San Diego County Webform Project – a no cost solution

Problem: Communication between parties and the court regarding continuance requests and stipulation notifications was inefficient and heavily consumed resources. Specifically, significant staff time was spent on the phone by IC Clerks and Courtroom clerks taking calls and returning messages from counsel who wanted to continue cases or alert the court to a "do not read" or stipulation. Worse, the attorneys would call repeatedly and call multiple clerks to try to "reach a person" and get an answer. Additional problems were that the clerks could not always get the information to the judge in time for the judge to avoid reading a file unnecessarily. Finally, attorneys would tell the court that they had called to alert the court of a continuance request or stip but there was no way to verify that statement.

Solution: The court created a webform using free Google Documents and all communications are now submitted to the court using an online form unique to each department. The form is live 7/24 and attorneys and parties can make their requests and notifications from any computer, tablet, smartphone, etc.

Results/Benefits

1. Incoming call volume to clerks has dropped precipitously;
2. We have a written record of when a request was made;
3. We have reduced ex-parte concerns since the communication is in writing instead of by phone;
4. Judges get the alert quicker that they may not need to read a file;
5. Attorneys and SRLs can alert the court 7/24 from any internet enabled phone or computer; and
6. The clerks can review the requests at THEIR convenience, even while court is in session, and respond as time permits via the most convenient method

Process: The moment a user submit a webform entry, the pertinent staff receive an e-mail notification that a new request has been made. The staff view the entry in a spreadsheet that resides online and takes appropriate action. The staff documents the action taken on the spreadsheet so that all users know the request has been addressed and what was the resolution. For example where parties reach a stipulation and want a case off calendar, the clerk acknowledges to the requestor that the request was granted, takes the case off calendar, and, where applicable, alerts the judge to not spend time preparing that case.