

Goal 1

access, fairness, and diversity

Superior Court of California,
COUNTY OF FRESNO

ACTION | AFTER CRIMINAL TRAFFIC INFRACTION ONE-STOP NETWORK CENTER

Helping Offenders Navigate the Legal System

Our legal system too often intimidates and confuses the people

it is supposed to serve—even (and sometimes especially) those who run afoul of it. The [Superior Court of Fresno County](#) found that to be particularly true in light of its mushrooming population and number of criminal cases.

From 2000 through 2005, the county population grew by more than 7 percent, almost twice as quickly as that of the state. Over that same period, the court saw a 55 percent increase in criminal case filings for that fiscal year. The court calendars are packed—especially in high-volume traffic and misdemeanor courts—and courtroom action is swift. The process was leaving too many offenders overwhelmed, especially those whose sentences involved more than one program or remediation.

The results were predictable: lack of understanding led to lack of offender compliance, which undermined public confidence. And an offender's noncompliance generally resulted in additional court appearances. In July 2000, the court collaborated with the [Probation Department](#) and the [Auditor-Controller's Office](#) to develop the first-of-its-kind program to

- ▶ Increase an offender's accountability to the court
- ▶ Make it easier for an offender to comply with court orders and get connected to court-mandated programs
- ▶ Restore and promote the public's trust and confidence in the judicial system

The [After Criminal Traffic Infraction One-Stop Network \(ACTION\) Center](#) was designed to enhance the delivery of court services and increase public access to the courts all in one place. Located in Fresno's downtown courthouse, the center enables offenders to

- ▶ Ask questions about court orders in the disposition of their cases
- ▶ Obtain information necessary to fulfill their sentence
- ▶ Pay fees and fines, or set up a schedule for restitution
- ▶ Get referrals (and often initial appointments) to court-ordered services, such as work furlough, anger management, batterer intervention, traffic school, and probation instructions



Two judicial assistants and one Probation Department employee staff the center. The court and probation cover operating costs from their budgets and also contribute supplies and equipment. Most important, they cross-trained their staffs in each other's procedures and gave each other access to their respective information systems, a collaboration unique in the state.

Many court users in the Fresno community have low incomes, limited literacy, and no Internet access. But at the center, each court user gets one-on-one assistance, until the staff member is certain that the user understands the case disposition and has the tools to help ensure compliance.

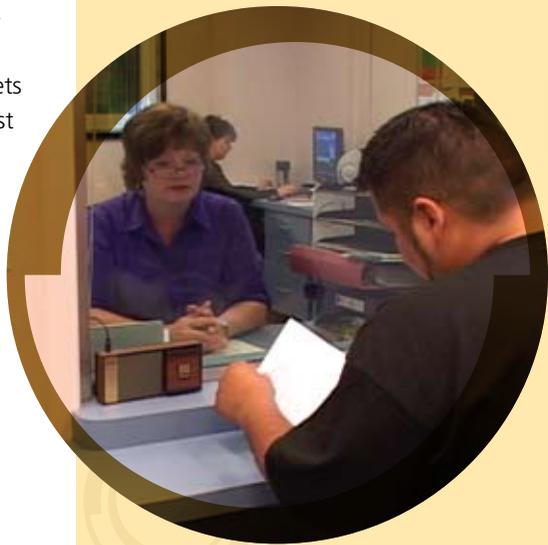
Impacts

- ▶ Offenders find it easier to follow court orders; 90 percent reported that the ACTION Center information increased their ability to comply with their case disposition.
- ▶ Compared with 2003, the number of services provided by the center in 2005 increased by 72 percent; the amount of revenue collected increased by 87 percent.
- ▶ In 2006, the staff serviced more than 25,000 court users and collected more than \$1.5 million in fees and fines.
- ▶ Freed from having to manage service delivery, the court can now process cases more efficiently: in fiscal year 2005–2006, the court disposed of 40 percent more cases than in the year before the center opened.

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ACTION Center staff assist offenders, such as David Barriga (above, right) and Andrea Roberson-Smith (facing page, bottom), by interpreting court orders, connecting them with court-ordered services, and working with them to set up payment plans for restitution, fees, and fines.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS *Fresno County is one of the most diverse in the state, with Hispanics making up 47 percent of the population. The county is also home to the second-largest Hmong community in the United States. In all, nearly half the county population speaks a language other than English at home. To guarantee fair administration of justice to all residents, the ACTION Center staff provides assistance in English, Spanish, and Hmong.*

In the words of one user,

“Aquí, te explican bien y te dan el tiempo para que tú entiendas mejor.”

“Here it is explained clearly and you are given the time to understand better.”