

Impact of the Office for Victims of Crime Improving Outcomes for Child and Youth Victims of Human Trafficking Grant in Minnesota (2016-2026)

STATE RESPONSE TO SEX AND LABOR TRAFFICKING OF YOUTH

Impact of the Office for Victims of Crime's Improving Outcomes for Child and Youth Victims of Human Trafficking Funding in Minnesota (2016-2026)

Minnesota Department of Health
Violence Prevention Programs
PO Box 64882
St. Paul, MN 55164-0882
651-201-5000
health.safeharbor@state.mn.us
www.health.state.mn.us

To obtain this information in a different format, call 651-201-5484

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Introduction

The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) [Human Trafficking Prevention and Response Program \(https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/humantrafficking/index.html\)](https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/humantrafficking/index.html) (HTPRP) commissioned this report as part of their Improving Outcomes for Child and Youth Victims of Human Trafficking (IO) grant from the Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) in the United States Department of Justice. The purpose of this report is to summarize the project's activities, outcomes, lessons learned, and recommendations. Over the past nine years, MDH has used this crucial funding to initiate systems change in the state's response to labor trafficking.

The success of this grant goes beyond MDH, reaching other state agencies and the state legislature. Minnesota has several unique circumstances, described in the Minnesota Context section below, that facilitated significant shifts in legislators' perceptions of the importance of addressing labor trafficking, improved collaboration within Safe Harbor as a whole, and proactive investigations into labor trafficking by law enforcement.

MDH learned important lessons and positioned itself for continued improvement in the state's response to human trafficking. These lessons can be applied by others seeking to implement systems change.

This report was prepared by MDH in coordination with contractor Amanda Colegrove, MA. Amanda worked as the IO grant coordinator for MDH from 2017-2023 and provides firsthand knowledge of the successes and challenges of systems change efforts. Data for this report was gathered through interviews with grant partners and collaborators.

Minnesota context

With the passage of the Safe Harbor law in 2011 (see <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/cite/145.4716>) and the subsequent funding and implementation of the Safe Harbor program three years later, Minnesota proved its commitment to leading a comprehensive response to the sex trafficking and sexual exploitation of youth. This legislation allowed minors, 18 and under, who were exploited for sex to be treated as victims rather than criminals, as well as increased penalties for buyers. In recognition of the complexity of human trafficking, state legislators mandated the Department of Public Safety (DPS) to collaborate with stakeholders to develop a victim-centered, statewide response, known as No Wrong Door, which supports the Safe Harbor Program.

MDH is the agency that administers the Safe Harbor Program, funds services, promotes prevention programs, provides training and technical assistance, and evaluates the program's efficacy. Nonprofit, county, and Tribal-based agencies across the state provide a network of service options for youth ages 24 and younger. As part of Safe Harbor programming, regional navigators act as hubs of training, information, and case consultation to ensure a consistent response to the trafficking of youth across regions, providers, and services. Placing a state-level health department as the lead agency allows a holistic response to a public health issue.

Although MDH is the lead agency for Safe Harbor Programs, the Departments of Human Services (DHS), Child, Youth and Families (DCYF), and DPS are key partners in implementing Safe Harbor objectives and legislative obligations. The [Minnesota Human Trafficking Investigators Task Force \(https://dps.mn.gov/divisions/bca/bca-divisions/investigative-services/specialized-investigative-services/predatory-crimes/human-trafficking-criminal-justice-agency-resources\)](https://dps.mn.gov/divisions/bca/bca-divisions/investigative-services/specialized-investigative-services/predatory-crimes/human-trafficking-criminal-justice-agency-resources) in

the DPS Bureau of Criminal Apprehension (BCA) provides training for law enforcement across the state, supports local police departments with investigations, and works closely with prosecutors to bring perpetrators to justice. DHS oversees the shelter and outreach programs, and DCYF leads the child welfare response.

Safe Harbor-funded programs focused solely on sex trafficking and sexual exploitation of youth, which left a gap in responding to labor trafficking. Mandated by legislators to explore other funding, MDH applied for and received the OVC IO grant in 2016, 2019, and 2022 to address this gap. These funds allowed MDH to integrate a statewide response to the labor trafficking of youth into the existing Safe Harbor program and change the overall focus of the MDH program so that it now has a new name: Human Trafficking and Prevention Response Program (HTPRP).

Unique approaches

The aforementioned efforts under the Safe Harbor Program positioned MDH to apply distinctive approaches under the IO grant. Below are four key strategies implemented throughout the project that contributed to its success and can inform future initiatives.

Public health response

Minnesota's public health response is a standout approach among statewide responses to human trafficking in the United States. Public health examines the social, economic, environmental, political, behavioral, and biological factors that influence health outcomes. It recognizes the interconnectedness of many social and health issues that must be addressed simultaneously and acknowledges that the impacts of human trafficking are felt across communities. Unlike responses that emphasize individual behaviors or criminal justice interventions, a public health approach to human trafficking considers factors occurring beyond the system constructs where force, fraud, and coercion limit individual agency. Social, cultural, economic, and many other factors also limit agency and influence the extent to which individuals and communities are vulnerable to perpetrator actions and manipulations.

While other approaches may have specialized skills or knowledge, like the justice system for holding offenders accountable, a university for collecting and analyzing data, or nonprofits for understanding the difficulty of complex trauma, none of these are "sufficient on their own to address the root causes of the harm and do not address prevention of the harm in the first place. Public health gives us the tools through data, policy, and services to work toward a more comprehensive response affecting many populations, not just individual cases. It also promotes health and safety while addressing the many factors that keep individuals and communities from accessing the resources needed to stop human trafficking and exploitation." (Caroline Palmer JD, MPH, Violence Prevention Programs Unit Supervisor, MDH)

A public health response, unlike a criminal justice response, is better situated to initiate systems change because it is less focused on a single factor. The complexity of human trafficking requires a broader, more nuanced response; one that centers the well-being of victims and survivors. According to Palmer, "If our goal is to ensure that survivors of human trafficking and exploitation are supported in a trauma-responsive way, it is imperative that public health is not only part of, but leads, statewide multidisciplinary strategies."

No Wrong Door Model

The No Wrong Door Model means regardless of where a youth connects to the system, whether law enforcement or child protection, or where a youth is identified as having experienced trafficking, through a drop-in center or school counselor, they have access to supportive services. It is a multidisciplinary approach, grounded in public health principles, that lowers barriers for victims and survivors to access help and places the burden of identification of human trafficking on professionals, thereby ensuring youth do not need to know the right words to receive help. Furthermore, survivors are identified in many different settings outside the criminal justice system, thereby increasing this model's effectiveness in connecting them to a continuum of care.

No match requirement for sub-grantees

The OVC IO funding requires the awardee to share a certain percentage of costs for any project. This is called “match.” Match requirements in grants are a way to demonstrate commitment to the work and to show that projects are not solely dependent on a single funder. It is common practice for awarded entities to meet federal match requirements by passing along some of the cost-sharing to sub-grantees. However, for smaller agencies and Tribes, it can be a barrier to applying for grants. MDH demonstrated its commitment to partnering with trusted members of the community, regardless of size, by taking on the full match required by the IO grant. By doing so, Tribal Nations and agencies such as The Enitan Story, a survivor-led service provider, could focus on funding services and programs without taking on this budgetary burden. Removing match requirements for sub-grantees allows more agencies with limited access to funding to participate.

Tribal engagement

From the start of project planning, MDH wanted to partner with Tribal Nations in a way that was atypical for Minnesota government agencies. Recognizing the harmful historical actions by federal and state governments towards Tribes, and the diverse needs from one Tribal Nation to another, Safe Harbor staff worked with representatives from each Tribe funded by this project to craft a better partnership.

The unique aspects of MDH’s engagement with Tribal Nations focus on respecting the sovereign government-to-government relationship, removing the competitive aspect of grant applications, allowing them as a group to decide how the block of funds would be divided among participating Tribes, and supporting each Tribe to develop their own project within the parameters of the federal grant.

Finding and winning funding for anti-human trafficking services is challenging for agencies, communities, and Tribal Nations alike. This can create competitive conditions that make it difficult for smaller entities without dedicated grant-writing staff. MDH innovated by allowing Tribes to simply write a letter of intent to participate. Of the 11 federally recognized Tribes in Minnesota, nine chose to partner with MDH for this first IO grant in 2016. Additionally, the participating Tribes met to determine how they wanted the funds to be divided. A common option chosen by Minnesota government agencies is to award amounts as a percentage of the total available, based on the population density of each Tribe. In some cases, awarding larger amounts to larger Tribes continues to hinder capacity building among smaller Tribes. Removing the competitive process and allowing them to decide on funding disbursement gave each Tribe an equal voice and opportunity, regardless of size or capacity. Over the course of the three grant awards, Tribal Nations' participation fluctuated based on their capacity. In the 2022

award, there are currently seven Tribal Nation partnerships, with some identifying additional needs such as support for dedicated Tribal navigators similar to the regional navigators operating across the state.

To increase flexibility for Tribes to design projects that align with unique communities, traditions, and needs, MDH staff avoided imposing any further restrictions on what a project could look like, other than those required by the IO grant award conditions. Instead, MDH offered support with brainstorming ideas when asked, provided technical assistance as needed, and served as a resource for any grant questions. Some Tribes focused on training law enforcement, others funded services, and some funded regional navigators who were their Tribe's and region's point of contact for training, referrals, and case consultation. This approach has improved MDH's relationships with Tribes by demonstrating Safe Harbor staff trust Tribal staff to know what is needed and will be best for their communities.

Summary of grant accomplishments

Over the course of three grant cycles, MDH created resources, helped create and fund new positions, and fostered increased collaboration across state agencies, service providers, and law enforcement. Below is a review of the many accomplishments made possible by the IO grant. A timeline of accomplishments is available in Appendix B.

Grant cycle 1 (2016-2020)

During the first grant cycle, the Advocates for Human Rights (AHR) developed the [Labor Trafficking Protocol Guidelines](https://www.theadvocatesforhumanrights.org/Res/labor_traffic_king_protocol_guidelines_final%202.pdf) (https://www.theadvocatesforhumanrights.org/Res/labor_traffic_king_protocol_guidelines_final%202.pdf) (hereinafter referred to as "Protocol Guidelines") and a diverse group of professionals, including staff from a Native American serving agency and an individual with lived experience, created the [Minnesota Youth Human Trafficking and Exploitation Identification \(MYTEI\) Tool and Guide](https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/humantrafficking/training/mytei.html) (<https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/humantrafficking/training/mytei.html>). These two resources helped lay the foundation for the "long-term mindset shift that has been created amongst leaders in Minnesota" (Bukola Oriola, Executive Director, The Enitan Story (TES)). The Protocol Guidelines were often the first opportunity for communities to learn about labor trafficking and build a multidisciplinary response. The MYTEI Tool and Guide, created for professionals working with youth outside the human trafficking response sector, raised awareness of labor trafficking among the broader community and gave them the knowledge needed to respond in a trauma-informed way. The original tool was widely distributed to other IO grantees, still remains in demand, and is being updated.

Beginning in 2016, MDH funded a position at DHS solely focused on improving the child welfare response to human trafficking. Since 2017, DHS created guidance around best practices for child welfare in developing a response to human trafficking that covers screening to permanency. They developed child welfare-specific identification tools, adapted from the MYTEI Tool and Guide, for both sex and labor trafficking as well as for youth who are in out-of-home placement. With the recent designation of labor trafficking as a form of maltreatment, DHS contributed to the state's BCA labor trafficking protocol on the child welfare response. DHS quickly recognized the importance of this role and made it a permanent, state-funded position.

Grant cycle 2 (2019-2023)

Beginning in 2019, at the recommendation of Native American partners, MDH funded the American Indian Human Trafficking Specialist position within the Indian Child Welfare (ICW) department of DHS, now housed in DCYF. This position focuses on improving relations between the state child welfare and ICW systems, as well as improving outcomes for Native minors who experience trafficking. Again, the state recognized the importance of the position and made it a permanent, state-funded role. Resources developed by DCYF can be found at [Safe Harbor/No Wrong Door \(https://dcyf.mn.gov/partners-and-providers/child-safety-and-permanency/safe-harbor/no-wrong-door\)](https://dcyf.mn.gov/partners-and-providers/child-safety-and-permanency/safe-harbor/no-wrong-door).

The two positions at DCYF played pivotal roles in changing state legislation. Minnesota now has a non-caregiver human trafficking assessment for cases that involve human trafficking by a non-caregiver or unknown alleged offender. And labor trafficking became a form of child maltreatment on July 1, 2025.

Using the previously developed Protocol Guidelines, a multi-sector working group, including individuals with lived experience, came together to develop the [Labor Trafficking Protocol for Law Enforcement \(https://www.theadvocatesforhumanrights.org/Res/BCA%20protocol%20full%20FINAL%209.14.22.pdf\)](https://www.theadvocatesforhumanrights.org/Res/BCA%20protocol%20full%20FINAL%209.14.22.pdf), the first of its kind in the country, led by the BCA and facilitated by AHR. The protocol covers Patrol Response, Investigator Response, and Administrator Response. As part of the project, BCA, AHR, and SMEs with lived experience developed and delivered trainings to law enforcement on the protocol across the state. “This was a game changer, getting law enforcement to open their eyes and recognize labor trafficking was occurring across our state and providing them with resources and tools to appropriately respond.” (Bobbi Jo Pazdernik, Special Agent in Charge, Human Trafficking Unit until early 2026, now Special Agent in Charge of the BCA’s Violent Crimes Prevention Unit).

Grant cycle 3 (2022-2027)

For the third grant cycle, MDH funded a victim advocate position within the BCA’s Human Trafficking Investigators Task Force and partnered with the newly created Office of [Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives \(MMIR\) \(https://dps.mn.gov/divisions/ojp/offices-missing-murdered/mmir-office\)](https://dps.mn.gov/divisions/ojp/offices-missing-murdered/mmir-office) within the Minnesota Office of Justice Programs (OJP). The victim advocate brings a new level of cultural competence to the task force’s work. Recently, the advocate stepped into a patrol car for privacy with a potential victim and smudged (a Native American cleansing ritual) with the individual. Being mindful of and responsive to someone’s cultural needs builds trust while putting them at ease. The MMIR Office has been able to attend and provide multiple training sessions throughout the state, support Tribal partnerships, and continue to build awareness of its mission. The IO grant has helped the MMIR Office connect with communities regarding the intersection of human trafficking and murdered and missing Indigenous people.

This grant cycle received a no-cost time extension. Further accomplishments will come.

Across all grant cycles

Throughout each grant cycle, the integration of SMEs with lived experience has been key to the project’s success and an accomplishment in its own right. Initially, the project created two survivor advisory groups, one for survivors of sex trafficking and one for survivors of labor

trafficking. The intention was for the groups to be led by a subject matter expert (SME) with lived experience. Due to very few survivors of labor trafficking working as leaders in the movement, that group consisted of one individual with lived experience and several staff providing direct services to labor trafficking survivors.

After the first grant cycle, MDH funded partners who had the trust of their clients and community to contract with individuals with lived experience to serve as subject matter experts. Whether it was participating in a focus group, consulting on specific projects, joining work groups, or reviewing documents, SMEs with lived experience consistently provided insight and leadership to MDH and its partners. This allowed for greater diversity of voices and brought those with lived experience to the table alongside everyone else.

MDH developed a procedure for consistent engagement with a diverse network of SMEs. This included identifying the skills needed for the project, steps to ensure understanding of the work being asked, clarifying the payment process, and ensuring SMEs have a support network. These changes helped Minnesota incorporate survivor voices in all aspects of the program from the beginning. Now professionals with lived experience are often at the forefront telling the industry what needs to happen, how it needs to happen, and what can be improved.

For example, in May 2026, TES, a survivor-founded and led agency, organized and hosted the first annual Survivor Impact Forum, where over 100 attendees with and without lived experience came together to learn how to improve collaboration and explore how survivors and professionals can better partner with and learn from one another. In addition, SMEs with lived experience are leading much of the [strategic planning process](https://www.health.mn.gov/communities/humantrafficking/reports/shforall.html) (<https://www.health.mn.gov/communities/humantrafficking/reports/shforall.html>) supported in part by the OVC funding.

Working with Tribal partners throughout this grant strengthened trust between Tribal staff and MDH project staff. Building these relationships involved a learning curve, and mistakes were made along the way. However, MDH's commitment to transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement fostered trust and encouraged Tribal partners to remain engaged as MDH learned and adapted its approach. Whatever the issue raised, MDH listened and let Tribes know whether any state regulations or grant requirements barred the necessary change.

Regardless of regulations or grant requirements, everyone worked together to find a solution within the parameters given. Funding from this grant allowed Tribal partners to travel more throughout their reservation and beyond to provide training to their community members and receive training from across the state and the country. Access to these funds increased the capacity of all participating Tribes, especially the smaller ones. "Because my position is grant funded, I am able to specialize in human trafficking issues specifically." (Chad Pattison, Tribes United Against Sex Trafficking (TRUST) Commander, Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa).

Lessons learned

Changes to initial plans are part of the implementation process. No one can plan for every possible outcome or situation. From these unexpected events, improvements to the original plan can be made. Below are several lessons learned as MDH navigated the state's response to a complex issue that may be helpful to new and existing IO grant awardees.

Estimating survivor access to services

When MDH began implementing the first award, the assumption was that far more survivors would need services. To account for that, a large portion of the budget was allocated to direct services. Partway through the grant cycle, it became apparent that there was not enough awareness of labor trafficking; therefore, it was not being identified, and victims were not seeking services at the level anticipated. All of the service providers funded on that first cycle required changes to their projects. While it is amazing to have a grant that allows for both direct service provision and systems change, direct services should be budgeted slightly above current need to prevent a mid-cycle project adjustment. Once a foundation has been laid and there is a noticeable increase in victim identification, budgeting more direct services is necessary.

Engaging subject matter experts with lived experience

From a systems standpoint, working with SMEs with lived experience is difficult. There are many checks and balances or policies that make ethical inclusion of lived experience challenging. After creating the Survivor Advisory Groups in the first grant cycle, MDH staff were informed that the payment amount and method were in violation of state policy. Changes needed to be made to make payments possible. While there is still no simple process for a state agency to include lived experience experts, MDH staff have persevered by contracting individually for each project, partnering with other organizations to lead focus groups, and continually seeking ways to ethically lower barriers to participation in state processes.

Partnering with Tribal Nations

The vast differences in capacity from one Tribe to the next, along with differing cultures, validated the approach outlined above. However, any contracting processes must be given significantly more time than usual to complete, as there are two government systems to navigate. Having two distinct administrative processes and various approval requirements across Tribes necessitates that projects involving both systems be granted extended timelines.

Staff should mark their calendars far in advance to note upcoming reports, check-in calls, and budget reviews. Monthly or quarterly check-ins can be very helpful for keeping everyone on target and providing early assistance with potential issues. This should all be done in a co-creating atmosphere with whichever Tribal staff the grant manager staff works with the most, and account for input from Tribal leadership. One of the best ways to build trust is to show up to Tribal events in person and schedule in-person meetings as often as possible. MDH staff should take on the burden of traveling whenever possible.

Allowing all Tribes to participate without competition and having those participants decide how the block of funds would be divided gave a level playing field to Tribes of all sizes and capacities. However, for those Tribes with less capacity, it was a struggle each grant cycle to spend down their budgets when unexpected events derailed plans, such as staff changes and COVID-19. Furthermore, although the amount of the award to each tribe was more than had ever been given to Tribes for this work, it was still not enough to fully implement the programs that many participants wanted. Over the three grant cycles, payment amounts to different Tribes have changed, depending on their activity needs. Still, open communication is crucial to adjusting as needed.

Success beyond the grants

The three IO grants did not just change how MDH and funded partners respond to human trafficking. The effects spread in amazing ways and changed how the entire state of Minnesota responds. Many of the successes named in this section build on the previous section and each other.

Survivors as leaders

The growth of survivor led agency, The Enitan Story (TES), started with the initial receipt of IO funds through MDH. From there, the Executive Director, Bukola Oriola, was mentored into becoming the new facilitator for the labor trafficking advisory group. In subsequent grant cycles, TES was a dependable partner in bringing SMEs into the projects.

Receiving funding from MDH allowed TES to apply for and receive funds from the Bush Foundation, which put TES in direct contact with legislators. Leaning on the expertise at MDH, Oriola participated in the creation of a new state bill that would provide direct services to victims of labor trafficking. Commitment and passion from TES, legislators, MDH, and the broader community, including trade union organizers, helped this bill come to pass. It could not have been achieved without the initial work under the IO grant.

TES also became a leading force in the professional development of SMEs with lived experience. They created training for agencies and lived-experience experts on best practices for working in this field. The trainings, now available online, feature a diverse group of subject-matter experts with lived experience who share what they have learned about being successful consultants. These training sessions have a national reach and are available at [TES Training Center](http://enitan.org/testrainingcenter/) (<http://enitan.org/testrainingcenter/>). Across the state, agencies are recognizing the necessity of lived experience in their planning, and subject matter experts with lived experience have access to skill-building resources.

The number of SMEs with lived experience consulting on various anti-human trafficking projects at MDH and partners around the state increased as a direct result of the IO funding. The diversity of voices, skills, and experiences would not be as developed in Minnesota if not for the concerted efforts of MDH and partners under this grant.

Shifts in mindsets

One of the clearest ways to know that MDH is changing the system is to look at the shift in attitude from those not funded by this grant. The work completed over the last nine years is bearing fruit in a variety of spaces.

Within the world of law enforcement, Special Agent Pazdernik said, “Nobody wanted to know or learn about labor trafficking.” We had to cancel multiple scheduled trainings because there was no interest in attending. Once we got people to attend, their eyes were opened, and it spread like wildfire. Then we started getting requests for more and more training in locations all over the state. This, in turn, developed into law enforcement and their partners identifying labor trafficking and allowing for victim survivors of these crimes to get the resources they needed to get out and to be safe.”

Others in positions of authority changed their thinking from labor trafficking does not pertain to their work, to recognizing and speaking about the importance of labor trafficking responses. Oriola from TES noted two examples in Minnesota that show labor trafficking and exploitation are receiving more attention from prosecutors: “Ten years ago, the Minnesota Attorney General’s office was focused entirely on sex trafficking. In the summer of 2025, Ramsey County

Attorney John Choi provided opening remarks at MDH’s training event: The Ecosystem of Labor Exploitation: Wage Theft to Human Trafficking.”

Collaboration

It is common for government agencies and nonprofits to work in silos, which hinders the coordinated response necessary to address trafficking. This grant has helped break down those silos. Staff across all sectors know who to reach out to and do so. Below are quotes from interviewees about working under the IO grant.

“I have been working with law enforcement more often and more inclusively within my role and understanding of trafficking, whether it be labor or sex trafficking. The meetings have been so helpful to know key players and roles within the work, and who to call on and how their resources can help.” – Taylor Wencel, Intelligence Specialist, MMIR Office

“Interactions with state and local agencies have transformed entirely. We now have very close relationships with local agencies, including the Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry, the BCA, local law enforcement, and child protection agencies. As a state, we created a new set of networks and developed trainings and protocols for the network, creating an organized response.” – Madeline Lohman, Senior Researcher, AHR

“In 2025, the Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry (DLI) successfully referred two labor trafficked individuals to a labor trafficking service provider funded through the IO grant. This provider helped these individuals with housing and a phone. DLI was able to recover back wages for these workers, in part, because they had a stable place to stay and a way to communicate with investigators throughout the process.” – Siv Dobrovolny, Strategic Compliance Lead, Labor Standards, MN DLI

“I have learned that MDH is very passionate about this issue, and will go to great lengths to assist or help out partner agencies that work under this grant to stop the issue of Human Trafficking, in the State of Minnesota. I have utilized this assistance myself many times already in my own work and Investigations of Human Trafficking in my area, and greatly appreciate the assistance that is given.” – Chad Pattison, TRUST Commander, Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa

Future opportunities

MDH has strategically used each grant cycle to address different components of the state’s human trafficking response. Although there are still opportunities for improvement, continuing to use previous work as a launching pad for new projects remains the best path forward. When those most impacted by an issue are given the tools and resources to address it, incredible and effective ideas come to fruition, improving the response in ways that benefit everyone. Based on the successes and lessons outlined above, below are recommendations for future projects.

Expanding opportunities for subject matter experts with lived experience

Subject matter experts with lived experience are well-positioned to take the lead in more areas of the response to trafficking. An opportunity exists to fully capitalize on the special skills and

creativity of Minnesota-based SMEs with lived experience. Minnesota is going from being survivor-informed to being survivor-led.

The following recommendations will further advance this trend: 1) encourage and hire more SMEs with lived experience into positions within systems and into positions of authority at nonprofits. MDH should assess workforce needs at MDH and across the Safe Harbor network, identify funding gaps to meet these needs, and design future job postings to hire SMEs with lived experience. MDH should also look for ways to support the professional development of SMEs with lived experience, so they have the required skills for such positions; and 2) fully fund projects by existing and new nonprofits led by those with lived experience.

Deepening relationships and collaborations

Working with Tribal Nations poses unique challenges, but also the opportunity to make the biggest impact on communities most affected by human trafficking. It is recommended that MDH take the challenges of the existing funding method to the Tribes and co-create an option that can more fully meet the needs of each Tribe without overburdening smaller tribes or MDH staff. This may require increasing the funding to match those needs. Initial steps could include meeting with each Tribal partner to discuss future goals and what they need to fully accomplish them. Alternatively, it could start with an in-person group meeting to lay out the challenges and brainstorm possible solutions together. This session should be facilitated by a trusted member of the Tribal community, and MDH may need to step out of the room after the discussion of the challenges. It is also recommended that a cross-section of agencies from each Tribe participate in the discussion. Furthermore, it is essential that MDH follow through, as closely as possible, with solutions the community puts forth.

The success of this IO grant funding in Minnesota is in no small part due to the collaborative nature of MDH's work. It is recommended that MDH continue on this path by deepening relationships with existing partners and bringing new partners to the table. Discuss with other state agencies any staffing needs directly related to responding to human trafficking. Work together to find ways to fund those positions, even temporarily through opportunities like the IO grant. MDH is a large institution with numerous programs intersecting with human trafficking. Look for ways to fund projects together to achieve greater impact. Other state agencies could also be part of this collective impact model. If undertaken, the greater administrative burden should rest on state agencies and not grantees; this includes the application process and invoicing.

Systems change is difficult and incremental, but as this work shows, it can happen. MDH is proud to have successfully completed its grant objectives over three grant cycles (with the final completion of all 2022 objectives in 2027). MDH is equally proud that fulfilling the grant laid the groundwork for the entire state to make changes. Without the consistent support of the IO grant, none of this would be possible. In addition, the funding from OVC has increased confidence in Minnesota's human trafficking response, leading to funding from other sources, such as the Howard G. Buffett Foundation, to expand the statewide labor trafficking response. Without the significant multidisciplinary groundwork completed through the OVC IO grants, it is unlikely Minnesota would have received the Buffett support.

Improving the labor trafficking response

As part of the labor trafficking response, it is recommended that MDH review the research by Kelle Barrick, Rebecca Pfeffer, et al, "[Analyzing Victim Recruitment, Exploitation, and Service](#)

Needs to Identify Strategies for Prevention and Intervention

(<https://nij.ojp.gov/funding/awards/15pnij-21-gg-03632-ht>).” This report details findings from four U.S. sites highlighting the most likely places for disrupting labor trafficking and exploitation. Comparing the report findings with current Minnesota efforts will offer new avenues for effective collaborations.

Appendix A: Abbreviations

AHR – Advocates for Human Rights

BCA – Bureau of Criminal Apprehension

DCYF – Minnesota Department of Children, Youth, and Families

DHS – Minnesota Department of Human Services

DPS – Minnesota Department of Public Safety

HTPRP – Human Trafficking and Prevention Response Program

ICW – Indian Child Welfare

IO – Improving Outcomes for Child and Youth Victims of Human Trafficking

MDH – Minnesota Department of Health

MMIR – Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives

MYTEI – Minnesota Youth Human Trafficking and Exploitation

OJP – Office of Justice Programs

OVC – Office for Victims of Crime

Protocol Guidelines – Labor Trafficking Protocol Guidelines

SMEs – Subject Matter Experts

TES – The Enitan Story

TRUST – Tribes United Against Sex Trafficking

Appendix B: Timeline of Accomplishments

Important moments

- **2016:** First IO grant awarded.
- **2018:** Child trafficking coordinator at DHS (now DCYF) made permanent with state funding.
- **2019:** Labor Trafficking Protocol Guidelines completed with second IO grant awarded.
- **2020:** Minnesota Youth Human Trafficking & Exploitation Identification Tool & Guide/ Statewide Conference held.
- **2021:** American Indian Human Trafficking Specialist at DCYF made permanent with state funding.
- **2022:** Labor Trafficking Protocol for Law Enforcement/ third IO grant awarded.
- **2023:** Victim Advocate position at the BCA fully funded by IO grant.
- **2023:** Labor trafficking services for all ages funded by state legislature.
- **2025:** Labor trafficking becomes a form of child maltreatment.
- **2026:** The Enitan Story hosts Survivor Impact Forum and launches training materials for subject matter experts.