



Requests for Startups: Automated Advocates

Guidelines on How to Create Requests for Startups for Your State: States seeking technological innovations to improve access to justice in civil courts should release an open solicitation for startups (nonprofit or for-profit) based on their most urgent legal challenges. Technology incubators and accelerators such as Y Combinator have successfully used Requests for Startups to inspire entrants to consider new markets. An optimal call for startups should be paired with an offering of resources for successful applicants, such as connections to potential end users, membership in a regulatory sandbox, collaboration opportunities with government digital service teams, financial backing, or access to free technology or mentorship.

Every state's Requests for Startups will look a bit different. Here are steps to take to design a solicitation in your area:

1. Collect issue areas in your state and then prioritize them by urgency. Consider:
 - a. Which legal challenges are faced by the greatest number of people?
 - b. Which legal challenges have a disproportionate impact on people's overall outcomes?
 - c. Which legal challenges offer a unified market (e.g., have similar laws across counties)?

- d. Which legal challenges have the highest percentage of pro se (self-represented) litigants?
 - e. Which legal challenges are most unrecognized by people experiencing them?
 - f. What parts of the civil legal field are facing rapid change?
 - g. Where has COVID-19 created new opportunities or urgency?
2. Collaborate with entities across the justice system, including nonprofits, universities, clinics, for-profit firms, and government agencies. Ask them to provide color and context to the priority areas. Additionally, ask them:
 - a. What resources or access to insights might you offer to an applicant in this space?
 - b. In what way could you support an applicant over time? Think outside the box. For example, could a government agency offer to make its forms more machine readable, or a law firm offer to make a consultation available pro bono? Could a university offer technology training to applicants who might know the law but need technical skills?
 3. Write up a teaser about each request, and build these into the Request for Startups. Share what the request is, why it matters, and where an interested potential builder could go to find out more information.
 4. Use partnerships and media announcements to share the Request for Startups broadly. This is a great moment to create excitement across industries.

Sample: Draft Requests for Startups for California

The California State Bar recently agreed to create a working group to consider a future regulatory sandbox and explore innovative ways to increase access to justice in the state. In preparation for a potential future sandbox, the State Bar of California is issuing an Access-to-Justice-themed open call to technology innovators from around the world.

The California justice gap is urgent and affects millions. In a representative survey of Californians as part of a 2019 California Justice Gap Study, more than 55 percent indicated that they had at least one civil legal problem in their household each year, including such issues as access to housing, benefits, custody, and divorce. This finding held true across income levels. The study found that Californians received no or inadequate legal help for 85 percent of their civil legal problems.

The State Bar is open to all potential Automated Advocate solutions. An Automated Advocate is a technology tool that both works on behalf of someone to help them achieve their goal more quickly, affordably, or easily than they otherwise would have by reducing their administrative burden through the use of automation; and uses insights from users' aggregate experience to advocate for improved functioning of the overall system for everyone.

The State Bar is especially interested in Automated Advocate tools in the following areas:

- **Access to civil justice during COVID-19:** COVID-19 has dramatically changed people's ability to access safe and in-person court services during the pandemic. Simultaneously, more people than ever are encountering problems that qualify for civil legal help.
- **Health:** More people in California qualify for healthcare coverage and health services than currently access them. This is true across state, federal, and privately-managed medical plans. We need tools to help people understand their civil legal options and advocate for their benefit access.
- **Employment:** Individuals across the state need support to know their workplace rights, push back against wage theft and discrimination, and access to unemployment benefits. As unemployment rates hit an all-time high, increasing numbers of people will need assistance navigating their legal options.

Applications will be reviewed on a rolling basis. Initial applications should contain a short description of the Automated Advocate tool, its goals, the requested regulatory exceptions, and a completed Automated Advocates Design Principles Rubric. Evaluators will reach out for an in-depth interview with finalists. Evaluators will consider applicants' adherence to Design Principles for Automated Advocates as well as their potential to increase access to justice in priority areas. Any approved applications will receive immediate support from at least one university legal clinic, access to free or subsidized technology tools, a consultation with the Digital Services Team at the Judicial Council of California, an invitation to a workshop with the working group shaping the potential regulatory sandbox, and a reference letter for potential funders.