



Request for Proposals

Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Access to Justice

Access to Justice Improvement Grant and Court Navigator Network

2026-2027

Proposals Due July 10, 2026

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, clerk's offices, and other courthouse staff 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 Grant can be used for any project or need that creates, expands, or improves programs which enhance access to our courts particularly for litigants facing barriers because they are self-represented, dealing with financial burdens, or experiencing language barriers, while addressing issues of diversity and inclusion.

This excludes projects covered by the Disability Access 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 assessments and updating informational materials;
- Repurposing courthouse spaces for SRL computer stations;
- Improving signage and materials;
- Revamping mediation services for SRLs;
- Launching text message reminder programs or online chat services;

- Helping SRLs access remote court services like appearing remotely for court dates or electronically filing court documents;
- Conducting community outreach campaigns to educate about court operations and resources;
- Unifying circuits with consistent resources across a region;
- Partnering with public libraries and lawyers for Lawyer in the Library programs; or
- Offsetting costs related to attending the national Access to Justice Network conference in Cincinnati in October 2026 (a *maximum* reimbursement of \$1,000 per attendee will be awarded subject to funding availability).

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](#), [August 2024](#); and [August 2025](#), but note that the grant parameters have changed over time.

Each grant will be for a one-year period from September 1, 2026, to August 31, 2027, and the funds will be paid at the beginning of the grant year. All award amounts are based on available funds. 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, mobile app maintenance fees, or text message reminder programs. Preference will be given to projects or programs not previously funded for three or more grant program years when considering ongoing maintenance costs.

Grant Requirements & Expectations

Each application for grant funding must identify a person 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 and 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 Access to Justice Division of the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts (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
- Comply with 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, July 10, 2026, by online application at ilcourts.info/26-rfp-atj-improvement 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 and likelihood of continuing independent of ATJ Improvement Grant funding, impact on SRLs, ability to work collaboratively, and willingness to innovate and think creatively.

The Committee anticipates announcing grant awards during the week of August 17 with grant monies to be disbursed shortly thereafter. The program year will begin September 1, 2026, 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 to address 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 trainings remotely and in-person (when applicable and possible) 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- to late-September, 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 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 ilcourts.info/26-rfp-atj-improvement (or the QR code above) before 5:00 pm on Friday, July 10, 2026.

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



2026-2027 ATJ Improvement Grant and Court Navigator Network List of Questions
(Answers must be submitted online at ilcourts.info/26-rfp-atj-improvement.)

Section I General Applicant Information

- Judicial Circuit or Appellate District, County served (if multiple counties in a Circuit/District, please list the ones served 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 and present at 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, Any other relevant staff contact information
- What you are requesting (grants funds & network membership or network only)?

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

- Short summary of proposed project or program (1-2 sentences)
- Will you still work on the project if you are awarded partial or no grant funds?
- 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 or program. 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 or program.
- How will you evaluate the effectiveness of the project or program? 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 or ongoing 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. Please include how much grant money you are requesting and how it 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 \$4,000 copy machine.