

Request for Proposals

Access to Justice Improvement Grant and Court Navigator Network Membership

2024-2025

Proposals Due June 28, 2024

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 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 grant recipients. In compliance with the Illinois Supreme Court's Strategic Agenda, it is our mission to maintain a Network with at least one member in every Judicial Circuit and Appellate District 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 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.

Each grant will be for a one-year period from August 1, 2024 to July 31, 2025, 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.

(1) ATJ Improvement Grant

The ATJ Improvement Grants can be used for any project or need 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 projects include, but are not limited to:

- buying paper, ink, and/or printers to print statewide forms;
- performing 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 programs to resolve cases more efficiently and economically;
- revamping mediation services;
- installing storage lockers for mobile devices for courts prohibiting those devices, to be compliant with Supreme Court Policy;

- launching a text message reminder program or online chat service;
- 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;
- partnering with public libraries and lawyers for Lawyer in the Library programs; or
- partnering with legal aid or other court stakeholders like Illinois JusticeCorps to expand services to court users.

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](#), and [August 2023](#). For more information about past grants or to brainstorm ideas, please reach out to Jill Roberts, Deputy Director, Access to Justice Division, AOIC at jroberts@illinoiscourts.gov.

(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.

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 mid-year and year-end 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 Form

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 **Friday, June 28, 2024** by email to Jill Roberts, Deputy Director, Access to Justice Division, AOIC at 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 15, 2024 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 August 1, 2024 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 mid-August, and ongoing monthly 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 before 5:00pm on June 28, 2024.

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. We can brainstorm, discuss proposal ideas, and provide support with the application process.

Section I – Application Form ATJ Improvement Grant and Court Navigator Network 2024-2025

Applicant Jurisdiction Information

Judicial Circuit/Appellate District	
County served (if multiple counties in a Circuit/District, please list the ones served by Project or state “all”)	
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. If not requesting funds, this is the person who will attend trainings and participate in the Network)

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		
(If seeking grant funds) Will you still work on the project if you are awarded partial or no grant funds?			<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
(If seeking grant funds) Are you interested in participating in the Court Navigator Network even if you are not awarded any grant funds?			<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

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 2024-2025 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 litigants, court staff, and court processes.

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 and (2) how the grant money will be spent. The grant money may include salary stipends for the Project Lead or other relevant staff, or partial salary for new staff dedicated to promoting access to justice. 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.

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