



First Children's Finance

Minnesota Access to Technology Grants

Guidelines for Child Care Providers

SEPTEMBER 2024

212 North Third Avenue, Suite 310
Minneapolis, MN 55401
612-473-6020

grants@firstchildrensfinance.org

Accommodations & Interpreter Services

If you need an accommodation or interpreter services during any open grant cycle, please contact the grants team at the Help Line at 612-473-6020 or email grants@firstchildrensfinance.org.

During open application periods, the help line is answered from 9 a.m. – 4 p.m. Monday – Friday and from 6:30 – 8:30 p.m. on Tuesday and Thursday evenings.

Email is monitored daily, and the help line is answered during open application cycles. During application review, calls may be directed to voice mail, and messages are returned within 2 business days.

For providers who do not have online access, an application may be requested by calling 612-473-6020. Completed paper applications must be received at least 24 hours prior to the grant deadline to ensure processing.

If paper application is not received in time, applicants will be notified and given the option to have their application held over and considered during the next grant round.

Grant Purpose

The State of Minnesota has allocated funds – just over \$200,000 per year through 2026 – for licensed child care businesses in Minnesota to access technology for business management purposes.

Priority will be given to child care businesses that currently have no or limited technology resources, particularly those whose child care locations are in Child Care Access Equity areas.

The following child care providers with child care programs located within the State of Minnesota are eligible to apply:

- Licensed family child care
- Licensed child care centers
- Tribally licensed child care

Eligible Uses

Eligible uses must be necessary to improve the business management efficiency of your child care program. Grant dollars may not be used retroactively for items or services purchased prior to the date that FCF receives a signed grant agreement following grant award notification.

Grant uses are limited to:

- **Connectivity:** new Internet service installation or related hardware (modem; router; hot spot; wifi extenders/boosters; ethernet port; and cables for new computer, such as hdmi)
- **New Equipment:** Smart phone; Tablet; Laptop; Desktop Computer (including monitor/keyboard/mouse/headset); Printer or multi-function printer with scan/copy functions
- **Child Care Business Management Software/Subscription:** Accounting, marketing, or spreadsheet software purchase; Child Care Management Software (CCMS) subscription
- **Training in Technology Skills**

NOTE: A detailed list identifying how grant funds may and may not be spent is included as a separate list at the end of this document.

Grant Size

Minimum grant size: \$100 Maximum grant size: \$1,000

With just over \$200,000 available to distribute each year, it is anticipated that between 200 – 300 grant awards will be made each fiscal year.

Providers who receive grants are ineligible to reapply for two years following the date of their signed grant agreement. In all grant rounds, new applicants will be prioritized over applicants who have previously received an Access to Technology grant.

Timeline

Please check the First Children’s Finance website for up-to-date information. Two grant cycles are planned each year through 2026.

Application cycles will remain open for one week.

- Grants are not first come, first served. Pre-determined criteria is used to award grants competitively based on all applications received during a grant period.
- Because we hope to fund as many child care providers in Minnesota as possible, please use exact costs in your budget, and request only what you need.
- The grant review process can take up to 8 weeks. Notifications letters are sent to all applications informing them of an award or declination.

Grant Awards

Grant awards will be paid-in-full* following the deadline for receiving a signed grant agreement.

Final reports* will be due within 60 days of the signed grant agreement deadline. Paid-in-full receipts matching the grant award and photos of purchases or training completion certificates will be required in the final report.

Access to Technology Training

Along with grant funding, the State of Minnesota allocated funds for training on **leveraging technology for child care businesses**. This training is offered to child care providers at no cost by First Children's Finance. Training opportunities may be viewed at www.firstchildrensfinance.org and training announcements may be viewed at <https://www.facebook.com/FCFMinnesota>. This training is designed to help you assess your business management technology needs and learn about various options.

Considerations for Eligible Requests

1. *All requests must be NECESSARY and directly related to child care business management only.*

2. Awardees will be given a deadline to sign and return a grant agreement. Providers may begin their projects/make their purchases on or after the date that this agreement is received by First Children's Finance.
3. Any item or service for which a previous commitment or payment has been made, including down payments – prior to return of the signed grant agreement – is not eligible. Grants may not be used to repay any type of debt service such as loans.
4. All labor requests must be provided by a professional installer or trainer not related to the child care provider who works in the technology field. Estimates and receipts must include their name, business name, address, and phone on quotes prior to grant awards and on receipts for work performed.
5. If planning to relocate child care program within 1 year, items paid under a grant that cannot be moved to the new location must be repaid on a prorated schedule.
6. Quotes should be itemized and prioritized so any portion not eligible can be subtracted from a potential grant award rather than disallowing the entire quote.
7. Any expense found to be in conflict with these guidelines during final report reconciliation will be disallowed.

Application Process

Applications may be submitted through our online portal at submittable.com using any computer, tablet or smart phone. The portal will also allow applications in Spanish, Hmong and Somali.

It is possible to submit applications by mail or email, but they must be received in time for a staff member to enter the application into the grant portal prior to the deadline. If not received by the deadline, the application must wait for the next open grant period.

Each application may cover one licensed setting only, and **applicants may submit only one application per grant period for each license**. If an edit or an addition is desired after submitting the application and the portal has not yet closed for the grant round, please request that your application be opened for editing. Edits cannot be made to an application once the portal closes for each quarterly cycle, and additional materials will not be accepted via Messaging or email after the portal

closes. Multiple applications submitted for the same license in a round will disqualify all submissions in that round. Providers wishing to apply for more than one license must submit separate applications for each. Each application will be evaluated separately.

The application must be signed by the owner of the child care business, even if the application is completed by another individual. Electronic signatures will be accepted.

More than one individual may collaborate on an application, but all communication will be sent through the portal to the email address used to sign into the Submittable grant portal. If Facebook or Google are used to create a Submittable account, providers must regularly check the email address associated with their Facebook or Google accounts to receive messages regarding the grant.

Application Grant Portal: Submittable

To apply for an Access to Technology Grant, complete an application by going to www.firstchildrensfinace.org/for-businesses/grants and clicking on the **“Click Here to Apply”** button. This will take you into our Submittable grant portal.

If you do not already have a Submittable account, you can create a free account **using an email address that you check regularly**. If you do not regularly use your email address associated with Facebook or Google, do NOT sign in with those platforms. ALL communication will be sent to the email address used to register for your Submittable account. Submittable tips:

- You can [save a draft](#) of your work if you would like to finish filling out the form at a later date. Click the **save draft** link for instructions.
- Once you submit your application in Submittable, you will no longer be able to make changes. If you need to provide any additional information or make changes prior to a grant deadline, you may request your application be re-opened to [edit the submission](#) by calling 612-473-6020. Please click the edit the submission link for instructions on how to do so.
- Submittable works best on Google Chrome, Firefox, and Safari. Microsoft Edge is not supported. Please make sure you are using a supported browser.

We will follow-up with you about your submission by email through the Submittable grant portal. Please be sure to [safelist](#) notification emails from Submittable and check the email you used to sign up for your Submittable Account regularly.

Information Requested in the Application

1. Provider information (name/address, license, provider type, capacity, etc.)
2. Demographics of Provider and Children in the Program (required for aggregate reporting)
3. Technology Self-Assessment (types and ages of current technology used for business management and technology skills)
4. Narrative Questions
 - a. Please describe your current child care business management practices. How would a technology grant improve the efficiency of managing your child care business?
 - b. When NOT caring for children, how many hours are you currently spending on managing the business aspects of your child care business (billing/invoicing, reporting, food program, CCAP, attendance, grants, business management training)?
 - c. Please describe in detail how you will use the grant funds, if awarded. If you are submitting multiple items for consideration, please add a priority list that clearly states what you need most in order.
 - d. Will the grant pay for the entire cost? What additional resources will be used to complete your technology purchase(s)?
 - e. If you receive this grant, how many jobs will be impacted?
5. Grant Request and Budget Information:
 - a. Total grant request amount
 - b. Installation or Subscription Service quote – must include:
 - i. Vendor name, address/contact information, service description and pricing; and/or
 - ii. Training description provided from trainer and Registration/pricing information
 - c. Screen shot of equipment requested – must include:
 - i. Store name/vendor;
 - ii. Contact information (address/phone or web address)
 - iii. Item/model number;

- iv. Description of equipment requested; and
 - v. Exact **regular** price
6. Attestation (same information as found in the Grant Agreement and Attestation to be signed and returned to FCF following an award letter)

Award Process

Complete award review will begin after each application round closes. Depending upon the number of applications in any given grant cycle, it is anticipated that award decisions and notifications will be made approximately six to eight weeks after the application deadline. All grant process stages, including notification of award, are subject to change and can vary with each grant cycle. Applicants are advised to watch for status updates delivered via email.

Grant Notification: Award notification will be made by email, using the email address used to register for a Submittable account. The award letter will specify terms of the grant, including which specific items from proposed budget are approved. Grant funds may only be used for items or services as outlined in the grant award letter.

Partial Awards: Partial grant awards may be made based on eligibility of items requested in the proposal budget. If a partial award is made, grant funding must be spent only on item(s) approved as identified in the grant award letter. If your project comes in under budget, do not spend the unused funds on other items – you will be required to return any unused funds to First Children’s Finance. If requesting more than one item or service, it is highly recommended to note priority order in the application.

Award Agreement: An acceptance of the grant terms will be required, including required attestations, an ACH deposit form W9 and a report form. **The signed grant agreement and attestations must be returned before grant funding will be released.**

Post Award – Final Report: Any unused funds for the awarded projects must be returned. You may not use remaining funds on unapproved items and cannot spend over the amount per item and/or project outlined in the award letter. Providers should review the eligible uses list – if the application did not disclose important information and it is determined in report reconciliation that a request was ineligible, a portion of the grant funding may be disallowed, requiring return of funds to First Children’s Finance.

Denied Applications: Applicants will be notified if their application is denied. Examples for why an application may not be approved for funding include but are not limited to:

- Application does not meet the grant guidelines for funding or is incomplete;
- Limited resources available within the grant program; or
- Applicant scored lower than other applications submitted.

Re-applying: Funds will be distributed in a balanced manner each cycle. Providers who submitted an eligible application that did not receive a grant in any cycle due to insufficient funds may apply again in a future round. Applicants will be notified if information is incomplete or if further detail is needed. A new application is required in each grant round.

Award Rubric

Grants will be evaluated using an award rubric with a numeric rating for the following categories:

- Current technology and identified need
- Access Equity Area score
- Applicant demographics
- Whether or not high need children/families are served
- Whether or not a provider accepts CCAP
- Number of sites owned/operated by provider
- Overall reason for request

Every effort will be made to balance grant allocations by geography, provider type and demographics of the community served. Requests from providers who currently have no technology or limited technology, demonstrate that the request will increase their business management efficiency and who scored high/moderate on the Access Equity Area score will be prioritized.

Grant Agreement and Attestation

To accept a grant, child care providers must sign an attestation that indicates understanding and agreement of the following:

1. They are **currently licensed in good standing** with the Minnesota Department of Human Services or Tribal Government.
2. Read and understand the requirements, including the reporting requirements and deadlines.
3. Upon acceptance of this award, grant dollars will be paid up front.* Once you have completed your purchase, you will submit your final report with receipts showing that you've made the purchase(s) as awarded. The report will be reconciled with your receipts and original award. If the purchase(s) do not align with the original award or if the grant funds are under-spent, an invoice will be issued to return unused or inappropriately used funds.
4. **Spend dollars exactly as described in the award letter** or as amended with permission in writing from Grant Administrators. Grant Administrators reserve the right to disallow items not matching the approved budget. Mis-spent or under-spent funds must be returned to First Children's Finance for re-allocation.
5. Not use funds to supplant expenditures for which there is another federal, state, tribal and/or local public funding source.
6. Submit a final report within 60 days, answering all questions in the report and submit:
 - i. Receipt/expense/training and/or certification documentation for entire grant
 - ii. Photo of equipment purchased out-of-the box/set-up for use
7. **Provide licensed child care in Minnesota caring for children other than the provider's own ranging in age from birth – school age for a minimum of one year from the date of the grant fund notification.** If the program closes before the minimum period is complete, the grantee understands that they will be required to re-pay a pro-rated amount of this grant. The prorated portion is calculated from the date that the signed grant agreement is received.
8. Return a prorated share of grant dollars spent on services not moving with a program that relocates within the one-year period, even if continual care is provided for children other than the provider's own.
9. Remain licensed in good standing, free from sanctions, verifiable by grant administrators following grant implementation.
10. Make services available to families regardless of race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, marital status, disability, public assistance, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, or familial status.
11. Return any unused portion of the grant to First Children's Finance for reallocation under these guidelines.

Grantees attest that they understand that by signing the agreement:

- First Children's Finance is authorized to share information with the Minnesota Department of Human Services to analyze data on use and effectiveness of grant funds. All data shared in the application and final report may be shared and/or aggregated for reporting purposes.
- if they knowingly submit false or fraudulent information during any part of the grant process, their program will no longer be eligible for funds. Any funds awarded during this grant process would be required to be repaid and appropriate authorities would be notified.
- If unable to meet grant requirements, they must agree to return the full amount of the grant to First Children's Finance for reallocation. Failure to do so will result in requirement to return funds and/or reporting to licensing authorities and DCYF / DHS fraud department.

Additional Forms

W9: Grant dollars are considered taxable income. First Children's Finance will issue a 1099 for any grant award over \$600 to businesses as required by the IRS. (S-Corps, C-Corps, churches and nonprofit centers are exempt from 1099s. FCF is still required to collect a W9, but a 1099 may not be issued.) Grantees should work with their tax advisors on how to calculate eligible business expense deductions when reporting the grant to the IRS for tax purposes.

ACH: Grantees will be asked to complete an electronic (ACH) direct deposit bank transfer form, including bank routing and account information for direct deposit. If a provider does not have a bank account, a check may be requested, though this will cause a delay in payment.

Final Report

A final report* will be due within 60 days of the deadline for returning signed grant agreements.

If the project cannot be completed in 60 days due to supply chain issues or delayed availability of an installer, a 30-day extension may be requested in writing through the MESSAGES feature in the grant portal. Approval must also be granted in writing. Failure to submit the final report will result in the grantee receiving an invoice for return of grant funds. If not paid, the grant will be reported to the Minnesota Department of Human Services or Tribal licensor, which may impact the provider's

child care license, other payments of public funds, and/or may be investigated for fraud. Grantee will also be ineligible to apply for future grants or loan funding from First Children's Finance.

Report elements will include:

- a. Demographics on provider and children served
- b. Result of funded project/items
- c. Narrative description of impact of grant on child care business management
- d. Documentation of expenditures matching the budget submitted in application. If actual costs were less than the grant award, an invoice will be issued for return of the underspent funds.
- e. Receipts must demonstrate that the project has been paid for in full and are itemized. (For example, an Amazon screen shot showing the total cost of an order is not acceptable. Providers must download the receipt from their Amazon account once the order is complete.)
Receipts and paid invoices from an installer must include the name of the vendor/business, address, and phone number. The entire receipt and/or document must be submitted - photos of partial receipts will not be accepted. Receipts should only include items that were approved in the award.
- f. Barriers encountered in implementing grant if any
- g. Photos and optional media release.
- h. If applying in future rounds final reports need to be returned, fully processed and final award funding reconciled before you are eligible to apply for an additional grant up to the maximum grant value through the current funding period (calendar year 2026). Grant status will change to COMPLETE when fully closed.

CAUTION

If grantees do not follow the terms outlined in the grant agreement, a referral will be made to the Minnesota Department of Human Services and may result in recoupment of payments already made, discontinuation of future payments from

state-funded programs, and/or additional action related to the funds and the provider license under Minnesota Statutes, chapters 119B, 245A, 245E, and Minnesota Statutes, section 245.095.

This means you may be ineligible for other Department of Human Services public programs per [Minnesota Statutes, section 245.095 LIMITS ON RECEIVING PUBLIC FUNDS](#).

These programs include Licensing (your license may be suspended or revoked), Parent Aware Ratings (your rating may be revoked and you will be excluded from seeking a future rating); and funds, including but not limited to Parent Aware grants, TEACH scholarships, REETAIN bonuses, Child Care Aware Regional Grants, reimbursement through the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) and any additional funding from First Children's Finance – both grants and loans. Referral to another agency may be made by the Minnesota Department of Human Services if necessary, such as the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension.

Confidentiality and Data Privacy

Applications will not be discussed outside of First Children's Finance employees, Board of Directors or External Advisory group comprised of key stakeholders or partners. Information will be compiled for reporting to the Minnesota Department of Children, Youth and Families(DCYF)/ Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS).

As this grant program is funded through the Minnesota Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) / Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS), First Children's Finance is required to comply with the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act, Minnesota Statutes Chapter 13.599, as it applies to data created collected, received, stored, used, maintained or disseminated.

When a grant application is submitted, the following is public information: name, address, license, number and age of children served, award amount (if any) and identity of grant reviewers.

Individual provider information will be reported to the Minnesota Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) / Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) licensing authority and/or fraud department if grant agreements are not honored, and law enforcement when required.

Grant Application/Report Assistance

For grant assistance (applications and reports) and for questions not covered in the manual, email grants@firstchildrensfinance.org or call the help line at 612-473-6020. Translation and interpreter services are available upon request.

If voice mail is received, please leave a message so the call may be returned.

During open grant application periods, the help line will be answered Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. – 4 p.m. and on Tuesday and Thursday evenings from 6:30 – 8:30 p.m.

*FCF reserves the right to pay grant awards on a reimbursement basis, depending upon the rate of timely final report submissions in early round(s).

Eligible/Approved and Ineligible/Denied Uses

Eligible uses must be necessary to improve the business management efficiency of your child care program. Grant dollars may not be used retroactively for items or services purchased prior to the date that FCF receives a signed grant agreement following grant award notification. Down payments, price-locks or any commitment to purchase, subscribe or register prior to the return of a signed grant agreement are not allowed/not eligible for this program. Eligible/approved uses are identified below under “Yes” and ineligible/denied uses are listed under “No” for each category.

Please note: professional grant writing or administration fees are not eligible for grant funding.

Connectivity:

Yes

- New Internet service installation or data plan (one per grant) - this may include a change to a new Internet service or data plan for the purposes of obtaining better service/stronger signal
- New Internet hardware including to improve signal (modem, router, hot spot)
- New or upgraded data plan is funded at 50%

Connectivity (cont.):

Yes

- New or upgraded internet service is funded at 50% if shared with personal/family use or with another business/organization
- Assistance with existing Internet service (future payments – not retroactive) – funded at 50% if shared with family or other business (Add in “Other Technology” category in the application)

No

- Prior purchases/commitment to install or purchase prior to return of signed grant agreement; no retroactive payments for Internet service or data plan

New Equipment:

Yes

- Smart phone
- Tablet
- Laptop
- Desktop Computer– web cam may be considered if the desktop computer is the only equipment available for training purposes
- Printer or multi-function printer with scan/copy functions
- One-time installation (such as set-up of desktop computer, printer, connection to Wi-Fi network)
- Accessories for Tablet, Laptop, Desktop: keyboard, mouse, monitor, headset

No

- Prior/recent purchase or commitment to purchase prior to return of grant agreement
- Used or previously-owned equipment, including professionally certified refurbished
- Purchases from private party including online auction/marketplace site(s)
- Service plans including extended warranty or ongoing training (in how to use equipment) or technical assistance
- Security cameras or other monitoring equipment
- Technology relating to security systems or door security

New Equipment (cont.):

No

- Equipment intended for use with children or classroom education
- Ink, paper, and other office supplies
- Service plans and/or protection warranties
- Protective cases, screen protectors, stylus pens, wall or ceiling mounts, and pull-down or standing presentation screens
- Docking stations/charging accessories

Child Care Business Management Software:

Yes

- Accounting or payment software purchase or subscription
- Spreadsheet software purchase or subscription, including as part of a package (for instance, Microsoft Office Suite)
- Child Care Management Software (CCMS) subscription
- Marketing software or subscription, including but not limited to website creation/maintenance. (Add in "Other Technology" category in the application)

No

- Fees for existing/prior subscription service or commitment to purchase or subscribe prior to return of signed grant agreement
- Hiring an accountant or accounting service for bookkeeping or hiring a consultant/service to develop a website
- Curriculum, educational software or any software not specifically referenced as eligible
- Anti-virus software

Training in Technology Skills

Yes

- One-time training to improve technology skills including how to use new equipment, software, or service (certificate of completion required with final report)

Training in Technology Skills (cont.):

No

- Training for which provider has already registered/previously signed-up prior to return of signed grant agreement
- Service plans for ongoing training, technical assistance or warranty service
- Travel, meals, lodging expenses related to attending in-person training
- Business management training