



Request for Proposals

Access to Justice Improvement Grant and Court Navigator Network Membership

2025-2026

Proposals Due June 20, 2025

Program Overview

The Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Access to Justice (ATJ Commission) is opening the Request for Proposals for two programs. The first is to provide funding to jurisdictions so they can develop access to justice initiatives locally (the ATJ Improvement Grant). The second is to offer training and support to staff working at courthouses throughout the state who assist self-represented litigants (SRLs) and other court users as part of the Court Navigator Network (Network). Network members serve as a bridge, linking courthouses throughout the state, to share ideas, develop new resources, and establish programs for assisting SRLs. Over the past few years, the base of this Network has been the Illinois JusticeCorps program and ATJ Improvement grant recipients. In compliance with the Illinois Supreme Court's Strategic Agenda, it is the mission of the ATJ Commission to maintain a Network with at least one member in every judicial circuit and appellate district in the state.

Courts and circuit clerk's offices may apply to participate in the **Network** for the training and collaboration segment only or may also apply for the **ATJ Improvement Grant** to cover expenses related to the development, modification, or expansion of resources and services to improve access to justice.

Access to Justice Improvement Grant



The ATJ Improvement Grants can be used for any project or need that creates, expands, or improves programs which enhance access to our courts particularly for vulnerable litigants, like those facing barriers being self-represented, dealing with financial burdens, or experiencing language barriers, while addressing issues of diversity and inclusion.

This excludes those projects covered by the Disability Accessibility Improvement Grant or Reducing Barriers to Meaningful Participation in Court Grant. To read the grant policies for all three grants, please visit ilcourts.info/Commission.

The needs of each local courthouse are unique, so the projects that are funded are as well. Examples of projects include, but are not limited to:

- buying paper, ink, and/or printers to print statewide forms;
- hiring new staff or supplementing the salary of existing staff to focus on serving SRLs;
- performing plain language assessment and remediation of informational materials;
- repurposing courthouse space for SRL computer stations;
- improving signage and materials;

- revamping mediation services;
- launching a text message reminder program or online chat services;
- helping SRLs with appearing remotely for court dates;
- conducting outreach campaigns to the community about court operations;
- unifying circuits with consistent resources across a region; or
- partnering with public libraries and lawyers for Lawyer in the Library programs.

You can read more about previous grant projects in *Illinois Courts Connect* newsletters for [November 2017](#), [November 2018](#), [December 2019](#), [August 2020](#), [July 2021](#), [July 2022](#), [August 2023](#), and [August 2024](#), but note that the grant parameters have changed over time.

Each grant will be for a one-year period from August 1, 2025 to July 31, 2026, and the funds will be paid at the beginning of the grant year. All award amounts are based on the funds which are available for the grant year and the ATJ Commission may not be able to fully fund a project and may award only partial funding. Each applicant may request up to \$40,000. Requests for certain technology-based programs are capped at \$2,500 each including, but not limited to, legal research tools like Westlaw, digital display software, or mobile app maintenance fees.

Grant Requirements & Expectations

Each application for grant funding must identify someone who will be the “Project Lead.” The Project Lead may be anyone working at a courthouse in Illinois who has knowledge of the challenges faced by SRLs, familiarity with court operations and the local legal community, and an interest in improving access to justice. This includes staff or personnel in the offices of chief or presiding judges, appellate clerks, circuit clerks, court law libraries, self-help centers, sheriffs or bailiffs, or other relevant courthouse staff.

Each grant recipient must engage in the following required activities:

- Submit mid-year and year-end reports to the AOIC about project activities, number of individuals served, and grant expenditures;
- Present to the Court Navigator Network about the project;
- Secure a replacement Project Lead from the jurisdiction if the original one is unable to continue work as Project Lead; and
- All requirements listed below for Court Navigator Network members.

➤ Grant Proposal Requirements

Each proposal for grant funds must include three components. The questions are listed below for your assistance in preparing to submit the proposal online via the link or QR code below.

- Section I General Applicant Information
- Section II Program Narrative (including partnership letters of support if applicable)
- Section III Grant Amount Request Information

➤ Grant Award Decision Process & Due Date

Completed grant applications must be submitted before 5:00 pm on **Friday, June 20, 2025** by online application at <https://forms.office.com/g/1YP37kgBQQ> or via this QR code:



All award decisions will be made by the ATJ Commission's Grant Selection Committee. The Committee will review all grant applications and make awards based on several criteria including, but not limited to, demonstrated need, local support, long-term sustainability, impact on SRLs, ability to work collaboratively, and willingness to innovate and think creatively.

The Committee anticipates that the grant recipients will be announced the week of July 15 with grant monies to be disbursed shortly thereafter. The program year will begin August 1, 2025 with orientation taking place later that month.

Court Navigator Network



All grant recipients will automatically be enrolled as members of the Network, but courts can also apply to join the Network without applying for grant funds. Network members share resources and best practices across county lines and judicial circuits to more effectively address access to justice gaps seen throughout the state. Network members identify, develop, and implement new tools and resources in their local courthouses and work with other stakeholders to facilitate better communication and collaboration in addressing these issues. Network members become aware of what their counterparts throughout the state are doing, learn from each other's successes (and missteps), share resources and updates, and provide the best possible service for SRLs. Network members repeatedly report that this cross-jurisdictional information sharing is the most beneficial aspect of the program.

Network members attend in-person (when possible) and remote trainings at the beginning of the grant year and once a month throughout the rest of the year, addressing topics such as information vs. legal advice, making referrals, customer service, implicit bias, assisting people who are dealing with mental illness, plain language, user-centered design, communication/de-escalation, and working with court users who have low literacy levels.

Network Requirements & Expectations

All members of the Court Navigator Network (including Illinois JusticeCorps fellows, Project Leads for grants, and any other members) are expected to:

- Participate in orientation in mid-August, and ongoing monthly trainings on relevant topics;
- Cooperate, coordinate, and collaborate with Network members; and
- Partner with the ATJ Commission, AOIC, and Network members to identify statewide needs and emerging trends and to collaborate on larger scale solutions.

➤ Network Membership Only

Anyone who is interested in joining the Court Navigator Network solely for training and collaboration, without submitting a full proposal for grant funds, should complete the online form at <https://forms.office.com/g/1YP37kgBQQ> (or the QR code above) before 5:00 pm on **Friday, June 20, 2025**.

Questions about the RFP, grants, or Court Navigator Network should be directed to Jill Roberts, Deputy Director, Access to Justice Division, AOIC at jroberts@illinoiscourts.gov. We can brainstorm, discuss proposal ideas, and provide support with the application process.

ATJ Improvement Grant and Court Navigator Network 2025-2026 Sample Questions (must be submitted online as mentioned above)

Section I Applicant's Information

- Judicial Circuit or Appellate District, County served (if multiple counties in a Circuit/District, please list the ones served by Project or state "all"), Chief Judge/Presiding Justice, Presiding Judge (if applicable), Email, Circuit/Appellate Clerk Name, Email
- Project Lead/Court Navigator Network Member Information (if requesting grant funds, this is the person who will attend trainings, oversee the grant project, and report to the ATJ Commission and AOIC. If not requesting funds, this is the person who will attend trainings and participate in the Network)
 - Name, Job Title, Employer, Address, Phone Number, Email Address, What requesting (grants funds & network membership or network only), Will you still work on the project if you are awarded partial or no grant funds?, Any other relevant staff contact information

Section II Program Narrative (including partnership letters of support if applicable)

- Short summary of proposed project or program (1-2 sentences)
- What is your proposed project or program? Please describe the project or program for which you are requesting grant funds, why it is necessary, and how it advances access to justice.
- 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.
- Who will you partner with to achieve these goals? (not applicable to every project). Please describe any proposed partnerships involved in your project. This may include court-based partners (e.g., circuit clerks, chief/presiding judge's office, IL JusticeCorps) and external partners (e.g., legal aid organizations, bar associations, public libraries).
 - If there are any such partnerships, please provide a letter of support from each partner confirming their commitment to the project.
- How will you evaluate the effectiveness of the project? Please include a plan to evaluate the effectiveness of the initiatives. Evaluations should consider the impact on litigants, court staff, and court processes.
- Why are you seeking funding from the ATJ Commission? Please describe how the proposal fits into your current budget, if the funds have been requested from other sources (and the outcome of those requests), how much, if any, of your proposal will you be able to do if you do not receive funds from the ATJ Commission.
- Long Term Sustainability. If applying for additional funding for your current project, please describe any steps you have taken towards developing a sustainable path forward for your current project and the reason for needing additional grant funds. If applying for a new project, please describe your plan for long-term sustainability.

Section III Grant Amount Request

- Budget Summary Narrative including how much grant money the applicant is requesting and how the grant money will be spent. In case we are only able to provide partial funding, please indicate here if something is essential to your proposal or if some things have priority over others.
- List the total amount requested (for example, \$16,000)
- List the breakdown of that request based on the categories listed (Equipment, Furniture, Staff or Volunteer Costs, Technology Programs, Materials, Other). Please follow the examples in each category, like \$10,000 for 2 \$3,000 laptop computers and 1 \$4000 copy machine.