



200 Massachusetts Ave., NW, Suite 700
Washington, DC 20001

www.dcbarfoundation.org

P | 202-467-3750
F | 202-467-3753

2025 General Support Grants Program

Overview and Application Instructions

I. About the DC Bar Foundation

Since its inception in 1977, the DC Bar Foundation (DCBF) has invested more than \$196 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 aid providers and the critical issues facing District residents to strengthen and expand our civil legal aid network and improve our community. As the largest 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 Private Grants Program

The DC Bar Foundation is pleased to announce it will award grant funding for the General Support Grants Program, for the grant year January 1, 2025, to December 31, 2025. Legal services providers located in the District of Columbia are eligible to receive private funding in the form of general support for the organization or a civil legal aid project. Refer to the definition section regarding Civil Legal services.

Funding for the General Support Grants Program comes from individual, law firm, and corporate donations, as well as revenue from the Interest on Lawyers’ Trust Accounts (IOLTA) program. DCBF is the administrator of DC’s IOLTA program, which pools the interest accrued on eligible client funds held in trust by attorneys and funds legal aid programs throughout DC.

DC’s IOLTA Program was created in 1985 by the District of Columbia Court of Appeals, and the program became mandatory in 2010. All attorneys barred in the District must place eligible client funds—those that are nominal in amount or will be held for only a short period of time—in a DC IOLTA account offered by an approved financial institution. Learn more about IOLTA [here](#).

III. Eligibility for Funding

A. Eligibility for Private 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. Have as a primary purpose of the provision of civil legal services to District residents with low incomes.*

*An organization meets the primary purpose test if the majority of its total organizational resources and/or legal services department or project are spent on the delivery of civil legal services to District residents with low incomes without charge.

B. Definitions

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

1. **“Civil legal services”** **must** include the individual representation of District residents. It may also include the following:
 - a. The 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. **“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 to the extent that 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.

IV. Funding Principles, Standards and Priorities

A. Principles to Guide Allocation of Funds

The primary purpose of the General Support Grants Program is to fund civil legal services to District residents with low incomes. Thus, funding will be provided:

1. ONLY for free civil legal services; and
2. ONLY for services to District residents with low incomes

B. The Foundation's Standards for Funding

Funding will be provided to civil legal aid 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, including methods for self-assessment to provide feedback regarding the extent to which those systems are achieving their desired purpose.

A strong application will demonstrate that the applying organization:

1. Seeks to identify and respond to the most pressing civil legal needs of the people with low incomes it serves;
2. 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;
3. Provides other services designed to increase the accessibility of legal services to DC residents with low incomes, such as assistance with self-help strategies, legal information through its website or other channels, community legal education; and
4. Engages with other important stakeholders working on behalf of or serving its targeted client population, such as the judiciary, government agencies, and social services agencies.

A strong application for private funding will also demonstrate that the organization:

1. Has adequate capacity for delivering the services that are proposed, as indicated by experience in providing services similar to those being offered, related current work that will be supported or enhanced by the

proposed services and other factors.

2. 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 prioritize applications that seek to address the most pressing legal needs of the District's residents with low incomes and make legal services accessible to this population.

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

1. Is likely to expand the number of DC residents who are provided legal assistance.
2. 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.
3. Is likely to make legal assistance more accessible to DC residents.
4. Is likely to expand pro bono participation by recruiting, training, and supervising law firm attorneys to help deliver free legal assistance to DC residents.
5. Is likely to leverage DCBF resources by applying them strategically to expand efforts by other service providers.
6. Is likely to provide services that are NOT 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 General Support Grants Program application:

1. **PART ONE: ORGANIZATION PROFILE** describes the overall civil legal aid organization that is applying for DCBF funding. This is a description of your organization – not a description of your project/application (Part One). 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 SmartSimple **one time per organization**.

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

2. PART TWO: APPLICATION describes the proposed program or project for which funding is requested. The Application consists of the following tabs: Executive Summary, Budget Information, Application Narrative, and Impact of this Funding. Each submitted application should be for a different funding request, which should be reflected in this section.

3. PART THREE: APPLICATION ATTACHMENTS include the following:

- Data Packet
 - For project-support grants only, complete tabs A & B
 - For operating support grants, complete tabs C, D, & E
- If requesting project support, you will need to upload the Budget Explanation Notes document and current resumes of all staff and supervisory personnel who will be involved in the activity for which funding is sought.
- Any Supplemental Documents

B. Definitions of Application Terms

- **Project support**— refers to funding allocated specifically for a particular project or program within your organization. This type of support is aimed at achieving specific outcomes or milestones as outlined in your proposal. While project support offers flexibility in terms of how the funds are used within the scope of the project, it is expected that the funding will be directed towards the activities and objectives described in the application.
- **Operating support**— provides unrestricted funding that can be used across various needs within your organization. This type of support is designed to enhance the overall capacity and sustainability of your organization, allowing you to allocate funds wherever they are most needed. Operating Support offers maximum flexibility, enabling you to cover expenses such as administrative costs, salaries, utilities, and other general operating expenses. This funding is not tied to a specific project but rather supports the organization's mission and operations as a whole.

C. How to Apply

The application and all attachments must be submitted via SmartSimple. General information about the General Support 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 sample are available for download on our website here. Templates will also be available in SmartSimple.

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

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.”

If you are applying for multiple grants, you can submit multiple applications for your organization as long as the user is registered to the organization.

D. Timeline of Application Process

July 15, 2024	Application Samples (PDF and Word) released. Please use the application samples to prepare your answers to be entered into SmartSimple starting July 29, 2024.
July 29, 2024	Applicants can begin submitting Grant applications in SmartSimple
August 30, 2024	Applications due by 11:59 pm
December 2024	Awards announced
January 1, 2025	Grant year begins

VI. Monitoring and Evaluation

If your application is approved, your organization must submit semiannual programmatic reports. 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 General Support Grants Program, how to apply, or our monitoring and evaluation processes, please contact us at grants@dcbfoundation.org.