



Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Access to Justice & Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts

Request for Proposals Self-Represented Litigant Coordinators 2019-2020

Background Information

Thousands of litigants appear in the Illinois civil courts without a lawyer every year. The growing number of self-represented litigants ("SRLs") in court is not unique to any one circuit, county, or case type, but can be seen in every courthouse in the state. However, the vast majority of SRLs do not choose to represent themselves. Most would prefer legal representation, but are unable to find or afford a lawyer. These SRLs—many who have little or no prior experience with the judicial system—pose a number of challenges for circuit clerks, judges, and other court staff. The litigants themselves also face many obstacles.

To address these challenges, the Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Access to Justice ("ATJ Commission") and the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts ("AOIC") have worked on a number of statewide initiatives to assist SRLs and the judges and court staff who serve them. However, the ATJ Commission and the AOIC also recognize that in many instances, a top down approach will not work—especially given the size and diversity of Illinois—and that local partners are critical to fully understanding and addressing the needs of the SRL population.

To this end, over the past two years the ATJ Commission has established a network of staff persons from the chief or presiding judges offices charged with evaluating and addressing the evolving needs of SRLs. These staff persons have collaboratively and creatively worked to identify new strategies for improving access to justice. By implementing these strategies locally, courts have improved efficiency, reduced the burden placed court staff, and improved the experience of all court patrons. Additionally, grant funds have been awarded to several judicial circuits to achieve those goals.

Program Overview

The goal of this project is to create, train, and support a statewide network of Self-Represented Litigant Coordinators ("Coordinators") based in courthouses throughout the state. Coordinators serve as a bridge, linking their courthouses with others throughout the state to share ideas, develop new resources, and establish programs for assisting SRLs. The project launched in late 2017 and so far thirteen different judicial circuits have participated in the Coordinator network, some circuits received grant funds and some only participate in the network. You can read more about the previous grantees in *Illinois Courts Connect* for [November 2017](#) and [November 2018](#). The SRL Coordinator grants are funded through the ATJ Commission and are facilitated by the Access to Justice Division of the AOIC.

The Coordinator network shares resources and best practices across county lines and judicial circuits to more effectively address the self-help service gaps seen throughout the state. Coordinators identify, develop, and implement new tools and resources in their local

courthouses and work with other stakeholders to facilitate better communication and collaboration in addressing these issues. As Coordinators became aware of what their counterparts throughout the state have been doing, they have learned from each other's successes, shared resources and updates, and provided the best possible service for SRLs.

For this year, we hope to expand the number of circuits participating in the Coordinator network. Additionally, grant awards of up to \$20,000 will be awarded to county courts or judicial circuits to cover expenses related to the development of new resources and services for SRLs. If a grant application is submitted on behalf of multiple counties, please indicate which counties will be served on the application form provided below in Section I. Multiple applications may be submitted by a circuit, but that circuit's maximum awards cannot exceed \$20,000 total.

Requirements & Expectations

The Coordinator must be a staff person from the chief judge or presiding judge's office. This role should be filled by an existing staff person with a demonstrated knowledge of the challenges faced by SRLs and familiarity with court operations and the legal community. An effective Coordinator will have strong problem-solving skills, customer service skills, and the ability to work both independently and with others.

Each Coordinator must participate in the following required activities:

- Attend an in-person annual Coordinator orientation and training in Chicago* (tentatively set for Dec. 5-6, 2019);
- Attend a second in-person Coordinator training* (dates and location TBD, but approximately May or June 2020);
- Participate in monthly telephone calls with the AOIC and other Coordinators;
- Create, modify, and update self-help resources for the courthouse;
- Evaluate self-help services and resources to determine their effectiveness;
- Track individuals served by the Coordinator and report data to the AOIC;
- Submit quarterly updates to the AOIC about activities and grant expenditures; and
- Partner with the ATJ Commission and the AOIC to identify statewide needs and emerging trends and to collaborate on larger scale solutions.

*Each Coordinator will be reimbursed travel-related expenses, separately from any grant award, to attend the in-person trainings.

Beyond those activities, each Coordinator's role will be unique within their courthouse and will be customized to meet the local needs of the community. Each Coordinator should incorporate most, if not all, of the following tasks into their work:

- Identify new program needs (*e.g.*, mediation, remote appearances, dedicated *pro se* calls);
- Develop new partnerships with community organizations (*e.g.*, bar association *pro bono* programs, volunteer greeters, public libraries, social service providers);
- Solicit ongoing feedback from litigants, judges, clerks, and other court staff about the effectiveness of self-help resources and programs;
- Facilitate effective communication between various offices within the courthouse (*e.g.*, Circuit Clerk's office, Chief Judge's office, law library, interpreters);
- Review quarterly data collected by the clerk's office on SRLs;
- Provide one-on-one legal information and referrals to SRLs as appropriate; and
- Act as a liaison between SRLs and other court staff, akin to the position of the Court Disability Coordinator.

This list is not exhaustive, but is meant to give some general guidance to the Coordinators. Each Coordinator's time will be used differently depending on both local priorities and needs and the level of resources currently available in the courthouse. This work is dynamic and will change over time as community and courthouse needs evolve. The Coordinator will be instrumental not just in creating and implementing new resources, but in monitoring existing ones to make sure they continue to be accurate and effective.

Each grant will be for a one-year period from December 1, 2019 to November 30, 2020. During the grant period, each recipient courthouse will be expected to take steps towards developing a sustainable path forward to keep the service level consistent at the conclusion of the grant.

Decision Process

Applications are due by October 1, 2019. All award decisions will be made by the ATJ Commission's SRL Coordinator Advisory Committee. The Advisory Committee will review all grant applications in mid-to-late October and make awards based on several criteria including demonstrated need, local support, ability to work collaboratively, and willingness to innovate and think creatively. The committee anticipates that the grant recipients will be announced in early November 2019 with grant monies to be disbursed shortly thereafter.

Proposal Requirements

Each proposal for grant funds must include the following five components:

- Section I Application Form (see below)
- Section II Program Narrative (1000 word maximum)
- Section III Budget Narrative
- Section IV Coordinator Statement of Interest (500 word maximum) & Resume
- Section V Letters of Support

More information on each section is provided below.

Completed applications must be submitted before 5:00 pm on October 1, 2019 by e-mail (preferred method) to jroberts@illinoiscourts.gov or by mail to:

Jill Roberts
Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts
222 N. LaSalle Street, 13th Floor
Chicago, IL 60601

Questions about this RFP or the SRL Coordinator program should be directed to Jill Roberts at jroberts@illinoiscourts.gov or 312-739-2305.

Section I – Application Form Self-Represented Litigant Coordinators 2019-2020

Applicant Information

Applicant Name	
County (if multiple counties, please list each one that will be served by Coordinator)	
Judicial Circuit	
Chief Judge	
Presiding Judge (if applicable)	
Circuit Clerk	
Request	<input type="checkbox"/> Grant funds & network membership <input type="checkbox"/> Network only*
Are you interested in participating in the Self-Represented Litigant Coordinator network even if you are not awarded any grant funds?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

* If you are requesting to participating in the SRL Coordinator network without requesting grant funds, you only need to complete this section and Section IV of the application.

Primary Contact Person

Name	
Job Title	
Address Line 1	
Address Line 2	
City, State, Zip Code	
Phone	
Email	

Proposed Self-Represented Litigant Coordinator (must be existing chief or presiding judge's staff member)

Check if same as above

Name	
Job Title	
Address Line 1	
Address Line 2	
City, State, Zip Code	
Phone	
Email	

Section II - Program Narrative (1000 word maximum)

The program narrative should answer the following questions:

- a) **Why are you interested in having a Coordinator?** Please describe your county's specific needs for providing assistance for SRLs. Include information about any current programs and available court-based and local services designed to address the needs of SRLs and how the Coordinator can support and expand the existing work in this area.
- b) **What are your goals for the Coordinator?** Please list specific objectives for your Coordinator and any steps that will be taken to achieve them. This should include any specific tasks or policies that will be put in place to achieve the objectives and a description of any desired outcomes (*e.g.*, specific materials or programs).
- c) **Who will partner with your Coordinator to achieve these goals?** Please describe any proposed partnerships that will enhance the work of the Coordinator. This should include court-based partners (*e.g.*, circuit clerks, law librarians, Illinois JusticeCorps) and external partners (*e.g.*, bar associations, legal and social service providers, public libraries).
- d) **How will the Coordinator evaluate the effectiveness of their work?** Please include a plan to evaluate the effectiveness of the Coordinator's initiatives and any other self-help resources that are currently available. Evaluations should consider the impact on both litigants and court staff.
- e) *For current grant fund recipients only:* **What were your biggest challenges and achievements during this year of the Coordinator program?** In addition, please describe any steps you have taken towards developing a sustainable path forward for your current project and the reason for needing an additional grant.

Section III - Budget Narrative (500 word maximum)

Please provide a budget narrative explaining (1) how much grant money the applicant is requesting (up to \$20,000) and (2) how the grant money will be spent. The grant money should not primarily cover the Coordinator's salary, but should instead be used to cover expenses related to programmatic needs like resource development and training (*e.g.*, technology, printing, events) or to creating an appropriate work space (*e.g.*, signs, computing equipment, minor renovations).

Section IV - Statement of Interest (500 word maximum)

This section should be completed by the proposed Coordinator (an existing staff member of the chief or presiding judge's office). The statement of interest should detail their interest in the role and any relevant experience or qualifications. The proposed Coordinator should also state any specific ideas for the position and their interest in participating in more statewide conversations and training. Please attach the Coordinator's resume or brief bio with the statement of interest.

Section V - Letters of Support

Each proposal must include a letter of support from the circuit's Chief Judge, the local Presiding Judge (if applicable), the Circuit Clerk, and any other relevant partners.