

ACTION PLAN TO ASSIST SELF-REPRESENTED LITIGANTS

1. *Description of Need:*

In narrative form, please describe the need that the Action Plan is intended to address. Include here information such as caseload data, survey results, languages spoken, and any other information that documents the scope of the need of self-represented litigants in your county.

The Superior Court of Sacramento County applied funding from the planning grant to establish a project team and conduct two planning workshops and a public forum to assess the needs of the County's self-represented litigants, the services currently available, and how to close the gap. The first planning workshop attended by court staff and service providers resulted in the compilation of an extensive list of services and resources currently available to self-represented litigants.

A Self-Represented Litigants Community Forum was conducted on February 8, 2002 and attended by over 50 representatives of community-based service organizations, local government, and the Sacramento Superior Court, all sharing an interest in the needs of people who represent themselves in their interaction with the court. The objectives of the Forum were as follows:

- Develop a profile of persons in Sacramento County who have represented or may in the future need to represent themselves in legal proceedings within Sacramento's Superior Court;
- Assist the Court in distributing and collecting a survey of persons who fit the profile;
- Identify currently available court and community-based services for the populations profiled as self-represented litigants;
- Identify the gaps in services for self-represented litigant populations.

The inventory of current services developed at the December planning workshop was presented at the Forum to seed the discussion of the objectives. There were several recurring themes when each of the topic areas was discussed within the breakout groups.

- Understanding and navigating the court system is complex and confusing, and is a significant barrier to self-represented litigants.
- The growing ethnic communities, particularly the Asian and Slavic, require language and cultural support to access the services available.
- Addressing access issues via person-to-person services (vs. documents or technology) is more effective when literacy, language, and culture create the barriers to doing business with the Court.

- There are resources and services that address the needs of self-represented litigants – alternative means of delivery will increase their effectiveness.
- Conducting a survey may not be of value and has the potential of creating unrealistic expectations.

Given this feedback from the Forum, the SRL Project Team proposed that to address the identified issues, one-on-one support for self-represented litigants is needed. This assistance can be made available via partnerships with community-based organizations currently serving the target populations. The community organizations will provide **liaisons** trained by the Court on processes, resources, and services to support self-represented litigants as they go through the steps of addressing their matters.

A second planning workshop was conducted on April 26th to discuss the proposal. The court staff and community organizations that attended the Community Forum were invited. The following conclusions drawn at this workshop helped to refine, focus, and position the initial proposal for development into a long-term action plan.

- The analysis of the feedback from the Forum, as stated above, is accurate in its summation of the issues and needs expressed.
- A plan to support self-represented litigants must consider all populations (ethnic, socio-economic, cultural, gender, age, etc.).
- A sustainable plan needs to begin with a Pilot Program that is easily measured, evaluated, and replicated. Therefore, the Hispanic community would be most compelling as an initial group served by this new program because the needs and demographics are succinct. (Hispanics are the largest and fastest growing ethnic group in Sacramento County.)
- To facilitate access to court-based and community-based services, the longer term Self-Represented Litigant Action Plan should consider establishing court services access centers. This approach was studied by Sacramento Superior Court over a one-year period and submitted to the Administrative Office of the Courts as a FY 2001-02 Budget Change Request. Although it received favorable reviews by the Judicial Council, priorities shifted and it did not receive funding. The approach expands the success of Self-Help Centers at court and community locations and increases access to technology-based court services, such as online E-Filing and “I-CAN” kiosks. This approach addresses so many of the barriers to access experienced by those with cultural and/or language issues, physical disabilities, and economic and transportation hardships that it warrants inclusion in the Self-Represented Litigants Action Plan.

2. Program Areas:

Describe here each program area that you intend to be a part of your overall Action Plan to assist self-represented litigants. For example, program areas in your plan might include Technology, Self-Help Center, Language Issues, Unbundling of Legal Services, Written Information (forms/instructions, brochures), Signage, Public Education (clinics/training), etc.

The plan establishes a pilot program entitled the Court/Community Liaison Program. Over the next year the court will conduct an evaluation for improvements, continuation, and expansion of this pilot program for possible inclusion of other target populations, i.e. Slavic and SE Asian communities, persons with disabilities. The court will also study the efficacy and efficiencies of expanding online access and other technology-based pilots already in place, such as Small Claims E-Filing and the "I-CAN" kiosks; as well as examine potential expansion of Court-Based Self-Help Centers and implementation of Community-based Court Service Centers.

The Court/Community Liaison Program will be a partnership with community-based organizations. The Court will train program managers and others within private, 501(c)(3) nonprofit human service agencies on court processes and staff roles, as well as familiarity with all services available to litigants seeking justice in the court system. These community-based service organizations may choose to recruit and train volunteers as Court/Community Liaisons, much like the Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) program. The community organizations will then be able to offer one-on-one, court liaison support to populations they already serve, with a full understanding of the language and cultural issues facing their constituents.

Evaluation of this Pilot Program will determine its value for the court and self-represented litigants it serves. If the program proves successful and cost-effective, an increase in targeted populations and numbers of self-represented litigants served would be planned for implementation in year two of the Action Plan.

During year one of the Action Plan the court will collect and analyze information from a series of community focus groups, court customer surveys, and evaluation of participants in the Court/Community Liaison Program. In addition, the court will monitor implementation of the "I-CAN" kiosks being installed at the Carol Miller Justice Center and continue its development and tracking of all online access to court services. A study of potential expansion of Self-Help Centers/Court Service Centers will investigate if community-based locations are more accessible and convenient to court customers. The study will also determine if Community-based Service Centers will have the same components available at Court-located Self Help Centers and offer services contracted through community-based organizations, such as existing free legal services and clinics, and the new Community/Court Liaison Program.

3. Program Action Plans:**a. Court/Community Liaison Program**

- i. **Description:** Describe an individual Program (from those identified in No. 2 above) including groups to be served, types of services to be offered, location of service delivery.

The objective of the Court/Community Liaison Program is the development of partnerships with community-based organizations to assist Self-Represented Litigants in ameliorating barriers and improving access to justice. The program will serve individuals, who for reasons related to language, culture, literacy, disabilities, or socio-economics, need personal assistance in understanding how to conduct business with the Court. Court/Community Liaison roles will be established within community-based organizations that serve target populations having that need.

Court/Community Liaisons will provide direct, one-on-one assistance to Self-Represented Litigants when they need help understanding how to conduct court business. This assistance will be provided at court locations and service centers, at community organization sites, and any location convenient for the Liaison and individual needing support.

The Court/Community Liaison Program will leverage existing Court programs, services, and technology currently available to assist self-represented litigants in the areas of Family Law, Traffic, Unlawful Detainer, Probate, and Small Claims. Liaisons will receive training by the Court that will familiarize them with court processes, staff roles, and the available information, technology, tools and resources to offer the following services:

- Meet with individuals wanting to represent themselves at a convenient time, in a community environment, prior to visiting the court to prepare by discussing the process requirements, how to begin, and what to expect.
- Accompany individuals to the court location to provide support necessary to overcome issues with access (i.e. language, culture, fear, intimidation, transportation, procedural understanding).
- Guide pro per litigants through the services offered at the William R. Ridgeway Family Relations Courthouse Self-Help Center, and the Small Claims Self-Help Center, Traffic Self-Help Center and Unlawful Detainer Self-Help Center at the Carol Miller Justice Center.
- Accompany self-represented litigants to clinics and workshops.
- Help individuals with the use of technology such as Small Claims e-filing, the Virtual Courthouse Tour, and I-CAN kiosks (description to follow).

- Introduce pro per litigants to the use of contracted services such as free legal services, clinics, InfoLine Sacramento, and court interpreters.
- Refer individuals to other community resources and services that address specific needs.
- Evaluate the experience of individuals using the program.

The Court/Community Liaison role will also provide a means of establishing and enhancing relationships with other legal and human services partners serving similar needs and populations. The training and access to information the Court will provide to Liaisons will enable them to deliver community-based education on court services and processes. Liaisons can use existing presentation material, videos, and other media to offer classes or workshops on the common issues requiring interaction with the Court.

The program plan includes development of a modular curriculum to be used for training program managers and liaisons that are CBO employees or volunteers. The Action Plan Project identified the following as important content to be presented and organized by Court operational areas:

- Court processes
- Court protocol
- Court staff roles and responsibilities
- Available services (by provider, including logistics, specific to the type and nature of the matter)
- Technology resources
- Multimedia information resources (video, audio, telephone)

Upon completion of the training, liaisons will receive a reference binder of the information covered.

ii. **Program Partners: Describe here the types of collaborators who have or will partner with developing and implementing your Action Plan.**

Potential program partners are community-based non-profit agencies that serve the target populations. The Court will conduct a Request for Proposal to select at least one organization for each community having potential access issues. Each organization will be contracted to provide a pre-determined number of liaison service hours per month. This allows the community-organizations more flexibility with their budgets and their approach to delivering the service.

iii. Program Plan: Identify tasks, deadlines, and persons responsible for implementing the Program.

Task	Deadline	Person/Org Responsible
Fund Pilot	June 2002	
Document Program Methodology	July 2002	
a) Program Services		
b) Deliverables		
c) Measurement		
d) Success Criteria		
Identify, Prioritize Target Populations	July 2002	
Develop Liaison Training	July 2002	
Develop RFP and Selection Criteria	July 2002	
Select Program Partner(s)	September 2002	
Train Liaisons	September 2002	
Begin Liaison Services	October 2002	
Mid-project Evaluation	January 2003	
End-of-Project Evaluation	March 2003	
End-of-Project Report	May 2003	
Justify/Fund Full Implementation	April – May 2003	
Implement Full Program	July 2003	
a) Develop Detailed Project Plan		
b) Select Program Partners		
c) Establish On-going Program Operations, Reporting, and Review		

iv. Existing Resources That Will Be Used: Describe here the existing resources, e.g., staff time, money, and other resources that will be contributed to the program by the Court or any collaborative partner in the program. Be as specific as possible regarding the dollar value for these resources.

The Court/Community Program will need a Program Coordinator, Court Trainer, and administrative support, the costs for which are presented in the attached budget. For the duration of the pilot, the court will provide these resources, in-kind, using existing resources on a part-time basis at a cost of \$11,200.

- v. **Additional Resources Needed: Describe here additional resources needed to complete the Program as described above. State the resources needs in terms of dollar amounts for specific types of resources needed, i.e., equipment, construction, staffing, printing, translation services, etc.**

The proposed budget for the program, broken down by pilot and full implementation is outlined in an attachment. The Court has applied for the AOC grant to fund implementation of Self-Represented Litigant Action Plans for the amount of \$15,000. The court will add \$11,200 in-kind to fund the total cost of \$26,200 to fund the pilot program. Full implementation of the Court/Community Liaison Program in the following fiscal year of 2003-2004, assuming a positive program evaluation, is currently estimated to cost \$181,500.

- vi. **Evaluation: Describe here the criteria for evaluating program effectiveness and the persons responsible for ongoing evaluation part of the Program.**

Court/Community Liaisons will request program users to complete a survey, assisting them if they are non-English speaking. The survey, to be developed, will measure performance to services, deliverables, and success criteria. Liaisons will also complete a simple activity report as input to program reporting requirements. Evaluation will be concerned with program performance (people served, costs, effectiveness) and impact on CBO and Court resources. The Program Coordinator will be responsible for ongoing evaluation and reporting.

b. Community-Based Court Service Centers

- i. **Description: Describe an individual Program (from those identified in No. 2 above) including groups to be served, types of services to be offered, location of service delivery.**

The need for convenient, community-oriented access to court services in an environment less intimidating and confusing than existing Court facilities was one of the most frequently expressed concerns during the planning process. In conducting focus groups and surveys of court customers as part of the 1999 Community-Focused Court Planning Initiative, it was found that 85% of those customers surveyed say that the court is not accessible for their needs. Their areas of concern were: lack of access for the disabled, inadequate public assistance, lack of understanding of court processes, poor customer service, and lack of meaningful outreach efforts. The establishment of Court Service Centers will positively address all such issues.

The success of the Court's partnership with the Voluntary Legal Services Program and the Meadowview Community Center indicates that bringing services to the community is well received. Through this community-focused program implemented in June 2000, VLSP conducts clinics and workshops for individuals representing themselves in family law matters while a court clerk is

available onsite to assist with and accept filings. The demand for the program's services now exceeds their availability. Establishing Community-based Court Service Centers expands this approach of effective outreach to the next level and will make the Court a more visible part of Sacramento's diverse communities.

Using a phased approach, the Sacramento Superior Court will study the need, efficacy, and scope of Community-based Court Service Centers. Previous study suggested a minimum of three Community-based Court Service Centers and a mobile unit. Locations will be determined based upon evaluation of information gathered from additional study as a part of this plan, which will include focus groups, public surveys and court-user surveys. Co-locating with existing community-based, government, and other non-profit agencies, such as the Community Services Planning Council, will also be considered when evaluating locations most convenient to potential self-represented litigants. The mobile will be a moving Community Court Service Center with a regular route to serve communities without a permanent location. The van, equipped and staffed similarly as the Court Service Centers, will further increase the Court's accessibility to the public with its presence at events, conferences, and meetings hosted by community-based organizations and local agencies.

The Court Service Centers and mobile unit may remove the access barriers encountered by self-represented litigants by providing court services in locations that are accessible and convenient. Judicial services would not be available directly, but the plan includes a test of the effectiveness of video technology for court hearings. The Centers will be staffed with senior court clerks for the transaction of Court business related to civil, unlawful detainer, traffic, probate, and family matters. Their availability will be augmented with part-time staff and volunteers to assist with self-help components similar to those available at Courthouses. The Community-based Court Service Centers can provide comprehensive and informative materials (brochures, packets, videos) on the Court-based, community-based, governmental, and privately funded services for self-represented litigants summarized in the attachment. A key offering at the Centers can be expanded access to technology that service self-represented litigants. PCs with Internet connectivity can provide the community with local access to E-Filing, the Virtual Courthouse Tour, and other online Court information. The plan includes a study of technology enhancements that expand online filing capabilities and the availability of I-CAN, the Interactive Community Access Network.

I-CAN is a kiosk- and Internet-based legal service that assists pro per litigants with the completion of forms; provides court tours; educates court users on the law, procedures, and steps necessary to pursue their matter; and provides answers to frequently asked questions. The kiosks have touch screens, can print forms, and display online legal assistance. I-CAN kiosks are currently being introduced in the Unlawful Detainer Self-Help Center at the Carol Miller Justice Center. Expanding the availability of I-CAN kiosks or PC-based I-CAN modules to the Community-based Court Service Centers provides another means of offering self-represented litigants convenient and effective access to the legal process. I-CAN is multilingual and includes modules that cover the range of legal matters often encountered by the under-served and unrepresented.

The Centers may also provide a more convenient and supportive environment for providers and users of the Community/Court Liaison program. Liaisons will have alternatives in considering the location and surroundings in which their patrons are most comfortable. Using the Community-based Court Service Centers as a part of the Liaison program may also acclimate the litigant to the legal process in a gradual manner. If and when the patron appears in Court, they are more prepared and informed.

The Court's previous planning efforts indicated that establishing Community-based Court Service Centers would have the following benefits:

- Increased access to court services by providing such services in locations that are convenient to the court's customers
- Improved customer service by widening the range and scope of services provided
- Increases public confidence in the Court as result of becoming a positive, integral part of the community.

The ability of court customers to access services and community-based programs, pay fees, and conduct other court business at convenient locations will demonstrate the commitment of the justice system toward meeting the needs of the public.

ii. **Program Partners: Describe here the types of collaborators who have or will partner with developing and implementing your Action Plan.**

Sacramento Superior Court will establish relationships with community-based organizations, government agencies, and private, 501(c)(3) non-profit human service agencies to allow provision of existing and planned services for self-represented litigants. Current relationships can be expanded such as those with the Voluntary Legal Services Program or InfoLine Sacramento, or new ones can be created that best serve the community in which the Court Service Center is located. The Court will also contract with the Legal Aid Society to modify the I-CAN system to meet plan objectives and local needs.

iii. Program Plan: Identify tasks, deadlines, and persons responsible for implementing the Program.

<i>Task</i>	<i>Deadline</i>	<i>Person/Org Responsible</i>
Planning Phase	FY 2002/2003	
a) Conduct survey/focus groups on needed services and areas that would be especially useful.	Sept-Oct 2002	
b) Investigate partnerships/co-location	November 2002	
c) Evaluate, prioritize potential locations	December 2002- January 2003	
d) Determine and evaluate technology requirements/enhancements	November 2002 – March 2003	
e) Develop performance measurements	March 2003	
f) Funding recommendations	April-May 2003	
Phase I	FY 2003/2004	
a) Establish program components		
b) Establish mobile-unit		
c) Establish first Court Service Center		
d) Test video appearance technology		
e) Analyze evaluative measures to determine performance		
Phase II	FY 2004-2005	
a) Establishment of two additional Court Service Centers		
b) Further development of video appearances		
c) Expand use of technology (internet access)		
d) Expansion of services provided by mobile unit		

iv. Existing Resources: Describe here the existing resources, e.g., staff time, money, and other resources that will be contributed to the program by the Court or any collaborative partner in the program. Be as specific as possible regarding the dollar value for these resources.

The Court currently expends approximately \$70,000 per year for contracted services in the self-help centers at the Family Relations Courthouse and Carol Miller Justice Center (for family law, small claims, unlawful detainer, and traffic). This cost includes various partnerships for providing information and limited legal services at all of the centers. Online services available to the public include small claims E-Filing; access to court information, records and forms; virtual courthouse tour; and linkage to related agencies - all accessible from the Internet or PCs at the self-help centers. In addition, many hours of staff time continues to be contributed in the ongoing planning processes for expanding self-help center services, serving self-represented litigants, establishment of Court Service Centers, and technology-based systems.

An estimated budget for the program, broken down by phase, is outlined in the budget attachment and includes existing resources that have been committed to the plan. In-kind cost of court personnel for planning during FY 2002-2003 is \$40,000. The implementation of I-CAN kiosks at the Carol Miller Justice Center Self-Help Centers will cost \$45,000 and is covered by a grant.

- v. **Additional Resources Needed: Describe here additional resources needed to complete the Program as described above. State the resources needs in terms of dollar amounts for specific types of resources needed, i.e., equipment, construction, staffing, printing, translation services, etc.**

Implementation during FY 2003/4 and FY 2004/5 has an estimated one-time cost of \$101,000 and annual on-going cost of \$718,300

Costs	One-time	On-going
Staffing		\$285,000
Services		\$354,000
Equipment	\$65,000	
Technology	\$23,000	\$6,000
Other	\$13,000	\$8,000
Indirect costs		\$65,300

- vi. **Evaluation: Describe here the criteria for evaluating program effectiveness and the persons responsible for ongoing evaluation part of the Program.**

Performance measurement of the Community-based Court Service Centers will begin with collection of data on the number of services and programs provided and customer satisfaction surveys. The Court will follow this initial analysis with surveys to determine public perception of accessibility and focus groups to measure perceived value of the Community-based Court Service Centers.

Success criteria will be increased access and assistance for the targeted populations. Responsibility for meeting the criteria will be the Sacramento County Superior Court Steering committee, which is comprised of members of Court Operations and Administration, Information Technology, the Community-Focused Court Planning Committee.

4. State Support: Describe here the kinds of services, resources, programs or other assistance from the State that would be helpful to your Court in implementing your Action Plan to Assist Self-Represented Litigants.

The Plan's strategy is to increase access to services that assist self-represented litigants. The State can support this strategy with new programs and funding that focus on the usefulness of the services themselves. Based upon what was learned during this planning process, the State can

- Simplify forms and processes;
- Create self-help literature at reading levels more comprehensible to the layman;
- Translate forms, audiotapes, and video tapes into more languages;
- Establish relationships with other statewide organizations, such as the State Bar and Legal Aid Association, that encourage and fund local partnerships;
- Support the development of standard technology approaches to assisting self-represented litigants;
- Provide training for Court staff on guidelines for assisting pro per litigants or hearing the cases in which they are involved; and
- Assist with measurement methodologies to evaluate the effectiveness of the different services.

5. Unique Approaches: Describe here, if known, any unique approaches used in developing your Action Plan or that will be used in the implementation phase. In other words, identify how your Court is acting as a leader and an innovator in assisting self-represented litigants.

The Action Planning Project Team believes that the Court/Community Liaison Program is a collaborative model for providing personal assistance that can be leverage to address almost any barrier to accessing Court services. Though the program's concept was developed to address the needs of new immigrant populations that do not understand the English language, a new culture, or the institutional processes they must participate in as self-represented litigants, the model can have many applications. In addition to serving self-represented litigants, Community/Court Liaisons can be helpful and supportive to individuals who have never used Court services, (such as youth with traffic violations), senior citizens with matters with which they are not familiar, and people with disabilities that may have problems using the services that do not accommodate their needs.

Holding community focus groups is not unique but sharing information in an "Access to Justice Community Leaders Forum" demonstrates court leadership and innovation by enlisting the whole community in addressing and educating the public about court system improvements, services, and initiatives.

6. *Sustaining the Action Plan:* Describe here the steps that will be taken to ensure that the program becomes self-sustaining so that it survives and thrives through changes in court leadership.

Sustaining the program requires coordination, funding, and ongoing evaluation to justify and maintain the Court/Community relationships and outreach it establishes. However, the single most important issue is funding ongoing operations. When partners are involved, this has a significant impact on the Court/Community relationship and the commitment Community organizations make to their constituents. If the outcome of new programs (the Community/Liaison Program and expansion of I-CAN kiosks) is effective and reduces cost such as similar programs in the past (the VSLP and InfoLine Sacramento), the Court must justify and seek ongoing, general funding. That includes requesting additional funds in the operating budget, applying for additional grants, and assisting community partners with seeking and applying for grants for which they may qualify.

The Action Plan identifies and calls for the roles, processes, resources, and measurement necessary to thrive and justify its existence. The Court is also sensitive to the expectations that will be set when new services are offered to the community and will manage their introduction in a manner commensurate to what can be sustained.

7. *Other Comments:* Include here any other comments regarding the development and implementation of your Action Plan or other issues related to self-represented litigant that you would like the State Task Force to consider in developing the statewide Action Plan and advocating for resources.

Attach Additional Pages as Needed to Provide Complete Description of All Programs that Comprise the Court's Self-Represented Litigant Action Plan

Attachments:

Budget

Strategic Operational Plan

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