

# THE BAIL PROJECT



## An Introduction to Federal Funding for Return to Court Services

When people miss their court dates – often due to everyday challenges such as a lack of transportation – it comes at a high cost to them and their local government. Fortunately, return-to-court services, such as court notifications and transportation support, can significantly improve court appearance rates. While the initial cost of implementing these interventions may seem daunting, states, local governments, and nonprofit organizations don't need to foot the bill solely through their local budgets. Federal grant solicitations open annually and are available to state, local, and tribal governments, nonprofits, and more. This explainer is designed to introduce readers to key federal funding streams, briefly overview the application process, and share a few tips for success.

### Where to look for federal funding

- The [Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance \(JAG\) program](#) is the leading source of federal justice funding for state and local jurisdictions and a great place to start.
- The [Office of Justice Programs \(OJP\)](#) provides leadership, grants, training, technical assistance, and other resources to reduce crime, assist victims, and improve the criminal justice system.
- The [Partnerships for Opportunity and Workforce and Economic Revitalization \(POWER\) + Plan](#) provides resources for regions impacted by the changing energy sector. Investments promote economic diversification, job creation and training, and other employment services.
- The [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration \(SAMHSA\)](#) provides programs and funding to support people with or at risk for mental health and substance use disorders.

### How to apply for federal funding

#### Step 1: Identify funding opportunities:

Search for open or upcoming grant solicitations through a granting agency's website, or use Civil Rights Corps' [Federal Grants Database](#).

**Step 2: Register:** Different grants and agencies may have different registration processes. The U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) grants require registration in [The System for Award Management](#) and on [JustGrants](#) and [Grants.gov](#).

**Step 3: Complete required forms:** Most grants require an Application for Federal Assistance Standard Form ([SF-424](#)) and a Disclosure of Lobbying Activities form ([SF-LLL](#)).

**Step 4: Complete your application:** The two most important parts are the [project narrative](#) and [budget](#).

## How to create a successful project narrative and budget

A [project narrative](#) is a chance to demonstrate the importance of the proposed work. A successful narrative tells a detailed story about the applicant, the population served, and how the project will provide effective interventions and services to that population. Key components of a successful project narrative include (but are not limited to):

- A description of the organization, mission, practices, and impacts;
- The number of individuals to be served with the funding and project duration;
- A description of the population to be served: demographic information, specific location, what challenges this population is facing, etc;
- How the project will address challenges and effectively serve this population; and
- The specific goals of the project and a general timeline for accomplishing each goal.

A [project budget](#) calculates the total estimated costs for the project's duration. It will likely include a [budget narrative](#), which provides an explanation of how you will use the requested funds. A successful budget narrative should include:

- An explanation of how much funding the entire project requires and a demonstration of how federal assistance will be used to fund the project;
- Sufficient detail for the various line items where funds are being requested;
- An explanation of the total costs (direct, indirect, federal, and non-federal); and
- An explanation of how the grant funds will be spent in compliance with the grant provisions and requirements and a plan for how you will carry out your project.

### Tips for Success!

- Find the grant's [point of contact](#) and ask questions regarding the grant or application process
- Watch a [webinar/informational session](#) on your grant of interest
- Make a reasonable funding request and [match the budget to the work](#)
- Review the [formatting requirements](#) for the application
- Submit your application [early](#) (at least 24-48 hours before the deadline)

## How to make the case for pretrial funding

When advocating for federal funding for pretrial support, highlight the following key points:

- The lack of funding for community-based pretrial support;
- The pretrial system is the entry point into the criminal justice system, and therefore, better pretrial practices can help reduce unnecessary incarceration later on;
- The potential impact and cost savings of court transportation or reminder programs;
- Racial and economic disparities in the particular population being served; or
- Estimates on how many people will be impacted and the downstream positive effects of the intervention (employment retention, housing security, keeping families together, etc).

*For a more in-depth overview, see [The Bail Project's Guide to Federal Funding for Return to Court Services](#).*