

Office of Massachusetts Attorney General Maura Healey



Request for Proposal (RFP)

Legal Assistance for Our Veterans Grant Program

Release Date: November 11, 2016

Response Due Date: December 16, 2016

Project Start Date: February 1, 2017

Project End Date: January 31, 2019

Grantor: Office of Massachusetts Attorney General Maura Healey
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Background and overview

Utilizing \$355,000 funds received by the Massachusetts Attorney General's Office (AGO) from a settlement with Sprint and Verizon, the AGO is pleased to announce the Legal Assistance for Our Veterans grant opportunity.

The Legal Assistance for Our Veterans grant is designed to fund legal aid groups, legal clinics, or nonprofit organizations who will focus on helping Massachusetts veterans, including those with a less than honorable discharge status, gain access to veterans' services, including, but not limited to: discharge status upgrades, health benefits through the Department of Veterans Affairs ("VA") healthcare system, housing & education assistance, general legal representation, and veteran-specific employment.

The AGO intends to offer grants to existing legal aid groups or nonprofit organizations with experience working with veterans, who will focus on increasing access to services for veterans. Special consideration will be given to applicants who can demonstrate that the grant will be used to serve underrepresented veteran populations, such as women, minorities, and LGBTQ veterans. Additionally, special consideration will be given to applicants who will focus on helping clients access a variety of services including help with discharge status upgrades, housing, and education assistance. Our hope is that applicants will be able to assist clients to overcome the wide range of legal obstacles that they may face.

Importance of Serving the Veterans Population

Massachusetts has approximately 380,000 veterans. Based on anecdotal national percentages, one legal aid group conservatively estimates that there are at least 12,000 Massachusetts veterans that separated from service with a less than honorable discharge status¹. These veterans may still be eligible to receive health benefits through the VA, but only after the VA makes a determination regarding the character of their service. With a favorable character of service determination, some of these veterans, particularly those with "administrative" discharge statuses, will be eligible to receive health benefits through the VA.

Veterans with an honorable discharge are also facing barriers to accessing services. These barriers include, but are not limited to, veterans who are a part of the LGBTQ community, who have experienced Military Sexual Trauma, and who have served in an earlier era. Veterans with a less than honorable discharge and those with an honorable discharge need help accessing services for which they may be eligible regardless whether the VA has determined otherwise.

¹ This statement is based on anecdotal information presented separately by the Veteran's Legal Clinic of Harvard's WilmerHale Legal Services Center (a non-profit legal services provider assisting Massachusetts veterans) and Swords to Plowshares (San Francisco).

The provision of legal services is vitally important to veterans and their families because the assistance of an attorney or other trained advocate can make all the difference to veterans navigating these esoteric processes.

Eligibility

The following types of organizations are eligible to apply:

- Non-Profit organizations within Massachusetts who serve veterans*
- Legal Aid organizations / Legal Clinics

*Non-profit organizations must be in full compliance with all annual reporting requirements of both the AGO and the Internal Revenue Service, as applicable, in order to be eligible for funding.

Community engagement requirement

The AGO may wish to collaborate with any organization awarded a grant to host Community Action Hours events focused on the veteran population. Community Action Hours (CAH) is a special outreach event done in partnership between the AGO and an interested community-based or faith-based organization. To this end, the partner organization and the AGO choose a time and date that is most convenient for the organization's members/clients, often weekday evenings or weekends.

Funding

The AGO anticipates disbursing up to a total of \$355,000. Grant awards will be issued to a maximum of **four** applicants, in varying amounts, and applicant budgets may not necessarily be funded in its entirety. Budgets should reflect a two-year project. The budget may include but is not limited to: salary and fringe, supplies, travel expenses, etc. **Please attach a budget with your grant application.**

Duration

This is a **two-year grant**. The project will start on February 1, 2017 and be completed on January 31, 2019. The AGO will not allow for project extensions.

Cash flow and Disbursement of grant funds

Disbursements are expected to be sent to awarded grantees annually by Electronic Funds Transfer, provided grantees have completed all necessary contract and reporting documents by the established deadlines. The first disbursement will be sent at the start of the grant project and the second disbursement will be provided at the beginning of the project's second year.

Evaluation

All funding decisions and the amounts of such funding will be made at the sole discretion of the AGO. Applicants may receive no funding or less funding than requested. Some of the criteria utilized in the selection process include:

- Commitment to assisting the veteran population;
- Existing focus on veteran population;
- Applicant's previous legal experience in requesting character of service determinations or discharge status upgrades;
- Applicant's previous experience in representing veterans at an agency level and;

- Geographic diversity of applicants (intention is to provide resources across the state).

Submission instructions

- Proposals must be delivered electronically through the AGO's online grant application by 4:00 p.m. on **Friday, December 16, 2016**.
- Applications received after the deadline will not be reviewed.
- There will be no applications accepted in any other format.
- Interested applicants may access the application here: www.mass.gov/ago/grants.
- New applicants will be asked to create a free online account. Any applicant that has applied for any grant using the online grant management system may log into its existing account.
- Once applicants have started an application, it may be saved and returned to later.
- Confirmation of Receipt: Applicants typically receive an email confirmation within 24 business hours; if one is not received please call 617-963-2090 for further instructions and assistance.

Questions

Questions regarding this RFP may be submitted to AGOgrants@state.ma.us by email, **only** until 4:00 p.m. on **December 12, 2016**. When submitting your question(s), please include "Legal Assistance for Veterans Grant" in your email subject line. Questions received and answers provided regarding this RFP will be posted on the AGO's website here: www.mass.gov/ago/grants.

Reasonable accommodation

Applicants with disabilities who seek reasonable accommodation, which may include the receipt of the RFP information in an alternative format, must communicate such requests in writing to AGOgrants@state.ma.us no later than **December 2, 2016**.

Expectations and requirements for successful applicants

- Awards are contingent upon the organization satisfactorily completing all necessary documents (see below) by the deadlines established during the contracting period.
- Any changes to a grant program or budget, made at any time during the grant period, must be requested in writing by grantees and must be approved, in advance, by the AGO.
- Grantees will be required to demonstrate that they have safeguards in place to protect personal data which meet or exceed the requirement of M.G.L. c.93H; 940 CMR 27; and 201 CMR 17.
- Grantees will be required to serve up to 25 veterans a year, including those with a less than honorable discharge.
- Grantees will be required to complete all quarterly reporting requirements, including completion of a satisfactory financial and programmatic summary at the conclusion of the grant (Final Report) by the deadline established and in a format to be provided by the AGO.
- Grantees will be required to attend a minimum of 2 outreach events quarterly to spread the word to veterans about their services and the services provided by this grant. Grantees will be required to track their outreach events in each quarterly reports.

- At the end of the grant period, any unexpended grant funds must be returned to the AGO within 30 days.

Required Commonwealth contract documents for successful grantees

These documents are listed for informational purposes and should not be submitted with the grant application. Successful grantees will be required to complete these documents within the deadline established at the time of the notification of grant award.

- Standard Contract Form
- Scope of Services Agreement
- Commonwealth Terms and Conditions
- Contractor Authorized Signatory Listing
- Request for Taxpayer Identification Number and Certification (W-9)
- Electronic Funds Transfer Form

Public records

All responses and information submitted in response to this call for applications are subject to the Massachusetts Public Records Law, M.G.L. c. 66, § 10, and M.G.L. c. 4, § 7, cl. 26. Any statements in submitted responses that are inconsistent with these statutes shall be disregarded. Applicants should not submit personal data on patient medical information.

Updates to this RFP

Any changes/corrections to any part to this RFP will be posted on www.mass.gov/ago/grants. It is the applicant's responsibility to check this web page frequently for any updates.