



# Request for Proposals

## Access to Justice Improvement Grant and Court Navigator Network Membership 2023-2024

*Proposals Due June 26, 2023*

### Background Information

In 2012, the Illinois Supreme Court established the Commission on Access to Justice (ATJ Commission) to promote, facilitate, and enhance equal access to justice. To that end, under the leadership of the Supreme Court, the ATJ Commission and the Access to Justice Division of the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts (AOIC ATJ Division) focus on developing improvements, resources, and programs within the judicial system to assist self-represented litigants (SRLs) with accessing our courts; assisting legal aid and pro bono lawyers in their representation of their clients; and providing support for the judiciary and other court personnel in ensuring justice for all.

The core goal of the ATJ Commission and the AOIC ATJ Division is to help make the entire judicial system fairer and more efficient for court users, judges, circuit clerks, court personnel, and all other stakeholders. To do that, the ATJ Commission and the AOIC ATJ Division have worked on a number of statewide initiatives to assist SRLs and the judges and court staff who serve them. However, the ATJ Commission and the AOIC also recognize that in many instances, a top-down approach will not work—especially given the size and diversity of Illinois. So, local programs are essential.

### Program Overview

The goal of this program is twofold. The first is to provide funds to jurisdictions so that they are able to develop access to justice initiatives locally (the ATJ Improvement Grant). The second is to offer training and support to people working at courthouses throughout the state who assist 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 the Self-Represented Litigant Coordinator (Coordinator) grant program (now renamed ATJ Improvement Grant program). At the urging of the Illinois Supreme Court's Strategic Agenda, it is our mission to maintain a Network with at least one member in every Judicial Circuit in the state.

Courts and Clerk's Offices may apply to participate in the Network for the training and collaboration segment only or may also apply for grant funds (up to \$30,000) to cover expenses related to the development, modification, or expansion of resources and services to improve access to justice. If a grant application is submitted on behalf of a Circuit with multiple counties, please indicate which counties will be served on the application form provided below in Section I. The award cap of \$30,000 may be lifted based on the availability of funds. Each grant will be for a one-year period from August 1, 2023-July 31, 2024, and the funds will be paid at the beginning of the grant year.

## (1) ATJ Improvement Grant

The ATJ Improvement Grants can be used for anything that advances access to justice, diversity, equity, inclusion, or procedural fairness, in your courthouse. The needs of each local courthouse are unique, so the projects that are funded are as well. Examples of potential projects include, but are not limited to:

- buying paper, ink, and/or printers to print statewide forms;
- getting plain language and accessibility assessments of informational materials;
- repurposing courthouse space for SRL computer stations;
- improving signage materials;
- creating early resolution or online dispute resolution<sup>1</sup> programs to resolve cases faster;
- 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 legal aid or other court stakeholders to expand services to court users.

You can read more about the previous grantees in *Illinois Courts Connect* newsletters for [November 2017](#), [November 2018](#), [December 2019](#), [August 2020](#), [July 2021](#), and [July 2022](#).

## (2) 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.

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<sup>1</sup> Previously, the ATJ Commission issued a separate request for proposals to plan and execute online dispute resolution (ODR) programs. To streamline the process, the ODR Grant Program has been consolidated into this RFP and the ATJ Improvement Grant may be used for ODR projects. ATJ division staff may have additional follow-up questions for ATJ Improvement Grant applications that seek to develop and launch an ODR program and may be in touch during the grant selection process. Furthermore, the separate process for the AOIC's approval of ODR programs prior to launch remains, and ATJ division staff will be available to assist with these efforts.

## Requirements & Expectations

### (1) ATJ Improvement Grant

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 a demonstrated 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 quarterly reports to the AOIC about project activities, opportunities and challenges, number of individuals served, and grant expenditures;
- Present to the Court Navigator Network about the project; and
- Secure a replacement Project Lead from the jurisdiction if the original one is unable to continue work as Project Lead.

#### ➤ Grant Proposal Requirements

Each proposal for grant funds must include the following three components:

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

More information on each section is provided below.

#### ➤ Grant Award Decision Process & Due Date

Completed grant applications must be submitted before 5:00 pm on **June 26, 2023** by email to Jill Roberts, Deputy Director, Access to Justice Division, AOIC at [jroberts@illinoiscourts.gov](mailto:jroberts@illinoiscourts.gov). 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 demonstrated need, local support, 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 17, 2023 with grant monies to be disbursed shortly thereafter. Grants will be paid by check to the person or entity designated by the recipient after selection. The program year will begin August 1, 2023 with orientation taking place later that month.

### (2) Court Navigator Network

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-person or virtual), tentatively scheduled for the week of August 14, 2023, and ongoing monthly virtual trainings on relevant topics;
- Cooperate, coordinate, and collaborate with Network members;

- Partner with the ATJ Commission, AOIC, and Network members to identify statewide needs and emerging trends and to collaborate on larger scale solutions; and
- Secure a replacement representative from the jurisdiction if the original member is unable to continue work as a Network member;

### **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 submit Section I of the application only by email to Jill Roberts, Deputy Director, Access to Justice Division, AOIC at [jroberts@illinoiscourts.gov](mailto:jroberts@illinoiscourts.gov) before 5:00pm on **June 26, 2023**.

*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](mailto:jroberts@illinoiscourts.gov). We can brainstorm, discuss proposal ideas, and provide support with the application process.*

## Section I – Application Form ATJ Improvement Grant and Court Navigator Network 2023-2024

### Applicant Jurisdiction Information

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Judicial Circuit/Appellate District   |  |
| County served (if multiple counties in a Circuit/District, please list each one that will be served by Project) |  |
| Chief Judge/Presiding Justice   |  |
| Presiding Judge (if applicable)   |  |
| Circuit/Appellate Clerk Name  |  |

### 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)

|   |  |               |  |
|---|--|---------------|--|
| Name  |  |               |  |
| Job Title   |  |               |  |
| Employer  |  |               |  |
| Street Address  |  |               |  |
| City, State, Zip Code   |  |               |  |
| Phone Number  |  | Email Address |  |
| Request   | <input type="checkbox"/> Grant funds & Network membership <input type="checkbox"/> Network only* |               |  |
| <i>(If seeking grant funds) Will you still work on the project if you are awarded partial or no grant funds?</i>                                |  |               | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| <i>(If seeking grant funds) Are you interested in participating in the Court Navigator Network even if you are not awarded any grant funds?</i> |  |               | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |

\*If you are requesting to participate in the Network without requesting grant funds, you only need to complete this section of the application.

### Additional Court Navigator Network Member Information (if additional staff members should be included on communications about the Network, please include their information here. If additional space is needed, please submit on an additional page)

|                       |  |               |  |
|-----------------------|--|---------------|--|
| Name                  |  |               |  |
| Job Title             |  |               |  |
| Employer              |  |               |  |
| Street Address        |  |               |  |
| City, State, Zip Code |  |               |  |
| Phone Number          |  | Email Address |  |

**Section II - Program Narrative ATJ Improvement Grant 2023-2024** Please answer each of the following prompts:

**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.

## Section II – continued

**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 both litigants and court staff.

***For current grant fund recipients only, 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.

### Section III – Grant Amount Request

Please provide a budget summary and itemized chart below explaining (1) how much grant money the applicant is requesting (up to \$30,000) and (2) how the grant money will be spent. The grant money may include salary stipends for the Project Lead or other relevant staff, but may not be used primarily for salary. Instead, the majority of grant funds should be used to cover expenses related to programmatic needs. Please note that the ATJ Commission may not be able to fully fund a project and may award only partial funding.

Please fill in this 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 printers), enter Printer, \$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.

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