

Request for Proposal 2027 Disability Access Grant Proposals Due October 23, 2026

I. Grant Opportunity Overview

Application period: September 18 through October 23, 2026

Application deadline: October 23, 2026, at 5:00 p.m. Central Time

Anticipated award announcement: December 2026

Grant period: January 1 through December 31, 2027

Capped award amount: \$40,000

Total available funding: \$400,000

Submission method: Online application portal*, linked [here](#).

***Note:** if you require assistance or reasonable accommodations to complete or submit the application, including alternatives to using Google Forms, please contact August Hieber at ahieber@illinoiscourts.gov to discuss available, alternative options.

II. Background Information

Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the Illinois Human Rights Act (IHRA), and the [Illinois Supreme Court Policy on Access for People with Disabilities](#) (Policy) are examples of comprehensive civil rights laws and guidance 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, the Policy, and corresponding laws and regulations, the Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Access to Justice (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 modifications, other courts may want to improve accessibility but lack the funding to realize their goals.

To forward the objective of equal access to court for people with disabilities, 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 who need more funding to promote dignity, advance accessibility, and reduce barriers to equal access to courts for people with disabilities.

III. Program Goals and Parameters

The Disability Access Committee of the ATJ Commission (Committee) issues this request for proposals for the 2027 Disability Access Grant.

The Disability Access Grant has three goals:

1. **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 modifications as per the requirements of the Policy, the ADA, and the IHRA;

2. **To promote respect and dignity** for people with disabilities by fostering a court environment where *all* people, both individuals with disabilities and without disabilities, are treated with dignity, respect, and courtesy; and
3. **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 for people with disabilities.

The Disability Access Grant can be used for activities or projects that advance these goals and address barriers to equal access to court for people with disabilities, with some limitations. Grant funds for projects are meant to support, enhance, or expand existing projects, or to create new or sustainably focused pilot projects that promote or enhance equal access for people with disabilities.

In 2026, the ATJ Commission received 35 applications and fully or partially funded 26 grantees. The average award amount was \$15,384, with the lowest award at \$1,000 and the highest at \$40,000, which was the capped award amount for 2026. For 2027, the total available funding for this grant is \$400,000; applicants may request up to \$40,000.

Some projects, especially smaller ones, may be fully funded, while larger projects may be partially funded; applicants are encouraged to apply for additional grants, such as the Illinois Supreme Court Technology Modernization Request Program (*anticipated October 2026*) by partnering with their local Chief Judge's Office, or to work with their local county boards and building commissions to receive matching funds to otherwise ensure larger projects are adequately resourced.

Examples of activities or projects that address barriers to equal access for people with disabilities that may be funded fully or partially include, **but are not limited to**:

- Installing or repairing ramps in court facilities to ensure accessibility.
- Remodeling jury boxes, witness stands, and restrooms to ensure accessibility.
 - **Note:** making one change to a primary function area means the entire primary function area and the path to it must be brought up to the latest accessibility code standards. For example, a courtroom is a single primary function area with several elements; changing the witness stand to make it more accessible requires changing the jury box, gallery, bench, and other features to bring it all up to the latest code. Make sure you have a plan to address these other needs in due course if they are not part of the same project.
- Conducting comprehensive accessibility audits or assessments of court buildings with qualified vendors to help identify and prioritize areas needing improvement, to monitor the effectiveness of existing disability accessibility measures, and to make informed adjustments towards further accessible improvements.
- Providing funding for Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) for court proceedings.

- Funding a consultant or community partner to lead 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 implementing signage and physical court forms for public use in accessible formats, such as large print and Braille.
 - **Note:** *developing court-created digital content in electronic formats that are compatible with assistive technology may be funded through the Illinois Supreme Court Technology Modernization Request Program.*
- Partnering with a disability advocacy organization to provide training for court staff on respect, dignity, support, and customer service for people with disabilities.
- 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.
- Conducting user testing or feedback sessions with local disability advocacy organizations and people with disabilities to ensure continuous feedback and improvement of accessibility measures and court resources.
- Accessible chairs **may** be approved on a **limited, case-by-case basis**. Requests for chairs must include at least two vendor quotes or estimates and must describe in the Project Narrative or Budget Summary the selected product, explain its intended use, describe the proposed accessibility improvements, and justify the cost.

While the grant may be used for many activities or projects that address barriers to equal access for people with disabilities, certain activities will **not** be funded:

- Installing *new* elevators or automatic doors (though *existing* elevator or door maintenance and accessibility enhancements may be funded).
- Purchasing and providing assistive listening devices and other communication technologies (as these may be provided through the ATJ Commission's Language Access Program).
- Digital improvements, such as developing court-created digital content in electronic formats that are compatible with assistive technology, redesigning court websites and mobile applications to ensure they comply with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) and are compatible with assistive technologies or 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 (as this may be funded through the Illinois Supreme Court Technology Modernization Request Program).
- Capital improvements (e.g., elevator replacement or installation, sidewalks, or a complete courthouse renovation) or construction projects not supporting the primary function of the court (e.g., water fountains or non-essential pathways or routes); and,
 - **Applications seeking funding for capital improvements may request support for those components of a broader project that are focused on providing accessibility**, as the Disability Access Grant cannot fully fund large-scale

construction or structural renovation projects. Collaboration with other responsible entities—such as county boards, building commissions, or other local partners—is strongly encouraged. If a request is part of a larger project, requestors should give this context in their application.

- Training from the ATJ Commission and Access to Justice Division of the Administrative Office of Illinois Courts (ATJ Division). Training in disability access for staff is always available through the Committee and ATJ Division staff for free or at a very minimal charge. ***Other types of training involving other presenters may be funded through the grant.***
 - If you would like a training tailored to your court’s needs, please contact August Hieber at ahieber@illinoiscourts.gov.

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 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.

IV. Grant Eligibility, Proposal Requirements, and Expectations

A. Eligibility

Each application for grant funding must be submitted in partnership with the local Court Disability Coordinator (CDC), who must act as the “Grant Liaison”, by an Illinois:

- Court or court system,
- Circuit or reviewing court clerk’s office,
- Law library,
- Sheriff’s office,
- Bailiff’s office,
- State’s attorney’s office, or a
- Public defender’s office.

Each eligible office or entity may submit one application per grant cycle. Multiple applications serving the same courthouse must identify any overlapping activities and explain how the projects will be coordinated.

Note: *The applicant’s associated CDC should ordinarily serve as the Grant Liaison. If the CDC cannot serve, the applicant may designate another responsible employee with the approval of the primary decisionmaker for the entity applying for funding (e.g., the Chief or Presiding judge of a court, the elected Clerk of a clerk’s office, an Executive Director of a law library, etc.), indicated in the required letter of support (see Section V: Letter(s) of Support). The application must still identify the CDC and explain why the alternate Grant Liaison is proposed.*

B. Grant Liaison Expectations

The Grant Liaison’s role is to implement the Disability Access Grant. Grant Liaisons shall:

- Serve as the primary contact for the grant application, coordinating between the applicant jurisdiction and the ATJ Commission,
- Oversee implementation of the funded project or activity, ensuring compliance with grant requirements and accessibility standards,
- Attend a midpoint progress meeting on project activities, including updates, challenges, and grant expenditures,
- Submit a final report, which shall include:
 - Final project status,
 - Description of project impact and projected sustainability,
 - Encountered barriers and solutions,
 - Proof of total grant expenditures, such as invoices, proof of payment, and/or photographs, if applicable, and
- Facilitate collaboration with any applicable court departments, community partners, and people with disabilities to meet stated project goals.

C. Proposal Requirements

Proposals must contain the following **five** sections:

- **Section I:** Applicant Jurisdiction Information
- **Section II:** Court Disability Coordinator Grant Liaison Information
- **Section III:** Program Narrative
- **Section IV:** Grant Amount Requested and Proposed Project Budget Summary
- **Section V:** Letter(s) of Support

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

- *Specific, demonstrable examples* describing how the award will support a new or existing project or activity that addresses accessibility barriers for people with disabilities,
- *Project design*, including evidence of efficacy and project readiness, compliance with applicable accessibility requirements under the ADA, the IHRA, and the Policy, responsiveness to the accessibility needs of people with disabilities, both generally and within the applicant's community, and sustainability.
- *Local support for the grant activities*, including examples of collaborative, successful past projects with relevant stakeholders addressing accessibility, if available, and required letters of support, including a letter of support from the Chief or Presiding judge of the relevant jurisdiction **and** letter from each listed partner confirming their commitment to the project, including any financial commitments if partial funding or funds matching those committed by other partners is requested,
- *Evidence of collaboration* will be viewed favorably, particularly where such coordination demonstrates shared investment, feasibility, and long-term sustainability of the proposed accessibility improvement,

- *Evidence of the practicality of the project or activity being completed*, including details of feasibility in the Program Narrative, a description of identified contractor expertise, if applicable, and other optional, accessibility-related assessments or estimates, and
- *Evidence of cost comparison and budget reasonableness*, demonstrating a good-faith effort to compare prices and explain why specific vendors or products were selected. While detailed cost comparisons will strengthen an application, courts will not be penalized if multiple quotes or granular pricing information are not reasonably obtainable. Reviewers will consider whether the applicant has provided sufficient context to understand the basis for the budget request.

D. Grant Expectations

Each grant recipient is expected to:

- Implement the project or activity proposed in the application;
- Agree to attend a midpoint progress meeting, submit a final report (*see Grant Liaison Expectations*), and provide updates 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, 2027);
- 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; and,
- Seek written permission (via email or letter) from the ATJ Division to utilize funds *beyond the end of the grant year*, should the Grant Recipient be unable to use the full award by the end of the grant period (January 1 - December 31, 2027), or to *use grant funds* for purposes other than those specified in the Grant Agreement, should circumstances prevent their use according to the original grant purpose.
 - Should either request be granted by the ATJ Division, the Grant Recipient shall return any funds not used by the end of the grant period by February 1, 2028.

V. Grant Application Process: Applications Accepted 9/18/26 to 10/23/26

Applications shall be accepted between **September 18 and October 23, 2026**. Completed applications must be submitted through the online application no later than 5:00 p.m. CT on Friday, October 23, 2026. The application is available as a Google Form [HERE](#).



Note: if you require assistance or reasonable accommodations to complete or submit the application, including alternatives to using Google Forms, please contact August Hieber at ahieber@illinoiscourts.gov to discuss available, alternative options.

Each grant will be for a one-year period from January 1 - December 31, 2027, 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. Unspent funds may not be carried forward without prior written approval from the ATJ Division. A recipient seeking an extension must submit a written request before the end of the grant period identifying the unobligated balance, reason for the delay, revised completion date, and proposed use of the remaining funds. Approval is discretionary and subject to continued fund availability.

The Committee anticipates that the grant recipients will be announced in early December 2026.

Grant funds will be paid to the entity or approved fiscal agent identified in the application. Funds will not be paid directly to an individual. The recipient is responsible for complying with applicable local fiscal, procurement, and audit requirements.

The application process, review, and evaluation are conducted by a subcommittee of the 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, and the grant may not be offered every year.

2027 Disability Access Grant Questions

(Responses must be submitted online as described above)

I. Section I: Applicant Jurisdiction Information

- *Enter information about your jurisdiction.*
 - Judicial Circuit/Reviewing Court, county served (if multiple counties in a Circuit/District, please list the ones served by the Project or state “all”), Chief Judge, Presiding Judge (if applicable)

II. Section II: Court Disability Coordinator/Grant Liaison Information

- *Enter information about the Grant Liaison.*
 - CDC/Grant Liaison name, job title, employer, street address, city, state, zip code, phone number, email address
 - *The applicant’s associated Court Disability Coordinator (CDC) should ordinarily serve as the Grant Liaison. If the CDC cannot serve, the applicant may designate another responsible employee with the approval of the primary decisionmaker for the entity applying for funding (e.g., the Chief or Presiding judge of a court, the elected Clerk of a clerk’s office, an Executive Director of a law library, etc.), indicated in the required letter of support (see Section V: Letter(s) of Support). The application must still identify the CDC and explain why the alternate Grant Liaison is proposed.*

III. Section III: Program Narrative

- *Please answer the following questions.*
 - **What is your proposed project or program?** Describe the project/program for which you are requesting grant funds.
 - **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 brief description of the short-term efficacy **and** the long-term sustainability of the project or activities, recognizing that Disability Access Grant awards are bridge grants designed to ensure independent long-term compliance with the ADA, the IHRA, and the Policy.
 - **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, etc.) and external partners (e.g., county boards, local building commissions, legal aid organizations, bar associations, public libraries, disability advocacy organizations, local centers for independent living (CILs)).
 - **How will you evaluate the effectiveness of the project?** Please include a plan to evaluate or measure the effectiveness of the initiatives. How will you know if

your project is successful? Evaluations should consider the impact on litigants, court staff, court processes, and any other groups.

- **Provide a brief, 1-2 sentence summary of your proposed project.**

IV. Section IV: Grant Amount Requested and Proposed Project Budget

- *Grant Amount Requested and Proposed Project Budget: General Considerations*
 - Please provide a budget request explaining (1) how much grant money you are requesting and (2) how the grant money will be spent.
 - Please note that the ATJ Commission may not be able to fully fund a project and may award only partial funding.
 - Applications will be considered more favorably when the Budget Summary provides *clear detail about anticipated expenses* and demonstrates a *good-faith effort to evaluate costs*.
 - After the summary, please list the total amount requested and then an itemized accounting breaking down that request based on the categories listed below (if something doesn't fall in a category, please explain the item and costs). Please follow the examples in each category.
 - Grant funds may only be used to cover expenses related to programmatic needs and are not to be used for salary, bonuses, or stipends paid to existing court or county employees. Grant funds may be used for reasonable fees paid to qualified contractors, consultants, trainers, and community partners when those services are included in the approved project budget.
- *Budget Summary*
 - A strong Budget Summary should:
 - Include **at least one** quote or estimate from a vendor, contractor, or service provider, and where possible, more than one quote is strongly encouraged.
 - Provide cost comparison or price context, such as a brief statement describing alternative vendors, publicly available pricing, or justification for the selected vendor.
 - While *multiple quotes are not required*, submitting *more than one quote* strengthens the application by demonstrating that the applicant explored pricing options.
 - Courts will not be penalized for the absence of detailed comparison where such detail is not reasonably obtainable; however, providing additional information, quotes, or explanations will be treated as helpful guidance that strengthen applications. Detail serves to help reviewers better understand the need, context, and appropriateness of the request.
 - **If you have not obtained more than one quote, please briefly explain why.** Your explanation may address factors such as vendor

availability, geographic constraints, budget limitations, procurement rules, or other barriers.

- Demonstrate reasonableness. The Commission will review the scope and scale of the proposed purchases in relation to the overall grant amount.
- Applicants should demonstrate a good-faith effort to explore multiple pricing options where possible, provide meaningful context about cost reasonableness and budget considerations and to ensure the budget reflects accurate and appropriate costs.

- *Budget Categories*

- **Category #1: Architectural Improvements** (installing ramps, remodeling jury boxes, witness stands, galleries, physical courthouse elements, elevator maintenance). List the total amount for the category and then list the quantity and price for each item (e.g., \$10,000 for two \$3,000 ramps and one \$4000 witness stand remodel)
- **Category #2: Accessibility Audits or Surveys** (hiring a qualified contractor or other stakeholder to assess accessibility issues). List the total amount for the category and then list the quantity and price for each item (e.g., \$500 for one survey)
- **Category #3: Communication Access** (paying for Communication Access Real Time Transcription (CART), or assisted or facilitated communication experts, such as those used by litigants with disabilities affecting communication, such as autism, cerebral palsy, Multiple Sclerosis (MS), traumatic brain injuries, or Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)). List the total amount for the category and then list the quantity and price for each item (e.g., \$400 for two hours of CART services at \$200 per hour)
- **Category #4: Community Feedback** (conducting user testing, user feedback, or listening sessions with local disability advocacy organizations and people with disabilities). List the total amount for the category and then list the quantity and price for each item (e.g., \$3000 for two \$1500 listening sessions)
- **Category #5: Resources for People with Disabilities** (implementing large print signage, transcribing court forms into large print or Braille, developing resources or educational programs for people with disabilities going to court). List the total amount for the category and then list the quantity and price for each item (e.g., \$1000 for one \$1000 Braille transcription of a court file)
- **Other** (anything else not previously encompassed by a category). List the total amount for the category and then list the quantity and price for each item (\$10,000 for training with two local disability advocacy groups, \$5,000 for one training on language access for deaf, deafblind, and hard-of-hearing people at in court and \$5,000 for a training about responsiveness for litigants with mental illness)

- *Grand total amount of grant request*

V. Section V: Letter(s) of Support

- You **must** provide a letter of support from:

- A primary official representing your entity (e.g., the Chief or Presiding judge of a court, the elected Clerk of a clerk's office, an Executive Director of a law library, etc.),
 - Any additional decision-making representative(s) whose participation is necessary to approve and implement the project (e.g., county boards, sheriff's offices who oversee physical court facilities, etc.), AND
 - Any partners making financial commitments, if partial funding or funds matching those committed by the partner are requested in the application.
- We strongly recommend proposals include letters from:
 - Other listed partners, and
 - Organizations representing people with disabilities, or from individuals with disabilities.
- These letters strengthen an application and help reviewers understand the depth of collaboration behind the proposed project. While letters are required, the ATJ Division recognizes that some applicants may face barriers in securing them. Applicants who encounter difficulties should contact August Hieber at ahieber@illinoiscourts.gov for assistance facilitating conversations and obtaining needed support.
- Lack of letters due to documented barriers will not negatively impact an applicant's scoring or competitiveness.