Bigglesworth Family Foundation

Legal Services Grant Program Update | November, 2026

Past, Present and Future

Since our formation in 2011, the Bigglesworth Family Foundation has focused most of our grantmaking on supporting legal service organization and access to justice. Early on, like many foundations, we operated "by invitation only". In 2017 we re-envisioned our approach, and over the next few years developed an open process that uses a three-step process for potential legal services grantees:

Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
An Open Letter of Inquiry (LOI)	Invitation to submit a full application	Invitation to participate in a site visit

This approach allowed us to "right size" the time and effort non-profit organizations invested in preparing their materials in relation to the likelihood of receiving funding. In 2020, our Board decided to accelerate our annual payout, raising the amount to in excess of 10% of our corpus. Bigglesworth is a small foundation both in asset size and number of staff. Our original corpus was roughly $20 million dollars. To date, we have granted over $16 million in total and close to $11 million in legal services grants.

~$20M	$16M+	~$11M
Original corpus	Granted to date	In legal services grants

These actions resulted in our foundation building a much larger number of grantees, as well as expanding the issues areas, geography and methodology used. This journey has been exciting and meaningful, but it has also created the reality that (1) it is difficult for us to stay up to speed and knowledgeable about the work our grantees are engaged in, (2) some of our grantees have been funded consistently for upwards of 10 years and (3) we have little flexibility to support new grantees or take on projects that will have sector wide impact.

2026: A Pivotal Year

2026 has been a pivotal year:

177	$4.98M	4x+
LOIs received in 2026	Total funding requested	Our annual legal services grants budget

01 Bigglesworth reached an all-time high with regards to the number of LOIs submitted and the amount of funding requested. In total, we received 177 LOIs, with requests totaling $4.98M, over 4x our annual legal services grants budget. The increase has been the result of (1) more organizations becoming aware of the work we do and our open LOI process, (2) more organizations facing cuts to their government grants and (3) the growing need for legal assistance because of actions taken by the current administration. As a result of the increased number of LOIs, the workload for our staff has more than doubled, yet the percentage of organizations that are invited to submit full applications has declined by more than 50%;

02 Bigglesworth relocated our offices from San Francisco to Sonoma County;

03 We spent even more time than usual working on advocacy and supporting regulatory reform, and our efforts have been worthwhile. Issues included but were not limited to the updated Certified Law Student Program (formerly known as Practical Training of Law Students (PTLS), outreach to funders about the impact of funding civil legal aid, and efforts to modify the Rules of Court and allow California to have Community Justice Workers (CJWs).

Given the convergence of these factors, we find ourselves at a good moment to once again review our grantmaking approach, funding priorities and plans for the foundation. This review will impact all our grantmaking work. However, as our legal services grant making program is the largest and the only one that uses an open application process.

Moving Forward

Moving forward, we plan to modify our process as follows:

01
Special Projects
We will be shifting from our open LOI process to an approach that uses Requests for Proposals (RFPs) for specific projects that we are focusing on, such as CJW programs, public interest fellowships and collaborations that address issues such as economic justice, domestic violence and equity.

02
Geographic Impact Grants
Our relocation to Sonoma affords us an opportunity to consider systemic impact in a smaller footprint. As a result, we will be offering Legal Services Organizations (LSOs) that significantly serve clients in the North Bay an application track for general operations grants, as well as program grants.

03
State and National Impact
We will continue to fund organizations that serve as support centers (both formally and informally), as the impact these organizations have benefits the entire legal services sector.

In some cases, current and former grantees will remain eligible for consideration. However, in other instances, they will no longer fit well within our guidelines. While we understand this will disappoint some of our grantees, we feel it is important to be transparent and share this news prior to the end of this year.

What Happens Next

Over the next few months, we will be redesigning our website and application materials. In the first quarter of 2027 we will post more information. For Spring 2026 grantees who normally would have self-reports due in Q4, we will be sending you a simplified report at the start of the new year to complete by the end of February.

> For those who anticipated completing an LOI in the coming months, with the hope of being invited to apply for our Spring 2027 grant cycle, as noted above, we are modifying our approach, and as a result, **will not be accepting LOIs this fall.**

We are deeply grateful for your work and the opportunity we have had to partner with you.

With appreciation,

Bigglesworth Family Foundation