

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

- Meeting participants listed at the end.
- To review the meeting agenda, presentation slides, and any other relevant documents from the meeting, visit the [workgroup webpage](#) and select the “Meetings” tab.

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:
 - Have household income below 200% of federal poverty guidelines.
 - Be a Minnesota resident or household otherwise approved by Minnesota Housing.
 - 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
- 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.
 - Prevention and Rapid Rehousing Assistance: 86% of households.
 - Coordinated Entry and Street Outreach: 14% of households.
- FHPAP served 59% households of color.
- Slight majority of households in greater MN (53%).
- 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