

PARTNERSHIP GRANT REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL REQUIREMENTS

I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The State Budget Act allocates funds to the Equal Access Fund *“to improve equal access and the fair administration of justice.”* The Equal Access Fund is given to the Judicial Council to be distributed through the State Bar of California’s Legal Services Trust Fund Program (LSTFP). Ten percent of the funds available for distribution will support Partnership Grants to legal services programs for *“joint projects of courts and legal services programs to make legal assistance available to pro per litigants.”*

Unlike IOLTA grants, Partnership Grants are awarded through a competitive process. The Legal Services Trust Fund Commission (Commission) reviews Partnership Grant applications and makes recommendations regarding funding to the Judicial Council. Grants are awarded for a one-year period commencing January 1. Historically, grants have been awarded in the range of \$25,000 to \$80,000.

Partnership Grants are intended to be seed money to support projects that will eventually be funded from other sources of revenue. Applicants must describe plans for obtaining funding from other sources to support these projects. Funding is typically reduced in the third, fourth, and fifth years in which an applicant is approved for a grant. The Commission will not provide Partnership Grant funding for the same project for more than five years except under extraordinary circumstances, such as in rural areas where the need is particularly high, yet alternative funding is unavailable, or to serve areas hit by disaster.

II. ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS FOR PARTNERSHIP GRANTS

There are four basic eligibility requirements for Partnership Grants:

1. Qualified Legal Services Projects (QLSPs). Only QLSPs are eligible to apply for Partnership Grants (Business & Professions Code 6210 et seq.).
2. Joint Court/Legal Services Program Projects. Proposals must be for projects jointly developed and implemented by courts and legal services programs, and, except in rare circumstances, services must be delivered at or near the courthouse.
3. Indigent Persons. Use of Partnership Grant funds is restricted to the provision of services to indigent persons as defined under Business and Professions Code §6213(d).
4. Self-Represented Civil Litigants in State Court. Use of Partnership Grant funds is restricted to providing assistance to individuals who are pursuing matters in state court without representation by counsel. These funds cannot be used to make court appearances on behalf of litigants.

III. SELECTION CRITERIA FOR PARTNERSHIP GRANTS

The Commission has full discretion to recommend grant awards based on its analysis of the need within the communities to be served, the extent to which the proposal addresses all the issues identified in the RFP, and consideration to fund a range of projects that represent diverse geographic areas, substantive issues, and client constituencies. Decisions of the Commission, as approved by the Judicial Council, are final. There is no appeals process.

In its review, the Commission will consider how effectively the proposal addresses the following issues:

1. Impact of Services. The project must address the needs of the targeted population and achieve meaningful and timely outcomes.
2. Collaboration with Cooperating Court. The project must be jointly undertaken with the court. The Commission will consider the extent to which the applicant and cooperating court will collaborate on this project to achieve access for self-represented litigants.
3. Integration with Court-Based Services. The applicant's services, or planned services, should be integrated with other court-based services, including the Family Law Facilitator, self-help centers, and other offices of the cooperating court.
4. Court's Impartiality. The proposal must ensure the court's independence and impartiality. If the project's services are to be reserved for only one litigant role, such as petitioners but not respondents, or defendants but not plaintiffs, the applicant must demonstrate that it has thoroughly explored all the implications of this decision with the court, and identified alternate legal resources that can provide equivalent levels of assistance to the opposing parties.
5. Conflict of Interest. If the project establishes an attorney-client relationship with the self-represented litigants, it must provide meaningful referrals for individuals who are not eligible to use the services because they present a conflict of interest for the project.
6. Information and Referrals. The project must address the methods by which it will provide information and referrals to litigants who are not eligible to use its services for any reason.
7. Additional Support. In anticipation of the eventual reduction or termination of Partnership Grant support, the applicant must diligently pursue other means for continuing the project. The Commission will consider efforts to pursue other sources of funding and support, as well as contributions actually received, such as commitments of the program's general operating revenue, recruitment of pro bono volunteers, and in-kind support.
8. Evaluation. All applicants must incorporate evaluation plans into their Partnership Grant proposal and complete a Year-End Evaluation Report.