

**Capacity-Building Grants for Family Support Networks 2026-27**  
**Grant Guidelines and Application Information**  
**Applications Due: Friday March 13, 2026**

**Overview: Capacity-Building Grants for Family Support Networks**

The Ontario Caregiver Organization (OCO) receives funding from The Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) to provide grant funding to help support, strengthen and expand the critical peer networks of families and (unpaid) caregivers that are supporting adults with developmental disabilities in Ontario. **Grants for 2026-27 will be awarded by June 2026, with activities to be completed by March 31, 2027.**

**What are Family Support Networks?**

For this grant program, a Family Support Network (FSN) is a group of family members and/or unpaid caregivers who are supporting individuals living with a developmental disability. To be eligible for a grant, FSN membership must include (but is not limited to) members who are the family or unpaid caregiver of adults (18+) with a developmental disability. FSNs are peer-based and family-led. They play a valuable role in:

- Connecting families/(unpaid) caregivers to one another.
- Supporting members through family support, education, networking, and peer mentoring.
- Connecting families/unpaid caregivers to appropriate supports/services/information that can assist their family member in achieving their goals.
- Empowering members to advocate for, and support full equity, inclusion, and citizenship of people with a developmental disability in Ontario; and
- Providing an environment built on trust, information-sharing, networking, and building relationships.

Grants are intended for FSNs that bring together families and unpaid caregivers from multiples families in the community – not groups that are centred on one individual or family. Family and unpaid caregivers are broadly defined and may include family members, friends, neighbours, or others who are supporting and mutually committed to a person with a developmental disability.

Family Support Networks often begin as informal grassroots networks of people with similar experiences that have found peer connection to be helpful. Many will expand their membership and activities and establish a more formal structure as they grow. The grant program aims to support both new/emerging FSNs as well as those that are more established.

## **Objectives of the Grant Program**

The grants will build capacity and sustainability of existing Family Support Networks (defined above) and encourage the creation of new Family Support Networks (FSNs) in order to achieve the following outcomes:

1. Expand membership and enhance member engagement to deepen social connections and belonging for families of adults with a developmental disability.
2. Provide forums for families and caregivers to support and mentor each other.
3. Provide opportunities for members to share local initiatives and information related to developmental services, resources, and family/caregiver support.
4. Support administrative needs of the network.
5. Expand local activities and create network-specific resources.
6. Share information and best practices with other Family Support Networks and communities.

All proposed activities for funding must align with one or more of these objectives. We recognize that some FSNs need basic operational support to sustain their work, while others are able to take on new activities and projects. We view both as very important.

## **Who Can Apply?**

To be eligible for funding, the applicant must:

- Be an existing Family Support Network (as defined above) OR a new/emerging Family Support Network OR an organization with a mandate to support and empower one or more family led FSNs.
- Be based/located in Ontario.
- Have a list of current FSN members or intended members.
- Include members/intended members who are family members or unpaid caregivers of an adult (18+) with a developmental disability.
- Have (or be prepared to set up) a bank account that has the ability to receive funds by Electronic Fund Transfer (EFT).
- **If the bank account is managed and set up by the FSN leaders**, it must be used for the sole purpose of FSN banking and must have two unrelated signing officers (co-signatories). The account may be in the name of the Family Support Network *or* the name of the two **unrelated** co-signatories.
- Operate on a non-profit basis (for-profit businesses and organizations are not eligible)

Note: Groups that have received any FASD (Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder) Family/Caregiver Support Grant, through [Health Nexus Santé](#), funded by the Government of Ontario in the past 12 months are **not** eligible to apply.

Each FSN or organization can only apply for one grant. If your activities will involve collaboration with other FSNs or organizations, they can be listed as “partnering organizations” on the application form, but only one should be identified as the applicant.

Applications are encouraged from groups that reflect the diverse experiences and communities of families/caregivers supporting people with developmental disabilities across Ontario, including those that may face barriers to accessing support.

Organizations or agencies who apply on behalf of an FSN will be required to demonstrate that:

- The FSN(s) they support is peer-led (led by families) and has the freedom to function and act with a high level of independence.
- The FSN(s) they support is intended to be a group that exists beyond the grant timeframe, not just for time-limited activities.
- At least one FSN family member(s) who is not paid staff of the organization is playing (or will play) a role in leading/supporting the FSN and is named in the application.
- There is a need for funding that cannot be supported by the organization’s budget. Funding will not be awarded to offset the cost of existing programs, staffing or expenses (e.g., if staffing is currently provided to facilitate an FSN, a grant will not be awarded to replace those costs).

Note: If you are an organization who would be receiving grant funds on behalf of an FSN or multiple FSNs, then please fill out the section for **organizations/agencies** on page 4 of the application and identify your organization as applicant on the application form.

### **What Can the Grant Funding Be Used For?**

Grants will support a wide range of initiatives and activities that help to build capacity of FSNs. It is important that expenditures and activities:

- Help achieve one or more of the 6 objectives of the grant program (as outlined in the Objectives section above)
- Benefit FSN members as a whole
- Be spent/implemented by March 31, 2027
- Be supported by invoices/receipts

The following are examples of eligible expenditures and activities. Please note that eligible expenses are not limited to these examples, provided they meet the guidelines outlined above:

- Administrative costs including online meeting platforms/online accounts, banking service costs, long distance charges.
- Event or meeting related costs including meals, meeting/event rental space, facilitation.

- Costs to support promotion of network activities.
- Development, design and/or production of network-specific resources.

The following expenditures and activities are not eligible for funding:

- Expenses that only benefit a specific individual or family (versus FSN members as a whole);
- Expenses charged for time/services provided by people submitting the grant application.
- Cost-offset for expenses that are already part of agency or organization budgets (organizations or agencies who apply must ensure their initiative is directly benefitting and empowering FSNs to build their network capacity, and is not for programs, groups or initiatives that are already funded);
- Expenses for which invoices/receipts cannot be provided.
- Building or development fees.
- Major capital costs.
- Mortgage, rent or housing related costs (meeting or event rental space is permitted).
- Alcoholic beverages (itemized receipt for food/meal expenses should be provided)
- Activities that are dependent on additional funding beyond the grant.

### **Funding Streams and Grant Funding Amounts:**

Grant applications ranging from \$1,000 to \$4,500 will be accepted. Applicants can only submit one application and must apply for one of two funding streams:

- 1) **New/emerging FSNs (\$1,000 to \$4,500):** To support the creation of new FSNs and build capacity for FSNs that are less established. This could include an informal group of families and caregivers that would like to form an FSN in their community, or a smaller/emerging FSN that would benefit from funding to help them continue activities and grow.
- 2) **Growth/support of existing Family Support Networks (\$1,000 to \$4,500):** To build capacity of FSNs that are already established but need funding to sustain, strengthen and expand.

The total amount of funding that will be awarded in each stream is not pre-determined and will be based on applications received. Due to funding limitations, applications may not be approved for funding and grants may be awarded for less than the full amount requested. Priority will be given to local, community-based initiatives. These are one-year grants and past recipients may or may not be funded depending on scoring of this year's applications.

Please contact [grants@ontariocaregiver.ca](mailto:grants@ontariocaregiver.ca) if you are uncertain which stream to apply for.

## **How Will Approved Grants be Decided?**

Grant applications will be reviewed and assessed by a review panel including caregivers/family members with lived experience caring for an adult with a developmental disability, Ontario Caregiver Organization staff members, and external partners. Each grant submission will be reviewed and assessed to ensure that the application is complete and that proposed expenses and activities are consistent with the parameters outlined in these guidelines.

All applications will be scored based on the following evaluation criteria: (max score 20 points):

- Impact (9 points)
  - The application clearly outlines the grant activities*
  - The application demonstrates benefits and positive impact for Family Support Networks and the families/caregivers they support, with potential for positive impact to be longer term.*
  - The application demonstrates a need for funding not available elsewhere.*
- Alignment with Objectives of Funding (7 points)
  - Funding is intended to enhance the capacity or sustain the activities of existing Family Support Networks (defined above), and to encourage the creation of new Family Support Networks.*
  - Alignment with one or more of the 6 grant program objectives (as outlined above).*
- Value for Money (4 points)
  - The application demonstrates good value for money and provides a description of how funding will be used.*

The Ontario Caregiver Organization will make the final decision on which applications will be funded. For groups that have received a grant in the past, ability to meet requirements of the grant program may be considered.

## **How Do We Apply?**

To apply, complete the Application for Funding and the signed Checklist and Terms and send it by email to [grants@ontariocaregiver.ca](mailto:grants@ontariocaregiver.ca) no later than **4:00 p.m. on Friday, March 13, 2026**. The Application is available as a Word document on our [website](#).

- In addition, all successful grant recipients must complete and return the Electronic Fund Transfer Information Form which will be provided to you upon notification of the success of your grant.

All financial requirements must be met including:

- Void cheque or EFT Information statement from FSN bank account forwarded to OCO, if grant is successful.
- Dedicated account for the FSN with 2 unrelated co-signatories (signing officers) on the above-mentioned account (unless the applicant is an organization supporting the FSN)

### **How Will the Funds Be Distributed?**

Successful grant applicants will be notified in mid May 2026.

OCO relies on funding from the Government of Ontario for this program. Plans for distribution of grant money is subject to change or cancellation if there are changes to government funding for the program.

Successful applicants must complete, sign and return the Letter of Acceptance and provide the banking information (void cheque or EFT statement) as noted above before funding will be released.

*All successful applicants must sign and return the Acceptance Letter and provide a Void cheque OR EFT Statement from your bank by July 15<sup>th</sup>, 2026, or your grant may be forfeited and passed on to another applicant.*

### **Accountability and Reporting Requirements for Grant Recipients**

Grantees will be required to complete an interim report and final report that will include updates on progress, spending vs budget, achievements, outstanding items to be completed, and impact relative to the goals of the program. The final report will also include a final spending/budget report with copies of all receipts. FSNs are also encouraged to submit a 1–2-minute video or photos describing their project and its outcomes at its completion.

### **Timelines:**

Below is the planned timeline for the grant program roll-out:

|  |   |
|--|---|
| Call for Applications Open   | Wednesday, February 4 <sup>th</sup> 2026  |
| Information sessions for interested applicants via Zoom.<br>(see below for more information) | February 19 <sup>th</sup> , 2026 @ 12:00 p.m.<br>March 5 <sup>th</sup> , 2026 @ 6:00 p.m. |
| Deadline for applications  | March 13, 2026, at 4:00 p.m.  |
| Notification to success grant recipients   | Mid-May 2026  |

|   |                                    |
|---|------------------------------------|
| Acceptance and financial forms submitted by recipients      | Late May 2026                      |
| Grant funds released  | Early June 2026                    |
| Interim Report due from grant recipients                    | November 13, 2026                  |
| Sharing and Knowledge transfer session for grant recipients | Late November/ early December 2026 |
| All grant activities and spending complete                  | March 31, 2027                     |
| Final report due from all grant recipients                  | April 16, 2027                     |

### **Virtual Information Sessions**

We want to make it as easy as possible for you to apply. New and returning applicants are encouraged to join an information session (via Zoom) offered on two dates. Both sessions will cover the same content. Please note that these sessions will only be offered in English. If you wish to speak to someone in French about the grant program, please contact [grants@ontariocaregiver.ca](mailto:grants@ontariocaregiver.ca).

**Thursday, February 19<sup>th</sup>, 2026 @ 12:00 p.m.**

Join Zoom Meeting

[2026-27 FSN Grant Information Session # 1](#)

Meeting ID: 858 0019 4847

Passcode: 1FSN2026

**Thursday, March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2026 @ 6:00 p.m.**

Join Zoom Meeting

[2026-27 FSN Grant Information Session # 2](#)

Meeting ID: 857 1317 4312

Passcode: 2FSN2026

### **For More Information**

For further details on the FSN Grant, timelines, eligibility or you have questions about your idea, event or project, you can refer to the FAQ or contact [grants@ontariocaregiver.ca](mailto:grants@ontariocaregiver.ca) . The Application Form can be found on our [website](#).