

Visual Guides to the Court

American Indian Storytelling About Court Processes

From a series of electronic community focus groups (conducted anonymously, so that participants would feel comfortable expressing their concerns and feelings), the [Superior Court of Siskiyou County](#) learned that many American Indians, the county's second-largest minority group, didn't know how to work with the courts. People said the processes and words used were hard to understand, and they asked the court to help them learn what to do.

In developing brochures to meet the challenge, the court became aware that Native Americans traditionally exchange information through storytelling rather than written words. The court enlisted help from a range of community partners to develop brochures that use visual storytelling to inform people about the judicial system.

The brochures describe court processes from the public's point of view and present the information in flow charts with pictures, color codes, and icons. For example,

- Yellow boxes indicate things a litigant is to do; blue boxes indicate places to be.
- A picture of a hand holding a paper represents filing a form; a stick figure with a star badge represents law enforcement.
- Pictures in the borders by a local artist portray aspects of Siskiyou culture.
- Soft garden colors give the brochures a calm tone.

The text is geared to fifth- or sixth-grade reading levels, and six of the brochures have been translated into Spanish. Brochures describe how to complete 10 court processes relevant to self-represented litigants:

1. Domestic violence restraining orders
2. Dissolution of marriage
3. Child custody and visitation
4. Civil harassment restraining orders
5. Guardianship
6. Paternity
7. Juvenile dependency
8. Juvenile delinquency
9. Unlawful detainer
10. Small claims

Wide-Ranging Input

To promote accuracy, wide representation, community buy-in, and knowledge of the brochures, the development team

- Met with civil, juvenile, and family law division clerks, managers, and judicial officers to develop and approve the flow charts.
- Met with representatives of local Indian tribes (including a Native American storyteller), the Hispanic population, and various service providers.
- Held seven public meetings around the county, which focused on cultural issues and visual storytelling. The meetings were promoted to draw old and young people, longtime residents and newcomers, legal professionals, clients, families, and retirees.
- Held meetings at the jail to incorporate the opinions of inmates.
- Invited all court personnel to review the brochures before they were printed and distributed.

The brochures are distributed to

- The Family Law Facilitator Clinic and courthouse branches
- Family resource centers
- County agencies such as the departments of human services, probation, and behavioral health
- The public library and county law library
- Local Indian tribes
- Schools
- Hospitals
- The Siskiyou Domestic Violence and Crisis Center
- Bar association members
- Law enforcement agencies

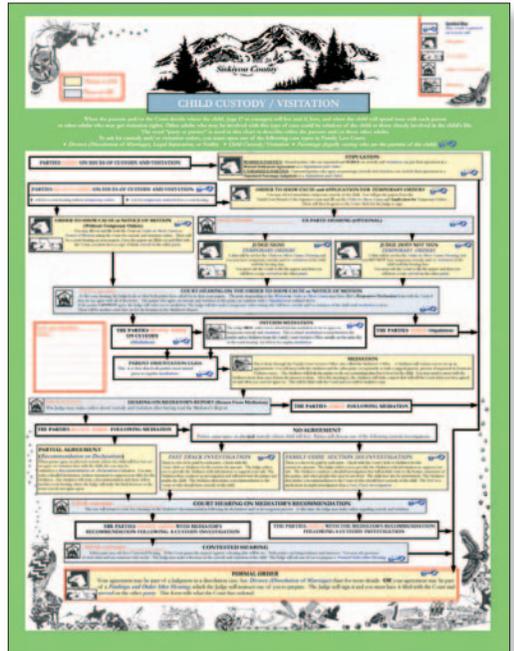
“They fly off the racks over here in the Family Law Facilitator Clinic area,” said the director of Family Court Services.

Impacts

- The Indian and Spanish-speaking populations of Siskiyou County now have understandable brochures about how to begin and complete common court procedures properly.
- The court initially printed and distributed 17,000 brochures.
- The brochures promote better access to and trust in the courts by both groups.
- Collaboration on the brochures forged stronger cooperation between the courts and legal, social service, and community groups.

Spreading the Idea

A county supervisor reported that during a meeting to improve relationships between tribal representatives and members of social service, law enforcement, and nongovernmental agencies, participants “mentioned how effective and helpful your visual pamphlets were in [explaining] the court system to clients. I hope we will develop more visual aids in other services areas. Great job!”



Superior Court of Siskiyou County, 311 Fourth Street, Yreka, CA 96097

Project contact: Lisa Hicks, Court Mediator/Evaluator, 530-842-0192, familycourtsvc@siskiyou.courts.ca.gov