



# The State Bar of California

## 2023–2024 Homelessness Prevention (HP 4) Competitive Grant Review Guide

### Background

Governor Newsom signed the Budget Act of 2022 (the Budget Act) on June 27, 2022.<sup>1</sup> The Budget Act allocates \$30 million for competitive awards to qualified legal services projects (QLSPs) and support centers to provide homelessness prevention legal services. Similar to the 2021-2024 and 2022-2024 homelessness prevention (HP 3) grants, these awards must fund:

[E]viction defense, other tenant defense assistance in landlord-tenant rental disputes, or services to prevent foreclosure for homeowners, including pre-eviction and eviction legal services, counseling, advice, and consultation, mediation, training, renter education, and representation, and legal services to improve habitability, increasing affordable housing, ensuring receipt of eligible income or benefits to improve housing stability, legal help for persons displaced because of domestic violence, and homelessness prevention.

On August 31, 2022, the Legal Services Trust Fund Commission Homelessness Prevention Funds Committee (committee) approved the request for proposals (RFP) for making 2023-2024 homelessness prevention (HP 4) awards. After administrative costs of up to five percent (\$1.5 million), the amount available for grants is at least \$28.5 million.

### Statutory Requirements

1. Applicants must be a QLSP or support center under California Business and Professions Code section 6213(a)-(b).
2. Awards may fund only the activities that the Budget Act enumerates, above. Legislative advocacy is outside the scope of these awards.
3. These grants must serve Californians who meet the definition of “indigent person” in Business & Professions Code section 6213(d).
4. Proposals that would serve rural or underserved communities, or include collaboration through partnerships and subgrants that were in effect as of June 30, 2022, must

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<sup>1</sup> The Budget Act is available at [https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill\\_id=202120220AB179](https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=202120220AB179).

receive preference.

### **Distribution**

After administrative costs, there will be at least \$28.5 million available for HP 4 awards. The most a program may request is \$1,500,000. If every application that receives funding requests the maximum amount, there would be 19 grants. Since some organizations will apply for less than the maximum amount, the Office of Access and Inclusion (OA&I) anticipates that more than 19 proposals will receive funding.

The Commission plans to vote on final awards in December 2022. The competitive grant period will start on January 1, 2023.

### **Application**

A complete application includes the following:

1. **Form A: Project Profile**

The project profile collected high-level information about the project's geography, budget request, and current funding (if any), as well as a project abstract.

2. **Form B: Project Description**

The project description collected detailed information about the project. This includes, for instance, the project's need, clients, partnerships/subgrants, goals, activities, deliverables, and strategies for outreach, accessibility, and evaluation. It also asked for detailed narratives about the applicant's qualifications and resources to perform the work effectively.

3. **Form C: Project Budget**

The budget collected information on how the program proposes to allocate HP 4 funds to the project for 1.5 years. Applicants needed to identify staff by their role (e.g. "Managing attorney" or "Housing attorney") and estimate the amount of time that these roles would spend on the project. The project staff, budget, and description should be consistent with one another.

4. **Form D: Budget Narrative**

The budget narrative collected information about each line of the budget, noting whether the grant would directly pay for specific items or be allocated on a percentage or other basis.

5. **Form E: Signed Project Assurances**

### **Selection Criteria**

On August 31, 2022, the committee adopted the following rubric to guide its deliberations:

Category	Exceeds Expectation	Meets Expectation	Below Expectation	Not Addressed
<b>Project impact and strategies:</b> The applicant proposes a project that significantly and directly addresses or will address a compelling need for the particular homelessness prevention intervention(s).				
<b>Number of check marks</b>	<b>X21-25 points</b>	<b>X11-20 points</b>	<b>X1-10 points</b>	<b>X0 points</b>
<b>Administration:</b> The applicant demonstrates that it has the qualifications, experience, resources, and/or partners that it needs to meet the proposal objectives.				
<b>Serves rural populations:</b> The applicant presents a strategy to meet the homelessness prevention legal needs of specific rural communities.				
<b>Serves underserved populations:</b> The applicant presents a strategy to meet the homelessness prevention legal needs of specific underserved communities.				
<b>Project evaluation:</b> The applicant details an evaluation strategy to acquire data that it can use to refine the project's strategies to increase its effectiveness in addressing homelessness.				
<b>Partnerships:</b> The applicant would leverage partnerships with or subgrants to community-based organizations or local jurisdictions. Those partnerships or subgrants must be in effect as of June 30, 2022.				
<b>Number of check marks</b>	<b>X15 points</b>	<b>X10 points</b>	<b>X5 points</b>	<b>X0 points</b>

The RFP states that the rubric is a tool to guide committee discussion of projects. A comparatively high score, therefore, does not guarantee funding. The committee and commission may still exercise discretion to recommend/make awards that best accomplish the statewide goals of the Budget Act. For instance, the committee can use its best efforts to distribute grants statewide and to fund a diversity of HP interventions.

The RFP communicated the following explanations to applicants:

- **Project impact and strategies:** Applicants should explain how the project’s strategies and goals—activities, partnerships, outputs, outcomes, etc.—will directly and significantly ameliorate homelessness. They should explain why they selected the particular intervention(s) over others. The justification for the proposed services should refer to the circumstances and needs of particular populations that the project seeks to serve.
- **Serves rural populations:** Applicants should describe the extent to which they would serve rural communities. The more the project would concentrate its efforts on rural populations, the more likely it will score a meets or exceeds expectations in this category. Applicants should also detail their strategy for serving rural Californians. The strategy should consider the challenges they face—economic, geographic, political, and otherwise—to safe and reliable housing. Likewise, it should address the likely challenges to providing services. Proposals ought to explain how the project will prioritize outreach and services to rural areas rather than just affirm their eligibility. The California Commission on Access to Justice recommends defining “rural” as areas that meet the medical service study area (MSSA) standard for “rural” or “frontier.” The California Office of Statewide Health Planning and Development identifies MSSAs using sub-county clusters of census tracts. The California Commission on Access to Justice argues that MSSA categories of rural and frontier—as opposed to urban—are better suited than counties to classify rural areas. Rural MSSAs have 50,000 or fewer residents and population densities below 250 people per square mile. “Frontier” MSSAs have population densities of fewer than 11 people per square mile.<sup>2</sup>
- **Serves underserved populations:** Applicants should describe the extent to which they would serve underserved clients. Applicants should also detail their strategy for serving underserved communities. The strategy should consider the challenges they face, and it should address the likely challenges to providing services. Proposals ought to explain how the project will prioritize outreach and services to underserved communities rather than just affirm their eligibility. A project that serves such communities should explain

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<sup>2</sup> MSSA data is available on the California State Geoportal at <https://gis.data.ca.gov/datasets/CHHSAgency::medical-service-studyareas/explore?filters=eyJERUZJTklUSU90IjpbIlJ1cmFslwiRnJvbnRpZXIiXX0%3D&location=36.206796%2C118.684374%2C7.63>. This link provides data with the following filters for definition: “Rural” and “Frontier.”

how the latter face even higher barriers to accessing civil justice than does the low-income community generally. Since “serves rural populations” is a separate criterion, “serves underserved populations” refers to other aspects of community access.

- **Project evaluation:** Applicants should describe a strategy—frequency, diversity of approaches to collecting information, etc.—to assess the effectiveness of project services. The project should gather and analyze data in time to inform services strategy during the grant period. Dedicating financial and other resources to evaluation is relevant to this criterion.
- **Partnerships:** Applicants should describe their relevant partnerships with and subgrants to community-based organizations and/or local jurisdictions. To receive points in this row, those relationships must have been in effect as of June 30, 2022. Legislative staff has confirmed that the Budget Act confers a preference on leveraging existing partnerships, rather than creating new ones. Scores in this category may reflect, among other things, the strength to the project of the partnership(s) or subgrant(s). Be sure to check that grantees receiving points for this category uploaded the required documents, and that the date(s) corroborate the partnership’s existence as of June 30, 2022.

The following provide guidance for “not addressed,” below expectations,” “meets expectations,” and “exceeds expectations”:

- **Not Addressed:** A proposal that scores “not addressed” in a category/criterion fails to satisfy that criterion in a meaningful way or lacks the relevant nexus. A proposal might fail to satisfy a criterion in a meaningful way if it articulates only a vague intention to do so. And a response might lack the relevant nexus to “serves rural populations,” for instance, if it would serve only an urban community.
- **Below expectations:** A proposal that scores “below expectations” in a category/criterion addresses that criterion but is insufficiently competitive or persuasive to justify a score of “meets expectations.” The proposal might aspire to do too little, for instance, such as only occasionally serve rural clients in “serves rural populations.” Or the proposal might lack sufficient detail, explanation, or basis in fact to demonstrate its contours or likelihood of success. Since an uncompetitive proposal might still articulate a feasible project, this score confers some points.
- **Meets expectations:** A proposal that scores “meets expectations” in a category/criterion is competitive and persuasive with respect to that row of the rubric. To be competitive, the proposal will be sufficiently ambitious and/or compelling to merit the use of competitive funds. To be persuasive, the proposal will describe circumstances sufficiently probative of the applicant’s intention and ability to accomplish its stated objectives in that criterion.

- **Exceeds expectations:** A proposal that scores “exceeds expectations” in a category/criterion satisfies the standard for “meets expectations” while standing out as particularly compelling or impressive. A project might be especially compelling, for instance, because its strategies or partnerships would be unusually impactful. Or the proposal might be exceptionally detailed, thorough, evidence-driven, or otherwise well-conceived and convincing.

Staff encourages the committee to explore the boundaries between these scores such that a spread of total points across applications is possible.