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2026 ACCESS TO JUSTICE GRANTS PROGRAM Underserved Areas, Housing-Related Matters and Shared Legal Services Interpreter Bank

Program Overview and Application Instructions

I. About the DC Bar Foundation

Since 1977, the DC Bar Foundation (DCBF) has funneled more than 200 million into DC's legal aid network to ensure every District resident, regardless of income, has access to justice. The Foundation makes strategic investments in legal services providers and the critical issues facing District residents to strengthen and expand our civil legal aid network and improve our community. As the leading funder of civil legal aid in the District, the Foundation is a steadfast community partner, committed to protecting access to justice in life's most pivotal moments.

In addition to our grant programs, the Foundation administers loan repayment assistance programs for attorneys working at DC legal aid organizations and provides training and technical assistance to these organizations. Learn more by visiting our website: www.dcbarfoundation.org.

II. Overview of the Access to Justice Grants Program

DCBF is pleased to announce it will award grant funding to nonprofit legal services providers located in the District of Columbia to fund civil legal services in the categories of **underserved areas, housing, and shared legal services interpreter bank** through the 2026 Access to Justice (ATJ) Grants Program.

Thanks to a grant from the District of Columbia Office of Victim Services and Justice Grants, eligible civil legal services providers and their nonprofit partners can apply for a grant that covers January 1, 2026 to December 31, 2026. Organizations may apply for funding for one project, multiple projects, and/or joint projects, by submitting one project per application. Nonprofit organizations applying in partnership with civil legal services providers **can** submit their own grant application for the services proposed by the organization.

III. Eligibility for Funding

A. Eligibility for Access to Justice Funding

Qualified recipients must:

1. Be a not-for-profit DC corporation;

2. Have tax-exempt status under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code;
3. Operate primarily within the District of Columbia;
4. Be located within the District of Columbia; and
5. Deliver civil legal services to DC residents with low income or who are underserved; or
6. Be a nonprofit organization that meets the requirements above and supports the provision of civil legal services to DC residents with low incomes or who are underserved

B. Definitions

DCBF defines the following terms for the purpose of determining eligibility for the ATJ Grants Program:

1. **“Civil legal services”** must include the individual representation of District residents. It may also include the following:
 - a. Supervision of such representation;
 - b. Appellate advocacy on behalf of District residents; and
 - c. Policy advocacy in the District that is associated with the representation of individual clients.
2. **“Low-income”** is calculated by using the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) income limits that determine the eligibility for District residents for HUD’s assisted housing programs.
3. **“Underserved”** is defined as those residents of the District of Columbia who share a common neighborhood, geographic area, language, culture, ethnicity, religion, life situation, or lack of adequate and affordable access to legal services.
4. **“District resident”** is defined as any individual with a residential address in the District of Columbia. DCBF may accept an organization’s reasonable functional alternatives to this definition if DCBF determines such functional alternatives are consistent with the goal of increasing access to justice in the District for special populations, including but not limited to individuals in correctional facilities, individuals living in or fleeing from violence, and unhoused individuals.
5. **“Lawyer”** means a graduate of an accredited law school who is:
 - a. Licensed to practice in the District of Columbia

- b. Authorized under the provisions of Rule 49(c)(9) of the District of Columbia Court of Appeals to practice law before that court; or
- c. A member in good standing of the highest court of any state who has submitted an application for admission to the District of Columbia Bar.

IV. Funding Principles, Standards and Priorities

A. Principles to Guide Allocation of Funds

The primary purpose of the ATJ Grants Program is to fund civil legal services to District residents with low incomes and/or who are underserved. Thus, funding will be provided:

- 1. ONLY for free civil legal services;
- 2. ONLY for services to District residents with low incomes; and
- 3. ONLY for projects that address underserved areas, housing, or support a shared legal services interpreter bank in the District.

B. The Foundation's Standards for Funding

1. Standards for Organizations

Funding will be provided to organizations that have systems in place that align with widely accepted industry standards for promoting quality, efficiency, and effectiveness in the delivery of civil legal aid and/or legal aid adjacent services, including methods for self-assessment to provide feedback regarding the extent to which those systems are achieving their desired purpose.

A strong proposal will demonstrate the applying organization:

- a. Seeks to identify and respond to one or more of the most pressing civil legal needs of District residents with low incomes or who are underserved, and make legal services accessible to this population;
- b. Has systems in place to ensure appropriate supervision, training, and development of its staff, applies feedback obtained from stakeholders and clients to evaluate and improve organization effectiveness and quality;
- c. Integrates pro bono attorneys and others to supplement and increase the effectiveness of its representation and other services;
- d. Provides other services designed to increase accessibility of legal

services to DC residents with low incomes or who are underserved, such as assistance with self-help strategies, legal information through its website or other channels, community legal education; and

- e. Engages with other important stakeholders working on behalf of or serving its targeted client population, such as the judiciary, government agencies, social services agencies, and community groups.

2. Standards for Projects

Funding will be provided only to projects that measure and report to DCBF their performance against stated goals with respect to legal services to be delivered, outreach and training, pro bono development, and any other activities to be funded under the requested grant.

A strong proposal will demonstrate that the project:

- a. **Has ambitious yet realistic goals for delivering significant amounts of legal services**, as measured by the volume and type of legal services to be provided, the number of DC residents to be assisted, the number of cases to be accepted, the DC wards from which the majority of clients are anticipated, and other measures.
- b. **Seeks to increase access to services to residents in underserved areas of the District**, as measured by the percentage of the total proposed legal services that will be provided in areas containing the greatest concentrations of residents with low incomes or who are underserved.
- c. **Has high goals for providing significant amounts of outreach and training**, as measured by the number of outreach efforts and/or trainings that will be conducted, the number of individuals to whom outreach will be conducted, the number of trainings to be held, the number of DC residents who will attend, the volume of materials distributed (literature, website accesses, etc.), and other relevant measures.
- d. **Seeks to increase engagement of pro bono attorneys and law firms in the provision of legal services to DC residents with low incomes or who are underserved**, as measured by the number of pro bono attorneys recruited, the number of attorneys trained, growth in the total number of attorneys and firms participating, and other relevant measures.
- e. **Has adequate capacity for delivering the services that are proposed**, as indicated by experience in providing services similar to those being proposed, related current work that will be supported or enhanced by the proposed services, and other factors.

- f. **Has a high likelihood of sustainability**, taking into account such factors as potential funding sources beyond DCBF, a longer-term service delivery strategy, and other factors.

C. The Foundation's Priorities for Funding

Additionally, in allocating available funding, the Foundation will give priority to proposals that seek to address the most pressing legal needs of District residents with low incomes or who are underserved and make legal services accessible to this population.

Proposals that address one or more of the following criteria will be given priority (all other factors being equal):

1. Addresses underserved areas in the District, OR addresses housing-related matters, OR supports a shared legal services interpreter bank.
2. Is likely to expand the number of DC residents who are provided legal assistance.
3. Seeks to avoid duplication of services being provided in the District, in the same issue area, or to the same special population segments as those being proposed.
4. Is likely to make legal assistance more accessible to DC residents.
5. Is likely to expand pro bono participation by recruiting, training, and supervising law firm attorneys to help deliver free legal assistance to DC residents.
6. Is likely to leverage DCBF resources by applying them strategically to expand efforts by other service providers and/or provide services that could NOT potentially be supported by other funding sources.
7. Will test innovative approaches for achieving the above priorities.

V. Application Instructions and Timeline

A. Application Structure

There are three sections required for the ATJ Grants Program application:

1. **PART ONE: ORGANIZATION PROFILE** describes the overall organization that is applying for DCBF funding. This is a description of your organization – not a description of your project/proposal (Part Two). The Organization Profile consists of the following tabs: Additional Information, Mission Statement/Legal Services, Executive/Board Information, Demographic Survey, and Attachments (Nonprofit Status, Organizational Budget, Form 990, Audited Financial Statements, Client Eligibility Guidelines). This

information will be entered into the DCBF Grants Management System (GMS) **one time**.

- If your organization has multiple grant writers, they will have the option to search to see if your organization is registered in the GMS.
- If you are applying for more than one grant, this information will be included in all applications for the ATJ, Civil Legal Counsel Projects Program (CLCPP), and General Support grant programs.

You can **work on several applications simultaneously**.

2. **PART TWO: APPLICATION** describes the proposed project or program for which funding is requested. The Application consists of the following tabs: Executive Summary, Budget & Funding, Application Narrative, and Proposed Performance Measures (specific to legal services provision). Each submitted application should be for a different project, which should be reflected in this section.

3. **PART THREE: APPLICATION ATTACHMENTS** include the following:

- Attachment 1: Data Packet
- Any Supplemental Documents (Resume, Job Descriptions, etc.)

B. Definitions of Application Terms

- **“Legal assistance”** includes any activity designed to help an individual understand or resolve a legal problem. It includes representation limited to advice or brief service as well as all forms of extended representation. Legal assistance does not include legal information offered to an individual in the form of a pamphlet or letter or oral presentations, trainings, or conversations offering general legal information. *[Appears in Part Two Proposal: Proposed Performance Measures Tab.]*
- **“Advice or legal counsel”** consists of guidance or explanation of options, often with a recommendation for a course of action offered in the context of the attorney-client relationship, based on the specific circumstances of the client and the law which applies to those circumstances. It includes advice given in the course of “limited scope representation,” such as an advice clinic, if an attorney-client relationship is formed and the assistance is not mere legal information that is not tailored to the circumstance of the client. *[Appears in Part Two Proposal Performance Measures Tabs.]*
- **“Brief service”** includes assistance such as making a phone call or writing a brief letter on the client’s behalf. Brief service generally involves assistance that takes less than two hours. Brief service may take place in the context of “limited representation,” in which the client agrees at the outset that assistance will be limited to the service that is offered,

although the matter could call for extended representation. *[Appears in Part Two Proposal: Proposed Performance Measures Tab.]*

- **“Extended representation”** refers to any legal representation beyond advice, legal counsel, or brief service, as defined previously. It may include, but is not limited to, transactional work or negotiation, administrative representation, litigation, and other forms of advocacy. *[Appears in Part Two Proposal: Proposed Performance Measures Tab.]*
- **“Legal information”** consists of general guidance provided to the general public regarding legal rights and responsibilities, as well as steps that can be taken to resolve legal problems on their own. The information can be given in the form of a pamphlet, self-help packet, letter with generalized advice, or guidance provided in a pro se clinic. No attorney-client relationship is formed when legal information is provided. *Do not* include participants in community legal education events. *[Appears in Part Two Proposal: Proposed Performance Measures Tab.]*
- **“Cases placed with pro bono attorneys”** are cases for which the volunteer attorney has assumed responsibility for the representation. *[Appears in Part Two Proposal: Proposed Performance Measures Tab.]*

C. How to Apply

The application and all attachments must be submitted via the GMS: <https://dcbarfoundation.smartsimple.com>. General information about ATJ Grants Program application is available on our website under the [Applicants section](#).

Log into the system using a previously created account **or** create a new account by clicking “Register Here.” and then following the steps as instructed on the screen.

All attachments for which the Foundation provides the template (e.g., Part Three), are available for download on our website [here](#). Templates will also be available in the GMS.

For technical questions on using our online application system, please refer to this [page](#).

1. To access an application you have begun or submitted, log in via the [main grantee portal](#) with the same username and password used to start or submit the application. Under, “My Applications” on your user dashboard, select “In Progress” or “Submitted”.
2. If you are applying for multiple grants, you can submit multiple applications for your organization under the same account (or different accounts).

D. Applying for a Joint Project

Applications for joint projects are welcomed under the ATJ Grants Program.

Please follow the instructions below when applying for a joint project:

1. Each organization must submit an application for the joint project.
2. Each organization should submit a unique **Part One: Organization Profile**. This section should include information about **your organization**, for example, do not include the partner organization's mission statement; only include your organization's mission statement.
3. For questions asked in **Part Two: Proposal**, include information on the roles, responsibilities, staffing pattern, activities, and expected results that **your organization** contributes to the joint project.

E. Timeline of Application Process

July 16, 2025	Application Samples (PDF) released Please use the application samples to prepare your answers to be entered into the GMS starting August 1, 2025
August 1, 2025	Applicants can begin submitting grant applications in the GMS
August 29, 2025	Applications due by 5:00 pm
December 2025	Awards announced
January 1, 2026	Grant year begins

VI. Monitoring and Evaluation

If your application is approved, your organization must submit quarterly financial reports, semiannual programmatic reports, and an annual client story. Plus, your organization may be required to participate in a programmatic and/or a financial site visit. The Foundation will contact the grantee directly to schedule site visits.

VII. Contact Information

If you have any questions regarding the ATJ Grants Program, how to apply, or our monitoring and evaluation processes, please contact grants@dcbarfoundation.org.