



Office of the State Public Defender

Grant Funding for Expanded Public Defense Services (Holistic Defense)

26-month Grant Funding for Holistic Defense Services in Public Defense

Background

The 2025-2026 Budget Act (SB 102) appropriated funding to support the expansion of public defense services, specifically holistic defense. \$14,250,000 is available for direct grant awards.

Holistic defense is a client-centered approach to public defense that addresses client needs beyond their immediate criminal case, including drivers into the criminal legal system and collateral consequences of legal system involvement. It generally relies on multi-disciplinary teams.

Allowable uses of the funding include:

- Hiring social workers, mental health professionals, housing specialists or similar staff who can support holistic defense for clients.
- Establishing or expanding holistic defense initiatives.
- Specialized training for defense attorneys and interdisciplinary staff in holistic defense implementation.
- Data collection and independent evaluation on the impact of holistic defense as it relates to client outcomes and public safety.

Grantees must be prepared to start work by February 1, 2026, and use all funds within a 26-month grant period. All grant funds expire on June 1, 2028.

Eligibility to Apply

Grant awards are restricted to:

- **Public Defender Offices/Alternate Defender Offices:** For purposes of this grant program, Public Defender Offices/Alternate Defender Offices are defined as county agencies where most employees are government employees.
- **Qualified Entities Providing Indigent Defense:** For purposes of this grant program, Qualified Entities are defined as entities providing public defense services at the behest of the county. This includes, where relevant, Bar Associations, panel systems, contracted law firms, or the county itself where it directly administers public defense services.

County Authorization: Except where the county itself is the proposed grantee, any application must include a letter authorizing the application from the Board of Supervisors or County Administrator.

One Application Per County: A proposal may request funding for multiple eligible entities within a county, but only one application per county will be accepted.

Collaborative Proposals: OSPD encourages collaboration across counties, and multi-county proposals are permitted. One entity, either a public defender/alternate defender office or qualified indigent defense provider, must be designated to serve as the lead grantee and funding recipient. A multi-county application must include Letters of Authorization from each county involved in the proposal.

Funding Limits

Applicants will self-select into the small scope, large scope, or multi-county category.

- Small scope projects are limited to requests of up to \$450,000.
- Large scope projects are limited to requests of up to \$850,000.
- A multi-county proposal will be capped at \$1.8 million.

All proposals will be scored using the same criteria and scoring matrix but will be compared only to proposals in their same project category.

Applicants may apply for any dollar amount up to and including the maximum grant amounts listed, but applicants are strongly encouraged to apply for only the amount of funding needed to implement the project during the 26-month grant period. Proposals will be scored, in part, on the reasonableness of the proposed budget.

Indirect costs shall not exceed 10% of the overall budget proposal request.

Usage Constraints: Any funding used for client incentives or support such as gift cards, food, or transportation must be clearly explained in the proposed budget, separately approved by OSPD, and carefully tracked by the grantee. Grantees must track spending to demonstrate it meets the allowable purpose.

Changes to Funding Use: Awarded funds are strictly for work authorized by the grant agreement. Any changes in grant fund usage must be made in writing and approved in advance by OSPD.

Creating the Proposal

Applicants are encouraged to review evidence-based literature, talk to stakeholders, and utilize their institutional expertise when creating their proposals. Some examples of holistic defense initiatives may include:

- Early representation, including client interviews and interventions prior to the first court appearance.
- Navigators and/or client advocates to increase linkages and connections to community-based programs and assist clients in accessing services.
- Expanded representation models such as family defense or immigration representation embedded within a public defender office.

- Centralizing or establishing holistic public defense models in rural counties.

Scoring Criteria

A successful application will persuasively describe the proposal's relationship to holistic defense, why the proposal activities are needed, how outcomes will be measured, and the applicant's ability to perform the proposed work.

This includes:

- **Project Need:** The proposal clearly explains how the community need, as defined by the applicant, was assessed and how the holistic defense proposal is responsive to the need.
- **Project Description:** The application explains the work and goals of the project and how they address the stated need. The proposal makes clear to the reader how the project will be managed and includes clear and realistic expected outcomes, while demonstrating how the project is related to holistic defense.
- **Capacity and Sustainability:** The applicant explains their ability to overcome obstacles, their capacity to track the grant financials and data outcomes for reporting and evaluation purposes, and their plans to create sustainability past the grant period.
- **Budget:** The proposal will be realistic about the resources available, how they will be used, and the project scope.

More information about scoring is provided in the Application Instructions.

Reporting Requirements & Evaluation

Grantees will be required to collect data about grant funded activity, including outcomes, and to report this data to OSPD biannually. In addition, grantees may be required to participate in virtual meetings with OSPD and other grantees.

OSPD will collect data from each grantee related to funding use and outcomes for grant reporting and evaluation purposes. This data will be provided to the legislature at the end of the funding period. Data collection metrics have not yet been established, but efforts will be made to develop metrics that are not overly burdensome yet demonstrate how funds were used and the impact of the grant program.

OSPD encourages all applicants to consider a structured evaluation of their project to better understand outcomes and impact and to demonstrate investment impacts to their funders. Applicants may include data collection and evaluation costs in their budgets.

Do Not Supplant

Supplanting is the intentional reduction in the amount of federal, state, or local funds appropriated to an existing program or activity because grant funds have been awarded for the same purposes. Supplanting is strictly prohibited under this grant. It is the responsibility of the grantee to ensure that supplanting does not occur. Grantees are required to maintain clear and detailed financial records to demonstrate that grant funds are used only for allowable costs and activities.

Decision-Making Rights

OSPD retains exclusive authority to select the qualified entities who will receive this grant funding. OSPD reserves the right to reject any and all applications and/or cancel this RFA. OSPD reserves the right to consider regional and programmatic needs, and to solicit additional applicants when necessary.

Questions

To ensure fairness and transparency, any inquiries concerning the grant application or grant process will only be answered in writing. Questions may be submitted between August 28, 2025, and October 16, 2025. Written responses will be sent to the requestor, and both the question and response will be posted, anonymously, once a week on OSPD's [Grant Opportunities](#) page.

Please direct all written inquiries to OSPD.Grant@ospd.ca.gov.

Timeline

- RFA published: August 27, 2025
- Proposals due: October 28, 2025 (5 pm PST)
- Grantees selected: December 16, 2025¹
- Contracts signed: February 3, 2026
- Service term begins: March 2, 2026
- Service term ends (services end): May 15, 2028
- Grant close out (grant reporting complete): August 31, 2028

Application Process

To be considered for funding, applicants must comply with the requirements described in this RFA and the Application Instructions. For questions, please contact OSPD.Grant@ospd.ca.gov.

- Applications and Instructions are available online on OSPD's [Grant Opportunities](#) page.

To apply, submit the application and all applicable attachments **no later than 5:00 p.m. PST on October 28, 2025**, to the email OSPD.Grant@ospd.ca.gov with the subject line: "Expanded Public Defense Grant: X County," where X is the name of the applicant county(ies). Incomplete or late applications will not be accepted or considered.

- Applicants must use the application form and submit the completed form as a PDF. All additional application documents must be submitted as individual PDFs and titled according to the content of the document.

¹ Time frames are a good faith estimate and may be adjusted at OSPD discretion based on business need.