



Judicial Council of California

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REPORT TO THE JUDICIAL COUNCIL

Item No.: 24-121

For business meeting on July 12, 2024

Title

Trial Court Budget: Model Self-Help Pilot Program—Technology Model Project Allocation Methodology

Agenda Item Type

Action Required

Effective Date

July 12, 2024

Rules, Forms, Standards, or Statutes Affected

None

Date of Report

June 18, 2024

Recommended by

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

Contact

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Executive Summary

The Trial Court Budget Advisory Committee recommends that the Judicial Council approve revisions to the methodology for the allocation of funds for the Model Self-Help Pilot Program's Technology Model Project to address the urgent need to expand self-help services in all courts.

Recommendation

The Trial Court Budget Advisory Committee recommends that the Judicial Council, effective July 12, 2024, revise the allocation methodology for the Model Self-Help Pilot Program's Technology Model Project to:

1. Require that proposed projects be limited to enabling courts to collaborate in providing self-help services remotely;
2. Award a three-year grant through a competitive solicitation process open to all courts and conducted every three years;
3. Make a single grant award for the project; and

4. If a responsive proposal is not received in the fiscal year 2024–25 solicitation process, allocate funding through the current methodology adopted by the council at its meeting on March 12, 2021.

This recommendation was presented to the Judicial Branch Budget Committee on May 16, 2024, and approved for consideration by the Judicial Council.

Relevant Previous Council Action

At its meeting on March 12, 2021, the Judicial Council adopted an allocation methodology for the Model Self-Help Pilot Program’s Technology Model Project.¹ This methodology allows all courts to apply for a share of the annual \$191,400 funding to support technology-related self-help projects.

Analysis/Rationale

The current allocation methodology calls for soliciting proposals from the courts each year for the annual Budget Act allocation of \$191,400 for technology projects related to self-help.² In fiscal year 2023–24, nine courts were awarded small grants based on this process. This proposal would revise the allocation to a single multiyear award following a solicitation process to all courts. The grantee court must agree to manage a self-help network for participating courts as described below. This collaboration will make additional self-help resources available to all participating courts.

The collaboration recommended in this proposal is based on SHARP (Self-Help Assistance and Referral Program) Tech Connect, a Judicial Council Court Innovations Grant project in the Superior Court of Butte County, which provided a voice and videoconferencing platform for 22 small courts. This model gave self-represented litigants in the small courts access to remote self-help services and allowed courts to pool their resources and make qualified attorneys available remotely. The SHARP Tech Connect project is discussed in the Judicial Council’s *Final Report on the Court Innovations Grant Program*.³

A phone, videoconferencing, and live-chat platform managed by a lead court but staffed by attorneys from all participating courts would provide residents and self-represented litigants in all participating counties access to:

¹ Judicial Council of Cal., Advisory Com. Rep., *Allocations and Reimbursements to Trial Courts: Model Self-Help Pilot Program Reallocation* (Feb. 18, 2021), <https://jcc.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=9196655&GUID=E2F158DD-0583-43AF-A839-4C99C4105AF8>.

² Judicial Council of Cal., Advisory Com. Rep., *Allocations and Reimbursements to Trial Courts: FY 2023–24 Model Self-Help Pilot Program—Technology* (Nov. 17, 2023), <https://jcc.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=12400803&GUID=46EDF4A7-C740-41A5-AD85-C12EAB34FE60>.

³ Judicial Council of Cal., Staff Rep., *Report to the Legislature: Final Report on the Court Innovations Grant Program* (Sept. 23, 2021), <https://jcc.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=9839364&GUID=E8AECBDE-B259-47F2-8995-700FEF76FA13>.

- Self-help legal assistance during all business hours;
- Legal experts in complex areas such as conservatorship, consumer debt, and eviction; and
- Experienced self-help attorney staff available to provide high-quality services.

Policy implications

The projects that courts have conducted using the self-help technology grant over the past three years have been very valuable. However, this proposed model will allow a much larger number of courts to benefit from the program and addresses one of the key barriers to accessing self-help services in California.

Comments

Public comments were not solicited for this proposal because the recommendations are within the Judicial Council’s purview to approve without circulation.

Alternatives considered

The Funding Methodology Subcommittee considered the proposal as approved and the alternative of maintaining the current methodology. The additional alternative of allocating the funding according to the current methodology if a responsive proposal is not received under the revised methodology was proposed and adopted by the committee.

Fiscal and Operational Impacts

The proposal is designed to expand public access to court-based self-help centers and enable courts to provide more hours of service to self-represented litigants in their counties. The funding available will underwrite any additional costs to the lead court.

Attachments and Links

None.