

The Supreme Court of Ohio

Court Improvement Program (CIP) Court Navigator Pilot Grant Request for Applications

Open July 1, 2026 to August 5, 2026 at 5:00 PM

Section 1. Overview

The Supreme Court of Ohio ("Court") is requesting grant applications to support the implementation of a Court Navigator Pilot Program within abuse, neglect, and dependency (A/N/D) cases. One applicant juvenile court will be competitively selected to receive funding through a federal grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, administered under the Court Improvement Program (CIP) by the Children and Families Section.

Court Navigators are trained individuals who assist court users in understanding court processes, accessing resources, navigating systems, and preparing for meaningful participation in court proceedings. Court Navigators do not provide legal advice or represent parties. Rather, they serve as a bridge between families, service providers, attorneys, and the court by helping individuals understand expectations, access information, and overcome barriers to participation.

This pilot initiative seeks to implement the Court Navigator model to enhance family engagement, increase participation in court proceedings, strengthen collaboration among system partners, reduce barriers to access, and promote more timely permanency outcomes for children and families involved in Ohio's child welfare system. The initiative will include an evaluation component to assess the effectiveness of the Court Navigator model in abuse, neglect, and dependency cases.

Section 2. Scope of Grant

Grant funds are intended to support the development, implementation, and evaluation of a Court Navigator Pilot Program serving families involved in abuse, neglect, and dependency cases.

Eligible uses include hiring or contracting with Court Navigators, developing navigator protocols and referral processes, training navigators and court staff, creating educational materials for families, conducting outreach and engagement activities, collecting and analyzing program data, and evaluating program effectiveness.

The selected juvenile court may apply for up to \$80,000. Awards will be made on a reimbursement basis. Matching funds are not required.

Section 3. Period of Grant

The project period begins on or about October 1, 2026, and ends September 30, 2027. All services and activities must be implemented within the grant period. Pending availability of funds, a grant extension may be considered for projects demonstrating continued need and alignment with program goals.

Section 4. Eligibility

Common pleas juvenile courts in Ohio are eligible to apply.

Applicants must propose a Court Navigator model focused on abuse, neglect, and dependency cases and demonstrate a commitment to improving family engagement, access to justice, collaboration, and permanency outcomes.

Section 5. Allowable Uses of Funds

Examples of allowable uses include:

- Personnel costs for Court Navigators.
- Contracted Court Navigator services.
- Training and professional development.
- Development of resource guides and educational materials.
- Technology and communication tools supporting navigator activities.
- Program coordination and supervision.
- Data collection and evaluation activities.
- Community outreach and stakeholder engagement.
- Travel related to program implementation.

(A) Applicant Requirements

Applicants must provide a complete and clear submission that includes:

1. **Completed Application Form:** All sections of the CIP Court Navigator Pilot Grant Application Form must be filled out. Incomplete applications will not be considered.
2. **Project Summary:** A concise (1–2 page) description of the proposed project, including:
 - Purpose and objectives of the project.
 - Target population.
 - Court Navigator model.
 - Key activities and implementation timeline.
 - Expected outcomes for the court and participants.
3. **Vendor Quotes (if applicable):** Courts must provide written quotes for any vendor or consultant services included in the application. To ensure cost-effectiveness, courts are encouraged to compare multiple vendors before selecting a provider.
4. **Connection to Grant Goals:** Applicants must indicate which of the following goals are supported by the project:
 - Improve family engagement and participation in court proceedings.
 - Increase understanding of court processes and expectations.
 - Reduce barriers to participation and access to services.
 - Improve communication among families, attorneys, agencies, service providers, and the court.
 - Support timely permanency outcomes and case progression.
 - Strengthen collaboration among child welfare system partners.
 - Improve court user experience, access to justice, and procedural fairness.

- Develop innovative approaches that may be replicated by other courts.

(B) Evaluation Criteria

Applications will be reviewed and scored based on the following weighted criteria (maximum 100 points):

1. **Alignment with CIP Goals and Federal Law (30 points):** Project demonstrates a clear connection to improving family engagement, court participation, permanency outcomes, procedural fairness, access to justice, or collaboration in child welfare cases.
2. **Need and Clarity of Impact (25 points):** Application clearly identifies existing challenges or service gaps and explains how a Court Navigator model will improve outcomes for children, families, and the court system.
3. **Feasibility and Sustainability (25 points):** Project includes a realistic implementation plan, identifies key partners, and demonstrates the potential for long-term sustainability beyond the grant period.
4. **Innovation and Replicability (10 points):** Project demonstrates an innovative approach and has the potential to serve as a model for other Ohio courts.
5. **Evaluation and Data Collection Plan (10 points):** Application includes a clear strategy for measuring program effectiveness and collecting meaningful outcome data.

(C) Impact Priority Considerations

To strengthen the application, the court should clearly state how project success will be measured. Impact measures should be realistic, measurable, and connected to improved outcomes for family engagement, access to justice, collaboration, and permanency outcomes.

Examples include:

- Increased family participation in hearings and case planning.
- Improved attendance at court hearings.
- Increased completion of referrals and services.
- Reduced continuances.
- Improved communication among parties.
- Reduced time to permanency.
- Increased satisfaction among families and system partners.
- Improved understanding of court processes by families.
- Increased engagement of fathers and kinship caregivers.
- Improved collaboration between courts and child welfare agencies.

Applicants should describe both short-term impacts (e.g., increased family participation in hearings and case planning, improved attendance at court hearings, or increased completion of referrals and services) and long-term impacts (e.g., reduced time to permanency, increased satisfaction among families and system partners, improved

understanding of court processes by families, or improved collaboration between courts and child welfare agencies).

Section 6. Terms and Conditions

(A) Rights of the Court

The Court reserves the right to refuse to fund applicants, to propose different funding amounts from the application in appropriate circumstances, and to decline funding any applicants at the Court's discretion.

Furthermore, the Court shall reserve the right to terminate a grant agreement and recoup any funds that are being misspent by an applicant or not being spent to efficiently complete the applicant's proposal. The Court may conduct site visits or conduct other types of monitoring to observe and evaluate grant programs.

The Court shall reserve the right to audit any recipient court to ensure compliance with the terms set forth in the application or grant agreement.

Lastly, the Court reserves the right to terminate a grant agreement if the Court's CIP funds appropriated for this project expire or fail to continue.

(B) Requirements of Receiving Applicants

Successful applicants must satisfy the following conditions:

1. Execution of a grant agreement between the Court and the receiving court selected for a grant.
2. Submit quarterly reports detailing progress on the project's objective, implementation activities, and impact measurements.
3. The receiving court shall, upon request, provide any and all activity and financial reports related to the purchase under the grant to the Court.
4. A receiving court shall immediately notify the Court in writing of a decision to decline the grant award.
5. A receiving court shall immediately notify the Court in writing of any changes to the contact information submitted within the application.

(C) Federal Regulations

If awarded, the receiving court shall follow all applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations under the grant award. Awarded entities shall be familiar with the Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards under the Code of Federal Regulations and the requirements shall be followed through the duration of the grant award period. Federal financial assistance requirements are located under Title 2 Part 200 of the Code of Federal Regulations and requirements specific to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services are located under Title 2 Part 300.

(D) Promotional Materials and News Releases

Successful applicants may be included in future outreach and promotional materials, as determined by the Court. Additionally, news releases and articles released throughout the program period by the Court may include informal updates about the program, as applicable.

Section 7. Submission of Grant Applications and Contact Information

Submit completed applications and vendor quotes no later than **5:00 PM on Wednesday, August 5, 2026** to CFC@sc.ohio.gov.

Late applications will not be accepted. Applicants will be notified of the status of their submission no later than **September 16, 2026**.

Section 8. Reporting Requirements

(A) General

Receiving courts will provide confirmation of project start-up activities and court navigator program implementation to the Court within 120 days after notification of funding award or by February 1, 2027, whichever comes first.

Courts will also be required to submit quarterly progress reports throughout the grant period. Each report must include:

- Number of families served by Court Navigators.
- Number and type of navigator contacts.
- Referral activities completed.
- Participation in hearings and case planning meetings.
- Identified barriers and resolutions.
- Outcome measures identified by the court.
- Successes, challenges, and lessons learned.
- Collaboration efforts with system partners.

In addition, courts may be asked to participate in evaluation activities conducted by a program evaluator, including the collection and submission of additional data, participation in interviews or surveys, and other activities designed to assess program effectiveness, identify promising practices, and inform future Court Navigator initiatives.

A final cumulative report will be due by October 15, 2027, summarizing program outcomes, lessons learned, and recommendations regarding statewide expansion of Court Navigator services.

(B) Failure to Comply

Failure to comply with reporting requirements or other aspects of the grant agreement could result in the termination of the award and reimbursement of grant funds to the Court.

Section 9. Contact Information

For questions regarding this Request for Applications, please contact:

Linda Topping at Linda.Topping@sc.ohio.gov or 614.387.9389.

Section 10. Applicable Policies

Applicant courts seeking grants from the Supreme Court of Ohio are subject to the Court's policies on Equal Employment Opportunity, Alcohol and Drug Free Workplace, Weapons and Violence Free Workplace, and Discrimination and Harassment. The Court's policies are attached as Appendix A.

Section 11. Attachments

- The Court's Equal Employment Opportunity Policy
- The Court's Alcohol and Drug Free Workplace Policy
- The Court's Weapons and Violence Free Workplace Policy
- The Court's Discrimination and Harassment Policy