

Request for Proposals

Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Access to Justice Reducing Barriers to Meaningful Participation in Court Grant 2026-2027

Proposals Due March 2, 2026

Program Overview

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.

Reducing Barriers to Meaningful Participation in Court Grant

The Reducing Barriers to Meaningful Participation in Court Grant (Grant) can be used for any program that increases a court user's ability to meaningfully participate in the court system. Organizations such as administrative agencies, universities, foundations, legal aid organizations, community-based organizations, and social service organizations are eligible to apply.

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:

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

Examples of eligible projects include, but are not limited to:

- Help desks or early resolution programs;
- Legal advice call centers or hotlines;
- Community-based legal centers (clinics, lawyer in the library, summits);
- Limited scope representation outreach;
- Document drafting workshops; and
- Remote appearance programs for rural counties.

Each grant will be for a one-year period from May 1, 2026-April 30, 2027, and the funds will be paid at the beginning of the grant year. All award amounts are based on the funds which are available for the grant year. 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.

Requirements & 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. Courts are not eligible to apply and should instead seek the Access to Justice Improvement grant opportunity available in the spring.

Each Point Person is expected to:

- Submit mid-year and year-end reports to the ATJ Division about project activities, number of individuals served, and grant expenditures;
- Communicate any changes in the project or staffing to the ATJ Division.

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.

➤ Grant Award Decision Process & Due Date

Completed grant proposals must be submitted before 5:00 pm on **Monday, March 2, 2026** by online application at ilcourts.info/meaningful-grant-application or via this QR code:



All award decisions will be made by the ATJ Commission's Reducing Barriers to Meaningful Participation in Court Grant Selection Committee (Committee). The Committee will review all grant applications and make awards based on several criteria including demonstrated need, potential impact of the project, long-term sustainability, and willingness to innovate and think creatively.

The Committee anticipates that the grant recipients will be announced mid-April 2026 with grant monies to be disbursed shortly thereafter. Grants will be paid to the person or entity designated by the recipient after selection. The program year will begin May 1, 2026.

Questions about the grant program should be directed to the AOIC Access to Justice Division at AccessToJustice@illinoiscourts.gov.

➤ Grant Proposal Requirements

Each proposal for grant funds must include the following three components. *The questions are listed here for your assistance in preparing to submit the proposal online via the link above.*

- **Section I Applicant's Information**
 - Organization, Organization's Leader, and Project Point Person Information
- **Section II Program Narrative**
 - Short summary of project (1-2 sentences)
 - What is your proposed project or program? Please describe the project or program for which you are requesting grant funds.
 - Why is this project or program necessary?
 - How does it increase court users' ability to meaningfully participate in the court system? How does it connect court users with self-help resources, legal advice, and/or legal representation, including limited scope representation services or access to legal services in a legal desert?

- Is there any cost or fees to program participants?
- Is this a new or existing program? If existing, is this to maintain or expand?
- If you are seeking funding for an ongoing/continuing program, what is your plan for sustaining this project or program after this grant year since this is only a one-year grant?
- What is the expected impact of the project? How many people will be served? How will you evaluate the effectiveness of the project? Evaluations should consider the impact on litigants, court staff, and court processes.
- 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 other partners (e.g., legal aid organizations, bar associations, public libraries). *Upload letters of support* for all partners (maximum of 5), the title of the document should begin with the agency name.
- **Section III Grant Amount Request**
 - NOTE:
 - If your request includes staff salary and/or benefits, please indicate if it is for existing or new staff and what portion of each staff person's costs would be funded through the grant.
 - If you are university requesting facilities & administration fees, they cannot equal any more than 10% of your grant request.
 - The ATJ Commission's entire budget for this grant program is \$400,000 for this program year. Although there is not a limit on the maximum award a single organization may receive, please tailor your requests appropriately.
 - Why are you seeking funding from the ATJ Commission rather than from other sources? Please describe whether the proposal fits the criteria for other funding opportunities such as through The Chicago Bar Foundation, Illinois Bar Foundation, Illinois Equal Justice Foundation, Lawyers Trust Fund of Illinois, Illinois Access to Justice (ILA2J), public sources of funding, or private foundations. If it does fit the criteria for these sources, please explain why you are seeking a grant award from the ATJ Commission.
 - What is the total cost of the program/project for which you are applying? What portion of that is requested from the ATJ Commission? If you are not seeking the full program/project amount from the ATJ Commission, what are your plans for fully funding this program?
 - If the ATJ Commission is not able to award the full amount requested, will you accept a partial award? If yes, please describe any limitations on your acceptance of a partial award (e.g., minimum award you will accept, funding priorities).
 - Please provide a budget summary explaining (1) how much grant money the applicant is requesting and (2) how the grant money will be spent.
 - List the total amount requested (for example, \$15,000)
 - Then itemize the request (for example \$10,000 for salary, \$4,000 for a copy machine, and \$1000 for office supplies) in the format of the online application