

Children in Court Improvement On-Going Solicitation for Grants

The Children in Court Improvement Committee (CICIC) accepts Children in Court grant proposals for consideration. The CICIC was established by the Judiciary in response to federal legislation, in part, to allocate and administer federal grants for Children in Court improvement projects affecting the lives of children in foster care. The CICIC typically meets monthly and is constantly examining possible areas for court improvement.

If you have a project which is in need of funding, and you believe such a project will improve the Children in Court functions of the Judiciary, your project may be considered for court improvement funding. Projects which are funded through the normal course of business will not be eligible for funding.

Specifically, three federal court improvement grants exist to help States address the most crucial court reform issues that will improve the safety, well-being and permanency of children in foster care, and strengthen the legal and judicial system. All court improvement programs must have a nexus to court improvement and are required to provide periodic assessments to prompt examination of current law, policy and practice and to identify areas in need of improvement to be addressed through court improvement grant activity such that the activity will focus on continuous quality improvement (CQI).

State courts receiving court improvement grants are now required to implement approaches for CQI to ensure that proceedings related to child abuse and neglect promote: (1) due process of law; (2) timely, thorough and complete court hearings; and (3) high quality legal representation to parents, children and Title IV-B/IV-E agencies through each project. Your court improvement application must discuss the need you hope to address; how the need is related to due process, timely court hearings, or high quality representation; how the activity fulfills the need and how will you use data to determine if your activity has been successful.

Examples of appropriate use for grant funds set forth in the Program Instructions received by the federal government include:

- improving and monitoring the timeliness and quality of court hearings and legal representation;
- improving court orders;
- increasing and improving the engagement of the entire family in court processes relating to child welfare, family preservation, family reunification and adoption;
- improving the handling of cases involving the interstate placement of children;
- increasing judicial and attorney knowledge and expertise;
- cross-training with multidisciplinary stakeholders;
- collecting data and developing data collection infrastructure;
- sharing data with the child welfare agency, state departments of education and other state agencies responsible for child well-being;
- increasing collaborative work with other stakeholders;

- state legislative and law reform initiatives;
- judicial leadership activities;
- CIP participation in Statewide committees, work groups and other collaborative bodies; and
- increasing and improving the engagement of the entire family in court processes relating to child welfare, family preservation, family reunification and adoption.

Examples of inappropriate grant funding include:

- funding to provide the court or child welfare agencies with added personnel;
- generally, purchasing of court equipment is not allowed;
- programs which focus on benefiting few foster youth; and
- programs that lack a nexus to a court improvement function.

In the past, court improvement grant funds have been awarded to:

- train on a specific Children in Court topic;
- allow different organizations to develop informational brochures on issues of child abuse and neglect or termination of parental rights;
- expand mediation programs;
- expand the data collection of court processes; and
- expand CASA to all counties.

Since these grants must be used exclusively for children in the foster care system, the federal government has also advised that if the grant award will also benefit other children (e.g., children involved in only domestic violence, juvenile or matrimonial cases), funding would have to be shared or prorated between the two groups and the grant proposal would have to indicate all funding sources.

In addition, the Director of the Administrative Office of the Courts has stated that if a vicinage submits a grant proposal which includes monies for computers, software or any informational technology, the proposal must be sent to the Information Technology Office (ITO) for approval before it is submitted as a grant proposal and the approval of ITO should be attached to the grant proposal. Otherwise, the funding may be denied.

There are three grants and they run in two year cycles. Each year, as three grants begin, three are in the process of concluding. The three grants are the Court Improvement Basic Grant, the Deficit Reduction Training Grant and the Deficit Reduction Data Collection and Analysis Grant. All three grants run from October 1st through September 30th (of the second year). Thus, if a grant begins on October 1, 2012, it will end on September 30, 2014.

The Court Improvement Basic grant enables State courts to conduct assessments of the role, responsibilities and effectiveness of State courts in carrying out State laws relating to foster care and adoption proceedings. Improvements made under the basic grant are required to provide for

the safety, well-being, and permanency of children in foster care. The Deficit Reduction Training grant was created to increase child welfare expertise within the legal community and facilitate cross-training opportunities among agencies, courts and other key child welfare stakeholders. The Deficit Reduction Data Collection and Analysis grant was created to facilitate State court data collection and analysis and promote data sharing between State courts and child welfare agencies.

All three grants require the Court Improvement Program to collect and analyze data to evaluate the quality of court performance and measure the success of court improvement efforts. Thus, there must be in place procedures for monitoring, implementation and evaluation of improvement efforts, and methods to measure progress. In the grant application process, you will be expected to share a summary of any prior evaluations by participants, if applicable. In addition, you will be asked to share any data (or measurable outcomes) which may have assessed the effectiveness of your program. If this is a new program or project, you will be asked to propose a way that the Court Improvement Program can measure the outcomes to assess the effectiveness of your program.

Before submitting a grant proposal, it is a good idea to contact the Court Improvement Program Coordinator to ensure that the idea for the grant proposal either fits within the parameters offered by the federal government or to ensure no other impediment exists. For example, although rarely done, sometimes the CICIC commits to certain long term projects that would preclude the committee from considering any new proposals under one or more of the grants.

After you have submitted a grant proposal, you will be invited to attend the CICIC's January, February or March meeting to provide a short presentation about your proposal and answer any questions the CICIC may have. Your presentation should not exceed 20 minutes. If you are unable to attend any of the meetings, your grant proposal will be presented by a staff member of the Administrative Office of the Courts. The CICIC will vote on grant proposals at its April meeting. Since there may be last minute questions about grant proposals, each grant applicant should be available by phone on the day of the April meeting.

Your grant proposal should be submitted no later than the first Wednesday after January 1st of each year for consideration by the CICIC. A grant application and anticipated budget forms have been attached for your completion and they contain additional instructions. The CICIC begins to review all proposals submitted in January and votes on the proposals at its April meeting.

All grant proposals must be approved by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and the Director of the Administrative Office of the Courts. Once approved by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and Director of the Administrative Office of the Courts, the grant applications are submitted to the federal government for their final approval and they generally award the grants in or about October.

It is important to note that as a State agency, the Administrative Office of the Courts is required to comply with the State's Purchasing regulations which subjects many grant proposals to the bidding process. Thus, while your grant proposal idea may be accepted by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, the Director of the Administrative Office of the Courts and the federal

government, your proposal may still need to go out for bid. Finally, as noted on the grant application form, all vendors must comply with the New Jersey Judiciary regulations.

Please discuss your grant proposal, along with any questions you may have about the grant process, with the Court Improvement Program Coordinator AOC, Family Practice Division, Hughes Justice Complex, P.O. Box 983-7-North, Trenton, New Jersey, 08625 before submitting your proposal. You may communicate your idea by email to FamilyCIPGrants.Mailbox@njcourts.gov.

Thank you for considering the submission of a grant proposal.