



Request for Proposals

Disability Access Grant 2026

Proposals Due October 10, 2025

I. Background Information

Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Illinois Human Rights Act (IHRA) are examples of comprehensive civil rights laws 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, and corresponding laws and regulations, the 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 accommodations, others 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.

II. Program Goals and Parameters

The Disability Access Committee of the Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Access to Justice (ATJ Commission) issues this request for proposals for a Disability Access Grant.

The Disability Access Grant has three goals:

- **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 accommodations as per the requirements of the [Illinois Supreme Court Policy on Access for People with Disabilities](#) (Policy), the ADA, and the IHRA;
- **To promote respect and dignity** for people with disabilities by fostering a court environment where all people, but particularly those with disabilities, are treated with dignity, respect, and courtesy; and
- **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 a barrier to equal access to court for people with disabilities, with some limitations. Grant funds for projects are meant to support, enhance, expand existing projects, or create new or sustainably focused pilot projects that promote or enhance equal access for people with disabilities.

In 2025, the Commission received 54 applications and fully or partially funded 31 grantees. The average award amount was \$19,355, with the lowest award at \$423 and the highest at \$98,000. For 2026, the total available funding for this grant is \$400,000; applicants may request up to \$40,000 for these projects.

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 Technology Modernization Request Program by partnering with their local Chief Judge's Office, or to work with their local county boards and building commissions to 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.¹
- 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 more accessible improvements.
- Providing funding to hire qualified Certified Deaf Interpreters or 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 distributing court forms and documents in accessible formats, such as large print and braille. Please note, developing documents in *electronic* formats that are compatible with assistive technology may be funded through the 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

¹ Please 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.

proceedings in multiple accessible formats, including videos with captions, sign language, and audio descriptions, and easy-to-read brochures.

- Conducting user testing or user feedback sessions with local disability advocacy organizations and people with disabilities to ensure continuous feedback and improvement of accessibility measures and court resources.

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 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 Technology Modernization Request Program or the Commission's Language Access Program).
- Digital improvements, such as 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 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 Training from the Commission and ATJ Division. Training on disability access for staff is always available through the ATJ Commission's Disability Access Committee and ATJ Division staff for free or at a very minimal charge. If you would like a training tailored to your court's needs, please contact August Hieber at ahieber@illinoiscourts.gov. Other types of training involving other presenters may be funded through the grant.

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 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.

III. Grant Eligibility, Proposal Requirements, and Expectations

Eligibility

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

in partnership with the local Court Disability Coordinator (CDC), who must act as the "Grant Liaison."

Proposal Requirements

Proposals must contain the following three sections:

- Section I: Applicant Jurisdiction Information
- Section II: Court Disability Coordinator Grant Liaison Information
- Section III: Program Narrative (including partnership letter(s) of support, which may include letters from people with disabilities or organizations representing people with disabilities)
- Section IV: Grant Amount Requested and Proposed Project Budget

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

- Specific, demonstrable examples describing how the award could support a new or existing project or activities that address accessibility barriers for people with disabilities.
- Local support for the grant activities, including examples of collaborative, successful past projects with relevant stakeholders addressing accessibility, if available, and letters of support, if available.
- Evidence of the practicality of the project or activity being completed, including details in the Project Budget or other optional, accessibility-related assessments or estimates.

Grant Expectations

Each grant recipient is expected to:

- Implement the project or activity proposed in the application.
- Agree to submit regular reports, 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, 2026).
- 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.

IV. Grant Application Process & Due Date

Proposals shall be accepted between September 5 – October 10, 2025.

Completed grant applications must be submitted **before 5:00 pm on Friday, October 10, 2025**, by online application at: <https://forms.office.com/g/s8WCp77HCF> or via this QR code:



Each grant will be for a one-year period from January 1 - December 31, 2026, 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. If funds are left over after the one-year period, grant recipients may request to roll over remaining funds into the next one-year grant period.

The Committee anticipates that the grant recipients will be announced in early December 2025. Grants will be paid to the person or entity designated by the recipient after selection.

The application process, review, and evaluation are conducted by a subcommittee of the Disability Access 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.

Disability Access Grant 2026 Questions

(Responses must be submitted online as described above.)

Section I: Applicant Jurisdiction Information

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

Section II: Court Disability Coordinator Grant Liaison Information

- *Enter information about the CDC Grant Liaison.*
 - CDC name, job title, employer, street address, city, state, zip code, phone number, email address

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) 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)). Please provide a letter of support from the chief/presiding judge of the relevant jurisdiction **and** each listed partner confirming their commitment to the project, including any financial commitments if partial funding is requested. *Letters of support to be emailed to ahieber@illinoiscourts.gov.*
 - **How will you evaluate the effectiveness of the project?** Please include a plan to evaluate or measure the effectiveness of the initiatives. Evaluations should consider the impact on litigants, court staff, court processes, and any other groups.

Section IV: Grant Amount Requested and Proposed Project Budget

- *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.*
- *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.*
- *All grant funds should be used to cover expenses related to programmatic needs and not salary stipends.*
 - Budget Summary
 - Grant total amount of grant request

- 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., \$6,000 for 2 \$3,000 ramps and 1 \$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 hiring Certified Deaf Interpreters (CDIs) or assisted communication experts (like those used by a litigant with MS)). List the total amount for the category and then list the quantity and price for each item (e.g., \$400 for two \$200 hours of CART services, \$500 to hire one CDI).
 - **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 (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., \$3000 for two \$1500 listening sessions).
 - **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 a training about deafness and \$5,000 for one about mental illness).