

ACTION PLAN TO ASSIST SELF-REPRESENTED LITIGANTS

Kern County Superior Court

**Kathleen A. Kress
Court Projects Manager**

- 1. What target group(s) will be served?**
 - a. Self-represented litigants with limited reading ability**
 - Adult literacy study conducted by Dr. Stephen Reder at Portland State University estimates that 25% of Kern County population lacks the literacy skills usually attained by the fourth grade. An additional 26% of Kern County population lacks the literacy skills usually attained by the eighth grade. This estimate is based upon indicators from 1990 census data. Estimates are now being revised for 2000 census data, but this information is not yet available.
 - b. Self-represented litigants who speak Spanish as their primary language**
 - Year 2000 census data shows that 29% of Kern County residents over the age of five speak Spanish as their primary language at home. Approximately half of these residents (14.8% of County total) indicate that they speak English at a level below “very well”.
 - c. Self-represented litigants involved in probate (guardianship and small estate) matters.**
 - Probate Division statistics from comparable months shows that the number of pro per litigants has increased 75% in the past two years.

- 2. What kinds of services will be offered:**
 - a. “Easy reader” informational materials in English and Spanish**
 - b. Court preparation workshops in English and Spanish**
 - c. Part-time Probate Advisor in the Probate Division, who will provide individual assistance to the public**

- 3. What are the major languages spoken in your community? What resources do you have for translation, interpretation?**
 - a. Spanish**
 - Year 2000 census data shows that 29% of Kern County residents over the age of five speak Spanish as their primary language at home. Approximately half of these residents (14.8% of County total) indicate that they speak English at a level below “very well.”

- b.** Resources available for Spanish language translation and interpretation
 - Bilingual English/Spanish-speaking employees are available to each division for interpreter services.
 - Qualified staff and contract court interpreters are available primarily for criminal cases. They occasionally assist staff with civil cases as time permits.
 - Accredited translators are available at a cost of \$0.14 to \$0.22 per word (translations would be verified by our Court Interpreter / Coordinator).
- 4.** Where will you provide services?
- a.** “Easy reader” informational materials will be provided in the appropriate divisions of Kern County courthouses. They will also be available at community-based organizations and/or the public library.
 - b.** Court preparation workshops can be conducted at the courthouses, county facilities, and/or the offices of community-based organizations.
 - c.** The bilingual Family Law Advisor will be based in the Family Law Facilitator’s Office at Kern County Superior Court, 1415 Truxtun Avenue, Bakersfield.
 - d.** Services of a part-time Probate Advisor in the Probate Division will be available at Kern County Superior Court, 1415 Truxtun Avenue, Bakersfield.
- 5.** What resources are available at the state level that you can use/adapt?
- a.** “Low lit” information should be available on the AOC Self-Help website within the next year.
 - b.** Spanish information should be available on the AOC Self-Help website within the next year.
- 6.** What programs are in place that can be built on?
- a.** Basic information about court procedures is available on the AOC’s Self-Help website.
 - b.** Our juvenile division is creating basic “quick reference” information handout cards, which will be available in both English and Spanish. The format of these cards can be modified by other divisions for their particular needs.
 - c.** The Family Law Facilitator’s Office recently began conducting workshops on child custody and visitation, and contested and uncontested divorce.
 - d.** Kern County Counsel provides a part-time attorney who functions as Small Claims Advisor. This employee is stationed at the small claims counter at Kern County Superior Court, 1415 Truxtun Avenue, Bakersfield.

7. What materials do you have that could be adapted for statewide use?
 - a. Format for “quick reference” information handouts, available in both English and Spanish.
 - b. Scripts and handout materials from Family Law Facilitator workshops.

8. Approval
 - a. Which key decision makers do you need to approve your proposed program(s)?
 - Presiding Judge
 - Court Executive Officer
 - b. How will you convince them?
 - A presentation will be made to the Court Executive Officer. Key administrators who engaged in the planning retreats will make this presentation.
 - Court Executive Officer will present ideas to our existing Community Outreach Committee, which includes the Presiding Judge, several judicial officers and representatives from community stakeholder groups.

9. Assuming you will expand your county team to further plan and implement your program(s), who else will be included in the implementation team? Please list names and titles of potential implementation team members below.
 - a. Judicial officers
 - Hon. H. A. “Skip” Staley, Chair – Community Outreach Committee
 - Commissioner Theresa Goldner
 - Commissioner Louie Vega
 - b. Court staff
 - Cheryl Chicky, Assistant Court Executive Officer for Regional Courts
 - Annette Heath, Law Librarian
 - Theresa Gary, Family Law Facilitator
 - Debra Matheney, Director of Family Court Services
 - Lorenzo Hurtado, Court Interpreter/Coordinator
 - Kathleen Kress, Court Projects Manager
 - c. Community-based organizations
 - Carmen Burgos, Greater Bakersfield Legal Assistance
 - Suzan Hopper, Executive Director, Kern County Bar Association
 - Jan Sublet, Executive Director, Alliance Against Family Violence and Sexual Assault
 - Bonita Coyle, Executive Director, Independent Living Center of Kern

- Fred Drew, Executive Director, Community Action Partnerships of Kern (formerly Kern County Economic Opportunity Corporation)
 - Donna Hylton, Executive Director, Kern Adult Literacy Council
 - Jim Varley, Administrator – Division of Communication, Kern County Superintendent of Schools
 - Kristi Coons, Community Outreach Manager, Kern County Library
 - Martin Castro, Executive Director, Mexican-American Opportunity Foundation
- d. Media**
- Mike Trihey, iknowbakersfield.com (website for community news and events)
 - Diane Hardisty or designee, *The Bakersfield Californian* (editorial page)
 - Lois Henry or designee, *The Bakersfield Californian* (local news)
- e. Other**
- Kendra Roberts, Kern County Counsel – Small Claims Advisor

10. Resource issues

- a. Methods to re-engineer existing court programs to limit the need for new funds?**
- Develop an ongoing collaborative network between the courts and community-based organizations to maximize resources from grants and foundations funding. This network will be used for all services proposed in this action plan.
- b. Cost to establish program(s); funding sources**
- “Easy reader” informational materials – see Attachment A
 - Court preparation workshops – see Attachment B
 - Part-time Probate Advisor in the Probate Division – see Attachment C
- c. How will you promote the program to funding sources?**
- At the state level? Through involvement of the Presiding Judge and Court Executive Officer in state-wide court-related organizations
 - At the local level? Through collaboration with community-based organizations
- d. What will be required level of staffing, and what skills and training will staff require?**
- The Court Projects Manager, who is required to have a Bachelor’s degree plus three years of administrative experience, will coordinate all projects. This position requires initiative, knowledge of community resources and funding opportunities, the ability to develop effective collaborative working

relationships, grant-writing skills and project management skills.

- The bilingual Family Law Advisor will be hired in the job classification of Legal Assistant I. This position requires graduation from high school and three years of experience preparing a variety of legal documents, supplemented by coursework in legal office practices and business law; or completion of an approved legal paraprofessional training program and two years of experience in the preparation of legal documents; or any equivalent combination of training and experience.
 - The Probate Advisor will be hired will also be a Legal Assistant I.
- e. What kinds of technology will you utilize (e.g., personal computers, Internet, interactive voice-telephone response systems, informational videos that explain court procedures, etc.)?
- Information videos will be used for court preparation workshops.
 - The court will pursue collaboration with the Kern County Superintendent of Schools, which offers state-of-the-art equipment to create new audiovisual resources.
 - We do not anticipate the use of additional technology for the other proposed projects. We may try a computer program that translates English text into Spanish, but the final product would need to be verified by a certified court interpreter. We will use word processing software that evaluates the reading level of text contained in informational materials.
- f. What amount of space will be needed? Will the program be housed in the courthouse or elsewhere? If in the courthouse, how will you ensure it is easily accessible?
- The Family Law Advisor will be primarily based in the Family Law Facilitator's Office of the Kern County Superior Court, 1415 Truxtun Avenue, Bakersfield.
 - The Probate Advisor will be located in the Probate Division of Kern County Superior Court at 1415 Truxtun Avenue, Bakersfield.
 - Additional services may be provided at Kern County courthouses, county buildings, or the offices of community-based organizations.
 - Most Kern County courthouses and county buildings are located within easy access of public transportation routes. The representative from the Independent Living Center will address disabled access issues.

- 11. With whom can or should you develop partnerships?**
- 12. What role should each partner play?**
 - a. Greater Bakersfield Legal Assistance – link with low income clientele**
 - b. Alliance Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault – link with domestic violence clientele**
 - c. Kern County Bar Association – link with attorneys**
 - d. Kern Adult Literacy Council – guidance on literacy questions**
 - e. Kern County Superintendent of Schools – technical assistance in creating audiovisual resources**
 - f. Kern County Library – assistance in distributing information materials and conducting workshops**
 - g. Community Action Partnership of Kern – link with low income clientele**
 - h. Independent Living Center of Kern – link with disabled community**
 - i. Mexican-American Opportunity Foundation – link with Spanish-speaking community**
 - j. All partners will be expected to engage in program development, share information and collaborate in pursuing grant and foundation funding.**
- 13. What regional partnerships might be possible?**
 - a. San Joaquin Valley Courts**
- 14. What counties might be appropriate to partner with?**
 - a. Fresno**
 - b. Kings**
 - c. Madera**
 - d. Merced**
 - e. San Joaquin**
 - f. Stanislaus**
 - g. Tulare**
- 15. Who will advocate your program to the following constituencies?**
 - a. The courts – Court Executive Officer + court staff**
 - b. The bar – Executive Director, Kern County Bar Association**
 - c. The public – Presiding Judge, Court Executive Officer, Court Projects Manager, all partners from the media and community-based organizations**
 - d. The legislature and Board of Supervisors – Presiding Judge and Court Executive Officer**
 - e. Media – Presiding Judge, Court Executive Officer, Court Projects Manager, partners from the media and community-based organizations**

- 16.** What is the projected time frame for planning and implementing the program?
- 17.** List below the tasks to be completed to implement the program(s) and the person responsible for completing the task.
 - a.** “Easy reader” informational materials – see Attachment A
 - b.** Court preparation workshops – see Attachment B
 - c.** Part-time Probate Advisor – see Attachment C
- 18.** What criteria will you use to evaluate the program’s effectiveness? Who will conduct the evaluation?
 - a.** Evaluation questionnaires will be developed for each project, with assistance from the Applied Research Center at California State University Bakersfield. The questionnaires will be distributed at the time the service is provided. The client will be asked to complete and return the questionnaire.
 - b.** “Easy reader” informational materials – see Attachment A
 - c.** Court preparation workshops – see Attachment B
 - d.** Part-time Probate Advisor – see Attachment C
- 19.** Since true institutional change transcends personalities and outlives its initial creators, what steps will you take to ensure that your program will be self-sustaining, and not dependent on a strong sponsor or other individual for its continuance?
 - a.** The Community Outreach Committee will champion services for self-represented litigants. A judicial officer chairs this committee on a rotating annual basis. The Court Projects Manager, a permanent position, functions as the administrative link for this committee, and will assure that the incumbent committee chair is aware of issues related to self-represented litigants. The Community Outreach Committee meets monthly.
 - b.** Collaboration with community-based organizations is a key component of our planning. Representatives from these stakeholder groups have a vested interest in advocacy for their constituents who are self-represented litigants. These stakeholders will continue to be involved when they know that the interests of their clients are heard and addressed. Their involvement is further assured if they receive funding as the result of collaborative ventures with the courts.
 - c.** Effective publicity and media coverage will assure that the community is aware of services for self-represented litigants. The public will demand continuation of these services if they prove truly helpful. The Court Projects Manager will coordinate publicity and media relations.

ATTACHMENT A

PROJECT BUDGET, TIMELINE AND EVALUATION

Project Summary: "Easy reader" information materials will be prepared in English and Spanish. The Probate Division will be the initial focus of this project. As templates are designed and additional funding is attained, the scope of the project will increase to include other divisions, such as Small Claims and Family Law.

FUNDING

Description	Cost
Spanish language translation services	\$1000
Typeset and print information materials in user friendly format	\$1416
TOTAL	\$2416.00

TIMELINE

Timeframe	Action	Person Responsible
Sept 1, 2002	Start date for Probate Advisor	Probate Examiner
Oct 1 – Dec 1, 2002	Probate Advisor prepares basic information sheets	Probate Examiner
Oct 1, 2002	Research translation/literacy services available from the Supt of Schools and contractors	Court Projects Manager
Dec 1, 2002	Develop evaluation questionnaire to be distributed with handouts. (Seek help from Cal State Bakersfield Applied Research Center)	Court Projects Manager
Dec 1 – Dec 31, 2002	Review and approve information sheets, adjust reading level if necessary	Commissioner Goldner Court Projects Manager
Jan 1 – Jan 20, 2002	Translate information sheets into Spanish	Court Projects Manager
Jan 20 – Jan 31, 2002	Review and approve Spanish information sheets	Court Interpreter / Coordinator
Feb 1 – 28, 2002	Typeset and print information sheets	Court Projects Manager

March 1 – 30, 2002	Generate publicity for information sheets	Court Projects Manager
March 15, 2002	Begin distributing information sheets to the public	Court Projects Manager, Probate Examiner
June 30, 2002	Complete evaluation	Court Projects Manager
Throughout	Research and pursue funding to expand the scope of the project	Court Projects Manager

EVALUATION

Action	Person Responsible
75% of evaluation questionnaires returned will indicate that hand-out materials were helpful	Court Projects Manager

ATTACHMENT B

PROJECT BUDGET, TIMELINE AND EVALUATION

Project Summary: Court preparation workshops will be conducted in English and Spanish. The Family Law Facilitator's Office will be the initial focus of this project. As the credibility of this project grows and additional funding is attained, the scope of the project will increase to include more topics and other divisions, such as Small Claims and Family Law.

FUNDING

Description	Cost
One full-time bilingual Family Law Advisor (Legal Assistant) \$16.31/hr X 40 hours X 4.3 weeks X 12 months = \$33,664 Bilingual pay = \$600 Benefits @ 30% salary = \$10,099	\$44,363
Combination TV/VCR/DVD	\$1000
Supt of Schools – cost to produce new audiovisual resources to be used during preparation workshops	\$20,000
TOTAL	\$65,363.00

TIMELINE

Timeframe	Action	Person Responsible
July 1, 2002	Family Law Facilitator will begin conducting workshops in English on the most common types of cases: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Child Custody/Visitation• Contested Divorce• Default Divorce	Family Law Facilitator
July 1, 2002	Publicize workshops to the community	Court Projects Manager Family Law Facilitator
Sept 1, 2002	Begin recruitment for bilingual Family Law Advisor (Legal Assistant)	Court Personnel Manager
Oct 1, 2002	Research availability of existing audiovisual resources	Court Projects Manager

Nov 1, 2002	Research services available through Supt of Schools to create audiovisual resources	Court Projects Manager
Jan 1, 2003	Obtain copies of existing audiovisual resources	Court Projects Manager
Jan 1, 2003	Hire bilingual Family Law Advisor	Court Personnel Manager Family Law Facilitator
Jan 1 – March 31, 2003	Train bilingual Family Law Advisor	Family Law Facilitator
Jan 1 – Dec 31, 2003	Work collaboratively with Supt of Schools to create audiovisual resources to meet local need	Court Projects Manager Family Law Facilitator
Feb 1, 2003	Incorporate existing audiovisual resources into workshops	Family Law Facilitator
March 1, 2003	Develop questionnaire to be distributed at workshops. (Seek help from Cal State Bakersfield Applied Research Center)	Court Projects Manager
March 1 – April 1, 2003	Publicize the availability of Spanish workshops	Court Projects Manager
April 1, 2003	Begin workshops in Spanish	Family Law Facilitator
May 1, 2003	Begin distributing evaluation questionnaires	Family Law Facilitator
Nov 1, 2003	Tabulate evaluation questionnaires returned in past six months	Court Projects Manager
Throughout	Incorporate new audiovisual resources into the workshops as available	Family Law Facilitator
Throughout	Seek funding for project	Court Projects Manager

EVALUATION

Action	Person Responsible
Sign-in sheets will show that an average of 40 people attended English workshops per week	Family Law Facilitator
Sign-in sheets will show that an average of 20 people attended Spanish workshops per week	Family Law Facilitator
75% of evaluation questionnaires returned will indicate that workshops were helpful	Court Projects Manager

ATTACHMENT C

PROJECT BUDGET, TIMELINE AND EVALUATION

Project Summary: Part-time Probate Advisor (Legal Assistant) will provide individual assistance on guardianship and small estate matters in the Probate Division of Kern County Superior Court.

BUDGET

Description	Cost
Part-time Probate Advisor (Legal Assistant) I - \$16.31/hr X 15 hours/wk X 31 weeks (extra-help position, which is not entitled to benefits)	\$7584.00

TIMELINE

Date	Action	Person Responsible
August 1-15, 2002	Recruit part-time extra-help Probate Advisor (Legal Assistant)	Court Projects Manager
August 15, 2002	Interview, decide who to hire	Commissioner Goldner, Probate Examiner & Asst Probate Examiner
Sept 1, 2002	Start date for Probate Advisor	Probate Examiner
Sept 1, 2002	Develop evaluation questionnaire to be distributed to clients. (Seek help from Cal State Bakersfield Applied Research Center.)	Court Projects Manager
Sept 1 – 30, 2002	Train Probate Advisor; develop methods for tracking number of clients served	Probate Examiner
Sept 1 – 30, 2002	Publicize services that will be provided	Court Projects Manager
Oct 1, 2002	Public contact begins	Probate Examiner
March 31, 2002	Funding deadline	
April 30, 2002	Project report is completed and sent to AOC	Court Projects Manager

EVALUATION

Action	Person Responsible
The Probate Advisor will provide assistance to 450 court patrons before March 31, 2003.	Court Projects Manager
75% of evaluation questionnaires returned will indicate that the Probate Advisor's assistance was helpful to them.	Court Projects Manager