspectives: Community members would like to hear providers share their experiences with the process

Presenters also shared community feedback on proposed solutions, including:

- Support from service providers such as information sessions, better pay for caseworkers and social workers, and peer advocates/peer navigators
- Building trust: mistrust in the system creates mistrust in interactions
- Changes to language, particularly the use of "unit" to refer to a family applying for assistance
- Development of a centralized portal/application process, and changes to required documentation

There was a brief question-and-answer period during which workgroup attendees also expressed their appreciation for the work done by RIA.

Small-group and individual work

The next topic was an overview of the upcoming small group work, to select the solution options that will be turned into recommendations.

Workgroup members went to various breakout rooms in Zoom in groups of 3-4 members for discussion and moved solution options into a feasibility-impact matrix on the Mural online workspace and noted any assumptions. Each group worked on approximately one-fourth of the 34 solution options developed in prior workgroup and subgroup meetings. Workgroup members were asked to consider the options with the legislative charge in mind, that is, whether the option would improve timeliness of determination and payment.

The full group reconvened briefly following the small groups to review the feasibility-impact matrix and discuss the exercise. Members of some subgroups expressed concern that they were not able to move all solution options to the matrix. They were reminded this was an initial thought exercise, and the work would continue in the recommendations drafting process over the next two months. Results of the feasibility-impact matrix are at the end of this document.

From here, the discussion turned to the voting activity, with an explanation that this would not be a true or final vote, but "preferencing," to see where there is the most energy and alignment with the legislative charge. Solution options would move to the list for creating recommendations based on getting at least 9 votes with 13 members voting and 69% of members in agreement with option moving forward.

Instructions were given to workgroup members on how to vote (in the Mural) that a given solution option should be turned into a draft recommendation, based on the criterion of accelerating determination/payment.

Results of Member Voting—Options moving forward

(Based on getting at least 9 votes with 13 members voting, 69% of members in agreement with option moving forward.)

Listed in order of the options with most votes to options the least votes

#	Subgroup origins	Category	Options moving forward	Rating on feasibility and impact table
1	EA/EGA and FHPAP	Funding	#20 Increase or start state funding for staff 13 votes	Medium feasibility, High impact
2	EA/EGA and FHPAP	Funding	#21 Increase funding to match real time assessment of need/ Size funding to match need and provide for nimble process to consistently evaluate changing needs 13 votes	In-between High-Medium feasibility, High impact

#	Subgroup origins	Category	Options moving forward	Rating on feasibility and impact table
3	EA/EGA and FHPAP	Processes and procedures	#1 Simplify verification process/ Allow for self-attestation 12 votes	Low feasibility, Medium impact
4	EA/EGA and FHPAP	Processes and procedures	#2 Utilize inclusive electronic signature process/ Require universal adoption of electronic signatures 12 votes	In-between High-Medium feasibility, High impact
5	FHPAP	Processes and procedures	#8 Provide application support 12 votes	Not rated
6	EA/EGA and FHPAP	Communications	#11 Provide access in multiple languages 12 votes	High feasibility, High impact
7	EA/EGA and FHPAP	Technology	#29 Integrate systems/ Develop communication system that integrates all programs seamlessly to benefit all stakeholders 12 votes	Medium feasibility, medium impact
8	EA/EGA and FHPAP	Communications	#10 Invest in infrastructure for flexible communication options/ Offer a variety of accessible communication options 11 votes	Not rated

#	Subgroup origins	Category	Options moving forward	Rating on feasibility and impact table
9	EA/EGA	Technology	#24 Modernizing the processing system to improve the application, communication, training timelines, etc. 11 votes	Medium to low feasibility, High impact
10	EA/EGA	Program rules	#18 Increase maximum issuance to $6,000 total combined or $4,000 per check 9 votes	Not rated
11	FHPAP	Program rules	#14 Expand, increase effective outreach, and unify all programs' eligibility criteria to allow more households to be eligible and for early intervention 9 votes	Medium feasibility, High impact
12	FHPAP and EA/EGA	Communications	#12 Build landlord trust/ Proactively engage rental property owners as critical partners in housing stability 9 votes	Medium feasibility, High impact

Results of Member Voting—Options on the Cusp

(Based on getting at least 8 votes with 13 members voting, 62% of members in agreement with option moving forward.)

#	Subgroup origins	Category	Options potentially moving forward	Rating on feasibility and impact table
**	EA/EGA	Program rules	#16 Expand program rule flexibility and clarify requirements 8 votes	

#	Subgroup origins	Category	Options potentially moving forward	Rating on feasibility and impact table
**	EA/EGA and FHPAP	Program rules	#17 Reduce amount of requirements/ Identify restrictive requirements that could be removed 8 votes	
**	EA/EGA and FHPAP	Technology	#28 Establish an online system for uploading, storing, and sharing documents/ Implement a tool for immediate worker visibility when documents are uploaded *Revision: Improve of better coordinate the process of uploading, storing, and sharing documents, including ability for workers to immediately see what documents are uploaded* 8 votes	

Options Potentially Out of Scope—Options NOT related to timeliness of application determination or payment

#	Subgroup origins	Category	Options moving forward
1	EA/EGA	Program rules	#19 Stay eviction while pending application—could still include a cap
2	EA/EGA	Funding	#22 Risk-sharing when counties overspend

Group discussion

When voting was complete, workgroup members reviewed the preliminary list of solution options that met the threshold for moving forward.

Highlights from the conversation:

- A member expressed reservation regarding the option related to inclusive electronic signature—electronic signatures are in English only and do not translate well.
- Suggestion to look at the solutions together and consider whether, if all were implemented, the goal timelines would be achieved.
- Expression of surprise at little support for a unified application process—high impact but also high risk.
- Agreement that there were a lot of parts that would be helpful to explore more as a group to understand the impact
- Considering whether to vote for item to create unified application; hesitation because a unified application would be very tricky due to different requirements for different programs.
- Note about improving document uploads. Noted that the option for modernizing processing system which has a lot of support and would be relevant for both FHPAP and EA/EGA. What would this mean? Ability to go online and apply and see status of application.
- If giving an eye toward getting to the goal (as noted earlier), wondering whether the workgroup can meaningfully predict this. Might not be able to be definitive in assessing that likelihood. There is a whole list of options that could have impact, and what's moving forward seems to be what will most likely have impact.
- Considering the sum of the parts of the recommendations becomes an important conversation. Yes, we won't be able to be definitive in our report even in best circumstance. But good to consider it
- When voting, looking at capacity within our current structure to do the thing. Like electronic filing system—staff of EA/EGA would need to know 2 systems, because they cover things other than rent payments (moving expenses, damage deposits). Already insufficient staff to cover the current work with one system. Could there be a guarantee that the necessary additional admin funding will be provided if the recommendation passes the legislature?
- Not sure how, but we need to look at the framework of the system vs. Individual components.
- Any recommendations that are identifying bigger systems-level changes, it's critical we pair that with the nuance of the kind of funding/support that is necessary to make that recommendation achievable for all partners involved. Don't limit our thinking. Let's recommend the things we think will have impact, AND the funding or other resources that will allow them to be implemented well.

Workgroup members were invited to add notes regarding concerns or reservations on any options in the Mural.

Conclusion/workgroup updates

Reminder of external consultation activities and other work assigned to be completed before the next workgroup activities, including the assignments that will be given during the subgroups next week to draft recommendations. The deadline for draft recommendations is November 30.

The next workgroup meeting is December 14, 9am–12pm.

The next subgroup meetings are:

- EA/EGA subgroup: November 14, 2:30–4:30pm
- FHPAP subgroup: November 17, 2:00–4:00pm
- Operations subgroup: December 4, 12:00–1:00pm.

Meeting participants

Workgroup members

- *Andrea Palumbo, HOME line*
- *Rinal Ray, Minnesota Housing*
- *Cynthia Fahland, Hennepin County*
- *Ellen Sahli, Family Housing Fund*
- *Jennifer Frisbie, Community Mediation Minnesota*
- *Jeremy Galley, Minnesota Department of Human Services*
- *Julie Ogunleye, Twin Cities United Way*
- *Kristyn Stephens, Washington County*
- *Mary Kaczorek, Legal Aid*
- *Rebekah Grimm, Salvation Army*
- *Rep. Mike Howard, Minnesota House of Representatives*
- *Theresa Dahlheimer, St. Louis County*
- *Cassandra Barden, Minnesota Multi Housing Association*
- *Lori Schulz, MN Community Action Partnership (MinnCAP)*

Members Absent

- Sen. Lindsey Port, Minnesota Senate
- Nicole Worlds, Human Services of Martin and Faribault Counties

Others

- Tsion Tulu, Research in Action
- Emma Wu, Research in Action
- Karen Gaides, MAD
- Kristina Krull, MAD
- Katie Hatt, MAD
- Stephanie Klein, MAD

Impact and Feasibility Matrix

The results of the impact/feasibility matrix for the options selected to move forward are below.

#	Subgroup origins	Category	Options moving forward	Rating on feasibility and impact table
1	EA/EGA and FHPAP	Funding	#20 Increase or start state funding for staff 13 votes	Medium feasibility, High impact
2	EA/EGA and FHPAP	Funding	#21 Increase funding to match real time assessment of need/ Size funding to match need and provide for nimble process to consistently evaluate changing needs 13 votes	In-between High-Medium feasibility, High impact
3	EA/EGA and FHPAP	Processes and procedures	#1 Simplify verification process/ Allow for self-attestation 12 votes	Low feasibility, Medium impact
4	EA/EGA and FHPAP	Processes and procedures	#2 Utilize inclusive electronic signature process/ Require universal adoption of electronic signatures 12 votes	In-between High-Medium feasibility, High impact
5	FHPAP	Processes and procedures	#8 Provide application support 12 votes	Not rated

#	Subgroup origins	Category	Options moving forward	Rating on feasibility and impact table
6	EA/EGA and FHPAP	Communications	#11 Provide access in multiple languages 12 votes	High feasibility, High impact
7	EA/EGA and FHPAP	Technology	#29 Integrate systems/ Develop communication system that integrates all programs seamlessly to benefit all stakeholders 12 votes	Medium feasibility, medium impact
8	EA/EGA and FHPAP	Communications	#10 Invest in infrastructure for flexible communication options/ Offer a variety of accessible communication options 11 votes	Not rated
9	EA/EGA	Technology	#24 Modernizing the processing system to improve the application, communication, training timelines, etc. 11 votes	Medium to low feasibility, High impact
10	EA/EGA	Program rules	#18 Increase maximum issuance to $6,000 total combined or $4,000 per check 9 votes	Not rated
11	FHPAP	Program rules	#14 Expand, increase effective outreach, and unify all programs' eligibility criteria to allow more households to be eligible and for early intervention 9 votes	Medium feasibility, High impact
12	FHPAP and EA/EGA	Communications	#12 Build landlord trust/ Proactively engage rental property owners as critical partners in housing stability 9 votes	Medium feasibility, High impact

Workgroup on Expediting Rental Assistance meeting summary, December 14, 2023

Main meeting topics

The December workgroup meeting began with workgroup updates, including information about the work completed to date, and updates regarding the legislative language subgroup.

The workgroup determined the decision-making approach.

Workgroup attendees reviewed the draft recommendations written by workgroup members since the November meeting. Polls were conducted to get a pulse check of how workgroup members were feeling about each recommendation, and any concerns were discussed.

The workgroup was advised that a working session would take place in which the subject matter experts would be reviewing the recommendations and the information gathered during the discussion, and making any revisions resulting from the conversation. Workgroup members were told they were welcome to attend the working session if they wished.

Workgroup members were asked to monitor email for any clarification questions that might emerge regarding the recommendations they had drafted.

Key agenda items

- Workgroup business and updates
- Determine workgroup decision-making approach
- Review and give input on draft recommendations
- Wrap-up and next steps

Workgroup business and updates

The December workgroup meeting began with workgroup updates, including information about the work completed to date. Members shared feedback received during an external consultation, and the workgroup was reminded where they can see the results of the external consultations conducted by members. An update was provided regarding the legislative language subgroup. An overview of the planned workgroup report was also provided.

Determination of workgroup decision-making approach

The proposed approach is if 62.5% of the members present are in favor of an action (10 of the 16 workgroup members), then the workgroup will advance that action. All 15 members in attendance voted in favor of this threshold.

Workgroup pulse check on draft recommendations

The focus topic for the meeting was discussion about draft recommendations. 14 recommendations drafted by workgroup members were reviewed and a "pulse check" poll was conducted for each one to gauge the level of support from workgroup members. If a draft recommendation received any scores indicating no or low support from one or more members, Workgroup members were encouraged to share questions or concerns.

Workgroup members raised concerns and/or suggested clarifications on 8 of the recommendations. The subject matter experts supporting the workgroup will use the information from the discussion as they review and revise the recommendations. For the rest of the recommendations, workgroup members engaged in limited discussion to note that a correction or clarification was needed, or to provide additional context.

December 14, 2023, meeting participants

Workgroup members

- *Andrea Palumbo, HOME line*
- *Cassandra Barden, Minnesota Multi Housing Association*
- *Cindy Fahland, Hennepin County*
- *Ellen Sahli, Family Housing Fund*
- *Jen Frisbie, Community Mediation Minnesota*
- *Jeremy Galley, DHS*
- *Josh Ney, MinnCAP, proxy for Lori Schultz*
- *Julie Ogunleye, United Way*
- *Kristyn Stephens, Washington County*
- *Mary Kaczorek, mid-Minnesota Legal Aid*
- *Rebekah Grimm, Salvation Army*
- *Rep. Michael Howard, MN House of Representatives*
- *Rinal Ray, Minnesota Housing*
- *Sen. Lindsey Port, MN Senate*
- *Theresa Dahlheimer, St. Louis County*

Others[3]

- John Petroskas, EGA
- Diane Elias, FHPAP
- Nancy Urbanski, FHPAP
- Katie Hatt, MAD
- Karen Gaides, MAD
- Trevor Frey, MAD
- Stephanie Klein, MAD
- George Shardlow, MMB

---

[3] Meeting summaries only list people who were in the online meeting space, not those who may have been watching on the livestream.

Not present

- Nicole Worlds, county administrator, Greater MN

Workgroup on Expediting Rental Assistance meeting summary, January 11, 2024

Main meeting topics

The January workgroup meeting began with workgroup updates, including an update on the legislative language process.

Workgroup attendees reviewed the revised recommendation language and discussed updates. Votes were conducted to determine which recommendations would be included in the planned workgroup report.

Workgroup members were asked to monitor email for any clarification questions that might emerge during the report creation process.

Key agenda items

- Workgroup business and updates
- Review and finalize draft recommendations
- Vote on recommendations
- Wrap-up and next steps

Workgroup business and updates

The January workgroup meeting began with workgroup updates, including information about the work completed to date and recent and upcoming external consultation activities. An overview was provided regarding the planned workgroup report and report creation process. A legislative language process update was also provided.

Workgroup discussion and vote on recommendations

The workgroup reviewed draft language for each of the twelve recommendations, and revised recommendations based on discussion during the meeting. Workgroup attendees voted on each recommendation to determine if the workgroup approved its inclusion in the forthcoming report to the legislature. One workgroup member was unable to attend the meeting and registered their votes according to the previously established decision-making approach.

All recommendations received a passing vote according to the previously established decision-making approach of 62.5% (10 of the 16 workgroup members) in favor. All votes cast by work group members approved of including each recommendation as revised in the final report, with no votes cast in opposition.

Workgroup members were advised that the recommendations would be passed along to the legislative language group and that the planned workgroup report was also in progress. Workgroup members were informed that they might be contacted by email if any clarification questions emerged during the writing of the report.

January 11, 2024 meeting participants

- Andrea Palumbo, HOME line
- Cindy Fahland, Hennepin County
- Davin Sokup, MN Senate, proxy for Senator Lindsey Port
- Ellen Sahli, Family Housing Fund
- Jen Frisbie, Community Mediation Minnesota
- Jeremy Galley, DHS
- Julie Ogunleye, United Way
- Kristyn Stephens, Washington County
- Mary Kaczorek, mid-Minnesota Legal Aid
- Nicole Worlds, county administrator, Greater MN
- Rebekah Grimm, Salvation Army
- Rep. Michael Howard, MN House of Representatives
- Rinal Ray, Minnesota Housing
- Sen. Lindsey Port, MN Senate
- Theresa Dahlheimer, St. Louis County

Others

- Katie Hatt, MAD
- Karen Gaides, MAD
- Trevor Frey, MAD
- Stephanie Klein, MAD
- George Shardlow, MMB

Not present

- Cassandra Barden, Minnesota Multi Housing Association

Workgroup on Expediting Rental Assistance meeting summary, February 8, 2024

Main meeting topics

The February workgroup meeting began with workgroup updates, including external consultation activities and the final report process.

The draft legislative language was reviewed and discussed. Votes were conducted to determine whether draft language, with minor technical edits, would be included in the workgroup report. Workgroup members also discussed some questions and concerns for consideration during the legislative process.

The meeting closed with recognition that this would be the final workgroup meeting, and appreciation for the efforts and engagement of everybody who contributed to the workgroup.

Key agenda items

- Workgroup business and updates
- Legislative language overview and discussion
- Voting on legislative language
- Comments and questions for future attention
- Wrap-up

Workgroup business and updates

The February meeting began with workgroup updates, including the suggestion that workgroup members should reach back out to the external people and organizations with whom they consulted during the workgroup process, and share the final report following its submittal to the legislature. The final report process was also reviewed, and workgroup members were invited to share their thoughts from their pre-meeting review of the draft workgroup report.

Legislative language overview and discussion

The overview began with an update on the legislative language process. Nonpartisan staff who participated in the drafting process then presented the legislative language, and workgroup members had the opportunity to ask questions about the draft language.

The discussion was framed around four questions inviting workgroup members to share what stood out for them, their response or reaction, implications and considerations for the workgroup, and whether there were any issues requiring resolution. One question that arose was related to timelines included in the draft legislative language, with members wondering whether shorter timelines might be possible. A workgroup member experienced with the legislative process advised that some of the work being laid out for agencies would require funding for them to complete information gathering necessary to scope and plan the work. Therefore, time would be needed for appropriation of funds, for the agency to complete their information gathering and planning, and then for appropriation of funds once the scope was known. Members expressed appreciation for this explanation and advised that this was helpful to understand.

Additional reactions and considerations were discussed. A workgroup member reflected on the lack of precision in some recommendations, noting that the legislative process would provide an opportunity to make the language more precise. Workgroup members also expressed appreciation that the draft legislation included both smaller- and larger-scope opportunities to expedite emergency rental assistance.

Voting on legislative language

This segment of the meeting began with introductory guidance that the workgroup would be voting on draft legislative language that had been updated with basic technical edits, but that broader implementation concerns

would be addressed during the legislative process. The most frequent technical edit was changing "rental assistance" to "emergency rental assistance." The technical edits were visible through the use of red font for any added words, and strikethrough of any words being removed (also in red font). (The presentation slides showing the technical edits can be viewed on the workgroup webpage referenced at the beginning of this meeting summary.)

The draft legislative language with technical edits was reviewed one section at a time. A few technical edits were added during the review and discussion. A few comments were brought up for future consideration (e.g., during the legislative process). These included:

Section 7

- Potential clarification as to which programs already had options in place and might not need to make a change
- Consideration of whether the date could be earlier

Section 8

- Addition of a date for completion

Section 10

- Suggestion to break the timeline down into achievable components, adding benchmarks between now and the final date. Suggestion to consider this not only for Section 10, but also for other sections reflecting a larger amount of work with longer timelines.

Section 11

- Suggestion to revisit timeline, as current date is broadly considered not achievable

Members were asked to vote on whether sections, with noted technical edits, should be included in the legislative language submitted to the legislature in the WERA final report. Member votes were unanimous in approving the sections to be included in the report.

Comments and questions for future attention

Prior to the workgroup meeting, DHS and Minnesota Housing had reviewed the draft legislative language to identify both technical edits (as described above) and broader considerations. The comments on broader considerations were shared with the workgroup for awareness and may come up during the legislative process. Workgroup members were invited to ask questions or offer reactions to the comments shared by DHS and Minnesota Housing that were beyond basic technical edits and therefore not addressed by the workgroup.

These additional agency comments are listed below: General comment overall - please note that recommendations in this legislation will require funding from the legislature. A fiscal note will be needed for any legislation introduced.

Section 1:

- Please note that the Emergency Assistance program is part of the MFIP consolidated fund and will move to the new Department of Children, Youth, and Families on 7.1.2024. Emergency General Assistance will stay at the Department of Human Services. The Revisor's Office likely has the authority to make this update afterwards but just raising it here for awareness since this applies to all other sections of this bill as well (i.e., references to the commissioner of human services will need to be updated to also include the commissioner of children, youth, and families once the new agency is operational).
- Please note that Emergency Assistance is more than just rental assistance and is part of the MFIP consolidated fund. Emergency Assistance is one of many "allowable expenditures" under the MFIP consolidated fund. Counties are not required to offer EA and have discretion over what to cover with EA (if offered). There are state statutes and federal regulations that dictate how EA must be used.

Section 3:

- We have explained to the workgroup previously that this data is not available at this time and MAXIS has limitations for producing this data.
- Will EA/EGA remain at DHS? Should Children, Youth, Families be named here as well? Since DHS will have a greater portion of the data in-house, should they be the lead for this report?

Section 4:

- The legislative language in this section is very broad. This language could be more specific in terms of what updates the commissioner is being requested to make in the MAXIS eligibility system. We would have difficulty fiscal noting this section given how broad the direction is.

Section 5:

- This section title refers to only the "Emergency Assistance Program," implying that this section applies only to the emergency assistance program. However, other language refers to "all emergency assistance programs," clause (1) refers to Emergency General Assistance, clause (2) does not refer to any specific program, and clause (3) refers to Emergency Assistance. Is this intentional? Does this language also apply to the Family Homeless Assistance and Prevention Program? This language needs to be clarified in terms of which specific programs it applies to.
- Is there an expectation that DHS report the recommendations to the Legislature? If not, what gets done with the recommendations?
- Should say report recommendations for legislative changes, rather than compel the executive branch to propose changes.

Section 6:

- Will there be funding available for additional outreach? Is there recognition that outreach without additional program funds will further burden the system? Is there a plan to sequence program funding and outreach?

Section 7:

- Please note that both Emergency Assistance and Emergency General Assistance already allow electronic signatures so legislation directing us to implement e-signature options is not needed. We recommend deleting the DHS commissioner and DHS programs from the language.

Section 8:

- Reference to "program materials" - does this apply to applicant-facing materials only?

Section 10:

- Please note that both Emergency Assistance and Emergency General Assistance currently use established common entry points for public assistance programs (i.e., the Combined Application Form and the online MNbenefits application). We would want to make sure that any future centralization work takes this existing program alignment in public assistance programs into account.
- Was it determined that DHS would operate the system?

Section 11:

- Note that policies for Emergency Assistance are set at the county level and not determined by DHS. This flexibility is allowed under 256J.626
- DHS has concerns with allowing landlords to apply on someone else's behalf. Agree that they could make a referral, but we would have concerns about a landlord starting the application on the renter's behalf. In addition, there could be barriers to allowing this under MA federal laws and regulations. For example, in provider-controlled settings where the landlord is the provider and there are protections in state law and our federal waiver plans to ensure individual self-autonomy.
- This timeline is not achievable. If this legislation is approved it would go into effect on 7/1/24. Having a report prepared by 1/1/25 on this topic is not feasible. Recommend a later due date for the recommendations.
- If this recommendation were to be adopted, it should require authorization from the tenant. An application seeking past-due rent from a renter who has moved out would disqualify them from applying for assistance for their new home for 12 months.

There were no questions or reactions shared by workgroup members at the meeting.

Wrap-up

Workgroup members were reminded that they were encouraged to share the report, when ready, with external individuals and groups with whom they consulted. Workgroup members were given the opportunity to express appreciation as the final workgroup meeting ended. Members were also asked to provide feedback on the workgroup process, so that future workgroups could operate more effectively.

February 8 meeting participants

- Cassandra Barden, Minnesota Multi Housing Association
- Cindy Fahland, Hennepin County

- Ellen Sahli, Family Housing Fund
- Jen Frisbie, Community Mediation Minnesota
- Jeremy Galley, DHS
- Josh Ney, MinnCAP, proxy for Lori Schultz
- Julie Ogunleye, United Way
- Kristyn Stephens, Washington County
- Rebekah Grimm, Salvation Army
- Rep. Michael Howard, MN House of Representatives
- Rinal Ray, Minnesota Housing
- Sen. Lindsey Port, MN Senate
- Theresa Dahlheimer, St. Louis County

Others

- Not present Amanda Welliver, MN Housing
- Dan Kitzberger, MN Housing
- Dan Mueller, Senate Counsel Research and Fiscal Analysis
- Erik Anderson, MMB
- Justin Cope, House Research Department
- Karen Gaides, MAD
- Katie Hatt, MAD
- Kristy Graume, DHS
- Nicolas Demm, DHS
- Stephanie Klein, MAD
- Trevor Frey, MAD
- Andrea Palumbo, HOME line
- Mary Kaczorek, mid-Minnesota Legal Aid
- Nicole Worlds, county administrator, Greater MN