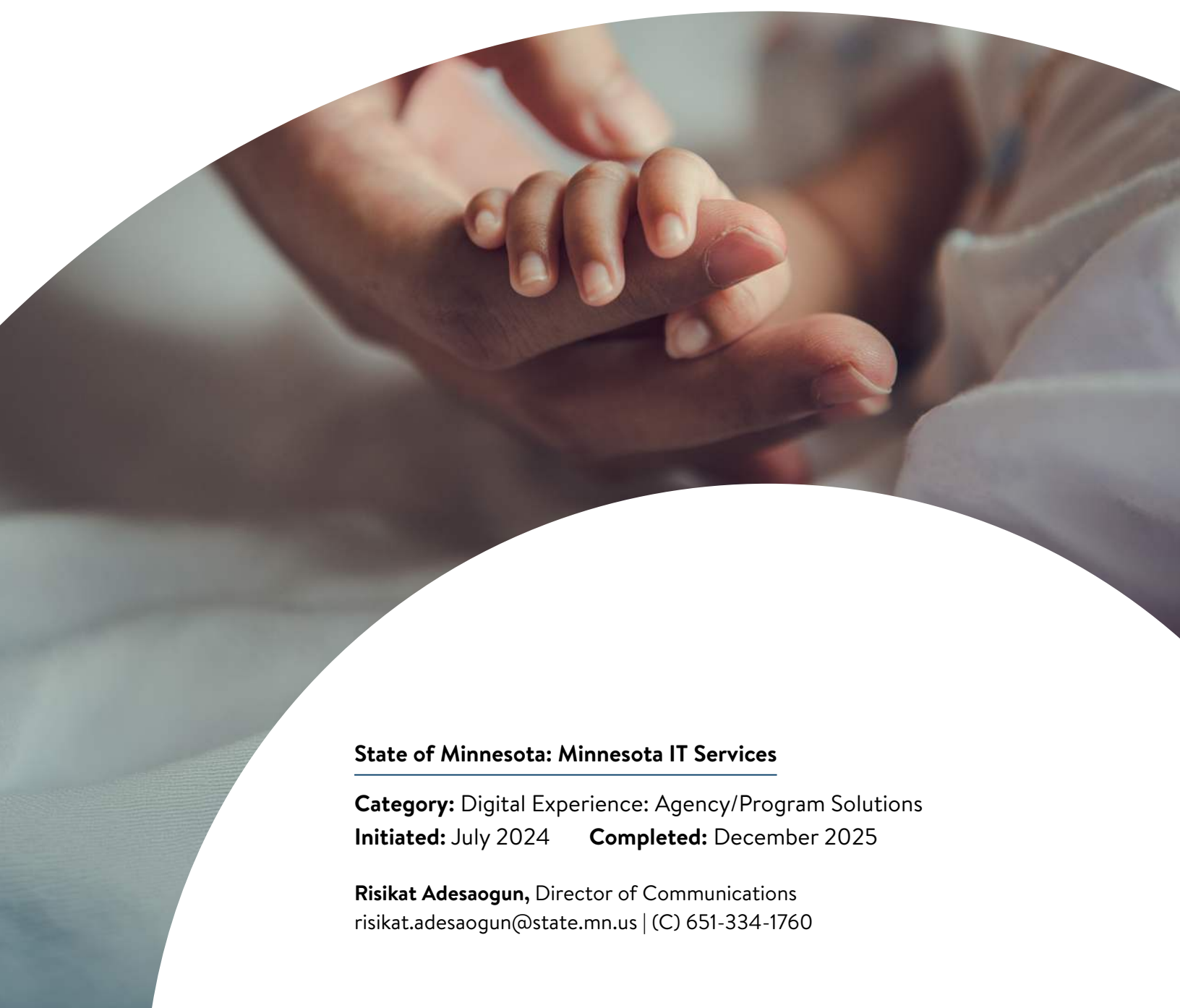


Minnesota Paid Leave: A digital service for life's most important moments



State of Minnesota: Minnesota IT Services

Category: Digital Experience: Agency/Program Solutions

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Executive summary

Minnesota transformed a new state law into one of the largest digital service launches in recent state history, building and launching a statewide Paid Leave program for more than 3 million workers in just over two and a half years. Signed in May 2023, the Minnesota Paid Leave Law created a new benefit program that provides eligible workers with partial wage replacement and job-protected leave during major life events, including welcoming a child, recovering from a serious health condition, caring for a family member, supporting a family member during deployment, or taking safety leave.

To meet the January 2026 legal deadline, the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) built the program from the ground up while preparing to serve workers, employers, and healthcare providers across the state. The effort required Minnesota to simultaneously develop a technology platform, statewide operations model, outreach campaign, and customer support workforce.

Failure to launch on time could have delayed benefits for workers, created confusion for employers and healthcare providers, and undermined trust in a major new public service.

Minnesota also needed to create a simple, accessible experience for applicants and employers while building the operational capacity to deliver a completely new statewide service on a fixed timeline.

The state hired and trained more than 350 employees, built the supporting technology infrastructure, and conducted statewide outreach to help communities and employers prepare for launch.

Minnesota rejected a traditional “big-bang” technology rollout and instead built Paid Leave as a modern digital service. The team launched key services in phases, tested the experience directly with users, and continuously refined the service using agile delivery and customer feedback. Team members traveled statewide to prepare employers and communities for launch, connecting with more than 40,000 people through more than 330 outreach events. They also conducted 14 user experience studies and used the findings to improve the product and reduce barriers for users.

Minnesota launched the full [Paid Leave program](#), and online platform ahead of the legal deadline and approximately \$70 million under budget.

Why it matters: Minnesota’s approach demonstrates how states can deliver large-scale public benefit programs faster, more affordably, and with a stronger focus on customer experience by integrating technology, policy, operations, outreach, and service design into one coordinated digital service strategy that other states can adopt for future modernization projects.

Types of applicable leave



Medical Leave

To care for your own serious health condition.



Bonding Leave

To bond with a child through birth, adoption, or foster placement.



Caring Leave

To care for a family member with a serious health condition.



Military Family Leave

To support a military family member called to active duty.



Safety Leave

To respond to domestic violence, sexual assault, or stalking, for you or a family member.

Idea

When Minnesota passed a new law requiring the state to launch a new benefits program by Jan. 1, 2026, the state faced a major delivery challenge: how do you launch a complex statewide benefits program, make it useful and easy to use, and do it on a fixed timeline. The law created an important benefit for workers, but its success depended on the state's ability to deliver the service effectively.

In 2021, the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) created the Worker Paid Leave Usage Simulation model, or Worker PLUS model, to study how paid leave affects workers in the U.S. The research found that access to paid leave can improve health, education, and economic stability for workers and families. Paid leave can support infant health by helping families access primary care and giving parents time to bond with their children. It can also help people recover from behavioral health or substance use challenges.

A 2026 National Partnership for Women and Families report, [Paid Leave Works: Evidence from State Programs](#), found that paid leave supports educational achievement, reduces absenteeism, increases high school completion, increases workforce participation, reduces reliance on public assistance, and lowers employee turnover and employer costs.

Paid Leave affects nearly every part of Minnesota's workforce. Workers need to understand when they qualify, how to apply, and what to expect. Employers need to report wages, understand contributions, manage exemptions or equivalent plans, and communicate with employees.

Healthcare providers need to support medical certification without unnecessary administrative burden. State staff need reliable tools, workflows, and data to operate the program. Community organizations, advocates, payroll companies, insurance companies, and other partners also need clear information and support.

A poor launch could delay benefits for workers, confuse employers, create extra work for healthcare providers, overwhelm state support teams, and reduce public trust in a new state service.

To reduce those risks, Minnesota approached the work as a digital service, not a one-time technology project. Instead of waiting until the final deadline to release the full program, the team broke the work into smaller launches, tested services with users, and used feedback to improve the experience over time.

The team treated service design, public engagement, technology, operations, and policy as connected parts of one public service. Minnesota's strategy focused on defining the problem clearly, reducing risk through phased delivery, keeping what worked, changing what did not, and continuing to improve after launch.

This model offers a practical roadmap for other states facing major legal deadlines or building new benefit programs. It demonstrates how government can improve digital access, use research to shape services, support statewide outreach, connect data and operations, and build a public service that continues to evolve after launch.

Paid Leave program process



Implementation

Lawmakers passed the Minnesota Paid Leave Law in May 2023 and set a full program launch date of January 1, 2026. That gave Minnesota two and a half years to build a major new public service program, prepare employers and communities, procure and build the technology, and create the operations needed to run the program.

The state also had to hire and train more than 350 employees to support the complex insurance program while rules, policies, and business processes continued to evolve. The timeline was fixed, public interest was high, and the work affected nearly every part of Minnesota's workforce.

Minnesota needed a digital service that worked well for applicants, employers, healthcare providers, and state staff. Applicants needed a simple way to understand whether they qualified and how to apply. Employers needed support to report wages, understand contributions, manage exemptions and equivalent plans, and meet key deadlines. Healthcare providers needed a process that fit within their existing duties and reduced administrative burden where possible. State staff needed reliable tools, workflows, and data to operate the program.

The technology also needed to connect many parts of the Paid Leave program. It had to support public-facing portals, secure sign-in, contact center support, data analytics, payment operations, integrations with other state systems, and staff tools to manage applications and program operations. The state hired the Paid Leave program director in September 2023. The director began building the teams needed to deliver the program. To complete the work, DEED partnered with Minnesota IT Services and Nava, a third-party technology vendor.

The team managed the scope by organizing the work into product workstreams, launching services in phases, testing with users, and using data and feedback to improve the service over time. The work required product managers, project managers, scrum masters, quality assurance staff, business analysts, engineers, designers, product owners, business subject matter experts, and operations partners.

Internal workstreams focused on infrastructure, payment operations, integrations, staff experience, data analytics, and quality assurance automation. Public-facing workstreams focused on applicant experience, employer experience, contact center support, healthcare provider experience, and staff tools.

Human-centered planning

It would have been risky to wait until the final deadline to find out whether the digital service worked. The Paid Leave program needed to deliver a user-friendly digital service that would work easily for real people, employers, providers, and staff. The team used a cross-functional product model so policy, operations, technology, service design, and public engagement could move together.

The team also prioritized early and broad public engagement. Outreach reached people in more than 250 ZIP codes across the state, including both metro and Greater Minnesota communities. The team used virtual and in-person formats to explain the program, hear concerns early, and adjust support before full launch.

This engagement helped build awareness and readiness before the program opened. Employer engagement results showed that 93% of employers increased their understanding of the program, and 91% felt prepared.

Pre-launch public engagement starting in November 2023

40,000+
Individual
connections

23,000+
employer connections

210+
employer events

90+
chamber partners

250+
participant ZIP codes

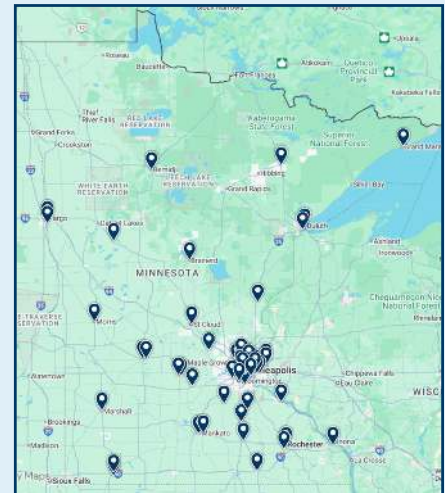
19%
women/minority
businesses

70% | **30%**
Metro | Greater MN

52% | **48%**
Virtual | In person

300+
Engagement
activities

- Chamber-sponsored events
- Community events (State Fair, Pride, Farmfest)
- Multilingual events
- Diverse business canvassing
- Presentations and Q&A
- Rulemaking and Tribal consultations



**Employer Engagement
Series event and business
canvassing locations**

Fall 2024, Spring 2025, Fall 2025

User testing and phased launch

Before full launch, the team used research and phased delivery to reduce risk and improve the service. The team conducted 14 user experience studies with 132 participants, including employers, healthcare providers, applicants, and focus groups. Their feedback helped improve navigation, simplify workflows, test the service with different users, and fix problems early.



14
User experience
studies completed



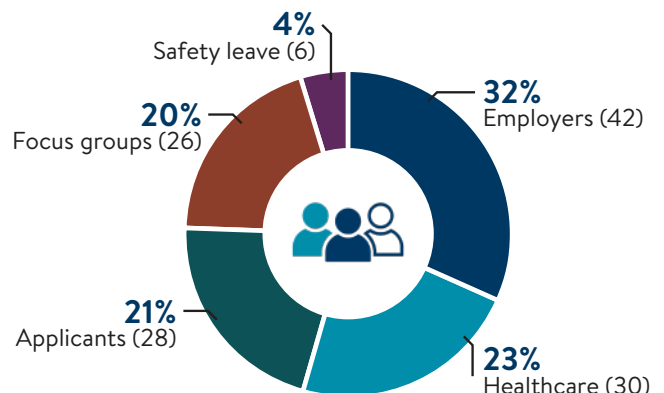
132
Total
participants

Minnesota also launched key services in stages instead of releasing everything at once on Jan. 1, 2026. Early releases included the contact center, employer wage reporting, exemptions, community outreach grants, seasonal designation, and early applications for Bonding Leave. Each release helped the team test the service, train staff, prepare partners, and adjust operations before full launch.

The final product is a full-service digital experience with portals for applicants, employers, and healthcare providers. It also supports staff workflows, data, security, payments, operations, reporting, and continuous improvement.

The project also showed strong financial management and came in about \$70 million below the appropriated implementation funding. The state returned the remaining funds to the Family and Medical Benefit Insurance Account.

User testing participants



Impact

Minnesota Paid Leave gives workers the freedom to care for themselves and the people who matter most during major life events. Eligible workers can take time away from work to care for themselves, welcome a child, support a family member through illness or deployment, or address safety needs. For many Minnesotans, Paid Leave means they no longer have to choose between a paycheck, their health, and their family.

Because the stakes were high, Minnesota designed Paid Leave as more than a one-time compliance project. The state built a digital service ecosystem that connects policy, technology, operations, outreach, data, and user experience to deliver a service that can adapt and improve over time.

Delivered on time and under budget

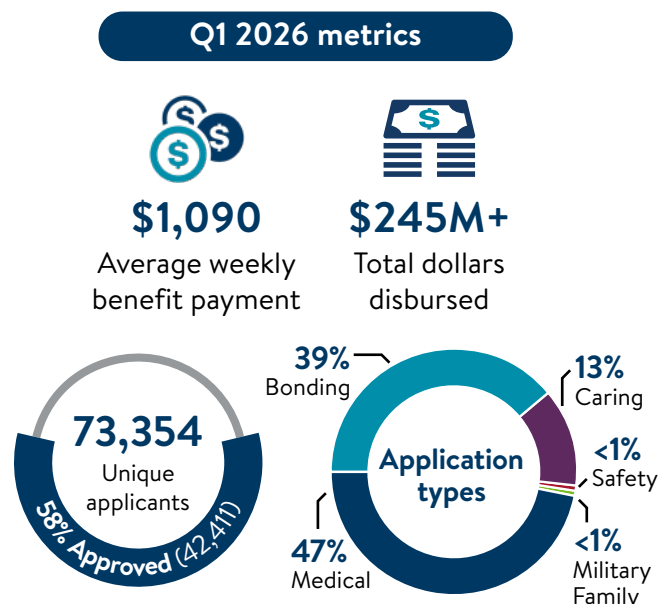
The program was launched on time and under budget. Implementation costs came in about \$70 million below the appropriated funding level, and the remaining funds were returned to the Family and Medical Benefit Insurance Account. Minnesota also began accepting applications from select employers and leave types before the Jan. 1, 2026, deadline. The state opened the system to all applicants on Dec. 29, 2025.

Broad pre-launch engagement with employers and communities helped reduce confusion and improve readiness. Among employers who participated in engagement activities before launch, 93% said they better understood the program and 91% said they felt prepared. These results matter because Paid Leave depends on employers to report accurately, comply with program requirements, and communicate effectively with workers.

Project timeline



Since the full launch, Minnesota Paid Leave has processed 73,354 applications. Incoming feedback shows that the service building strategy is working. Users describe the system as clear, simple, and easy to navigate. For a new benefit program, that clarity is central to continued success.



Before this work, Minnesota did not have an established system to manage a public benefits program like Paid Leave. The state now has a working digital service for applicants, employers, healthcare providers, and staff. It includes secure authentication, public-facing portals, contact center support, integrated workflows, and a trained workforce prepared to continue improving the program over time.

Minnesota's approach provides a scalable model for other states facing complex implementation challenges and fixed legal deadlines. The project demonstrated how states can deliver major public benefit programs while maintaining accessibility, fiscal responsibility, operational readiness, and public trust.

Through cross-functional collaboration, phased launches, public engagement, user testing, and continuous improvement, Minnesota transformed a complex legal mandate into a modern digital public service. The launch of Minnesota Paid Leave demonstrates how government can use technology, service design, and operational coordination to deliver better outcomes for the people it serves.

User feedback

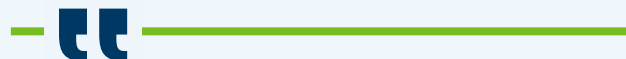
Employers with experience using paid leave programs in other states said **Minnesota's rollout was among the best they had experienced.**

Some employers with approved equivalent plans even **asked how they could return to the state plan** after hearing positive feedback about the service experience.

Applicants said Minnesota Paid Leave provided **one of the best experiences they had with a government program.**

Healthcare providers have **expressed interest in future electronic health record integrations** to reduce administrative burden related to Family and Medical Leave Act processes.

Overall feedback showed that **Minnesota delivered a strong service experience** for employers, applicants, and providers during a major program launch.



"The experience was not overcomplicated and allowed for quick access to the necessary information."

— Mayo Clinic Research Participant

"I like the simplicity of it. It's easy to maneuver through and read to see a snapshot at a glance."

— County Medical Center Employee

"The flow feels good moving from one application to the next, 4 out of 5 for easy navigation."

— Human Resources Technician

