

## Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Access to Justice Disability Accessibility Improvement Grant Grant Policy

### I. Background

In 2012, the Illinois Supreme Court established the Commission on Access to Justice (ATJ Commission) to promote, facilitate, and enhance equal access to justice by developing policies and programs to reduce barriers to the court system. The Access to Justice Division of the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts staffs the ATJ Commission (ATJ Division).

Under the principle of equal access stated in the [ATJ Commission's 2023-2028 Strategic Plan](#):

Court users should have access to justice through full participation in the judicial process, regardless of their circumstances, socioeconomic status, English language proficiency, cultural background, *disability status*, or legal representation status.

Recognizing the critical need to collaboratively examine access to justice issues for people with disabilities, the ATJ Commission received Supreme Court approval to form a new Disability Access Committee (Committee) in 2022. The Committee, comprised of disability access and advocacy leaders across the state with diverse backgrounds and experience, adopted the mission "to promote equal access to the court system for people with disabilities by partnering with the disability community and by engaging all stakeholders, from the community to the courtroom, to identify and address barriers to the court and legal process."

In 2024, the Supreme Court approved a revised [Illinois Supreme Court Policy on Access for People with Disabilities](#) (Policy) with significant amendments suggested by the Committee. The Policy states:

The Supreme Court of Illinois (Court) is committed to ensuring equal access to all court facilities, hearings and proceedings, activities, services, communications, and programs (collectively referred to as court activities) for people with disabilities and to maintaining an environment in which all people, including those with disabilities, are treated with dignity, respect, and courtesy.

Further:



It is the policy of the Court to ensure people with disabilities have full and equal access to participate in court activities and receive accommodations consistent with the requirements of Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Illinois Human Rights Act (IHRA). This policy applies to all levels of Illinois state courts, including Circuit Courts, the Appellate Court, and the Supreme Court. Courts will provide, free of charge, physical access, reasonable accommodations, accessibility aids, and services to ensure that people with disabilities have an equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from any court activities.

As reflected in the Policy, which applies to all court users, lawyers, jurors, court observers, and their companions and family members, people with disabilities are members of our communities. They engage with all aspects of our legal system, live in every county, and utilize every courthouse in Illinois. Disability access is a statewide concern for all Illinois courts.

While all courts must address these issues, the ATJ Commission recognizes that 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 accommodations, others may want to improve accessibility but lack the funding to realize their goals.

To forward the ATJ Commission and Committee's purpose, and to support courts in complying with the Policy, the ADA, and the IHRA, the ATJ Commission will award grant funds in support of projects or activities from local courts that advance accessibility and reduce barriers to equal access to courts for people with disabilities.

## **II. Grant Program Overview**

The purpose of this Policy is to record and state the ATJ Commission's process and criteria for awarding grants to public entities seeking funding for programs that will promote equal access to the court system for people with disabilities. Grant recipients must be a:

- Court or court system,
- Clerk's office,
- Sheriff or bailiff's office,
- State's attorney's office, or
- Public defender's office.

Requests for funding through the Disability Access Improvement Grant Program *must* directly address accessibility barriers for people with disabilities participating in court activities, which include, but are not limited to, access to all court facilities, hearings and proceedings, services, communications, and programs. Recognizing that, while projects that address disability accessibility will promote accessibility for all, this policy does not

apply to general requests for funding that promote accessibility for all court users, as those requests will be reviewed under the policy for the Access to Justice Improvement Grant Program.

Proposals for one-year grants will be considered.

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 Parameters**

The Disability Access Improvement Grant can be used for any activity or project that addresses a barrier to equal access to court for people with disabilities. Grant funds for projects are meant to support, enhance, expand, or create projects that address barriers to equal access at court for people with disabilities, which may include, but are not limited to inaccessible physical elements, communication barriers, and challenges understanding case proceedings or processes.

The needs of each applicant for grant funding are unique and particularized to the needs of the surrounding community; projects or activities that are funded will also be distinct. Grant funds may be used to enhance existing projects and activities or may be used for new or pilot projects.

The ATJ Commission encourages creativity and innovation, informed by the individualized needs of people with disabilities served by the grant recipient. To this end, the ATJ Commission encourages applications that are informed by qualitative or quantitative data demonstrating the need, the project or activity, and the accessibility barrier that will be addressed. Examples of helpful data include surveys, statistics, reports, listening or feedback sessions, town halls, or other examples of public input.

The ATJ Commission also 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, Requirements, and Expectations**

Each application for grant funding must be submitted by an Illinois:

- Court or court system,
- Clerk's office,
- Sheriff or bailiff's office,
- State's attorney's office, or
- Public defender's office.

Applications 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 people with disabilities, familiarity with court operations and the local legal community, and an interest in reducing barriers to equal access to court activities for people with disabilities. 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’ offices, state’s attorney’s offices, public defender’s offices, or other relevant courthouse offices.

The court-appointed Court Disability Coordinator (CDC) may serve as the Project Lead. If the CDC is not the Project Lead, the application must also identify and include a short statement from the CDC for the local courthouse where the project or activity will take place.<sup>1</sup>

Each grant recipient is expected to:

- Agree to submit regular reports, as requested, to the AOIC ATJ Division about project activities, opportunities and challenges, number of individuals served (if applicable), and grant expenditures,
- Secure a replacement Project Lead from the jurisdiction if the original one is unable to continue work as Project Lead,
- Cooperate, coordinate, and collaborate with court departments, offices, communities, and people with disabilities, and
- Periodically partner with the ATJ Commission, Committee, AOIC, and other grant recipients to share data and information to better identify statewide needs, emerging trends, and create innovative solutions.

The ATJ Commission will:

- Meet regularly with grant recipients to provide guidance, directly or by providing technical assistance referrals to the Illinois Attorney General Disability Rights Bureau, to guide grant recipients throughout the implementation of the project or activity,
- Provide support to the Project Lead to further the Grant Purpose, and
- Disburse funds to support Grantee upon execution by the parties of a Grant Agreement.

More information, including the application form, will be included in the annual Request for Proposals (RFP). The proposals shall be submitted electronically by email as explained in the RFP by the deadline stated.

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<sup>1</sup> Court Disability Coordinator contact information can be found on court pages listed on the [Illinois Supreme Court’s directory](#) and on signage posted at each court. For more information, please see [Exhibit A of the Policy](#), attached.

## **V. Application Process**

To be responsive to needs, the ATJ Commission will accept proposals once per year, from September 1 – September 30. Each grant will be for a one-year period from January 1 - December 31, 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 granting reasonable accommodation requests and programs that will promote equal access to the court system for people with disabilities. The requested funds may be spent over a one-year period. Funds left over after the one-year period may be rolled over into the next one-year period. The RFP explaining the grant parameters, eligibility, requirements, and expectations will be posted on the ATJ Commission's and the Illinois Courts' website. The Disability Accessibility Improvement Grant Review Subcommittee will periodically review and update the Request for Proposals as needed.

The RFP will outline the requirement to submit a proposal for grant funds. Each proposal for grant funds must include the following components:

- Section I Application Form
- Section II Program Narrative (including letters of support from partners and the local Court Disability Coordinator, if applicable)
- Section III Grant Amount Request and Rationale

More information, including the application form, will be included in the RFP.

Funding availability may vary. Applicants may be asked to apply again if funds are low at the time the application is received. Applicants and grant recipients may apply once during the year.

## **VI. Proposal Review and Evaluation Process**

The Disability Accessibility Improvement Grants are awarded through a comprehensive screening and evaluation process. All award decisions will be made by the Disability Access Committee's Disability Accessibility Improvement Grant Review Subcommittee. The Disability Accessibility Improvement Grant Review Subcommittee will review all grant applications and make awards based on the information contained in the application, examining for the following criteria.

### Factors In Determining Grant Awards

Proposed projects or activities must have:

- Specific, demonstrable examples of how the award could support a project or activities that address accessibility barriers for people with disabilities,
- A connection to the requirements of the Policy,
- A demonstrated need for the award,

- Evidence (data, feedback, qualitative or quantitative information) connecting the need, the project or activity, and the accessibility barrier that will be addressed,
- Local support for the grant activities,
- Description of short-term efficacy and/or long-term sustainability, depending on the project or activity proposed,
- Evidence of and ability to work collaboratively with stakeholders, including other court offices and people with disabilities,
- Evidence of the practicality of the project or activity being completed,
- A willingness to innovate and think creatively, and
- For returning applicants, how effectively previous funds have been utilized.

## **VII. Disability Accessibility Improvement Grant Review Subcommittee**

The Co-Chairs of the Committee serve as chairs of the Disability Accessibility Improvement Grant Review Subcommittee, a division of the Committee. The Subcommittee has four additional Committee members and two ATJ Division staff as members.

## **VIII. Source of Funds**

These grants are funded by the ATJ Commission. The ATJ Commission is funded via publication royalties, pro hoc 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. Any unused grant funds from one program year may be carried over to the following program year.

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.

## CONTACT INFORMATION FOR ILLINOIS COURT DISABILITY COORDINATORS

### Court Disability Coordinator for the Supreme Court

Clerk of the Supreme  
Court 200 East Capitol  
Avenue, Springfield, IL  
62701

[ADACoordinator@IllinoisCourts.gov](mailto:ADACoordinator@IllinoisCourts.gov)

### Court Disability Coordinators for the Appellate Courts

Clerk of the Appellate Court, First District,  
Fourth 160 North LaSalle Street, Room S1400  
Chicago, IL 60601

[ADA1stDistrict@IllinoisCourts.gov](mailto:ADA1stDistrict@IllinoisCourts.gov)

Phone: (312) 793-5484

Clerk of the Illinois Appellate Court,  
District

201 West Monroe Street  
Springfield, IL 62704

[ada4thdistrict@IllinoisCourts.gov](mailto:ada4thdistrict@IllinoisCourts.gov)

Phone: (217) 782-2586

Clerk of the Appellate Court, Second District  
Fifth 55 Symphony Way  
Elgin, IL 60120

[ada2nddistrict@IllinoisCourts.gov](mailto:ada2nddistrict@IllinoisCourts.gov)

Phone: (847) 695-3750

TDD: (847) 695-0092

Clerk of the Illinois Appellate Court,  
District

14th & Main St., P.O. Box 867  
Mt. Vernon, IL 62864

[ada5thdistrict@IllinoisCourts.gov](mailto:ada5thdistrict@IllinoisCourts.gov)

Phone: (618) 242-3120

Clerk of the Illinois Appellate Court, Third  
District 1004 Columbus Street  
Ottawa, IL 61350

[ada3rddistrict@IllinoisCourts.gov](mailto:ada3rddistrict@IllinoisCourts.gov)

Phone: (815) 434-5050

### Court Disability Coordinators for the Circuit Courts

Find contact information for Court Disability Coordinators of the circuit  
courts at: <https://www.illinoiscourts.gov/courts-directory>

Illinois Court Help can help finding contact information for the Court Disability  
Coordinator at <https://www.ilcourthelp.gov> or call (833) 411-1121.