Utilizing the Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) to Improve Public Defense

Byrne JAG is a federal grant program available to local jurisdictions in two ways: direct formula grants and a separate competitive grant process. *Although these are federal dollars, California's Board of State and Community Corrections (BSCC) administers and awards the competitive grants.* Currently, $33 million in competitive grant funds over a two-year period are available to California counties, with an additional $16 million potentially available for a third year depending on availability of federal funds. While historically Byrne JAG grants have been predominantly awarded to law enforcement, public defense providers received a significant portion of these funds in the last grant cycle. In fact, BSCC identifies **"innovations in indigent defense"** as a **priority area of need** for Byrne JAG funds. Given the variety of other state and federal resources available for prosecution and policing, counties should consider prioritizing Byrne JAG funding for their indigent defense programs.

Using Byrne JAG to Improve Indigent Defense

Below are examples of public defense projects funded in the last Byrne JAG cycle, shared here to inspire ideas for the current round.

Social Workers. El Dorado County added a social work team to start a pilot program of reentry evaluations for detained clients, connecting clients to services benefits and resources.	**Specialty Courts.** Mendocino County added a case worker, paralegal, and an attorney to staff specialty courts, connect clients to treatment programs, and refer clients to services.
Holistic Defense. Los Angeles County expanded a pilot holistic defense project that improved access to social services for individuals charged with misdemeanors and low-level felonies.	**Juvenile Early Representation.** Sacramento County created a juvenile pre-trial program to connect youth with services upon entry into the juvenile justice system.
Services Liaison and Support. Sonoma County added a holistic defense unit, including a DMV liaison, social worker and an attorney, to help clients connect to support services.	**Reentry and Diversion.** Santa Barbara County created the *Holistic Reentry, Early Access, and Diversion for You* project to connect individuals to reentry services during pre-trial incarceration.
Early Representation. San Diego County created the *Pre-Trial Advocacy and Community Connections Program* to provide interventions post-arrest and pre-arraignment. Stanislaus County implemented an early representation partnership to gather mitigating information for release advocacy.	

Important Dates:

RFP RELEASED:
November 19, 2026

LETTERS OF INTENT DUE (not required):
January 8, 2027

PROPOSALS DUE:
February 26, 2027

Application Info:

Byrne JAG RFP Instruction Packet

BSCC Byrne JAG Website

BSCC Info Session

Wednesday, December 9, 2026 at 1:30pm

Join Zoom Here

GRANT SERVICE PERIODS:

Initial two-year grant period: July 1, 2027 to Sept. 30, 2029

Third year grant period (contingent on availability): July 1, 2029 to Sept. 30, 2030

Contact Us

Office of the

State Public Defender

Indigent Defense Improvement Division

The Office of the State Public Defender's Indigent Defense Improvement Division (IDID) provides technical assistance and training to indigent defense systems and engages in related efforts for the purpose of improving indigent defense across the state.

If you need assistance with ideas and/or research for your grant application, including evidence-based practices and evaluations, please contact us:

capacitybuilding@ospd.ca.gov

For general information on grants, please see the following guide:

Grant Funding for Public Defense: Strategies for Getting Started

Who is eligible to apply for JAG funding?

Every county in California is eligible, but a county may only submit one application. Applications must be submitted by the Board of Supervisors or the Chief County Administrative Officer.

FUNDING CATEGORIES	POPULATION	MAXIMUM GRANT	AVAILABLE FUNDING
SMALL COUNTIES	<200,001	$400,000	$6,520,732
MEDIUM COUNTIES	200,001-700,000	$1,333,333	$9,781,099
LARGE COUNTIES	700,001+	$2,000,000	$16,301,831

*Los Angeles County may apply for up to $3,333,333 within the large counties category.

Potential Year Three Funding**:** Grant awardees will be able to submit a non-competitive application for a third year of funding contingent on federal funds availability and compliance with program requirements. Year 3 funds will be capped at half of the grantee's Years 1-2 budget.

How is JAG funding awarded?

Program proposals must fall within an identified *Program Purpose Area* and relate to a *Priority Area of Need*. Designated program areas relevant to indigent defense include: *Prosecution and Court Programs, Prevention and Education Programs,* and *Drug Treatment and Enforcement Programs*. The BSCC specifically identifies *Innovations in Indigent Defense* as a *Priority Area of Need*. You may find that your project meets multiple *Program Purpose Areas* and *Priority Areas of Need*. The full list of areas are found on pages 9-10 of the Byrne JAG RFP Instruction Packet.

What immediate steps are necessary?

- Reach out to your county decisionmakers to advocate for the Byrne JAG funds to be used for indigent defense.
- Form a JAG local steering committee. Applicants must form a steering committee comprised of community stakeholders to identify the needs of the community as they relate to JAG.
- Develop a project proposal and budget. Ensure that you carefully read the directions and provide all necessary information.
- Submit application to BSCC by February 26, 2027, at 5:00 pm.