



2026 Request for Proposals

This program is a new 18 month fellowship that places clients and community advocates with lived experience in civil legal aid and public defender offices to ensure that the voice of the community is centered in the services and advocacy.



National Legal Aid & Defender Association Client & Community Advocate Fellowship Request for Proposals – 2026

Program Background

The NLADA Client and Community Advocate fellowship* is created to strengthen Civil Legal Aid and Public Defender Offices by developing sustainable, community-based solutions to today's urgent challenges. This program places clients and community advocates with lived experience in civil legal aid and public defender offices to ensure that the voice of the community is centered in the services and advocacy. The goal is to leverage the expertise and deep commitment to equity and justice to assist legal aid and public defender organizations to build the capacity to adapt, innovate, and expand equitable access to justice.

Guided by the belief that the quality of justice should not depend on financial means, NLADA strives to ensure access to justice by supporting organizations dedicated to expanding legal resources and advancing justice for communities facing systemic barriers. Legal aid organizations often encounter systemic barriers that limit their access to essential resources, and this fellowship is designed to help these organizations overcome such obstacles and strengthen relationships with the client communities served.

Through this model, NLADA's Client and Community Advocate program enables host sites to:

- Build sustainable community relationships and partnerships.
- Develop and Strengthen client-centered values and services.
- Incorporate the expertise of the client community into their operations and advocacy.

Eligibility Requirements

Eligible host sites include public defender offices, legal aid organizations, and community-based nonprofits that provide services directly addressing barriers to justice, such as legal support, restorative justice initiatives, reentry programs, and resources for individuals facing systemic barriers. Fellows will serve at their sites four days a week, dedicating a full day each Friday for NLADA training.

Ideal Host Sites Are:

- **Community-Centered:** Actively engage with their local community to provide services and/or activities.
- **Data-Informed:** Actively use data to assess, improve, and adapt services to better meet client and community needs.
- **Collaborative:** Currently engaged in, or open to, cross-sector collaboration with various stakeholders to enhance services.

**In the NLADA community, the definition of client includes those who have received either civil legal aid or public defense services, and community advocate refers to former clients who are now working alongside civil legal aid and public defenders to improve equal justice.*

- **Transparent and Learning-Oriented:** Willing to share relevant project data and learning with NLADA to support program evaluation, storytelling, and field-wide impact.
- **Mission-Aligned:** Deeply committed to NLADA’s mission of expanding equitable access to justice, particularly in under-resourced communities.

To qualify, organizations must have:

- A dedicated staff member or team able to supervise and mentor the Fellow.
- Hold an NLADA Program Membership
- Demonstrated ability to contribute a \$50,000 cost share

Project Duration:

Each selected organization will host a NLADA Client and Community Advocate Fellow for a project duration of 18 months, with an opportunity to renew annually, pending successful project outcomes and alignment with program goals.

Roles and Responsibilities

Organizations chosen to participate as host sites will be responsible for:

- *Supervision and Mentorship:* Designating a full-time supervisor to mentor and guide the fellow, including regular meetings and ongoing feedback. Approval may be granted for a part-time supervisor if additional full-time support is available.
- *Work Environment:* Providing a safe and resource-equipped work environment, including office space, a computer, phone, and email access equivalent to that of paid staff.
- *Project Plan Development:* Collaborating with NLADA to develop a Project Plan that defines clear activities, goals, and timelines for the fellow. The plan will be a joint agreement among the host site, fellow, and NLADA.
- *Recruitment and Selection:* Leading the recruitment and selection process for their fellow, with support from NLADA. This includes interviewing and identifying candidates who align well with the project’s goals.
- *Training and Reporting:* Participating in training sessions hosted by NLADA and completing bi-annual progress reports, performance evaluations, and any site visits conducted by NLADA staff.

NLADA Responsibilities:

NLADA will provide:

- *Guidance and Support:* Assistance in developing project plans, setting realistic goals, and ensuring project alignment with Client and Community Advocate core principles and NLADA’s mission.
- *Training and Resources:* Orientation and ongoing training for host sites and fellow to ensure a smooth onboarding and productive service year.

- *Evaluation and Feedback:* Ongoing support to monitor and evaluate the project's progress and provide guidance for improvements or adjustments as needed.
- *Administrative Duties:* Support with administrative responsibilities, including payroll processing, and onboarding procedures.

Financial Commitment

Host sites are required to agree to a non-refundable \$50,000 cost-sharing contribution to support the NLADA Client and Community Advocate Fellow program. This can be spread out over the 18 months of the fellow's service paid through monthly invoices from NLADA.

Service-Related Expenses: Host sites are also responsible for reimbursing the fellows for any approved service-related travel or other authorized expenses.

Fellow Benefits: Stipend paid in bi-weekly living allowance checks from NLADA over 18 months

Service Requirements:

- **Service Hours:** Full-time commitment, including occasional evenings or weekends if required by the host site
- **Employment and Education:** Part-time employment is permitted but must not conflict with fellow hours and requires supervisor approval. Fellows may also enroll in part-time courses.

Eligibility Requirements:

Age and Residency: Must be at least 18 years old (no upper age limit). Fellows must be legally authorized to work in the United States.

Application Process

The application process for NLADA's Client and Community Advocate Fellowship Program involves two primary steps:

Part 1 – Proposal and Narrative Due Date: Slots filled on a rolling basis- priority deadline December 31, 2025

Applicants must submit a proposal that articulates their organization's alignment with the goals of the NLADA Client and Community Advocate Fellowship and outlines how they plan to incorporate insights and data generated by the Fellow into meaningful programmatic improvements.

Part 2 – Project Plan Development Due Date: 1st Quarter 2026

Organizations selected in the initial review phase will be invited to co-develop a work plan for the fellow with NLADA. This plan should include defined objectives, expected outcomes, and a timeline for the fellow's activities and milestones.

Selection Criteria

Proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

1. Alignment with NLADA's Mission: The extent to which the proposed project reflects NLADA's mission to expand access to justice and address barriers faced by underserved communities.

- 2. Community Involvement:** The level of engagement and input from the community in shaping project goals and expected outcomes.
- 3. Track Record of Collaboration:** A track record of collaboration with civil legal aid and public defense offices
- 4. Supportive Environment:** The host site's ability to provide a structured, resourceful, and supportive environment for the fellow.
- 5. Commitment to Equity and Justice:** Evidence of the organization's dedication to promoting equity and justice within both internal operations and its community impact.

Proposal Submission

All proposals and application materials are encouraged to be submitted electronically by December 31st, 2025. Slots will be filled on a rolling basis. For additional information and detailed submission instructions, please contact Anna Stolte-Huchim at a.stolte-huchim@nlada.org

Access the application directly here:



Timeline for Proposal, Award, and Recruitment

Dates for proposal review, award notifications, and fellowship recruitment are to be determined (TBD) and will be communicated to applicants once finalized.

Additional Support and Contact Information

For questions or assistance, contact Program Manager Anna Stolte-Huchim at a.stolte-huchim@nlada.org. To submit your application [click here](#) and to learn more go to <https://www.nlada.org/client-community-advocate-fellowship>

Information Sessions (recommended for all applicants)

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| • November 6, 2025: Register here | <u>One-on-One Assistance</u> |
| • December 11, 2025: Register here | Schedule a consultation: Schedule here |

Thank You for Your Interest!

We look forward to reviewing your application and partnering with you to expand access to justice.