

SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA, COUNTY OF NAPA

Date Submitted May 31, 2002 Contact Name and Phone Tammy Glathe (707) 299-1125

ACTION PLAN TO ASSIST SELF-REPRESENTED LITIGANTS

1. Description of Need:

Strategic plans of the Napa Superior Court as well as the Judicial Council of California identify increasing access to court constituents as a high priority. The increasing number of litigants who are either unable to afford an attorney or elect to represent themselves has resulted the need for self help centers to provide increased access.

In general there are three major challenges to self-represented litigants in Napa County. First, there is no assistance in numerous areas of the law. Although Legal Aid provides representation on some legal issues to those that meet certain financial guidelines, there is no assistance to the working poor other than the Family Law Facilitator. There is no help for self-represented litigants with guardianship, civil harassment, name change, adoption, termination of parental rights, or unlawful detainer cases, and very limited assistance to those in need of restraining orders. There is absolutely no assistance to those who need to respond in a restraining order case or to those who wish to file for a dissolution.

Second, there is a cultural and linguistic challenge. The monolingual Spanish speaking community often is afraid of the judicial system, and this is compounded by the fact that there is virtually no Spanish speaking assistance to people who have non-family law cases. The need for Spanish Speaking assistance is urgent.

Third, there is a geographical challenge. The Napa Court is located in the town of Napa, and a large number of the self-represented population live in rural areas in the northern part of the county. For example, the town of Calistoga is located 27 miles from the City of Napa. It is very difficult for many of the self-represented who do not have a vehicle to obtain court services.

In order to develop a plan to address these general concerns, the Court conducted extensive research. First court staff visited four established self-help centers in Nevada County, Sacramento County, Ventura County, and Maricopa County. Each member of the court's site visit team prepared a report¹ documenting their perspectives on the different approaches taken by the self-help centers. These visits yielded valuable information about what types of services are effective at increasing access to the Court. Although the size of the counties varied, it was clear that the problems experienced by self-represented litigants, such as poverty, illiteracy, transportation and linguistic problems, exist in almost all counties.

¹ Copies of the reports are available upon request.

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Second, the Court conducted a series of four focus groups. These groups consisted of separate sessions with community groups (mostly non-profit agencies), judicial partners (such as law enforcement, public defender, etc.), regional groups (other governmental agencies and large employers) and employees. These focus groups identified the following goals to increase access to court services for self-represented litigants.

1. Provide an “Information Center” to orient people to the court. This should include a point of contact to explain how the court system works and how to get to where you need to go. Ideally, this service would be a collaboration between the court and other government entities to insure that citizens can easily find any government service they need within the government campus.

2. Produce and or make available information to the public, both general about the court system, and specific to addressing problems faced by the self-represented litigant. A variety of methods for communicating this information should be considered: links with community agencies and schools, self-help literature, forms packets and instructions, videos, community access cable channel, increased use of the web, etc. Include referrals to community agencies for resolving problems related to the legal issue(s).

3. Expand available services for family law, small claims and unlawful detainer cases in particular. All focus groups strongly recommended that the hours and types of services offered by the Family Law Facilitator be increased. The public has complained that the extent of services provided by the small claims advisor do not meet their needs. For example, the Small Claims advisors are paralegals working in the County Council's office and are only available to the public on Tuesdays and Wednesdays from 1:00 to 3:30. The advisors assist people over the telephone only; forms are not distributed, although some education is provided. Additional help for unlawful detainer cases was also strongly recommended. The court has experienced an increasing number of pro pers in this area. For example, in 2001, a total of 245 unlawful detainer cases were filed. Of these 232, or 95% involved self-represented plaintiffs. 65 of these cases, or 28%, also had self-represented defendants. Other California Courts who have implemented self help centers have found a high demand for unlawful detainer services. For example, unlawful detainer cases comprised nearly 30% of the assistance provided by the Nevada County Public Law Center in its first year of operation. For all areas, increased mediation was encouraged by the focus groups.

Comments received directly from customers also support the need for increased services for self represented litigants, particularly in the civil area. Customers are asked to rate the promptness, courtesy, efficiency and information given at the front counter via a customer service survey. Generally, the ratings are very high; however, “information” is typically ranked lower than the other categories.

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Customers have made statements such as “Need a civil version of family law facilitator to show people how to fill out forms” and “There needs to be more help filling out small claims forms, such as a booklet or a workshop”. Customers have also expressed frustration that clerks refer people **outside** of the court to places such as Legal Aid or a paralegal when they need legal assistance. Clearly, customers think it is the Court’s responsibility to provide basic information about forms and procedures.

4. Provide referrals to community resources. There is a clear need for referrals to the community that are closely related to legal issues, and the trend is to approach legal problems using a holistic approach. Many litigants are in need of counseling referrals. Guardianship cases often result from substance abuse issues; a parent may be in need of referrals to various treatment resources. Defendants in domestic violence restraining order cases may benefit from referrals to anger management classes. If a defendant in a domestic violence case is served with an order excluding him or her from a residence, referrals to emergency housing may be needed. Substance abuse issues are common in domestic violence cases, as well, and in these situations, parents can often benefit from referrals to parenting classes. In unlawful detainer cases where a customer is facing eviction, referrals to emergency housing resources are crucial; there are often immigration issues, as well. The referral center would be a natural link between the Family Law Facilitator's office and the self-help center for other legal issues. The person who staffs this referral center should be someone who is familiar with resources in the community so that a solid referral base can be established.

5. Increase the amount of assistance provided to the monolingual Spanish speaking population. This group faces extensive cultural, language and literacy barriers that are reducing access to the courts. At present, there is virtually no assistance for self represented litigants, especially the mono-lingual Spanish, many of whom are the working poor and cannot afford to obtain counsel, yet do not qualify for Legal Aid. For those who do qualify for Legal Aid, there is a long waiting list, and many people simply give up. Napa Emergency Women’s Shelter provides help in obtaining restraining orders only and does not give any assistance in any other areas of the law. Assistance needs to be provided in Spanish by staff and written information needs to be available in Spanish. An increased understanding of the Mexican culture is needed by those who work throughout the justice system. More information about the American legal system needs to be communicated in an understandable format to the Latino community.

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6. Provide court services in remote locations. The needs of the self-represented cannot be addressed by simply expanding available services at the courthouse in Napa. For example, many residents in cities outside of Napa may have difficulty getting to the courthouse, as they may not have a driver's license or vehicle. While there is bus transportation, it is limited. In addition, the groups mentioned that the public is intimidated and confused by the court system. Suggestions were as follows:
- Co-locate services in an existing community center, where users are already comfortable and familiar. Ideally, daycare would be provided and sufficient parking would be available. There would be a menu of services available and consistent information given to the public.
 - Bring court services to specific community locations, such as churches, the Farm Workers Bureau, on specific days and times via a mobile center. This center would be capable of assisting users with transactions similar to those planned for the main self-help center.

Discussion with focus group members and analysis of demographic data led to the conclusion that the cities of Calistoga and American Canyon are the most in need of court outpost centers. Calistoga is located 27 miles from the City of Napa where the court is located. The census data for 2000 shows that 38% of the Calistoga population is Latino, many do not speak English. In fact, data prepared by the California Department of Finance shows that the percentage of Latino residents in Calistoga is higher than the statewide percentage of 32.4%. Calistoga also faces significant poverty issues. For example, Calistoga children represent only 19% of the population but nearly 30% of those in poverty. Calistoga also has more school aged children in poverty than any area of the county: 19.9%, compared to 11.5% in the Napa Unified School District. Further, Napa County schools served 142,500 reduced price lunches to students in 1998 (or an average of 6.5 per student) higher than any other bay area county except San Francisco at 9.1.

American Canyon is closer to the City of Napa (11 miles); however, it has the highest area of population growth in Napa County. For example, American Canyon experienced a 17.1% population increase between 1990 and 1998, compared to the second highest growth rate in Napa County of 11.8% experienced by the city of St. Helena. The Department of Finance listed American Canyon as the 7th fastest growing city in the state between 2001 and 2002 due to substantial new housing unit construction. According to the report *Building Family Self-Sufficiency and Preparing Children Ages 0-5 for School by the Bay Area Partnership*, American Canyon also has an overrepresentation of both children and seniors in poverty. Thus, both Calistoga and American Canyon face significant access barriers to the court, including language, poverty and geography.

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Third, the Court looked at available data to further document the extent of the need for services as outlined by the focus groups. The dissolution case data chart shows that the percentage of self-represented litigants (particularly petitioners) remains high even when the number of filings decreases.

Dissolution Cases 1995-2001

	<i>1995</i>	<i>1996</i>	<i>1997</i>	<i>1998</i>	<i>1999</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>2001</i>
<i>Total Filings</i>	<i>633</i>	<i>610</i>	<i>608</i>	<i>602</i>	<i>521</i>	<i>554</i>	<i>558</i>
<i>% of Cases with Pro Per Petitioner</i>	<i>67%</i>	<i>63%</i>	<i>64%</i>	<i>77%</i>	<i>63%</i>	<i>63%</i>	<i>64%</i>

Domestic violence cases are another area where pro per assistance appears warranted. The Court does not keep data to show the number of self represented litigants appearing at domestic violence hearings, however, experience shows that there is rarely an attorney present representing the petitioner. The number of domestic violence hearings has continued to increase. For example, in 1998, there were 305 such hearings. The number of hearings nearly doubled in 2001 (592), while at the same time the number of petitions filed has been decreasing.

Data maintained by the Family Law Facilitator’s office shows that there are large numbers of people who cannot obtain assistance in non-AB 1058 issues. Based on the statistics collected by the Family Law Facilitator’s Survey Project for the year 2001, the Family Law Facilitator sees an average of 62 people per month in person and another 169 per month by telephone, primarily on AB 1058 issues. However, the Family Law Facilitator receives several requests per week for assistance in obtaining default judgments in dissolution cases, and for assistance in cases where the primary issue is custody and/or visitation. The facilitator’s office also receives numerous requests for miscellaneous other assistance, such as registration of foreign judgments, changes of venue, and Civil Harassment injunctive orders. In addition, there is no assistance to those needing to respond to an OSC and TRO, and insufficient assistance to those needing restraining orders.

During the year that these statistics were collected, the Family Law Facilitator was at a remote location, but in May of 2002 the Facilitator’s office was moved to the courthouse. Since the move, the numbers of drop-ins and telephone calls have increased. As of May 22, 2002, there is a waiting list of 40 people and the next available appointment is on June 24. Prior to the move, appointments were scheduled within one to two weeks out with a waiting list of 10. Telephone calls have increased from 39 per week to 60 per week. A report of the number of calls to the facilitator phone number was run to confirm these numbers. The report showed that over a two-week period in May, there were 135 calls, 64% of which resulted in a voice mail message that involves a return call. Many of these clients will also

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need appointments, so the numbers assisted in person will increase as well. These increases are directly attributable to the close proximity of the Clerk's Office, increased awareness of the services offered by the facilitator and the tendency for the public to drop in and ask for help, since they have already made the trip to the courthouse. If the position reverted to .6, then an estimated 113 people per month, or 1,364 per year, would receive no assistance. This figure is based on the 2001 data and does not take into consideration the increase in numbers as a result of the relocation of the Facilitator's office.

At present, the Family Law Facilitator turns away at least 8 requests for assistance in guardianship cases per month. Often these calls indicate that one party is being represented by Legal Aid, leaving all other parties to the action who cannot afford to retain counsel unable to obtain legal representation because of the resulting conflict. Therefore, the party faces an attorney on the other side of the case, yet is unable to find any legal assistance. There is insufficient assistance on Unlawful Detainer cases, as well. No data has been collected in Napa County regarding the numbers of people who are unable to obtain assistance in various areas of the law. However, Nevada County's Public Law Center's statistics for the year 2001-02 reflect that 29.1% of the cases on which assistance is provided are Unlawful Detainer cases. The next largest percentage is 19% in the category of "other", and the Public Law Center has indicated that many of those cases are restraining orders. Some other categories are 6.2% for contract disputes and 6% for small claims. Based on the Public Law Center data, approximately 4 people per day were assisted in these areas alone during 2001/2002, with a total average number per day of 6.4. Because Napa County is similar in size to Nevada County, it appears that the numbers would be similar. However, based on observation by the Family Law Facilitator of the numbers of calls regarding guardianships, it is likely that there would be a higher number of these cases and on small claims cases on which assistance is needed. Napa intends to add an alternative dispute resolution component to the self-help center, as well. Based on the figures of Nevada County and on the Napa County Family Law Facilitator estimates, it appears that at least 1,102 people per year would be impacted if the position were not funded.

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2. *Program Areas:*

The Court's program to address the needs of self-represented litigants includes the following program areas.

- *Expanded Family Law Services.* The Napa Superior Court's facilitator's office is funded solely through AB1058 monies. Additional attorney support (.4 FTE) is needed to provide assistance to litigants in areas not funded by AB1058, such as obtaining default judgements when there is no property and assistance with domestic violence issues. Provision of expanded services to family law litigants was one of the most often stated concerns of the focus groups.
- *General Self-Help Center.* The purpose of this Center is to address other areas of the law such as civil and small claims. This Center would be staffed by an attorney and a bilingual senior clerk position. This staffing model was common to the California self-help centers visited included a clerical position in addition to the attorney manager position who ran the center. These clerks provided direct assistance to customers with legal questions and paperwork. The presence of a bilingual position focusing on the needs of the self-represented will begin to address the needs of the monolingual Spanish community.
- *General Public Information.* This component of the center has three goals: 1) provide general public education about how the court system works 2) provide information to users of the court system regarding how to access the service they need 3) assist with referrals to other agencies. Providing this service will also support another fundamental goal of the court's strategic plan: To promote public understanding of the judiciary and its role in society. Napa Superior Court is also one of the five courts participating in a collaborative effort to develop an education program for youth, focusing on the judiciary. The Court plans to incorporate these materials into the education component of the center.
- *Self-Represented Litigant materials.* The Court has already received an *Innovation Grant* to purchase legal self-help books for the court and public libraries located in Napa County. The Court has also submitted a grant for purchase of other materials needed to implement the Center and has been unofficially notified that partial funding has been received. Funding will still be needed for purchase of materials not covered by either of these grants and to cover printing costs of court developed materials.

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- *Translation of materials.* The Court plans to make as many materials as possible available in Spanish. The Court is also considering developing graphic based materials useful to the monolingual Spanish, illiterate adults and those who speak a language other than Spanish or English. The State Literary Resource Center of California includes county level projections of literacy data collected in California as part of the National Adult Literacy Survey. Data for Napa shows that about 35% of Hispanic males and 36% of Hispanic females are not literate in English. This survey data projects that about 5% of Napa County residents are not literate in English, but the percentage of those who do not understand English when reading it is nearly 7%. Providing some key information in a graphic format would help address this issue.
- *Technology.* The Court has been providing access to case information via a public access terminal for civil cases for over three years. We have received positive feedback from the public regarding the availability of this terminal. One frequent complaint, however, is that there is only one terminal. The public generally finds it very convenient to use the computer instead of having a clerk look up information for them; however, they don't like having to wait to use it. Public terminals in the self- help center will alleviate this problem. The Court also plans to include Internet access to allow access to web that offer free access to legal reference materials and help for self represented litigants. This will enable those who don't have a computer in their home to benefit from the extensive amount of information available on-line. The Court is also looking at software options to aid in the completion of forms, such as Interactive Family Law Program used by San Mateo County.
- *Video Production/Purchase.* Many self help centers use video as a means of communicating information to the public. The Court plans to provide a VCR and series of educational videos for individual or group viewing in the center. For example, the Napa court produced a domestic violence prevention video in Spanish that will be made available. The Court also plans to use video in its document preparation training sessions, as is done in the Sacramento Superior Court. The Court also plans to request copies of videos that have already been produced by the Administrative Office of the Courts as well as other trial courts. Finally, a small number of videos will be purchased, such as the American Bar Association's mediation video.

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- *Court Outposts-Calistoga and American Canyon.* The community has expressed willingness to work with the court to provide space for court outpost centers in existing community centers. It is envisioned that the downtown center and the court outposts located in Calistoga and American Canyon would share staff. The center schedules would be coordinate to facilitate resource sharing and assess the level of need in each location. If this proved unworkable due to volume, scheduling conflicts, etc., additional staffing would be pursued at a later date. Materials needed for the downtown center would also be used at the remote centers. The Court also plans to provide one public access computer at each remote location.

3. *Program Action Plans:*

This program would be a comprehensive service delivery system for self represented litigants and would address transportation, language, cultural and literacy issues. The transportation issue would be addressed by providing two remote locations; one in Calistoga and another in American Canyon. To assist the Spanish speaking population, the remote locations would provide assistance in Spanish. In addition, written materials and videos in Spanish would be provided. This would reduce the monolingual population's fear of the court, as well. An "Information Center" would be developed to orient people to the court, including how the system works and where services are located. To provide specific legal assistance and information, the family law facilitator's role would be expanded to encompass non-1058 issues, including obtaining dissolution judgments and assistance to those in need of restraining orders and to those needing to respond to them. At present, there is no help to defendants in restraining order cases. A self-help center would be developed to provide information on non-family law issues, including guardianships, small claims and unlawful detainer cases. Finally, an important piece of this center would be the development of a system to provide community outreach and referrals.

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a. **Program Description:**

Elements of each program area are described below.

Self-Help Center: This would be a center that provides information and education on non-family law civil cases, including small claims, unlawful detainer and guardianship cases. Assistance would include provision of education materials, legal reference books, one-on-one assistance, various videos, computer terminals with access to court case information and legal web sites. Mediation would be provided when appropriate. Referrals to other local non-profit and government agencies to address other issues would be given as warranted. This center would be staffed by an attorney and Spanish speaking senior legal process clerk. This center would be located at the courthouse.

Information Center: The information center would orient the general public to the court and to where various government offices and agencies are located. The Information Center would be staffed by the senior legal process clerk who would also be able to provide information on how the court system works. It is envisioned that the information center would be located in the main hallway of the courthouse, near the secured entrance, to provide the most visibility to the public. The staffing for this center may change if the volume of the general self-help center requires the full-time assistance of the legal process clerk. The Court is also assessing the feasibility of assigning staff from other divisions to handle this desk on a rotating basis.

Expanded Family Law Center: The scope of work handled by the Family Law Facilitator office will be increased to include provision of assistance in non-1058 issues. Spanish speaking assistance would be provided, as well as education on the cultural differences in the laws of Mexico and the United States. Alternative dispute resolution would be encouraged when appropriate.

Remote Center: Two remote centers would be established with limited hours: One in American Canyon and one in Calistoga. These centers would provide direct assistance in family law, unlawful detainer and small claims cases.

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b. Program Partners:

The Napa Superior Court has a broad view of program partnerships. Some partnerships are those that are essential to completing the day to day work of the court. The Court, however, has a long- standing approach to problem solving that includes working with key community agencies that are not always obvious strategic partners. The Court is planning to develop an increased level of collaboration with a wider range of agencies to insure the development of a successful self-help center. Agencies that may participate in the self-help center, as an advisor, contributor, education partner, or member of the referral database include the following:

Government/Other Agencies

1. Napa County Public Defender
2. Napa County Bar Association
3. Napa County Probation Department
4. Napa County District Attorney
5. Napa County Department of Child Support Services
6. Napa Police Department
7. St. Helena Police Department
8. Calistoga Police Department
9. Napa County Sheriff's Department
10. California Highway Patrol
11. Napa County Health and Human Services
12. Napa County Peer Court
13. Napa County Office of Education
14. Napa Valley Unified School District
15. Calistoga Joint Unified School District
16. St. Helena Unified School District
17. Napa Valley Adult School
18. California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection
19. Napa State Hospital
20. Napa Valley College
21. Napa County Library
22. Napa Community Resources Department

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Non-Profit Agencies

1. Napa Valley Coalition of Non-Profit Agencies
2. Los Latinos del Valle
3. Family Violence Prevention Council
4. Aldea Children and Family Services
5. Area Agency on Aging
6. CA Human Development Corporation
7. Catholic Charities
8. Community Health Clinic Ole´
9. COPE Family Center
10. Family Service of the North Bay
11. Hispanic Network
12. Legal Aid of Napa
13. Napa County Council for Economic Opportunity
14. Napa Emergency Women’s Services
15. Napa Valley Community Housing
16. Napa County Rental Information & Mediation
17. Nuestra Esperanza
18. Volunteer Center
19. Napa County Children and Families Commission
20. Juvenile Justice Network
21. Community Resources for Children
22. United Way of the Bay Area
23. Samaritan Family Center

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c. Program Plan:

Major tasks of the action plan are listed below. There will be significant numbers of smaller level tasks that need to be completed under each of these major headings. Although the Court is taking the lead, many agencies will be involved in establishing the Center.

Task	Deadline	Person/Organization Responsible
Research and apply for funding	May 2002	Court Management
Secure participation from key agencies	October 2002	Court Executive Officer
Gather materials	January 2003	Court Planning and Research Director
Develop referral system	February 2003	Director Family Court Services
Hire and train staff	April 2003	Director Family Court Services
Purchase Equipment	May 2003	Court Information Technology Manager
Purchase Supplies	May 2003	Court Planning and Research Director
Develop additional materials	May 2003	Court Management
Complete Facilities Renovation/Remodel	June 2003	Court Executive Officer
Translate materials	June 2003	Contract Certified Interpreters
Advertise Resources	July 2003	Court Management
Host Grand Opening Ceremony	July 2003	Court Executive Officer
Conduct Program Evaluation	October 2003	Court Planning and Research Director

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d. Existing Resources:

The Court is providing the administrative support needed for the Center. For example, the Court has assigned responsibility for research, grant management, community outreach and program evaluation to the Planning and Research Director. The Court is also allocating a portion of the Director of Family Court Services time to Center development and management. The Court's Information Technology staff will be installing and maintaining the Center computer equipment. The Court is allocating space to the Center. In fact, the Historic Courthouse is being renovated, including a new clerk's office concept that will accommodate the needs of the self-help center. Existing resources will be used to the extent possible to develop materials for use in the Center. For example, each supervisor will be developing brochures that describe court programs in their areas of responsibility that will be made available to the public. Existing staff will also update the court's web page with information helpful to the self-represented litigants.

e. Additional Resources Needed:

The Court has identified the following minimum funding level for the Center.

Family Additional attorney support (.4 FTE)	
to increase services in non-1058 areas of family law	\$ 40,000
Attorney for General Self-Help Center	\$100,000
Judicial Assistant IV – bilingual	\$ 56,000
Translation of materials	\$ 10,000
Materials Purchase	\$ 19,000
Printing Costs	\$ 40,000
Training (staff)	\$ 1,500
Conferences/Travel	\$ 1,500
Equipment - /TV/VCR	\$ 800
Computers	\$ 9,600
Printers	\$ 3,500
Mileage	\$ 1,285
Total	\$283,185

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f. **Evaluation:**

The Court will implement a comprehensive program to evaluate program effectiveness. The Court's Planning and Research Director will be responsible for designing or modifying data gathering tools and analysis of the data, however, the direct service providers such as the self help attorney will be responsible for data collection.

- *Questionnaires* - In order to determine the level of use for various services planned for the Center, the Court will implement a questionnaire similar to that used in Nevada and Ventura Counties. These questionnaires cover the service type requested, the service provided, income, referral source, interpreter services needed, etc.
- *Customer Service Surveys and Interviews*-Periodically, the Court will use a modified survey format that also measures not just the type of service provided but customer satisfaction level. Measures similar to those used on the general public survey already in use include staff courtesy, service efficiency, quality of information, etc.
- *Data Collection*-Data collected by the Facilitator will be expanded to allow more refined assessment of trends and workload. Any Self Help Center data not covered by the questionnaire will also be collected to document services provided and services needed.
- *Workload Analysis*-Basic court workload data such as filings and dispositions will be monitored in relation to the program. For example, the number of small claims case filings has been decreasing in Napa for some time. One theory for this decrease is that potential litigants are discouraged by the insufficient level of assistance available and don't file. If after implementation of the new center the number of filings increase, it could be due to the program's availability. An increased use of mediation may also cause a decrease in the number of court hearings. Data such as these will be monitored on an on-going basis.
- *Community Input*-Input of the larger community will be essential to program evaluation. For example, do other agencies notice an increase in the number of customers resulting from program referrals by the Court? Are customers able to find their way to other agencies due to the availability of information services provided by the Court? The Court will be developing ways of keeping in contact with other agencies, including but not limited to focus groups, to facilitate evaluation of the Center and its services.

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- *Judicial Feedback*-Judges meet regularly with the Court Executive Officer. On a periodic basis, bench officers will be asked to evaluate changes they see in the courtroom in terms of litigant preparedness, understanding of court process, satisfaction with Center services, etc.

4. *State Support:*

In order for the Court to implement a self-help center that is a core component of court operations, stable funding must be provided from the State. One key finding from the site visits conducted by Napa court staff was that all of the centers had stable funding. Although grant funding may have contributed to a component of the center such as technology or the purchase of a van for the mobile center, the centers were not dependent on grant funding for survival. All of them received stable financial support from the Court. It will be impossible to undertake this program without staffing, which requires increased baseline funding. It would also be helpful if the state provided clear policy direction regarding services for self represented litigants.

More information sharing between the Court programs is also needed. For example, the type of information that has been shared lately through the PINetwork has been very helpful in regards to self-represented litigants. It would be helpful if the Administrative Office of the Courts had a section of Serranus devoted to research and planning information, such as demographic trends in California and links to other sites. It would also be helpful if information developed by existing centers could be shared via the AOC. For example, through messages sent to the PINetwork listserve it was clear that trial courts have developed many videos helpful to self represented litigants. It would reduce overall program costs for individual courts and improve programs statewide if resources such as these videos (as well as other materials) developed by one court were made available to all courts by the AOC.

The Court sees potential for collaboration with other agencies at the state level as well as the Judicial Council. For example, the Department of Education could be of great assistance as a partner in implementing the public education component of the Center. Other agencies with a broad scope of responsibilities such as the California Health and Human Services Agency may also help the courts in identifying health care, social services, public assistance, job training and rehabilitation resources in their communities. A Judicial Council collaboration with agencies such as Health and Human Services and large non-profit agencies such as United Way may result in the creation of a statewide database for referrals to non-legal services that many litigants need. This would go a long way towards solving the problems faced by litigants in a holistic manner and would avoid each local court having to undertake this project.

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5. Unique Approaches:

The combination of services Napa plans to include is somewhat unique. The community referral concept is one of convenience, so that non-legal issues, such as emergency housing, food, transportation and employment would be addressed along with the legal issues. Although most counties recognize that it would be advantageous to the public to have some assistance in non-legal problems, Napa county is unique in that the size of the County is large enough to generate the need, yet small enough so that the need can be addressed without committing huge resources in order to implement the plan.

The Center will also include a strong public education component that is related to the Court's involvement in the statewide public education effort. This element will help the court achieve both access and public education goals via the center.

The Court's collaboration with the education community, non-profit community, local government and legal community is extensive. This demonstrates leadership in the resolution of problems of concern to the community as a whole, not just the court. The Court needs to demonstrate this level of leadership in order to remain a relevant and viable institution of government.

6. Sustaining the Action Plan

The Court's strategic plan is based on the fundamental values first articulated in the Trial Court Performance Standards: Access to Justice, Expedition and Timeliness, Equality Fairness and Integrity, Independence and Accountability and Public Trust and Confidence. These values also create the core of our vision statement.

The Napa strategic plan recognizes that access to justice may be reduced through all types of barriers including financial, linguistic, literacy, confusing procedures, geography, etc. The comprehensive nature of the action plan will allow the court to address all of the barriers to insure access is provided to self represented litigants. Access to Justice will continue to be an enduring value for the Court regardless of changes in presiding judge or court executive officer. In addition, the Court has made a commitment to the community to increase services to self-represented litigants and the community will hold the court accountable for making progress in this area.

7. Other Comments