



JUDICIAL COUNCIL OF CALIFORNIA

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REPORT TO THE JUDICIAL COUNCIL

Item No.: 22-193

For business meeting on December 2, 2022

Title

Allocations and Reimbursements to Trial Courts: Model Self-Help Pilot Program

Agenda Item Type

Action Required

Rules, Forms, Standards, or Statutes Affected

None

Effective Date

December 2, 2022

Recommended by

Trial Court Budget Advisory Committee
Hon. Jonathan B. Conklin, Chair

Date of Report

November 14, 2022

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Executive Summary

The Model Self-Help Pilot Program has been operating in four trial courts since 2002. A fifth court operating a technological solutions project decided not to continue its participation during the 2019–20 program year. The Trial Court Budget Advisory Committee recommended and the Judicial Council approved allowing all courts to apply for funds to expand their use of technology in providing self-help assistance as part of a consolidated technology funding application process. This allows a wider group of courts to expand services using technology. This report makes recommendations for funding for 2022–23.

Recommendation

The Trial Court Budget Advisory Committee recommends that the Judicial Council, effective December 2, 2022, approve the proposed one-time funding allocations for the 2022–23 Model Self-Help Program—Technology as set forth in Table 2.

Relevant Previous Council Action

On March 12, 2021, the Judicial Council approved a recommendation to allow all trial courts to apply for funds to expand their use of technology in providing self-help assistance as part of a consolidated technology funding application process and to determine a process for future funding.

Analysis/Rationale

The Budget Act of 2001 provided funding for the Judicial Council to establish five model self-help center pilot projects in response to a budget change proposal submitted by the agency. A special selection review committee reviewed the proposals submitted by interested courts and made recommendations about funding. Those recommendations were then reviewed by the Task Force on Self-Represented Litigants and approved by the Executive and Planning Committee on April 12, 2002, and reported at the Judicial Council meeting on April 19, 2002.

The following programs were approved:

- Superior Court of Butte County, Regional Model Court;
- Superior Court of Contra Costa County, Technology Model Court;
- Superior Court of Fresno County, Spanish-speaking Model Court;
- Superior Court of Los Angeles County, Urban Collaboration Model Court; and
- Superior Court of San Francisco County, Multilingual Model Court.

An extensive evaluation of the project was submitted to the Legislature on March 1, 2005, demonstrating the benefits of these programs. Funding has been included as a line item for local assistance in the Budget Act in the General Fund since that time, and the grants were continued with each court receiving \$191,400 per year. The projects continue to model innovative practices and report to Judicial Council's Center for Families, Children & the Courts (CFCC) staff on their activities.

On September 16, 2019, the Superior Court of Contra Costa County informed the council that it would no longer participate in the Model Self-Help Pilot Program. After further discussion with the court and review of potential options, the Trial Court Budget Advisory Committee recommended, and the Judicial Council approved, that the \$191,400 in funding that the court would have received be reallocated to the remaining four pilot projects to use for technology-related services to improve the experience for self-represented litigants. The reallocation was based on a short application process to ensure the full use of this funding for its intended purpose—which would serve more court users.

Two of the existing programs applied for and received funding. The Superior Court of San Francisco County used the funding to retool its program to provide more remote services in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Superior Court of Los Angeles County used the funding to develop online courses, including an orientation to divorce, and purchased equipment capable of showing recorded workshops at court sites throughout the county.

On January 12, 2021, the Trial Court Budget Advisory Committee recommended that the funding be distributed through a consolidated funding approach for technology. This consolidated process minimizes court time to prepare applications and comply with requirements. The committee voted to delegate authority for determination of the project to an ad hoc subcommittee comprised of members of the Trial Court Budget Advisory Committee, the Committee on Providing Access and Fairness, and the Information Technology Advisory Committee.

Seven courts applied for a combined total of over \$735,000 in funding. CFCC staff recommended funding four programs for a total of \$191,400 that increased remote service capacity, supported multiple or coordinated court efforts, could be replicated by other courts, and did not duplicate statewide efforts. Each of these programs presented the results of their efforts to self-help centers throughout the state at a weekly webinar for self-help staff as outlined in table 1.

Table 1. 2021–22 Project Outcome

Court	Project	Amount
San Joaquin	Implement web-based file submittal for electronic review with document queue monitoring and reports; establish a computer lab.	\$14,970
San Mateo	Select and implement technology for form completion and staff assistance with forms; facilitate electronic signatures for family law/divorce judgments.	75,755
Santa Cruz	Procure technology equipment to allow staff to provide remote services.	4,908
Sutter	Set-up of a computer room for remote and in-person litigant assistance, including voice-to-computer technology with remote audio-video (AV) controls.	95,767
	Total Allocations to the Courts	\$191,400

Current recommendations

Using the same consolidated funding application process for the current grant year, 13 courts submitted a total of 15 applications for a combined total of \$699,635. To ensure the most effective use of funding, CFCC staff coordinated proposal reviews with the Court Technology and Modernization Fund and the Language Access and Signage Technology Grant reviews and identified \$306,783 in Model Self-Help applications that could be funded by those other sources. Thus, \$498,183 of the \$699,635 could be funded and all courts that applied for Model Self-Help funding would receive a significant portion of their request. Only one application is not recommended for funding at this time because the council is working on a statewide solution with separate funding.

The ad hoc committee of representatives from the Trial Court Budget Advisory Committee, the Committee on Providing Access and Fairness, and the Information Technology Advisory Committee considered all applications and recommends allocating the \$191,400 in 2022–23 Model Self-Help technology funding to the eight programs outlined in table 2.

Table 2. 2022–23 Project Recommendations

Court	Project	Amount
Lassen	Computers for the Self-Help Center	\$5,000
Mendocino	Self-Help Center Remote Communication Coordination	6,758
Nevada	Computers for Remote Staff including Self-Help Staff	3,040
San Francisco	Computers for Self-Help Center staff	40,070
San Mateo	Remote Case Management for Pro Pers with Additional Services, Instructions, and Support	70,200
Shasta	Computers for remote online and video support, intake, and triage	32,112
Sutter	Computers for the Self-Help Center	16,470
Tuolumne	Computers for the Self-Help Center	17,750
Total Allocations to the Courts		<u>\$191,400</u>

Policy implications

Technology has become increasingly important in assisting self-represented litigants. Allowing all courts to apply for funding to develop model programs and reporting on their activities to allow replication promotes broader dissemination of innovative technological solutions.

Comments

This proposal did not circulate for public comment and no public comments were received.

Alternatives considered

The ad hoc subcommittee considered identifying one model technology project. However, given the interest of a wide variety of courts in exploring new methods of utilizing technology and the greater opportunity for replication with smaller grants, the committee recommended continuing to allow all courts to apply using the consolidated technology funding application.

Fiscal and Operational Impacts

For 2022–23, more self-help centers will be able to expand services using technology as a result of this allocation. Resources developed by the courts administering these projects will be available to all courts throughout the state as they continue to adapt services, particularly with remote and shared services.

Attachments and Links

1. Attachment A: Model Self-Help 2022–23 Proposed Project Funding