



Annual Grant Guidelines for CY 2027

(Grant Period: January 1 – December 31, 2027)

Part I. Grant Guidelines	1
Background and Mission	1
LTF Grantmaking Goals.....	2
Services Funded	2
Eligibility for Grants.....	2
Attorney Staffing Requirement	4
LTF Waiver Policy and Process	4
<i>New Applicant Waivers</i>	4
<i>Current Grantee Waivers</i>	5
<i>Waiver Policies</i>	6
<i>Questions about Attorney Staffing</i>	6
Minimum Grant Amount	6
Factors in Determining Grant Awards	7
<i>Service Delivery</i>	7
<i>Organizational Capacity</i>	8
Part II. Annual Grant Funding for CY 2027.....	9
Part III. Grant Application Instructions for CY 2027	9
Online Grants Portal	9
Applying for a Grant: Key Dates.....	9
Information and Support for Grant Applicants	10
Applying as an Organization or as a Program: What is the Difference?	11
Applications from Partnerships/Joint Applications	11

Part I. Grant Guidelines

Background and Mission

The Lawyers Trust Fund of Illinois (LTF) is a private, not-for-profit foundation incorporated by the Illinois State Bar Association and The Chicago Bar Association in 1983. Under rules established by the

Illinois Supreme Court, LTF receives revenue from the Interest on Lawyers' Trust Accounts (IOLTA) program; a portion of the annual registration fee paid by Illinois attorneys; and the remittance of unidentified funds from IOLTA accounts. These revenues enable LTF to pursue its mission, which is to support the provision of civil legal services to low-income Illinois residents throughout the state in an efficient, effective, and equitable manner.

LTF Grantmaking Goals

The Lawyers Trust Fund of Illinois makes grants to Illinois non-profit organizations that provide direct civil legal services free of charge to low-income families and individuals residing in Illinois. LTF awards grants annually, on a calendar-year basis.

In allocating grant funds and making awards to individual organizations, LTF prioritizes the following broad goals:

- 1. Supporting the availability of civil legal services throughout the state.**
- 2. Encouraging the use of a variety of methods to deliver civil legal services (*e.g.*, advice desks, brief service projects, neighborhood clinics, unbundled representation, technology-based tools, extended representation by staff and volunteer attorneys).**
- 3. Supporting civil legal services that address the most critical needs of low-income individuals and families, including health, personal safety, family stability, housing, and economic security.**
- 4. Supporting civil legal services that assist low-income individuals and families in overcoming barriers and helping them attain full participation in society.**
- 5. Supporting civil legal services to meet critical needs that otherwise would not be addressed due to geographic location, area of the law, and/or client characteristics.**

Services Funded

LTF funding supports the delivery of direct civil legal services to individuals. Civil legal services funded by LTF include brief services (such as legal advice and document preparation), limited scope assistance, and direct representation in administrative hearings or litigation. LTF does not make grants to fund the provision of mediation services, representation in class action litigation, court accompaniment services, or policy advocacy.

Eligibility for Grants

LTF makes grants to eligible entities that provide direct civil legal services to low-income Illinois individuals and families. These entities include (1) organizations whose primary focus is on providing civil legal services, and (2) legal aid programs that are distinct sub-units or programs of larger organizations that provide social or other services in addition to legal services. Whether an application for funding comes from an organization focused on legal aid or from a program that is

part of a larger entity, LTF grants are limited to supporting the delivery of civil legal services.

To be eligible for grant funding from LTF, an entity must meet the following requirements:

- 1) Be an Illinois non-profit organization that is tax-exempt under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.
- 2) Serve Illinois residents who cannot secure private legal counsel. This means individuals and families whose income is at or below 250% of the federal poverty level, but includes other factors – such as client characteristics, geography, and area of law – that substantially limit an individual’s ability to get legal help from a private attorney.
- 3) Provide services without charge to the client. [*Note: Entities funded by LTF may charge sliding-scale fees to clients whose income exceeds their guidelines and may also require clients to pay court costs or related expenses that cannot be waived. However, LTF funds may only be used to support free legal services.*]
- 4) Meet LTF’s Attorney Staffing Requirement (detailed in the section below).
- 5) Provide legal services in a nondiscriminatory manner. This means the entity may not deny services to any otherwise qualified client or prospective client on the basis of race; color; religion; sex; national origin; ancestry; age; marital status; order of protection status; physical or mental disability; military status; sexual orientation; gender identity; or any other category prohibited by federal or Illinois law.

LTF will consider grants to a law school clinic only if the LTF board determines that the legal aid services provided by the clinic are unique in terms of the types of services offered or the target population to whom services are offered (*i.e.*, no other legal aid entity is providing the same services or targeting the same population).

LTF will consider grants to a faith-based organization provided that:

- The organization’s assistance is open to people of all faiths;
- The organization’s service decisions are not based on the faith or religion of any prospective client or client; and
- The organization’s policies and practices regarding the provision of legal services do not conflict with LTF’s requirement to provide legal services in a nondiscriminatory manner (see requirement 5 above).

In addition, the LTF board of directors must be satisfied that the entity provides services in a manner that does not oblige or influence individuals receiving assistance to engage in religious activities.

Attorney Staffing Requirement

LTF's grantmaking focuses on organizations and programs that use attorneys to deliver and/or supervise the delivery of civil legal services. Consistent with this approach, LTF requires grantees to meet the attorney staffing standards listed below in addition to the eligibility requirements listed above.

Under the Attorney Staffing Requirement, **grantees must employ at least one (1) Qualified Attorney**. For the purposes of this requirement, a Qualified Attorney means an individual who:

- Is directly involved in providing the entity's legal services.
- Is a compensated, full-time employee of the entity.
- Will have been licensed to practice law for a minimum of three years as of January 1 of the year for which an applicant seeks grant funding (*e.g.*, for the CY 2027 grant year, the reference date is January 1, 2027, meaning the attorney would need to have been licensed by no later than January 1, 2024).

An entity may meet the Attorney Staffing Requirement by employing up to two otherwise qualified part-time attorneys whose combined time is the equivalent of at least one full-time employee position. However, LTF **strongly** prefers that an entity fulfills the Attorney Staffing Requirement by employing one attorney on a full-time basis.

LTF Waiver Policy and Process

The LTF board may, at its sole discretion, grant a temporary, one-year waiver to entities that do not meet the Attorney Staffing Requirement. An entity that receives a waiver may be eligible to receive an Annual Grant (pending review of its complete grant application) for one funding year as it works to secure attorney staffing that meets LTF's requirement.

Waivers are available under two limited circumstances:

- 1) A **New Applicant** that has an attorney on staff who does not fully meet the standard of the Attorney Staffing Requirement may request a temporary, one-year waiver that will enable it to apply for an Annual Grant. Waiver requests may be submitted only through a pre-application process that takes place before the Annual Grant application deadline. An approved waiver request means the New Applicant can proceed to submit a full application for an Annual Grant. (Further details and instructions regarding New Applicant Waiver requests are described below.)
- 2) A **Current LTF Grantee** whose attorney staffing no longer meets the Attorney Staffing Requirement may request a temporary, one-year waiver in conjunction with its application for an Annual Grant. (Further details and instructions regarding Current Grantee Waiver requests are described below.)

New Applicant Waivers

In 2021, LTF updated its application process to give emerging organizations and legal aid programs based in under-resourced communities the opportunity to request a temporary, one-year waiver of its requirements regarding attorney staffing. This decision was based on the recognition that such

organizations or programs – many of which reach under-served populations, address unmet needs, and/or offer new ways of helping people solve legal problems – may not be able to meet this requirement. LTF has updated its waiver policy and process with the goal of continuing to provide opportunities for emerging organizations and legal aid programs based in under-resourced communities.

The following provisions apply to New Applicant Waivers:

- An entity may request a New Applicant Waiver only when it has an attorney in the role of providing legal services as of 45 days before the Annual Grant application deadline, and the attorney is performing that role on a less than full-time basis or as a contractor. Entities that do not meet the other aspects of the Attorney Staffing Requirement (*i.e.*, that the attorney has not been licensed to practice for at least three years or that the attorney is not directly involved in providing legal services) may not request a waiver and are ineligible for LTF funding.
- An entity must request a New Applicant Waiver in advance of submitting an application for an Annual Grant by completing the New Applicant Waiver request form through the LTF online grants portal.
- If granted, a New Applicant Waiver means that the entity may submit a full Annual Grant application. A successful request for a waiver does not mean that the entity has been or will be awarded an Annual Grant. LTF will respond to timely waiver requests in advance of the Annual Grant application deadline so entities will know their waiver status before deciding whether to submit a complete grant application. (See the timeline on page 10 for the relevant deadlines for the waiver request and grant application.)
- In assessing emerging organizations and programs seeking a waiver, LTF will consider factors including but not limited to: the organization or program's revenues and budget; staff size; longevity; and plans to meet the Attorney Staffing Requirement in the future. The LTF board will make waiver determinations based on the complete circumstances presented in the applicant's request.
- An entity that received a New Applicant Waiver for the current funding year may request a second waiver if the attorney role continues to be fulfilled by an attorney working on a part-time basis or as a contractor. An entity seeking a second waiver under these circumstances must request a Current Grantee Waiver following the process described below. However, an entity may not request a second waiver if the attorney role is vacant.

Current Grantee Waivers

Consistent with LTF's goal of being a source of stability for its grantees, an entity that currently receives an Annual Grant but that no longer meets the Attorney Staffing Requirement may request a Current Grantee Waiver in conjunction with its application for an Annual Grant. If granted, a Current Grantee Waiver will mean the entity is eligible for Annual Grant funding for one funding year as it works to secure attorney staffing that meets LTF's requirement.

The following provisions apply to Current Grantee Waivers:

- An entity may request a Current Grantee Waiver if it has an established attorney role previously

filled by a Qualified Attorney, but which is vacant at the time the Annual Grant Application is due.

- An entity may request a Current Grantee Waiver if it has an established attorney role previously filled by a Qualified Attorney, but which is filled by an attorney on a part-time or contractual basis at the time the Annual Grant Application is due.
- In the limited circumstances described in the previous section, an entity that received a New Applicant Waiver for the current funding year and wishes to request a second waiver should submit a request for a Current Grantee Waiver.
- To apply for a Current Grantee Waiver, an entity must complete the relevant portions of the Annual Grant Application.

An entity's request for a Current Grantee Waiver will be assessed alongside its Annual Grant application. LTF will notify the entity of the outcome of its waiver request as well as its application for funding at the conclusion of the Annual Grant review process in December.

Waiver Policies

- 1) Waiver determinations by the LTF board are final and not appealable.
- 2) An entity may request a waiver for **no more than two consecutive years**.
- 3) An entity that has received a waiver must meet the Attorney Staffing Requirement no later than the date its application for the next year of Annual Grant funding is due. (For example, an entity that receives a waiver for CY 2027 would need to meet the LTF requirements by the time its CY 2028 application is due in September 2027.)
- 4) An entity that is granted a waiver and receives an LTF Annual Grant but that does not meet the Attorney Staffing Requirement during this timeframe may seek a second waiver – by requesting a Current Grantee Waiver – for the next funding year, subject to the limitations described above.
- 5) If LTF determines that the attorney staffing level of a grantee that receives LTF funding pursuant to a waiver is insufficient to deliver legal services in an effective manner, LTF has the discretion to suspend or cancel future grant payments.

Questions about Attorney Staffing

If you have questions about LTF's Attorney Staffing Requirement, the waiver policy, and how they impact your entity's ability to apply for an Annual Grant, contact LTF Deputy Executive Director for Grants & Legal Affairs David Holtermann (david@ltf.org / 312-938-3076) before completing any application.

Minimum Grant Amount

In 2023, LTF implemented a minimum annual grant amount of \$25,000. For CY 2027, LTF will continue this policy and will not make annual grant awards of less than \$25,000.

Factors in Determining Grant Awards

In reviewing applications and making funding decisions regarding grants, LTF will consider the following questions regarding service delivery and organizational capacity:

Service Delivery

LTF seeks to make grants to organizations and programs that will deliver substantial amounts of high-quality, direct legal aid services. Accordingly, LTF will consider the following in its evaluation of grant applications:

- 1. Scope of Work:** Is the work LTF is being asked to support clearly defined and focused on directly addressing critical civil legal needs of low-income Illinoisans?
- 2. Legal Needs Addressed:** What type of legal problem(s) and client need(s) does the applicant address? Are these critical needs for low-income individuals and families? Do the applicant's services assist low-income individuals and families in overcoming barriers to meeting their needs? Are these services unique or are they also addressed by other organizations serving the same client population and/or geographic area? Is there evidence that the applicant is responsive to evolving community needs?
- 3. Levels of Service:** Does the applicant provide appropriate levels of service (*e.g.*, brief services, litigation) to effectively address client needs, based on its mission and priorities? How does the applicant evaluate and improve its delivery of services? Has the applicant taken steps to adjust the levels of service it provides?
- 4. Clients Populations Served:** Does the applicant provide services to a representative cross-section of the low-income population of the geographic area(s) it serves and/or target services to one or more distinct, traditionally underserved or at-risk subgroups (*e.g.*, veterans, homeless youths)? Does the applicant conduct outreach and use strategies to ensure that its services are accessible?
- 5. Efficient & Effective Service Delivery:** Does the applicant use delivery methods that balance efficiency, effectiveness, and accessibility? How does the applicant use technology to increase and improve services? Has the applicant taken any steps to try to increase the number of clients provided with representation?
- 6. Quality:** Does the applicant have systems of quality control in place? Do case-handlers and supervisory personnel have adequate levels of experience? Are training and mentoring opportunities available for staff and/or volunteers?
- 7. Use of Volunteers:** Does the applicant make appropriate use of volunteers, both as case-handlers and in other capacities? Does the applicant have systems in place to recruit, train, support, monitor, recognize, and retain volunteers?

Organizational Capacity

LTF seeks to make grants to organizations and programs that demonstrate the capacity to sustainably deliver the legal services proposed in the application. Accordingly, LTF will consider the following questions regarding the applicant:

1. **Infrastructure:** Are there adequate systems and structures in place to oversee and support the applicant's legal work (e.g., staff-level management, information technology, human resources, fundraising)?
2. **Leadership:** Does the leadership team have the necessary skills and experience in the areas of fiscal management, personnel management, and the supervision of legal work? Has the applicant made efforts to develop a leadership team (executive and senior management) that represents a variety of demographic groups and lived experiences?
3. **Governance:** Does the applicant have a governing board with skills and experience to oversee the organization? Does the membership of the board reflect the population of its service area, and (to the extent possible) the specific client population the organization serves? Does the board develop new leaders and encourage board renewal through limits on officers' terms and/or board tenure?
4. **Staff Composition:** Does the applicant employ staff from various backgrounds? Has the applicant made efforts to develop a staff that includes people from a variety of demographic groups and lived experiences? Has the applicant undertaken initiatives to build a healthy workplace culture and retain staff?
5. **Financial Viability:** Does the legal services work for which funding is sought from LTF have other sources of financial support? Is this financial support broad, or reliant on one or two major sources? How secure is this support? Is there evidence that the organization is making efforts to increase its fundraising revenue and tap into new funding sources?
6. **Fiscal Management:** Does the applicant have adequate internal controls and accounting policies in place? Is there evidence of adequate fiscal oversight by the governing board?

Part II. Annual Grant Funding for CY 2027

The LTF board anticipates making approximately \$31,500,000 available for CY 2027 grants, which is a slight increase over the record amount LTF distributed to its 57 grantees in CY 2026 (\$31,049,500). LTF expects to use the increased pool of funds to provide merit-based increases in Annual Grants to current grantees and to support new applicants that make a strong case for an initial grant from LTF.

Current grantees may seek increases in annual support to maintain or increase service delivery as well as to support organizational needs, such as staffing, technology, and infrastructure. This includes requests based on financial need. Requests for one-time funding are not encouraged.

LTF will assess all applications in light of the goals, eligibility criteria, and factors identified in these guidelines. LTF's assessment also will be informed by the goals and framework of the [Strategic Plan](#) adopted by LTF's board in 2022.

Applicants seeking a grant increase for CY 2027 will be required to explain their request in the grant application. New applicants will be required to make a case for first-time funding from LTF.

Part III. Grant Application Instructions for CY 2027

Online Grants Portal

Current grantees and new applicants must use LTF's [online grants portal](#) to complete and submit applications for LTF funding. New applicants must register as new users and will need approval from LTF before accessing the portal and online application. LTF has published a User Guide and other materials on its [Applicant Support page](#) to help applicants in completing the online application.

Applying for a Grant: Key Dates

CY 2027 Annual Grant application available on online grants portal	July 8, 2026
Open door for questions about LTF grants and funding opportunity and applicant support	By request beginning July 9
New applicant information session - via Zoom (<i>register in advance via email to nebula@ltf.org</i>)	July 16 at 10:00 am
General grant application information session - via Zoom (<i>register in advance via email to nebula@ltf.org</i>)	July 28 at 2:00 pm

New applicant information session - via Zoom (<i>repeats July 16 session; register in advance via email to nebula@ltf.org</i>)	July 30 at 2:00 pm
New Applicant Waiver Deadline: Organizations seeking a New Applicant Waiver must submit a completed New Applicant Waiver Request before 6:00pm on August 4.	August 4 before 6:00pm
General grant application information session - via Zoom (<i>repeats July 30 session; register in advance via email to nebula@ltf.org</i>)	August 5 at 10:00 am
CY 2027 Application Deadline: All applicants must submit a completed grant application before 6:00pm on Tuesday, September 15	September 15 before 6:00pm
Grant decisions made by LTF board	December 2026
Applicants notified of grant decisions	December 2026
Initial CY 2027 grant payment	January 2027

Information and Support for Grant Applicants

To help current grantees and prospective applicants understand LTF’s grant guidelines, funding criteria, and application procedures, LTF offers several opportunities to connect with LTF staff:

- **Open Door Policy:** Call or email LTF staff with any questions about grants, the application process, and completing an application.
 - For information about LTF’s grant guidelines and priorities, LTF grants in general, and applying for a CY 2027 grant, contact:
 - David Holtermann, Deputy Executive Director for Grants & Legal Affairs (312-938-3076 or david@ltf.org)
 - For technical support completing the application and data collection pages, contact:
 - Nebula Li (312-938-2106 or nebula@ltf.org)
 - David Holtermann (312-938-3076 or david@ltf.org)
- **General Grant Application Information Sessions:** LTF will host two Zoom webinars for a general orientation to the grant application and process. These sessions will cover changes for 2027. Current grantees and new applicants are welcome to participate, but participation is optional.
 - Sessions are scheduled for July 28 and August 5. The two sessions will present

the same information.

- Register in advance by emailing Nebula Li (nebula@ltf.org). You will receive an email with instructions for joining the session shortly in advance of the session.
- **New Applicant Information Sessions:** LTF will host two additional Zoom webinars specifically for prospective applicants that are not current LTF grantees. This session will explain LTF’s grant guidelines, eligibility criteria, and application. Participation in these sessions is optional.
 - Sessions are scheduled for July 16 and July 30. The two sessions will present the same information.
 - Register in advance by emailing Nebula Li (nebula@ltf.org). You will receive an email with instructions for joining the session shortly in advance of the session.
- **Online Applicant Support:** A user guide for the LTF grants portal, instructions for completing the data portions of the grant application, and other resources and information for applicants are available on [LTF’s Applicant Support page](#).

Applying as an Organization or as a Program: What is the Difference?

In its grantmaking to support direct legal aid, LTF provides funding to a variety of entities, including organizations focused on delivering legal services; legal aid programs operating as distinct sub-units of larger organizations; and law school clinics. Regardless of the nature of the entity requesting funding, LTF grants are limited to supporting the provision of free, direct legal assistance to individuals and families in civil cases.

When completing the Annual Grant application, applicants that are programs – entities operating within larger organizations or institutions – should define the scope of the legal services delivery for which funding is sought. When responding to questions about service delivery and organizational capacity, the applicant should focus primarily on matters within the scope of the program defined by the applicant.

Applications from Partnerships/Joint Applications

LTF encourages partnerships between legal aid providers and trusted intermediary organizations (*e.g.*, faith communities, social service agencies, community groups, health care providers) that help legal aid services reach individuals who are not aware of their legal options, who do not trust the legal system, or who are otherwise disconnected from pursuing solutions through the legal system.

Accordingly, LTF will consider grant requests to support the delivery of services through these types of partnerships. To be consistent with the grant guidelines, however, LTF’s funding for joint or partnership initiatives (1) must support the provision of legal services and (2) must be granted to an organization that provides legal aid services. Grant applications for joint/partnership initiatives should come from the partner organization that is responsible for providing legal services. Any grant funds awarded by LTF will be paid to the legal aid partner and will be designated to support legal services.

For information about seeking a CY 2027 grant to support a joint or partnership initiative, contact David Holtermann (312-938-3076 or david@ltf.org).