



Legal Services Corporation

Pro Bono Innovation Fund

Notice

**Request for Letters of Intent to Apply
For 2017 Funding**

Issued: January 27, 2017

**Letter of Intent to Apply for Funding Submission Deadline: Wednesday, March 29,
2017 by 11:59 p.m. ET**

Submit online at: <http://lscgrants.lsc.gov>

**Legal Services Corporation
Pro Bono Innovation Fund
Request for Letters of Intent to Apply for 2017 Grant Funding**

The Legal Services Corporation (LSC) issues this Notice describing the conditions for submitting a Letter of Intent to Apply (LOI) for 2017 Pro Bono Innovation Fund grants.

I. Introduction

Congress annually appropriates funds to LSC “for a Pro Bono Innovation Fund.” *See, e.g.*, Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2016, Public Law 114-113, 129 Stat. 2242, 2321 (2015). LSC requested these funds for grants to “develop, test, and replicate innovative pro bono efforts that can enable LSC grantees to expand clients’ access to high quality legal assistance.” LSC Budget Request, Fiscal Year 2014 at 26 (2013). The grants must involve innovations that are either “new ideas” or “new applications of existing best practices.” *Id.* Each grant would “either serve as a model for other legal services providers to follow or effectively replicate a prior innovation. *Id.* The Senate Appropriations Committee explained that these funds “will support innovative projects that promote and enhance pro initiatives throughout the Nation,” and the House Appropriations Committee directed LSC “to increase the involvement of private attorneys in the delivery of legal services to [LSC-eligible] clients.” Senate Report 114-239 at 123 (2016), House Report 113-448 at 85 (2014). LSC sought these funds based on the 2012 recommendation of the LSC Pro Bono Task Force. In its first three years, the Pro Bono Innovation Fund advanced LSC’s goal of increasing the quantity and quality of legal services by funding projects that more efficiently and effectively involve pro bono volunteers in serving the critical unmet legal needs of LSC-eligible clients. For 2017, LSC will build on these successes by dividing the grants into three categories to better focus on innovations serving unmet and well-defined client needs (Project Grants), on building comprehensive and effective pro bono projects through new applications of existing best practices (Transformation Grants), and on providing continued development support for the most promising innovations (Sustainability Grants).

II. New Pro Bono Innovation Fund Tracks for FY 2017

A. Background and Rationale for New Funding Tracks

Each year, LSC staff reviews Pro Bono Innovation Fund application data and engages with grantees to inform our grant making. In addition to analyzing successful and unsuccessful applications, LSC surveys our applicants and current Pro Bono Innovation Fund grantees to improve our program.

Since 2014, there has been significant interest in and competition for Pro Bono Innovation Fund grants. In 2015 and 2016, the total average amount requested for Pro Bono Innovation Fund grants was \$12.1 million for the \$3.8 million available in direct grants. From our three-year review of the Pro Bono Innovation Fund applications and data, LSC staff also noted that a number of grantees have been repeatedly unsuccessful in obtaining a grant or have never applied for a Pro Bono Innovation Fund grant. At the same time, several 2014 Pro Bono Innovation Fund grantees submitted Letters of Intent to apply for a second Pro Bono Innovation Fund grant, even as their currently-funded projects were still underway.

For FY 2017, LSC will divide the grants into three categories to better implement the innovation, development, and replication goals of this program.

We believe that offering three types of different grant opportunities with our available FY 2017 Pro Bono Innovation Fund appropriation affords more options for LSC grantees to seek funding for what they most need to strengthen their pro bono program and increase the effective involvement of pro bono volunteers in their delivery of legal services to clients. It also allows LSC to continue to fund the highest-quality projects with the most potential for learning, replication, and impact.

III. Funding Opportunities Information

A. Pro Bono Innovation Fund Purpose and Key Goals

Pro Bono Innovation Fund grants develop, test, and replicate innovative pro bono efforts that can enable LSC grantees to use pro bono volunteers to serve larger numbers of low-income clients and improve the quality and effectiveness of the services provided. The key goals of the Pro Bono Innovation Fund are to:

1. Address gaps in the delivery of legal services to low-income people.
2. Engage more lawyers and other volunteers in pro bono service.
3. Develop, test, and replicate innovative pro bono efforts.

B. Project Grants

The goal of Pro Bono Innovation Fund ***Project Grants*** is to leverage volunteers to meet a critical, unmet and well-defined client needs. LSC welcomes applications for *Project Grants* in a wide variety of areas; there are no specific areas of interest. Consistent with the key goals of the Pro Bono Innovation Fund, however, applicants are encouraged to focus on engaging volunteers to increase free civil legal aid for low-income Americans by proposing new, replicable ideas.

Past funded projects include efforts to integrate pro bono volunteers into medical-legal partnerships, to engage retired and transitioning attorneys in legal aid, to leverage transactional pro bono attorneys to serve low-income micro-entrepreneurs, and to use technology and web-based systems to allow metropolitan pro bono attorneys to serve rural clients in more remote parts of the state. *Project Grants* can be either 18 or 24-months.

C. Transformation Grants

The goal of Pro Bono Innovation Fund ***Transformation Grants*** is to support LSC grantees in comprehensive assessment and restructuring of pro bono programs through new applications of existing best practices in pro bono delivery. Each *Transformation Grant* will support a rigorous and extensive assessment of an LSC grantee's pro bono program, the identification of best practices in pro bono delivery that are best suited to that grantee's needs and circumstances, and the development and implementation of new applications of those best practices to restructuring its pro bono program through short- and long-term improvements to organizational policies, management, and operations.

Transformation Grants are 24 months and targeted towards LSC grantees whose leadership is committed to restructuring an entire pro bono program and incorporating pro bono best practices into core, high-priority client services with an urgency to create a high-impact pro bono program. This funding opportunity is open to all LSC grantees, but is primarily intended for LSC grantees who have been unsuccessful with *Project Grants* or who have never applied for a Pro Bono Innovation Fund grant in the past.

D. Sustainability Grants

Pro Bono Innovation Fund *Sustainability Grants* are available to current or former Pro Bono Innovation Fund grantees who were funded in either FY 2014 or FY 2015. The goal of *Sustainability Grants* is to support further development of the most promising and replicable Pro Bono Innovation Fund projects with an additional 24 months of funding so grantees can leverage new sources of revenue for the project, collect meaningful data to demonstrate the project's results and outcomes for clients and volunteers, and quantify the return on LSC's investment of Pro Bono Innovation Fund dollars. Applicants for *Sustainability Grants* will be required to propose an ambitious match requirement, tied to realistic goals that reduce the Pro Bono Innovation Fund contribution to the project over the grant term.

E. Available Funds for FY 2017

The availability of Pro Bono Innovation Fund grants for FY 2017 depends on LSC's receipt of a full fiscal year appropriation. LSC is currently operating under a Continuing Resolution for FY 2017 which funds the federal government through April 28, 2017. The Continuing Resolution maintains funding at FY 2016 levels, but with an across-the-board reduction of 0.19 percent.

In FY 2016, LSC received an appropriation of \$4 million, of which \$3.8 million was available for direct grants to support Pro Bono Innovation Fund projects. A .19 percent rescission for all of FY17 would result in a \$7,600 decrease in the Pro Bono Innovation Fund's appropriation.

In 2016, eleven Pro Bono Innovation Fund Projects received funding with a median funding amount of \$345,455. There is no maximum amount for Pro Bono Innovation Fund requests that are within the total funding available.

Pro Bono Innovation Fund grant decisions for FY 2017 will be made in late August 2017. LSC anticipates knowing the total amount available for Pro Bono Innovation Fund grants before August and will communicate this information to all applicants as soon as LSC receives our final appropriation for the full fiscal year.

LSC will not designate fixed or estimated amounts for the three different funding tracks and will make grant awards for the three funding tracks.

F. Project and Grant Term

Pro Bono Innovation Fund grant awards will cover an 18- to 24-month project period. Applicants for *Project Grants* can apply for either an 18- or a 24-month project. Applicants for *Transformation Grants* and *Sustainability Grants* apply for a 24-month grant only. Applicants' proposals should cover the full term for which a grant award is requested. The grant term is expected to commence on October 1, 2017.

IV. Grant Application Process and Letter of Intent to Apply Instructions

A. Pro Bono Innovation Fund Grant Application Process

LSC is committed to reviewing all Pro Bono Innovation Fund grant applications in a timely and thorough manner. Applicants must first submit a Letter of Intent to Apply for Funding to LSC to be considered for a grant. LSC staff will review the LOIs and notify applicants *by early May 2017* if their LOI is selected to proceed to the next round of the application process. Applicants whose LOIs are selected will be asked to submit a detailed, full application due to LSC in late June or July depending on the funding track. Once LSC has received a full application from a selected applicant, the application will undergo a rigorous review by LSC staff and external subject matter experts. LSC's President makes the final decision on funding for the Pro Bono Innovation Fund.

B. Letters of Intent to Apply for Funding Requirements and Format

The LOI should succinctly summarize the information requested for the funding track(s) for which an applicant seeks funding. A complete LOI consists of 1) a narrative that responds to the questions for the funding track and 2) a budget form. Applicants must submit the LOI electronically using the LSC Grants online system found at <http://lscgrants.lsc.gov>. The system will be live for applicants in early March 2017.

The LOI narrative should be a Word or PDF document submitted in the LSC Grants system. *The narrative must not exceed 5 double-spaced pages or approximately 1,300 words in Times New Roman, 12-point font.* The budget form is an online form that is submitted in LSC Grants.

Applicants may submit multiple LOIs under the same or different funding tracks. If applying for multiple grants, applicants should submit a separate LOI in LSC Grants for each funding request.

1. Project Grants

The LOI Narrative for *Project Grants* should respond to the following questions.

- a. Project Description.** Please provide a brief description of the proposed project that includes:
 - The specific client need and challenge or opportunity in the pro bono delivery system that the project will address.
 - The goals and objectives of the project, the activities that make up the project, and how those activities will link to and achieve the stated goals and objectives.

- Strong indication of volunteer interest in and support for the project.
 - The expected impact of the project. This should include a brief explanation of the changes and outcomes that will be created as a result of the project.
 - The proposed strategies that are innovative or the best practices being replicated, including a brief discussion of how these innovation and/or replicable strategies were identified.
- b. Project Staff, Organizational Capacity, and Project Partners.** Please briefly identify and describe the project team and project partners including:
- The qualifications and relevant experience of the proposed project team, any proposed partner organizations, and your organization.
 - The role of your organization’s executive management in the design and implementation of the project.
- c. Budget and Timeline.** Please state whether you are proposing an 18- or 24-month project and provide the following information about the estimated project costs:
- Estimated total project cost. This includes the estimate for the Pro Bono Innovation Fund requested amount and other in-kind or cash contributions to support the project. Your narrative should provide a breakdown of the major project expenses including, but not limited to, personnel, project expenses, contracts or sub-grants, etc., and how each expense supports the project design.
 - For expenses related to personnel, please indicate how many and which positions will be fully or partially funded by the proposed grant.
 - A list of any anticipated contributions, both in-kind and monetary, from all partners involved in the project.
 - List of key partners who will receive Pro Bono Innovation Fund funding, including their roles and the estimated dollar amount or percent of budget assigned to each partner.

2. Transformation Grants

The LOI Narrative for *Transformation Grants* should respond to the following questions.

- a. Transformation Strategy:** Please explain why are you seeking a Transformation Grant for your pro bono program at this time. In your response, please include:
- An honest assessment of the challenges with your organization’s current pro bono efforts that inhibit your ability to test, develop, and replicate innovations, and the reasons for them.

- At least three specific and ambitious improvements to your organization’s pro bono program that you would like to achieve in the first 6 - 9 months of a two-year Transformation Grant.
- b. Guiding Coalition:** Please describe the core team who would be responsible for the pro bono transformation effort in your organization. In your response, please state:
- The qualifications and relevant experience of each proposed team member.
 - Whether a majority your executive and senior managers agree that your organization’s pro bono program needs significant improvements.
 - The role your organization’s executive director and/or senior managers would play in a pro bono transformation effort.
- c. Budget.** Please describe what you would like the *Transformation Grant* to fund over the 24-month grant period. In your response, please be sure to provide the following information about the anticipated costs associated with a transformation effort for your pro bono program:
- The estimated total cost and a clear description of what the grant will fund. Your narrative should provide a breakdown of the major expenses including, but not limited to, personnel, project expenses, contracts or sub-grants, etc., and how each expense supports the transformation effort to improve your pro bono program.
 - For expenses related to personnel, please indicate how many and which positions will be fully or partially funded by the proposed grant.
 - For contracts, please describe whether you intend to use consultants, implement new technology systems, conduct business process analysis, etc. and how this supports improvements to you pro bono program.

3. Sustainability Grants

The LOI Narrative for *Sustainability Grants* should respond to the following questions.

- a. Justification for Sustaining the Pro Bono Innovation Project.** Please describe why you are seeking Sustainability Grant. In your response, please discuss the following:
- The impact of the Pro Bono Innovation Fund project to date, supported by data and analysis as to whether the goals of the project were achieved.
 - Evidence of ongoing client need and how you intend to make the project part of your core legal services.
 - The level of engagement of pro bono volunteers/private bar and the best practices in pro bono delivery that can be replicated by others.

- How ongoing program evaluation and data collection will be incorporated into the project.

b. Project Staff and Management Support. Please briefly identify and describe the project team and project partners. In your response, please include the following:

- The project staff that will be responsible for the sustainability phase of the project. Please include any additional staff, descriptions of new responsibilities for existing project staff and/or organizational changes that will be made.
- The role of your organization’s executive management in the decision to seek this Sustainability Grant and recent examples of your organization’s track record turning “new” or special projects into core legal services.

c. Budget and Match Requirement. Please describe what you would like the *Sustainability Grant* to fund. In your response, please be sure to provide the following information:

- Estimated total project cost. This includes the estimate for the Pro Bono Innovation Fund requested amount and other in-kind or cash contributions to support the project. Your narrative should provide a breakdown of the major project expenses including, but not limited to, personnel, project expenses, etc., and how each expense supports the project design.
- A narrative proposing an ambitious match requirement that reduces the Pro Bono Innovation Fund contribution to the project for the grant term. LSC is not setting a specific percentage of required match for Sustainability grant applicants but will assess the two-year budget from the applicant’s previously funded project with the grant amount proposed in the Sustainability LOI. LSC’s expectation is that applicants will propose a meaningful shift from Pro Bono Innovation Fund support to other sources of support during the grant term.
- A narrative discussing the potential sources of funding that have been or will be cultivated. If the project has already received new financial support, please provide the source and amount committed and further describe the plans for ensuring continued financial support.