

American Bar Endowment Opportunity Grant Program

Frequently Asked Questions

I. Grant Program Purpose and Project Eligibility Information

What is the purpose of the ABE Opportunity Grant Program?

The ABE Opportunity Grant Program provides funding for new AND innovative law-related projects and programs of importance to the public and the legal profession.

The grant program funding areas are:

- Enhancing access to justice, especially for vulnerable and underserved populations using innovations to legal services delivery, capacity-building, or pro bono service.
- Improvement of the justice system, including ensuring equal justice and elimination of bias; and
- Increasing public understanding of legal rights and responsibilities so people can recognize legal problems and know how to address them.

What types of projects/programs does an ABE Opportunity Grant typically fund?

The ABE Opportunity Grant Program supports new AND innovative projects/programs that directly affect individual and community law-related needs. Grant funds are project-specific and not for general operating or existing expenses. National organizations can apply but need to carefully draw the connection between their proposed work and its impact on local communities.

The Opportunity Grant Program favors programs and projects that:

- serve those who are traditionally underserved or marginalized;
- address immediate and urgent law-related needs in innovative ways;
- are not replicated by other organizations in the proposed service area;
- take advantage of existing and emerging technologies; or
- might not otherwise be able to obtain timely funding from other sources.

The ABE will consider projects that, for example:

- build organizational capacity to serve clients better;
- develop tools, technology, or approaches that the broader legal community could use;
- launch a new law-related program; or
- document/prove a best practice.

ABE Opportunity Grants do not support efforts to influence legislation, elect candidates or conduct impact litigation.

Descriptions of past funded projects can be found at [Opportunity Grants | American Bar Endowment \(ABE\)](#) .

Can an ABE Opportunity Grant fund an organization's current work?

An ABE Opportunity Grant cannot be used to fund projects/programs that the organization is already doing or services it is already providing.

To be considered new, the project/program proposed must, for example:

- create or utilize a tool or technology that is new to the organization or community or the field of law;
- use a tool, technology, or service delivery model to reach a previously unserved population; or
- develop and implement new training for lawyers or the public;
- create or use a program delivery approach that is new to the organization or community or the field of law;
- address a new and urgent law-related need or problem; or
- identify or document a new challenge or need and propose solutions.

The proposed work cannot start earlier than January 1 of the year in which funds would be received and expenses the ABE grant will support cannot be incurred prior to January 1 of the year in which the funds would be received.

How does the Opportunity Grant Program define innovation?

An innovative project/program, for example:

- creates or uses a tool, technology that builds organizational capacity or makes current service delivery more effective, efficient, or responsive to client needs;
- creates or uses a service delivery approach that improves access, client experience, or client outcomes; or
- proposes a unique solution to an urgent need or problem, perhaps using technology or drawing on previously untapped expertise and resources.

Projects/programs that other organizations can replicate or that produce tools/resources other organizations can use will be favored. Projects/programs that address the root cause of problems, leading to problem-solving or prevention, will also be favored.

General Organizational Eligibility Information

What organizations are eligible to apply?

Internal Revenue Service designated 501(c)(3) organizations that are classified as a public charity under section 509 (a) of the Internal Revenue Code can apply. Organizations with a written fiscal agency agreement with such an entity can also apply. The fiscal agent must meet this eligibility criterion.

Potential grantees include (but are not limited to):

- bar associations and bar foundations;
- law schools, law school legal clinics;
- academic institutions;
- Legal Services Corporation (LSC) funded organizations;
- legal service delivery organizations;
- human service organizations with legal service or law-related programming; and
- other non-profits or civic organizations with law-related programming.

Eligible organizations must be incorporated in the United States or a U.S. Territory. The ABE does not fund international work. This grant program does not support governmental regulatory agencies or individuals.

Can an organization apply for an Opportunity Grant to support providing direct legal services?

The ABE will not consider projects that seek funding to support the direct provision of legal services without a new or innovative component. Please see expense exclusions for additional information.

What if the project/program will be a multi-year effort?

An ABE Opportunity Grant is generally a one-time award with a grant period of one year or less.

The ABE will consider seed funding (except excluded expenses) for a long-term program if the organization can demonstrate a plan to secure continued funding. Organizations applying for seed funding will need to provide information about their specific plans to ensure continued funding for the effort. The ABE will consider grants to support the initial costs of a longer-term program (see expense exclusions for additional information).

Can an organization apply for more than one grant in a cycle?

Yes. An organization can apply for more than one grant as long as each application is for a separate and distinct project or program that meets all the eligibility criteria. The ABE will consider each proposal; however, it is unlikely that more than one project/program from a single organization would receive funding in any given grant year.

Can an organization that has received funding in the past apply again?

Yes. Organizations that the ABE has previously funded may apply for a new project/program. The ABE can only consider additional funding to an organization after a final grant report is submitted and accepted. Therefore, it is unlikely that the ABE would fund an organization in two consecutive years unless the previous project is completed and a final report approved before the new application is considered.

Application Information

Is submitting a Letter of Inquiry (LOI) mandatory?

Yes, submitting an LOI is required. Doing so helps the applicant in two ways. First, a Letter of Inquiry will result in a response from the ABE about whether or not the organization is invited to apply for funding for the proposed project or program. Only invited organizations can apply for an Opportunity Grant. Submitting an LOI saves the applicant valuable time and ensures that time is not wasted submitting an application for a project or program that does not meet the guidelines or is not likely to be funded. Second, an invitation to apply may include valuable information about submitting a compelling proposal.

If you have questions about the LOI or if a discussion of eligibility would be helpful, please contact Izzy Eisen at ieisen@abenet.org or 312-988-6402.

Is there a form for submitting an LOI?

Yes. The LOI form can be found on the ABE website at [Opportunity Grants | American Bar Endowment \(ABE\)](#).

What other materials must be submitted with the LOI.

A copy of the organization’s 501(c)(3) IRS determination letter must accompany the LOI.

How will the ABE inform an organization that it is invited to submit a full proposal?

The ABE will respond to each LOI indicating if the proposed project or program is invited to submit a full application. The sooner the LOI is submitted, the sooner the applicant will receive a response, affording the most time to prepare an application if invited. If the project or program is not eligible or unlikely to be funded, the applicant will be given this information before the application deadline.

How should the LOI be submitted?

Email the completed application to Izzy Eisen at ieisen@abenet.org. The LOI form should be submitted in its original Word format.

Is there an application form?

Yes. Invited applicants should use the application form and instructions found on the ABE website at [Opportunity Grants | American Bar Endowment \(ABE\)](#). Be sure to visit the site after the new cycle’s launch (July 1) to access the most updated forms. There are also application instructions available for guidance.

What other material is required for a complete application?

For an application to be considered complete, the following items must be submitted.

- Cover letter
- Organizational Budget
- Project/Program Budget Template (found on the ABE website)
- IRS Determination Letter (If the IRS Determination Letter is from the organization's fiscal agent, you will also need to submit the written fiscal agency agreement)
- List of the organization's Board of Directors with names and affiliations
- Short staff biographies of the senior-most administrative staff who will oversee the project and the person(s) who will provide day-to-day management of the project
- Link to view the organization's most recent 990 (e.g., IRS, GuideStar, etc.)

Applicants can also submit optional documents such as annual reports, letters of support, news articles, etc.

The ABE can only consider completed applications.

Is there a form to submit the project budget?

The Opportunity Grant forms and instructions can be found on the ABE website at [Opportunity Grants | American Bar Endowment \(ABE\)](#). The Project Budget Form is required. Be sure to visit the site after the new cycle's launch (July 1) to ensure access to the most updated forms.

Is there a specific form to submit the organizational budget?

No. The organization's budget can be submitted in whatever format is generally used to report the organization's budget.

How should the application be submitted?

Email the completed application to Izzy Eisen at ieisen@abenet.org. All documents should be combined into one PDF, with the first documents being the cover letter, the application, the project budget and the org budget, followed by whatever supplemental material you choose to provide.

There is no revise and resubmit cycle.

Grant Amount and Expenses

What is the typical grant size?

Grant awards of \$25,000 or less are typical. Organizations can request larger amounts; however, the ABE may contact the applicant during the review process to ask if the project or program can be completed with less funding or by finding additional funding.

The ABE occasionally makes more significant awards when the proposed project addresses immediate and critical needs in a uniquely innovative way, with tools or resources that can be used or replicated by other service providers.

Are there expenses that an Opportunity Grant cannot support?

The ABE Opportunity Grant Program cannot be used to pay the following costs.

- personnel costs (salaries and benefits) of regular existing or new staff (ABE grant funds can be used to pay for consultants; interns; and short-term, project-specific contractual workers);
- portions of salary for individuals who are supervising direct project staff;
- legal case fees;
- impact litigation and other litigation costs;
- direct payments to clients;
- payment of items such as rent, utilities, travel for clients;
- capital expenditures unless they are one-time costs directly related to the implementation of the project;
- indirect expenses and administrative overhead (including fees to a fiscal agent);
- fundraising expenses;
- sponsorships of fundraising or awards events;
- costs associated with influencing legislation or electing candidates;
- operating deficits.

Timelines and Deadlines

Who should be contacted with questions about the Opportunity Grant Program?

Questions can be directed to Izzy Eisen at 312-988-6402 or ieisen@abenet.org.

What is the deadline for LOIs and applications?

The general timing of submissions and responses is that Letters of Inquiry are accepted between July 1 and September 1st, with ABE responses received within two weeks of receipt. LOI applicants are encouraged to submit early to be afforded the most amount of time to prepare an application if invited. Applications are due by October 6th. The specific program deadlines can be found at [Opportunity Grants | American Bar Endowment \(ABE\)](#) when each new cycle opens on July 1.

When will the ABE notify funded organizations? When will funds be received?

Generally, the ABE notifies applicants of award decisions in mid to late February. Grant awards are paid in full by April 1. All applicants are notified of funding decisions by the end of February.

What is the duration of the grant?

The grant period for an Opportunity Grant is generally one year. A grant period of less than one year can be negotiated. Upon receipt of notice of an award, Grantees are asked to sign a Grant Agreement that specifies the grant period and reporting deadlines.

What if progress on the funded project is delayed?

Funded projects must begin no later than July 1 of the year the award is paid. If it is not possible to start the proposed project or program by that time, Izzy Eisen at the ABE should be contacted immediately to discuss options, which might include the return of funds and reapplication in the following grant cycle. If progress is delayed during the grant term or it is not possible to accomplish the stated project objectives, Izzy Eisen should be contacted immediately to discuss options, including a no-cost extension of time, renegotiation of objectives, or budget/award modification.

Expectations of Grantees

What are the Opportunity Grant reporting requirements?

Grantees are required to read the Grant Agreement before the grant funds are released. The Grant Agreement will be emailed to the grantees after they have been notified of their award. Any concerns with the agreement should be communicated via email to Izzy Eisen as soon as possible to prevent the holdback of funds. Grantees must sign the Grant Agreement as a condition of receiving a grant.

Grantees are required to provide an interim report of progress on the project objectives halfway through the grant period. Thirty days after the grant period, a written final report of accomplishments and expenditures is due. A phone call may be necessary to answer questions about the final report. The ABE will notify Grantees via email of the acceptance and approval of their final report.

If an organization receives a grant, what issues need to be communicated to the ABE immediately?

Grantees are also expected to notify the ABE of the following immediately:

- inability to complete the proposed program or project;
- wish to terminate the project/program;
- desire to redirect the purpose of the funds;
- need for more time to complete the program or project;
- proposed changes in the budget (more than 25% in any line item); and
- changes in key staff responsible for grant-funded activities

These notifications should be emailed to Izzy Eisen at ieisen@abenet.org.

How does the ABE expect funded organizations to acknowledge and recognize the grant?

The ABE requests that a funded organization recognize the ABE's support in how it generally acknowledges other grant support. Recognition can include the organization's website, print or electronic annual report, event signage, or event program books.

ABE encourages funded organizations to seek local and social media coverage of the project/program that the ABE Opportunity Grant has funded. Grantees should note the ABE's support in media releases and social media posts.

If printed, electronic, or video products and tools are created using grant funds, Grantees are asked to acknowledge ABE support on those tools and resources. Grantees should contact Izzy Eisen at 312/988-6402 or ieisen@abenet.org for the ABE logo and to get approval of recognition language.

The ABE will also seek media and social media placement of Opportunity Grants, collectively and individually. Periodically, throughout the grant period, the ABE may contact Grantees to review media releases and other communications that help get the word out about the work of their organization and the Opportunity Grant.