

## BRIDGING THE GAP

When developing its strategic plan, the Superior Court of Orange County took the opportunity to form a new and lasting connection with the culturally diverse community it serves by creating its first Leadership Academy. At this early date, the academy has already proved a great success. Its 22 participants, who graduated from the six-week program in April 2007, have a better understanding of the court's work and have provided feedback on how to improve programs and services.

The Superior Court of Orange County previously had a Court Community-Focused Planning Committee but wanted a more concentrated and inclusive program to establish a bridge between the court and various ethnic, immigrant, and disabled communities. The Leadership Academy, modeled after the Superior Court of San Joaquin County program, was the perfect medium. Academy participants share what they've learned about the court with their organization, thus spreading the information to the community and increasing understanding and access to the court.

Judge Frederick P. Aguirre organized the program and recruited participants. The new program, tailored to meet the needs of Orange County's diverse community, successfully achieved broad representation from many service agencies: Catholic Charities of Orange County, the Korean American Coalition, the Black Chamber of Commerce, Latino Advocates for Education, the Council on American-Islamic Relations, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Names and addresses of organizations were obtained from lists used for prior stakeholder meetings. Judicial officers with the court's CwC committee also helped attract participants with follow-up calls to organizations that would benefit from the academy.

"It was a rewarding experience to lead an effort where the community took a genuine interest, was able to learn more, and made a contribution to the improvement of our court," says Judge Aguirre. He adds, "We recruited judges, attorneys, and court staff to make informative presentations and provided reference materials based on participant interest, which covered

**"The court has already benefited from this collaborative effort, with graduates having made a presentation to our court's Executive Committee. It is our hope that graduates will be involved in many facets of our court's strategic planning."**

—Presiding Judge  
Nancy Wieben Stock

a wide range of topics: self-help, collaborative courts, traffic, landlord-tenant issues, and domestic violence.”

Orange County used funds from a CwC grant to produce a 14-minute video and resource guide about the court to share with the Leadership Academy members during their orientation. The video, narrated by a well-known radio announcer, is also shown to jurors and the general public to demonstrate how the court is changing to meet community needs.

The court surveyed its Leadership Academy members at different stages of the program to assess if their expectations had been met. The feedback received was overwhelmingly favorable:

in 2008, the Leadership Academy will become an eight-week program. Leadership Academy graduates will also be participating in focus groups to help court planning efforts.



Graduating members of the Superior Court of Orange County’s inaugural Leadership Academy. The 22 participants attended the six-week session, which concluded in April 2007, and now have a better understanding of the court’s work to share with members of their communities.

## CREATING A LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

- 1** *Develop a list of 20 to 30 community organizations, with an emphasis on leaders who might represent traditionally marginalized communities in the court system.*
- 2** *Draft course content and select appropriate speakers.*
- 3** *Send invitation letters, applications, and a course schedule.*
- 4** *Review applications, obtain background checks, and confirm attendees.*
- 5** *Prepare class materials.*
- 6** *Create certificates of completion for the graduation ceremony.*