

Northstar Adoption Assistance: *Eligibility Determination and Benefit Agreement*

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Northstar Adoption: Overview

In Minnesota, Adoption is the preferred permanency option for a child who cannot return home. Adoption is the *legal permanency disposition*. Northstar Adoption Assistance (NAA) is a financial benefit available for children who would otherwise remain in foster care; it is intended to reduce financial barriers to adoption of these children.

Typically this benefit is available for children under guardianship of the commissioner (or tribal equivalent), although in some unique circumstances some privately adopted children are eligible. The child must be legally free for adoption through either Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) or the Court's acceptance of a Consent of Parent to Adoption pursuant to Minnesota Statutes, section 260C.515, subd. 3 (Consent to Adopt), and Guardianship is then transferred to the Commissioner of Human Services. Alternatively, children under Tribal court jurisdiction and for whom a suspension of parental rights has occurred may be eligible.

The agency adoption process relies on entering child, previous parent, sibling, and pre-adoptive parent client information into SSIS and then verifying that the information is complete and accurate for the State Adoptions Unit at DHS. AFCARS information is gathered throughout the permanency process, from the first entries into the Permanency folder through the finalization of an adoption.

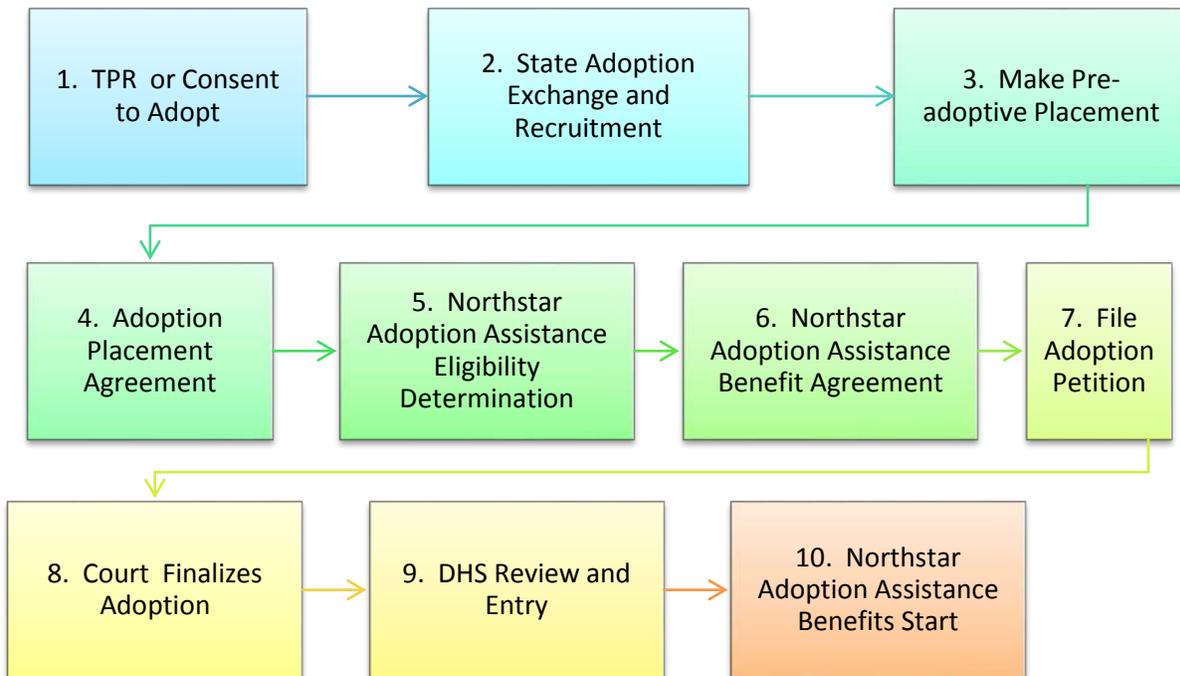
For children and families in which adoption for a child is the identified permanency outcome, SSIS provides additional tools to complete this process. These changes are due to Northstar Care for Children and include Northstar Adoption Assistance Eligibility Determination, Income Offsets, and Northstar Assistance Adoption Benefit Agreement.

Typically, a child will reside with the prospective adoptive parents while moving forward with finalizing an adoption. In some circumstances, the child may not be in a pre-adoptive placement setting with the prospective adoptive parent (s) at the time the Northstar Adoption Placement Agreement is signed; i.e., the child is in a treatment facility. At the time SSIS does not currently allow for adoptive placement verification if a child is not placed in the home, so completion of the adoption placement verification requires a data fix.

Child Ward folder and Adoption Verifications must be completed prior to completing Northstar Adoption Eligibility Determination. The Adoption Assistance Eligibility Determination must be approved by DHS and the Adoption Benefit Agreement signed before the Adoption is finalized in court.

Additional information about Northstar Adoption Assistance can be found in the [Northstar Care for Children Practice Guide](#). An [Adoption Process Checklist](#) is available in eDocs and SSIS External documents. This checklist has been designed to provide county social workers with a clear guide of the required steps to legally finalize the adoption of a child under guardianship of the commissioner. It also provides a place to document in the case file completion of each step of the adoption process.

Northstar Adoption Workflow



Hint: This workflow represents the typical workflow for non-American Indian children under the jurisdiction of a county; for children under tribal jurisdiction the workflow could differ, including but in no way limited to such important practices as Suspension of Parental Rights.

SSIS Resources:

- [SSIS Documentation](#)
 - Placement module
 - [Kinship Workflow](#)
 - Permanency Folder

Adoption Resources:

- [Paths to Permanency](#) (DHS-7024A)
- [Adoption and Guardianship webpage](#) on County Link
 - [Policy on Foster and Adoption Placement Decisions for Children Under Guardianship of the Commissioner](#)
 - [Adoption Process Checklist for Children Under Guardianship of the Commissioner](#) (DHS 6542)
- [Northstar Care for Children webpage](#) on County Link
- [Northstar Care for Children Practice Guide](#)
- [The Benefit Information Portal](#) (BIP)

System Requirements for Adoption

In preparation for completing the Northstar Adoption work, ensure the following items are entered or open for the child:

- Legal Names (for the child, previous parents, siblings, and pre-adoptive parents)
- Date of Birth (for the child, previous parents, siblings, and pre-adoptive parents')
- Race
- Birth Location information (state and tribal wards)

- Citizenship Information (child and pre-adoptive parents)
- Relationships (add the birth father detail, if known); the *SSIS system at DHS requires two birth parents, even if one is unknown.*
- All child clients, known legal parents (either biological or adoptive), prospective relative custodians and all siblings must be cleared to SWNDX to begin the Adoption verifications.
- Completed Continuous Placement
- Entry of a Removal and Adoptions History folder within the Permanency folder
- Update Placement setting to Pre-adoptive Placement (when appropriate), with Foster Parent relationships defined
- The Business Organization record with the Pre-adoptive parents identified as the individual providers

In preparation for creating the Adoption Assistance Eligibility Determination, ensure the following is entered:

- Completed Court Action with Best Interests recorded (only required for initially Court Ordered Placements)
- A MAPCY Assessment (required for all adoptions after 01/01/2015)

Security Functions

The Security Administration functions include **Create adoption**, **View adoption**, and **Access adoption reports**:

- **Create adoption**: allows workers to create and edit the new Child Ward folder and complete all verifications
- **View adoption**: allows worker only to view access to adoption related nodes
- **Access adoption reports**: allows workers to access the adoption related reports in Tools> General Reports

Eligibility for Adoption Assistance

For a child to be eligible for Northstar Adoption Assistance, a child must meet the “special needs” determination:

- Cannot or should not return home
- Reasonable efforts were made to place the child for adoption without providing adoption assistance
- Barrier to Adoption:
 - Has a specific factor or condition that makes it reasonable to believe the child cannot be adopted without providing adoption assistance:
 1. Determination by the SSA that the child meets all medical or disability requirements of title XVI of the Social Security Act with respect to eligibility for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits.
 2. Documented physical, mental, emotional, or behavioral disability, but without SSI eligibility.
 3. Member of a sibling group being adopted at the same time by the same parent.
 4. Adoptive placement in the home of a parent who previously adopted a sibling for whom they receive adoption assistance.

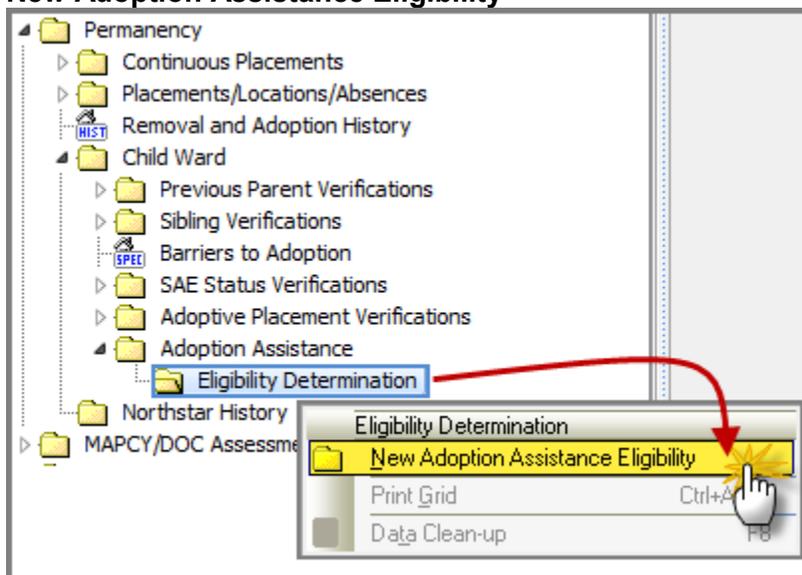
5. Documentation that the child is an at-risk child.
 - *These “at-risk only” children will receive no monthly benefit payment. These children may be eligible for Adoption Assistance in the future if a disability manifests.*

Additionally, for children who will be eligible for Northstar Adoption Assistance, the rate is determined by the age of the child when the financially responsible agency sends the eligibility determination to DHS for approval. Children age 0-5 when the Northstar Adoption Assistance Eligibility Determination is submitted will receive the “Pre-school entry rate” sometimes also referred to as the “Alternate rate”. Children age 6 or older when their Northstar Adoption Assistance Eligibility Determination is submitted DHS will receive the “School age rate” or “Standard rate”, if they are eligible and not “at-risk” only. For more information about this, please refer to [DHS Bulletin 14-32-11](#).

Completing the Northstar Adoption Assistance Eligibility Determination document tabs

The Adoption Assistance Eligibility Determination is created from the Child Ward node. There are four tabs in this document: Setup, Document, Properties, Income Offsets, Discussion Log and Required Documents.

New Adoption Assistance Eligibility



To complete an Adoption Assistance Eligibility Determination Setup tab:

1. Expand the Child Ward folder and highlight the Adoption Assistance folder
2. Access the Action menu and select **New Adoption Assistance Eligibility**
3. On the Setup tab, in the Document template filed, select **Northstar Adoption Assistance Eligibility Determination**. This autofills into the Description field; you can remove this and enter new information into the Description field if desired.
4. The Status field displays as **Draft** and the Status Change date displays the date/time the Adoption Assistance Eligibility document was opened.
5. Select the **Document** tab.

Northstar Adoption Assistance Eligibility Determination>Setup tab

Name	Status	Determination	Determination Reason	Initial Submission Date
Adoption Assistance Eligibility Determination - Draft				

Setup	Document	Properties	Discussions	Required Documents
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No required fields needed to complete.

Document template: Northstar Adoption Assistance Eligibility Determination

Description: Northstar Adoption Assistance Eligibility Determination

Status: Draft

Status change date: 1/23/2015 2:31:11 F Initial submission date:

Document Tab

Northstar Adoption Assistance Eligibility Determination Document will guide the user through a series of questions based on how the previous question was answered. As the questions are answered, a list of required supporting documents is compiled. The user will need to select the Required Documents Tab to view the list. Based on how the questions are answered, the Eligibility Determination Document will calculate the child's eligibility for Adoption Assistance.

To Complete an Adoption Assistance Eligibility Determination Document tab:

1. Review the fields on the Title Page and ensure the data that merged in from the Tree View folders is accurate.
2. Complete each section: **Age and Citizenship**, **Background Studies**, **Placement Information** (Barriers to Adoption), and **Eligibility Factors**. This document should be completed from top to bottom, as fields display, based on how previous fields were answered.
3. The Complete checkbox auto checks to ensure this screen prints on the document.
4. Click on each Navigation bar (or advance the screens by clicking the double-arrows at the bottom right of the screen) and answer the questions as listed.
5. Click **Save**.

Northstar Adoption Assistance Eligibility Determination > Document tab > Title Page

Income Offsets

Income offsets are required when sending NAA Eligibility Determination for Approval for an eligible child who is not “At-risk” only eligible. However, this tab does not automatically display with the other tabs, because it is used for both Northstar Kinship Assistance and Northstar Adoption Assistance.

Eligibility Determination Action Menu > New Income Offsets

To Complete Income Offsets:

1. From the Eligibility Determination folder, access the Action menu.
2. Select **New Income Offsets**. Income Offsets tab displays.
3. Complete entry in the fields to indicate if the child receives any income from: **RSDI**, **Veterans Benefits**, **Railroad Retirement Benefits**, **Black Lung benefits**, or from **SSI**.
4. **Save**. The **Total Income Offsets** displays.

Income Offset tab

Name	Status	Determination	Determination Reason	Initial Submission Date
Adoption Assistance Eligibility Determination - Draft	Draft	Eligible for Title IV-E		

[Setup](#) | [Document](#) | [Properties](#) | **Income Offsets** | [Discussions](#) | [Required Documents](#)

Initial Income Offsets

Child Name:

Reporting Date:

Does the child receive any of the following Yes No

[RSDI \(Social Security\)](#):
[Veterans Benefits \(VA\)](#):
[Railroad Retirement Benefits](#):
[Black Lung Benefits](#):

Total Income Offsets: Benefit amount will be adjusted to reflect Total Income Offsets

Additional Monthly Income Offsets

[Supplemental Security Income \(SSI\)](#):

Properties Tab

This tab displays basic information about the Adoption Document, including **Last Edited Date**, and **Last Changed By** fields.

Northstar Adoption Assistance Eligibility Determination > Properties tab

Setup	Document	Properties	Discussions	Required Documents
Kinship Document Properties				
Description:	Velma - Northstar Adoption Assistance Eligibility Determination			
SSIS Document #:	213548677			
Created Date:	1/26/2015 9:53:36 AM	Created By:	Burns, Mister	
Initial Submission Date:		Pre-school Indicator:		
Status:	Draft			
Determination:	Eligible for Title IV-E			
Determination Reason:				
Infant Benefit Level:	<input type="checkbox"/>	Child Benefit Level:	<input type="checkbox"/>	Teen Benefit Level:
Last Edited Date:	1/26/2015 10:15:32 AM	Last Changed Date:	1/26/2015 10:15:32 AM	Last Changed By:
				Burns, Mister
Template Properties				
Name:	Northstar Adoption Assistance Eligibility Determination			
Document Template #:	282470			
Document Identification:	07/29/2014			
Format:	Forms			
Description:	Northstar Adoption Assistance Eligibility Determination 15.1			

Discussion tab

Use the Discussion tab to communicate (i.e. instead of sending an email) between the Agency and DHS. This allows you to retain communications specific to a person.

Action Menu options for the discussion tab are:

- New Discussion-To begin a new communication with DHS.
- Print Grid-To print your screen
- Show Discussion Details-To view detail communications between the Agency and the State.
- Save- To save the communication.
- Cancel- To exit without saving.
- Copy Preview to Clipboard-To copy your entry to the clipboard.
- Add Comment- To add a comment to an existing discussion.

To start a New Discussion:

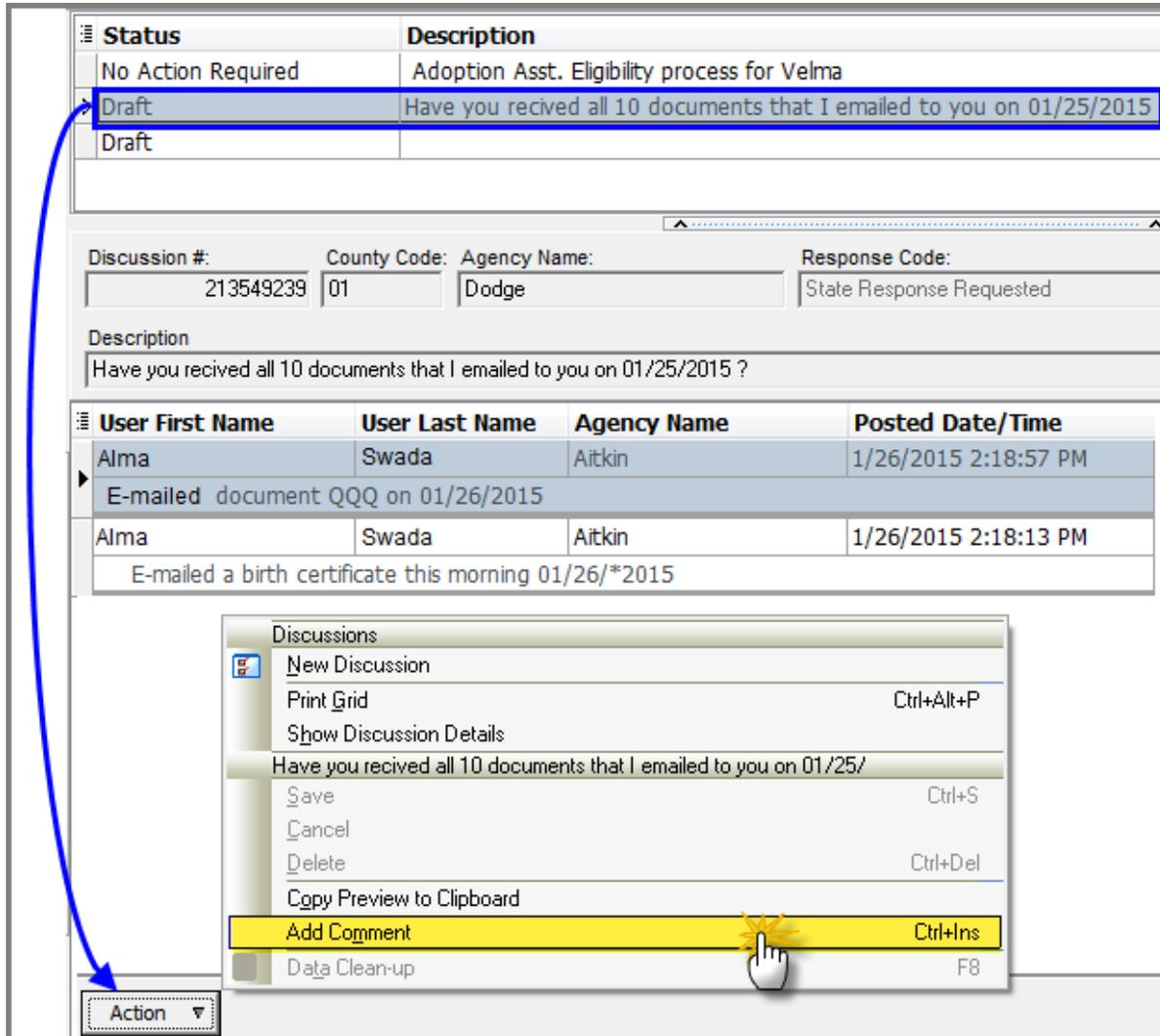
1. From the Discussion tab, access the Action menu
2. Select New Discussion

3. The fields Discussion #, County code, and Agency Name autofill. Select a **Response Code** and in the **Description** field, type the new discussion.

To Add A Comment to a Discussion:

1. From the Discussions tab, highlight in the grid the discussion to which you want to add a comment.
2. Access the action menu and select **Add Comment**. Add Comment box displays.
3. Write Comment and Select **OK**.

Discussions Tab> Add Comment



Required Documents tab

There are several required documents to submit to the State. Use the Required Documents tab to select the specific document your Agency is submitting to the DHS. DHS will verify receipt and accuracy of document(s). The documents required will differ based on the information entered in the Document and Income Offsets tabs. First click on to the page for the Requirement Met By drop-down menus to display. Use the drop-down menus to identify the appropriate documents to satisfy this requirement.

Required Documents tab

To Complete the Required Documents Tab:

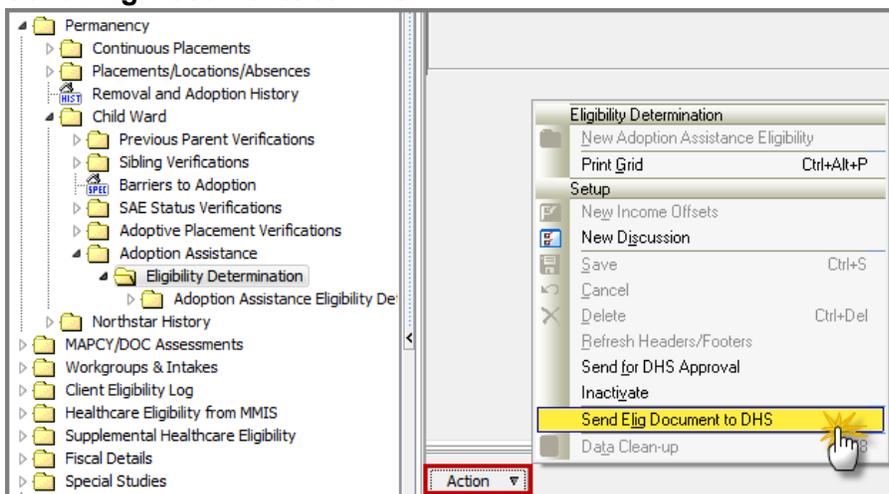
1. Click on the **Required Documents** tab.
2. For each field repeat the following steps:
 1. Select the required document from the **Requirement Met By** field drop-down menu.
 2. Select the submission method from the **Submission method** drop-down menu.
 3. Enter comment in the **Comment** field if/as applicable.
 4. Click **Save**.

DHS staff will review and indicate if they have received the documentation and if it has been verified by checking the applicable boxes for each Required Document.

To Send Adoption Assistance Eligibility Determination Documentation to DHS

1. From the Eligibility Determination folder, Access the Action menu
2. Select **Send Elig documentation to DHS**. A dialogue box displays, stating **Document Sent**.

Send Elig Documents to DHS



Declining Northstar Adoption Assistance

If a prospective adoptive parent chooses not to apply for NAA, have the parent sign a *Prospective Adoptive Parent Statement to Decline Northstar Adoption Assistance*, found in the Child's Documents folder. Submit a copy to DHS. The NAA Eligibility Determination must still be

completed; this form will document the adoptive parents' choice to "opt-out" of Northstar Adoption Assistance.

Setup tab >Declining Northstar Adoption Assistance

Does the adoptive parent(s) for this child wish to apply for Northstar Adoption Assistance benefits?	No ▾
--	------

Sending Northstar Adoption Assistance Eligibility Determination to DHS for Approval

After the agency completes the adoption eligibility determination screens, has sent all *supporting documentation* to DHS, the final step in NAA eligibility determination is for the agency to send the eligibility information to DHS for Approval in SSIS

To Send for DHS Approval:

1. From the Adoption Assistance Eligibility Determination screen, while on the Setup tab access the **Action** menu.
2. Select **Send for DHS Approval**.

DHS Review of Northstar Adoption Assistance Eligibility Determination

The State must confirm all determinations and requests, even when the child is not eligible for Northstar Adoption Assistance or the adoptive parents have declined. After agency submits eligibility determination *plus all supporting documentation* to DHS, DHS will review and respond:

- Affirming agency's decision (approval or denial)
- Denying agency's decision (approval or denial).
- Requesting additional information/documentation and/or corrections.
 - When DHS sends back to the Agency for a correction, the Agency will need to complete the request and re-send for DHS approval.

If DHS affirms approval, it will notify the agency of the correct Northstar Adoption Assistance Benefit Agreement to use based on:

- Title-IV-E/ Non IV-E
- Preschool/ School Age
- At risk

Northstar Adoption Assistance Benefit Agreement

After DHS approval of the Adoption Assistance Eligibility Determination, the financially responsible agency worker will be notified to proceed with completing the Northstar Adoption Assistance Benefit Agreement. Once notified, select the correct Northstar Adoption Assistance (NAA) Benefit Agreement in SSIS:

- Northstar Adoption Assistance Benefit Agreement
- Northstar At-Risk Adoption Assistance Benefit Agreement

After the NAA Benefit Agreement is fully executed, the adoption petition may be filed. ***Court may order adoption finalization at any time, but it will impact the child's eligibility for Northstar Adoption Assistance.*** The Adoption petition is required to be filed within nine months of the adoptive placement. The Petitioning adopting parent must be at least 21 years old, with some exceptions for relatives. There is no Minnesota state residency requirement. A responsible agency may file an adoption petition on behalf of a willing prospective adoptive

parent. This petition should be filed in the county or tribal court conducting post-guardianship review hearings.

The following items should be filed with the petition:

- Judgment, Order and Decree
- Adopting parent(s) home study and background study
- Fully executed Adoption Placement Agreement
- Child's social and medical history
- Names of persons who must be given notice

Filed after petition, but before finalization:

- Certified copy of child's birth certificate
- Certified TPR/guardianship transfer orders
- Communication or contact agreement
- Certification that the Minnesota Father's Adoption Registry (MFAR) has been searched
- Original of each consent required
- Post-placement assessment and report to court
- Minnesota Department of Health forms, including the Certificate of Adoption and Birth Certificate Application

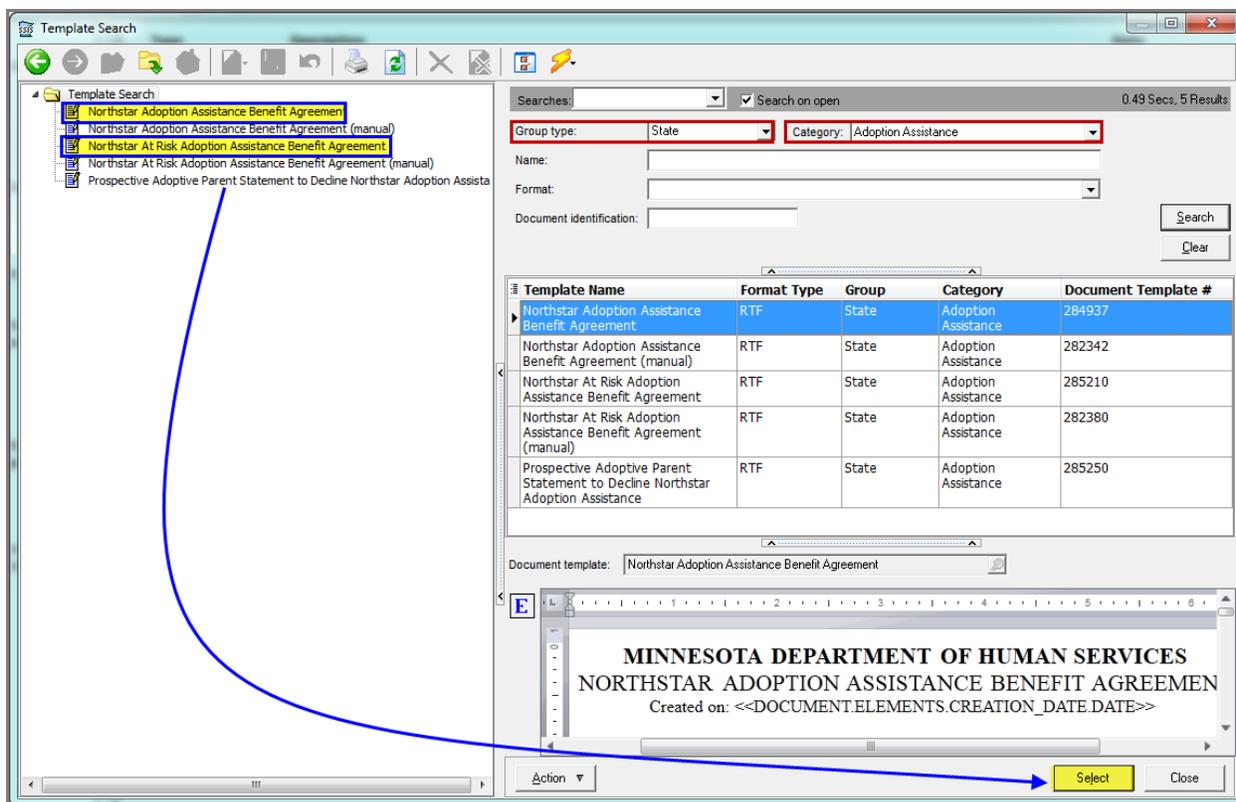
Hint: Refer to the Adoption Process Checklist or your Supervisor for additional information or direction.

The Northstar Adoption Benefit Agreements are Person documents, located beneath the client's node in the Tree View. Person documents remain with the client no matter which future workgroup(s) the client becomes associated with. There are three tabs in this document: Set up, RTF Document , and Properties.

To Create a Northstar Adoption Assistance Benefit Agreement:

1. From the child's Document folder, access the Action menu and select **New Document**.
2. Complete a Document Template Search.
3. Select State in the Group Type field and Select Adoption Assistance in the Category field.
4. Highlight the correct **Northstar Adoption Assistance Benefit Agreement**; choose **Select**.

Template Search > Northstar Adoption Assistance Benefit Agreements



To Complete the Setup tab and RTF Document Tabs

1. On the Setup tab, complete all applicable fields.
2. Click the **RTF Document** tab and click the Blue E, editor button. Ensure the document is complete and accurate.
3. **Save.**
4. Click **Print** to print a copy and obtain signatures of Case Worker, Supervisor, adoptive parent (s).
5. Send to DHS staff for review and signature. The NAA Benefit Agreement must be:
 - a. Signed by adopting parents, workers, and supervisor.
 - b. Submitted to DHS in the mail (original signatures needed by DHS).

Northstar At-Risk Adoption Assistance Benefit Agreement > Set Up Tab

Setup | RTF Document | Properties

No required fields needed to complete.

Document template: Northstar At Risk Adoption Assistance Benefit Agreement

Description: Northstar At Risk Adoption Assistance Benefit Agreement

Status: Draft Finalized date:

Document

Document: Northstar At Risk Adoption Assistance Benefit Agreement (manual)

Elements

Creation Date: 1/29/2015

Agency

Agency: Test County Family Services

Agency name: Test County Family Services

Is agency county or region: Yes

Participant

Participant: Velma X Vaughn

Name: Velma X Vaughn

Date of birth: September 01, 2012

18th birthday: September 01, 2030

What entry rate is being used? Pre-School Entry Rate (ages 0-5)

What is the funding source? Title IV-E

Display the language block? no

Are the Legally and Financially Responsible Agency the same? yes

Enter Adoptive Parent 1 name: Anikka A Andersson

Enter Adoptive Parent 2 name: Lars L Andersson

Properties Tab

This tab displays basic information about the Adoption Assistance Benefit Agreement, including **Last Edited Date**, and **Last Changed By** fields.

Northstar Adoption Assistance Eligibility Determination > Properties tab

Setup	RTF Document	Properties
Document Properties		
Description:	Northstar At Risk Adoption Assistance Benefit Agreement	
SSIS Document #:	214095510	
Created Date:	1/29/2015 4:13:24 PM	Created By: Star, Falling
Last Edited Date:	1/29/2015 4:22:12 PM	
Last Changed Date:	1/29/2015 4:22:12 PM	Last Changed By: Star, Falling
Template Properties		
Name:	Northstar At Risk Adoption Assistance Benefit Agreement (manual)	
Document Template #:	282380	
Category:	Adoption Assistance	
Group:	State	Documents and Service Plans associated with templates with a "Template Status" of Inactive cannot be copied using the Copy Document and Copy Service Plan menu options.
Template Status:	Active	
Document Identification:	10/30/2014	
Format:	Forms	
Description:		

When received, DHS reviews the Northstar Adoption Assistance Benefit Agreement.

- **DHS must sign the Agreement to make it fully executed.**
- DHS will send an introduction/information packet to adopting parent(s) and worker.