

Superior Court of California

County of Tulare

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ACTION PLAN TO ASSIST SELF-REPRESENTED LITIGANTS

1. Description of Need:

Tulare County, located in the Central Valley of California is an economically depressed area with high unemployment. In 2000 Tulare County's unemployment rate was 15.4%. The per capita income of the county is \$19,329 (statewide average is \$29,856.00). Tulare County is the 7th largest of California's 58 counties with an area of 4,800 square miles. Much of Tulare County remains open and sparsely populated and dominated by farmland. These factors lead to a population that is isolated from the Court system and difficult to reach to increase access.

2. Program Areas:

With the award of \$6,600.00 from the Judicial Council, the combined Community Focused Court Planning Team and the Self-Represented Litigants Planning Team joined forces to achieve the common goal of serving the self-represented litigants of Tulare County. It was determined that providing information to self-represented litigants in the outlying areas and making the court system more understandable was a high priority. It had already been observed that the population needed more written information about the court and more access to web-based information.

The original project plan included further surveys, brochure development and distribution with placement of the material on the court's website. The plan was then modified with approval from the Administrative Office of the Courts to focus on the following three areas: 1) the purchase of equipment to permit the court to install 4 computers and printers in the central and outlying courts to permit access to the Court's and the Judicial Council's websites; 2) the purchase of external CD-ROMs for computers in the Family Law Facilitator's Office and 3) the development of a general court brochure, describing functions of the different court courtrooms and offices.

3. Program Action Plans:

1. Program Description

The Court researched ways to disseminate information to the public to increase access to and familiarity with the court system. Four stations in existing courthouses were identified as locations to install surplus computers and purchased cabinets and printers. Additionally, it was determined that the Family Law Facilitator's Office was a place where additional self-help information was needed, so external CD-Roms were purchased for the computers installed there. Finally, the court developed a court information brochure which will be distributed county-wide in not only courthouses, but also libraries, schools,

employment offices, county offices and any other places it would be helpful.

2. Program Partners

The Court has partnered with a number of agencies and community offices in the Self-Represented Litigants Team. Central California Legal Services, the Small Claims Advisor, the Law Library, Domestic Violence advocates, the Paralegal Program at College of the Sequoias, the Tulare County Office of Education and C-SET, a job training program, are included.

3. Program Plan:

Task	Deadline	Person/Org Responsible
Purchase of Computer stands and Printers	June 2002	Court IT
Installation of Computers	July 2002	Court IT
Purchase of CD-Roms for FLF office	June 2002	Court IT
Intallation of CD-Roms at FLF	July 2002	Court IT
Development of Court Brochure	June 2002	Court personnel
Disbursal of Brochures	Ongoing	Court Grants Asst.

4. Existing Resources that will be used:

The court currently had available older computers that had been replaced, but were still serviceable. These were installed in the Family Law Facilitator's Office and external CD-ROMs purchased to enable the office to install current editions of programs the public could utilize. Other computers were installed in the purchased cabinets with the new printers to be set up in the outlying courts.

5. Additional Resources Needed

There will be ongoing costs to maintain the computers, printers and update the programs installed. Additional printings of the brochure developed will be another continuing cost as well as personnel time to distribute them.

6. Evaluation

It is early in the project to evaluate the benefit to the community, however, the

members of the SRL Task Force are supportive in the project and will utilize the materials and refer clients to use of the court computers. The court staff have found it difficult, without additional assistance, to coordinate the project and have the outcome take place timely.

4. State support

The State has provided this \$6,600 grant and an additional \$10,000 implementation grant which will permit and court to hire a part time coordinator of the self-represented litigants projects.

5. Unique Approaches

The rural nature of Tulare County has encouraged the court to partner with programs which reach out into the outlying communities. These programs are willing to distribute the information the court can provide and the members of the CFPT and SRLT are in support of the Court's efforts and will also contribute to dissemination of information.

6. Sustaining the Action Plan

The Plan involves primarily a sustained effort to increase information about the court in the community. The addition of a part time grant administrator will greatly assist this effort. In addition, other grants involving the Court have increased the visibility of the Court. In the process of developing a Customer Service Training (through a Trial Court Initiative Grant) and as part of a collaboration with four other counties to develop a California Court-based curriculum further contacts have been made which will enrich the court's community -related efforts. These contacts and additional assistance will enable the Court to more easily sustain the plan.

7. Other Comments.