RE: INSTITUTIONALIZING SUPPORT FOR DEVELOPMENTAL AND SOCIAL CHANGE LAWYERING,

A.M. No. 24-07-24-SC, August 26, 2026

Ponente: (Sgd.) ALEXANDER G. GESMUNDO   Chief Justice(Sgd.) ALFREDO BENJAMIN S. CAGUIOA   Associate Justice(Sgd.) RAMON PAUL L. HERNANDO   Associate Justice (Sgd.) AMY C. LAZARO-JAVIER   Associate Justice (Sgd.) HENRI JEAN PAUL B. INTING   Associate Justice(Sgd.) RODIL V. ZALAMEDA   Associate Justice(Sgd.) SAMUEL H. GAERLAN   Associate Justice(Sgd.) RICARDO R. ROSARIO   Associate Justice(Sgd.) JHOSEP Y. LOPEZ   Associate Justice(Sgd.) JAPAR B. DIMAAMPAO   Associate Justice(Sgd.) JOSE MIDAS P. MARQUEZ   Associate Justice(Sgd.) ANTONIO T. KHO, JR.   Associate Justice (Sgd.) MARIA FILOMENA D. SINGH   Associate JusticeOn official leave but left a vote(Sgd.) RAUL B. VILLANUEVAAssociate Justice[1] CONST., art. II, sec. 23.EN BANCA.M. No. 24-07-24-SCRE: INSTITUTIONALIZING SUPPORT FOR DEVELOPMENTAL AND SOCIAL CHANGE LAWYERINGRESOLUTIONWHEREAS, Article VIII, Section 5(5) of the Constitution empowers the Supreme Court to promulgate rules concerning the protection and enforcement of constitutional rights and legal assistance to the underprivileged;WHEREAS, Article II, Section 11 of the Constitution declares that the State values the dignity of every human person and guarantees full respect for human rights;WHEREAS, Article II, Section 10 of the Constitution mandates the promotion of social justice in all phases of national development. Article XIII, Section 2 states that social justice shall include the commitment to create economic opportunities based on freedom of initiative and self-reliance;WHEREAS, Article II, Section 23 of the Constitution directs the State to encourage nongovernmental, community-based, or sectoral organizations that promote the welfare of the nation;WHEREAS, Article III, Section 11 of the Constitution declares that free access to the courts and quasi-judicial bodies and adequate legal assistance shall not be denied to any person by reason of poverty;WHEREAS, Article III, Section 12 of the Constitution guarantees that any person under investigation for the commission of an offense shall have the right to have competent and independent counsel preferably of their own choice;WHEREAS, Article XIII, Section 15 of the Constitution mandates the State to respect independent people's organizations to enable them to pursue and protect their legitimate and collective interests and aspirations through peaceful and lawful means. People's organizations are bona fide associations of citizens with demonstrated capacity to promote public interest, and with identifiable leadership, membership, and structure;WHEREAS, Article XIII, Section 16 of the Constitution ensures that the right of the people and their organizations to effective and reasonable participation on all levels of social, political, and economic decision-making shall not be abridged;WHEREAS, Article 2 of the Declaration on the Right to Development adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 4, 1986, recognizes the inalienable human right to development of every human person and the duty of the State to formulate appropriate national development policies that aim to constantly improve the well-being of the entire population and of all individuals, on the basis of their active, free, and meaningful participation in development and in the fair distribution of the benefits resulting therefrom;WHEREAS, the United Nations Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers obligates the State to provide sufficient funding and other resources for legal services to the poor and other disadvantaged persons;WHEREAS, the Supreme Court recognizes its duty to ensure equal access to justice, provide adequate legal assistance, and promote social justice;WHEREAS, guided by the foregoing principles, the Supreme Court, in the Strategic Plan for Judicial Innovations 2022-2027, recognized that legal aid programs, including developmental and social change lawyering such as public interest legal services, alternative legal programs, and developmental legal aid, should be strengthened as an "equalizing mechanism" to ensure effective legal representation;WHEREAS, developmental and social change lawyering is rooted in the protection of human rights. It contributes to bridging the gaps in access to justice through legal empowerment. This type of lawyering

enables meaningful participation of marginalized, vulnerable, disadvantaged, and underserved peoples, communities, and identities so they can exercise their right to development and achieve social justice; WHEREAS, developmental and social change lawyering is a distinct practice of the legal profession which also involves the application of law, legal procedure, knowledge, training, and experience.[1] Besides providing legal aid, practitioners of developmental and social change lawyering capacitate and empower marginalized, vulnerable, disadvantaged, and underserved peoples, communities, and identities. Together, they apply the law and work within the legal system or toward legal reforms to create a society that is more equitable and responsive to the needs of these peoples, communities, and identities;WHEREAS, during the National Legal Aid Summit conducted in Bacolod from November 27 to 30, 2022, lawyers and representatives from the different justice sectors, private practitioners, and nongovernment organizations gathered to amplify and sustain avenues of access to justice. During the Summit, the different modalities of providing legal aid, their sustainability, and best practices were discussed and explored by formal and informal sectors that facilitate access to justice for the marginalized, vulnerable, disadvantaged, and underserved peoples, communities, and identities;WHEREAS, traditional legal aid has been institutionalized through the Public Attorney's Office and the Integrated Bar of the Philippines National Center for Legal Aid (IBP NCLA). The Supreme Court, through Rule 138-A of the Rules of Court, institutionalized the Clinical Legal Education Program (CLEP) in all law schools. Recently, the Court also required the mandatory rendition of free legal aid by covered lawyers as defined under the Rules on Unified Legal Aid Service (ULAS) through A.M. No. 22-11-01-SC. There is no similar institutional recognition and support given to legal organizations engaged in developmental and social change lawyering;WHEREAS, the Supreme Court Committee on Access to Justice/Underserved Areas commissioned a study on the sustainability of organizations that pioneered the practice of developmental legal advocacy, alternative, and other public interest lawyering in the Philippines. It raised concerns on the lack of human and financial resources, and the need for social and institutional recognition and support to sustain developmental and social change lawyering;[2]WHEREAS, the Supreme Court, through Bar Matter No. 1173 (Re: Integrated Bar of the Philippines Legal Aid Subsidy), adopted the Revised Guidelines on the Release, Disbursement, and Liquidation of the Integrated Bar of the Philippines Subsidy (IBP Guidelines). Together with the relevant government auditing and accounting regulations and issuances of the Integrated Bar of the Philippines (IBP), Bar Matter No. 1173 will be used as a reference for fiscal responsibility and accountability of organizations subsidized by the Supreme Court.NOW, THEREFORE, this Court resolved, upon the recommendation of Senior Associate Justice Marvic M.V.F. Leonen, Chairperson of the Supreme Court Committee on Access to Justice/Underserved Areas, to adopt the following Rules to support developmental and social change lawyering.RULE IGENERAL PROVISIONSSection 1. Title. – This shall be known as "Rules on Institutionalizing Support for Developmental. and Social Change Lawyering" (Rules on DSC Support).Section 2. Rationale. – The Rules on DSC Support is issued to institutionally recognize a broader conception of the rights of free access to courts and equal access to justice, which are at the core of developmental and social change lawyering (hereinafter referred to as DSC).DSC practitioners and organizations visit and integrate themselves in or with marginalized, vulnerable, disadvantaged, and underserved peoples, communities, and identities, even reaching remote or geographically isolated areas. They aim to legally empower these peoples, communities, and identities to exercise their right to development.Given these constraints and challenges, mainstreaming DSC as a distinct practice of law and institutionalizing financial and other forms of support are crucial in sustaining the practice and its practitioners.Section 3. Definition of Terms. – The following terms in the Rules are defined as follows: a.Access to justice – refers to a fundamental human right pertaining to the ability of people—especially the marginalized, vulnerable, and under represented—to secure remedies for their grievances. Apart from improving their access to courts or guaranteeing legal representation, access to justice involves a broad range of socio-legal processes including legal protection, legal awareness, legal aid and counsel, adjudication, enforcement, and civil society oversight.[3]b.Accreditation – is the process and adherence to the standards under Section 4 of these Rules, in which organizations engaged in DSC are recognized to avail of the support, incentives, exemptions, and other entitlements provided in these Rules.c.Coalition – is a group of duly registered organizations engaged in DSC that are formally or informally organized.d. Community-based law group – is an organized group of individuals that renders legal assistance to underserved communities, consistent with DSC methods. This includes paralegal services affiliated with

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DSC organizations that empower and capacitate community members.e. Core personnel – is a lawyer-member of an accredited DSC organization possessing skills, qualifications, knowledge, and experience which are relevant to the services offered by the organization. The Board of Trustees or any equivalent entity within the organization is not considered as core personnel.f.Direct compensation – consists of cash compensation items which are either fixed or variable and are paid for the performance of work, including basic pay, cash allowances, and fringe benefits.[4]g.DSC lawyering – is a type of practice of law which is anchored on the principle of legal empowerment and meaningful participation of marginalized people, communities, and identities to achieve social justice and realize their right to development. It is a distinct practice because it involves a combination of different methods of work such as strategic litigation, policy advocacy, campaigns, capacity building, legal education, and community organizing, among others.[5]h.DSC Council – is the governing administrative body created under Rule III of these Rules.i.DSC Fund – is a special fund created under Rule IV, Section 22 of these Rules, to be administered by the DSC Council. It shall be utilized for the DSC Council's operations and for the various forms of support available to accredited DSC organizations.j.

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Under the Strategic Plan for Judicial Innovations 2022-2027 (SPJI), the Supreme Court committed to advancing meaningful access to justice. Access to justice, however, extends beyond indigency. Countless individuals continue to suffer because their needs are unseen, unheard, or worse, ignored.

Those who design and shape our institutions, including our laws and policies, often come from positions of privilege and may be detached from the lived realities of marginalized and vulnerable communities. As a result, these groups remain underserved and underrepresented. For decades, lawyers have devoted their careers to advancing the rights of the marginalized, yet they have often had to sustain this work with limited institutional support. Their work is often viewed as an act of benevolence rather than recognized as a distinct and vital form of lawyering that enhances access to justice and strengthens communities' capacity to assert their rights. With diminishing resources and support, fewer lawyers are able to sustain full-time work devoted to legal empowerment.

The Constitution empowers the Supreme Court, through its rule-making authority, to address these barriers to access to justice.

In line with the SPJI's vision of legal aid as an equalizing mechanism, the Supreme Court recognized the need to institutionalize support for full-time public interest lawyers organized into nongovernment organizations that provide free legal assistance and promote legal empowerment. These organizations and their lawyers have long engaged in practices variously described as grassroots lawyering, developmental legal aid, alternative lawyering, peoples' or public interest lawyering, and many others. For brevity, this practice is referred to in the Rules as Developmental and Social Change Lawyering (DSC).

The work of DSC organizations extends beyond legal representation. At its core, DSC organizations bridge the gaps in public sector interventions by promoting access to justice through legal empowerment of marginalized, vulnerable, disadvantaged, and underserved peoples, communities, and identities.

DSC organizations not only provide legal assistance but also foster learning, reflection, and collaboration among lawyers and their partner communities and marginalized peoples and identities. Their work creates opportunities for evolving necessary legal reforms that address the root causes of systemic inequalities. After all, access to justice begins with the awareness of one's rights and the capacity to meaningfully participate in shaping a just legal order.

The Supreme Court started recognizing a spectrum of legal assistance in November 2022 during the National Legal Aid Summit in Bacolod City. The Technical Working Group (TWG) headed by Senior Associate Justice Marvic M.V.F. Leonen as Chairperson, Associate Justice Antonio T. Kho, Jr. as Vice-Chairperson, the Integrated Bar of the Philippines (IBP), together with various (DSC) practitioners, members of the academe, and development partners, was organized to draft the DSC Rules. The Supreme Court also commissioned a study on the sustainability of DSC Law Groups in the Philippines, led by Atty. Damcelle Torres-Cortes.

The DSC Rules was crafted from the ground up, developed through a broad consultative and collaborative process. Several focus group discussions and TWG meetings were conducted to develop the framework for the Rules. After an initial draft was prepared, over 100 DSC practitioners participated in a workshop in Iloilo in 2024, providing their inputs and suggestions. The draft Rules was then revised. Early in 2025, the Supreme Court, the IBP, and TWG conducted a Writeshop in Pampanga to further refine and finalize the draft. Tts technical provisions were revised through the guidance of Associate Justice Corazon G. Ferrer-Flores of the Court of Tax Appeals, the Fiscal Management and Budget Office of the Court, and current IBP Chancellor Atty. Carmelita Y. Sison.

The DSC Rules was born from the collaboration of this Court, the IBP, and various nongovernmental organizations advocating for indigenous peoples, environmental defenders, women, persons deprived of liberty, children, fishers, farmers, and other communities and sectors. Integral to the formulation of the Rules were its TWG members leading the DSC practice in the country, which include the Alternative Law Groups, Inc. (ALG), Free Legal Assistance Group (FLAG), Initiatives for Dialogue and Empowerment through Alternative Legal Services (IDEALS), and National Union of Peoples' Lawyers (NUPL).

These organizations employ various methods for the legal empowerment of their partner communities and identities. Beyond strategic litigation, they engage in drafting key legislation, advocating policy reforms, and working directly with communities to strengthen their capacity for self-advocacy.

Throughout history, DSC organizations have contributed to systemic change by providing legal assistance grounded in human rights.

Despite its impact, DSC practice mostly operates on financial subsistence, through limited and project-based resources, making long-term institutional sustainability a continuing challenge. Most DSC lawyers are compelled to take on other engagements to support themselves, limiting their capacity to grow in the field. Thus, few lawyers engage in DSC full-time. Rights-based (FAJR) Justice Program, and The Asia Foundation (TAF), among others.

Institutional recognition of DSC's significance also remains limited, affecting its reach, support, and perception of legitimacy even among the members of the legal profession.

The Constitution empowers the Supreme Court to promulgate rules to provide legal assistance to the underprivileged. It likewise directs the State to encourage nongovernmental, community-based, or sectoral organizations that promote national welfare.[1] These constitutional principles serve as the foundation of the DSC Rules, which create measures to encourage the efforts of public interest law organizations working toward the legal empowerment of their partner communities and marginalized peoples and identities.

FOR THESE REASONS, the Court hereby resolves to APPROVE A.M. No. 24-07-24-SC, titled "Rules on Institutionalizing Support for Developmental and Social Change Lawyering."

Pursuant to Section 48 thereof, A.M. No. 24-07-24-SC shall take effect following its complete publication in the Official Gazette or in two newspapers of national circulation in the Philippines, and in the websites of the IBP and of the Supreme Court.

SO ORDERED.

(Sgd.) ALEXANDER G. GESMUNDO
Chief Justice

(Sgd.) ALFREDO BENJAMIN S. CAGUIOA
Associate Justice

(Sgd.) RAMON PAUL L. HERNANDO
Associate Justice

(Sgd.) AMY C. LAZARO-JAVIER
Associate Justice

(Sgd.) HENRI JEAN PAUL B. INTING
Associate Justice

(Sgd.) RODIL V. ZALAMEDA
Associate Justice

(Sgd.) SAMUEL H. GAERLAN
Associate Justice

(Sgd.) RICARDO R. ROSARIO
Associate Justice

(Sgd.) JHOSEP Y. LOPEZ
Associate Justice

(Sgd.) JAPAR B. DIMAAMPAO
Associate Justice

(Sgd.) JOSE MIDAS P. MARQUEZ
Associate Justice

(Sgd.) ANTONIO T. KHO, JR.
Associate Justice

(Sgd.) MARIA FILOMENA D. SINGH
Associate Justice

On official leave but left a vote
(Sgd.) RAUL B. VILLANUEVA
Associate Justice

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[1] CONST., art. II, sec. 23.

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A.M. No. 24-07-24-SC

RE: INSTITUTIONALIZING SUPPORT FOR DEVELOPMENTAL AND SOCIAL CHANGE LAWYERING

RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, Article VIII, Section 5(5) of the Constitution empowers the Supreme Court to promulgate rules concerning the protection and enforcement of constitutional rights and legal assistance to the underprivileged;

WHEREAS, Article II, Section 11 of the Constitution declares that the State values the dignity of every human person and guarantees full respect for human rights;

WHEREAS, Article II, Section 10 of the Constitution mandates the promotion of social justice in all phases of national development. Article XIII, Section 2 states that social justice shall include the commitment to create economic opportunities based on freedom of initiative and self-reliance;

WHEREAS, Article II, Section 23 of the Constitution directs the State to encourage nongovernmental, community-based, or sectoral organizations that promote the welfare of the nation;

WHEREAS, Article III, Section 11 of the Constitution declares that free access to the courts and quasi-judicial bodies and adequate legal assistance shall not be denied to any person by reason of poverty;

WHEREAS, Article III, Section 12 of the Constitution guarantees that any person under investigation for the commission of an offense shall have the right to have competent and independent counsel preferably of their own choice;

WHEREAS, Article XIII, Section 15 of the Constitution mandates the State to respect independent people's organizations to enable them to pursue and protect their legitimate and collective interests and aspirations through peaceful and lawful means. People's organizations are bona fide associations of citizens with demonstrated capacity to promote public interest, and with identifiable leadership, membership, and structure;

WHEREAS, Article XIII, Section 16 of the Constitution ensures that the right of the people and their organizations to effective and reasonable participation on all levels of social, political, and economic decision-making shall not be abridged;

WHEREAS, Article 2 of the Declaration on the Right to Development adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 4, 1986, recognizes the inalienable human right to development of every human person and the duty of the State to formulate appropriate national development policies that aim to constantly improve the well-being of the entire population and of all individuals, on the basis of their active, free, and meaningful participation in development and in the fair distribution of the benefits resulting therefrom;

WHEREAS, the United Nations Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers obligates the State to provide sufficient funding and other resources for legal services to the poor and other disadvantaged persons;

WHEREAS, the Supreme Court recognizes its duty to ensure equal access to justice, provide adequate legal assistance, and promote social justice;

WHEREAS, guided by the foregoing principles, the Supreme Court, in the Strategic Plan for Judicial Innovations 2022-2027, recognized that legal aid programs, including developmental and social change lawyering such as public interest legal services, alternative legal programs, and developmental legal aid, should be strengthened as an "equalizing mechanism" to ensure effective legal representation;

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WHEREAS, developmental and social change lawyering is rooted in the protection of human rights. It contributes to bridging the gaps in access to justice through legal empowerment. This type of lawyering enables meaningful participation of marginalized, vulnerable, disadvantaged, and underserved peoples, communities, and identities so they can exercise their right to development and achieve social justice;

WHEREAS, developmental and social change lawyering is a distinct practice of the legal profession which also involves the application of law, legal procedure, knowledge, training, and experience.[1] Besides providing legal aid, practitioners of developmental and social change lawyering capacitate and empower marginalized, vulnerable, disadvantaged, and underserved peoples, communities, and identities. Together, they apply the law and work within the legal system or toward legal reforms to create a society that is more equitable and responsive to the needs of these peoples, communities, and identities;

WHEREAS, during the National Legal Aid Summit conducted in Bacolod from November 27 to 30, 2022, lawyers and representatives from the different justice sectors, private practitioners, and nongovernment organizations gathered to amplify and sustain avenues of access to justice. During the Summit, the different modalities of providing legal aid, their sustainability, and best practices were discussed and explored by formal and informal sectors that facilitate access to justice for the marginalized, vulnerable, disadvantaged, and underserved peoples, communities, and identities;

WHEREAS, traditional legal aid has been institutionalized through the Public Attorney's Office and the Integrated Bar of the Philippines National Center for Legal Aid (IBP NCLA). The Supreme Court, through Rule 138-A of the Rules of Court, institutionalized the Clinical Legal Education Program (CLEP) in all law schools. Recently, the Court also required the mandatory rendition of free legal aid by covered lawyers as defined under the Rules on Unified Legal Aid Service (ULAS) through A.M. No. 22-11-01-SC. There is no similar institutional recognition and support given to legal organizations engaged in developmental and social change lawyering;

WHEREAS, the Supreme Court Committee on Access to Justice/Underserved Areas commissioned a study on the sustainability of organizations that pioneered the practice of developmental legal advocacy, alternative, and other public interest lawyering in the Philippines. It raised concerns on the lack of human and financial resources, and the need for social and institutional recognition and support to sustain developmental and social change lawyering;[2]

WHEREAS, the Supreme Court, through Bar Matter No. 1173 (Re: Integrated Bar of the Philippines Legal Aid Subsidy), adopted the Revised Guidelines on the Release, Disbursement, and Liquidation of the Integrated Bar of the Philippines Subsidy (IBP Guidelines). Together with the relevant government auditing and accounting regulations and issuances of the Integrated Bar of the Philippines (IBP), Bar Matter No. 1173 will be used as a reference for fiscal responsibility and accountability of organizations subsidized by the Supreme Court.

NOW, THEREFORE, this Court resolved, upon the recommendation of Senior Associate Justice Marvic M.V.F. Leonen, Chairperson of the Supreme Court Committee on Access to Justice/Underserved Areas, to adopt the following Rules to support developmental and social change lawyering.

RULE I
GENERAL PROVISIONS

Section 1. Title. – This shall be known as "Rules on Institutionalizing Support for Developmental. and Social Change Lawyering" (Rules on DSC Support).

Section 2. Rationale. – The Rules on DSC Support is issued to institutionally recognize a broader conception of the rights of free access to courts and equal access to justice, which are at the core of developmental and social

change lawyering (hereinafter referred to as DSC).

DSC practitioners and organizations visit and integrate themselves in or with marginalized, vulnerable, disadvantaged, and underserved peoples, communities, and identities, even reaching remote or geographically isolated areas. They aim to legally empower these peoples, communities, and identities to exercise their right to development.

Given these constraints and challenges, mainstreaming DSC as a distinct practice of law and institutionalizing financial and other forms of support are crucial in sustaining the practice and its practitioners.

Section 3. Definition of Terms. – The following terms in the Rules are defined as follows:

a.

Access to justice – refers to a fundamental human right pertaining to the ability of people—especially the marginalized, vulnerable, and under represented—to secure remedies for their grievances. Apart from improving their access to courts or guaranteeing legal representation, access to justice involves a broad range of socio-legal processes including legal protection, legal awareness, legal aid and counsel, adjudication, enforcement, and civil society oversight.[3]

b.

Accreditation – is the process and adherence to the standards under Section 4 of these Rules, in which organizations engaged in DSC are recognized to avail of the support, incentives, exemptions, and other entitlements provided in these Rules.

c.

Coalition – is a group of duly registered organizations engaged in DSC that are formally or informally organized.

d.

Community-based law group – is an organized group of individuals that renders legal assistance to underserved communities, consistent with DSC methods. This includes paralegal services affiliated with DSC organizations that empower and capacitate community members.

e.

Core personnel – is a lawyer-member of an accredited DSC organization possessing skills, qualifications, knowledge, and experience which are relevant to the services offered by the organization. The Board of Trustees or any equivalent entity within the organization is not considered as core personnel.

f.

Direct compensation – consists of cash compensation items which are either fixed or variable and are paid for the performance of work, including basic pay, cash allowances, and fringe benefits.[4]

g.

DSC lawyering – is a type of practice of law which is anchored on the principle of legal empowerment and meaningful participation of marginalized people, communities, and identities to achieve social justice and realize their right to development. It is a distinct practice because it involves a combination of different methods of work such as strategic litigation, policy advocacy, campaigns, capacity building, legal education, and community organizing, among others.[5]

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h.

DSC Council – is the governing administrative body created under Rule III of these Rules.

i.

DSC Fund – is a special fund created under Rule IV, Section 22 of these Rules, to be administered by the DSC Council. It shall be utilized for the DSC Council's operations and for the various forms of support available to accredited DSC organizations.

j.

DSC Manual – is the implementing guidelines of these Rules.

k.

DSC organizations – are associations adhering to a broad range of philosophies within the DSC framework, with demonstrated capacity to promote the public interest and with identifiable leadership, membership, and structure. For purposes of these Rules, the following types of DSC organizations are defined:

(i)

Accredited DSC organizations – are DSC organizations having all the eligibility criteria under Section 4 and none of the grounds for ineligibility for accreditation under Section 8. They are duly recognized by the DSC Council to apply for and avail the benefits under these Rules.

(ii)

Grantee DSC organizations – are accredited DSC organizations that have been granted financial and other forms of support under these Rules.

l.

Fiscal year – is the period beginning with the 1st day of January and ending with the 31st day of December of each calendar year.[6]

m.

Formational program – is a set of activities, advocacies, and means to integrate, inculcate, align, and re-center the philosophy, vision, mission, and programs of a DSC organization among its members and volunteers.

n.

Indirect compensation – is a non-cash or in-kind benefit item that contributes to the personnel's welfare, standard of living, and personal development. This includes protection programs such as insurances, paid leaves, perquisites, and training programs.[7]

o.

Legal empowerment – is both a DSC process and outcome wherein the marginalized people, communities, and identities are empowered to participate and engage in legal and social reforms through knowledge and awareness of the law and its institutions to advance their interests and achieve social justice, and realize the full extent of their right to development.[8]

p.

Marginalized people, identities, and communities – is a category of people that is excluded from useful and meaningful participation in political, economic, social, and cultural life. This category also includes the basic,

disadvantaged, or vulnerable persons or groups who are mostly living in poverty, have little or no access to the justice system, land, other resources, and basic social and economic services such as healthcare, education, water and sanitation, employment and livelihood opportunities, housing, social security, and physical infrastructure.[9]

q.

National organization – is a nationwide and duly registered DSC organization with chapters or similar units in at least two regions in the country engaged in DSC. The chapters enjoy the benefits of accreditation with the national organization; hence, they need not be separately accredited by the DSC Council from the national organization.

r.

Not-for-Profit organization – is a registered nongovernment organization rendering DSC without profit. Any incidental income derived from its activities is actually and directly used for necessary expenses to render services to partner marginalized people, identities, and communities.

s.

Responsible officer – is a member of an accredited DSC organization who is designated by its governing body to be accountable for ensuring compliance with the financial obligations and reporting requirements under these Rules.

t.

Right to development – is the inalienable human right by virtue of which every human person and all peoples are entitled to participate in, contribute to, and enjoy economic, social, cultural, and political development, in which all human rights and fundamental freedoms can be fully realized. This also implies the full realization of the right of peoples to self-determination, which includes the exercise of their inalienable right to full sovereignty over all their natural wealth and resources, subject to the relevant provisions of both International Covenants on Human Rights.[10]

u.

Strategic lawsuit against public participation (SLAPP) – is any civil, criminal, or administrative case against any accredited DSC organization including its members, officers, and any other persons affiliated thereto, with the intent to harass, vex, exert undue pressure, or stifle any legal recourse that they may take in pursuit of the interests of their partner communities and identities in the protection of the rights of the marginalized people, identities, and communities.

v.

Vulnerable person – is a person who is at a higher risk of harm than others. Vulnerable persons include children, the elderly, the homeless, persons deprived of liberty, human rights victims, victims of domestic violence, victims of armed conflict; those who are socio-economically disadvantaged; those who belong to racial or ethnic minorities; or those with disability or debilitating physical or mental conditions.[11]

RULE II
ACCREDITATION

Section 4. Criteria for Eligibility. – To be eligible for accreditation, DSC organizations must comply with the following eligibility criteria:

- Must have a minimum track record of five years of operations consistent with its vision, mission, and practice as an organization engaged in DSC;

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- Must demonstrate a formational program within the DSC framework;

- Must be a not-for-profit organization, including but not limited to community-based law groups or university-based legal aid clinics engaged in DSC;

- Must be engaged in DSC that primarily renders assistance to marginalized, vulnerable, disadvantaged, and underserved people, communities, and identities; and

- Must exhibit financial transparency and accountability.

The criteria for eligibility are continuing requirements for accredited DSC organizations. Hence, DSC organizations applying for accreditation must meet the foregoing eligibility requirements prior to the grant of their application and during their accreditation. The same requirements are also applicable for purposes of the renewal of their accreditation.

In case an application is denied for failure to demonstrate any of the continuing requirements under this Section, the DSC organization may re-apply for accreditation after one year from the denial of its application, subject to the requirements in the DSC Manual.

Section 5. Documentary Requirements. – A DSC organization applying for accreditation must submit the following documents in support of its application for accreditation:

- letter of intent;

- accomplished application form;

- organizational chart with a list of its executive or governing board, officers, and core personnel;

- proof of legal personality;

- vision, mission, and formation programs;

- proof of track record containing reports of its activities and undertakings in pursuit of its cause, and general statement of the sector or communities that the organization is mostly engaged with;

- financial reports from the past five years; and

- other documentary requirements as may be required in the DSC Manual.

A coalition may be entitled to separate accreditation as long as it has legal personality independent from its member organizations. Chapters of national organizations without separate legal personality are not eligible for accreditation.

Accredited DSC organizations in a coalition are not automatically entitled to financial and other forms of support under these Rules by virtue of their coalition's accreditation. Availing of the support under these Rules requires separate applications for coalition members.

Section 6. Evaluation Process. – The DSC Council shall evaluate the applications for accreditation. The list of names of DSC organizations applying for accreditation shall be published in the Supreme Court website. Observing the rights to privacy, safety, and security of the DSC organization and its members, sufficient time shall be given for any interested person or entity to file its comment or opposition to the application. The procedure and periods for resolving contests to the application shall be stated in the DSC Manual. In any event, the DSC Council shall conduct due diligence and review all submissions of DSC organizations applying for accreditation and those opposing their application.

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Section 7. Term of Accreditation. – The initial accreditation of DSC organizations shall be for a provisional period of three years. Succeeding renewals of accreditation shall be for a period of five years. Both initial accreditation and succeeding renewals are subject to compliance with the requirements in Section 4 of these Rules.

Section 8. Grounds for Ineligibility. – The DSC Council shall not grant the application for accreditation of any DSC organization shown to be as follows:

- organizations found to have committed misrepresentation or fraud in the submission of required documents to the DSC Council;

- organizations which are engaged in activities inimical to DSC such as, but not limited to, red tagging, terrorist branding, profiling, engaging in hateful speech directed against DSC practitioners;

- organizations whose officers and core personnel are convicted by final judgment of having engaged in criminal activities; or

- organizations that fail to submit to the DSC Council a full and final liquidation of the financial support awarded to it.

The process for reapplication and re-evaluation of applications by DSC organizations whose accreditation has been denied under this provision shall be stated in the DSC Manual.

Section 9. Autonomy of Accredited DSC Organizations. – The independence or autonomy of accredited DSC organizations in conducting their affairs shall be respected. However, these accredited DSC organizations must comply with the conditions for the support and incentives, exemptions, and recognition availed of under these Rules, applicable Commission on Audit (COA) rules and regulations, and relevant statutes. In any case, their decision to avail themselves of support is purely voluntary.

Section 10. Available Benefits. – Accredited DSC organizations may avail of the following benefits:

- eligibility to be elected in subsequent DSC Councils under Section 15;

- apply for financial support under Section 25;

- priority in sending representatives to attend capacity-building activities, consultations, and other relevant activities under Section 33;

- exemption from the requirement of affiliating with a law school for purposes of accreditation for Mandatory Continuing Legal Education (MCLE) provided under Section 34;

- exemption from payment of legal fees in the litigation of cases under Section 35;

- facilitated reporting compliance with the Rules on Unified Legal Aid Service (ULAS Rules) as stated in Section 37; and

- protection against SLAPP suits under Section 36.

Section 11. Grounds for Suspension or Revocation of Accreditation. – The DSC Council may motu proprio or upon complaint, after notice and hearing, suspend or revoke the accreditation of a DSC organization on any of the following grounds:

- noncompliance with any of the reportorial and accountability requirements;

- permanent cessation of any of the continuing requirements of accredited DSC organizations under Section 4

of these Rules. For temporary cessation of the continuing requirements, the DSC Council shall provide the mechanism for the temporary suspension of accreditation in the DSC Manual; or

- any supervening grounds for ineligibility under Section 8 arising after the accreditation of the DSC organization.

The mechanism to resolve complaints and appeals on the DSC Council's decision shall be provided in the DSC Manual.

RULE III
DSC COUNCIL

Section 12. Creation of the DSC Council. – The DSC Council is the administering body of these Rules and shall be an autonomous unit attached to the IBP NCLA. The IBP shall exercise oversight and supervision functions over the DSC Council as defined under Section 19 of these Rules.

Section 13. Powers and Responsibilities of the DSC Council. – The DSC Council shall have the following powers and duties:

a.

act as the governing body in the enforcement and implementation of these Rules;

b.

prepare the DSC Manual and recommend amendments thereto, as may be necessary, for the review and endorsement of the IBP Board of Governors regarding financial matters and processes under Rule IV. The DSC Manual, including any amendments thereto, shall be subject to the approval of the Supreme Court En Banc;

c.

accredit DSC organizations to access the different types of support by:

i.

developing an evaluation system for accreditation; and

ii.

conducting due diligence on the eligibility of DSC organizations.

d.

administer and manage the DSC Fund by:

i.

determining the program of expenses per fiscal year and the thresholds for financial support to be granted to qualified DSC organizations per application cycle;

ii.

evaluating detailed proposals for funding;

iii.

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awarding financial support to grantee accredited DSC organizations; and

iv.

implementing sound fiscal policies for proper accounting, auditing, and liquidation of its program of expenses and financial support to grantee DSC organizations, in accordance with the DSC Manual. The IBP Guidelines may apply suppletorily until the DSC Manual takes effect.

e.

monitor compliance of accredited and grantee DSC organizations with these Rules by:

i.

enforcing the liquidation, reporting, and accountability requirements such as, but not limited to, the suspension or revocation of accreditation, recommendation of the filing of disciplinary cases against erring responsible officers including the leadership of accredited organizations to the IBP Commission on Bar Discipline, and the recovery of misused or unliquidated financial support;

ii.

receiving and processing complaints relating to the accreditation of a DSC organization and the rollout of its programs supported by the DSC Fund;

iii.

conducting visits, ocular inspections, and investigations to resolve complaints or compliance issues; and

iv.

retaining custody of records submitted by accredited and grantee DSC organizations in relation to financial and other forms of support they availed of.

f.

prepare and submit reports as may be required by the Supreme Court or the IBP Board of Governors;

g.

conduct consultations with accredited DSC organizations and convene them in an annual assembly to discuss developments, share best practices, and address all other matters deemed necessary by the DSC Council. The DSC Council shall also convene the accredited DSC organizations every four years to elect succeeding organizations to sit in the DSC Council;

h.

conduct capacity-building activities on DSC and collaborate with the activities of the IBP NCLA when appropriate;

i.

promote DSC in law schools and in the legal profession, and raise public awareness; and

j.

perform other necessary or analogous functions to advance DSC.

Operational details such as, but not limited to, the manner of exercising these duties, the prescribed voting requirements for carrying out a decision, and the resolution of concerns will be contained in the DSC Manual.

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Section 14. Composition and Nomination of the Interim Council. – Upon the approval of these Rules, an Interim Council shall be constituted and composed of designated member representatives from the following organizations:

- Alternative Law Groups coalition (ALG);
- Free Legal Assistance Group (FLAG);
- National Union of Peoples' Lawyers (NUPL);
- one organization engaged in DSC; and
- IBP NCLA.

The DSC Technical Working Group (TWG) shall submit no more than five DSC organizations to the Supreme Court Committee on Access to Justice/Underserved Areas to be considered as the fourth DSC organization to sit in the Interim Council. DSC organizations which are members of coalitions may be nominated as the fourth member. The nominees must meet the eligibility or accreditation requirements under these Rules. Similarly, ALG, FLAG, and NUPL will likewise designate their respective members.

The Supreme Court Committee on Access to Justice/Underserved Areas shall endorse the list of nominees of the fourth DSC organization and nominees of the ALG, FLAG, and NUPL to the Supreme Court En Banc for approval. Thereafter, the fourth DSC organization shall inform the Court of its nominated representative to sit in the Interim Council without further approval.

Though not yet required to be formally accredited, all the Interim Council members must meet the eligibility or accreditation requirements under these Rules. All the Interim Council organizations shall automatically be given initial accreditation for the duration of their tenure. After its expiration, they must apply for accreditation to be able to access the benefits under these Rules.

The National Director of the IBP NCLA sitting as an ex officio member of the Interim Council has voting rights.

Except for the director of the IBP NCLA, DSC lawyers who are not affiliated with any DSC organization may not be nominated or occupy a seat in the Interim Council or subsequent DSC Councils.

The Interim Council shall serve for a period of four years. Before their assumption of duty, the individual representatives of the Interim Council members shall execute an oath of office for the faithful discharge of their functions.

Section 15. Composition, Election, and Qualifications of the DSC Council. – Upon expiration of the term of the Interim Council, succeeding DSC Councils shall have seven members, composed of the Director of IBP NCLA as a voting, ex officio member, and the six elected accredited DSC organizations.

The succeeding DSC Councils shall be nominated and elected by accredited DSC organizations every four years. The outgoing DSC Council will convene a general assembly of all accredited DSC organizations for nomination and election of the succeeding DSC Council members. The procedure for nomination and elections shall be provided in the DSC Manual.

Representatives of the elected DSC Council members must have demonstrated probity and integrity; have been engaged in DSC for at least 10 years; and are duly authorized by their executive or governing board to perform the duties of DSC Council members.

At the start of the DSC Council's term, the DSC Council members will convene to vote for a chairperson, a vice

chairperson, a treasurer, and other officers as may be determined in the DSC Manual. These officers shall assume their respective positions upon garnering a majority vote. They shall receive reasonable allowances and per diem for attendance in meetings to be sourced from the funds allocated for the DSC Council's operational expenses.

Section 16. Term of Office. – Every DSC Council succeeding the Interim Council shall serve for a period of four years from the date of their respective election.

A DSC Council member shall not serve for two consecutive terms. The term of Interim Council members shall not be considered in computing the two-term limit.

If a DSC Council member's term expires without a successor being elected, such member shall serve in a hold-over capacity until a successor is elected.

Section 17. Replacement of Incapacitated Representative of a DSC Council Member. – In the event of resignation, death, suspension, removal, and other manner of incapacity of the representative of a DSC Council member prior to expiration of their term of office, the DSC Council shall request the concerned DSC Council member for an alternate representative to serve the remaining term of its incapacitated representative.

Section 18. Suspension or Removal of a DSC Council Member. – The DSC Council may motu proprio investigate or process complaints against a DSC Council member or its representative for acts or omissions that are inimical to DSC and the effective and efficient functioning of the DSC Council.

The DSC Council may preventively suspend its member during the pendency of the investigation. An elected or incumbent DSC Council member may be suspended or removed from office upon a finding of substantial evidence on the charges against them or upon the suspension or revocation of its accreditation, and by a majority vote of the DSC Council.

The suspension or removal of a DSC Council member carries with it the suspension or removal of its representative. However, the suspension or removal of a representative does not suspend or remove the concerned DSC Council member but only requires the appointment of an alternate representative.

The resumption of or reinstatement into office of a suspended or removed DSC Council member does not automatically result in the retention or recall of its representative, which is within the discretion of the DSC Council.

Section 19. Oversight. – As an office attached to the IBP, the DSC Council's administration of the DSC Fund is under the IBP's fiscal oversight, and the DSC Council's programs are under the IBP's general oversight. The IBP's supervision is limited to financial and other administrative matters. The DSC Council has autonomy to decide outside these matters, subject to these Rules, the DSC Manual, and other applicable rules and regulations.

Section 20. Fiduciary Relationships. – Within the DSC framework, there shall be a fiduciary relationship between: (1) the accredited DSC organizations and their personnel; (2) the accredited DSC organizations and the DSC Council; (3) the DSC Council and the IBP Board of Governors; and (4) the IBP Board of Governors and the Supreme Court.

a.

Fiduciary relationship between the accredited DSC organizations and their personnel

i.

The personnel must act in the best interest of their organization, prioritizing the organization's vision, mission,

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and objectives;

ii.

The personnel must maintain confidentiality regarding information obtained through their professional relationship with their respective organizations;

iii.

The personnel must perform their duties with the efficiency, professionalism, intelligence, and skill required of a competent professional; and

iv.

Accredited DSC organizations must ensure the continuing development and strengthening of their formational programs for the general membership and their volunteers.

b.

Fiduciary relationship between an accredited DSC organization and the DSC Council

i.

The accredited DSC organization must be accountable to the DSC Council, ensuring transparency, integrity, and accountability in its operations and utilization of financial and other forms of support under these Rules;

ii.

The accredited DSC organization shall submit reports and other relevant documents periodically and in a timely manner, as may be reasonably required by the DSC Council;

iii.

The accredited DSC organization shall cooperate with the DSC Council, providing necessary support to allow its members to perform their administrative and oversight functions; and

iv.

The accredited DSC organization shall adhere to policies, rules, and regulations set forth by the DSC Council.

c.

Fiduciary relationship between the DSC Council and the IBP Board of Governors

i.

The IBP Board of Governors, through its IBP NCLA ex officio DSC Council member, may recommend strategic direction and guidance to the DSC Council to promote effective governance and operational efficiency;

ii.

The DSC Council shall report to the IBP Board of Governors, as may be required, on the performance, compliance, and strategic alignment of the organization; and

iii.

The DSC Council shall share accurate, relevant, and timely information, as may be requested by the IBP Board of Governors.

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d.

Fiduciary relationship between the IBP Board of Governors and the Supreme Court

i.

The IBP Board of Governors shall be accountable for the funds released to the DSC Council for the purposes provided under these Rules and in accordance with the DSC Manual.

ii.

The IBP Board of Governors shall ensure the DSC Council's transparency and accountability, providing guidance in the practices and policies of the DSC Council and aligning them with the rulings and directives of the Supreme Court; and

iii.

The IBP Board of Governors shall assist the DSC Council in promptly and effectively implementing the Supreme Court's decisions, regulations, and issuances affecting the IBP and accredited DSC organizations and practitioners.

Section 21. DSC Council Office, Secretariat, and Staff. – The Interim Council and succeeding DSC Councils shall hold office in the IBP Building and shall have a dedicated secretariat and staff to carry out the Council's functions.

Upon assumption into office, the Interim Council shall create the permanent secretariat to be headed by a staff member appointed by the Interim Council.

Except for the head of the permanent secretariat, the staff shall enjoy security of tenure until the expiration or termination of their employment. The head of the secretariat shall have the same term as the appointing Interim Council. Thereafter, the appointment of the head staff shall be rotated among the DSC Council members.

The composition and duties of the permanent secretariat shall be stated in the DSC Manual.

RULE IV
FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Section 22. Creation of DSC Fund. – A special fund to be known as the "DSC Fund" shall be created under these Rules. This fund shat1 be administered by the DSC Council for its operational expenses, the grants given to qualified DSC organizations, and other financial expenses under these Rules.

Section 23. Sources, Chargeable Expenses, and Character of the DSC Fund. – The DSC Fund will be sourced from public and non-public sources.

(a) The DSC Fund is partly funded by the Supreme Court from the budget allocated for DSC Subsidy under the relevant General Appropriations Act. This source of funds is public in n3ture and subject to COA rules and regulations on disbursement and liquidation.

The expenses for financial support awarded to grantee DSC organizations under Section 29, the monetary award under Section 32, and all the operational expenses of the DSC Council, including its programs, activities, and projects, as approved in its Program of Expenses, shall be chargeable to this portion of the DSC Fund.

(b) The DSC Fund may also receive funding from non-public sources, as may be allowed in the DSC Manual. These non-public funds include private donations, contributions, grants from private entities, or other development partners. They are subject to the general accounting and auditing rules as well as the applicable guidelines of the non-public sources as stated in the DSC Manual.

The expenses chargeable to this portion of the DSC Fund shall be subject to the DSC Council's discretion. The DSC Manual shall provide the mechanism for the DSC Council's receipt, management, and release of non-public funds coursed through the DSC Fund.

(c) The Court may consider supplemental sources for the DSC Fund.

Section 24. Administration of the DSC Fund. – All releases from the DSC Fund shall be administered and utilized by the DSC Council in accordance with these Rules and the DSC Manual. The Council shall have the power to make disbursements therefrom, subject to the approval of its Program of Expenses by the IBP Board of Governors and the Supreme Court En Banc.

The IBP shall be authorized by the Court En Banc to open the appropriate accounts with the Land Bank of the Philippines. There shall be no commingling of funds. Each DSC Fund source, i.e., General Appropriations Act and non-public sources, shall be deposited in a separate account.

The separate accounts created for the DSC Subsidy under the General Appropriations Act for the DSC Fund shall be under the account of the Supreme Court. The account created for non-public sources shall be under the DSC Council as provided for in the DSC Manual.

The DSC Council shall safekeep the proper books of accounts, submit financial statements, and closely coordinate with the IBP Finance Office on DSC Fund disbursements and liquidations, and ensure the proper auditing of the financial support given to grantee DSC organizations.

The DSC Manual shall also prescribe the thresholds or the maximum allowable amounts of financial support that can be applied for by qualified DSC organizations every fiscal year. Changes to these amounts may be made upon the DSC Council's recommendation, with the endorsement of the IBP Board of Governors, and approval of the Supreme Court En Banc.

Section 25. Application for Financial Support. – Applying for financial support is voluntary and separate from the accreditation process under Rule II. Accredited DSC organizations applying for financial support must submit the following requirements to the DSC Council:

a.

A detailed proposal signed by the responsible officer of the accredited DSC organization justifying the need for funding, the proposed allocation of allowable expenses under Section 29, the indicative date for release of the grant, the timeline and milestones of the expected outcomes for the proposed programs, activities, and projects in need of funding;

b.

A notarized board resolution, special power of authority, or any other notarized document issued by the executive or governing board of an accredited DSC organization:

i.

appointing the responsible officer accountable to the DSC organization and the DSC Council;

ii.

approving the detailed proposal to be submitted to the DSC Council;

iii.

stating that the items being applied for financial support have not been funded or will not be funded from other

sources; and

iv.

undertaking to comply with the Iiquidation and reportorial requirements under these Rules;

c.

Financial documents such as the designated bank account/s and registration with the Bureau of Internal Revenue, if any, of the accredited DSC organization:

d.

An undertaking to comply with the liquidation and reportorial requirements signed by the responsible officer designated by the accredited DSC organization.

An accredited coalition shall not submit a grant application on behalf of any of its member organizations. To be entitled to the grant, the member organization must separately apply for accreditation and financial support under these Rules.

An accredited national organization may opt to submit a consolidated grant application for all its chapters or equivalent units. However, chapters with separate legal personalities are not precluded from filing a separate grant application, provided that they obtain a prior endorsement from its national organization.

Section 26. Evaluation and Approval of Applications for Financial Support and Program of Expenses. – (a) The DSC Council shall evaluate the applications for financial support upon receipt of the complete requirements. If necessary, the DSC Council shall meet with the responsible officers of applicant DSC organizations to assist in the preparation of or clarify items in their applications.

A DSC Council member must inhibit from the evaluation and approval process of the application for financial support of the organization or coalition that the DSC Council member belongs to.

The DSC Council members who participated in the evaluation and approval process shall sign the evaluation reports, which shall indicate the details of the evaluation and the approval or disapproval of the applications for financial support. The evaluation reports shall be attached as supporting documents to the DSC Council's Program of Expenses.

(b) The DSC Council shall prepare a Program of Expenses based on the approved applications for financial support to qualified DSC organizations and the operational and other expenses it projected for the corning fiscal year. The DSC Council shall submit its Program of Expenses to the IBP Board of Governors, which shall also review and approve it and thereafter endorse it to the Supreme Court En Banc for approval. The timeline for this procedure shall be stated in the DSC Manual.

Section 27. Release of DSC Fund to the DSC Council. – After the DSC Council's Program of Expenses and financial support to the grantee DSC organizations have been approved, the IBP shall clear the approved amounts in the Program of Expenses for release to the DSC Council. The DSC Council shall properly disburse the approved amounts according to the process prescribed in the DSC Manual. The IBP Guidelines shall apply suppletorily.

In line with its fiscal oversight on the DSC Fund, the IBP shall require the DSC Council to folly liquidate the fonds released for the entire fiscal year, in accordance with the IBP Guidelines. To obtain the IBP's endorsement for the Supreme Court's approval for the subsequent fiscal year, the DSC Council must fully liquidate its

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disbursements prior to the submission of its Program of Expenses for the next fiscal year.

Section 28. Responsibility to Comply with the Conditions for the Approved Program of Expenses and Financial Support. – The DSC Council and the grantee DSC organizations shall be responsible for ensuring that the conditions for the approved program of expenses and financial support are respectively complied with.

The DSC Council or the grantee DSC organizations must provide written justification for deviations from the approved program of expenses or financial support, respectively. These deviations may be considered, allowed, or disallowed, as provided in the DSC Manual.

Unauthorized expenses, e.g., exceeding the approved financial support, used for purposes outside the allowable expenses, or without the required prior approval, shall be for the account of the grantee DSC organization. Its executive or governing board shall be solidarily liable with the DSC organization for any unauthorized expenses relating to the financial support granted to it.

Section 29. Allowable Expenses under the Financial Support for Grantee DSC Organizations. – The financial support to grantee DSC organizations, sourced from Section 23(a) of these Rules, shall be exclusively used for the following expenses:

- Personnel support. – At least 60% of the grant shall be allocated for direct and/or indirect compensation, which includes but is not limited to salary, government-mandated contributions, and other benefits as may be provided by the grantee DSC organizations to their core personnel.

  The roles and responsibilities of the core personnel should be detailed in the application for financial support. They must render minimum working hours per week as prescribed in the DSC Manual. An attestation on this work arrangement by the core personnel and the grantee DSC organization must be submitted as a supporting document in its application.

  Expenses for development such as training, seminars, lectures, and other capacity-building activities of core personnel of grantee DSC organizations may also be charged under personnel support subject to proper liquidation.

  Grantee DSC organizations have the discretion to allocate, apportion, and disburse the personnel support component of their financial support as stated under this provision.

- Programmatic support. – The other 40% of the allocation may be utilized for the conduct of programs, activities, and projects of the grantee DSC organization subject to proper liquidation based on appropriate rules and regulations. This includes expenses such as venue rental, honoraria and allowances, and other benefits as may be provided by the grantee DSC organization which are given to resource speakers, lecturers, trainers, volunteers, and attendees, including but not limited to their transportation, accommodations, meals, program materials, and other necessary expenses as may be stated in the DSC Manual.

- Protection and security support. – The remaining part of the allocation, if any, may be utilized for expenses related to emergency security measures for personnel of accredited DSC organizations experiencing actual and imminent threats to their life, liberty, or security. The allowable expenses and disbursement and liquidation of such amounts shall be stated in the DSC Manual.

The DSC Manual shall set a cap on the financial support that a single DSC organization may receive.

The foregoing allowable expenses and the limits imposed therein are subject to review and adjustment by the Supreme Court.

Section 30. Liquidation of Released DSC Fund and Financial Support. – Before applying for financial support for

the next fiscal year, the grantee DSC organizations must submit to the DSC Council a full and final liquidation of the financial support awarded to it. The DSC Council shall also observe the liquidation and reportorial requirements under these Rules, ensure that the grantee DSC organizations comply with them, and call their responsible officers to account for unliquidated amounts.

Any unexpended portion of the DSC Fund under Section 23(a) shall be withheld by the TBP and the Supreme Court. The liquidation of DSC Fund disbursements to the DSC Council and the grantee DSC organizations should be in accordance with the procedures under these Rules, the DSC Manual, and by suppletory application, Sections VIT and VIII of the IBP Guidelines.[12] For any unliquidated portion of the DSC Fund, the concerned DSC organization shall be responsible for the consequences mentioned therein.

Section 31. Mandatory Training for DSC Council and Accredited DSC Organizations. – To ensure the capacity and competence of the DSC Council and accredited DSC organizations to comply with these Rules, the DSC Manual, and the relevant COA regulations on liquidation, training workshops shall be conducted by the DSC TWG and the IBP Finance Office on a biannual basis to effectively institutionalize these Rules in the operations of the DSC Council and the accredited DSC organizations.

RULE V
OTHER FORMS OF SUPPORT AND RECOGNITION

Section 32. Recognition. – To recognize DSC as a distinct practice, there will be a triennial award for organizations or individuals who are deemed to have made an outstanding contribution to the promotion, protection, and advancement of human rights, especially the marginalized people, communities, and identities.

Nominees must have demonstrated leadership, commitment, courage, perseverance, and sacrifice in advancing human rights and justice for Filipinos. Nominees may be individuals, collective legal practitioners, human rights defenders, or organizations. Self-nominations are also permitted.

The DSC Council shall form a special committee to evaluate and decide on the nominations and award a plaque of recognition and a reasonable honorarium to the awardee. The details of this awarding process shall be provided in the DSC Manual.

Section 33. Capacity-building Activities on DSC Programs. – A list of accredited DSC organizations and their specializations and practice areas shall be endorsed by the DSC Council to the relevant committees of the Supreme Court, the Philippine Judicial Academy, and the IBP. They will be prioritized for participation in relevant trainings, consultations, workshops, technical working groups, and deliberations on the creation and/or amendment of rules and regulations affecting DSC, human rights, access to justice, and other relevant topics. They may also propose capacity-building activities needed in the field of DSC.

Section 34. Exemption for MCLE Providers. – Accredited DSC organizations shall be exempt from the requirement to affiliate with a law school prior to their accreditation as an MCLE Provider. Subject to approval by the MCLE Board, accredited DSC organizations may conduct MCLE activities only as a secondary, not primary, purpose.

Section 35. Exemption from Payment of Legal Fees in Selected Cases. – Accredited DSC organizations shall be exempt from payment of legal fees for cases filed by sector groups or organizations asserting their rights or welfare as labor, agricultural workers, farmers, fisherfolk, or indigenous people, urban poor, or marginalized people, identities, or communities.

Section 36. Protection against SLAPP Suits. – When a SLAPP suit is filed against an accredited DSC organization

in any administrative, quasi-judicial, or judicial forum, its officials, members, or affiliates, the defendant may avail the SLAPP suit protection in Rule 6 of A.M. No. 09-6-8-SC or the Rules of Procedure for Environmental Cases.

Section 37. Compliance with ULAS Reporting Requirement. – The ULAS Board, in consultation with the Committee on Access to Justice/Underserved Areas or the Interim DSC Council, will promulgate rules facilitating the mechanism for compliance by accredited DSC organizations with the ULAS Rules.

RULE VI
REPORTING AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Section 38. Principles in Reporting. – With due regard to the nature of DSC as a practice, the grantee DSC organization shall submit the required reports in detail. The reports shall be accompanied by original documents and certified true copies, as may be applicable, and other receipts. The original documents, receipts, and other records shall be preserved and kept by the DSC organization or submitted to an authorized body as required under Section 30 for at least five years, unless the DSC Council determines the need for a longer period of preservation.

The DSC Council may consult the relevant government agencies and development partners to ensure that its reporting processes and principles are compliant and responsive to their regulations and requirements, such as but not limited to attorney-client confidentiality, data privacy and security, and applicable reporting, accounting, and auditing rules.

To facilitate ease of compliance and uniformity in submissions, the DSC Council shall prescribe a standard template or format for preparing applications for accreditation, financial support, and other reportorial requirements. The IBP Guidelines will apply suppletorily for the DSC Council's submissions to the IBP.

Section 39. Liquidation Report. – Grantee DSC organizations shall submit to the DSC Council a liquidation report within 15 days from the end of every quarter and within 15 days from the end of every fiscal year, together with receipts and other documents allowable by COA, and an undertaking by the DSC organization as to the truthfulness of the contents of the financial report submitted.

Any expense exceeding the approved budget shall be for the account of the DSC organization, while other unauthorized expenses cannot be charged to the grant and must be returned to the DSC Council.

Liquidation reports shall consider the kind of support extended to the DSC organization and comply with the applicable reporting rules based on the source of funds used for the covered activities.

The DSC Council will consult with the relevant government agencies on the allowable substitutes for official receipts such as certifications or signed acknowledgment receipts, and review or validate these substitute documents. The relevant details or list of substitute liquidation documents, as may be allowed by the COA, will be provided in the DSC Manual.

Section 40. Accomplishment Report. – Grantee DSC organizations shall submit to the DSC Council an accomplishment report within 30 days from the end of every fiscal year stating the work done by each of the personnel supported by the grant, including a narration of their main accomplishments, lessons learned, challenges encountered, and future activities, if any. The accomplishment report shall be signed by the responsible officer and shall be certified by the executive or governing board of the grantee DSC organization.

To avoid prejudicing the safety of the DSC lawyers and personnel, accomplishment reports should ensure that attorney-client privilege and data privacy and security are observed. In sensitive or tenuous cases as determined by the grantee DSC organization and approved by the DSC Council, the names of parties and counsels shall not

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be disclosed in the report. Other implementation details hereof shall be stated in the DSC Manual.

Section 41. Other Reports. – Grantee DSC organizations shall report to the DSC Council any relevant changes in their personnel's employment supported by the grant, the disciplinary measures imposed on them; and other similar scenarios.

Changes in employment include actions concerning changes in personnel status, such as but not limited to, regularization, promotion, transfer, resignation, and retirement.

Section 42. Government Required Reporting. – Accredited DSC organizations shall furnish to the DSC Council copies of such other reports as may be required by relevant government agencies.

Section 43. Required Financial Statements. – Grantee DSC organizations shall submit to the DSC Council their annual audited financial statement or, in the absence thereof, a statement of financial position reflecting the grant received under these Rules, duly signed by the responsible officers of the DSC organization.

Section 44. Consequences of Noncompliance. – The failure or delay in the submission of reportorial requirements under these Rules by grantee or accredited DSC organizations shall subject them to sanctions that may be imposed by the DSC Council and to possible civil, criminal, and administrative liability as may be further defined in the DSC Manual.

- Prior to imposing sanctions, the DSC Council shall issue to the erring accredited or grantee DSC organization a notice to explain its noncompliance with the reportorial requirements.

- Upon finding that the explanation for noncompliance is not valid or justified, the DSC Council shall issue a warning for the first offense, with caution that a similar offense will be dealt with more severely.

- In succeeding offenses, the DSC Council shall disqualify the erring accredited or grantee DSC organization from applying for subsequent financial support until it completes the required liquidation, returns any unexpended amount, if any, and submits the required reportorial requirements.

- For repeated violations and depending on their gravity, the DSC Council shall suspend or revoke the accreditation of the erring accredited or grantee DSC organization.

Section 45. Visitorial Powers of the Supreme Court. – The Supreme Court, or any of its duly authorized representatives, may exercise visitorial powers on the DSC Council and any accredited DSC organization to access and inspect pertinent records and premises, including the right to copy and retain these records, to question any personnel, and to investigate any matter which may be necessary to ensure the proper implementation of these Rules.

If in the exercise of the visitorial powers of the Supreme Court, the suspension or revocation of the accreditation of the DSC organization is found to be justified, the DSC organization may request reconsideration through the DSC Council before the Supreme Court in relation to Section 11 of these Rules.

Section 46. Assessment and Reporting. The Supreme Court may designate the Committee on Access to Justice/Underserved Areas to assess and report on the performance of the DSC Council to the Court En Banc to ensure the proper implementation of these Rules. The Committee will coordinate with the DSC Council and the IBP Board of Governors on the relevant information for its report to the Court En Banc.

Section 47. DSC Manual. – The Interim DSC Council shall submit to the Supreme Court En Banc a Manual of rules and regulations necessary for the implementation of these Rules for its approval. The Interim DSC Council shall coordinate with the DSC TWG, Supreme Court Fiscal Management and Budget Office, Court Management Office, Financial Management Office of the Office of the Court Administrator, IBP, and other relevant

government agencies for the drafting of this Manual.

Section 48. Effectivity. – These Rules shall take effect following its complete publication in the Official Gazette or in two newspapers of national circulation in the Philippines, and in the websites of the IBP and of the Supreme Court.

August 26, 2026.

(Sgd.) ALEXANDER G. GESMUNDO
Chief Justice

(Sgd.) MARVIC M.V.F. LEONEN
Associate Justice

(Sgd.) ALFREDO BENJAMIN S. CAGUIOA
Associate Justice

(Sgd.) RAMON PAUL L. HERNANDO
Associate Justice

(Sgd.) AMY C. LAZARO-JAVIER
Associate Justice

(Sgd.) HENRI JEAN PAUL B. INTING
Associate Justice

(Sgd.) RODIL V. ZALAMEDA
Associate Justice

(Sgd.) SAMUEL H. GAERLAN
Associate Justice

(Sgd.) RICARDO R. ROSARIO
Associate Justice

(Sgd.) JHOSEP Y. LOPEZ
Associate Justice

(Sgd.) JAPAR B. DIMAAMPAO
Associate Justice

(Sgd.) JOSE MIDAS P. MARQUEZ
Associate Justice

(Sgd.) ANTONIO T. KHO, JR.
Associate Justice

(Sgd.) MARIA FILOMENA D. SINGH
Associate Justice

On official leave but left a vote
(Sgd.) RAUL B. VILLANUEVA
Associate Justice

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[1] Damcelle Torres-Cortes, European Union Justice Sector Reform Programme Governance in Justice 2, NKE Mission No. 34, Final Report. Study on the Sustainability of Developmental & Social Change (DSC) Law Groups in the Philippines, June 2024.

[2] Id.

[3] United Nations Development Programme, Access to Justice Practice Note, 2004, available at https://www.undp.org/publications/access-justice-practice-note (last accessed on September 3, 2026). See also Damcelle Torres-Cortes, European Union Justice Sector Reform Programme Governance in Justice 2, NKE Mission No. 34, Final Report: Study on the Sustainability of Developmental & Social Change (DSC) Law Groups in the Philippines, June 2024.

[4] See Department of Budget Management, Manual on Position Classification and Compensation System (PCCS), Chapter 3, sec. 3.2.4, available at https://www.dbm.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/Manual-on-PCC-Chapter-3.pdf (lasl accessed on September 3, 2026).

[5] Damcelle Torres-Cortes, European Union Justice Sector Reform Programme Governance in Justice 2, NKE Mission No. 34, Final Report: Study on the Sustainability of Developmental & Social Change (DSC) Law Groups in the Philippines, June 2024, Part III, p. 10.

[6] Executive Order No. 292 (1987), Book VI (National Government Budgeting), Chapter 1 (General Provisions), sec. 2(8), The Administrative Code of 1987.

[7] See Department of Budget Management, Manual on Position Classification and Compensation System (PCCS), Chapter 3, sec. 3.2.5, available at https://www.dbm.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/Manual-on-PCC-Chapter-3.pdf (last accessed on September 3, 2026).

[8] See United Nations, General Assembly, Legal empowerment of the poor and eradication of poverty: Resolution / adopted by the General Assembly, A/RES/63/142, (March 5, 2009). See also the Report of the Secretary-General on Legal Empowerment of the poor and eradication of poverty, available at https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/reports/Legal%20empowerment%20of%20the%20poor.pdf (last accessed on September 3, 2026).

[9] Republic Act No. 9710 (2009), sec. 4(d).

[10] United Nations Declaration on the Right to Development, art. 1, available at https://www.un.org/en/events/righttodevelopment/declaration.shtml (last accessed on September 3, 2026).

[11] CODE OF PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY, Canon V, sec. 2.

[12] Integrated Bar of the Philippines Guidelines, Bar Matter No. 1173, secs. VII (Liquidation Report on Utilization of IBP Subsidy) and VIII (Liquidation of the IBP Subsidy).

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