



TEXAS INDIGENT DEFENSE COMMISSION

CHAIR:
Honorable Missy Medary
Corpus Christi, Presiding Judge,
5th Administrative
Judicial Region of Texas

EX OFFICIO MEMBERS:
Honorable Jimmy Blacklock
Honorable Brandon Creighton
Honorable Emily Miskel
Honorable Joseph "Joe" Moody
Honorable David J. Schenck
Honorable John Smithee

MEMBERS APPOINTED BY GOVERNOR:
Mr. James D. "Jim" Bethke
Mr. Alex Bunin
Mr. Jay Cohen
Honorable Valerie Covey
Honorable Richard Evans
Honorable Missy Medary
Honorable James R. "J.R."
Woolley, Jr.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR:
Scott Ehlers

September 22, 2025

The Honorable Weldon P. Cude
Atascosa County Judge
Via E-mail: wcude@co.atascosa.tx.us

RE: FY2026 Statement of Grant Award - TR-26-001

Dear Judge Cude:

I am pleased to inform you that the Texas Indigent Defense Commission has awarded Atascosa County a **FY2026 Supplemental Improvement Grant** in the amount of **\$37,600** for the **Atascosa Rural Regional Public Defender Office** for equipment and internship costs. Your Statement of Grant Award is attached. Please sign page two of the award statement and return via e-mail to Grants@tidc.texas.gov to accept the award and become eligible for payments.

Congratulations to Atascosa County on taking the lead in Texas by developing and continuing this indigent defense program. If you have any questions or need clarification of the information contained in this letter or the attached Statement of Grant Award, please contact Edwin Colfax, the Commission Director of Grant Funding at (512) 463-2508 or ecolfax@tidc.texas.gov.

Sincerely,

Missy Medary
Chair, Texas Indigent Defense Commission
Presiding Judge, 5th Administrative Judicial Region of Texas

Copy: tbarrera@co.atascosa.tx.us
sbrown@co.atascosa.tx.us



TEXAS INDIGENT DEFENSE COMMISSION
Statement of Grant Award
FY2026 Improvement Grant

Grant Number: TR-26-001
 Grantee Name: Atascosa County
 Program Title: RPDO Temporary Supplemental Funding
 Grant Period: 10/1/2025-9/30/2027
 Grant Award: **\$37,600**

The Texas Indigent Defense Commission (herein, the Commission) has awarded the above-referenced grant to Atascosa County (herein, the County) for indigent defense services. The authorized official named on the grant application must sign this Statement of Grant Award and return it to the Commission. The grantee will not receive any grant funds until this notice is executed and returned to the Commission. Funding is provided as listed in the categories in the table below:

Direct Costs:	
1) Personnel (Total Number of FTEs: 21)	\$14,000
2) Fringe Benefits	\$1,100
3) Travel and Training	
4) Equipment	\$22,500
5) Supplies	
6) Contract Services	
7) Indirect Costs	
Total Approved Budget	\$37,600
Less Cash from Other Sources- County Match	\$0
Total Amount Funded by Commission	\$37,600

Standard Grant Conditions:

- The authorized official for the grantee accepts the grant award.
- The authorized official, financial officer, and program director, referred to below as grant officials, must comply with the terms of the grant as written in the Request for Applications issued in July 2025, including the rules and documents adopted by reference in the Commission’s Grant Rules in Title 1, Part 8, Chapter 173, Texas Administrative Code.
- The grant officials understand that a violation of any term of the grant may result in the Commission placing a temporary hold on grant funds, permanently de-obligating all or part of the grant funds, requiring reimbursement for funds already spent, or barring the organization from receiving future grants.
- Disbursement of funds is always subject to the availability of funds.
- The grant officials agree to follow the grant terms contained in the “Grant Terms and Conditions” contained in Attachment A which includes the final grant application.
- Any indigent defense plan documents submitted to the Commission must continue to meet all grant eligibility requirements.
- The judges hearing criminal and juvenile matters must amend the Indigent Defense Plan for their respective courts to include the program funded under this award as necessary and submit it to the Commission by November 1, 2024.

The authorized official for this grant program has read the preceding and indicates agreement by signing the Statement of Grant Award included below.

Signature of Authorized Official

Name & Title (must print or type)

Date

Attachment A

Grant Terms and Conditions

In addition to the program requirements stated in the Request for Applications (RFA) these specific program requirements apply to this funded program.

- This grant requires quarterly progress reports to provide information on the operation of the program. The Commission grant manager will create an online progress report to document the work performed in this program. The County may request modifications to the online report when the report items do not accurately reflect the work performed. See the Timeline for Reporting and Fund Distribution at the end of this document for dates.
- The County will submit quarterly expenditure reports to obtain reimbursement of the scheduled percentage of expended funds based on actual expenditures. The reimbursements will be proportional to the county's required match. See the Timeline for Reporting and Fund Distribution at the end of this document for dates.
- The County must provide to TIDC staff the minimum job requirements and a full job description of the positions specified under this project before positions are publicly posted.
- Requests to revise the scope, target, or staffing of the project, or substantively alter project activities require advance written approval from TIDC.
- Budget adjustments consisting of reallocations of funds among or within budget categories in excess of \$10,000 or ten percent of the original approved budget, whichever is less, are considered budget adjustments and are allowable only with prior approval of the executive director of the Commission.

2025 Atascosa County Improvement Grant Application Narrative
Indigent Defense Improvement Grant Program Supplemental Funds for Interns and Office Equipment-
FY2026/FY2027
Rural Regional Public Defender Sustainability

a. Application Form

Counties Represented: **Atascosa, Frio, Karnes, Wilson**

Fiscal Year: **2025**

State Payee Identification Number: **17460014685**

Division To Administer Grant: **Tracy Barrera**

Program Title: **Indigent Defense Improvement Grant Program Supplemental Funds for Interns and Office Equipment- FY2026/FY2027**

Requested Grant Amount: **\$37,600.00**

Authorized Official: **Weldon P. Cude**

Financial Officer: **Tracy Barrera**

Program Director: **STEPHANIE R. BROWN**

Mailing Address: **1 Courthouse Circle; Suite 105; Jourdanton, TX 78026**

b. Introduction (Executive Summary)

The Legal Internship Program allows an attorney in training to conduct legal research, draft documents and perform administrative tasks to gain practical experience. Legal internships are used as a major tool to assist law students in determining if this field is really where they want to be. Legal intern training is an attempt to hire those with in-house training upon bar passage. The use of Ipad tablets to enhance immediate client services is increasingly beneficial due to versatility and portability, and are useful for immediate brief writing, filings and enhancing productivity away from the office.

c. Problem Statement

LEGAL INTERNS: Atascosa County has created a local high school summer internship program exclusively for high school students. High school students are paid \$15.00 per hour to assist various office divisions within the county, including the Atascosa Area Advocates Public Defender's Office (AAAPDO). Unfortunately, these high school students are limited in their abilities within the courtroom. Unlike law student interns, a temporary bar card is not provided to high school students. This temporary bar card, along with an attorney supervisor, allows the law student intern to appear before the court in various realistic learning opportunities, whereas the high school intern provided by the county cannot.

In addition, due to the rural location's distance from a major city and the current lack of funding, law students are reluctant to volunteer their time so far away from a major city center, especially to work for free.

Without the opportunity of an internship in realistic legal circumstances, time, money and effort may be wasted.

PORTABLE TECHNOLOGY: Technological gaps within the legal landscape remain in many aspects of the judicial system, despite the advent of progressions toward matters such as artificial intelligence. Inefficiencies in court filings, caseload and reporting data will continue to thrive without the use of portable technology. Needing an office for manual tasks from a bygone era such as entering and managing case information is far too time-consuming and leads to backlogs, case delays and continuances. The drive for hybrid systems and virtual hearings remain in this post-COVID era

The law student of today's era are trained to focus on access to justice via technology according to a report by Thomson Reuters. Without the use of portable devices, these law students are less inclined to work for a law firm that remains focused on manually inputting data and seeking solutions within an office environment.

d. Objectives

LEGAL INTERNS: According to the *Absolute Internship*, an international internship program, legal interns provide a platform to explore different areas of law, and identify preferred specializations, which assist students in making informed career choices. The advantage of being a legal intern includes gaining practical legal experience, networking with legal professionals, developing valuable skills, and gaining insight into the day-to-day workings of a Public Defender's office. Internships offer students the rigors of the legal profession by providing them with necessary skills and knowledge, in addition to boosting their confidence in their abilities. Furthermore, legal internships can be utilized as a source of job fulfillment for open positions within the Public Defender's Office.

Our legal interns will assist Assistant Public Defenders with various tasks such as legal research, drafting legal documents, attending court proceedings, and providing support in case preparation. By investing time in these formative experiences, students not only enhance their employability but also lay a strong foundation for a fulfilling career in law, according to *The Importance of Internships: How Internships Can Shape Your Legal Career*.

PORTABLE TECHNOLOGY: The AAAPDO is requesting funds for 15-Ipads in order to streamline client services and data to make for faster and efficient representation in court. The drive to develop accessibility and streamline processes stands as a foundational purpose for law firms and courts to wholeheartedly embrace technology into their system. The integration of digital platforms drives innovation, facilitating online filing, case tracking, and document management. This not only reduces the burden of relying on a physical structure but also minimizes bureaucratic red tape, contributing to a more agile and responsive judicial system.

The integration of Ipads tablets in the courtroom is not simply a modernization effort; it is an essential transformation that aligns the legal system with the expectations of the 21st century. It also aligns with the goal of hiring the law students of the current generation who seek to associate with an innovative and a forward-thinking law firm.

e. Activities

Legal Internship: The AAAPDO will implement a 6-week internship program utilizing candidates from predominantly Texan law schools, and other law schools across the country. This PDO will provide job descriptions to the law schools' career services division, including contact information, pay, hours and duties. Most law school career services programs have a specific time of the year to conduct virtual and in-person interviews. The choice to interview in person or virtually depends upon the time and location, although in-person is preferred. After the school or virtual interviews have been conducted, the potential candidates will have an in-office interview. The purpose of the subsequent interview is to allow the potential candidate the opportunity to see where the office is located. Considering the AAAPDO is located in a rural area almost an hour away from the nearest law school, this in-office interview will factor into the decision as to whether or not the candidate is willing to make the daily drive. The candidate will be introduced to office staff and attorneys, will obtain a "lay-of-the-land," visit the local courthouse, and obtain further instructions on the additional counties' locations. When all parties agree the working relationship is worth proceeding with, an offer will be made, and the candidate will be provided with office instructions, a start date and time and instructions via the human resource department. The legal intern will complete documentation for a temporary bar card issued by the State Bar of Texas. The candidate is then placed on the next Commissioner's Court agenda for the Treasury department's acknowledgement.

Upon starting, the legal intern will be provided with a desk and all necessary office equipment, i.e., a computer, phone and contact information for all employees. The intern will be trained to work the PDO's software case database and record keeping methods. After the introduction of office procedures, the legal intern will accompany the PDs to court.

In court, the intern will become familiar with the Judge, court staff and procedures. Under the guidance of a supervising attorney, the legal intern will participate in various tasks such as legal research, drafting legal documents, handling simple court proceedings, providing support in case preparation and sitting second chair in hearings and trials. At the end of each court day, the legal intern will update case file data via the PDO's software system, discuss the case results for the day, and prepare for the next day's docket.

This internship will assist the existing staff attorneys in serving clients better and completing tasks faster. The internship will also help the legal intern connect what is learned in class with practical tasks, like research and assisting attorneys. Through these methods, the value lies in exposure to legal processes and teamwork. By collaborating with the PDO, this opportunity can prove to be relevant, enriching, and aligned with the skills students are learning in their courses, according to *QHE Association*, an independent quality assurance agency in education and training.

PORTABLE TECHNOLOGY: The Staffing, Operations and Technology: A 2025 survey of State Courts provides that most courts are facing an unprecedented convergence of major waves of change, especially the far-reaching impacts of both GenAI and generational shifts in workforce and leadership roles. Courts must deal with these changes while continuing to face challenges in case backlogs and staff shortages. Resources, including often-limited budgets, must be strategically balanced between current operations and investments in technology that could improve future operations. The current situation shows that courts will be unrecognizable in a few decades.

One way to counter the changes is with portable technology. *Ipad* tables and other such devices are assisting in moving cases and the court forward to emerge on the other side of changes with more efficient, technology-driven procedures. With the use of portable devices, documents, dates and data are easily manipulated in real time, without the need to return to the office for creations or alterations.

f. Evaluation

LEGAL INTERNSHIP: This PDO must consider balancing the need for dedication and education with the wellbeing of interns, which is a crucial aspect of maintaining a successful legal internship program. According to the article of *How Internships Shape Careers*, students are provided with real world experience needed to secure a job post bar passage.

1. Understanding Industry Expectations: Internships allow students to experience real-world work environments. They learn about deadlines, teamwork, and corporate culture, which are not covered in academic courses.
2. Bridging the Gap Between Theory and Practice: Academic learning often lacks practical applications. Internships provide hands-on opportunities to apply classroom knowledge to real-world tasks.
3. Growing Demand for Practical Experience in Hiring: Employers prioritize candidates with internship experience because they require less training and can contribute immediately.

Gaining Hands-On Experience in the Chosen Legal Field:

1. Applying Knowledge to Real-World Scenarios: Internships help students use their classroom knowledge in practical situations, allowing the real-world exposure to sharpen their expertise.
2. Exposure to Public Defender's Office Operations and Workflows: Interns observe how professionals manage projects, handle clients, and solve problems, improving their adaptability.
3. Enhancing Professional Growth and Confidence: Working in professional environments makes students more confident and prepared for full-time roles.

PORTABLE TECHNOLOGY: According to *Everlaw: Technology that Makes a difference*, the discovery process has undergone drastic changes over the past decade. Body cam images, surveillance video, geodata, and multiple types of cell phone data have joined institutional records, email, and paper documents as sources of evidence in a typical investigation.

Facing the growing demands of the discovery process, with resources that remain flat, Public Defender Offices need to find advanced tools that allow them to not only meet the needs of modern ediscovery, but to go far beyond baseline requirements - without requiring additional resources.

These changes are impressive not only because they show the ingenuity of the legal system in the face of problematic times, but also because they have upended long-standing court norms to better serve attorney and their clients. As courts deploy online tools, law firms and court officials set out goals for ensuring that those technologies were implemented in ways that addressed inequities in legal proceedings.

Moving beyond case management and filing, the introduction of Ipads and tablets exemplifies a pivotal step in the modernization of court processes. These devices are tools used to empower judges, lawyers, and stakeholders to access case information, schedules, and documents remotely. If an attorney needs to review case records, track schedules, or access relevant documents outside of the courtroom, a portable device or tablet enables seamless remote access, reducing dependency on physical case files and facilitating efficient case preparation.

g. Future Funding

Future funding is essential to allow Atascosa County the ability to improve indigent defense with the assistance of legal interns and portable technology. However, the current need to make the request can be alleviated with the granting of these supplemental funds for the next 2-years. Although this Improvement Grant Program does not currently require future assistance from Atascosa, Karnes, Wilson or Frio Counties, the point remains that without the assistance of this grant, AAAPDO will not be able to hire legal interns, nor entice the legal interns with adaptive or technological advancements. We will not be able to make the described improvements in our indigent defense systems without this substantial infusion of state funding.

h. Budget Narrative and Budget Form

The funds requested through use in 2027 include all relevant numbers pertaining to the employment of 4-legal interns at \$18.00 per hour for 6 weeks, and the purchase and use of 15-Ipad tablets at 1500.00 each. These requests will be incorporated into the previously established Atascosa Area Advocates Public Defender's Office.

Personnel Costs	\$15,100.00
FTE's	
Salary	\$14,000.00

Fringe Benefits	\$1,100.00	
Travel and Training		
Equipment		\$22,500.00
Supplies		
Contract Services		
Indirect		
Total		\$37,600.00
Required County Match		
Total less County Match		\$37,600.00

[Home](#)

Timeline for Reporting and Fund Distribution

Reports will be submitted on-line at tidc.tamu.edu.

Reporting Period	Type Report Due	Date Report Due	Fund Distribution Date
October 2025 through December 2025	Grant Expenditure Report Progress Report	January 15, 2026	February 2026
January 2026 through March 2026	Grant Expenditure Report Progress Report	April 15, 2026	May 2026
April 2026 through June 2026	Grant Expenditure Report Progress Report	July 15, 2026	August 2026
July 2026 through September 2026	Grant Expenditure Report Progress Report	October 15, 2026	December 2026
October 2026 through December 2026	Grant Expenditure Report Progress Report	January 15, 2027	February 2027
January 2027 through March 2027	Grant Expenditure Report Progress Report	April 15, 2027	May 2027
April 2027 through June 2027	Grant Expenditure Report Progress Report	July 15, 2027	August 2027
July 2027 through September 2027	Grant Expenditure Report Progress Report	October 15, 2027	December 2027