

Theory of Change: High-quality and accessible legal services ensure basic access to justice, protect the rights of low-income individuals and families, and improve their stability and self-sufficiency. Communities are improved by civil legal services that ensure a wide array of social policies are implemented and sustained.

Program Goal: To increase access to legal services that address critical needs such as housing, economic security, health, family stability and personal safety.

All proposals submitted to the Foundation should adhere to one of the following strategies:

STRATEGY A

Direct Assistance

Target Population: Low-income Chicagoans, including immigrants, people with disabilities and those impacted by discrimination, domestic violence or abuse

Components

- Provides culturally competent services and connects clients to an array of support needed to help stabilize their lives
- Uses technology to improve performance and innovation
- Leverages resources of the legal community
- Provides ongoing training and mentorship for staff and volunteer attorneys

Priority is given to organizations that collaborate with other social service agencies to enable provision of legal services in areas of high need and for joint initiatives that allow organizations to increase individual and collective impact. Attorney retention efforts are encouraged.

Evaluation Criteria

- Within each practice area for which funding is provided: number of clients represented in litigation; number represented without litigation; number provided with brief services; number served through information and referral
- Impact of legal aid including public benefits secured or other quantifiable costs saved
- Positive impact on clients' lives as a result of received legal or social services
- Retention of staff attorneys
- Self-help materials produced and distributed
- Number of trainings held for the public or other providers; number of attendees

STRATEGY B

Advocacy and Impact Litigation

Target Population: Public systems and policies that affect the rights, health and welfare of low-income individuals and families

Components

- Pursues cases that have the potential to achieve lasting effects in public policy that protect and advance the constitutional and civil rights of vulnerable communities
- Utilizes a multi-disciplinary team of topic experts, policy advocates, attorneys and communications specialists
- Collaborates with low-income individuals, grassroots groups and fellow advocates to build public support through information sharing and education
- Conducts research or promotes improved use of existing data
- Negotiates settlements
- Assists with implementation of court-mandated reforms
- Monitors compliance to maintain reforms

Evaluation Criteria

- Growth of productive relationships across allies, policymakers, media members and other key stakeholders
- Increased citizen support for policy changes
- Momentum gained from court filings or appearances
- Favorable rulings or legislative changes secured
- Upheld and continued implementation of reforms

STRATEGY C

Systems Improvement and Innovation

Target Population: Local, state and federal policymakers; other government decision-makers that support and advance the legal service sector and the justice system

Components

- Focuses on needs or issues that can be most effectively addressed through a collaboration that includes nonprofits, local government and private sectors
- Provides a clear action plan, developed with participant input, that includes benchmarks for progress, defined organization and sector goals and anticipated outcomes and timing
- Provides individualized technical assistance and/or advanced training for staff at participating organizations
- Offers opportunities for cumulative learning to promote effective systems integration and improvement
- Advocates to advance effective policies and practices, leverage public dollars and promote the development and sharing of resources across systems

Evaluation Criteria

- Description, number and length of activities
- Number of staff from participating organizations, including number who attended multiple sessions, and total number of organizations
- Documentation of learning that will lead to greater reach, impact, or efficiency for participating organizations and the sector
- Demonstrated progress toward systemic changes that lead to increased or improved resources or services
- Collection and assessment of reliable and useful data that informs ongoing sector development