November 28, 2012

RE: Request for Proposals for Working Interdisciplinary Networks of Guardianship Stakeholders

Dear Chief Judge Lippman and Judge Prudenti:

A mark of court excellence is how it works with its partners in the justice system and community on cases involving vulnerable individuals, such as the growing number of elders and those with disabilities who need decision-making support. Indeed the older population is expected to increase by 36% between 2010 and 2020, with an especially rapid rise in the 85+ group. Thus, in 2012, at the initiative of the CCJ/COSCA Elders and the Courts Committee, the Conference of Chief Justices and the Conference of State Court Administrators passed a resolution encouraging each state court system to review and consider implementation of the 2011 Third National Guardianship Summit Standards and Recommendations – including the development of “Working Interdisciplinary Networks of Guardianship Stakeholders” (WINGS).

In the attached Request for Proposals, the National Guardianship Network (NGN) invites the highest court in each state to take a leadership role in adult guardianship reform – and specifically in the creation of an ongoing WINGS group. Under the WINGS project, NGN will support the highest court in four states in partnering with key community stakeholders to assess the state’s system of guardianship and alternatives, address policy and practice issues, and begin to serve as an ongoing problem-solving mechanism. Courts selected for the WINGS project will:

- Receive a start-up mini-grant of $7,000 toward the establishment of a state WINGS group – which can be applied toward convening meetings, commissioning research, conducting initial needs assessments and engaging in outreach;

- Receive at least one technical assistance visit by an NGN expert;
• Increase public trust and confidence in the role of the courts for at-risk individuals who may need help in decision-making;

• Be at the forefront of reform and gain national visibility as a model for other courts; and

• Advance CCJ and COSCA policy.

The National Guardianship Network, established in 2002, consists of 10 national organizations dedicated to effective adult guardianship law and practice, including the National Center for State Courts and the National College of Probate Judges.

The due date for applications is January 31, 2013. These grants will provide an opportunity to demonstrate the impact of leadership for ensuring that the growing number of elders, individuals with intellectual disabilities, and persons with mental illness or brain injuries receive the decision-making support they need.

Sincerely,

Hon. Gerald W. VandeWalle
Co-Chair
CCJ/COSCA Elders in the Court Committee

Ms. Janice K. Walker
Co-Chair
CCJ/COSCA Elders in the Court Committee

c: Ms. Kay Farley
    Ms. Brenda Williams
    Ms. Shelley Rockwell
    Ms. Brenda Uekert

Enclosure
Working Interdisciplinary Networks of Guardianship Stakeholders (WINGS) -- Request for Proposals from State Courts

Purpose: The aim of this Project is for the state’s highest court to partner with community groups in establishing and maintaining “working interdisciplinary networks of guardianship stakeholders” (WINGS). Such a stakeholder network will: (1) identify strengths and weaknesses in the state’s current system of adult guardianship and less restrictive decision-making options; (2) address key policy and practice issues; (3) engage in outreach, education and training; and (4) serve as an ongoing problem-solving mechanism to enhance the quality of care and quality of life of adults in or potentially in the guardianship and alternatives system.

Eligible Applicants: Eligible applicants are the highest court of each state, in collaboration with key community stakeholders. Stakeholders must include at minimum the State Unit on Aging under the Older Americans Act, the state Adult Protective Services office, and the federally-mandated state Protection & Advocacy agency or state Council on Developmental Disabilities. Applications that also include additional stakeholders such as the following will be favorably rated: state guardianship associations (including family guardian representation), regional VA offices, local Social Security offices, the public and private bar, the long-term care ombudsman, and aging & disability resource centers (ADRCs).

Awards and Requirements: A total of four states each will receive a $7,000 incentive grant plus technical assistance from the National Guardianship Network. Experience in these four demonstration states will be used to promote ongoing WINGS groups in other jurisdictions; and the selected states will gain high visibility nationally. Each state will receive at least one in-person visit from NGN experts. States must agree to participate in at least two planning calls before the WINGS meeting and the NGN visit, and two calls following the visit. States that can contribute additional matching funds, including supporting the cost of a second NGN site visit, will be favorably rated.

Sponsoring and Funding Entities: The WINGS Project is sponsored by the National Guardianship Network (NGN), which includes ten national organizations dedicated to effective adult guardianship law and practice: AARP, the American Bar Association Commission on Law and Aging, the American Bar Association Section of Real Property, Trust and Estate Law, the Alzheimer’s Association, the American College of Trust and Estate Counsel, the Center for Guardianship Certification, the National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys, the National Center for State Courts, the National College of Probate Judges, and the National Guardianship Association. The ABA Commission on Law and Aging is coordinating the WINGS Project on behalf of NGN.

Funding for the WINGS Project is provided by the State Justice Institute and the Borchard Center on Law and Aging (a program of the Albert and Elaine Borchard Foundation).
Application Requirements: Applications are due by Thursday, January 31, 2013. Applications must provide contact information and must address the questions below, which will serve as the basis for the evaluation. Applications should be no longer than three pages. Letters of commitment and collaboration from stakeholders are required. Applications should be emailed to: Erica.wood@americanbar.org. For questions, contact Erica Wood at 202-662-8693.

APPLICATION

Name of court:

Court Project Point Person:
Name
Address
Phone
Email

Name and Signature of State Chief Justice:
Name
Signature

Principal Project Stakeholders and Contact Information
1.
2.
3.

Letters of Collaboration. List letters of collaboration attached to the proposal.

a. Statement of Need. (30 of 100 evaluation points) Explain the need for WINGS in your state; outline key issues.

b. Project Approach (50 of 100 evaluation points)

• Describe any current collaborative efforts and how the project will build on or coordinate with such initiatives.
• How will the project establish and convene a WINGS group? What key tasks will be involved?
• How will the state WINGS group set working goals and objectives?
• What kinds of technical assistance will the project need from NGN?

c. Budget (20 of 100 evaluation points)

• How will the project use the $7,000 incentive funds? Submit brief budget.
• In addition to the $7,000 incentive grant, what other resources can be devoted to the project?
• How will the WINGS group be sustained beyond the grant period?
**Background:** In October 2011, the National Guardianship Network (NGN) convened the Third National Guardianship Summit, a landmark consensus conference funded by the State Justice Institute and the Borchard Center on Law and Aging (a program of the Albert and Elaine Borchard Foundation). The Summit focused on post-appointment guardian performance and decision-making across several key areas of practice. Its 93 participants crafted some 43 Standards for Guardians and 21 Recommendations for Action by courts, legislators and others. See [www.guardianshipsummit.org](http://www.guardianshipsummit.org).

A key Summit focus was the need for coordinated court-community partnerships to implement the Standards and Recommendations, and to drive changes that will affect the ways courts and guardian practice, as well as improve the lives of incapacitated people. A central thrust of the Summit Recommendations was that implementation and reform can best be accomplished by ongoing state multidisciplinary entities for problem-solving, trend identification, and action strategies.

States have lacked this kind of ongoing mechanism to continually evaluate “on the ground” guardian practice, to consistently target solutions for key problems, and to ensure a regular protocol of communication among stakeholders. All too often, state task forces gather, discuss needed legislative changes, and advocate effectively for those changes – only to disappear before the changes are fully implemented. Moreover, such state task forces may not always include the essential gamut of stakeholders to involve aging and disability advocates, family members, the mental health community, and guardianship professionals.

The Summit recommended that states create ongoing WINGS – Working Interdisciplinary Networks of Guardianship Stakeholders. Through the WINGS Project, NGN will work with states to establish such active stakeholder networks. NGN will select four states to receive technical assistance and a small incentive grant of $7,000 toward the establishment of a state WINGS group. The incentive funds could be used, for instance, for commissioning research, conducting an initial needs assessment, convening meetings, and conducting outreach. NGN will work intensively with each grant-funded state to create a WINGS group, help the group define priorities for reform, and develop a sustainability plan. Examples of WINGS priorities, as set out in the Summit Recommendations, include: encouraging and supporting court monitoring and data collection; evaluating court procedures; expanding the use of technology, developing standardized forms and web resources; supporting education and cross-training; and promoting standards of conduct and best practices for guardians.

The creation of state WINGS is squarely in line with policy of the Conference of Chief Justices (CCJ) and the Conference of State Court Administrators (COSCA). In 2010, COSCA adopted a policy paper (*The Demographic Imperative: Guardianships and Conservatorships*) that called for the creation of statewide multidisciplinary task forces “to review the guardianship process, court rules, and statutes; to make and prioritize recommendations for improvement; and to implement best practices.” In 2012 CCJ and COSCA passed resolutions encouraging each state court system to review and consider implementation of the Summit Standards and Recommendations, including the development of WINGS.

The WINGS vision is that at the state level, key players will be involved on an ongoing basis to consider how adult guardianship is working in the state, what the priority needs and pressure points are, what solutions might work, and how to promote other less restrictive decision-making options. In the end, this may be the real engine driving reform.