

**San Mateo County
Self-Represented Litigants
Collaborative**

ACTION PLAN

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Action Plan

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Executive Summary

In May 2001, the Superior Court of California, County of San Mateo, together with numerous community groups (see Appendix A for collaborative members), founded the San Mateo County Self-Represented Litigants Collaborative. The Collaborative formulated this Action Plan and its Strategic Plan (see Appendix C for Strategic Plan) to provide focus to its efforts to address self-represented parties' needs. The following is a brief description of the Collaborative's history and the process it used to formulate these plans.

The Collaborative began meeting in May 2001. It developed its Mission Statement and immediately undertook three research initiatives that were designed to improve knowledge of the nature of challenges faced by self-represented litigants in San Mateo County. The research methodology consisted of surveys, compiling an exhaustive list of existing services in the county, and analyzing numerous "best practices" in California for assisting self-represented litigants. Two surveys were conducted; one of self-represented litigants and one of court and community agency staff who assist the self-represented as a regular part of their jobs.

The Collaborative analyzed the research results and, based on that data, formulated potential strategies for assisting the county's many self-represented litigants. These strategies became the basis for the Strategic Plan, which was then expanded with the various suggested action steps to be taken over the next two years. These action steps are the basis for the Action Plan.

Introduction

The San Mateo Self-Represented Litigant Collaborative is an unincorporated association made up of the San Mateo Superior Court and a broad range of community organizations. It adopted the following Mission Statement:

“The Collaborative will improve the ability of self-represented litigants to knowledgeably and successfully address their legal issues.”

The Collaborative, led by co-chairs representing the Court and the Center for Domestic Violence Prevention, has adopted guiding principles and member organizations have written letters of commitment to the ongoing work of the Collaborative. (See Appendix A for the List of Collaborative Member Organization and Appendix B for the Collaborative’s Guiding Principles.)

Members of the Collaborative actively engaged in data gathering efforts including:

- Identifying existing available resources in the county
- Identifying “best practices” related to services for self-represented litigants
- Conducting surveys of court staff, legal agency personnel and court users

After considering the results of the research, the Collaborative worked over a period of several months to develop its Strategic and Action Plans.

The active involvement of members of the Collaborative is represented in a few photos taken of small group discussions at one of its Action Planning Sessions, below.



The Collaborative worked on their action plan by breaking into smaller groups and bringing their work product back to the larger group.



The Court wishes to thank and acknowledge all of the people and organizations who are part of the Collaborative and who have worked so diligently in preparing this Action Plan. The Court looks forward to the continued accomplishments of the Collaborative as it undertakes implementation of this Action Plan. On behalf of the Collaborative, the Court hereby submits San Mateo County's Self-Represented Litigant Action Plan to the Judicial Council.

Description of Need

Together with the rest of the judicial system, the San Mateo Court has become aware of the increasing numbers of self-represented litigants and has been actively involved in addressing the unmet needs of self-represented litigants for some time.

In addition to the widely researched needs, as part of the Collaborative's action planning efforts, the group conducted research to determine the nature and kinds of services needed by self-represented litigants.

Process:

The Collaborative implemented three types of data gathering to assess the needs of SRLs in San Mateo County – surveys of SRLs and the staff who help them; a comprehensive inventory of existing services; and a review of best practices statewide.

- **Surveys:** The goal in surveying self-represented litigants and the staff who assist them was to evaluate the needs of self-represented litigants and determine whether the system is or is not currently meeting those needs.

Specifically, data was collected to assess:

- Resources that are currently available
- The factors that impede access to the legal system
- Additional resources/services that would be most beneficial

Surveys were posted at all locations throughout the court where self-represented litigants are found – civil and criminal clerks' offices, family court services, probate, family law facilitators, traffic, small claims, juvenile, jurors. Court staff and agency staff were also surveyed to determine what needs they have identified during their dealings with self-represented litigants. A total of 162 staff members and 304 self-represented litigants responded to the surveys (see Appendix D).

- **Existing Services:** A subcommittee contacted every agency that provides legal assistance within San Mateo County. This information is used to determine what gaps in services exist within the County and to look for ways to weave existing services among agencies. Approximately 100 types of services were identified (see Appendix E).
- **Best Practices:** A questionnaire was developed to identify specific elements of existing programs throughout the state. The types of existing programs were categorized into the following elements:
 - Web based (e.g., informational or interactive)
 - Kiosk based (e.g., informational or interactive)
 - Self-service based programs (e.g., videos, books, pamphlets, etc.)
 - Staff based programs (e.g., clinics, workshops, self-help centers, etc.)

From there, the Best Practices subcommittee researched various, well-known programs to identify the best practices within the above categories (see Appendix F).

Findings:

Based on the data collected, the Collaborative made the following four findings regarding the needs of self-represented litigants.

- 1. *Self-Help Resources:*** Self-represented litigants need information about legal processes, procedures, and remedies. Self-represented litigants turn to the court, legal service agencies, self-help books and other resources to address their legal issues. To that end, the quantity and quality of information and assistance available to self-represented litigants should be increased.
- 2. *Access to Services:*** Many services exist to assist self-represented litigants with their legal issues. To maximize the usage of these services, it may be necessary to look to creative methods of service delivery. Additionally, once self-represented litigants have accessed services, special attention should be focused on ensuring that they understand legal processes and procedures.
- 3. *Technology-Based Assistance:*** The public looks to innovative technology for help with their legal issues. By creating more resources on the internet, information can be available twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Users can access the information from home, libraries, community-service agencies or wherever internet access is available.
- 4. *Collaboration:*** San Mateo County's Self-Represented Litigants Collaborative is dedicated to improving the ability of self-represented litigants to knowledgeably and successfully address their legal issues. In so doing, the organizations represented by the collaborative will work together to improve communication, expand training opportunities and support efforts to facilitate the accomplishment of the Collaborative's mission.

The Collaborative has framed these findings as Strategic Issues and has identified goals and strategic initiatives in each area. (See the Self-Represented Litigants Collaborative's Strategic Plan submitted herewith as Appendix C.) In the Action Plan below, each of these Strategic Directions is described along with the strategic initiatives and actions that will be taken.

Program Areas

The Court’s Action Plan for Self-Represented Litigants contains activities in four different program areas, as follows

Program Area	Goal
I. Self Help Resources	Provide self-help resources to enable self-represented litigants to address their legal issues.
II. Access to Services	Improve access to current and future services by self-represented litigants.
III. Technology-Based Assistance	Use technology to educate and empower self-represented litigants and leverage legal resources.
IV. Collaboration	Facilitate the accomplishment of the Collaborative’s strategic goals.

The Collaborative’s Action Plan for each of these Program Areas is set forth below.

Program Action Plans

The following section uses in the following format:

- **Program Description and Resulting Initiatives:** A description of the planned program including information about the groups to be served, types of services offered and the location of service delivery.
- **Program Partners:** The collaborators who will assist with the development and implementation of the initiatives.
- **Milestones (i.e., program plan):** The tasks, deadlines and persons responsible for implementing the initiatives.
- **Resources:** Identification of needed resources to complete the initiatives.
- **Evaluation:** A description of the criteria for evaluating the initiatives' effectiveness.

I. Self-Help Resources

Program Description:

Promote and expand existing self-help resource centers and establish new self-help resource and service center opportunities. Possible ways we may promote and expand self-help services include a mobile unit, centralized service center at or near the courthouse, collaboration with county libraries, video viewing and kiosk sites and multi-site collaboration with non-profit and/or government agencies within the county.

Initiatives

- **Coordinated Plan for Service Delivery – Self-Help Center:** Provide for individualized needs through effective and coordinated delivery of services. In May 2002, the Self-Represented Litigants Collaboration formed implementation subcommittees, one of which will focus on planning for self-help services. The Self-Help Subcommittee will research the needs of self-represented litigants and best practices. Based on this research, the subcommittee will determine the approximate scope and content of the Self-Help Center(s) to serve a wide variety of self-represented litigants who speak diverse languages and/or have disabilities or access issues.

The scope of the center(s) will potentially include a broad range of substantive areas of law (not only family law, probate, small claims and landlord/tenant, but other litigation and administrative areas of law as well) and will include information for self-represented litigants regarding all stages of the litigation or administrative process (from initial filing to enforcement).

The subcommittee will further identify potential appropriate locations – some possibilities include a local law library or building that houses local nonprofit agencies. Some of the possible types of services include: drop-in appointments with pro bono attorneys, in-person staff assistance by salaried coordinator, video viewing, internet access and resources, written materials (ex: brochures & sample forms). Based on the content, location and types of services to be provided, the subcommittee will determine the staffing, funding and other resources needed to implement a self-help center and/or mobile unit.

- **Public Education:** Provide effective training and education in group settings. Sponsor and/or support presentations and workshops that educate self-represented litigants about various legal issues and procedures as well as providing form completion assistance.
- **Comprehensive Information:** Provide comprehensive resource information, instructions and educational aids. Develop and provide topical fact sheets, instructional packets and brochures in written and/or multi-media formats and multiple languages. Distribute resource information through fixed or mobile sites, local court and collaborative web sites and other media sources.

Program Partners:

Partners will include all of the agencies represented in the SLRC (Court, nonprofits, Bar Association, etc), universities (for interpretation), local libraries, and law schools.

Milestones

<i>Task</i>	<i>Deadline</i>	<i>Person/Org Responsible</i>
<i>Self-Help Center</i>		
Form planning subcommittee	May 2002	Self-Represented Litigants Collaboration
Develop Work Plan	September 2002	Self-Help Subcommittee
Conduct Research	September 2002	Self-Help Subcommittee
Determine Scope and Content	December 2002	Self-Help Subcommittee
Identify potential locations for Self-Help Center	January 2003	Self-Help Subcommittee
Identify needed funding and resources	March 2003	Self-Help Subcommittee
Present report of desired program outline, potential locations and funding requirements to Collaborative	April 2003	Self-Help Subcommittee
Seek Funding	May 2003	Self-Help Subcommittee and Court
Collect Baseline data for program evaluation	June 2003	Self-Help Subcommittee
<i>Public Education</i>		
Develop Work Plan	September 2003	Self-Help Subcommittee
<i>Comprehensive Information</i>		
Develop Work Plan	September 2003	Self-Help Subcommittee

Resources:

Existing resources include the in-kind contributions of all of the Court and agency staff who are contributing significant time to the Collaboration and the planning subcommittees. Needed resources include funding for location, program development, staffing, materials, etc.

Evaluation:

We will collect baseline data regarding the obstacles that self-represented litigants encounter before implementing any new self-help resources. Then we will evaluate each program we implement, expand or promote by collecting data to show whether the users benefit from these services.

II. Access to Services

Program Description:

Increase access to services for self-represented litigants. Many services exist to assist self-represented litigants with their legal issues. To maximize the usage of these services, improvements must be made to enhance physical, geographical and logistical access. Additionally, special attention should be focused on ensuring that legal processes and procedures are more readily understood. Access to low or no-cost attorney assistance will also be examined.

Initiatives

- **Access:** Enhance physical, geographical and logistical access to legal services. Install PC's and photocopiers in the courthouse for members of the public. Develop handouts and maps to assist SRLs in navigating the courthouses and making their way to other Collaborative member agencies. Consult with the Court about opportunities for better courthouse signage. Implement a fax-filing system for Temporary Restraining Orders.
- **Public Understanding:** Improve the ability of self-represented litigants to understand and utilize legal processes. Study the possibilities for providing on-site (including courtroom) assistance and referrals. Increase interpreter services and availability. Provide opportunities for streamlined referrals to non-legal services such as counseling.
- **Legal Services:** Improve access to attorney representation, alternative dispute resolution and advocacy resources. Coordinate with the San Mateo County Bar Association to enhance *pro bono* attorney programs. Explore alternatives to traditional fee-based attorney representation. Recruit, train and supervise law student interns and volunteers to assist self-represented litigants.

Program Partners:

Partners will include Collaborative agencies and other agencies that provide support or services to SRLs; Clerk's Office; Facilitators Office; and Santa Clara Superior Court (already existing model for TRO fax filing service).

Milestones

<i>Task</i>	<i>Deadline</i>	<i>Person/Org Responsible</i>
<i>Access</i>		
Determine location(s) for copier equipment	September 2002	Access Subcommittee
County approvals for projects involving County property	October 2002	Subcommittee and Court Facilities Manager
Funding identified	October 2002	Subcommittee and Court CFO
Maintenance procedures established	November 2002	Subcommittee and Court Facilities Manager & Records Manager
Installation of equipment	December 2002	Court Facilities Manager
<i>Public Understanding and Legal Services</i>		
Consultants engaged	October 2002	Subcommittee and Court Mgmt.
Content development	February 2003	Consultant and subcommittee
Maps and distribution	April 2003	Consultant and subcommittee
Form a work group (TRO fax)	April 2003	Subcommittee
Consult with Santa Clara and evaluate what we want to do in San Mateo	April 2003	Subcommittee
Develop Court policies and Rule of Court	May 2003	Subcommittee and Court Rules Manager
Reengineering design	June 2003	Subcommittee w/relevant Court departments
MOUs with agencies	June 2003	Subcommittee
Staff training	September 2003	Subcommittee and Court Training

Resources

For the 2002-03 projects, required resources are: substantial Court staff and subcommittee time; one-time funding for the consultant and the production of handouts, maps and signs (some grant funds have already been secured from the AOC); ongoing funding for photocopier expense (may not be necessary depending on customer revenue).

Evaluation

The projects will be evaluated as follows:

- **Signs, handouts, and maps:** Customer surveys will be conducted to help focus upon which information will be most useful and to ascertain the effectiveness of the materials once they are produced. Responses will be used to improve future editions of the materials.
- **Fax filing of TRO's:** Survey information will be obtained from each of the community agencies that enter into MOU's with the Court to utilize the fax filing system.

III. Technology-Based Assistance

Program Description:

Provide litigants with web-based and other technological opportunities to conduct their legal business. Develop additional interactive web programs and enhance existing programs to educate users and to provide users with an expanded array of legal forms and instruction. Augment the Court website with general, substantive and procedural information, sample agreement forms and additional links to self-help resources.

Initiatives

- **Web-site Development:** Augmentation of the Court's website including: the creation of a definitive list of links to all legal assistance agencies for SMC (this could be used by local agencies as well). Internet-based services will be revised to provide additional information to assist SRLs. Reorganization of the court's existing web site will allow for easier access to information and will contain links to various sections of the AOC's self-help site and other web-based information.

The public, including self-represented litigants of all types, will be served by this project as will legal service agencies who will be able to use the listing of links to further enhance their websites.

- **Additional Interactive Web Programs:** Modeled after the Court's Family Law Interactive Program, the Court will expand its Internet-based Interactive Electronic Forms (IEF) Program, which will help SRLs with the form completion process. This internet-based program will include forms for Unlawful Detainers, Guardianships, Name Changes, Adoptions and others.

The IEF program will contain a program that, on the front-end, will ask the user basic, easy-to-understand questions. Depending on the responses given, the program will determine which additional questions to ask and which forms are necessary for the user's situation. The program will then use those responses to complete the necessary forms by automatically populating all of the fields. Each question on the court form will represent one web page where the user will respond by either picking from a list of available responses or by typing in a response. At all times in the process, the user will have the opportunity to learn more about legal terms and procedures.

There are three primary benefits to the expansion of the IEF program:

1. SRLs receive forms that are properly completed and are, therefore, better equipped to address their legal issue.
2. Court proceedings will be more effective because SRLs will possess completed forms and will be better educated about the court process.
3. The system is available anywhere over the Internet twenty-four hours per day, seven days per week.

Program Partners:

Partners will include Collaborative agencies and other agencies who provide support or services to SRLs; website consultant; literacy consultant; members of the Collaborative will assist the Court with the testing phase of the system; librarians at public libraries; AOC; local courts

Milestones

<i>Task</i>	<i>Deadline</i>	<i>Person/Org Responsible</i>
<i>Web Site Development</i>		
Hire consultant	6/30/02	Court
Conduct review of Court website (content, organization, etc.)		↓
Look at Court and other websites to review content and determine how best to create links		
Research who would use the system and what information is needed		
Website goes live	3/1/03	
<i>Interactive Web Programs</i>		
Development and release of new IEF applications	10/04	↓

Resources

The following resources are needed:

1. Funds (some grant funds have already been awarded)
2. Consultant for website development
3. Literacy consultant
4. Staff who are experts in their fields to assist with the creation of IEF programs
5. Staff to review new website content and to test new IEF programs

Evaluation

- **Website Development:** Website development is an ongoing process. As such a software program that tracks users to determine where they go and the path that they took to get there will be utilized to ensure that information most frequently accessed is easily found.

- **Additional Interactive Web Programs:** There are three primary benefits to the expansion of the IEF program:
 1. SRLs receive forms that are properly completed and are, therefore, better equipped to address their legal issue.
 2. Court proceedings will be more effective because SRLs will possess completed forms and will be better educated about the court process.
 3. System is available anywhere over the internet twenty-four hours per day, seven days per week.

The IEF program has a statistical program that will gather data about the number of users of the system. Staff surveys and user surveys will determine to what extent users are being served and whether SRLs are prepared with the correct forms properly completed.

IV. Collaboration

Program Description

San Mateo County’s Self-Represented Litigants Collaborative is dedicated to improving the ability of self-represented litigants to knowledgeably and successfully address their legal issues. In so doing, the organizations represented by the collaborative will work together to improve communication, expand training opportunities and support efforts to facilitate the accomplishment of the Collaborative’s mission.

Initiatives

- **Training:** Provide training opportunities to improve service to self-represented litigants. Design and implement a training program for staff of Collaborative member organizations about programs and services available to SRLs. The goal of the trainings would be to enable staff that serve SRLs to give correct, up-to-date and thorough information and referrals. The training would be offered with sufficient frequency (perhaps twice per year) to adequately cover new staff. Two sessions might be offered: a thorough “beginner’s session” and an “update session” for experienced staff.
- **Strengthen Collaborative Infrastructure:** Support collaborative efforts to bring knowledge and services to self-represented litigants. Strengthen the infrastructure of the San Mateo County Self-Represented Litigants Collaborative through the adoption of Guiding Principles and by continuing to welcome new members. Create partnerships with related collaborative efforts such as the Landlord and Tenant Information and Referral Collaborative and the Domestic Violence – Temporary Restraining Order Committee.
- **Communication Plan:** Develop and implement a communication plan about Collaborative initiatives and other activities. This plan would promote better communication with the public, the judiciary, the AOC, the media, collaborative agencies, funders and the Board of Supervisors. It would also improve communication and coordination between Collaborative members to improve service to the public. One effort would include publishing a referral guide of legal resources and information for San Mateo County residents.

Program Partners:

Partners will include Collaborative agencies and other agencies that provide support or services to SRLs; the Community Information Project (CIP) of the San Mateo County Library System; and the Superior Court Training Department.

Milestones

<i>Task</i>	<i>Deadline</i>	<i>Person/Org Responsible</i>
<i>Training</i>		
Establish a Training Program Development Committee	June 2002	Collaborative
Produce curriculum(s) according to target audiences and training goals	January 2003	Training Committee plus Court Training
Communicate program to interested parties and pre-register	March 2003	Training Committee
Offer first course(s)	April 2003	Training Committee and Court Training, other agency staff
Report on results to Oversight Committee	June 2003	Training Committee
Revise curriculum based on trainee and Oversight Committee feedback	July 2003	Training Committee and Court Training
<i>Strengthen Collaborative Infrastructure</i>		
Evaluate effectiveness of Collaborative's Guiding Principles	Jan – Mar 2003	A subcommittee of the Collaborative
Propose amended Guiding Principles	April 2003	Subcommittee
Adopt amended Guiding Principles	May 2003	Collaborative
Invite reports (one per meeting) from each of the other active SRL related collaboratives	Beginning with the Sept 2002 quarterly Collaborative meeting	Collaborative
<i>Communication Plan</i>		
Establishing a sub-committee	January 2003	Collaborative
Outlining potential audiences and benefits of reaching each one (strategy)	February 2003	Subcommittee
Produce a draft plan	March 2003	Subcommittee
Ask each Collaborative member group to designate a communication liaison	March 2003	Collaborative
Seek approval of the plan from the Collaborative	April 2003	Collaborative

Resources

The most important required resources for all three initiatives are staff time. The Training Program will require significant time of the Training Committee, the Court Training Unit and some agency staff. In addition, the trainings will require office supplies and reproduction expense. The Collaborative infrastructure and communication plan require time and attention of Collaborative members.

Evaluation

Training: The training program will be evaluated with two surveys; one of the training participants about their satisfaction with the program and one of Collaborative member managers and/or supervisors to determine whether the program is having an impact on the quality of assistance being given to SRLs.

Strengthening Infrastructure: The process of evaluating and amending the Collaborative's guiding principles will, in itself, be an evaluative process. This process will be chronicled so that a report can be shared with all interested parties. Ultimately, the overall success with implementing the Action and Strategic Plans will also be a measure of the success of the Collaborative's infrastructure.

Communication Plan: The Communication Plan can be evaluated by the number of agencies reached (potential partners), funders informed (potential funders), and media coverage obtained.

Needed Resources - Summary

- Central location/space with good geographical access for self-help center
- Space planner
- Computers
- TV/VCR's
- Written materials (ex: brochures & sample forms)
- Salaried coordinator/assistant position
- Furniture
- Translator for written materials
- Interpreters
- Simultaneous translating equipment
- Costs of publicity and outreach
- Grant funds
- Consultant
- Staffing to review content
- Grant funding
- Consultant/Programmers
- Court Project Manager
- Court staff knowledgeable in IEF Program
- Superior Court Training Department (program development, maintenance and teaching time)
- Superior Court Employee Newsletter
- Experienced personnel from Collaborative member agencies (program development, maintenance and teaching time)
- Money for materials (workbooks, resource guides)
- The Communications Plan requires staff time and effort. A Collaborative subcommittee may work on implementation of the plan.

Evaluation – Summary

The Court will design an ongoing evaluation process to effectively identify and document project successes, needed adjustments, and outcomes regarding the impact of all Self-Represented Litigant program services on both case processing and on the ability of court users to effectively use justice services.

The evaluation process will include the use of surveys, focus groups, and other forms of input from Legal Services Providers, and judicial and court staff, as well as case processing analysis within the technological capability of the court's case management systems.

The court will also determine increases in the use of Self-Help resource availability by tallying the numbers of individuals using services and will seek customer feedback about the quality and helpfulness of those services. Some of the ways in which the information will be gathered include.

- Staff and customer service surveys
- Number of filings received by fax; impact on time spent by facilitators; impact on partner agencies
- Numbers and locations of user visits on the website
- Pre/post-surveys of availability of information on the website and users' ability to address their issues
- The IEF program has a statistical program that will gather data about the number of users of the system.
- Evaluation forms from all trainees
- Follow-up surveys of trainees (and possibly their managers) to determine whether completing the training was beneficial to on-the-job situations.

State Support

The State can best provide support to local Action Plan implementation efforts as follows:

- **Leadership:** Strong leadership is necessary in order to maintain a focus on the needs of SRLs. Also, as progress in implementing innovative projects often requires overcoming some organizational inertia, continuing strong leadership from the top is a required countervailing force. For example, the voices of the Chief Justice and the Statewide SRL Task Force have been extremely helpful in creating the political will to proactively address the needs of SRLs in California.
- **Communications:** The State can disseminate information about the many initiatives being undertaken in California. This is extremely helpful because it encourages the thought processes of all planners and avoids “reinventing the wheel” activities.
- **Funding:** Many of the proposed initiatives require funding. The state’s recognition of these requirements is critical not only to help local organizations achieve their plans, but also to demonstrate the priority these projects constitute for the state. Such funding is also important as a tool for leveraging support of potential local funders.

Unique Approaches

San Mateo County approached this project in the following innovative ways:

- **A True Collaborative:** The San Mateo Court believes that the challenge presented by self-represented litigants is a challenge to the entire community and not just the Court. Therefore, the response to the challenge must come from the entire community. For this reason, the San Mateo County Self-Represented Litigants Collaborative is an equal partnership among community agencies and the Court. Furthermore, the Court and local agencies share leadership of the Collaborative and responsibility for all outcomes.
- **Guiding Principles:** To support the collaborative approach desired in San Mateo County, the Collaborative spent considerable time developing a set of Guiding Principles for its operations (Appendix B).
- **Strategic Plan:** The San Mateo Collaborative sought to place its action planning within a strategic context. Therefore, in addition to this Action Plan, the Collaborative developed and formally adopted an overarching Strategic Plan to guide its actions over the next several years (Appendix C).
- **Research:** While the challenges presented by SRLs are widely documented, the San Mateo Collaborative believes that local circumstances are critical to effective planning and evaluation. Therefore, the Collaborative devoted considerable time and energy to carrying out three local research initiatives, including two unique surveys.
- **Communication:** The San Mateo Court initiated the publication of a statewide update of self-represented collaboratives and updated this list twice during the past year. The list has been a useful way for courts to share ideas and support each other's progress.

Sustaining the Action Plan

Since its founding, the San Mateo SRLC has taken steps to insure the formation of a strong foundation to support the ongoing work of its Strategic and Action Plans. This has been accomplished in the following ways:

- **Unique Collaborative Structure:** The Collaborative was formed with a partnership approach of shared leadership and responsibility between the Court and the community. This structure is supported by the adoption of the Collaborative's Guiding Principles and by the formal commitments asked of all Collaborative members (typically Board of Directors letters of support).
- **Strategic Plan:** The adoption of a multi-year Strategic Plan will guide the Collaborative even as individual action steps evolve or are completed and even as individual partners change. The Strategic Plan has a broad, long-term vision and is therefore capable of supporting the Collaborative through unforeseen changes of environment, e.g. community need, funding, individual partner changes, etc.
- **Funding:** Since its inception, the Collaborative has involved our most prominent local funder, the Peninsula Community Foundation, in its plans and progress. The Foundation will be approached to assist with Collaborative projects.
- **Leadership:** The Collaborative's Guiding Principles formalize a sustainable leadership structure in terms of shared leadership, succession and court involvement.

Appendix A

Committee Members

- Bay Area Legal Aid
- Center for Domestic Violence Prevention
 - District Attorney's Office
- East Palo Alto Community Law Project
- San Mateo County Legal Aid Society
- Peninsula Conflict Resolution Center
- San Mateo County Bar Association
- San Mateo County Department of Child Support Services
 - San Mateo County Law Library
 - Small Claims Advisor
- Sor Juana Inés Services for Abused Women
- Superior Court of California, County of San Mateo
 - Youth and Family Assistance

Appendix B

Guiding Principles

The San Mateo County public and non-profit organizations that form the Self-Represented Litigants Collaborative will work together to identify and address the needs of self-represented litigants in San Mateo County. In so doing, these organizations agree to operate as co-equal collaborators and to be guided and organized according to the following guiding principles that set forth the Collaborative's purpose, structure, levels of authority, roles, resources, decision-making protocol, communications, evaluation procedures, methods for promotion of the Collaborative, and succession planning.

Values

The Collaborative believes in and stands for:

- Consensus decision-making
- Cultural sensitivity
- Focus on client needs
- Broad representation
- Awareness of process through use of ongoing evaluation techniques
- Equal participation/access
- Shared responsibility and resources
- Empowerment of the community
- Commitment to action
- Innovative ideas
- Collaboration

Structure

- The Collaborative is made up of public and non-profit agencies that work together in an ongoing relationship to meet the agreed upon Mission.
- Agencies become members by executing a written commitment to participate on a regular basis and abide by its guiding principles.
- Members designate one or more employees as representatives to the Collaborative.
- The Collaborative makes policy decisions by consensus at regular meetings of the whole group.
- The Collaborative uses ad hoc committees as needed on specific topics/projects.
- Committees established by the Collaborative have no independent decision-making authority; rather, they report research findings and recommendations to the group as a whole.

Levels of Authority

- All member agencies share responsibility for leadership of the Collaborative by representatives serving as co-chairs on a periodic rotating basis. The Superior Court will always be one of the co-chairs.
- All members agree to seek and obtain their own agency board or governance body approval as needed to participate in the Collaborative, and provide fiscal and other resources as needed, including leadership by agency representatives.

Roles

- The San Mateo Superior Court convenes the Collaborative and will have an on-going, central role in the business of the Collaborative.
- The Collaborative's initial focus is to develop an Action Plan for assisting self-represented litigants for San Mateo County. The San Mateo Superior Court will submit the plan to the Judicial Council of California, Administrative Office of the Courts by June 2002.
- Once the plan is developed, the members of the Collaborative will participate equally in the implementation of Collaborative projects and programs.

Resources

- In addition to the commitment to participate in the Collaborative, member agencies also agree to:
 - Consider pledges of resources for plan implementation, as needed;
 - Support grant applications, as needed; and
 - Approach other agencies and advocate for additional resources.
- The San Mateo County Superior Court pledges continuing administrative support to the work of the Collaborative.

Decision-Making Protocol

- The Collaborative agrees to establish policy and make decisions based on a consensus of the members. A consensus model will be adopted by the Collaborative to guide decision-making processes.
- Members agree to seek and obtain necessary approvals from their boards or governing bodies for recommended proposals.
- In creating and supporting the work of ad hoc committees, the Collaborative will give clear direction to the committees for work product expected, and will respect the findings of the committees.
- Members who are unable to attend meetings where consensus decisions are reached, may communicate their ideas/comments in advance to another member for inclusion in the discussion, or may comment after receiving the minutes of the meeting.
- Members will give support to decisions that have been reached by consensus.

Communications

- The Collaborative is committed to open communication among all members at and between meetings.
- The Collaborative will regularly communicate through the use of written agendas disseminated before each meeting and distribution of minutes documenting matters discussed and decisions reached at each meeting.

Evaluation Procedures

The Collaborative will engage in periodic self-assessment of the Collaborative to ensure that it is operating at its highest and best capacity.

- The Collaborative is committed to ongoing evaluation of programs that it develops and implements and will include evaluation design as a key element at the formative stages of each program/project.

Promotion of the Collaborative

Each member of the Collaborative will support and promote the purpose and accomplishments of the Collaborative, as follows:

- Discuss the existence and activities of the Collaborative with other agencies, organizations and individuals in the County (“talk it up”);
- Actively publicize the existence of the Collaborative and its programs;
- Invite media coverage at appropriate times;
- Arrange for members to speak at various community meetings;
- Actively inform self-represented litigants of the availability of programs and services;
- Reach out to other organizations for participation and ideas; and
- Provide feedback to those who have participated and continue seeking input.

Succession Planning

- Each agency member executes its Letter of Commitment and renews that commitment as necessary when determined by the Collaborative.
- Each agency member of the Collaborative agrees to provide replacement representatives to the Collaborative as needed when agency personnel assignments change.

Appendix C

Strategic Plan

Appendix D
Survey Results

Appendix E

Inventory of Existing Services

Appendix F
Best Practices