

KINSHIP NAVIGATOR PROGRAMS AND OTHER FAMILY CONNECTION GRANT ACTIVITIES

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3.1 What are Family Connection Grants?

Family Connection Grants are competitive grants that will allow applicants to create or enhance programs that will connect children in or at risk of entering foster care to their families. State, local, and tribal child welfare agencies and non-profit agencies that have experience serving children in foster or kinship care can apply for the grants to establish or expand Kinship Navigators, Family Group Decision Making, Intensive Family Finding, or Residential Family-Based Substance Abuse Treatment programs. The new law guarantees \$15 million for each fiscal year between 2009 and 2013 for these grants, including \$5 million annually that is set aside for Kinship Navigator programs. The Secretary of Health and Human Services may allow up to 30 new grants each year, provided new funding is not already committed to existing grants. Individual grants may not be for less than one year or more than three years. (§427; P.L. 110-351 §102)

3.2 What activities may the Family Connection Grants be used to support?

Family Connection Grants may be used to fund four different types of activities, all of which have the purpose of helping children who are in, or at risk of entering, foster care connect or reconnect with family members:

- **Kinship Navigator** programs will assist grandparents and other relative caregivers in learning about, finding, and using programs and services to meet the needs of the children they are raising and their own needs and promote effective partnerships among public and private agencies to ensure kinship caregiver families are served. (§427(a)(1); P.L. 110-351 §102(a))
- **Family Group Decision Making** meetings will enable families to make decisions and develop plans that nurture children and protect them from abuse and neglect, and when appropriate, address domestic violence issues in a safe manner and facilitate connecting children exposed to domestic violence to appropriate services, including reconnection with the abused parent when appropriate. (§427(a)(3); P.L. 110-351 §102(a))
- **Intensive Family Finding** efforts use search technology to find biological family members for children in the child welfare system, and when family members are identified, work to establish or build upon relationships and explore ways to find a permanent family placement for the children. (§427(a)(2); P.L. 110-351 §102(a))
- **Residential Family-Based Substance Abuse Treatment** programs enable parents and their children to live in a safe environment for a period of not less than six months and provide, on-site or by referral, substance abuse treatment services; children's early intervention services; family counseling, medical, and mental health services; nursery and pre-school; and other services that are designed to provide comprehensive treatment that supports the family. (§427(a)(4); P.L. 110-351 §102(a))

3.3 What specific components must be part of a Kinship Navigator Program?

In order to meet the grant requirements, a Kinship Navigator program must:

- Be coordinated with other state or local agencies that promote service coordination or provide information and referral services, including the entities that provide 211 or 311 information systems where available, to avoid duplication or fragmentation of services to kinship care families;
- Be planned and operated in consultation with kinship caregivers and organizations representing them, youth raised by kinship caregivers, relevant government agencies, and relevant community-based or faith-based organizations;

- Establish information and referral systems that link (via toll-free access) kinship caregivers, kinship support group facilitators, and kinship service providers to (i) each other; (ii) eligibility and enrollment information for federal, state, and local benefits; (iii) relevant training to assist kinship caregivers in caregiving and in obtaining benefits and services; and (iv) relevant legal assistance and help in obtaining legal services;
- Provide outreach to kinship care families, including by establishing, distributing, and updating a kinship care website, or other relevant guides or outreach materials; and
- Promote partnerships between public and private agencies, including schools, community-based or faith-based organizations, and relevant government agencies, to increase their knowledge of the needs of kinship care families to promote better services for those families.

The act also provides that kinship navigator programs applying for the grants may establish and support a kinship care ombudsman with authority to intervene and help kinship caregivers access services. They also may support any other activities designed to assist kinship caregivers in obtaining benefits and services to improve their caregiving. (§427(a)(1); P.L. 110-351 §102(a))

3.4 When is the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) likely to release a Request for Proposals (RFP) for the Family Connection Grants?

According to the HHS Grants Forecast website, the Request for Proposals for the Family Connection Grants is tentatively scheduled to be released on March 16, 2009. Updates on the status of the RFP can be found at

https://extranet.acf.hhs.gov/hhsgrantsforecast/index.cfm?switch=grant.view&gff_grants_forecast_InfoID=12342.

3.5 Who may apply for the Family Connection Grants?

State, local, or tribal child welfare agencies and non-profit organizations with experience working with children in foster care or kinship care may apply for the grants. (§427(a); P.L. 110-351 §102(a))

3.6 How are the grants funded? How much money is available?

The Family Connection Grants are funded through a mandatory appropriation of \$15 million each fiscal year between 2009-2013, including \$5 million that is set aside each year for Kinship Navigator programs. (§427(g) & (h); P.L. 110-351 §102(a))

3.7 How much will a grantee have to contribute toward these grants?

A grantee will have to contribute 25 percent of the total grant amount in the first and second years of a grant and 50 percent in the third year. This declining federal match is intended to get the grantee to increase its investment in the program and to continue it after the federal dollars are no longer available. Up to 50 percent of the grantee's contribution may be in-kind contributions, including plant, equipment, or services. (§427(d) & (e); P.L. 110-351 §102(a))

3.8 How many grants will be available? Will there be new grants awarded each year?

The number of grants available will depend on the size of the grants that are awarded. The Secretary of HHS may award up to 30 new grants each year, but the exact number will depend on the number of grants that continue from year to year. (§427(c)(2); P.L. 110-351 §102(a))

3.9 May an applicant seek funds for more than one of the activities allowed under the Family Connection Grants?

Yes, an applicant may apply for more than one of the activities allowed under the Family Connection Grants. (§427(b)(1); P.L. 110-351 §102(a))

3.10 Is an evaluation of the Family Connection Grants required? What funds are set aside for this purpose?

HHS is required to set aside no less than three percent of the total annual funding (\$450,000 of the \$15 million) for Family Connection Grants for the evaluation of grantee activities. (§427(g)(2); P.L. 110-351 §102(a))