

Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Access to Justice **Reducing Barriers to Meaningful Participation in Court** **Grant Policy**

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I. Background

The Illinois Supreme Court created the Commission on Access to Justice (ATJ Commission) in 2012 to develop policies and programs to reduce barriers to the court system for self-represented court users, court users who do not speak English as a first language, court users with a disability, and other court users who may struggle to utilize the court system to address their legal issue. The Access to Justice Division of the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts (ATJ Division) staffs the ATJ Commission.

In creating the ATJ Commission, the Illinois Supreme Court enshrined its purpose in Rule under [10-100\(a\)](#):

The Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Access to Justice is established to promote, facilitate, and enhance equal access to justice with an emphasis on access to the Illinois civil courts and administrative agencies for all people, particularly the poor and vulnerable. The purpose is to make access to justice a high priority for everyone in the legal system and, to the maximum extent possible, the Commission is intended to complement and collaborate with other entities addressing access to justice issues.

The ATJ Commission's vision for the Illinois Courts, as set forth in its [2023-2028 Strategic Plan](#), is:

An accessible and innovative court system that serves people equitably and empowers them to participate meaningfully in the resolution of their legal issues.

The ATJ Commission recognizes that achieving its mission and vision requires partnership, collaboration, and adaptability. One meaningful way to strengthen partnership, collaboration, and adaptability is the awarding of grant funds in support of projects that advance the ATJ Commission's mission and vision.

II. Grant Program Overview & Parameters

The ATJ Commission has long focused internally on the court system and this grant opportunity turns the attention outward to legal and community partners who can and should be financially supported by the ATJ Commission for their work in reducing barriers to the Illinois courts.

The purpose of this policy is to record the ATJ Commission's process and criteria for awarding grants to organizations seeking funding for a program that will increase a court user's ability to meaningfully participate in the court system. These organizations include administrative



agencies, universities, foundations, legal aid organizations, community-based organizations, and social service organizations.

This policy does not apply to requests for funding from circuit courts, the Appellate Court, or the Supreme Court, as those requests will be reviewed under the policy for the Access to Justice Improvement Grant Program. It also does not apply to programs where the ATJ Division staff have a central role in administering the program.

Proposals for one year or multi-year grants will be considered. Each grant will be for one year or a multi-year period, as appropriate, with the funds being paid at the beginning of the grant period. Each grant recipient must enter into a Grant Agreement with the ATJ Commission, which will detail important features of the grant award such as constraints on spending, reporting requirements, and fund disbursement.

III. Grant Eligibility, Requirements, and Expectations

Each application for grant funding must be submitted by a point person at an administrative agency, university, foundation, legal aid organization, community-based organization, or social service organization.

Each grant recipient is expected to:

- Submit any requested reports to the ATJ Division about project activities, opportunities and challenges, number of individuals served, and grant expenditures;
- Communicate with the ATJ Division of any changes in the project or staffing.

The ATJ Commission and Division will:

- Provide support to the grant point person to further the Grant Purpose; and
- Disburse funds to support the Grantee upon execution by the parties of a Grant Agreement.

IV. Application Process

To be responsive to needs, the ATJ Commission will accept proposals once per year. A Request for Proposals (RFP), explaining the grant parameters, eligibility, requirements, and expectations, based on what is included in this grant policy, will be posted on the ATJ Commission's and the Illinois Courts' website.

Each proposal for grant funds must include the following components:

- Section I Application Form
- Section II Program Narrative (including partnership letters of support if applicable)
- Section III Grant Amount Request

More information, including the application form, is included in the annual RFP. The proposals shall be submitted electronically by email, as explained in the RFP, by the deadline stated.

V. Proposal Review & Evaluation Process

The Reducing Barriers to Meaningful Participation in Court Grants are awarded through a comprehensive screening and evaluation process. All award decisions will be made by the ATJ Commission's Reducing Barriers to Meaningful Participation in Court Grant Selection Committee. The Committee will review all grant applications and make awards based on the information contained in the application looking at several criteria including:

Project Requirements: Proposed projects must have a clear connection to ATJ Commission's mission and duties under [Illinois Supreme Court Rule 10-100](#) and its [current strategic plan](#) and the goal of connecting self-represented court users who are low-income, don't speak English as a first language, are disabled, or are otherwise vulnerable (such as elderly adults, people of color, native Americans and veterans) with either (or both):

1. self-help resources, legal advice, and/or legal representation and/or
2. limited scope representation services or provide legal information to an area of the state that is considered a legal desert.

Budget and Timeline: Proposals must include a budget detailing how grant funds will be expended and a realistic project timeline.

Other Funding Opportunities: Proposals must contain a statement which explains why it is seeking a grant award from the ATJ Commission in addition to, or rather than from, other viable sources. Our state has a strong legal community and forward-thinking justice funders. Because the ATJ Commission's funding is limited and there are opportunities for grant awards from other sources, each applicant must address whether the proposal fits the criteria for other funding opportunities such as through The Chicago Bar Foundation, Illinois Bar Foundation, Illinois Equal Justice Foundation, and Lawyers Trust Fund of Illinois, public sources of funding, or private foundations. If it does fit the criteria, the applicant must explain why it is seeking a grant award from the ATJ Commission.

VI. Funding

These grants are funded by the ATJ Commission. The ATJ Commission is funded via publication royalties, *pro hac vice* fees, and attorney registration fees. No government funds are used for the grants. Each year, the ATJ Commission's budget will include a line item for these grant awards, as funds allow. Any unused grant funds from one program year's budget may be carried over to the following program year's budget to be used for grant funds.

All grant awards will be based on availability of funds and the criteria mentioned above. The ATJ Commission may fully or partially fund a project or decline to fund a project. Grants will be paid by check or direct deposit to the person or entity designated by the recipient after selection as a grantee.