

Request for Proposals Disability Accessibility Improvement Grant 2025

Proposals Due October 15, 2024

I. Background Information

Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Illinois Human Rights Act (IHRA) are examples of comprehensive civil rights laws that prohibit discrimination based on disability in state and local governments, including courts.

While all courts must work towards meeting the requirements of the ADA, IHRA, and corresponding laws and regulations, the ATJ Commission recognizes that needs and resources differ across jurisdictions; where one court may have funding to provide state of the art accessibility aids, make changes to physical spaces, and seamlessly process reasonable accommodations, others may want to improve accessibility but lack the funding to realize their goals.

To forward this objective, and to ensure more uniform access to resources for courts, the ATJ Commission will award grant funds in support of projects or activities from local courts that promote dignity, advance accessibility, and reduce barriers to equal access to courts for people with disabilities.

II. Program Goals and Parameters

The Disability Access Committee of the Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Access to Justice (ATJ Commission) is issuing this request for proposals for a Disability Accessibility Improvement Grant (Disability Grant).

The Disability Grant has three goals:

- **To promote full and equal access** for people with disabilities to participate in court activities, to be able to communicate with the court as effectively as people without disabilities, and to receive accommodations as per the requirements of the [Illinois Supreme Court Policy on Access for People with Disabilities](#) (Policy), the ADA, and the IHRA;
- **To promote respect and dignity** for people with disabilities by fostering a court environment where all people, but particularly those with disabilities, are treated with dignity, respect, and courtesy; and
- **To support local courts** to pursue enhancements that bridge gaps in current budgets but will ultimately lead to sustainable paths forward to local funding for solutions that address barriers to full and equal access or respect and dignity for people with disabilities.

The Disability Grant can be used for any activity or project that forwards these goals and addresses a barrier to equal access to court for people with disabilities. Grant funds for projects are meant to support, enhance, expand, or create new or pilot projects, which may include, **but are not limited to:**

- Installing or repairing ramps, elevators, and automatic doors in court facilities to ensure accessibility.
- Remodeling jury boxes, witness stands, and restrooms to ensure accessibility.
- Conducting comprehensive accessibility audits of court buildings to identify and prioritize areas needing improvement, to monitor the effectiveness of existing disability accessibility measures, and to make informed adjustments towards more accessible improvements.
- Providing funding to hire qualified Certified Deaf Interpreters or Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) transcription for court proceedings.
- Purchasing and providing assistive listening devices and other communication technologies.
- Funding a community listening session or town hall to better understand the experiences of people with disabilities and to promote disability-centered cultural responsiveness from court personnel.
- Developing and distributing court forms and documents in accessible formats, such as large print, braille, and electronic formats compatible with screen readers.
- Providing additional training and further skill development opportunities for the jurisdiction's Court Disability Coordinator.
- Providing training for court staff on their obligations under the Policy, ADA, and IHRA, including how to effectively respond to reasonable accommodation requests from court users.
- Providing training for court staff on respect, dignity, support, and customer service for people with disabilities from a disability advocacy organization.
- Developing and distributing explanatory resources or educational programs for people with disabilities that provide clear, accessible explanations of court processes and case proceedings in multiple accessible formats, including videos with captions, sign language, and audio descriptions, and easy-to-read brochures.

- Redesigning court websites and mobile applications to ensure they comply with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) and are compatible with assistive technologies.¹
- Developing and improving accessible online court services or procedures, such as virtual court clerk counters and remote court proceedings, and ensuring they are accessible for people with disabilities.
- Conducting listening sessions or user testing sessions with local disability advocacy organizations to ensure continuous feedback and improvement of accessibility measures and court resources.

The needs of each applicant for grant funding are unique and particularized to the needs of the surrounding community. Accordingly, projects or activities that are funded will also be distinct.

The ATJ Commission also encourages collaboration across court departments, offices, communities, and people with disabilities served by the grant applicant. Applications incorporating examples of collaboration with stakeholders are encouraged.

III. Grant Eligibility, Proposal Requirements, and Expectations

Eligibility

Each application for grant funding must be submitted by an Illinois:

- Court or court system,
- Clerk's office,
- Sheriff or bailiff's office,
- State's attorney's office, or
- Public defender's office

in partnership with the local Court Disability Coordinator (CDC), who must act as the "Grant Liaison."

Proposal Requirements

Proposals must contain the following three sections:

- Section I: Application Form
- Section II: Program Narrative (including partnership letter(s) of support, which may include letters from people with disabilities or organizations representing people with disabilities)

¹ The Department of Justice (DOJ) issued a [final rule in April 2024](#) requiring that all state and local government websites, apps, and online information and services comply with the requirements of WCAG Level 2.1 AA by April 2026 for jurisdictions with more than 50,000 people, and by April 2027 for those with fewer than 50,000. Please see this [DOJ Fact Sheet](#) to learn more about these requirements.

- Section III: Grant Amount Requested

Each application for grant funding will be considered in terms of the following components:

- Specific, demonstrable examples describing how the award could support a new or existing project or activities that address accessibility barriers for people with disabilities, including a description of the connection between the need for the funding, the project or activities that will be funded, and the accessibility barrier that will be addressed.
- A connection to the requirements of the Policy.
- Local support for the grant activities.
- Description of the short-term efficacy **and** the long-term sustainability of the project or activities, recognizing that Disability Grant awards are bridge grants designed to ensure courts secure local funding for further, long-term compliance with the ADA, the IHRA, and the Policy.
- Evidence of and ability to work collaboratively with stakeholders, including other court offices and people with disabilities, such as examples of collaborative, successful past projects addressing accessibility, if available.
- Evidence of the practicality of the project or activity being completed, including details in the Project Budget or other optional, accessibility-related assessments or estimates.
- A description of how the project or activity will promote dignity and respect for people with disabilities; and
- A willingness to innovate and think creatively.

Grant Expectations

Each grant recipient is expected to:

- Implement the project or activity proposed in the application.
- Agree to submit regular reports, as requested, to the ATJ Division about project activities, opportunities and challenges, number of individuals served (if applicable), and grant expenditures.
- Identify the long-term need addressed by the grant award and take steps to implement solutions to meet the ongoing need after the conclusion of the grant period (December 31, 2025).
- Secure a replacement Grant Liaison from the jurisdiction if the original CDC is unable to continue work as Grant Liaison.

- Cooperate, coordinate, and collaborate with court departments, offices, communities, and people with disabilities.
- Periodically partner with the ATJ Commission, Committee, ATJ Division, and other grant recipients to share data and information to better identify needs, emerging trends, and create innovative solutions that the rest of the state can implement.

IV. Grant Application Process & Due Date

Proposals shall be accepted between September 2 – October 15, 2024.

Completed grant applications must be submitted **before 5:00 pm on Tuesday, October 15, 2024**, by email to August Hieber, Sr. Program Manager, Inclusive Access, Access to Justice Division, AOIC at ahieber@illinoiscourts.gov.

Each grant will be for a one-year period from January 1 - December 31, 2025, with the funds being paid at the beginning of the grant year.

Applicants may apply once per year for the requested funding amount to be used for projects that will promote equal access to the court system for people with disabilities. The requested funds may be spent over the one-year period. Funds left over after the one-year period may be rolled over into the next one-year period.

The Committee anticipates that the grant recipients will be announced early December 2024. Grants will be paid to the person or entity designated by the recipient after selection.

The application process, review, and evaluation are conducted by a subcommittee of the Disability Access Committee. This rigorous review will focus on ensuring that grant recipients are selected based on localized, individualized need that directly reduces barriers to access to justice at court for people with disabilities. Note that awards are subject to fund availability; not all projects or activities may be funded this grant cycle.

Section I: Application Form, Disability Accessibility Improvement Grant, 2025

1. Applicant Jurisdiction information	
Judicial Circuit/Appellate District	
County served (if multiple counties in a Circuit/District, please list the ones served by Project or state "all")	
Chief Judge	
Presiding Judge (if applicable)	
Circuit/Appellate Clerk Name	

2. Court Disability Coordinator Grant Liaison Information			
Name			
Job Title			
Employer			
Street Address			
City, State, Zip Code			
Phone Number		Email Address	

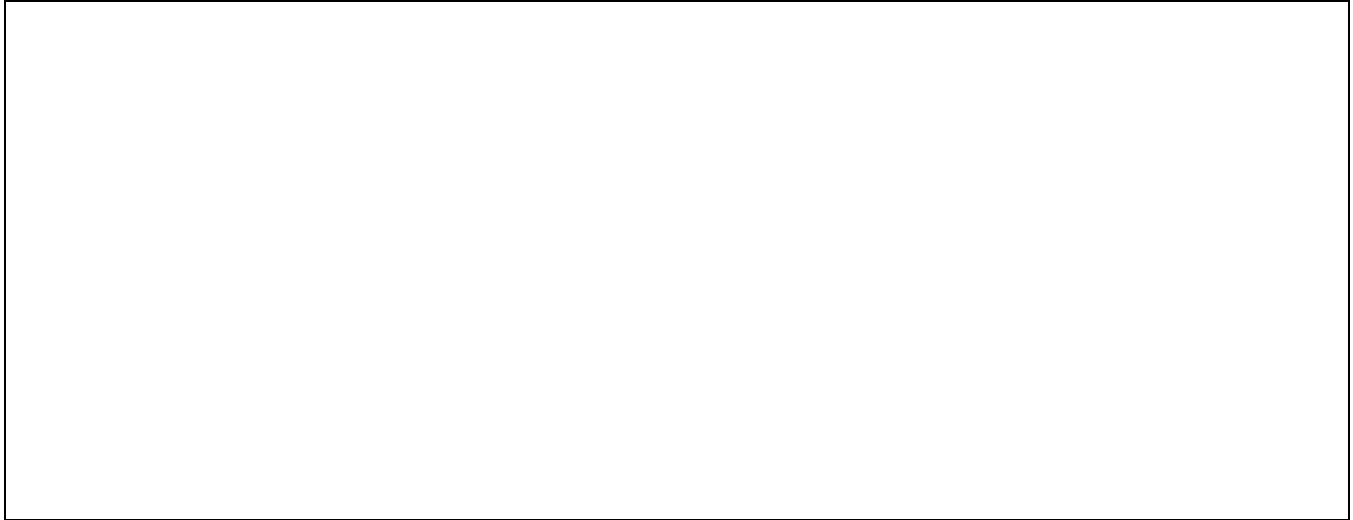
Section II: Program Narrative, Disability Accessibility Improvement Grant

Please answer each of the following prompts:


1. What is your proposed project or program?

A. Describe the project/program for which you are requesting grant funds.
B. Why is it necessary and how do you know it is necessary? Feel free to use specific examples.
C. How does the project/program promote the requirements of the Policy?
D. How does it promote equal access, respect, and dignity for people with disabilities?

2. **What are your goals for the project or program?** Please list specific objectives, how success will be defined, and the steps you will take to achieve them. Include a description of the short-term efficacy **and** the long-term sustainability of the project or activities, recognizing that Disability Grant awards are bridge grants designed to ensure independent long-term compliance with the ADA, the IHRA, and the Policy.



3. **Who will you partner with to achieve these goals?** Please describe the partnerships involved in your project. This includes court-based partners (e.g., circuit clerks, chief/presiding judge's office, sheriffs) and external partners (e.g., legal aid organizations, bar associations, public libraries, disability advocacy organizations). Please provide a letter of support from the chief/presiding judge of the relevant jurisdiction **and** each listed partner confirming their commitment to the project.



4. **How will you evaluate the effectiveness of the project?** Please include a plan to evaluate or measure the effectiveness of the initiatives. Evaluations should consider the impact on litigants, court staff, and court processes.



Section III: Grant Amount Request, Disability Accessibility Improvement Grant

Please provide a budget summary and itemized chart below explaining (1) how much grant money the application is requesting and (2) how the grant money will be spent. All grant funds should be used to cover expenses related to programmatic needs and not salary stipends. Please note that the ATJ Commission may not be able to fully fund a project and may award only partial funding.

Please fill in the below chart with your proposed budget. Start with an overall summary of your budget request and then breakdown the expenditures. If you are purchasing multiple units of an item (like two \$300 ramps), enter Ramps, \$300, 2, \$600. In the last box, please add up all the totals in the right column to list the total budget request. If you need more lines, submit multiple pages.

Budget Summary:			
Expenditure Name (item/service/what you are spending money on)	Cost	Quantity or # of installments	Total amount
Grand Total Amount of Grant Request			