



# **Families First**

## **Community Grant Application Guide**

**2026**

# Families First Community Grants

The TANF Opportunity Act created the Families First Community Grant program, which will allocate almost \$4 million, infusing Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds into the community through organizations providing services to low-income families.

The Tennessee Department of Human Services (TDHS) seeks to partner with public and private organizations to conduct this critical work. The following guide provides additional detail and instructions for those interested in partnering with TDHS to deliver services.

## About the Tennessee Department of Human Services (TDHS)

**Our Mission:** Strengthen Tennessee by Strengthening Tennesseans

**Our Vision:** To revolutionize the customer experience by growing capacity to reduce dependency.

**Our Core Values:**

- High Performance
- Collaboration
- Continuous Improvement
- A Shared Vision
- Customer-Centered Solutions

Led by a governor-appointed Commissioner and organized into customer-facing and support divisions, the TDHS understands that our state's strength comes from its people. Our work seeks to ensure every Tennessean has the opportunity to achieve economic and social wellness. We achieve this goal by offering an extensive range of social services to Tennesseans in all 95 counties. Our broad range of customers includes custodial and non-custodial parents who participate in the Child Support Program, as well as licensed childcare providers and parents that need childcare payment assistance. We also serve community members with disabilities in reaching their employment, education, and independent living goals. Other customers include families living below the poverty line who may need assistance in obtaining nutrition or other resources to move beyond their current circumstances. We serve these groups and more, however our goal is always the same: help more Tennesseans to reach a higher capacity for self-sufficiency and reduce their dependency on outside supports. Simply put, we want to strengthen Tennessee by strengthening Tennesseans.

**TDHS engages partners to:**

- Focus on reducing poverty among children and families using a Whole Family Approach;
- Create effective pathways to economic opportunity, including access to mainstream education, training, and individualized services for those with barriers to employment;
- Ensure that families have access to economic and social supports to foster upward mobility, while also assuring healthy child development;
- Help families build social capital that can support both resilience and upward mobility; and
- Engage, listen, and incorporate the voices of families.

## TDHS Programs for Children and Families



The **Child Support Program** provides services that promote parental responsibility to meet the financial needs for children and their families. Core services include locating parents, establishing paternity, establishing and enforcing financial and medical support orders, and collecting and disbursing child support collections. In addition to these services, the Child Support Program uses the Whole Family Approach to offer a number of employment support programs throughout the state.



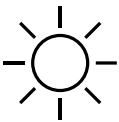
The **Child Care Certificate Program** provides childcare payment assistance to families who are working or pursuing education programs. The Smart Steps Child Care payment assistance programs provide financial assistance for parents working and pursuing educational goals. Parents may be responsible for a co-pay for their child's care. All childcare payment assistance programs not only allow parents and guardians a sense of security while they work or pursue educational goals, but they also promote children's learning and development in quality care.



The **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)** provides nutritional assistance supplemental benefits to children and families, the elderly, the disabled, and unemployed and working families. SNAP also provides an opportunity through the SNAP Employment and Training Program for SNAP participants to gain employment skills, training, or work experience to increase their ability to obtain regular employment that leads to economic self-sufficiency.



The **Families First Program** is a workforce development and employment program. It is temporary and has a primary focus on helping individuals gain self-sufficiency through employment. Services include, but are not limited to, assistance with transportation, childcare, education, job training, employment activities, temporary cash assistance, and other support services.



The **Summer Food Service Program (SFSP)** provides administrative and operational payments to eligible agencies for serving meals to low-income children. Eligible agencies include private nonprofit organizations, local governments, and state colleges and universities. The **Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)** is a federally funded program that provides reimbursement for eligible meals that are served to participants who meet age and income requirements.



**Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)** services provide a variety of individualized services to persons with disabilities in preparation for their employment in a competitive and integrated labor market. Disability Determination Services (DDS) operates by agreement between the State of Tennessee and the Social Security Administration to process Social Security income disability claims.



The **Community Services Block Grant (CSBG)** provides services and strategies to address the causes and conditions of poverty by removing barriers to self-sufficiency for low-income individuals and families. These services are driven by a local community needs assessment and community action plan. Services and strategies may include education, employment, housing, health, nutrition, income management, case management, self-sufficiency, and re-entry programs.

## Determining Success – Universal Outcomes Framework

The Department seeks family-focused solutions that demonstrate measurable impacts designed to address at least one of the four purposes of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. The four purposes of the TANF program are to:

1. Provide assistance to needy families so that children can be cared for in their own homes or in the homes of relatives;
2. End the dependence of needy parents by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage;
3. Prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies; and
4. Encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.

Additionally, the Department has developed a universal outcomes framework and **is targeting the outcome areas on the next page** in alignment with the goal of transforming Tennessee's safety net by growing the capacity of families and moving them beyond the vulnerabilities that brought them to our programs. Our universal outcomes were created with the assistance of Ascend at the Aspen Institute and constitute four core components: Economic Supports, Education, Health & Well-Being, and Social Capital.

**Partners selected for the Families First Community Grants must identify outcomes that it will achieve based on the Department's Universal Whole Family Outcome areas listed below. Partners must also develop specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and timely outcomes (with metrics) to be used to support the identified goal(s).**

In addition to tracking and reporting outcomes, partners will be expected to conduct pre- and post-well-being assessments for each family to identify their own strengths and areas of improvement; to assess service effectiveness; and demonstrate the success of the family and program. Partners will be expected to utilize a universal assessment to gather service data, track outcomes, identify families' needs and goals, and manage a care coordination model to support effective referrals and ultimately, family success.

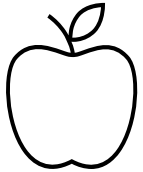
It is the goal of the TDHS to support the upward mobility of all Tennesseans. To that end, the applicants must demonstrate how their proposal seeks to grow capacity to reduce dependency on public supports.

# Universal Outcomes Framework



## **Economic Support: Increase Economic Status and Stability**

- Improve stable, safe housing conditions or obtain home ownership;
- Increase earned income/wage benefits;
- Increase participation or enrollment in education and job training opportunities;
- Increase financial empowerment (increased savings, decreased debt, improved credit scores, access to banking); and
- Increase attainment of certifications or post-secondary degrees.



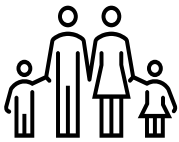
## **Education: Empower Parents as their Children's First/Primary Teachers**

- Increase parental engagement in the academic planning and success of their child to improve classroom behavior, attendance, and grades;
- Increase parents' attendance and involvement in their child's learning activities through workshops, individualized consultations, or other impactful parenting education activities; and
- Improve parenting skills.



## **Health & Well-being: Decrease Psychological Distress**

- Improve health and well-being of families (physical, mental, and emotional health);
- Improve families' awareness on healthy lifestyle behaviors and available health services and resources;
- Reduce Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE); and
- Improve self-advocacy skills for families.



## **Social Capital: Increase Family Engagement**

- Expand families' networks and connection to other families;
- Increase families' knowledge of, access to, and utilization of community resources;
- Increase civic engagement through community involvement and neighborhood outreach;
- Increase family support through youth mentoring programs; and
- Increase family cohesion and communication through workshops, family-centered events, and in-home support services.

### ***Families First Community Grant – Mandatory Application Requirements***

The Grant Applicant must address all items detailed below and provide all required documents upon application to be evaluated for a Families First Community Grant.

The following documents must be submitted with the completed application:

- Provide a statement of whether the Grant Applicant is actively registered with public profile access in the [System for Award Management](#). The public profile access shall be required to contract with the State of Tennessee. If registered, provide the SAM.gov Unique Entity Identification Number. (SAM UEI). If not yet registered, please provide proof application has been made.
- Certificate of Acknowledgement (COA) – State form provided.
- Provide the organization's conflict of interest policy and a signed statement on official letterhead attesting that: based upon reasonable inquiry, neither the organization, its employees, affiliate entities/agencies, employees of any affiliate entity/agency, nor any affiliated individual who will perform services under this potential contract, as a result of this application, have a possible or perceived conflict of interest.
- Provide tax-exempt status determination letter from the IRS.
- Provide a copy of the organization's [Tennessee Department of Revenue Registration Certificate](#).
- Provide a copy of the organization's Certificate of Insurance (COI) unless your organization is considered a governmental entity under Tennessee Code Annotated § 29-20-102 (see application for more information).
- Provide a statement confirming Applicant's ability to meet the grant's insurance coverage requirements. Historically, the insurance coverage requirement(s) has not exceeded \$10 million and is able to be reimbursed under the grant award.
  - Required insurance may include, but is not limited to: Commercial General Liability, Workers' Compensation and Employer Liability, Automobile Liability, Professional Liability, Technology Professional Liability (Errors & Omissions)/Cyber Liability, Crime Insurance, and Sexual Abuse and Molestation coverage.

### ***Families First Community Grant – Program Participant Eligibility Criteria***

Families participating in the services funded by the Families First Community Grants must meet certain eligibility requirements established by federal law. Specifically, participating families (parent/legal guardian with child(ren) under the age of 18) must meet Tennessee's low-income eligibility criteria. "Low-Income Families" is defined as families who are:

- Living at or below the Federal Poverty Level;
- Eligible for Medicaid;
- Recipients of, or eligible for, public benefits such as Families First (TANF) or Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP);
- Unemployed or zero income verification;
- Live in Section 8 housing or low rent public housing; or
- Eligible for National School Lunch Program (free or reduced lunch).

## ***Families First Community Grant – Applicant Criteria***

The Department is looking to engage eligible nonprofit organizations in Tennessee with evidence-based and evidence-informed program models who can administer community-based services to meet the needs of low-income families, placing the whole family on a path to permanent economic security. The Department requires these services to be delivered in a manner that improves economic security and well-being for low-income families and fosters a more strategic use of TANF funds, specifically as it pertains to the four purposes of TANF:

1. Providing assistance to needy families so that children can be cared for in their own homes;
2. Reducing the dependency of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage;
3. Preventing and reducing the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies; and
4. Encouraging the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.

The Department is seeking to partner with eligible nonprofit organizations in Tennessee that demonstrate an understanding of the challenges low-income families experience in their community, including those related to:

- Education;
- Health and well-being;
- Economic stability; and
- Safe, stable, and nurturing relationships.

The Department seeks to partner with organizations that have:

- Implemented or developed community-based programs that have been proven to be effective even when subjected to third-party evaluation.
- Demonstrated strong leadership and coordination of cross-sector partnerships.
- Demonstrated a proven track record for providing services intended to help low-income families achieve economic mobility.
- Identified a diverse set of resources, secured cross-sector partnerships, and developed a plan to deliver services from a family-led approach that is aligned with one or more of the four purposes of TANF.
- Articulated long-term impact of the community's approach, including applicable return on investment and cost-benefit analysis, to support and sustain delivery of services.
- Articulated a desire to work in partnership with the Department, community-based organizations, other stakeholders, and current and former customers to co-create solutions that address significant social problems.
- Innovative initiatives leveraging other public resources to build the economic, social, and developmental capital of those served to reduce dependency.

Eligible nonprofit organizations who wish to apply, including subcontractor partners, must maintain tax-exempt status under 26 U.S.C. 501(c)(3) or 26 U.S.C. 501(c)(19), with such status acknowledged by IRS determination letter. All eligible entities who wish to apply must not be currently debarred, suspended, or otherwise ineligible to conduct business in the State of Tennessee. Grant Contracts with the Department may be entered for services on a short-term basis and based upon the type of service needed, available resources and funding, and applicable legal and regulatory requirements.

## ***Families First Community Grant – Application Guidelines - What Must be Included in the Application?***

### ***1. Organizational Background.***

Discuss how the nonprofit organization was initiated/founded. Describe the work that the organization is currently doing, the population and number of people currently serving, and outputs and outcomes that demonstrate a true impact as a result of the program or services. Describe, in detail, the organization's

experience receiving federal funds and complying with federal grants. Provide information on how the organization's mission and vision align with at least one of the four purposes of TANF.

## II. TANF and Program Purpose.

State the TANF purpose this program will support from the list above. Provide a brief but clear overview of the program. Clearly describe if the program already exists within the organization or if the application is to establish a new program. Identify the community problem/goal to be addressed. Explain how it connects to the identified TANF purpose. Indicate how community involvement was obtained in identifying problems/needs and goals to be addressed. Describe how the program is different from other coordinated services already in place in the community or if these services are unique to the community to address a specific need. Provide a risk mitigation strategy to ensure participants are receiving unique services through this grant award.

## III. Target Population.

Describe the community (target population) being served by race, culture, ethnicity, age, geography, or other defining characteristics. Define the criteria of low-income families being served by this program.

### **Examples:**

*Individual's income at or below the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) guidelines,  
Receives governmental assistance,  
Some parts of Medicaid,  
Section 8 low-income housing assistance/low-rent public housing,  
Supplemental Security Income (SSI),  
Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC),  
Head Start, and/or National School Lunch Program: Free or Reduced Lunch.*

Clearly define enrollment guidelines, including eligibility determination. Explain frequency at which families must re-verify program eligibility. Explain your marketing and outreach plan to recruit your target population. Explain the support and partnerships you anticipate needing from TDHS, other state agencies, or organizations to reach and serve the target population. Provide the total number of unduplicated families you anticipate serving each year. Break down the group by adults and/or children/youth.

## IV. Scope of Work (SOW).

*The SOW clearly explains the services and describes the specific tasks that will be performed to meet the purpose of the program, TANF purpose, and program objectives.*

- Specify the core components of the services being offered.
- Identify the mode of delivery through which each component and element of the program will be delivered (e.g., workshops for skill training).
- Describe how these services will support the stated TANF and program purpose.
- Provide the duration (start and end dates) and implementation timeline of the specific services and activities that support the program.
- List all key partnerships (paid and unpaid) and describe their role in the delivery of services to support the program.
- List all program services that will be subcontracted through another organization.
- Include how you will coordinate and facilitate the various partnerships (i.e., frequency of meetings, delivery of reports, monitoring of outcomes and financials (if paid subcontractor)).
- Describe how the program will engage and continuously incorporate the voices of families in the program.
- Indicate how the program will adapt, or "best practice" used, to fit the needs and context of your community (e.g., differences in resources, cultural values, competence, and language).

V. Performance Measures/Outcomes.

Outcomes should look not only at the number of families served by the program, but whether the program improved opportunities for success for the whole family. Based on the four Whole Family core components and the Department's Universal Outcomes above, list at least six outcomes you will achieve and key results for the adult and/or the child. Provide outcomes that are specific, measurable with associated metrics, achievable, relevant, and timely. Describe how the data will be collected (its sources), monitored, measured, and evaluated. Indicate the TANF purpose that will support each outcome.

**Example:** *Economic Supports-Increased Economic Status and Stability. Increase participation or enrollment in education and job training opportunities: Seventy-five percent (75%) of parent participants that completed the ESL class and/or attained their HiSET diploma will attain full-time employment by the end of the Term. TANF Purpose: End the dependence of needy parents by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage.*

VI. Detailed Proposed Budget.

Provide the grant amount being requested for each year and the total amount for the program. Include a budget breakdown for the program on the provided budget form. Include a detailed budget narrative to support the budget form for the program and each subcontracting agency, if applicable. Include private and public funding sources (pending and received). Include the members responsible for financial management and oversight related to this funding and their role within the organization **Note:** *The total available funds may not necessarily be divided equally among the applicants, nor will selected applicants be guaranteed the entire amount requested.*

It is your responsibility to ensure the Proposed Budget follows U.S. Department of Health & Human Services regulations regarding allowable cost in the context of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program.

VII. Organizational Structure.

Provide an organization chart that outlines key staff for the oversight, support, and delivery of the program including the estimated number of hours dedicated to this grant. Describe the current staffing structure/model and positions needed. The description should include job titles and description of roles and responsibilities of all key positions. Indicate any services that will be contracted out such as fiscal, audit, etc.

**NOTE:** Failure to follow these Application Guidelines may remove your application from further consideration.

### ***Families First Community Grant – Application Instructions***

Eligible nonprofit organizations in Tennessee who can administer services that are consistent with the Department's mission and meet one of the four purposes of TANF are encouraged to apply during this grant open enrollment cycle. The Department will not be available to assist with the actual writing of applications or critiques of drafts.

Each response should be succinctly prepared with an emphasis on completeness and clarity. The application must not exceed ten (10) pages in length (the required supplemental documents will not count towards the page limit) and address all the statements/requirements under each header in accordance with the application guidelines above including: Organizational Background, TANF and Program Purpose, Target Population, Scope of Work (SOW), Performance Measures/Outcomes, Detailed Proposed Budget, and Organizational Structure. The application pages must be numbered and submitted on 8 ½ X 11-inch document, doubled spaced, 1" (2.54 cm) margins all around, and at least 11pt. font size in Arial or Calibri typeface.

Note: The size and/or style of graphics are not restricted, and their use and style are at the applicant's discretion, but

they will count towards the application page limit of ten (10) pages.

In addition to the 10-page application, the following supplemental documents are required (and do *not* count towards the application page limit of 10 pages):

- Organization chart
- Two completed budget forms - State forms provided
- Minimum of three (3) Letters of Support
- Certificate of Acknowledgement (COA) – State form provided
- Conflict of Interest
- IRS determination letter affirming tax-exempt status
- Revenue Registration Certificate
- Certificate of Insurance (COI), if applicable (see above and application for more information)
- Statement of ability to meet insurance coverage requirements

Application materials must be submitted electronically through the provided web portal Formstack: [2026 TANF Community Grant Application](#). Applicants must complete all required sections in Formstack. The budget forms must be submitted in Excel and all other documents must be converted to PDF format. All documents should be titled “Agency Name – FY2026 FFCG Application”, followed by the type of document (Application, Certificate of Acknowledgement, Certificate of Insurance, Org Chart, Budget, Letter of Support, IRS Determination Letter, etc.).

All documents mentioned above **must be submitted in Formstack by 5:00 p.m. Central Time on July 13, 2026**, to be considered. Late or incomplete submissions will not be considered. It is the applicant’s sole responsibility to allow sufficient time to address all potential delays caused for any reason whatsoever, including computer or technology problems.

### ***Families First Community Grant – Selection Criteria***

All completed applications received by the deadline will be reviewed. No applicant obtains any right to a Families First Community Grant based on submission of an application. The total available funds may not necessarily be divided equally among the applicants, nor will selected applicants be guaranteed the entire amount requested.

Application packets will be reviewed in three phases:

**Phase I – Required Mandatory Standards Review**

*Application must pass the mandatory review to move onto the evaluation phase.*

**Phase II – Evaluation**

**Phase III – Recommendation**

In addition to evaluating application responses, the Department will also consider:

- Qualifications and experience of the nonprofit organization;
- Familiarity and experience performing the services needed by the Department, and familiarity and experience creating and running programs, including the ability to perform the work in a timely manner;
- Organization’s (and partnering agencies) current or former contract performance history with the Department or other local governmental agencies; and
- Criteria as outlined in the application guidelines.

### **TANF Grants are Reimbursement Grants**

Grant contracts with the Department are reimbursement grants, typically written for a maximum dollar amount based upon an approved budget. A reimbursement grant provides funding to grant recipients after expenses have been

incurred. Therefore, it is expected that interested organizations have the capabilities to fund these activities upfront. Grantees must follow State and Federal guidance on allowable, necessary, and reasonable expenses and certain procedures to obtain the reimbursement for project expenses. Reimbursements are provided after the organization has submitted sufficient documents, as requested by the State, to verify expenses. Start-up or upfront funding are not allowable expenses.

There are restrictions by which the use of TANF funds is not allowed. Such restrictions include, but are not limited to, the construction, rehabilitation, and purchase of buildings; the purchase of trailer or modular buildings; and medical services and expenses. This prohibition applies to grantees and sub-recipients, including county sub-grantees, nonprofit agencies, and contractors. TANF funds may not be used to satisfy the cost-sharing or matching requirements of another federal program unless specifically authorized by Federal law.

For more information, please see the following links:

[What does the term “assistance” mean?](#)

[Prohibitions and Requirements](#) and

[U.S. Department of Health & Human Services Office of Child Care](#)

## **I. Performance Monitoring and Reporting Requirements**

Grantees will be required to submit Quarterly Progress Reports.

## **II. State of Tennessee Grant Requirements**

Every organization contracting with the State of Tennessee must comply with applicable legal and regulatory requirements, including vendor registration. Applicants should review the [State’s Central Procurement Office’s website](#) to obtain a vendor registration application. The vendor registration application may be completed and submitted online. Other forms and instructions may be obtained in person from:

Central Procurement Office  
710 James Robertson Pky Tower  
Nashville, TN 37243

To learn about the benefits of becoming a certified diversity business and to apply for certification by the Governor’s Office of Diversity Business Enterprise, applicants may also wish to review the information located at [Tennessee GO-BID System](#).

Thank you for your interest in the Families First Community Grant program. Through partnerships such as this, together we can contribute to building stronger Tennessee families, stronger communities, and a stronger Tennessee.