Innovations in the California Courts
Models for Administering Justice
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**Kleps Award Winners, 2003–2005**

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I am pleased to present Innovations in the California Courts, a collection of stories about court programs that help improve the administration of justice throughout the state. This book is meant to be a resource for the entire court family—members of the Judicial Branch, court staff, and our key stakeholders.

The Ralph N. Kleps Award for Improvement in the Administration of the Courts was established in 1991 in honor of the first Administrative Director of the Courts. Since then, California courts have responded to the needs of the public by creating programs that support self-represented litigants, keep pace with advances in technology, streamline legal processes, and address the professional development needs of judicial officers and court staffs. The Kleps Award-winning programs profiled in the first section of this booklet represent these innovations and many more.

Each program has contributed to accomplishing one or more of the six overarching goals established by the Judicial Council in its operational plan for the state’s judicial branch, Leading Justice Into the Future:

- Access, fairness, and diversity
- Independence and accountability
- Modernization of management and administration
- Quality of justice and service to the public
- Education
- Technology

The last decade of transition and unification in the courts has provided the council, the courts, and the Administrative Office of the Courts the opportunity to encourage and support statewide diverse initiatives that promote equal access to fair and consistent justice, modernize the administration of justice, and improve the quality of justice for the public. These court improvement efforts range from areas such as jury reform, support of self-represented litigants, and services to children and families to administrative issues such as integrated technology and fiscal procedures and systems to promote stability, efficiency, and accountability. The second section of this booklet highlights these and other achievements in our quest for the continued improvement of the administration of justice. This is only a small sampling of the superb progress the court family has made in response to public needs.

Innovation is an ongoing—and exciting—process. It is my sincere hope that this book furthers the information sharing that is essential to courts’ developing and maintaining programs to foster access for and service to the public.

Thank you for your continued commitment to providing innovative and creative programming that serves the people of California.

William C. Vickrey
Administrative Director of the Courts
Kleps Award Winners
2003–2005
Introduction

So many people working in the California judicial system have highly creative minds and a strong dedication to serving justice that it is no surprise they come up with innovative ways to solve challenges facing the courts. In 1991, the Judicial Council of California decided to honor and celebrate valuable innovations developed by courts around the state. The council initiated awards named in honor of Ralph N. Kleps, the first Administrative Director of the California courts.

Courts submit descriptions of their creative programs to apply for the awards. For the judging of award winners, superior courts are grouped in three categories, based on size, from those with only 2 judicial positions to those with more than 40. A fourth category comprises appellate courts, and a fifth consists of projects in which two or more courts collaborate. A committee of the nominees’ peers—including justices, judges, and court executives—chooses the winners.

Programs nominated must be innovative (that is, create value by initiating practices that enhance judicial efficiency and effectiveness), transferable to other courts, and in operation for at least one year. The committee seeks programs that demonstrate a positive impact on the court and the public served.

Choosing the winners from among many exemplary programs is a difficult but heartwarming task. Perhaps reading about the award winners in the following pages will encourage others to adopt or adapt these wonderful innovations in their own work—and inspire them to think of new solutions to improve the administration of justice.
Part 1
Access, Fairness, and Diversity; Quality of Justice and Service to the Public

Judicial Council Goals

Goal I: Access, Fairness, and Diversity
All Californians will have equal access to the courts and equal ability to participate in court proceedings, and will be treated in a fair and just manner. Members of the judicial branch community will reflect the rich diversity of the state’s residents.

Goal IV: Quality of Justice and Service to the Public
Judicial branch services will be responsive to the needs of the public and will enhance the public’s understanding, use of, and confidence in the judiciary.

Challenges

California courts are experiencing a flood of litigants representing themselves. Most often these parties are poor, and many are not fluent in English, much less in legalese. Some have low literacy skills. Some are unfamiliar with the American legal system.

Committed to making sure that all population groups have access to justice, courts have developed ways to help self-represented Californians know their rights and legal options, fill out the appropriate legal papers clearly and correctly, find understandable help in their native languages, and navigate the legal process—including at trial and any subsequent appeal.

With help, the self-represented gain better access to the courts, the tools to better present their cases properly, and more trust in the system of justice. Important side effects are reduced court time and costs in handling their cases, benefiting the public at large.

Court service to the community extends beyond the courtroom. The judiciary sees the importance of educating the public, so that litigants, witnesses, jurors, voters, schoolchildren, immigrants, and others understand what the law is and what the courts do. That is why courts have designed innovative programs to educate the populace.
Assisting Court Customers with Educational and Self-Help Services (ACCESS)

Multilingual, Multicultural Help

San Francisco has a widely diverse population, including many residents who are not fluent in English; are racial, ethnic, or cultural minorities; or are poor and can’t afford to hire attorneys when legal issues arise. The Superior Court of San Francisco County was determined to give more of the county’s diverse residents meaningful access to the courts. Using funds granted to the Model Self-Help Pilot Program, the court created a program and center called ACCESS (Assisting Court Customers with Educational and Self-Help Services). The program works with residents in culturally appropriate ways in Spanish, Chinese (Cantonese), Russian, Vietnamese, and Tagalog, and also provides legal information in simple, clear English.

Customers may drop in to the ACCESS center at the courthouse, but they can also ask questions by e-mail. The program helps them understand their legal rights and responsibilities in matters such as civil harassment restraining orders, unlawful detainers, name and gender changes, guardianships, and small claims.

- Center staff members (two attorneys and a clerk) answer client questions, discuss legal options, help with completing papers, explain court procedures such as filing and service of process, explain court orders, discuss how to get orders enforced, and give clients an idea of what to expect in court appearances. The vast majority of customers receive one-on-one help.
- ACCESS conducts weekly workshops on topics such as small claims and collection of judgments.
- The center offers multilingual literature about civil litigation, service of process, judgment collection, answering a complaint, and small estates.

Taking the Law to the Communities

ACCESS does broad outreach to communities that, for various reasons, have traditionally not enjoyed full access to the courts—people not fluent in English; people of color; immigrants; low-income people; seniors; dependent adults; and lesbian, gay, and transgender people.

- It runs a biweekly clinic in Spanish at La Raza Resource Center.
- It broadcasts bimonthly radio programs translated into Cantonese by the staff of Donaldina Cameron House, a social-service provider in Chinatown for the Asian-Pacific Islander community. Following each broadcast, ACCESS conducts a clinic on the topics discussed.
- It participates in a day of workshops, in Cantonese, on issues of interest to the Chinese community, at Cameron House’s annual Family Day.
- It works with the Eviction Defense Collaborative (EDC) and the Bar Association of San Francisco in two weekly workshops for tenants, taught by EDC staff at the ACCESS center, before litigants’ settlement conferences. Volunteer attorneys are also on call to assist the occasional self-represented landlord.
- It collaborates with Community Boards, a nonprofit mediation agency, to offer dispute resolution services (currently focusing on small claims).
Impacts

- Since March 2003, the ACCESS program has served more than 10,000 customers, almost 40 percent in languages other than English.
- Television and radio broadcasts in Spanish have reached audiences of more than 10,000; radio programs in Cantonese, more than 3,000 per broadcast.
- ACCESS services have improved the accuracy and completeness of self-represented litigants’ filings, the efficiency of court proceedings, customers’ access to justice, and their understanding of court processes and the judicial system.
- Fewer matters are taken off calendar due to defective service; fewer continuances are required for procedural errors; customers are better prepared for court appearances and file better paperwork; more interpreters are available; and more small claims judgments are satisfied.
- ACCESS customers reported greater satisfaction with their hearings, more reasonable expectations of case outcomes, greater perceptions of fairness, and greater ability to communicate with the judge.

Law School Volunteers

The Civil Justice Clinic at Hastings School of Law has supplied a large number of volunteers to serve ACCESS customers.

Superior Court of San Francisco County, Civic Center Courthouse,
400 McAllister Street, Room 208, San Francisco, CA 94102
Project contact: Cristina Llop, ACCESS Director, 415-551-5880, access@sftc.org
A Step-by-Step Appellate Manual for the Self-Represented

Appeals Demystified for Laypeople

More Californians than ever before are representing themselves in appeals of civil cases, but many do not know how to file or respond to an appeal correctly. Most are unaware that an appeal cannot review the evidence anew; they may also have no idea what the standards of review are.

Appellate courts have to spend time deciphering and organizing the papers that self-represented litigants submit. Sometimes the courts must declare a party in default or must dismiss an appeal because the litigant failed to file properly. Seeing an obvious need, the Court of Appeal, Fourth Appellate District, Division One, created a manual in clear eighth-grade or lower English, telling how and when to file documents in appeals. The manual teaches litigants what the standards are for reviewing a case, how to designate the record, how to file the civil case information statement, and how to prepare a brief that is based on the record and that states the facts, issues, and law clearly. To prevent defaults and dismissals, it spells out court procedures, practices, and deadlines.

Now, if the Fourth Appellate District, Division One, has to return a document that doesn’t comply with procedure in some way, it also sends the party a copy of the part of the manual describing how to prepare the document correctly.

Impacts

■ Fewer appeals by self-represented litigants are rejected for failure to follow procedures, meet deadlines, or prepare documents properly.

■ People are guided step-by-step through the forms they need, so the papers they file are more organized, more comprehensible, and more likely to communicate successfully. This strengthens people’s confidence in court rulings.

■ Court clerks and staff members save time because more litigants submit paperwork that is complete, timely, and intelligible.

■ In the first five months, more than 700 copies of the printed manual were distributed. Copying the manual is permitted, so the number of copies in circulation is substantially higher but cannot be tracked.

■ The manual is used as a model for other appellate districts to customize to their practices.

A Flyer Takes Off

“There had been a long-standing dearth of user-friendly materials for self-represented litigants on how to handle a civil appeal in the California courts,” recounts Michael Kaye, reference librarian at the San Diego County Public Law Library. “Enter Mary Eikel, then the principal research attorney for the Fourth Appellate District. She saw pro pers making fatal procedural blunders and envisioned a simple handout on how to avoid them.”

Eikel invited input from multiple sources, and what started as a flyer grew into a 140-page manual with an appendix of 21 court forms and samples, giving line-by-line instructions. It is used not only by litigants but also by legal secretaries and by attorneys who are unfamiliar with appellate practice.

Kaye teaches an orientation class on appellate practice, aimed at parties representing themselves, and he shows students the sample forms, in the hope that they’ll turn to the manual if they run into any problems with their appeals.
Freely Available

The manual, entitled *The California Court of Appeal Step-by-Step Civil Appellate Practices and Procedures for the Self-Represented*, is available electronically on the Fourth Appellate District’s Web site, www.courtinfo.ca.gov/courtsofappeal/4thDistrictDiv1/, and in a print version, free, from several sources:

- The Fourth Appellate District, Division One
- The Superior Court of San Diego County and its branches
- The San Diego Family and Probate Courts, which serve the most self-represented litigants in the county
- The San Diego County Public Law Library and its branches
- The San Diego Volunteer Lawyer Program
- The Legal Aid Society

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**Representing Yourself on Appeal?**

**The California Court of Appeal Step by Step Manual:**
Civil Appellate Practices and Procedures for the Self-Represented

This manual will provide you with a summary of the information you need if you are appealing your case from the Superior Courts of San Diego County or Imperial County to the Court of Appeal, Fourth Appellate District, Division One.

The manual helps self-represented litigants understand the appellate process and includes copies of most forms needed to pursue an appeal, with line-by-line instructions on how to fill them out.

- Chapter 1: Can You Appeal?
- Chapter 2: Filing the Notice of Appeal
- Chapter 3: Preparing the Record
- Chapter 4: Civil Case Information Statement
- Chapter 5: Briefing the Case
- Chapter 6: Other Things You Should Know
- Chapter 7: Post-Briefing

Find the manual on the Court of Appeal’s Web site:
www.courtinfo.ca.gov/courts/courtsofappeal/4thDistrictDiv1/4dca_proper.htm

Or pick up a free copy at any of these locations:

**Court of Appeal**
Fourth Appellate District, Division One
750 B Street, Suite 300
San Diego, CA 92101
619-645-2762

San Diego County Public Law Library
3161 2nd Street
San Diego, CA 92101
619-235-2176

Superior Court of San Diego County
North County Division, Appeals Section
4150 Camino Real, Suite 1008
Vista, CA 92081
760-728-3722

Superior Court of Imperial County
Business Office, Appeals Section
259 West Imperial Avenue
El Centro, CA 92243
760-746-4443

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Court of Appeal, Fourth Appellate District, Division One, 750 B Street, Suite 300, San Diego, CA 92101

Project contact: Stephen M. Kelly, Clerk/Administrator, 619-645-2762, steve.kelly@jud.ca.gov
One-Stop Community Services

Several Calaveras County agencies concerned with self-represented litigants saw that their populations were overwhelmed by or fearful of the court system and needed more help. They collaborated with the Superior Court of Calaveras County to bring their legal assistance resources together in one location.

Only six months after the first planning meeting, the groups opened a one-stop help center in San Andreas. With a core staff of two, the center is open from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. four days a week. The family law facilitator’s office and the court clerk’s office provide additional staff.

Center services focus on self-help. Visitors use computers and printers with easy online access to legal assistance Web sites, including

- The California Courts Online Self-Help Center ([www.courtinfo.ca.gov/self-help](http://www.courtinfo.ca.gov/self-help))
- EZLegalFile ([www.EZLegalFile.org](http://www.EZLegalFile.org)—see page 44)
- The California Courts Web site ([www.courtinfo.ca.gov/forms](http://www.courtinfo.ca.gov/forms))

The center also has a comprehensive legal self-help library consisting of the California codes, Nolo Press books, and other materials.

To keep down costs, each agency donated the time its staff members spent on planning the center. Human Resources Council, Inc., was selected to run the program, and space it was vacating was ideal for the center. The council used its funds to pay rent, utilities, and the core staff. The superior court contributed to rent, paid for staff from the family law facilitator program, provided the services of court personnel, and helped with grant funding. Other agencies donated surplus computers and furnishings. Information technology departments from the county and the court together created the infrastructure for public access to the Internet and e-mail. A committee developed press releases, pamphlets, and flyers to publicize the center, and the local Calaveras Works and Human Services Agency designed and printed the materials. That agency also donated funds to buy library reference materials.
Impacts

- In one year, 1,745 people visited the center. About 40 percent were return visitors. The legal services attorney served 439 visitors, the family law facilitator served 317, and 989 used the library or computers.
- Using clerical staff at the center, the family law facilitator program in Calaveras County was able to expand its services to now serve Amador County as well.
- The family law facilitator volunteered to train center staff members and works closely with them.
- A grant has enabled Legal Services of Northern California to provide services to people whose income exceeds the limit to qualify them for help but who still cannot afford a lawyer.
- On two days a week, the court clerk helps people one-on-one with legal procedures at the center, in a quiet place away from long lines. This has helped reduce congestion at the court's cramped counter.

Shari Reed, a paralegal from Legal Services of Northern California, assists a client at the Calaveras Community Legal Assistance Center.
Courts as Curriculum

High School Students Watch Real Appeals

When the California Supreme Court planned to hold two days of hearings in Fresno in October 2002, the Court of Appeal, Fifth Appellate District, hit upon the idea of using this rare opportunity to give high school students an exciting firsthand look at appellate practice. Through a program called Courts as Curriculum, the students would observe real appeals in action, as experts explained what was going on, answered questions, and corrected misinformation on the spot. The process would be televised to a wider school audience and videotaped for future students to see.

- Drawing from more than 200 Central Valley schools, the program brought 120 representative students to the Supreme Court session.
- Thousands more students at schools across the state watched the broadcast by a Fresno, a Sacramento, and a cable television station.
- The presiding justice of the Fifth Appellate District provided commentary in the telecast.
- Volunteer attorneys and judges went to the schools to explain the proceedings and discuss the oral arguments with the students. The experts answered students’ questions and cleared up misconceptions.
- Students at the court session had the chance to engage in a question-and-answer session with the Supreme Court justices.

To prepare students for the day, the legal staff of the appellate court and Kern County school personnel compiled written study guides for the government classes. The guides covered

- What the cases at the morning session were about.
- What to expect in oral argument.
- What the court’s job was, and how it would carry out those tasks.

The study guides were posted on the school district’s Web site and the California Courts Web site.

Later, when opinions were handed down in the cases, court personnel told the students the outcomes of the cases they had witnessed.

Since then, the Fifth Appellate District has invited students to outreach sessions in courthouses around the nine counties of the district once or twice a year, and the video of the 2002 Supreme Court session is still used in schools.

Appellate Cases Come Alive

One student participant expressed the feelings of many: “Thank you for allowing me that privilege [of taking part]. It was one of the most exciting things I have ever done in my life.”
Impacts

- Thousands of students, hundreds of community groups, and hundreds of people involved with the courts have viewed the video, learning how appellate courts truly operate. Judicial procedures came alive for these viewers in a way that classes cannot match.
- The program built a partnership among the schools, the courts, the bar associations, local government officials, and the broadcast media, improving community relations and mutual understanding.
- By using video, the program reached a wider audience and has had an effect over a longer time than a single session would have.
- Although the program was designed for high school students, it has also been used by middle schools, law schools, court management and orientation programs, and community groups, enlightening a broad spectrum of the public.

In Fresno a high school student engages in a question-and-answer session with the California Supreme Court.
Gaining Education Through Determination (GED)

A Helping Hand for Delinquent and Dependent Minors

Juvenile court can turn a youngster away from crime and violence, but many youths must overcome nearly insurmountable obstacles to maintain a law-abiding life. Earning a high school diploma or the equivalent General Educational Development (GED) certificate can significantly improve a young person’s chances of success and satisfaction in work, higher education, and life.

In July 2003, the Unified Family Court of Yolo started offering individual tutoring in preparation for the GED exam to minors who appeared in juvenile delinquency and dependency actions, some of whom were in county custody. As the first step of the program, the court identifies minors who won’t be graduating from high school. If they want help, they are referred to the court’s Gaining Education Through Determination (GED) program. The program is a collaborative effort:

- Family court judges and staff, the public defender, and Child Protective Services all identify and refer potential candidates.
- The instructor, Charlotte Beal, works helping adult offenders prepare for the GED test. She generously volunteers her talents and time to tutor minors, usually one-on-one, for an hour or more a week.
- The program is free to students. Grants pay for study books and test fees. The students are expected to map out their work in the program. If minors in custody are released while their studies are ongoing, they continue in the GED program and consult with Beal on when to take the exam.
- The public library provides a meeting room at no cost.
- The court tracks the students’ progress, stays work requirements for them while they are enrolled, and waives the work requirement once they earn their GED certificates.
- A local attorney donates a $100 cash award to each graduate.
- The court holds a graduation ceremony, celebrated with cake and punch, at which the court, the Yolo Children’s Fund, and prominent community members present the program certificate, the cash gift, and offers of support to each graduate.

First in the Program and the Family

The program’s first graduate was the first person in his family to earn a diploma or GED certificate outside of prison. He was always early to his appointments and thoroughly prepared. While enrolled, he worked nearly full-time to help support his mother and siblings. Since passing the test, he has continued his education and his support of the family. His goal is to become an air force pilot.

Success to Build On

A family court presiding judge noted that “the minors are not just passing the test but achieving very high scores. Many of these kids had given up on education, and, in the GED program, they realize their hard work yields concrete results. They can succeed academically and in the world.”
Impacts

- By May 2005, the program had enrolled 23 students; 3 had taken the GED examination and had passed. The others continue to prepare, except for those who have moved out of the county.
- The students have learned to trust and respect their dedicated tutor and have gained self-esteem from her constant “you can do it” encouragement.
- The program has instilled a sense of responsibility in its students. They are encouraged to set educational and career goals, and they discover how important education is.
- The students learn that the juvenile court system works for the public good, not simply to punish.

Charlotte Beal tutors a teen dependent preparing for the GED exam.
A Quicker, Smoother Process to Protect Children

When the Superior Court of Yolo County unified all family and juvenile cases, judges were able to learn more about parents who were having trouble caring for their children and could more quickly identify at-risk children. Often, someone reliable was willing to care for or already caring for the children but had no legal right to do so. The guardianship process was not widely known to laypeople, and even those who knew about it found the forms complicated and daunting.

The Unified Family Court decided to have a court staff attorney conduct a clinic one morning each week to help grandparents and other caregivers obtain legal guardianship. In a private office at the court, the attorney meets one-on-one with people seeking guardianships. Some hear about the clinic from the court’s outreach efforts; others are referred by the court, by Child Protective Services, or by the district attorney’s Parental Abduction Unit.

The staff attorney describes guardianship, listens to the caregivers’ stories, helps them fill out the correct paperwork, informs them about procedures such as service of process, and refers them to other needed services—such as city childcare programs or the district attorney’s office if there is an abduction threat.

The clinic demystifies the guardianship process. It alerts caregivers to the danger that Child Protective Services may remove the children to foster care, if the caregiver hasn’t established guardianship, particularly if the agency files a petition to declare the children dependents of the court. In such dependency situations, a court will adopt a final plan for care of the children much later. Both the foster placement and the delay are traumatic to the children.

Doing a Lot of Good With Little Expense

The guardianship project was created without extra funding from the court because the staff of the Unified Family Court reached a consensus to allow one attorney to leave regular duties and conduct the clinic one half-day per week.

Staff from Legal Services of Northern California, using a grant by Area 4 Agency on Aging (funded under the federal Older Americans Act), aid the attorney as needed. A Judicial Council grant paid for a computer and printer for the attorney.

County Collaboration

Many agencies facilitate the guardianship clinic and its outreach effort:

- Child Protective Services refers children and caregivers to the guardianship clinic.
- The county sheriff/coroner performs criminal background checks on potential guardians.
- The county district attorney assists in preventing child abductions.
- The county Mental Health Department provides counseling services.
- The Child Care Grant Program from the City of Davis funds child care to give guardians some respite from caregiving.
- Countless community organizations invite the court staff to tell their members about the clinic.
Impacts

- Since the program began in 1999, guardianship petitions have more than doubled.
- The guardianship facilitator assisted 250 families between March 2001 and April 2003. Without the program, most of these cases would have entered the juvenile dependency process instead.
- The program saves county agencies the costs of filing and prosecuting dependency petitions against the parents.
- The guardianship process is less traumatic for children than the dependency process, because children are immediately placed with either a relative or a known caregiver and cannot be removed without court intervention.
- Caregivers who receive guardianship assistance complete the process properly the first time, saving court time and expense.

DeLena McEssy, Unified Family Court assistant, goes over just-completed guardianship paperwork with a newborn’s grandmother.

Superior Court of Yolo County, Unified Family Court, 725 Court Street, Woodland, CA 95695
Project contact: Peter Sapunor, Family Law Facilitator/Unified Family Court Attorney, 530-406-6792. psapunor@yolocourts.com
Interactive Community Assistance Network (I-CAN!)

Simple On-Screen Help in Three Languages

In Orange County, the Legal Aid Society and the superior court collaborated to help self-represented litigants by producing a user-friendly set of 13 interactive modules on the legal matters these clients most often encounter (all are available in English and Spanish; five are available in Vietnamese):

1. License denials
2. Wage assignments
3. Divorce (dissolution of marriage) cases
4. Paternity petitions
5. Answers to paternity petitions
6. Domestic violence restraining orders
7. New cases with the county Department of Child Support Services
8. Small claims sheets
9. Small claims pleadings
10. Orders to show cause
11. Unlawful detainer cases
12. Fee waiver requests
13. Income and expense reimbursement requests

The creators worked hard to produce a simple on-screen guide, accessed on a Web site or at kiosks with touch-screen computers. It asks users easy-to-understand questions at a fifth-grade reading level and explains legal terms and court practices, while guiding users through tutorials.

As the user responds to each question, the module initiates the relevant court pleadings. By the end of the tutorial, properly formatted court forms are completed, printed, and ready for filing. Forms completed in Spanish and Vietnamese are printed in English to satisfy court filing requirements.

If users run into problems, they can use a telephone at the kiosk or click on an icon on the Web site to reach a legal aid help center for immediate personal assistance.

I-CAN! also includes educational videos telling, for example, how to

- File forms
- Serve papers
- Prepare for court appearances
- Locate court facilities
- Find parking
- Present a case

I-CAN! is being linked with the California Courts Online Self-Help Center to provide consistent information statewide and to help parties create and file forms and pleadings electronically.

Reducing Risks of Domestic Violence

The I-CAN! domestic violence module helps victims file applications for temporary restraining orders electronically from sites such as women’s shelters. No longer does the victim have to travel long distances to the courtroom or risk an encounter with the perpetrator that might lead to retaliatory violence. Electronic filing also reduces the risk of misplaced or lost documents.
Impacts

- By midyear 2003, I-CAN! had helped nearly 16,000 self-represented litigants prepare legal forms properly at no cost to them. It significantly reduced disparities of access to the court. (Software in the system collects data on how much and for what issues the program is being used.)
- Litigants in rural locations gained access to legal aid attorneys for help with their cases.
- Judges reported that users were better prepared and more familiar with court procedures—two important factors for successful self-representation. The judges found that they could help six I-CAN! users in the time they previously spent with one self-represented litigant.
- Collaboration on I-CAN! created a closer working relationship among the courts, legal services programs, women’s shelters, the State Bar, child support agencies, the Judicial Council, and pro bono attorneys.
- Courts in nine California counties have adopted I-CAN!, and seven more counties are considering it. Other states are also using or studying the program.

Easy and Popular

An evaluation conducted by the University of California, Irvine, reported that 97 percent of I-CAN! users found it “easy or very easy to use” and approximately 95 percent found it to be “helpful or very helpful.”

A court staff member noted, “Every time I go past the kiosks there are people lined up waiting to use the modules. This program has helped a lot of people.”

A self-represented litigant fills out order to show cause forms at an I-CAN! kiosk.
Self-Help Assistance and Referral Program (SHARP)

Videoconferences for Rural Clients

The superior courts in the neighboring rural counties of Butte, Glenn, and Tehama saw that the volume of calls by self-represented clients to court clerks was growing. To effectively and economically give self-represented residents the assistance they needed, the courts joined forces to create the Self-Help Assistance and Referral Program (SHARP). Funded by a grant from the Administrative Office of the Courts, the program offers procedural help (not legal advice) in matters such as

- Family law issues not covered by the family law facilitator
- General civil cases
- Guardianships
- Unlawful detainer (both landlord and tenant)
- Domestic violence and civil harassment restraining orders
- Elder abuse
- Name changes
- Emancipation

To cover the wide geographic area without requiring parties to travel long distances, the program planners turned to videoconferencing technology and high-speed connections. SHARP set up centers in or near courthouses across the three counties.

The managing attorney conducts videoconference workshops on particular topics, offering information and answering participants’ questions. Residents can interact simultaneously with the attorney and each other. Spanish interpreters at any center can help clients during the conference. As the attorney broadcasts from one center, administrative staff or volunteers at the other centers help people face-to-face during the conference. The attorney travels to each center on a rotating basis.

Clients walking into the centers at other times can independently use computer self-help programs and workbooks the staff has developed. These contain simple instructions for navigating the legal system (for example, how to file an answer in an unlawful detainer case; how to prepare for a court hearing). If clients hit a snag, they can get help from an administrative support person and trained volunteers. The centers also conduct group workshops. Volunteers come from the local university, law schools, and service organizations.

The staff has also compiled a resource directory with information, pamphlets, and guides about other help clients may need—from finding housing to helping troubled teens, to finding an affordable lawyer. The managing attorney is collaborating with Legal Services of Northern California to produce a video on how to respond to an unlawful detainer action.

Most and Least Helpful Methods

To plan the program, the courts surveyed the public, legal professionals, court staff, and service providers to learn what needs were unmet and how best to meet them. Respondents said that face-to-face individual and group conferences were the most helpful formats, while telephone recordings and unstaffed law libraries were least helpful.
Impacts

- In 2003, SHARP assisted just under 7,000 parties. Contact and participation statistics are continuing to rise, and the program is beginning to see repeat clients.
- Clients receive quality self-help services that would not have been economically feasible for each court to provide independently.
- The clerks’ offices are able to refer parties to a reliable program.
- Because self-represented parties file more complete and accurate documents and are better prepared for court hearings, case delays and court clerks’ workloads have been reduced.

A Bonus: Better Court Practices

Judges and court administrators from all three counties contributed to obtaining the grants; choosing the managing attorney; setting priorities; and deciding on the services, program details, and center locations. From information compiled on local court policies and procedures the managing attorney recommended each court’s effective and efficient practices to the other courts, which increased their uniformity.
Clear, Correct Court Information in Spanish

The Hispanic population of Fresno County has grown almost 50 percent since 1990, reaching 44 percent of the county’s total. Growth is expected to continue, particularly in the outlying farm communities, where concentrated pockets of Spanish-speaking residents constitute from 65 to 98 percent of the population.

Self-represented Spanish-speaking litigants commonly complained that they found court forms cumbersome and hard to understand, that court procedures were unfamiliar to them and seemed complex, and that they couldn’t communicate effectively with the court staff.

The Superior Court of Fresno County responded by developing a Spanish self-help center, Centro de Recursos Legales, located separately from the downtown Fresno courthouse and offering four approaches to meet the needs of this population.

1. Simple (fifth-grade reading level) self-help instruction pamphlets in Spanish about the legal issues most commonly faced by the target population:
   - Family law
   - Guardianship
   - Unlawful detainer
   - Civil harassment
2. Family law “How-to” clinics, held weekly, at which a court examiner who speaks Spanish explains court forms line by line, answers clients’ questions, and explains procedures such as service and return of process.
3. Review of clients’ completed court documents by the court examiner (for people attending the clinic or walk-in users at other times).
4. A Community Volunteer Interpreter Bureau that provides volunteer interpreters to assist self-represented Spanish-speaking litigants as their cases proceed.

The center is open four days a week. On Fridays, the staff goes out to community centers in the area to spread the word about the center’s services.
Impacts

- In its first four months, the center served 620 litigants. On average, more than 160 self-represented litigants are helped each month.
- The interpreter bureau has developed a broader pool of qualified Spanish-language translators and has helped some of them qualify for certification as court interpreters.
- The Spanish-speaking population has access to understandable, accurate information about the courts, legal processes, judicial procedures, and required legal documents.
- The self-help center makes the law and the courts more user-friendly for a high proportion of the county population that was underserved before.

Model Program Funding

The Administrative Office of the Courts funded the program for three years with a grant from its Model Self-Help Pilot Program. The Superior Court of Fresno County hopes that the Legislature will continue to fund the center, based on the very positive reports about its impact.
Teachers’ Courthouse Seminar

Inspiring Lively Classes About the Criminal Courts

California high school seniors are required to take a class in government, and one component of that curriculum is a description of the scope and operation of the state trial courts. Most teachers of high school government classes, however, aren’t formally educated about the trial courts.

Of the nearly 100,000 students who graduate from Los Angeles County high schools each year, more than a few slump in their seats during government class with eyelids at half-mast, not realizing that they might someday find themselves before trial courts (as defendants, plaintiffs, jurors, or witnesses), unprepared and at sea.

The Superior Court of Los Angeles County reasoned that if teachers had a better grounding in the operations of trial courts and more exciting and relevant teaching materials, their lessons would be livelier, more accurate, more relevant to students’ lives, and more likely to capture students’ attention and involvement. The court developed the Teachers’ Courthouse Seminar, to give high school government teachers an authentic experience in the criminal justice system. Held at different court locations throughout the year, the program aimed to change the way educators teach about the court system and the constitutional values that the courts uphold.

The program encourages teachers to

- Spend more time teaching about the court system.
- Communicate more accurate information after they see firsthand how the courts work.
- Instill in graduating high school students a greater appreciation of and respect for the courts.

The program has two major components: a one-day seminar for teachers at a local courthouse and a CD of teaching materials to take back to class.

The carefully designed schedule of the seminar day includes all aspects of the criminal process—arraignments, preliminary hearings, suppression motions, plea bargains, trials, and sentencing. It gives the teachers the chance to meet key personnel, including bench officers, deputy district attorneys, deputy public defenders, and court staff at the proceedings. Then the teachers have lunch with judges, commissioners, and referees from the sponsoring courthouse. After lunch, they learn to use court and legal Web sites as teaching aids, and they are introduced to the CD, which contains video, audio, text, and graphic materials they can use to better explain the criminal justice system. Finally, the teachers meet with the bench officers who preside in drug courts and juvenile courts.
Impacts

- Seminars held at 11 courthouses in 2002–2003 had an average attendance of 15 teachers each, reaching an estimated 29,700 students in government classes each year.
- The program has expanded in each of its first three years.
- In response to a mail survey designed to evaluate the success and motivating effect of the program, participating teachers praised the program and the court for offering it.

Feedback From Teachers

“As an attorney teaching high school, I was impressed by everything about this program. This was by far the most useful seminar that Los Angeles Unified School District has offered. Thank you.”

“When you are studying the Constitution, it seems so foreign. You want to relate it to real life. This [the court process observed] is the Constitution at work!”
Five-Minute Law Lessons in Spanish

The Superior Court of Ventura County operates two Self-Help Legal Access Centers, which offer information and one-on-one assistance for clients. While the Ventura center averaged more than 500 clients per month, the Oxnard center, in the predominately Spanish-speaking La Colonia neighborhood, assisted only 100 to 120 people per month. Oxnard staff were convinced that more residents who needed services were either unaware of the center or apprehensive about using it—perhaps because of cultural and educational issues or negative experiences with governments in other countries.

A staff member at the Colonia center had the idea to broadcast a court-related “Tip of the Day” in Spanish on a popular radio program in the Latino community, and the superior court initiated the project. Five-minute public-service announcements, broadcast at 10:30 a.m. Monday through Friday, covered topics raised by people seeking help at the county’s self-help centers. Each tip aimed to provide general legal information and to inform citizens about help available from the center or at court.

Colonia center staff did not expect to match the Ventura center’s level of client service but rather to gain a measurable increase in Oxnard. The program also hoped to boost local Spanish-speaking immigrants’ trust in the judicial system. Most Spanish-speaking people tend to rely on and trust radio programs.

The announcements were broadcast on Mercadito a el Aire Libre, a popular on-air swap meet, drawing people who want to buy, sell, or trade virtually anything or who want to make public announcements.

A center staff member called in the Tip of the Day live from the self-help center, keeping the costs and time required low. The same person was used every day—one with a personable and sincere speaking voice, a strong command of Spanish, and in-depth knowledge about the courts.

Because the station believed that the self-help centers were a valuable community resource and that the tips were of interest to its listeners, it did not charge the court for airtime, and the host of the show supported the tips with strong lead-ins, demonstrated rapport with the court staff member, and follow-up questions.
Impacts

- The number of people seeking assistance at the Colonia center has increased to 220 per month. To prepare self-represented litigants for interaction with the court, the center helps them complete forms properly, follow court procedures, and understand the judicial process better. These litigants then take up less judicial time to resolve their issues.
- Many people report that they became aware of the center’s existence from the Tip of the Day.
- The radio station broadcasting the program receives frequent calls from listeners asking for the phone number of the self-help center. Because of the interest, the station keeps brochures about the center in its lobby.
- The general information in the tips also helps people comply with the law and stay out of court.
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!”
Part 2

Modernization of Management and Administration; Technology

Judicial Council Goals

Goal III: Modernization of Management and Administration
Justice will be administered in a timely, efficient, and effective manner that utilizes contemporary management practices; innovative ideas; highly competent judges, other judicial officers, and staff; and adequate facilities.

Goal VI: Technology
Technology will enhance the quality of justice by improving the ability of the judicial branch to collect, process, analyze, and share information and by increasing the public’s access to information about the judicial branch.

Challenges

Courts have been handling heavy workloads for decades, and there is no reason to believe that will change. And the day of the so-called paperless office may never truly arrive. The courts continue to face challenges in managing voluminous records, the increasing flood of cases in which parties represent themselves, complex or high-profile cases that demand unusual amounts of court and staff time, and low-profile cases that require sensitivity to the needs of children, parents, and elders or far-flung residents in rural counties.

In meeting these challenges, California courts have sometimes turned to innovative uses of technology to produce efficiencies and cost savings. At other times, creative courts have hit upon low-tech ways to manage judicial functions better at no extra cost.
Automated Records Management

Central File Storage and Access

The Superior Court of San Bernardino County has a Court Records Center, where its 15 court districts can send records and make space for new files. Originally holding 300,000 case files when it was created in 1992, the center housed more than 3 million files by 2004, and districts and divisions were sending about 100,000 more each year. About 70 percent were active and requested.

Maintaining, locating, and tracking files at the center and the court locations were tedious and labor-intensive but essential tasks. As budget pressures increased, the San Bernardino court developed a Centralized Court Records Center and an Automated Records Management Program, intended to

- Consolidate file and case numbers
- Store records in a central location
- Set up procedures for destroying or retaining records
- Streamline the processing and retrieval of files
- Reduce the number of misplaced records
- Increase the security of records

The program was implemented in phases. The court installed software to automate tracking, locating, and maintaining case records throughout the county.

Clients can interact with the program on a computer in the Court Records Center when they need access to a record. In outlying court districts, staff members link to the center’s database on a Web site, to locate and request files from the center. Center staff members track files moving between the center and court sites. The software generates statistical reports on where files are, what files have been checked out of the center, which court or person checked them out, why they were requested, how long they have been gone, and even what the center’s staff workloads have been.

When a court courier takes a file from or to a court or the records center, the courier scans the file’s bar code into a personal digital assistant (PDA). The bar code indicates the type of case, the case number, and the court of origin. The information is then uploaded from the PDA to the consolidated database at the records center.

Three to five existing staff initially entered the tracking data for all active files into the system. Today, as courts transfer new files to the records center, two staff members enter their data.

In later phases of the Records Management Program, automated tracking, location, and maintenance will be applied to evidence stored at outlying court divisions.
Impacts

- Staff time spent and workloads for managing records have decreased.
- Courts send files to the center knowing that the records will be readily available if needed.
- File requests are filled more quickly.
- Fewer files are lost or misplaced.
- When files are scheduled for destruction, notices and reports are given more efficiently.
- The court can track files more accurately and quickly.
- Court space, always in short supply, is managed better.
- The records management program has established a platform for further automation of court tasks.

Court employee Scott Love checks out files to a court district. This handheld scanner captures bar code information that shows the file’s location.

Robert McDaniel checks in files returned to the Court Records Center from outlying districts. Information is automatically updated when he scans the bar code.

Superior Court of San Bernardino County, 172 West Third Street, San Bernardino, CA 92415
Project contact: Wendy Sellnow, Director of Court Facilities and Planning, 909-387-6500
Huge Documents Filed in Minutes

The Superior Court of Orange County is one of six courts chosen for a pilot program on handling complex civil cases (see page 66). One aspect of the cases is the huge volume of documents they generate. The Orange County court created a way for parties to submit briefs, motions, and other legal pleadings electronically via a Web page, without needing special software, instead of having to print out, copy, and deliver documents to the court clerk’s office.

The attorney registers online, submits the documents as PDF files, receives an e-mail confirmation (with a tracking number), and, when the clerk completes the filing process, receives an e-mail notice that the documents were either accepted or rejected (along with any other case information). The attorney provides credit card information to pay the filing fees; no extra fee is charged for e-filing. The documents are imported into the court’s document management system.

The software can accept large PDF files, and the files can be fully searched (an enormous help to legal researchers). The user interface was carefully designed to be simple to use, and the program requires little support from the court’s technology staff, although users can send e-mail to a help line if they run into problems.

Court-Furnished E-Filing

Although other trial courts in California accept electronic filing of documents in some cases, the Orange County project is unique in providing the e-filing software and interface at no extra charge to parties. Court staff did all the programming, and the court provided all the hardware, software, and technical support. The filing system was designed to make expansion to other types of cases easy.

The Orange County court holds brown-bag seminars to educate the legal community about complex civil electronic filing options.
Impacts

- The project received a 98 percent favorable rating from e-filing litigants, who are surveyed at the site and asked for suggestions. Based on user comments and suggestions, several improvements have been made since the pilot project began.
- Litigants save the costs of paper, printing, copying, and delivery of documents to the court (including parking fees).
- Foot traffic in the court clerk’s office is reduced, and waiting lines are shorter.
- Court staff members can process e-filed papers in a more orderly sequence and manage their workflow better. They spend less time batching, sorting, scanning, and verifying paper documents.
- Attorneys can file documents from remote locations at any time of day, seven days a week.
- The PDF files have better image quality than photocopies and are text-searchable. The PDF bookmark function can be used to move quickly through documents, many of which are very lengthy.
- Communication between the court and the attorneys is faster, which improves bench-bar relations.

**Tremendous Savings of Time and Paper**

A 100-page document—which previously required from 45 minutes to 1 hour for counter processing, scanning, indexing, and the like—can now be filed in 5 to 10 minutes, without using a single sheet of paper.
Court Web Site for Press Information in a High-Profile Case

Coping With the Press Feeding Frenzy

When the arrest warrant was issued for the defendant in *People v. Michael Jackson*, the Superior Court of Santa Barbara County was deluged with phone calls and visits from members of the media. To lessen the communication burden it was facing, so that other cases could proceed more normally, the court established a Web site (www.sbscpressinfo.org). Intended initially for news media (and later expanded to serve the public), the site gave people who were clamoring for information immediate access to court statements, documents, and calendars.

Members of the press registered to receive a user identification and password, which they used to log on to the site. There they found:

- Information from the court about the case.
- Filed documents in the case, which they could print out.
- Protocol for the media on court hearing dates.
- Forms to submit to gain access to the courtroom and to apply electronically for seating positions.
- Information on camera and press pool positions.

Whenever the court posted new information to the site, a listserv e-mail message went to all registered media representatives, giving equal access to each update: the same information released at the same time to all.

To evaluate the project’s effectiveness, the superior court established a separate accounting code to track labor and expenses for the high-profile case. The Web site was funded entirely by the court. The project was emulated subsequently by the Superior Court of San Mateo County in *People v. Scott Peterson*.

New Rule of Court

To establish the Web site, the court requested a special interim rule of court allowing full access to critical public court documents on the Internet in conjunction with a high-profile criminal case. The Judicial Council adopted this as rule 2073.5 of the California Rules of Court on February 27, 2004, for one year.

Protecting Confidentiality

The superior court adopted a comprehensive step-by-step process to review all documents approved for posting on the site. Because the charges in *People v. Michael Jackson* alleged sexual misconduct and involved children, the court took extra precautions in areas of confidentiality. A staff attorney, the trial judge, and the court clerk reviewed documents to determine whether confidential or sensitive data needed to be redacted. The parties also could propose redactions of documents they were submitting or submit proposed orders asking the judge to seal the documents. The Web project raised the awareness of all court staff about confidentiality and privacy rights.
Impacts

- The number of phone and in-person inquiries from news media and the public to the court staff fell dramatically, from a flood to a trickle. Reporters clearly used the Web site as their first source and found that it gave them all the information they were seeking about the case.
- The Web site leveled the playing field for media outlets, giving them all simultaneous access to information.
- Users had very few Web site access problems. The site proved stable and accessible at all times, and the number of subscribers increased to more than 700. The count of pages viewed increased dramatically as the case progressed.
- The court is surveying subscribers about the effectiveness of the Web site. Preliminary feedback is very positive.
- The listserv made it easy, efficient, and almost cost-free to disseminate information to hundreds of journalists.
- The public was able to obtain all information in the case file via the Web site.
- The Web site project will be the template for future high-profile cases in Santa Barbara County.
Elder Abuse Protection Court Project

Swift Court Action to Stop Abuse

As the elderly population grows, so does the problem of physical, emotional, or financial abuse of elders. It is not uncommon for people serving as caregivers—often the elder’s own adult children—to abuse the vulnerable person in their charge.

In the courts, elders can obtain restraining orders, stay-away orders, and residence exclusions against anyone who is abusing them. But they may be reluctant to do so because the abuser is often their caregiver and, thus, in their eyes, the only person who helps them. Elders may also feel impeded by health problems; impairment to vision, hearing, or mobility; lack of reading skills or English fluency; limited access to transportation; or lack of funds to hire a lawyer. Elders who aren’t computer literate have trouble using Web-based legal aids for self-represented litigants.

In 2002, the Superior Court of Alameda County created the Elder Abuse Protection Court Project, a court calendar dedicated to elder abuse cases. The separate calendar offers elders a shorter wait time in the courtroom and more privacy for public hearings dealing with very personal matters. The calendar is heard weekly at each of four courthouses (to be closer to the petitioners’ homes) starting late in the morning (to give seniors more time to travel to court).

Collaboration with community agencies is the cornerstone of the project’s success. Funded by a Judicial Council grant, the project comprises judicial officers, an elder abuse case manager, a clinical supervisor, administrative staff, and filing and courtroom clerks, who offer

- Direct assistance to elders in navigating a court system that seems complex and intimidating to them.
- Coordination with various court personnel and programs to identify possible elder abuse when cases are filed and to help elders apply for protection.
- Efficient processing of elders’ petitions for civil restraining orders.
- Links with legal and social agencies that can help elders and follow up on abuse cases.
- New protocols for investigating, tracking, and recording criminal information on parties, as required by statute.

Outreach

An Elder Access Steering Committee collaborates vigorously with public and nonprofit organizations, such as Adult Protective Services, the district attorney’s Victim Witness Program, and legal aid and pro bono attorneys. Project staff members have

- Conducted a symposium on court access for elders that drew more than 140 community participants.
- Made presentations to more than 30 community agencies and senior centers to tell elders about their legal rights and resources.
- Used radio interviews and press releases to publicize the project.
Impacts

- In two years, the project provided case management to more than 330 abused elders. Most were low income and self-represented; 40 percent were male; most alleged abusers were family members.
- Now, fewer elder abuse cases are filed incorrectly as either domestic violence or civil harassment cases.
- More than 20 police and sheriff departments now have Elder Abuse Law Enforcement Liaisons.

Elder Abuse Case Managers Make a Difference

“Elder abuse cases typically involve complicated facts with subtle nuances that older litigants may have difficulty conveying. With the Elder Abuse Case Manager available in the courtroom, I am much more likely to be aware of . . . essential [facts to make] helpful and appropriate [orders].” —Fremont Hall of Justice commissioner

“The project has tremendously improved our agency’s efficiency and effectiveness in serving our elderly clients who are victims of abuse.” —Supervising attorney, Legal Assistance for Seniors

Superior Court of Alameda County Judge Julie Conger listens to the presentation of the facts in an elder abuse case. The number of elder abuse filings continues to grow each month.
In 2001, the Superior Court of San Mateo County developed a highly successful set of interactive Judicial Council legal forms to help self-represented litigants file legal forms properly. The interactive forms were so effective that San Mateo was asked to share the technology with other courts. In response, it created the EZLegalFile Service Bureau to make the forms available throughout the state in an Internet-based form-completion program (www.EZLegalFile.org).

The bureau offers Judicial Council forms that are required for matters that most concern self-represented parties:

- Family law, including dissolution of marriage, custody, support, and paternity issues
- Domestic violence restraining orders
- Guardianship petitions
- Small claims
- Unlawful detainer (evictions)

A third-party vendor supplies access to the programs. The software was developed to allow thousands of simultaneous users, and the forms can be customized with local court information. The San Mateo court personnel work with the software developer to create new interactive form programs and add new courts to the EZLegalFile Service Bureau.

To join the EZLegalFile Service Bureau, a court pays less than $3,000 and adds a link to EZLegalFile on its local court Web site. San Mateo adds the local court’s addresses and Web address into the system, so that users can select the proper court. A statistical component of the program tracks the number of users by court and by forms used. The participating courts split the annual maintenance costs—for Web hosting, entering changes made to Judicial Council forms, and administration of EZLegalFile (including limited technical support).
Impacts

- By April 2005, more than 150,000 litigants throughout California had completed forms using EZLegalFile.
- Self-represented parties have round-the-clock access from any location to an Internet-based service that helps them complete the required Judicial Council forms properly and legibly.
- The program has reduced court processing time because forms are complete, correct, and readable. EZLegalFile makes the uniform use of Judicial Council forms easier.
- The bureau has given courts throughout the state cost-effective access to innovative and reliable software and server hardware. More courts continue to join the program.

Comments From Users

“I love the automated service. It was so easy.”

“These forms and the process in which they are produced are absolutely wonderful.”

San Mateo Superior Court’s Interactive Electronic Forms Program

www.EZLegalFile.org

Free help completing court forms!
Get help with:

- Divorce
- Family Law
- Small Claims
- Evictions
- Guardianships

Superior Court of San Mateo County, 400 County Center, Redwood City, CA 94063

Project contact: Anthony Serafica, I.T. Analyst, 650-599-7746, aserafica@sanmateocourt.org
Night Court for Child Support Calendar

Less Time Off Work, More Money for Support

Most parents in child support cases have to miss work in order to attend court hearings, and many—especially low-income earners—would then lose pay that might have gone to support their children. To spare those parents that loss of income, which was the last thing the courts wanted, the Superior Court of Inyo County started hearing child support cases at night. The court already had three Dedicated Child Support Calendars during working hours; it simply moved one of those calendars to after work hours. The court also allows telephone appearances on all calendars, when necessary.

The night calendar, held in the main population center of the county from 6 to 9 p.m., has the same staffing as the daytime calendars:

- The child support commissioner
- A court clerk
- A bailiff (from the sheriff’s department)
- Attorneys, staff members, and an ombudsperson from the Department of Child Support Services (DCSS)
- The family law facilitator/family court services coordinator (one person)

In most hearings on the calendar, parents who have been ordered to pay support are called into court to explain why they are not paying. The court process accomplishes several things:

- At the outset, the parents in a case meet outside the courtroom with the DCSS staff members, who gather information about whether the parent is working, actively seeking work, or unable to work. When it’s appropriate, the parent may sign a stipulation to seek work and return on another date for the court to review the employment status. Since a court hearing that night is not necessary, the court calendar is expedited. DCSS staff may also save time by summarizing the information they gather from the parents so the commissioner can make appropriate orders in the case.
- The DCSS ombudsperson can discuss any issues not before the court, such as a parent’s child support problems in other counties.
- The family law facilitator/family court services coordinator is available to discuss support-related issues such as child custody.

All these activities take place while the court is hearing other cases, and the initial meetings with DCSS staff enable the court to conduct more focused and efficient hearings. Parents benefit greatly from having access to support services that would generally be available only during the day.
Impacts

- In the first year, more than 300 people were served by the night court.
- More parents attended the child support calendar, allowing the court to resolve issues more quickly and completely.
- Parents no longer complained that they had to miss work (and lose pay) to attend court.
- The DCSS staff and family law facilitator/family court services coordinator had better access to clients and vice versa.
- The court calendar operated more efficiently.
- Costs (and staffing) for the night court were about the same as for the daytime calendars, and funds were obtained under the Assembly Bill 1058 Child Support Commissioner and Family Law Facilitator Program.

Court Responsiveness Is Appreciated

Parties are grateful for the night court option. People see that the DCSS and the court are trying to respond to their needs. Now, instead of having to jump through endless hoops when they have family law questions that are not before the court, parents receive answers and help from the family law facilitator/family court services coordinator, the ombudsperson, or DCSS staff members in the meeting before the support hearing.
Siskiyou/Modoc Joint Court

Better Service to Rural Residents at Lower Cost

The border area of Siskiyou and Modoc Counties is sparsely populated and isolated in a high-elevation valley, where winter driving is precarious. Many of the residents may have low incomes or low levels of education, and lack even such resources as working vehicles. Public transportation does not serve the area.

It is a hardship, at the very least, for residents to have to travel 70 to 100 miles to Alturas or Yreka, the county seats of Modoc and Siskiyou, respectively, for court proceedings.

The presiding judge of the Superior Court of Modoc County broached the idea of developing a joint court, to serve residents of both counties. Court leaders in Siskiyou County liked the idea and applied for funding to bring it to fruition. In 2000–2001, the Administrative Office of the Courts awarded a mini-grant for the counties to set up a pilot joint court.

The Siskiyou/Modoc Joint Court began in January 2002 and convenes one morning a month in the border town of Tulelake, with a Modoc judge presiding one month and a Siskiyou judge the next. The same judge holds an afternoon joint court session in Dorris, 25 miles to the west, in Siskiyou County, attended mostly by Siskiyou residents.

Siskiyou provides the court clerk, bailiff, and interpreter. Because the population is predominately Spanish-speaking, the joint court clerk is bilingual, and court customers in the area are generally familiar and comfortable with Siskiyou’s court interpreters. Culturally, the residents prefer face-to-face contact rather than phone or Internet access for court interactions. The joint court staff gives them personal contact in their own area with people they already know.

For Modoc County residents, the joint court hears only traffic infractions, although plans to hear other types of cases are being evaluated.

Learning Along the Way

Using grant funds, the Superior Court of County hired a consultant to research and define the legal issues involved in forming a joint court and to chart how to proceed. With the consultant’s report in hand, the two courts began the pilot project, working out more details as specific needs, solutions, and resources were identified.

Other courts that want to replicate the joint court project have been advised by Siskiyou/Modoc personnel to keep plans flexible. Not all factors are known when a joint court is started. Partners need to recognize and respond to project needs in mutually beneficial ways as they arise.

Staff members should expect extra work trying to follow two courts’ sets of rules and requirements. For example, someone needs to guide judges unfamiliar with the rules, forms, and processes of the other court; and residents are apt to call the wrong county with questions about their case. The joint court clerk has learned to ask questions about a case so that correct and timely referrals or answers to callers’ questions can be given.
Impacts

- The Siskiyou/Modoc Joint Court pilot project continues, without supplemental funding, to serve Siskiyou and Modoc court customers monthly.
- On average, the court hears 5 to 10 cases apiece from each county during a typical monthly session. About half of the parties otherwise would have had to travel greater distances to court, sometimes in treacherous weather.
- Every other month, each court saves the cost of having a judge preside in an outlying court branch.
- The two courts have developed a more cooperative relationship. As neighboring counties, Siskiyou and Modoc not only face similar geographical challenges but also share similar court customer demographics. The project encourages further partnerships between them to meet the needs of litigants in the region.

Above left: Judge Chris Stromsness presides over a case at the joint court.

Above right: Court interpreter Michelle Carlson assists a Spanish-speaking defendant.

Superior Court Dorris/Tulelake Branch, Tulelake City Hall, Tulelake, CA
Project contact: Liz McFarland, Court Clerk, 530-397-3168, lmcfarland@siskiyou.courts.ca.gov
Part 3
Independence and Accountability; Education

Judicial Council Goals

Goal II: Independence and Accountability
The judiciary is an institutionally independent, co-equal branch of government that responsibly seeks, uses, and accounts for public resources necessary for its support. The independence of judicial decision making will be protected.

Goal V: Education
The effectiveness of judges, court personnel, and other judicial branch staff will be enhanced through high-quality continuing education and professional development.

Challenges

Education that gives judicial officers and employees professional development and informs them of the best business practices in the field enhances the independence of the courts and the judicial branch as a whole. As courts become increasingly empowered by highly skilled personnel, they can collectively build their institutional independence and accountability.

The judiciary needs to educate its staff members regularly and consistently, helping them grow and keep pace with current issues and topics. Lawyers appointed or elected to the bench have much to learn about their new roles—from setting up the office to running court hearings and staying abreast of important legislative developments. But orientation meetings can take a lot of staff time, and written orientation manuals can be dry. Too often, there is little space for the personal examples and advice that capture the essential craft of judgeship.

Training is also crucial in making court staff members informed, independent, accountable professionals: education about administrative procedures, judicial procedures, dealing with the public, and changes in the law enhances any court employee’s ability to work competently and efficiently. When court personnel were employees of the counties, county governments provided staff education to them. Now that legislation has made courts independent of the counties and employers in their own right, employee training can be tailored to the specific needs of the judiciary, but the costs generally exceed the means of individual courts. The courts in the following pages found ways to meet their educational needs efficiently and at lower cost with high-quality programs, innovative methods, and pertinent content.
New Judge Orientation

Friendly Video Advice From Colleagues

To give new judges the nitty-gritty information they need to make the transition from bar to bench in an efficient and cost-effective way, the presiding judge of the Superior Court of Los Angeles County (the country’s largest court) asked the court’s Planning and Research Unit to create a new approach to judicial orientation videos. The result was New Judge Orientation, a personalized CD-ROM (also available on an Intranet/Internet Web site), containing friendly, dynamic learning modules that users view at their own pace and convenience. The CD features experienced judges in informal “one-on-one” video discussions, sharing their insights, practical information, and anecdotal advice, and inviting new colleagues to call with further questions.

The three modules—“Assuming the Bench,” “Running the Courtroom,” and “Policy Considerations”—comprise 12 lessons, most featuring video presentations by judicial officers and court staff. The speakers share their expertise on subjects such as treatment of jurors, access and fairness issues, media relations, public policy issues, the court’s organizational structure, and the institution’s values. The videos are integrated with text explanations, documents, administrative resources and phone numbers, Internet links, maps, photographs, and even a historical presentation with music.

The modules keep related materials together for the new judges to absorb. Judges can choose a topic to view and can easily return to it later as needed. Maintaining and updating the modules is also easy, and changes are immediately posted on the Web site and copied onto CDs.

Judicial officers generously gave their time and expertise during the creation of the video segments. No additional funding was required for the project.

New Appointees Are Delighted

“I found the CD for the new judges to be fantastic. It was nice to have a video format that could be paused or repeated. It also made me feel as if I had actually met the judges in the video, and was therefore far more personal.”

“Immediately after my appointment, I received mountains of written orientation materials, toured . . . different kinds of courts, and met innumerable court officers and personnel. In the tumult of those first few weeks, I used the CD at home to clarify and organize the information that I was getting from so many different sources in such a short period of time.”

“The quality of the CD in terms of using modern technology was outstanding.”

“I especially liked the convenience of not lugging around yet another binder and being able to return to topics or skip them as needed.”
Impacts

- All new judicial officers in the county—more than 200 since the project began—are given the New Judge Orientation CD, and any judge can view the program on the court’s Intranet. This ensures a consistent, uniform, and up-to-date orientation for all.

- The 15 judge-to-judge video segments of practical advice and insights enable new judicial officers to hit the ground running and help give them a sense of community.

- The program saves the court many hours of training time, freeing judges and staff for other court duties.

- Materials can be updated or modified to meet changing needs more easily and at lower cost than printed materials can.

- New judges often spend several days reviewing the materials at their own pace before they take the bench, benefiting both themselves and the court.

- The program is available to judicial officers throughout the county and the state on the home page of the court’s digital library. It has proved an excellent reference tool for all judicial officers, not just new ones.

Designed for Easy Use

The Web site design combines simplicity and sophistication to present complex information in an easy-to-use navigation system, so that judges don’t get lost in the many pages of information. The program also checks that the user’s computer has the necessary software before installing itself. This lets judges focus on learning, rather than computer skills.

Judge Martha Bellinger, a newly appointed officer of the court, tests out Los Angeles’s New Judge Orientation Web site.

Superior Court of Los Angeles County, 111 North Hill Street, Los Angeles, CA 90012

Project contact: Joyce Cook, Project Manager, 213-974-6181, jcook@lasuperiorcourt.org
Regional Educational Consortium

Pooling Resources for Staff Training

In 2003 the Superior Courts of Monterey, San Benito, Santa Clara, and Santa Cruz Counties collaborated to create a Regional Educational Consortium for staff training. The consortium had a twofold purpose: to offer employee development and training consistent with Judicial Council and individual court goals; and to make the most courses available to the largest number of employees at the lowest cost while avoiding duplication of effort.

The Santa Clara court already had a development and training unit, which the smaller courts could use to get started. Among them, the courts brought together

- Trainers and facilitators
- Workshop and course materials
- Supplies
- Facilities
- Funds to buy materials
- Clerical staff to compile and distribute materials

The four courts now can offer continuous orientation, training, and development to employees through the use of courses and modules

- Developed by the participating courts
- Offered by the Administrative Office of the Courts
- From the Association of Court Trainers
- From outside vendors

Courses and modules are tailored to the participating courts’ needs and are offered in convenient locations. Whenever a court develops a course, it is shared; when a court needs a course created, the work is shared. Most courses are free, because they use materials available within the judiciary; otherwise, courts pay for materials only when staff members attend the course.

To measure the effectiveness and value of each course, all attendees are asked to complete evaluation questionnaires, and the results are analyzed. Consortium members address deficiencies immediately. Workshop facilitators ask peers to evaluate their new courses.

An annual training day is held each February, open to all employees of the consortium courts. Ride-sharing and other cost-saving measures help make the event accessible.

Employee Cohesion

A side effect of the program is that employees of the various courts have chances to network at classes and develop a sense of community. They also gain a broader view of the role of the courts and their own jobs by talking with their counterparts from other courts.

Deep Collaboration

The Regional Educational Consortium went further than other shared resources programs among courts in two ways:

1. Member courts collaborated in creating a strategic plan and common goals for education.
2. Member courts share educational personnel, materials, time, and money as if they were one court.
Impacts

- Employees are enthusiastic about the program. More than 1,000 court employees have been offered previously unavailable educational opportunities in local facilities, reducing travel costs and time away from the office.
- Employees have been trained to deal with the public, so that they can provide better service under a variety of circumstances.
- Diversity courses have enabled employees to understand how to accommodate the needs of disabled people and members of various ethnic groups.
- Ethics education has helped employees understand and respect the high standards set forth in the code of ethics.
- Ergonomics and safety courses have helped protect employees from injuries.
- Judges can depend on trained professional employees to assist them in their judicial duties.
- Judges can be confident that staff members have served litigants competently and fairly in compliance with constitutional, statutory, and California Rules of Court mandates.

The collaborative Regional Educational Consortium brings together facilitators and students from four different courts, to pool resources, share ideas, and generate communication.
Statewide Judicial Initiatives
Introduction

G
overnment is a dynamic entity, changing with the times and society’s needs. The judicial branch must continue to develop innovations to fulfill its mission. The need for a systematic approach to new programs and policies statewide became clear in the past decade, as major changes occurred: the two types of trial courts—municipal and superior—were unified into one; county funding of courts shifted to state funding; and the courts became independent employers, instead of part of county government for employment purposes.

Courts had relied on county systems for administrative functions such as human resources, finance, and facilities management. When legislation severed those ties, several courts suddenly found themselves without the infrastructure to manage administrative tasks.

It was unrealistic to expect trial courts to have—or quickly gain—the expertise they needed to manage their new administrative responsibilities on their own. Recognizing this, the Administrative Office of the Courts prepared to support the courts through this transition, with an eye to bringing more consistency, effectiveness, and efficiency to the day-to-day business of running the courts.

Working collaboratively with the courts, the AOC launched initiatives to address needs in the areas of court administration, infrastructure, and statewide administration. Those new broad programs are described in the pages that follow.
Part 1
Court Administration

Managing the work of individual courts is art, science, and craft. The responsibilities are legion, from handling jurors at every stage of their interactions with the judicial system to running master and special calendars to balancing the needs of large and small cases. And that's just part of it.

When one court develops an exciting innovation in some aspect of court administration, the Judicial Council facilitates the sharing of information, so that other courts can replicate the policy or program if it suits their local needs. Broad adoption has beneficial side effects for the courts, litigants, and the public. California courts currently are seeing initiatives in the use of dispute resolution techniques other than trial, assistance to self-represented litigants, modern case-management methods, bold creative ways to manage complex civil cases, a carefully revised jury summons designed to be appealing and clear to citizens, and a program to unify juvenile and family court cases.
When Trial Isn’t the Best Way

With its formal rules and procedural protections, litigation leading to trial or (more often) to a negotiated settlement shortly before trial is the best process for some civil disputes—but not all. To some parties, a quicker resolution is more important than the protections afforded by litigation. Other parties believe they can design a resolution that is more satisfying than any remedy a court might order.

Several processes other than litigation and trial—commonly known as alternative dispute resolution (ADR) processes—are used effectively to resolve civil disputes (see “Most Common ADR Processes”). All are less formal than litigation and can be used early in the litigation process. Some, particularly mediation, give the parties more flexibility to shape the dispute resolution process and outcome.

The Judicial Council’s long-range strategic plan includes support for ADR programs in the courts. When courts offer a broad range of ADR processes, they can better perform their essential function: resolving disputes in a fair, timely, appropriate, and cost-effective manner.

To help courts broaden their ADR options, the Judicial Council sponsored pilot programs from 2000 through 2003 in five superior courts to study the effects of early mediation of civil cases. After an assessment of the programs found substantial benefits (see Impacts of the Early Mediation Pilot Program), the Judicial Council and the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) increased their efforts to expand the use of mediation and other settlement programs for civil cases.

In 2004, the AOC surveyed superior courts about their current ADR programs, and 36 of 40 courts responded that they offered one or more ADR programs for civil cases: 33 offered judicial arbitration;
32, settlement conferences; 26, mediation for small claims or other civil cases; 8, neutral evaluation; and 7, other ADR programs. A significant 40 percent (16 courts) said they wanted to offer new ADR programs, but many of these courts needed resources to do so.

In 2004–2005, the Judicial Council awarded grants to 9 courts to conduct needs assessments and plan ADR programs; 13 courts were awarded grants to implement new programs or improve existing ones.

Impacts of the Early Mediation Pilot Programs

- Of the 6,300 unlimited cases that participated in mediation during the first two years of the pilot programs, 58 percent settled as a direct result of the mediation. Of the 1,600 limited civil cases that went to mediation, 71 percent settled as a direct result.
- In all five courts, mediation parties and attorneys expressed satisfaction with the experience. In three courts the study found that attorneys were more satisfied with the court’s services even if their cases were not resolved in mediation.
- Attorneys in cases that settled at mediation estimated that their clients saved from 61 to 68 percent in litigation costs.
- Early mediation, along with early case-management conferences, significantly shortened the time needed to resolve cases.
- In four of the five pilot courts, the program reduced the number of motions or other pretrial events.
- In two of the courts, the number of cases going to trial decreased by 24 to 30 percent.

Positive Possibilities

Potential benefits of court-connected ADR programs include

- Making justice more accessible to parties
- Giving litigants more dispute-resolution process options
- Allowing a broader range of outcomes
- Increasing litigant satisfaction with the courts
- Resolving issues that might otherwise bring the parties back to court
- Settling more cases
- Shortening the time from filing to disposition of a case
- Saving time and money for the courts and the parties
Assistance to Self-Represented Litigants

Helping Clients and Courts to Help Themselves

Since the early 1990s, the number of people coming to the courts without lawyers has increased dramatically. Courts report that 80 percent of parties in family law cases represent themselves, as well as 90 percent of tenants and 34 percent of landlords in eviction cases. Because court procedures were designed for lawyers, the growing number of self-represented litigants presents new challenges to the courts. The Judicial Council set its Task Force on Self-Represented Litigants to develop an Action Plan for Serving Self-Represented Litigants in California. The council adopted that plan in February 2004.

Of key importance, the task force found that

- Court-based staffed self-help centers, supervised by attorneys, are the optimum way for courts to facilitate the timely and cost-effective processing of cases involving self-represented litigants, to increase access to the courts, and to improve the delivery of justice to the public.
- Well-designed strategies to serve self-represented litigants and to effectively manage their cases at all stages must be incorporated and budgeted as core court functions to ensure that today's courts operate efficiently.
- Partnerships between the courts and other governmental and community-based legal and social service organizations are critical to providing the comprehensive field of services required for success.

The task force determined that a state-level system of support should be developed to promote and assist in the creation, implementation, and operation of the self-help centers and to increase efficiency in cases involving self-represented litigants. Working with the task force to implement the action plan, AOC staff has achieved many milestones, including

- Developing a resource library with materials for use by self-help centers in the local courts
- Expanding the California Courts Online Self-Help Center, which now has more than 900 pages of information and 2,400 links. The entire site has been translated into Spanish, and it receives more than 3 million hits per month
- Collecting translations of self-help materials and posting them on the Online Self-Help Center for use by all the courts, and continuing the work of translating commonly used Judicial Council forms and instructions into Spanish and other languages
- Working with subject matter Advisory Committees to continue to simplify instructions and forms—such as domestic violence and adoption forms—converting them into plain language

Legislative Mandate

The Budget Act of 2001 established two funding sources involved with self-represented litigants. One was the Model Self-Help Pilot Program, which provided grants to self-help pilot programs; the other was the Equal Access Fund, which provided funding for legal services—including self-help centers operated in partnership with the courts. Attached to the budget act funding was a requirement that the Judicial Council study and report on the programs that were created and operated with funds from the two sources. Those studies, which were completed in 2005, found that self-help centers had a positive effect on the courts that established them.
Teaming up with the State Bar, the California Commission on Access, the Legal Aid Association of California, and other state entities to expand pro bono services, develop rules and forms to support limited scope representation, and seek additional funding for legal services

Collaborating with the State Bar to develop methods of recognition for individuals and organizations that lead the way in providing access to self-represented litigants

Providing assistance to courts on the use of self-help technology. This included developing software for use by self-help centers and convening a national conference on using technology, volunteers, and community partnerships to expand access to the courts

Impacts

Self-help centers promote public trust and confidence in the court system. Litigants were highly satisfied with the services they received from the self-help center.

Receiving assistance from a self-help center not only increases a litigant’s initial access to the justice system, it also facilitates that person’s ability to participate more effectively in those court matters in which they can represent themselves.

Judicial officers and court staff can often identify which self-represented litigants have received assistance from the self-help centers, because such individuals have a better understanding of the process, have more accurate paperwork, and are better prepared for court.

Self-help center staff and court staff collaborated successfully. By identifying systemic challenges that self-represented litigants face, the programs helped courts develop creative ways to process these cases more efficiently, saving time and reducing frustration for litigants and court staff.

Self-help centers meet a great need for service in their community. More than 450,000 people receive assistance from self-help programs each year.
California Case Management System (CCMS)

Addressing Local Needs and Economies of Scale

The California Case Management System (CCMS) is a statewide effort to develop an integrated application to manage all case types for the California trial courts. CCMS is a multi-year effort with two phases currently under way: development and installation of the criminal and traffic system; and a civil, small-claims, and probate system. Planning for the third phase, which includes family law, juvenile, and mental health case types, will begin this fall. Key participants in development of CCMS include six lead courts—the Superior Courts of Alameda, Sacramento, San Diego, Los Angeles, Ventura, and Orange Counties—the Southern California Regional Office, AOC Information Services Division, and leading vendors for systems development. All courts are scheduled to complete deployment by fiscal year 2009–2010.

CCMS is aligned with statewide technology initiatives such as the California Courts Technology Center (see page 78) and the new Integrated Services Backbone (see “Data Integration Program”).

CCMS has completed the following key milestones:

- The criminal and traffic system was installed in the California Courts Technology Center in July 2004.
- Implementation of the criminal and traffic system in the Superior Court of Alameda County is under way. The Superior Courts of Orange, Fresno, San Luis Obispo, Marin, Solano, Sonoma, and Butte Counties are in various stages of implementation planning.
- Development of the civil, small-claims, and probate system is well under way and on schedule to be completed in October 2005. The Superior Courts of San Diego and Sacramento Counties are beginning implementation planning.
- Planning for CCMS in family law, juvenile, and mental health will begin in fall 2005.

Data Integration Program

The statewide Data Integration Program is setting standards and obtaining tools to facilitate the exchange of information. By implementing integration solutions, courts can continue to exchange information with their county justice system partners—district attorneys and law enforcement agencies—as they move from county systems to branchwide systems such as the California Case Management System.

As part of the Data Integration Program, a user group of court subject matter experts has developed 17 standards for criminal and traffic information exchanges among justice agencies. The standards define the content requirements and high-level business rules for specific information exchanges that are essential to court business and public safety, such as information on traffic citations, warrants, and domestic violence restraining orders.

The Data Integration Program has teamed with a leading vendor of integration solutions to offer the courts the Integrated Services Backbone, a uniform set of tools for sharing information. In conjunction with the user group’s standards, the Integrated Services Backbone allows courts to readily share critical information within the judicial branch, with justice partners, and with the public.
Goals

- Meet the business requirements of the California courts by creating a system that can be configured to address economies of scale while supporting local county needs.
- Implement a system that supports state ownership and maintenance of developed software.
- Reengineer court processes and establish common procedures for all courts, regardless of size.
- Use a common technology on current architecture and leverage evolving technology.
- Support the overarching goal of “venue transparency,” which will allow access to information across the entire judicial branch by judicial officers, court staff, and the public.
Complex Civil Litigation Pilot Program

Expediting Big Cases

Civil cases that required unusual amounts of judicial time—whether because the legal or factual issues were complicated or highly technical or because there were numerous parties and claims—placed strains on the courts. Different judges (or referees) might handle pretrial matters and trial, interspersed with other cases. Not all knew enough about the issues or the law involved to rule authoritatively.

Lawyers, parties, and judges wanted to see complex cases progress more quickly; although the vast majority of these cases were eventually settled, many took years to be resolved.

After exhaustive study, a judicial task force recommended a pilot program in which six of the largest superior courts would establish separate complex civil litigation departments. Begun in January 2000, the program has multiple facets:

- Complex cases are calendared separately from the master calendar, so that a single judge handles a case from start to finish.
- Judges assigned to the new departments have experience, interest, and expertise in complex civil cases.
- Judges receive the *Deskbook on the Management of Complex Civil Litigation* and training materials on complex civil case management, to learn innovative case-management techniques. Twice yearly they exchange information and participate in continuing education.
- Several pilot courts hold bench-bar symposiums to educate parties about discovery, case management, alternative dispute resolution, substantive legal areas, and use of technology.
- Some courts allow electronic filing (see page 38) and remote access to the register of actions.

The complex case department staff typically consists of one or more clerks, a court reporter, a bailiff, and one or more research attorneys.

The senior clerk is at the “heart of the action,” according to judges, making things work both in and out of the courtroom. “I couldn’t do all this without her,” one judge commented.

The judges also identified one of the program’s greatest benefits: having a research attorney dedicated to each judge. The attorneys research the law, prepare memoranda, explain procedures to the participating attorneys, encourage and coordinate mediation hearings, and relay communications between judge and counsel.
Impacts

- Pilot program judges handled more than 2,000 complex cases with an average of 22 parties per case.
- Cases received significantly closer judicial supervision, attorneys were better informed, and cases were resolved earlier.
- The program led to more effective and faster case resolution, saving resources and time for litigants and the courts.
- About 95 percent of attorneys reported that the judge understood the issues in their cases well (80 percent said “very well”). More than 90 percent found judges “accessible and helpful,” up from 18 percent before the pilot program.

Examples of Complex Cases

One case in the pilot program had some 20 defendants and 250 class members who had suffered various catastrophic injuries and had received annuities to pay for medical needs. Unauthorized activity by the trustee led to default on the annuity payments, and the injured parties sued.

In another case, 50 suits, including one with class-action allegations, arose from a head-on collision between freight and commuter trains. The parties sought damages in two counties for personal injuries, wrongful death, and loss of consortium. The cases were coordinated before one court.
Model Jury Summons Project

Juror-Friendly, Clear Information

California courts send out millions of jury summonses a year. Many courts include so much information that recipients have a hard time finding the information they need. In some jurisdictions, citizens first receive a jury service questionnaire to fill out and return, and later they receive a jury summons; some find this confusing.

In the mid-1990s, a Blue Ribbon Commission on Jury System Improvements recommended (among other measures) that the judiciary develop a statewide jury summons. The Judicial Council charged its Task Force on Jury System Improvements to produce a standardized summons that would help the public understand the need for jury service, respond to the summons properly, and perform jury service. Courts can adopt the summons voluntarily. The task force’s goals were to

- Improve the appearance and readability of the summons
- Eliminate the costs of a two-step process in favor of a one-step summons
- Create a summons with consumer appeal

Beginning in 1999, the task force collected and reviewed sample one-step summonses from courts around the state and identified the basic necessities of a summons. To clarify and simplify the summons, the task force decided to put introductory court information—such as the dress code for jurors, court amenities, and frequently asked questions—in a separate pamphlet sent with the summons, so that the summons could have a cleaner, more open layout. The task force then worked with design and communications consultants to develop and refine drafts of the model summons and the juror information pamphlet.

The task force put the documents before potential jurors in focus groups, to gauge reactions and fine-tune improvements. Task force members viewed videotaped excerpts from some of the focus groups and used participant suggestions in creating the final version of the model, which the task force approved in November 2002.

Impacts

- In 2003 the model summons and juror information pamphlet (titled “Court and Community”) underwent a pilot test in the superior court systems of four counties: Alameda, San Diego, Shasta, and Ventura. The pilot courts adapted the documents to their systems.
- Randomly selected jurors in the pilot jurisdictions were surveyed about their reactions to the new summons and the “Court and Community” pamphlet. The findings showed a significant improvement in juror comprehension of the summons and knowledge about jury service.
- Data were collected on juror compliance rates in the pilot program courts. The results showed a small
increase in juror compliance versus the same period the previous year, before the courts were using the standardized summons.

- A working group of court executives helped to roll out the model summons to more courts in 2004 and 2005, with technical assistance from the Administrative Office of the Courts.

- Courts are exploring pooled printing and summoning practices, once they have standardized summonses, to increase efficiency and lower costs. The Superior Courts of Riverside and San Bernardino Counties began using a common summons and brochure in March 2005.

- The Superior Court of Los Angeles County ran a pilot of its adaptation of the model summons and juror pamphlet in three locations for two months and began countywide use in May 2005.

- The courts of San Francisco, Alameda, Contra Costa, and Marin Counties are developing a common summons form to implement in late summer 2005.
Unified Courts for Families Program

Coordinating the Needs of Family and Juvenile Justice

Domestic cases are the fastest-growing area of civil litigation in the United States. In California, juvenile and family cases constituted 40 percent of all civil cases filed in superior courts during the 2001–2002 fiscal year. A significant number of those involved litigants who had multiple cases being handled in family, juvenile, probate, or criminal court.

Such cases generally address complex issues of domestic violence, child abuse, or substance abuse. Say, for example, that a dissolution case with child custody issues is filed in the family law department, and that one of the parents in the case is a restrained person in a Domestic Violence Prevention Act case with a former spouse. If there is no method for identifying the related case, the judicial officer hearing the child custody matter may not have access to important information that could affect the custody decision. As a result, the Judicial Council’s Operational Plan includes the objective “to improve courts’ management of family and children’s cases, with particular emphasis on unifying and coordinating court procedures.”

In 2003, the Judicial Council selected seven “mentor courts” to focus on unification or coordination of family, juvenile, or probate matters and to teach other courts about their processes. By the end of three years, these courts—Butte and Glenn Counties (in collaboration), Del Norte, Los Angeles, Napa, Placer, San Joaquin, and Yolo Counties—will have created rules or protocols to address many issues, including

- Identifying families with cases in more than one division or courtroom
- Sharing appropriate information to advise judicial officers about existing orders
- Notifying court-connected services that members of a client family are involved in other related matters before the courts
- Ensuring safety and security for family and juvenile court participants and staff

The courts will also be able to provide evidence of accessible services, including facilities designed to meet the needs of families and children; implement calendaring methods to coordinate multiple court appearances; and develop case-tracking methods to expedite cases where appropriate.
Impacts

- In 2004, the Center for Families, Children, and the Courts (CFCC) published the *Unified Courts for Families Deskbook* to help courts move forward with unification and coordination. The CFCC distributed the deskbook to California’s family and juvenile courts and makes it available on its Web site (www.courtnfo.ca.gov/programs/cfcc/).
- Each mentor court has protocols or rules to ensure that its information-sharing policy complies with legal mandates to protect confidential information.
- Nearly all the courts report increased levels of collaboration between the court and the community.
- Some courts report increased levels of communication within their courts. Family law courts have become more familiar with juvenile court policies and procedures and vice versa.
- Several program stakeholders report that the unified court effort encouraged a shift in the court culture toward a system that is more user-friendly and more effective in meeting the needs of litigants.
- Preliminary anecdotal information suggests that the program helps judicial officers feel they can make more informed decisions and avoid issuing conflicting orders.
Part 2
Infrastructure

Individual courts in California have a great deal of autonomy, but statewide support systems are essential for some functions and responsibilities. Drawing on one of its most valuable resources—the courts themselves—the Administrative Office of the Courts brings together nuts-and-bolts innovations from around the state in infrastructure initiatives that can help all California courts. Consistent, uniform practices and policies among the courts lead to greater efficiency, effectiveness, and accountability throughout the judiciary and foster the success and independence of the courts.

Fiscal accountability, human resources, technology, and facilities are four primary areas in which innovation in infrastructure is flourishing.
Fiscal Accountability Initiatives

A Financial Infrastructure for Trial Courts

When trial court funding became a state rather than a county responsibility in 1997, the judiciary saw that it needed to achieve greater fiscal accountability. As courts embarked on the transition to state funding, the Administrative Office of the Courts developed several initiatives to support their efforts:

- The *Trial Court Financial Policies and Procedures Manual* was published in 2001 and is updated periodically. It details basic financial policies and procedures that courts throughout the state are to implement uniformly.

- The Court Accounting and Reporting System (CARS), launched in 2002, is a financial system designed for trial courts. In a 2001 survey, the majority of trial courts had expressed interest in such a statewide financial system. CARS is currently in the middle of a five-year rollout in courts across the state.

- The Trial Court Accounting and Financial Services Unit was launched in conjunction with CARS and designed to support that system’s back-end processing requirements. Formerly known as the Trial Court Accounting Processing Center, this Sacramento office provides services such as processing of invoice payments, contract management, procurement, trust accounting, and maintenance of trial court financial information.

- The Treasury Services Unit was established to handle complex centralized banking, with a current emphasis on short-term investments and cash management.

Together these initiatives provide the infrastructure for a unified approach to accounting, reporting, and other financial procedures for all California trial courts.

CARS Software and Training

Built on a widely accepted software platform, CARS is tailored to the accounting needs of trial courts. The system is designed to automate court accounting functions, saving hours of staff labor.

At the beginning of each fiscal year, all courts scheduled to start using CARS come to the AOC for a general orientation. Just before the system goes into effect in a particular court, the AOC provides an intensive, hands-on staff training session. CARS users also meet quarterly to discuss what’s working, what’s not, and how the system could be improved.
Impacts

- Uniform financial practices and systems make data from court to court more usable and reliable, so that the judiciary can budget more efficiently and accurately.
- Trial courts around the state are being offered the financial administration systems they need to support their operations.
- The statewide accounting support center and treasury offer better administrative services than individual trial courts could afford on their own.
Tools for Day-to-Day Employee Relations

When the Trial Court Employment Protection and Governance Act (Sen. Bill 2140) took effect in 2001, California courts became the employers of 19,000 staff members formerly considered county employees. Then the Trial Court Interpreter Employment and Labor Relations Act (Sen. Bill 371) in 2002 gave many independent-contractor court interpreters the right to apply for trial court employment (with collective bargaining rights), adding these members to the court family.

Many courts were not fully equipped with the expertise in human resources to deal with employee administration. In response to the need, the Administrative Office of the Courts’ Human Resources Division began to design tools that courts could use for such employment tasks as setting pay scales and benefits, negotiating labor contracts, administering retirement programs, recruiting and training new staff members, and compensating employees for work-related injuries or illnesses.

Several human resources programs are currently up and running to meet the needs of courts statewide:

- The Labor and Employee Relations Services and Support initiative was rolled out in 2002 to give superior courts the expertise to manage labor relations and to assist the courts as needed. Information and procedural help come from the Labor and Employee Relations Unit of the AOC’s Human Resources Division.
- The Trial Court Benefits Program, in effect since 2003, is a comprehensive and competitive health and benefits alternative for trial court employees. It was created after research was conducted on designing and implementing a statewide, multiple-employer benefits program; continual evolution is planned to meet the needs of trial courts. By January 2005, 24 courts had chosen to participate.
- The Judicial Branch Workers’ Compensation Program, a self-insured system administered by a third party, was developed after a study determined the feasibility of a unified program for all courts. As an incentive to courts to join the program, the cost of participating was stabilized for the first two fiscal years, so that no rate increases would occur through the end of June 2005. By that date, 54 courts were participating.
- The Court Human Resources Information System (CHRIS), a tool on the same platform as the statewide court accounting tool CARS (see page 74), will address courts’ personnel management needs. Currently in development, CHRIS is scheduled to begin phased implementation in 2006. Court human resources professionals participated in the information-gathering stage, and the AOC is offering project management and oversight. A model court will begin testing the program in fall 2005.

Help With Labor Negotiations

As part of its human resources program, the AOC’s Labor and Employee Relations Unit has developed a strategic plan for labor negotiations, served as chief negotiator for courts, and offered labor mediation and investigative services, when courts request them.

The AOC’s Human Resources Division holds Labor Relations Forums twice annually, at which court managers solve problems, share information, and discuss labor issues. Trial Court Outlet, a password-protected Web site on the judicial branch Intranet, is specifically for trial court administrators to exchange information about labor agreements and court personnel policies. The Human Resources Division also offers the Labor Relations Academy, an interactive three-day program on labor relations topics with lectures, exercises, group activities, information exchanges, and mock negotiations.
Impacts

- Court human resources personnel receive training from AOC programs and can consult with experts from the AOC.
- Court employees are protected by a reliable, self-insured workers’ compensation program that offers improved and more cost-effective case management of workers’ compensation claims.
- Trial courts can offer their employees the statewide court benefits plan, saving them the costs and effort of researching and designing individual health and benefits programs.
Technology Initiatives

Expanding Technology Throughout the Court System

In a three-year operational plan, adopted in 2003, the Judicial Council set the goal to create a statewide infrastructure for several functions—including technology—that would provide consistent, uniform, and cost-effective administrative services and programs to support court operations.

California Courts Technology Center (CCTC)

In 2003, the judicial branch began operating a new statewide technology center, the California Courts Technology Center (CCTC). This centralized data center provides comprehensive information technology support for a growing number of trial courts. Services including hosting and support services for certified interim case-management systems; help-desk services; e-mail; and network, security, and disaster recovery services. The CCTC now hosts 20 courts using the new Court Accounting and Reporting System (CARS) and 8 courts using certified interim case-management systems. The new criminal and traffic application for the California Case Management System (CCMS) has also been installed in the technology center. CCTC will support additional courts as new systems are brought on board.

The operational plan emphasizes that modern, uniform business practices are necessary to court management, to just resolution of disputes, and to effective administration of justice. It also stresses that operation of the judicial branch should be current, consistent, and responsive to the diverse needs of California’s 58 court systems, large and small.

Since implementation of this plan, the AOC and the courts have made substantial progress in developing the technology infrastructure and court technology initiatives to achieve these objectives. Today, courts with critical case-management needs have been stabilized through implementation of interim certified case-management systems. Development and implementation of CCMS are meeting key milestones, and the first deployment of the civil and criminal system is expected later this year.
Goals

- Enable the courts to take advantage of state-of-the-art technology services.
- Achieve economies of scale and enable courts to leverage the buying power of the state by using a single vendor.
- Provide round-the-clock staffing.
- Achieve a high level of system availability and optimize performance for court applications.
- Provide comprehensive security monitoring and planning.
- Prevent interruptions and loss of critical data through regular system backups and a disaster recovery plan.
- Help achieve the goal to share common business processes across all courts.
- Continue to provide services to the courts as technology needs evolve.
Facilities Initiatives

Delivering Statewide Facilities Services to the Courts

As responsibility for trial court facilities transfers from California’s 58 counties to the state, the judicial branch faces the challenge of maintaining and operating a large real-estate portfolio for the first time. Consolidating oversight of all trial court buildings will allow the state, under the governance of the Judicial Council, to address serious conditions of disrepair currently found in many courts and increase courthouse security, accessibility, and efficiency throughout California. The AOC’s Office of Court Construction and Management (OCCM) is responsible for improving existing court buildings, designing and constructing new courthouses, developing long-range capital plans, and overseeing facilities operations.

Computer-Aided Facilities Management (CAFM)

To effectively manage and integrate these tasks, OCCM is implementing Computer-Aided Facilities Management (CAFM), a Web-based program that allows court personnel, AOC staff, and third-party contractors to access real-time information on building data and design, construction, operations, and maintenance. The CAFM pilot debuted in April 2005. The program will be rolled out to court buildings as they transfer to the state.

The pilot launch involved only CAFM’s real-estate administration, project management, demand-maintenance, and portfolio-oversight capabilities. CAFM will be expanded in subsequent rollouts to include space planning, proactive maintenance programs, and services tied to health and life safety. The program’s full capabilities will eventually include:

- Single-point data integration of capital plans, active construction projects, and facility operations
- Complex project management of schedules, cost controls, and contract administration
- Integrating risk management and mitigation into facility operations and planning
- Long-term facility performance and budgeting projections
- Tracking and documentation of maintenance work as scheduled and performed
- Asset and inventory management
- Calendaring important dates, such as rent payment deadlines
- Real-estate and operational records management and archiving

Court Facility Transfers

The transfers are the last step in transforming California’s judicial branch from a conglomerate of 220 local trial courts to a unified, statewide system of superior courts. This transformation is the result of four key developments in California law:

- **Proposition 220**. Passed by California voters in 1998, Prop. 220 amended the state Constitution to permit each county’s municipal and superior courts to voluntarily merge their operations and become a single superior court.
- **Trial Court Employment Protection and Governance Act** (Sen. Bill 2140; Stats. 2000, ch. 1010). Enacted by the state Legislature in 2001, this law gave the courts the status of independent employers, making trial court staff employees of the courts.
- **Trial Court Facilities Act** (Sen. Bill 1732; Stats. 2002, ch. 1082). Passed by the state Legislature in 2002, SB 1732 shifted responsibility for the operation and maintenance of court facilities from the counties to the state.
Although administered by OCCM from the AOC’s San Francisco, Sacramento, and Burbank offices, CAFM will not minimize the courts’ role or control over their buildings. The program will allow court staff engaged in facilities management to help plan annual repairs and renovations, report maintenance problems, and track project progress. CAFM can produce reports customized to a court’s needs, allowing court managers to access relevant local information online. OCCM staff will provide CAFM training for designated court employees. CAFM capabilities may be expanded over time to allow users to access information contained in other databases, for example, those containing financial and human resources information for superior courts throughout the state. The program will eventually become a central information hub for all court buildings in California.

OCCM’s goal is to provide a uniform level of high-quality facilities services to every court. By standardizing court facilities management, CAFM will help ensure that all courts receive consistent, timely support.

A fluorescent light bulb needs replacing at the Oroville courthouse in Butte County.

Facts and Figures: California’s Courts

- There are over 450 trial court facilities in California, totaling 10.1 million square feet of usable space.
- More than 75 percent have inadequate access for people with disabilities, and 68 percent lack up-to-date fire and life-safety systems.
- Thirty percent were built before 1960, and 72 percent were built before 1980.
- More than two million in-custody defendants pass through California’s trial court facilities annually. In 41 percent of facilities, they must be brought to courtrooms via public hallways, passing by witnesses, jurors, victims, and other court users.
- Seventy-one California court facilities qualify as historic resources under national, state, or local qualifying criteria, and 48 of them still house court functions.

The Judicial Council’s Trial Court Five-Year Capital Outlay Plan, available online at www.courtinfo.ca.gov/reference/fiveyear.htm, details all necessary court renovation and new construction projects.
Now that California courts are no longer part of county governments but instead are unified within an independent branch of state government, they have the opportunity, the motivation, and the challenge to keep in touch with one another more fully and frequently. All courts need to know what the other courts are doing, how they are handling complex issues, and what practices work the best. They need to collaborate on tasks that are done more efficiently and effectively by the judiciary as a whole than by individual courts. Statewide administrative initiatives foster collective actions and the adoption of uniform practices by the courts.

Communication—between individual courts and the Administrative Office of the Courts, and among local courts—is one area in which the branch has made great strides in statewide administration. Another is collaboration on collection of fines, fees, and penalties owed to the courts.
California Courts Connected

Creating the Infrastructure for Judicial Branch Communications

Court leaders and staff of the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) are striving ambitiously to make communications smoother and more effective between the AOC and the courts, among the courts, and with judicial branch stakeholders.

In 2003, a workgroup of presiding judges, court executives, and AOC executives began a series of focus groups and regional meetings to identify issues and propose solutions for strengthening dialogue within the branch.

Among the challenges court leaders identified were

- Rapid pace of work and change, and shifting priorities
- Size of the branch and corresponding size of communications effort
- Volume of information being shared, often urgent and needing action
- Frequent changes in leadership and loss of institutional memory
- Varying levels of need to engage or desire to know
- Few established protocols for branchwide interaction

Opportunities for improvement included

- Defining roles and expectations
- Enhancing relationships across the branch
- Facilitating more effective governance and service to the public

The workgroup produced *California Courts Connected*, a 16-page plan that proposes practical infrastructure for more effective branch communications based on three channels: Judicial Council/AOC to courts, courts to Judicial Council/AOC, and courts to courts. The plan also presents solutions to address identified needs and clarifies the roles and responsibilities of each branch stakeholder in improving communications.

Several parts of the plan have been implemented, and others are in progress. A second phase of the initiative, focusing on external communications, has been proposed.

**Impacts**

- Information and ideas are more easily exchanged between the courts and the Judicial Council/AOC.
- Opportunities for informed dialogue within the branch are expanded.
- Communication between court staff members is routine and institutionalized.
Staying Connected

*California Courts Connected* uses a transit map metaphor to identify branch stakeholders as both sources and recipients, to convey that all groups are interconnected, to list primary channels, and to represent the flow of information within the branch. Among the information channels available to branch stakeholders are

- **AOC-TV**, the broadcast educational and news service for the California courts, launched in 2001. Its programs are distributed via satellite to more than 200 locations in trial and appellate courts around the state.
- **California Courts Review**, a quarterly magazine for the state judicial branch, with in-depth articles on issues affecting judicial administration in California.
- **California Courts Web site** ([www.courtinfo.ca.gov](http://www.courtinfo.ca.gov)), a resource for the public, law and justice partners, and the courts. The Court Administration section of the site includes an AOC staff directory (sorted by name and subject matter), background and reports on Judicial Council actions, and summaries of court-related legislation.
- **Court News Online (CNO)**, a monthly online newsletter focusing on practical information for court professionals. It was launched in February 2005.
- **Court News Update (CNU)**, a weekly e-mail briefing on judicial administration distributed every Tuesday morning to court leaders. Most items offer online links to full-text documents or other resources.
- Networks of virtual statewide workgroups, consisting of listservs and collective online resource centers for court professionals. Established networks include senior management (ExecutiveNetwork), human resources (HRNetwork), and public information/communications (PINetwork). Plans are afoot for networks for finance, education, information services, and alternative dispute resolution.
- Regional meetings, on a regular schedule at the three AOC Regional Offices, at which court leaders and AOC staff review branch initiatives, statewide procedures, progress on legislation, and other issues; and examine solutions to common problems.
- Serranus ([http://serranus.courtinfo.ca.gov](http://serranus.courtinfo.ca.gov)), the password-protected site for the California judiciary. Content and use of the site have exploded in recent years, making it a vital element of intrabranch communications. Enhancements include sections devoted to education and training, finance, human resources, and court-community outreach, as well as an extensively reorganized section for judicial officers.
Collaborative Court-County Working Group on Enhanced Collections

Bringing in Fines, Fees, and Penalties

Courts have varied widely in the priority they have given to collecting fines, penalties, and fees. There have been no uniform collection standards or guidelines, and each court has had its own method of assessing success. As fiscal year 2004–2005 began, uncollected court-ordered payments were estimated at $3 billion.

In his 2003 State of the Judiciary address, Chief Justice of California Ronald M. George called collection of court debt a top priority, and the Judicial Council responded by establishing a Collaborative Court-County Working Group on Enhanced Collections. The working group brought together representatives of the following groups:

- Trial court judges
- Trial court executive officers
- California State Association of Counties
- Franchise Tax Board
- Department of Corrections
- California Youth Authority
- Victim Compensation and Government Claims Board
- State Controller’s Office
- Administrative Office of the Courts

The working group formed subcommittees to deal with different aspects of collections and held workshops on salient issues. In August 2004 the Judicial Council adopted several policies on collections, based on the working group’s recommendations.

- It approved a definition of delinquent accounts or payments.
- It issued standards for discharging court-ordered debt.
- It directed trial courts and counties to establish joint “enhanced collection and compliance coordination” committees.
- It directed courts and counties to collaborate in submitting midyear and year-end reports on Judicial Council–approved templates.
- It called for legislation to allow courts, as well as counties, to charge a fee for setting up installment payments and to increase the fee from $35 or less to $50 or less.

Components Needed for a Successful Collections Program

- Credit reports on debtors
- Monthly statements to debtors
- Access to Employment Development Department reports
- Skip tracing
- Acceptance of credit card payments
- Participation in the Franchise Tax Board’s Court-Ordered Debt program
It established a subcommittee of the working group to develop standards and guidelines for courts to follow in approving or denying fee waivers.

Under the Penal Code, courts that establish a comprehensive collections program, by meeting at least 10 of 17 criteria set forth in the code, can be reimbursed for the operating costs of collecting delinquent court-ordered payments; and the state has contracts with four private collections vendors to help courts and counties with debts that are deemed hard to collect.

**Impacts**

- Several courts and counties have established or enhanced their collection programs.
- The working group's Fee Waiver Subcommittee is developing ways to ensure that the primary goal of fee waivers is access to the courts and that the fee waiver process is applied to all parties with integrity and uniformity.
- The Reporting Subcommittee has been gathering comments, experiences, and recommendations from courts and counties about the reporting template, with an eye to revising and improving the template, if warranted.
- The Statewide Request for Proposal Subcommittee helps courts and counties choose a collections vendor based on their specific needs.
- The Standard Fine Schedule Subcommittee is developing software to give courts quick access to data on mandatory and discretionary fines, fees, and assessments in infractions, misdemeanors, and felonies. The program will become part of the California Case Management System.