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**Appendix B**  
**Methodology**



## Methodology

The evaluation of the self-help pilot projects included several different components. Evaluation data collection took place between March 2003 and May 2004 for evaluation components undertaken by BPA and NPC, and through November for additional components undertaken by the AOC.<sup>1</sup> The evaluation design for the Butte/Glenn/Tehama, Contra Costa, Fresno, and San Francisco county sites shared a core set of data collection strategies, while the evaluation design for the Los Angeles program was based on its unique program model. Below we describe the methodologies used for Butte/Glenn/Tehama, Contra Costa, Fresno, and San Francisco counties, including site visits, intake data, service tracking data, court file review, and courtroom observation and post-hearing interviews, customer satisfaction surveys, Web site user testing, and Web site usage analysis. The second section of this appendix describes the Los Angeles evaluation design, and the final section outlines supplemental data sources consulted for the evaluation.

### Site Visits

To study program implementation, researchers from BPA and NPC conducted two- to three-day site visits to each site at two points in time. During these visits, in-depth interviews were conducted with self-help center staff, bench officers, attorneys, clerks, court administrators, and court executive officers. As appropriate, the evaluation team also interviewed with outside partners and stakeholders, such as representatives of the local bar associations, local adult schools, and community-based social service organizations. In cases where there were multiple informants in a particular category (e.g., court clerks or attorneys), focus groups were conducted. AOC staff accompanied the researchers on two of the site visits during the first round. The number of respondents interviewed at each site is detailed in Figure B.1.

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<sup>1</sup> BPA and NPC took primary responsibility for site visit interviews, intake and service tracking data, post-hearing interviews, and the Los Angeles program's evaluation. AOC staff took primary responsibility for developing and analyzing customer satisfaction surveys, analyzing Web site usage statistics for the Contra Costa program, and integrating information from supplemental data sources into the report. For court file reviews, BPA designed the sample and entered the data, while AOC staff designed the instruments and collected and analyzed the data.

**Figure B.1  
Number of Site Visit Respondents**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Butte</b>	<b>Contra Costa</b>	<b>Fresno</b>	<b>San Francisco</b>	<b>Los Angeles</b>
Court administrator	3	4	1	2	6
Judicial officer	4	5	4	3	2
Clerk	10	2	8	6	0
Other court staff member	3	5	3	3	2
Managing attorney/ supervising attorney	0*	1	1	0*	0*
Community partner	0	1	9	3	4
County employee	0	1	0	0	0
Pilot self-help project staff	5	2	3	3	2
Pilot self-help project volunteer	0	0	4	4	0
Local Los Angeles provider	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	7
Local family law attorneys	5	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>23</b>

\*The Project Director also serves as the Managing Attorney.

N/A: Not applicable. Local providers were interviewed only in Los Angeles and local family law attorneys were interviewed only for the Butte/Glenn/Tehama project.

The first round of site visits, conducted in the Spring 2003, was timed to coincide with the early implementation of the self-help programs; the second round was conducted one year later. The two rounds of site visits had similar structures and included many of the same respondents so that they could provide assessments of the projects' accomplishments and challenges over time. During these visits information was gathered about the following:

- The court process for self-represented litigants before the newly formed self-help centers were operational;
- Barriers self-represented litigants face in obtaining access to justice;
- Start-up and early implementation activities of the self-help programs;
- Program services and operations and any changes over time; and
- Assessments of the programs' successes, challenges, and impact on self-represented litigants and the courts.

Site visits provided researchers with qualitative information about service delivery methods, the challenges the centers face and their innovations, and key stakeholder impressions of the impact of the centers. Site visit data do not, however, provide quantitative data about effects of the centers.

## Intake Data

BPA and NPC, in close collaboration with the AOC and pilot program staff, designed intake forms for the pilot projects in Butte/Glenn/Tehama, Fresno and San Francisco counties. Individuals seeking assistance from the pilot self-help projects were asked to complete intake forms in either English or Spanish, providing basic demographic and background information. This instrument can be found in Appendix K.

Pilot versions of the forms were collected from March to May 2003, after which center directors were asked to complete a brief survey to give their feedback on the forms. After the forms were revised, the centers were asked to continue to collect them from June to December 2003. An additional month of data collection took place in March 2004 to capture data from the later implementation stages of the projects. To facilitate data entry, the forms were made available on the Internet, allowing authorized center staff to enter forms directly into a central database maintained by BPA, to which center staff also had access.

The data from the intake forms are used to describe the demographic characteristics of center customers, the reasons customers sought help, and how they heard of the self-help center. Some customers who visited the centers did not complete an intake form; as a result, our findings under-represent the number of customers served and this may generalizability to the whole customer population . Figure B.2 shows the number of intake and service tracking forms for Butte/Glenn/Tehama, Fresno, and San Francisco counties.

**Figure B.2  
Number of Intake and Service Tracking Forms Completed**

Month	Butte		Fresno		San Francisco	
	Intake Forms	Service Forms	Intake Forms	Service Forms	Intake Forms	Service Forms
Date missing	66	520	8	29	44	70
January 2003	6	1	0	0	0	4
February 2003	1	0	0	1	0	1
March 2003	1	2	0	0	3	6
April 2003	3	2	0	1	3	0
May 2003	22	29	0	3	1	25
June 2003	161	245	13	63	87	300
July 2003	162	301	53	153	186	463
August 2003	187	501	65	156	156	611
September 2003	163	623	63	227	195	728
October 2003	193	913	60	161	323	913
November 2003	137	558	62	151	175	793
December 2003	126	297	29	73	76	514
January 2004	157	2	0	0	0	36
February 2004	133	1	0	0	0	29
March 2004	142	669	64	223	362	1,020
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,662</b>	<b>4,665</b>	<b>479</b>	<b>1,480</b>	<b>1,612</b>	<b>5,514</b>

### Service Tracking Data

The evaluation team also created service tracking forms for the pilot projects in Butte/Glenn/Tehama, Fresno and San Francisco counties. Staff members completed a service tracking form each time a customer received assistance, and several service tracking forms were completed for one person. To aid data entry, authorized center staff entered forms through a secure Internet site directly into a central database maintained by BPA. A copy of the service tracking form can be found in Appendix K.

The service tracking form provided data on the types of cases the center served, the assistance self-represented litigants needed, the services they received, and the referrals made by center staff. Due to a high volume of customers, centers were not able to complete service tracking forms for all services provided. As a result, the data underrepresent the services provided. Figure B.2 above shows the number of intake and service tracking forms for Butte/Glenn/Tehama, Fresno and San Francisco counties.

Because the Contra Costa County project uses the Internet to provide the bulk of its services, service tracking forms were not applicable for this site. Instead, Web site usage statistics were gathered. See the “Web Site Usage Tracking” section below

In addition to the service tracking forms, center staff collected data on center-administered workshops in March 2004. These workshop data include information about

attendance, location, language, workshop length, format, case types, and characteristics of workshop leaders. The workshop form can be found in Appendix K.

### Court File Review

AOC staff conducted a review of court files in Butte/Glenn/Tehama, Fresno, and San Francisco counties because at these three sites, center users could be identified through the intake forms. Court files contribute important independent information about the experiences of self-represented litigants and the impact of self-help services on the courts. Instruments for these court file reviews were developed by AOC staff, including attorneys, with input from BPA, NPC, and the evaluation advisory board. AOC staff, along with an experienced self-help center attorney, reviewed unlawful detainer cases and dissolution cases in Butte/Glenn/Tehama counties, dissolution cases in Fresno County, and civil harassment cases in San Francisco County. These case types were chosen, with input from center directors, because they accounted for a large proportion of the centers' services and because they were the case types most likely show the impact of the centers via the court files.

Court file review data elements include:

- Applications for a fee waiver;
- Litigant requests, including custody, visitation, and property information for dissolution cases and damages for unlawful detainer;
- Whether and how service was effected;
- Procedural defects and paperwork problems;
- Details regarding default declarations, orders to show cause (OSCs), and motions;
- Details of responses and answers
- Key dates, including when petition or complaint was filed, when service was effected, when hearings were set, and when the case was disposed;
- Numbers of hearings and continuances;
- Reasons for continuances (including improperly filed forms, missing paperwork, and proof of service problems);
- Which parties appeared at hearing, hearing results, judgments, and orders issued;
- Changes in representation status;
- Indication of assistance with the case including using the self-help center; and
- Indications that litigants needed language assistance.

The court file review instruments can be found in Appendix K.

AOC reviewers entered the court file review data directly into a database developed by BPA in San Francisco. Due to the complexity of the protocols, the reviewers used paper forms in Butte and Fresno counties that were subsequently entered at BPA.

### **Sampling Strategy**

The sampling methodology varied slightly for each county. In all counties, a group of self-represented litigants who visited the self-help center and filed a specified case type during a particular time period were compared to self-represented litigants who did not visit the self-help center but filed a case of that same type during the specified time period. Contemporaneous comparison groups were used in Butte and Fresno counties to reduce the interference of external factors, such as the economy or court budget constraints, on comparing indicators before and after the centers were in operation. However, a pre/post design was used in San Francisco, due to a structural change in the court that accompanied the centers' development, wherein all self-represented litigants dropped off their civil harassment forms and picked up OSCs or temporary restraining orders at the self-help center. This interaction between the center and all self-represented litigants may have led to contamination of a contemporaneous sample, in that there were few if any litigants who did not come into contact with the self-help center in some way.

The court file reviews were conducted on a sample of cases in which at least one of the self-represented litigants had received help from the self-help pilot project and on a sample of cases for which self-represented litigants did not access the pilot self help project. Court clerks provided the research team with lists of cases that involved at least one self-represented litigant and that were filed during particular time frames. The list of names was then cross-referenced against the intake and service tracking data collected by the sites.<sup>2</sup> A file was selected for the self-help project sample if one of the litigants was self-represented and (1) had received help at the center for the same case type as the case presented in court during the time period for which intake and service tracking data were collected and (2) had been to the center but no case type was identified. Comparison cases, those in which a litigant had not been to the center, were randomly chosen from the list of cases with self-represented litigants. During the actual file review, some cases were determined ineligible for review because the litigants were identified as having been represented by an attorney at the time of filing or because they were particular subcategories of cases deemed unsuitable for review (e.g., workplace violence cases in civil harassment, nullity in dissolution). Because not all information used to match litigants from court-provided case lists to intake and service tracking databases was available, another round of matching was conducted after data collection, which resulted in some cases being moved from the self-help center group to the comparison group, and vice versa (most in the former direction).

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<sup>2</sup>The lists of cases filed in Tehama County only provided the last names of litigants. After the AOC's review of cases, a second cross-listing based on both first names and last names was performed, which led to the elimination of some of the cases from the analysis.

### **Sample Size and Comparison Groups**

Cases were reviewed in each of the three counties served by the Butte County regional self-help pilot project (Butte, Glenn, and Tehama). About 100 dissolution cases in which at least one of the parties received assistance from the self-help center were compared to 100 dissolution cases in which neither party used the center. The same comparison was made for unlawful detainer cases. Sample sizes for each county were determined based on their estimated proportions of the overall SHARP customer volume. All of the cases in Butte/Glenn/Tehama counties were filed between January 2003 and March 2004. These dates were chosen to coincide with the center's dates of operation and to meet the sample size goal.

In Fresno County, about 100 dissolution cases in which at least one of the parties received assistance at the self-help center were compared with about 100 dissolution cases in which neither party used the center. All of the Fresno County cases were filed between April and December 2003 (except cases from August, when intake and service tracking data were not entered due to time constraints). These dates were selected to coincide with the center's dates of operation and to meet the sample size goal.

In San Francisco County, about 100 civil harassment cases filed *prior* to the opening of the self-help center were compared with about 100 civil harassment cases filed *after* the opening of the self-help center in which at least one party had been to the self-help center. In both instances, the cases included at least one self-represented party. The San Francisco County cases were filed between April and December 2002 and between April and December 2003. The 2003 dates were selected to coincide with the center's dates of operation and to meet the sample size goal and the 2002 dates were selected to ensure a comparable time period before the center's implementation. Case information from the court's case management system was also used to complete the forms when information from the court files was missing or incomplete.

See Figure B.3 for a breakdown of the actual numbers of cases reviewed in each of the counties.

**Figure B.3**  
**Number of Court Files Reviewed by Case Type and Program**

	<b>Been to Self-Help Center</b>	<b>Not Been to Self-Help Center</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Dissolution</b>			
Fresno	96	93	189
SHARP total	106	87	193
Butte	46	33	79
Glenn	16	17	33
Tehama	44	37	81
<b>Civil Harassment</b>			
San Francisco	101	98	199
<b>Unlawful Detainer</b>			
SHARP total	78	97	175
Butte	20	34	54
Glenn	22	31	53
Tehama	36	32	68

**Limitations**

In both the Fresno and San Francisco centers, the original goal was to compare non-English-speaking litigants who had or had not received pilot self-help center services. Unfortunately, non-English-speaking litigants could not be confidently identified from the case files. Therefore, it is not possible to know if the comparison group litigants faced the same language barriers as the center users. Both the Fresno and San Francisco programs, however, ended up serving a higher number of English-speaking customers than anticipated.

The samples are drawn from cases filed during the time the self-help centers were in operation, which limits the ability to analyze the centers’ impact on the length of time from filing to disposition. To stay within the dates of center operation, time from filing to disposition must be relatively short—and bounded—and the amount of potential variation among cases is reduced. In addition, this methodology does not capture cases that were active or unresolved for an extended period of time, an area where self-help center directors feel they have an important impact.

The fact that a party’s name did not appear in the intake or service tracking data does not necessarily mean that he or she did not receive assistance at the self-help center. Many customers chose not to complete an intake form, and some may have visited the centers outside the time frame during which intake and service tracking data were collected. In addition, many parties appear to have received some other type of assistance preparing their forms, even though the help didn’t come from the centers. These factors limit the kinds of conclusions that can be drawn from the comparison group analysis.

The samples were not restricted to cases in which the center was involved from the time of filing. Some litigants may have sought help very early in the process, and other litigants much later. For example, litigants could have made errors on forms or

procedural errors prior to seeking assistance from the centers. Therefore, the extent to which certain indicators should be attributed to the work of the centers is limited. Also, samples were not restricted to customers who received specific types of services. Litigants could have received a range of services at the centers—as little as obtaining forms with written instructions and as much as attending a three-part series of workshops. Impacts of the self-help centers would be expected to vary with the level of assistance provided.

### Post-Hearing Interviews

Over the course of the study, two rounds (Spring 2003 and 2004) of post-hearing interviews were conducted with self-represented litigants in Butte/Glenn/Tehama, Contra Costa, Fresno, and San Francisco counties.

Post-hearing interviews were conducted with self-represented litigants as they left the courtroom after a hearing. When the litigants did not have time to speak at that time, they were asked whether they would be willing to be interviewed by telephone; two interviews were conducted this way. These ad hoc interviews were similar to those used by the Empirical Research Group at UCLA,<sup>3</sup> and yielded a much more detailed perspective key attitudes and characteristics of self-represented litigants:

- Understanding of details of the legal process;
- Understanding of terms of court orders;
- Ability to comply with terms of court orders;
- Sense that they received a fair and just hearing;
- Past experiences seeking assistance on their case; and
- Overall satisfaction with the court process.

The interviews were conducted in teams of two to three researchers. During the first round, a researcher fluent in Spanish as well as English was present during the interviews in San Francisco and Fresno counties. During the second round, a bilingual researcher was present in Fresno, Butte, and Contra Costa counties. During both rounds, researchers were on site for two to five days to collect these data.

Figure B.4 provides greater detail on the courts and calendars observed as well as sample sizes.

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<sup>3</sup> The Empirical Research Group, UCLA School of Law, *Evaluation of the Van Nuys Legal Self-Help Center Final Report* (2001).

**Figure B.4**  
**Post-Hearing Interview Data for Year 1 (2003) and Year 2 (2004)**

<b>County</b>	<b>Year 1</b>	<b>Year 2</b>
<b>Butte/Glenn/Tehama</b>		
Dates of Observation	June 2, 5–6	April 19–20, 22
Number of Cases Fully Observed	43	46
Number of Self Represented Litigants Interviewed	19	16
Calendars Observed	3 Family Law	1 Family Law and Domestic Violence, 1 Family Law, Domestic Violence and Small Claims, 1 Small Claims
Courthouse Locations	Butte, Glenn, and Tehama County Superior Courthouse	Butte, Glenn, and Tehama County Superior Courthouse
<b>Contra Costa</b>		
Dates of Observation	June 30–July 2	April 27–28
Number of Cases Fully Observed	26	12
Number of Self Represented Litigants Interviewed	12	20
Calendars Observed	1 Family Law, 1 Small Claims, 1 Guardianship	4 Family Law, 2 Small Claims, 1 Unlawful Detainer
Courthouse Locations	Contra Costa County Superior Courthouse in Martinez and Pittsburg	Contra Costa County Superior Courthouse in Martinez and Pittsburg
<b>Fresno</b>		
Dates of Observation	April 30–May 1	April 27–28
Number of Cases Fully Observed	24	27
Number of Self Represented Litigants Interviewed	13	13
Calendars Observed	2 Family Law, 1 Small Claims, 1 Unlawful Detainer	1 Unlawful Detainer, 3 Family Law
Courthouse Locations	Fresno County Superior Courthouse	Fresno County Superior Courthouse
<b>San Francisco</b>		
Dates of Observation	July 7-11	May 5–7
Number of Cases Fully Observed	29	24*
Number of Self Represented Litigants Interviewed	13	29
Calendars Observed	2 Name Change, 2 Civil Harassment	1 Name Change, 2 Unlawful Detainer, 2 Civil Harassment
Courthouse Locations	San Francisco County Superior Courthouse	San Francisco County Superior Courthouse

\* Two calendars were unlawful detainer settlement conferences and therefore could not be observed.  
 Note: The numbers in this figure report the number of cases and the number of self-represented litigants observed. Most cases involved more than one self-represented litigant.

While the researchers worked with self-help center directors to select court calendars that would maximize the number of self-represented litigants observed, the results were unpredictable. The number of self-represented litigants in court dictated the sample sizes obtained on the observation days. Furthermore, the researchers had no control over the proportion of self-represented litigants who had used the self-help centers. Also, many litigants were unwilling to speak to researchers after their cases. Researchers did not approach litigants who were visibly upset or angry. As a result of all these factors, the sample sizes across all sites—and particularly the sample sizes of self-represented litigants who used the centers—were small.

## Customer Satisfaction Surveys

In collaboration with staff of the self-help pilot programs, AOC staff developed self-administered customer satisfaction surveys to solicit customers' feedback on the services they received. There were two versions of the survey: one that targeted drop-in customers and one that targeted workshop participants. The majority of the questions on the two surveys overlapped, with a small number of questions being specific to either drop-in or workshop services.

### **Survey Content**

Topics addressed on the surveys included whether customers had a better understanding of their case, the laws that apply to their case, and the court process; whether customers felt more prepared to proceed with the next steps in their case; how customers perceived their interactions with center staff; and whether customers would recommend the self-help centers to others. (These questions are referred to as “general satisfaction questions” in this report.) In addition, customers were asked to rate the helpfulness of specific types of services they received. (These questions are referred to as “service assessment questions” in this report.) The survey also included a space for customers to provide general comments or suggestions about the services they received. Customers who participated in workshops were asked whether they received assistance anywhere other than the workshop, and if they participated in the workshop via videoconferencing, they were asked to rate the features of the equipment and facilities. See Appendix K for the survey instruments.

Other items included on the surveys were self-reported customer demographics (language, race/ethnicity, income, and education), as well as the case types with which customers sought assistance and the services they received, both of which were completed by self-help center staff prior to distributing the surveys. This additional information was collected to investigate whether levels of satisfaction varied by demographics, case types, or services received.

### **Survey Administration**

Customer satisfaction surveys were distributed in each of the programs providing direct

services to litigants—in Butte/Glenn/Tehama, Contra Costa, Fresno, and San Francisco counties—during a two-week sample period, May 17 through May 28, 2004. Due to the extremely high customer volume in San Francisco County’s program, AOC staff assisted with administering the surveys; otherwise, program staff were responsible for distributing the surveys. Drop-in surveys were not distributed in Contra Costa County because workshops were the only direct services the program provided. Workshop surveys in Contra Costa County were distributed only in the remote location for the videoconferenced workshop because the Contra Costa County program brought the videoconferencing component to an already existing set of workshops. Figure B.5 provides a summary of the number of surveys completed in each program.

**Figure B.5  
Number of Customer Satisfaction Surveys Completed**

	<b>Drop-In</b>	<b>Workshop</b>	<b>Total</b>
Butte	23	49	72
Contra Costa	N/A*	9	9
Fresno	44	N/A**	44
San Francisco	75	29	104
<b>Total</b>	<b>142</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>229</b>

\* The Contra Costa program does not provide drop-in services

\*\* The Fresno program offers workshops, but no workshops were held during the sample period.

For the drop-in customer survey, program staff were instructed to complete a “staff use only” section, noting the case types and services provided after the customer received service. For the workshop participant survey, customers were instructed to write the name of the workshop and workshop date at the top of the form. Customers were then asked to complete the survey and place it in a drop box in the center or, in the case of workshops, return to the survey to the workshop facilitator. Surveys were available in English, Spanish, Chinese, and Russian. Participation in the survey was completely voluntary.

Program staff were directed not to give surveys to customers who were only picking up forms, making appointments, or checking times and locations of court dates or workshops. This was done because such services are less substantive than other services that the self-help centers provide, and it would be difficult for customers to provide meaningful feedback on such limited contact. Furthermore, these customers would have likely spent more time filling out the survey than actually receiving assistance.

**Response Rates and Representativeness**

Response rates on the surveys were estimated, based on the self-help centers’ average monthly volumes from Fall 2003 through Spring 2004 (actual months varied slightly by

program)<sup>4</sup>. Response rates for the drop-in survey were relatively low, ranging from 14 percent to 58 percent (26 percent for all programs combined), but somewhat higher for workshop surveys, ranging from 47 percent to 60 percent (51 percent for all programs combined). See Figure B.6 below for response rate information by site and by survey version.

**Figure B.6**  
**Estimated Response Rates for Customer Satisfaction Surveys**

<b>Program</b>	<b>Drop-In</b>	<b>Workshop</b>	<b>Drop-In and Workshop Combined</b>
Butte	14%	47%	26%
Fresno	58%	N/A*	58%
San Francisco	24%	60%	29%
<b>Total</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>51%</b>	<b>31%</b>

\* No workshops were held in Fresno during the sample period.

Customers who responded to the surveys were more or less representative of the overall customer populations (as determined by the intake and service tracking data) in terms of demographics and case types, with some exceptions. Significant differences between customer satisfaction survey respondents and the overall customer population are noted below.

- Survey respondents in Butte/Glenn/Tehama counties were significantly more likely to be male (47 percent, compared with 35 percent of all customers); more likely not to have completed high school (35 percent versus 22 percent), but otherwise not very different in terms of educational attainment; less likely to be involved in dissolution (15 percent versus 29 percent) and civil harassment cases (5 percent versus 14 percent); and more likely to be involved in other family law cases (17percent versus 7 percent) than the overall customer population.
- In Fresno County, survey respondents were more likely than the general customer population to be female (74 percent, compared with 59 percent of all customers). They were also more likely to be seeking assistance with custody issues (34 percent versus 4 percent) and less likely to be seeking assistance with visitation (34 percent versus 43 percent), although almost equally likely to be involved in a dissolution case.
- In San Francisco County, survey respondents were more likely to have an associates degree or higher (52 percent, compared with 37 percent of all customers) and less likely to be involved a civil harassment case (28 percent versus 10 percent).

<sup>4</sup> Response rates were not calculated for the workshop surveys in Contra Costa County due to the fact that the videoconferencing component was new and the volume in the early workshops was relatively low, so no reliable volume estimates could be produced. Therefore, customer satisfaction data from Contra Costa County are provided for descriptive purposes only.

Results should be interpreted with caution due to both the low response rates and possible non-response bias.<sup>5</sup> Some types of customers may have been more likely than others to complete the survey—including, in addition to those with different demographics characteristics or different case types—those who were more satisfied with the services they received. As a result, the generalizability of findings to all self-help center customers is limited. Nonetheless, the survey results can provide important descriptive information about customers’ perspectives on the services they received at the self-help centers. Results are presented across all programs and for each individual program, as well across survey versions and for drop-in and workshop services separately.

## Virtual Self-Help Law Center Data Collection

### **User Intake Survey**

The Contra Costa County self-help pilot project serves customers primarily through the Internet, and therefore, a separate plan for collecting data was developed. BPA, in collaboration with the AOC, Contra Costa center staff, and the Web developer, designed an intake form that “popped up” on screen when customers accessed the Web site. These forms were put online in February 2004, and 353 users completed the online intake form between February 20, 2004, and October 31, 2004.

In designing this survey, the need for information on the characteristics of people using the Web site had to be balanced against the safety and privacy concerns of users. Therefore, the Web developer and AOC technology attorney did extensive research to come up with the safest solution possible for litigants while maintaining the need to collect data. Web-based surveys and Web site usage tracking software use cookies, which are mini-files placed in the “temp” directory of users’ computers. A session cookie erases itself as soon as the user closes out of the browser, whereas a persistent cookie stays in the directory until it expires, the expiration date determined by the programmer who creates the script that makes the cookie. Cookies may only be accessed by the domain that creates them, and the domain name is part of the cookie’s name. As a result, a computer-savvy person could go into a user’s “temp” directory and identify that he or she had been on the Virtual Self-Help Law Center site. In the case of guardianship or domestic violence issues, this could put the user at risk.

An additional concern was to ensure that users saw the intake forms only once, so they would not feel bothered by continual requests for data and potentially driven away from using the site. However, accomplishing this would involve tracking a single user over multiple visits, which would require a persistent cookie. Therefore, the Web developer used a generic domain to collect the user data. That way, a cookie could be dropped without connecting the user to the cc-couthelp.org Web site. Using the generic domain

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<sup>5</sup> In spite of the fact that response rates were low, survey results were very consistent with those from similar studies.

also allowed for the collection of IP addresses that would allow intake survey data to be linked to feedback survey data and/or to NetTracker Web site usage statistics. (See below for further discussion of NetTracker.)

### **User Feedback Survey**

For visitors to the Virtual Self-Help Law Center, a different type of customer satisfaction survey was used. Researchers worked with Contra Costa County program staff and the Web developer to create a “pop-up” survey that would appear when users visited certain more helpful sections of the Web site, such as videos or the glossary. Questions on the survey included case type, types of help received (e.g., forms, instructions, procedural information, referrals), overall goal for visiting the site, whether users found the information they wanted, whether users understood the information they received, and how easy or difficult it was to navigate the Web site. Space was also provided for users to give suggestions for improving the site. From February 2004 through October 2004, fewer than 40 visitors chose to respond to the survey. Due to the extremely small sample size and concerns about how representative those responses were, the results are not presented in this report.

### **Web Site Usage Tracking Data**

Monthly reports on usage of the Contra Costa Web site, including number of visits, number and type of pages accessed, and days and times of peak usage were provided by DreamHost and analyzed to better understand how the Virtual Self-Help Law Center was being used. Because the DreamHost statistics provided only very basic information, the Web developer and AOC technology attorney worked with program staff to locate and install more sophisticated Web tracking software. This software, NetTracker, was installed in July 2004 and provides the same types of information as Dream Host, but it also allows users to examine in detail the length of time spent on the site, at what points users entered and exited the site, and what paths users took through the site. NetTracker generates a wide array of both standard and customized reports, which could be filtered for different segments of the user population. DreamHost data are analyzed for October 2003 through July 2004, and NetTracker data are analyzed for July through November 2004.

Weekly Atomz reports provide information on the top keywords searched by Web site users. Atomz data are analyzed for October 2003 through July 2004.

### **Web Site User Testing**

To better understand how helpful the Virtual Self-Help Law Center Web site is for litigants, a clinic was set up in the Contra Costa County law library to observe litigants using the Web site and to gather their feedback. Because the guardianship content was the best developed of all of the content areas, this clinic focused on the guardianship section of the site.

The procedure for testing is as follows. Litigants would go to the forms window for the guardianship packet. Rather than giving out the packet, at a cost to the litigant, the forms staff would tell litigants about the program (providing them with a flyer) and direct them to the law library where the AOC technology attorney or his assistant would be located. The clerks explained that the court was offering the free use of guardianship forms on a computer, free information, and help with the computer.

When they reached the law library, customers were asked to sign in and give consent to be observed using the site, and to have someone follow up in the court files to track the process and outcome of their case. Subjects were set up on the Web site and AOC staff took detailed notes on how customers used the site and what problems they encountered. AOC staff tried as much as possible to let customers use the site on their own, but they offered assistance when customers could not find the information that applied to their case or otherwise got stuck. After using the site, customers were asked to fill out customer satisfaction surveys, but only six were completed, a number inadequate for analysis.

At the end of the session, litigants were sent back to the probate legal technicians for processing or referred to other resources.

The clinic was in operation every Friday from mid-August through October 2004. On some days, no customers were seen, so analysis is based on data collected on 6 Fridays from 12 subjects, three of whom did not actually use the site because AOC staff felt the site would not be useful for their particular situation.

### Self-Help Management Project Evaluation Design

Because the program design, goals, and activities of the Los Angeles County program differ markedly from the four other self-help pilot projects, the research team developed a unique evaluation design for Los Angeles County. This design consisted of three activities: site visits, monthly activity logs, and provider telephone surveys.

The evaluation design called for two site visits. The first visit was conducted in April 2003, and the second visit was conducted a year later. The first visit consisted of a series of interviews with key personnel involved in the design of the Self-Help Management Project. In addition, the research team met with a selection of self-help providers to gain a baseline understanding of the state of self-help services and interagency collaboration. The second site visit focused on understanding the implementation of the Self-Help Management Project, including the types of collaborative activities the project has facilitated, the challenges it has faced, how the project helped new self-help centers develop services, and the strategies it developed for engaging providers. This visit included interviews with Self-Help Management Project staff and key partners, as well as observation of management center activities, including collaborative meetings.

The second component of the Los Angeles County program evaluation was monthly

activity logs, which were completed by the program's managing attorney. The purpose of these activity logs was to systematically document the major activities of the project, including collaborative meetings; trainings for providers; creation and dissemination of forms, packets, policies, and protocols; and facilitation of collaborative funding and projects. This system allowed the evaluation team to analyze not only what activities the Self-Help Management Project had completed, but also which providers and partners the project had the most success in engaging. The monthly activity log was designed by NPC in collaboration with the managing attorney. The logs were completed from May 2003 to April 2004.

The final component of the Los Angeles County program evaluation was a telephone survey conducted by NPC with self-help service providers in Los Angeles County. The telephone survey consisted of a baseline wave conducted in May and June 2003 and a follow-up wave in May 2004. The purpose of the interviews was to document the following:

- The state of collaborative relations among providers and between providers and law schools, bar associations, and the courts;
- The organizations and individuals with whom the centers collaborated;
- The type of technical support and training self-help service providers welcomed; and
- The type of collaborative opportunities the centers welcomed.

The information from the telephone surveys was compared with the activities recorded in the monthly activity logs to identify areas in which the Self-Help Management Project was addressing needs identified by the telephone respondents.

During the baseline wave conducted in May and June 2003, the research team used a list of 40 self-help agencies compiled by the Central court and provided by the managing attorney of the Self-Help Management Project.<sup>6</sup> The evaluation telephone interviewer determined that many of the agencies on the list either were no longer in operation or did not actually provide self-help services, and therefore, telephone interviews were conducted with 19 of the original 40 agencies on the list. For the second wave of interviews, the researchers provided the Self-Help Management Project with the list of agencies interviewed in the first wave. Self-Help Management Project staff were asked to update contact information for any of these individuals as necessary and to suggest additional agencies with whom they had worked during the past year. Appendix I contains a list of the agencies represented by the interview respondents. Appendix K contains a sample of the survey instrument.

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<sup>6</sup> This was not a list created by the managing attorney but rather the most recently compiled list of self-help providers used by the central court.

## Supplemental Data Sources

Several other data sources that were not a part of the original evaluation design were consulted to provide background information or complement research findings.

**Quarterly reports.** Every quarter, the center director submitted reports to the AOC, and these included a discussion of the project's development, such as changes in staffing, services offered, and collaborations developed. The reports also included data on the number of customers served, as well as the director's evaluation of the project's progress and goals for the future. The quarterly reports provided the research team with more frequent snapshots of the project's development than the two rounds of site visits.

**Writing exercises.** After the data collection was completed, AOC project staff identified a need for additional information and developed a structured writing exercise for self-help center directors to complete, including a project timeline marking major milestones, information about other forms of assistance available to litigants in their counties, and detailed workshop descriptions.

**Project proposals.** Proposals were consulted to fill in additional background information on identified needs or gaps in the county, as well as the rationale for the program.

Other data included:

- Project invoices for information on operational expenses;
- Notes from conference calls and meetings with pilot project staff;
- Census data for background information on county population;
- Judicial Branch Statistical Information System (JBSIS) data for background information on court filings; and
- Evaluations of other self-help centers and services.