

**JUDICIAL COUNCIL OF CALIFORNIA
ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE COURTS**

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Report

TO: Members of the Judicial Council

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SUBJECT: Funding to Plan, Implement and Improve Self-Help Assistance
(No Action Required)

In order to expedite the processing of cases involving self-represented litigants and increase access to justice for the public, fiscal year 2005–2006 Trial Court Improvement Funds have been made available to help superior courts plan, implement, and improve self-help assistance.

Courts have been strongly encouraged to apply for funds to:

- (A) Implement or expand an existing program (\$1,250,000 through September 30, 2006. At least \$2,500,000 will be available in fiscal year 2006-2007.);
- (B) Plan and develop partnerships to determine the most effective way to develop or expand programs (\$300,000); and
- (C) Provide for one-time costs in implementing or expanding an existing program (\$250,000).

The first two grants are noncompetitive and will be disbursed according to a formula based on the number of courts applying for the grants.

(A) Grants to Start and Sustain Ongoing Self-Help Services

These grants will be available to implement a new program or to expand an existing one. These grants will be noncompetitive and disbursed according to a formula that consists of a mean of the family law facilitator and population figures from each county. \$1,250,000 is available for 2005–2006. Grants will run from March 1 to September 30, 2006. It is anticipated that increased and continued funding will be available in subsequent years.

These funds may not be used to supplant existing services. They may be used only to expand existing services or start new ones.

At least 75 percent of the funds need to be disbursed for the costs of an attorney. Courts will be asked to match 10 percent of the grant with existing resources. This can include allocating an existing court clerk to assist the attorney. It is recommended that these funds be designated to supplement either the family law facilitator or another existing court-based self-help program. The family law facilitator can offer assistance with other topics, as long as funding is provided that pays for that time in areas other than child support.

(B) Planning Grants

1. Basic Grants

These grants will allow courts to assess the current state of services for self-represented litigants, set a baseline for reporting, and develop a plan of action. These grants will be noncompetitive and based on the number of courts requesting funding. Grants will be approximately \$5,000 per applying court. Funds may be used to supplement the number of attendees for the March 14 – 17 Statewide Conference on Self-Represented Litigants. Courts will be provided with a template of questions to answer, to help them

1. Identify the most effective ways to use additional funds;
2. Establish a baseline for reporting;
3. Provide information to the Administrative Office of the Courts on additional resource needs; and
4. Evaluate the effectiveness of existing programs and identify areas for improvement or expansion.

Courts that apply for implementation funding are strongly encouraged to request planning grant funds to assist them in developing or expanding their programs and in meeting reporting requirements.

2. Regional Efforts

Courts that wish to collaborate with other counties on services for self-represented resources may request up to \$10,000 per court for planning and implementation of these regional programs. Smaller courts may find that they will be able to provide enhanced services by collaborating with other courts in their region. These supplemental funds may be used to allow expansion of services between collaborating courts beyond the formula-based funding provided for the expanded self-help assistance described in section (A) above.

(C) One-Time Costs to Start a New Self-Help Program or Enhance an Existing Self-Help Program

These funds may be used for:

- Costs of setting up self-help centers
- Videoconferencing equipment for services between self-help centers
- Costs of publications, videos, and computer programs

- Equipment, furniture, and furnishings for the self-help center
- Signage
- Duplication expenses for materials

These one-time grants will be competitive.

Longer Term Strategy

The Judicial Council's Task Force on Self-Represented Litigants has been charged with implementing the Statewide Action Plan for Serving Self-Represented Litigants which was approved by the Judicial Council in February 2004.

They are developing guidelines for self-help centers and are developing a proposed budget for implementing self-help centers on a statewide basis which will be presented to the Judicial Council later in the year.