



**THE PARTNERSHIP GRANT REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL:  
REQUIREMENTS, PRIORITIES, AND POLICIES**

This document provides information for organizations interested in submitting proposals for Partnership Grants. Organizations should review this document to ensure that the proposed projects are eligible for this funding, and that their proposals describe those activities in a manner that best addresses the principal concerns of the funding authorities.

Partnership Grants are competitive and discretionary. Project proposals must be submitted on SmartSimple by **5:00 p.m. on Thursday, March 18, 2021**.

If you have any questions, please contact Christal Bundang at [christal.bundang@calbar.ca.gov](mailto:christal.bundang@calbar.ca.gov).

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**BACKGROUND**

The State Budget Act establishes the Equal Access Fund “to improve equal access and the fair administration of justice.” The Equal Access Fund is allocated to the Judicial Council and administered by the State Bar of California, through its Legal Services Trust Fund Commission (Commission). Ten percent of the Equal Access Fund is reserved for “joint projects of courts and legal services programs to make legal assistance available to pro per litigants.”

Partnership Grants are awarded through a competitive process. The Commission reviews and compares all eligible proposals and makes funding recommendations to the Judicial Council. Grants are awarded for a one-year period commencing January 1. Decisions of the Commission, as approved by the Judicial Council, are final; there is no appeals process. Due to the limited availability of funding, all proposals may not be funded. Historically, projects have been funded in a range from \$20,000 to \$100,000. Grant award allocations also vary based on available funding. For the 2021 grant year, a total of \$2.42 million was awarded to 35 eligible projects.

Partnership Grants are primarily intended to support new projects. Consideration will also be given to ensure that this funding supports projects serving a diverse range of geographic areas, substantive issues, and client constituencies. Projects seeking funding beyond five consecutive years will be more closely reviewed by the Commission in terms of overall project strength and other selection criteria.

At the conclusion of each grant year, Partnership grantees must submit a comprehensive report and evaluation on the use and impact of these funds. Partnership Grant funding is typically awarded for no more than five consecutive years of support, and applicants must describe their plans for obtaining funding from other sources to support these projects after the termination of Partnership Grant support.

## **2022 PARTNERSHIP GRANTS SCORING RUBRIC**

In an effort to provide transparency and equity in the review process, the Committee will be using a new scoring rubric as a tool to help guide review of all eligible proposals. As this is the first time implementing a rubric for Partnership Grants, the Commission will revisit during the codification process and solicit feedback from applicants.

The rubric is comprised of four sections - Eligibility Requirements, Selection Criteria, Funding Priorities, and Innovation. Initial rubric scores will be shared with applicants, who will have an opportunity to improve their scores, by providing additional information or addressing initial concerns. Note that the Commission still maintains its discretion when determining funding recommendations.

### **Eligibility Requirements**

This section is not weighted. Applicants must meet the following criteria to be eligible to submit a proposal:

- Qualified Legal Services Projects (QLSPs): Pursuant to Business & Professions Code 6210 et seq., only QLSPs are eligible to apply for Partnership Grants.
- Joint Court/Qualified Legal Services Projects: Proposals must be for projects jointly developed and implemented by California State courts and QLSPs, and, except in rare circumstances, services must be delivered at or near the courthouse.
- 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).
- Self-Represented Civil Litigants: Partnership Grant funding is restricted to providing assistance to individuals who are or expect to be engaged in civil litigation without representation by counsel. These funds cannot be used to make court appearances on behalf of litigants.

If the proposed project will be serving non-indigent persons or if individuals will be engaged in civil litigation, the project must identify non-Partnership Grant funds that will be used to cover this work.

### **Selection Criteria (80 points)**

Based on responses provided in the proposal, the Committee will score each sub-section as “Exceeds Expectations,” “Meets Expectations,” or “Below Expectations” with corresponding multipliers for a maximum of 80 points.

Generally, responses that provide relevant and detailed information, such as metrics or specific examples would be scored favorably. Responses that do not appear responsive to the selection criteria's description may be considered "below requirements."

### **Funding Priorities (20 points)**

In 2018, the Commission approved the following policy regarding funding priorities:

"Historically, Partnership Grants have been awarded as "seed funding," with an initial expectation of funding reductions after the first three years and termination of funding after the fifth year. This model can sometimes lead to valuable, high functioning projects making major changes to their substantive focus or operational model for the purpose of retaining eligibility for Partnership Grant funding beyond the initial five-year period.

While the Commission continues to prioritize innovative programs, it also seeks to support existing projects that provide valuable services to underserved communities. The following considerations are intended to assist applicants in setting reasonable expectations regarding the expected timeframe for the duration of Partnership Grant support.

Matters to be taken into consideration when determining whether to renew Partnership Grant funding include:

- That Partnership Grants will continue to be awarded with the principal intention of providing seed funding for new projects, which may be renewed annually over an initial five-year period.
- That Partnership Grant funding may or may not be reduced from year to year during that time, taking into account project strength, demonstrated success, and funding availability.
- That the discretionary nature of Partnership Grants, under which the Commission's decisions on continued funding may be contingent upon projects meeting programmatic, administrative, and financial expectations The Commission retains discretion not to renew funding within the initial five-year timeframe should projects be unable to meet basic expectations.
- That funding beyond a fifth-year cycle be considered on a case by case basis. Particular consideration should be given to projects supporting unmet rural needs, program that have evolved to respond to a recent emergency or disaster, and high functioning and heavily utilized projects that have been unable to secure alternate funding despite documented efforts. The foregoing examples are illustrative, not exclusive.
  - Applicants seeking funding beyond a fifth year into a second cycle must demonstrate the effectiveness of the project and provide additional justification such as documentation of their pursuit of alternate funding sources, narratives

and quantitative data on local needs or circumstances, and/or additional project evaluation such as court feedback, case file review or other such evaluative processes.

- Projects seeking funding beyond a fifth year will be reviewed with respect to the factors cited above, as well as in comparison to new and other renewing applicants in the areas of program strength, demonstrated success, and funding availability.”

The Commission will exercise its discretion and score the project 1-5 based on funding priorities. That number will be multiplied by 4 for a maximum section score of 20 points.

**Optional – Innovation (up to 10 points)**

The Commission encourages innovative projects and may award up to 10 bonus points for innovation.

Examples of innovation may include:

- Projects that involve courts that have not had projects in a long time
- Projects with models that were tried/successful in other jurisdictions, but are new to the court
- Initial projects in a case type (first consumer program, first conservatorship program, etc.)
- Projects testing new ways of providing services.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS			
Please select “yes” or “no” for each requirement.			
Applicant is a Qualified Legal Services Project	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	
Proposal is jointly developed and implemented by a California State court and services are delivered at or near the courthouse.	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	
Proposed services will be provided only to indigent persons, as defined under Business and Profession Code §6213(d).	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	
If NO, has the project identified non-Partnership Grant funds that will cover this work?	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> N/A
Proposed services will be provided only to self-represented litigants (individuals who are or expect to be engaged in civil litigation without representation by counsel).	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	
If NO, has the project identified non-Partnership Grant funds that will cover this work?	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> N/A

DEFINITIONS	
<b>Exceeds Expectations</b>	Response is very high quality, addressing all questions in the request for proposal and all elements of the selection criteria. The identified strengths in the category are substantial with no or minimal weaknesses or additional questions identified. Any identified weakness has minimal effect on the overall quality of the response.

<b>Meets Expectations</b>	Response is good, effectively addressing most questions in the request for proposal and the selection criteria. Strengths and weaknesses are identified that may balance each other in significance. Overall quality of response is satisfactory
<b>Below Expectations</b>	Response is weak, neglecting to address questions in the request for proposal and the elements of the criteria. The responses identified weaknesses hold significant weight, overshadowing the identified strengths. Overall quality of response is inadequate, with significant flaws in key elements.

<b>SELECTION CRITERIA (80 PTS)</b>			
Checkmark the appropriate ranking for each category, and then multiply by the number below. Add sub-scores from A and B to get the total points for this section.			
<b>CATEGORY &amp; DESCRIPTION</b>	<b>Exceeds Expectations</b>	<b>Meets Expectations</b>	<b>Below Expectations</b>
<p><b><u>Court Involvement</u></b>                      A successful proposal will indicate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• significant cooperation between the partner court and legal services organization,</li> <li>• integration with other court-based services and</li> <li>• if the project's services are to be reserved for only one litigant role, such as petitioners but not respondents, that this has been thoroughly explored with the court, and alternate legal resources that can provide meaningful if not equivalent levels of assistance to the opposing parties have been identified.</li> </ul>			
<p><b><u>Project Impact</u></b>                      A successful proposal will clearly address the needs of the targeted population with meaningful and timely outcomes.</p>			
<b>A. Number of Check Marks</b>	<b>X20=</b>	<b>X15=</b>	<b>X10=</b>
<b>Subtotal (A)</b>			
<p><b><u>Administration</u></b>                      A successful proposal will have adequate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• staffing,</li> <li>• leadership, and</li> <li>• oversight of project monitoring, outreach and resource development.</li> </ul>			
<p><b><u>Project Budget</u></b>                      A successful project will clearly reflect how Partnership Grant funds are tied to actual project expenses or directly related costs.</p>			

<b>Continuity Planning</b> A successful project will adequately describe meaningful continuity planning efforts, such as pursuing other sources of funding, recruitment of volunteers, and in-kind support.			
<b>Evaluation</b> A successful proposal will incorporate meaningful evaluation plans and metrics that effectively demonstrate how the project’s planned goals will be achieved.			
<b>B. Number of Check Marks</b>	<b>X10 =</b>	<b>X6 =</b>	<b>X3 =</b>
<b>Subtotal (B)</b>			
<b>Selection Criteria Total (A+B)</b>			

<b>FUNDING PRIORITIES (20 PTS)</b> Keeping the funding priorities in mind, determine the number points you wish to score this project and then multiply by the number below.	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Partnership Grants will be awarded with the principal intention of providing seed funding for <u>new projects</u> and projects in their second to fifth year of funding.</li> <li>Projects requesting funding beyond their fifth year that serve rural areas, are responsive to a recent emergency or disaster, or are high-functioning and heavily utilized projects but have been unable to secure alternate funding despite documented efforts are prioritized.</li> <li>Projects seeking funding beyond a fifth year that are not in these priority areas are considered for funding only after proposed awards have been allocated for all prioritized projects. The State Bar retains discretion to waive this policy.</li> </ol>	<p>5 4 3 2 1</p>
<b>Funding Priority Total Score</b>	<b>X4 =</b>

<b>OPTIONAL - INNOVATION (up to 10 PTS)</b> The Committee may exercise discretion in awarding points for innovation. Based on your review of the proposal, determine if wish to score additional points for innovation and provide your reason(s) below.		
Additional points will be awarded to successful proposals that demonstrate innovation.	YES	NO
<b>Bonus Points Awarded (1-10 pts)</b>		
Reason(s) for awarding bonus points for innovation:		

## **OTHER POLICIES REGARDING ADMINISTRATION OF PARTNERSHIP GRANTS**

The Commission has made policy determinations with regard to certain substantive issues that have arisen repeatedly, as guidance for applicants seeking to strengthen their proposals, and to help ensure the consistency of its own deliberations and recommendations regarding Partnership Grants. The following statements of Partnership Grants policies were each approved by the Commission, on the dates indicated in parentheses after their titles:

### **Self-Representation and Attorney-Client Relationships (July 2017)**

Self-represented litigants receiving services under a Partnership Grant are not prohibited from forming a confidential relationship with a lawyer, so long as they remain unrepresented when they appear in court. While we [the Commission] will ultimately defer to the court's own determination as to whether the litigant is self-represented, factors impacting this determination include where any attorney's participation takes place, and whether the attorney's name appears on pleadings or in the records of proceedings in court. So long as no appearance is made on the record and no representational activity occurs in court, formation of an attorney-client relationship in and of itself is not inconsistent with the "self-represented" status of a litigant.

### **Overhead, Administration, and Audit (August 2018)**

Partnership Grant funds should pay for actual project expenses or directly related costs – to fund the project, but not the organization. Some programs have used individual line items to identify administrative costs. Others use an Allocated Cost Ratio, which is often based on a standardized formula; however, it is sometimes unclear how a formula-based allocation relates to the proposed activities.

- Some non-personnel costs which may be appropriately tied to the project include malpractice insurance and attorney licensing fees.
- As Partnership Grant-funded services should typically be performed primarily at or near the courthouse, which reduces the need for program space and equipment, costs allocated to these lines should be clearly justified in the budget narrative.
- Programs using formula-based allocated cost ratios must clearly explain what these comprise and how they are calculated, for purposes of Partnership grant budgeting.

### **Use of Partnership Funding as a Sub-grant Covering Wages of Court Staff (August 2018)**

An organization receiving Partnership Grant funding is expected to be the primary service provider under that grant. However, greater efficiencies can sometimes be attained by sub-granting some of that funding to a court partner. The following considerations have been identified as relevant in determining whether to approve discretionary funding for such a request:

- The contract governing the relationship between the grant recipient organization and the court must clearly specify that grant-funded court staff will only work on project activities, not on other duties that might be assigned by the court.
- The contracted staff must follow the Guidelines for the Operation of Self-Help Centers, with particular regard to ensuring the court's neutrality as to the fact that services are

being provided, the manner in which they are provided, and the persons to whom they are provided.

- The services funded would not otherwise be provided by the court, but for the Partnership Grant. The Partnership Grant shall not supplant existing funding or services.
- The project budget must include additional funding sufficient to assist litigants who do not qualify to be served with Partnership Grant funding.
- In these and all cases, the court must participate in providing feedback and in developing evaluative data. Where funding is sub-granted to the court partner for payment of court staff, this evaluative data will include information on the number of litigants using the service who do not meet the definition of “indigent” found at Business & Professions Code §6213.

**Funding of Supervised Settlement Services through Partnership Grants (July 2019)**

Partnership Grants may be used to support supervised settlement services to assist litigants in settling their litigation, so long as the settlement services are a component of court-based litigation and are overseen by an attorney.