



# HARRIS COUNTY, TEXAS

Office of Management and Budget 1001 Preston; Suite 500 Houston, TX 77002 713-274-1135

Grants Coordination Section - Conveyance Form Application  Award

<b>Department Name / Number</b>	<b>DUNs</b>	<b>Grant Title</b>
Domestic Relations - 286	Not Applicable	Self-Represented Services in the Family Courts '23
<b>Funding Source:</b> Texas Bar Foundation: CFDA# N/A	<b>Grant Agency:</b> Texas Bar Foundation	
<b>Program Year:</b> 1 st	<b>Program Ending:</b>	
<b>Grant Begin Date:</b> 04/01/2023	<b>Grant End Date:</b> 09/30/2023	
<b>Grant Org. Key:</b>	<b>If applicable, Prior Year Org. Key:</b> N/A	

### Grant Description:

The Texas Bar Foundation solicits charitable contributions and provides funding to enhance the rule of law and the system of justice in Texas, especially for programs that relate to legal assistance for the underserved, the administration of justice, ethics in the legal profession, the encouragement of legal research, and the education of the public

	Total Budget	Grant Funded	County Funded
Salary & Benefits	\$25,000.00	\$25,000.00	\$0.00
Non-Labor	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Sub Tot. Incremental Cost	\$25,000.00	\$25,000.00	\$0.00
Indirect Cost	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00*
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>\$25,000.00</b>	<b>\$25,000.00</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>

\* under development

Full Time Equivalent Positions

Date Guidelines are Available

% of Positions Paid by Grant

Grant Submittal Deadline Date

### Grant Discussion:

If awarded, this would be the first year of funding for this program, which proposes to hire a grant-funded attorney to support self-represented services with actions pending in Harris County Family District Courts, a program that aids in the provision of legal assistance for parents who are self-represented litigants in an uncontested Court matter. There is no match requirement.

### County Funded Cost Projection

Year	Required	Discretionary
2023	-	-
2024	-	-
2025	-	-
2026	-	-
2027	-	-

Completed by: Michael Mattingly Mattingly, Mike

Date: 1/3/23

Reviewed by: [Signature]

Date: 1/3/23



## Self-Represented Services for the Harris County Family Courts

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*Spring 2023 Grant Application*

### ***Harris County Domestic Relations Office***

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Mr David Simpson  
1310 Prairie Street  
Suite 700  
Houston, TX 77002

DRInquiries@hctx.net  
O: 713-274-7300

### ***Ms. Blanca Reyna***

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1310 Prairie Street  
Suite 700  
Houston, TX 77002

blanca.reyna@dro.hctx.net

## Application Form Spring 2023 Grant Application

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### ***Condition of Grant and Preferred Activities READ FIRST***

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#### **Conditions of Texas Bar Foundation grants**

***The Texas Bar Foundation allows only ONE GRANT APPLICATION per fiscal year June 1 - May 31.***

The Texas Bar Foundation reserves the property rights, copyrights and all other rights of reproduction with respect to any intellectual property for which service is provided as a condition of this grant.

Grant awards must be used strictly in accordance with the proposal and budget submitted to the Foundation. A grantee must petition the board for permission to make any changes or alternate uses of grant funds.

An agreement accepting the terms and conditions of the grant must be signed and submitted within 90 days of funding notification or the award will be rescinded.

Grant Award Check will void after 90 days if not cashed. If grantee has not cashed the grant award check within 90 days of funding the Foundation may deny or withdraw the approved funding.

A press release and semi-annual progress & financial reports are required.

A final report stating the original goals and progress made toward the goal that includes a description of the project's benefit to the community is required.

Bar Foundation funds must be used within 12 months of the date of the award.

#### **Preferred Activities**

**The Texas Bar Foundation preferred activities or projects:**

Projects must directly impact or address the Mission of the Texas Bar Foundation. Preferred projects have a statewide impact; have new or innovative approaches requiring start-up funding; encourage and promote legal assistance to poor and disadvantaged people; encourage pro bono legal work; help members of the public understand their rights and responsibilities under the law; enhance the ethical and professional practice of law; produce legal research, publications, and forums; strengthen the court system or the administration of justice; or support for the annual Judicial conference.

#### **Disfavored or Excluded Activities**

- **Disallowed Activities:** Internal Revenue Service rules forbid the use of charitable funds for propaganda, lobbying activities, the election of public officials or activities to promote or sustain a trade association. No grants will be awarded to individuals. Projects that funds will be utilized outside the State of Texas; fundraising benefits or mass appeal solicitations; additions to endowments, multi-year commitments.
- **Disfavored Activities:** Repeat grants for the identical project in the identical location and/or serving the identical community; continuing legal education (unless experimental or not self-supporting); operating expenses (unless used exclusively for a project); non-project-dedicated salary.

## ***General Information***

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### **Conditions of grants\***

I have read and understand the conditions for receiving a Texas Bar Foundation grant.

### **Grant Frequency\***

Only one application per fiscal year per organization will be considered. The fiscal year for the Foundation is June 1- May 31. Has your organization previously applied for a Texas Bar Foundation grant during the Foundation's current fiscal year?

No

You may use your GuideStar profile to help populate your application form. Before doing so, please be sure that your GuideStar profile contains the most up-to-date information.

To auto-populate your form with GuideStar profile answers click the "Copy GuideStar Profile" button in the top right corner. Simply pick and choose which answers you would like to pull into the form by clicking the checkbox next to the applicable answer. When finished selecting, click the "Copy Answers" button in the bottom right of the pop-up and the GuideStar data will be pulled into the applicable fields in the form.

Please note that copying answers will not overwrite any existing answers and any answers pulled from GuideStar which populate into your form can be edited and updated. If you do not have a GuideStar profile you may simply answer the questions by typing or copy/pasting in your response.

### **Primary Organization Name\***

Harris County Domestic Relations Office

**DBA**

**EIN\***

76-0454514

### **Organization Website**

[www.dro.hctx.net](http://www.dro.hctx.net)

### **Organization Mission Statement\***

Under four divisions: Family Court Services, Alternative Dispute Resolution, Legal Services and Community Supervision, the office ensures that:

- Parents discover that mediation is a preferred alternative to litigation.
- Parents understand and keep children out of parental conflict
- Parents are aware of the consequences of failing to follow court orders.
- Children receive both emotional and financial support from each parent.
- Children are afforded quality time, in a safe environment with both parents.
- Children timely receive the financial support needed to grow up and thrive in life

### **Texas Bar Foundation's Mission Statement\***

The Texas Bar Foundation solicits charitable contributions and provides funding to enhance the rule of law and the system of justice in Texas, especially for programs that relate to the administration of justice; ethics in the legal profession; legal assistance for the needy; the encouragement of legal research, publications and forums; and the education of the public.

Grants are awarded in the following program areas. Please indicate the area your grant qualifies under:

Legal Services for the Underserved

### ***Project Information***

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#### **Project Name\***

This should NOT be the name of your organization. This is the title of your project and it will be used as the "identifier" for this request in every form within the process.

Self-Represented Services for the Harris County Family Courts

#### **Grant Amount Requested\***

Please round to a whole number, do not use cents.

\$25,000.00

#### **Brief Description of What This Grant Will Accomplish\***

In 180 characters give a brief synopsis of what this grant will accomplish. "This grant will..." or "To provide..." type of description.

This grant will support the Office's Legal Services Division in providing self-represented services for parties with actions pending in Harris County Family District Courts.

#### **Primary Focus of the Project\***

Which of the Texas Bar Foundation's preferred activities is the primary focus of this project?

Encourage and promote legal assistance to poor and disadvantaged people

#### **Other Preferred Activities**

If your project includes more than one preferred activity, please check any other of the Texas Bar Foundation's preferred activities your project supports NOT checked in the above question.

Educate members of the public on their rights and responsibilities under the law

#### **Full Explanation of the Project\***

In this section please give a full, detailed explanation of your project.

The grant will primarily serve parents who are navigating the Harris County Family District Court system as self-represented litigants in an uncontested matter. These are parents eager to move forward with their family-related matter but are unable or believe they are unable to afford legal counsel. In addition to financial limitations, these individuals may have work hours and/or family care responsibilities that do not allow sufficient time to navigate the system, learn the proper rules and procedures, and properly prepare for their court appearances. The end goal is to review their petition, waiver, affidavit, answer, summons, return of service, and final order, and approve these documents to the satisfaction of the family judiciary so they can proceed with their self-represented action. In addition, the grant monies will be used to empower them with the tools and mindset needed to navigate the court system successfully, in a fraction of the amount of time it would take them on their own. Parties would be referred to the Harris County Law Library for the forms needed to complete their specific court action and unique set of circumstances. After completing the forms online, they would get scheduled to come to our office for form approval. Once the Harris County Domestic Relations Office approves their forms, they will be provided a certification that can be presented to the court clerk that will allow them to join the uncontested docket. Ultimately, these parents will be able to secure access to justice, ensuring that even those with limited resources can gain access to the family courts for conservatorship, possession/access, child support, medical support, community property, adoption and/or termination actions. Finalizing these matters will allow their families to move forward in life.

>Services that are needed the most

In Harris County, self-represented litigants are able to access forms from the Harris County Law Library. Once they have completed their various pleadings, they will need a lawyer to review whether the pleadings and orders comply with the Rules of Civil Procedure and the Texas Family Code. A review and approval of their prepared forms is their greatest need to achieving a spot on the uncontested docket.

>Typical types of court appearances, and how the Domestic Relations Office plans to help

Most of these self-represented litigants are appearing to finalize a divorce, a parentage, an adoption, a modification, or an enforcement action.

Where the self-represented party is seeking to finalize an action by waiver, agreement or default, this office will review their forms and approve the forms should they meet all statutory requirements. If the reviewed forms fail to meet statutory requirements, the self-represented litigant will be advised of the forms' defect (s) and given suggestions on what actions to take. Once approved, the self-represented litigant can return to the assigned court's clerk with an approval slip and secure a spot on the court's uncontested docket.

>Recurring issues encountered, and how the program will resolve these issues

The primary situations involve self-represented litigants researching their legal action, securing and completing legal pleadings/orders from form files and then being turned away by a court because their paperwork does not comply with the law. Self-represented litigants can be turned away multiple times by a Court should they be unable to properly prepare the necessary forms and comply with timeframes. Our service will offer a free review of the Petition, Waiver, Affidavit, and Order by an attorney. Should the documents comply with the law, a form will be tendered to the self-represented litigant signifying that their paperwork complies. This form can be hand-delivered to the court clerk where the self-represented litigant will be scheduled for a hearing. Should the form not be in compliance, the attorney will explain the defects.

Such a program will ensure wrap-around self-litigation services in Harris County. The Harris County Law Library will provide access to form books, the Houston Volunteer Lawyer' Program (HVLPP) will provide legal advice and representation to income-qualifying self-represented litigants. The Harris County Domestic Relations Office will provide pleading and order review, recommendation, and approval. Such a process will provide self-represented litigants with the opportunity to be prepared prior to being added to the court's docket. That in turn will assist the progress of self-represented cases—dockets will not be delayed because wrong or incorrect paperwork was submitted.

>Steps already taken to solve the issue

The Harris County Law Library has some resources in place but is unable to provide legal assistance for self-represented litigants. They have requested assistance from the Harris County Domestic Relations Office and this two-tier model is a viable solution to the problem.

**>How the program will work**

Self-represented litigants will visit the Harris County Law Library to secure the appropriate forms. Once completed, they will be referred to the Harris County Domestic Relations Office for review and approval of their pleadings/orders.

**>Where clients will come from**

Clients will be referred by the family judiciary, district clerk, domestic violence agencies, Houston Bar Association, and other entities.

**>What funds are needed and why**

Harris County has not funded this endeavor. The Harris County Domestic Relations Office needs seed money to begin providing the service, determine what is successful, and demonstrate both court time-savings, positive economic impact, and access to justice so that future funding is more likely to come from local government. During the first year, metrics can be developed and secured that will be beneficial when requesting additional funding.

\$25,000.00 is needed to cover the salary and benefits of one part-time attorney for one year.

**>What the Domestic Relations Office will provide**

The Harris County Domestic Relations Office (DRO) will provide user-friendly space in the Harris County Courthouse with a reception area and separate office for self-represented litigants to meet with an attorney. In addition, the DRO will provide phones, internet access, supplies, furniture, website media, Facebook coverage, management, IT and a receptionist.

**Staff dedicated to create the program will include:**

- A. Executive Director—Manages the DRO
- B. Legal Services Director—Manages the Legal Services Division
- C. Attorney—Provide self-represented services
- D. Receptionist—Greets self-represented litigants and collects information

**>Timeline to create the program, list it online, and how the program will be tracked**

Services will begin within 14 days of funding being received. The DRO website will be modified to include a tab for self-represented litigants, displaying a case flow with phone numbers and locations for each entity providing services.

Staff will maintain data on the number of individuals seeking services, demographics (race, sex, level of income, type of family law case, etc.), whether their orders/pleadings were approved, how many times the same litigant sought services before approval, and court number.

## Project Type\*

Please indicate if this is a new or continuing project for your organization:

New



### **New or Continuing Project\***

Please provide details regarding your above answer

- If this is a new project, will it continue after all Texas Bar Foundation funds are expended?
- If this is a continuation or expansion of an existing project, how long has the project existed?

This is a new project. Yes, it is our intention that the project will continue after all the Texas Bar Foundation funds are expended. As a result of the Texas Bar Foundation providing seed money, the DRO will be able to track metrics and use those statistics to secure additional funding from other sources for the service moving forward.

### **Planning and Staffing\***

Describe how this organization plans to accomplish the project and staff that will be utilized specifically for this project?

The project will be accomplished by partnering with Houston Volunteer Lawyers Program and the Harris County Law Library. Self-represented litigants may be referred to any of the three entities by the judiciary, court clerk, court manager, nonprofit agency, or self-referred through an agency’s website. If the litigant is initially seen by HVLP, an income-qualifying determination will be completed on whether they qualify for free legal services. If not income-qualifying, advice will be given to the self-represented litigant on what action must be taken and the forms to use and advised to meet with the DRO once the forms are completed. The litigant is referred to the law library to secure those forms. Once the forms are completed, they are referred to the DRO for review and approval of the forms.

The Domestic Relations Office (DRO) already has an intake office staffed with a receptionist and coordinator in the Harris County Civil Courthouse. There is sufficient space to add an attorney. Self-represented litigants will report to the DRO intake office, be greeted, asked to fill out a demographic worksheet, and submit their pleadings for review. After registering, an attorney will review the forms and offer their feedback. The following staff will be utilized:

- A. Executive Director—Manages the DRO (Paid by Harris County)
- B. Legal Services Director—Manages the Legal Services Division (Paid by Harris County)
- C. Attorney—Provide self-represented services (Paid by A Grant)
- D. Receptionist—Greets self-represented litigants and collects information (Paid by Harris County)

### **Number of Participants or Beneficiaries\***

How many participants or beneficiaries will this project serve?

700

### **Cost per Participant or Beneficiary\***

What is the cost per beneficiary?

\$97.71

### **Type of Participants or Beneficiaries**

This project targets the following audience(s):

Adults

## Socioeconomic Group of Participants or Beneficiaries

Is a particular socioeconomic group targeted by the project? Describe.

Self-represented litigants in the Harris County Family Courts

## Selection of Participants or Beneficiaries

How will the beneficiaries of the project be selected?

The project will be limited to self-represented litigants where the Harris County Family District Courts have jurisdiction to hear the matter in controversy. Each litigant who has completed pleadings and orders will be provided services.

## Primary County\*

Please check the primary county your project will affect. Only check ALL if your project will truly benefit all 254 counties in Texas.

Harris

## Other Affected Counties

Please check all counties OTHER than the primary county checked above, that will benefit from your project.

## Similar Projects

What other organizations in Texas or your area are providing similar service or working to solve a similar problem?

1. The Harris County Robert W. Hainsworth Law Library is a public library that serves the legal information needs of self-represented litigants, legal professionals, the judiciary, and county and other governmental officials. The library offers:
  - Self-help resources and guides including prose litigant handbooks in multiple languages.
  - Forms and templates including free information and forms related to various family law issues.
  - A reference desk to assist with legal research. Law librarians are available via email, phone, voicemail, and in-person appointments to help navigate legal research materials.
  - Links and contact information to volunteer and pro bono lawyer programs through the Houston Volunteer Lawyers Program and others, as well as reference materials.
  - A copy center with reasonable prices for document printing, copying, scanning, and faxing services for all library visitors.

2. The Houston Volunteer Lawyers program is the pro bono legal aid arm of the Houston Bar Association, helping thousands of people each year with their most pressing legal needs, such as child custody circumstances. Their mission is to fill this gap in the civil justice system by connecting eligible clients who cannot afford an attorney with private attorneys who volunteer their time. Each year the program receives over 30,000 calls for help, and volunteer attorneys collectively donate over \$5 million in free legal services.

## Request for Funding of Publications

Please check any that apply. *If it does not apply to your project, please leave all boxes blank.*

## Publication Research

If you checked the last box above, please list the organizations and a brief description of their published material.

### Class or Presentation

If the request is to fund a class or presentation, upload a copy of the agenda, outline, and/or full presentation.

## ***Tell Us How Our Texas Bar Foundation Dollars Will Be Spent***

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Please indicate what specific areas of the project will be funded with Texas Bar Foundation funds. Please show **ONLY** budgeted amounts needed from the Texas Bar Foundation. **THE TOTAL OF ALL YOUR LISTED EXPENDITURES MUST EQUAL YOUR GRANT AMOUNT REQUESTED.** Record \$0 for all line items that do not apply.

### Video/Audio Tapes + duplication\*

\$0.00

### Printing/copy costs/postage\*

\$0.00

### Paper/office supplies\*

\$0.00

### Project Related Salary Costs\*

\$25,000.00

### Salary Funding

Which staff member's salary and/or benefits will these funds be allocated to?

Part-time attorney

### Salary Allocation

Are the grant salary funds listed above allocated specifically for this project rather than offsetting general funds or expenses of your organization?

Yes

### Salary Position

Is this a new position, not currently on the payroll of the organization?

Yes

### Staff Training\*

\$0.00

**Transportation\***

\$0.00

**Stipends for Students\***

\$0.00

**Equipment/Software\***

\$0.00

**Publicity/Advertising\***

\$0.00

**Other Project Specific Expenses Not Included Above\***

\$0.00

**Other Project Specific Expenses Detail**

Create a detailed list of costs and descriptions of any project specific expenses equal to the amount listed in the previous question.

**Total of All Line Items Listed Above\***

\$25,000.00

**Does The Total Amount Above Equal Grant Amount Requested?\***

Yes

***Financial Information***

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**Organization Budget\***

This application represents what percentage of your organization's budget?

1%

**Project Budget\***

This application represents what percentage of the total budget of this project?

85%

**Upload Entire Project Budget\***

This is the total funding required to complete the project, including Texas Bar Foundation funds and all other sources of funding.

### Previous Expenditures\*

List all previous expenditures for this project.

None

### Current Funding\*

Identify all sources of funding already received for this project by listing the name and address of the source and the amount of funding received.

Harris County will provide space, electricity, IT, supplies and a receptionist.

### Prospective Funding\*

If additional funding is being sought, please describe the prospective funding sources and amounts.

N/A

### Future Funding\*

If the Texas Bar Foundation does award this grant, how will the organization continue the project beyond this funding cycle? Who will provide funding?

This is a new project. The Harris County Domestic Relations Office will seek other sources for seed money to begin providing the service, determine what is successful, and demonstrate both court time-savings, positive economic impact and access to justice so that future funding is more likely to come from local government. During the first year, metrics can be developed and secured that will be beneficial when requesting additional funding.

### Partial Funding\*

If the Texas Bar Foundation cannot provide full funding, what are the most critical pieces of the project that need funding?

Without paying the salary of the staff attorney, the project will not be provided

If the Texas Bar Foundation is unable to award this grant, how will this project be funded?\*

It is not clear whether there will be funding secured. The Harris County Domestic Relations Office will seek other sources for seed money to begin providing the service.

## *File Uploads*

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### IRS Determination Letter\*

Please upload a copy of your most recent IRS determination letter. All organizations MUST upload an IRS letter showing their 501(c)3 status and EIN. The letter will start with "Dear Applicant, We are pleased to inform you that upon review of your application for tax exempt status we have determined..." OR "This is in response to your (date) request for information regarding your tax-exempt status."

DO NOT upload a W-9 or a 990 form. DO NOT upload a state tax exempt form. DO NOT upload an application for a determination letter. For organizations that operate under the umbrella of another organization or a national organization (i.e. the Catholic Church) please submit the national IRS letter and the local organizations IRS letter

with the EIN number used by the local organization that is applying. Only one upload is allowed so scan all documents into one pdf before uploading. State, county and local governmental entities **MUST** upload an IRS determination letter showing their governmental status, this can be a 147-C letter.

**Upload Statement of Activities\***

Upload audited Statement of Activities. *If you do not have an audited Statement of Activities, please submit an unaudited statement with a letter of explanation. A Profit and Loss Statement of some type MUST be submitted.*

**Upload Statement of Financial Position\***

Upload audited Statement of Financial Position. *If you do not have an audited Statement of Financial Position, please submit an unaudited statement with a letter of explanation. A Balance Sheet of some type MUST be submitted.*

**Board Members\***

Upload a list of the board members with telephone numbers and addresses.

**Staff Members\***

Upload a list of staff or organizational chart with staff names.

**Letters of Support**

Letters of support are NOT required. Please make sure to upload letters before hitting submit. Do not mail or email to the Texas Bar Foundation staff. Only one upload is allowed. If you have more than one letter, scan them into one document.

***Reporting Responsibilities***

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**Person Responsible\***

Every six months, a grantee must submit a progress report and financial information to the Texas Bar Foundation. Who will be the person responsible for these reports?

Blanca Reyna

**Reporting\***

Is the person named above aware of this responsibility?

Yes

**Publicity\***

The Texas Bar Foundation requires that any organization receiving a grant must give credit to the Texas Bar Foundation by issuing a press release regarding the grant and include a required paragraph about the Bar Foundation. In addition to the press release, describe how additional credit or recognition will be given.

The press release or similar information will be listed on the DRO website, along with a Facebook announcement, and an email to the judiciary.

**Noncompliance, for any reason, with the Texas Bar Foundation’s requests regarding reports or the content of the press release could result in disapproval of future applications from your organization.**

## File Attachment Summary

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*Applicant File Uploads*

*No files were uploaded*