



DAKOTA PLAINS LEGAL SERVICES

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Grant Proposal for Central Intake Specialist Position Dakota Plains Legal Services (DPLS) Submitted: 7-1-25

Executive Summary

Dakota Plains Legal Services (DPLS) respectfully requests funding to support the hiring of an Intake Specialist to lead a centralized, accessible intake system across our service region. This position is critical to improving our ability to efficiently and equitably connect low-income and Native American individuals with civil legal assistance. The Intake Specialist will be the first point of contact for applicants, ensuring prompt response, accurate eligibility screening, and appropriate referral or assignment to staff attorneys. This investment will strengthen our intake infrastructure, reduce unmet legal need, and enhance our compliance with Legal Services Corporation (LSC) and other funding requirements.

Organizational Background

DPLS is a non-profit law firm providing free civil legal aid to low-income individuals and Native American communities in South Dakota and North Dakota. We serve some of the most rural and underserved areas in the nation, including multiple tribal jurisdictions. Our services help clients secure safety, shelter, income, health care, and access to justice. As a grantee of the LSC, we are committed to ensuring accountability, client-centered services, and responsible stewardship of public funds.

Statement of Need

DPLS receives over a hundred applications a month for legal help through phone calls, online applications, and walk-ins at multiple offices. Currently, intake duties are dispersed and conducted by various staff, which leads to inconsistencies, bottlenecks, and delays.

With limited staff capacity and complex eligibility rules, the need for a coordinated intake process is more urgent than ever. Without a dedicated Intake Specialist to screen applicants, collect data, and ensure referrals or case assignments are handled promptly, DPLS risks missing clients in crisis and losing opportunities to resolve time-sensitive matters.

Project Description

We propose hiring a full-time **Intake Specialist** to serve as the central coordinator for all incoming legal aid requests. The Intake Specialist will streamline communication across DPLS' access points and ensure consistent, equitable client service.

Goals and Objectives

Improve the accessibility and efficiency of legal intake services by ensuring consistent and accurate eligibility screening and case routing to improve client satisfaction and engagement.

Budget Request

Personnel:

- Intake Specialist Salary (Full-Time): \$40,000
- Fringe Benefits (25%): \$10,000
- **Total Personnel Cost: \$50,000**

Additional Support (if applicable):

- Technology (computer, phone, software): \$2,500
- Training/Professional Development: \$1,500
- **Total Project Request: \$54,000**

Conclusion

DPLS is uniquely positioned to provide civil legal aid to underserved and marginalized communities in our service region. A centralized intake system, led by a dedicated Intake Specialist, will significantly improve our capacity to serve clients more quickly, equitably, and effectively. We respectfully request funding support to make this position possible.

Grant Proposal for Justice Bus Personnel Costs
Dakota Plains Legal Services (DPLS)
Submitted: 7-1-25

Executive Summary

Dakota Plains Legal Services (DPLS) respectfully requests \$13,000 to support the personnel costs associated with staffing the Justice Bus, a mobile legal aid unit delivering free civil legal services to rural and tribal communities across South Dakota and North Dakota. This request will fund necessary travel-related expenses, including lodging, per diem, and mileage reimbursement, for current DPLS staff as they conduct legal outreach and intake across our region. This funding will directly support the continuation and expansion of a program that is actively addressing access-to-justice gaps while building community awareness through legal needs assessments and public engagement.

Organizational Background

DPLS is a nonprofit legal aid provider serving low-income and Native American individuals across a vast and predominantly rural region. As a Legal Services Corporation (LSC) grantee, DPLS focuses on providing free civil legal help in areas such as housing, domestic violence, public benefits, consumer protection, and tribal law.

To better reach isolated clients, DPLS launched the Justice Bus, a mobile outreach initiative that brings attorneys and legal advocates directly to communities in need. The Justice Bus supports both legal assistance and public education, removing geographic and technological barriers to justice.

Project Purpose and Recent Impact

The requested funds will enable DPLS to continue staffing the Justice Bus with its current legal team. As staff travel significant distances for multi-day outreach trips, lodging, meals, and mileage expenses are critical to sustaining this program.

Since its launch in Summer 2025, the Justice Bus has:

- Visited seven communities, providing on-site legal information and intake services.
- Been used as a tool for statewide legal needs assessment, helping DPLS identify unmet legal issues and guide future service planning.
- Gained meaningful media and public recognition, significantly expanding awareness of legal aid services.

Recent public engagement and media coverage includes:

- **News feature on DRG Media Group:**
"Justice Bus providing free legal services making stops Thursday in Pierre and Fort Pierre"
(DRGNews, June 11, 2025)
- **Instagram coverage by South Dakota Unified Judicial System (@southdakotacourts),** showcasing the Justice Bus stop at Potter County Courthouse in Gettysburg, SD.

- **Community event listing for June 26, 2025:**
"Potter County Courthouse Justice Bus Event," 201 S Exene St, Gettysburg, SD ([AllEvents](#))
- **Inclusion on SD UJS Self-Help webpage:**
 The Justice Bus is now listed as a resource under the *"Get Legal Help in South Dakota"* section of the **South Dakota Unified Judicial System's Self-Help Center**, helping connect individuals with live legal aid services.

This level of outreach and public visibility has made the Justice Bus not only a legal service delivery tool but also a vehicle for civic engagement, legal education, and access-to-justice advocacy.

Budget Breakdown

Cost Category	Estimated Expense
Lodging (overnight stays for staff during outreach trips), Per Diem (meals and incidental expenses for staff during travel), Mileage Reimbursement (based on standard IRS mileage rates)	\$8,000
Incentive Bonus (overnight travel, staffing events that fall outside of business hours)	\$5,000
	<hr/> \$13,000

These estimates reflect anticipated personnel travel costs over the next 4 months for scheduled and emerging outreach events using the Justice Bus.

Expected Outcomes

With this support, DPLS expects to:

- Conduct community-based legal needs assessments to guide strategic planning and funding decisions.
- Continue growing public awareness and engagement through partnerships, social media, and earned media.
- Strengthen legal networks by building collaborative relationships with tribal authorities, local courts, and nonprofit organizations.

Conclusion

The Justice Bus represents DPLS's commitment to meeting people where they are—geographically, economically, and legally. It is a proven, cost-effective model for improving access to justice in isolated communities. With your investment of \$13,000, we can ensure that the staff behind this vital initiative are supported, and the Justice Bus can continue to serve as a beacon of legal aid, education, and empowerment across the region.

Thank you for considering this request.