



JUDICIAL COUNCIL OF CALIFORNIA

455 Golden Gate Avenue • San Francisco, California 94102-3688

www.courts.ca.gov

REPORT TO THE JUDICIAL COUNCIL

Item No.: 21-094

For business meeting on July 9, 2021

Title

Judicial Branch Technology: Court
Technology Modernization Funding Status,
Fiscal Year 2020–21

Agenda Item Type

Information Only

Date of Report

June 16, 2021

Submitted by

Technology Committee
Hon. Kyle S. Brodie, Chair

Contact

Heather L. Pettit, 916-263-2708
heather.pettit@jud.ca.gov

Executive Summary

The Budget Act of 2020 (Stats. 2020, ch. 7) appropriated \$25 million for the modernization of trial court operations. The Judicial Council asked the Technology Committee to make recommendations on the funding and to provide regular updates on the approved allocation of \$12.5 million directly to trial courts for use in one or more identified program categories, \$10 million for branchwide initiatives, and \$2.5 million to be held in reserve for program adjustments. This is a status update for fiscal year 2020–21.

Relevant Previous Council Action

The Budget Act of 2020 included a \$25 million appropriation for the modernization of California’s trial courts. At the July 24, 2020, Judicial Council meeting, the Chief Justice directed the Technology Committee to recommend a proposal¹ for allocating that funding.²

At the September 25, 2020, Judicial Council meeting, the council approved using the \$25 million for 13 approved programs and directed the Technology Committee to recommend individual

¹ Judicial Council of Cal., captured captioning (July 24, 2020), p. 16, <https://jcc.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=E3&ID=711582&GUID=90001AF2-7CEE-4F0F-906B-29A03ED9CB43>.

² The budget bill language (item 0250-001-0001 of section 2.00) explicitly limits the use of the funding to modernizing trial courts; see https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=201920200AB89.

allocations to trial courts and report on each program's progress. The 13 approved programs are listed in Attachment A.

At the January 22, 2021, Judicial Council meeting, the council approved \$12.5 million in direct allocations to the trial courts and received a status update on the activities to date.

At the March 12, 2021, Judicial Council meeting, the council approved the allocation of \$4.3 million (funded partly from the \$10 million identified for branchwide initiatives and partly from the \$2.5 million held in reserve) to trial courts to allow expanded participation in four branchwide programs. The council also approved the allocation of \$25,000 to each of 32 courts currently engaged in efforts to digitize their paper records (\$800,000 in total, which utilized all remaining funds from the \$2.5 million held in reserve).

Analysis/Rationale

Before allocating money directly to trial courts, a wide variety of stakeholders were asked to provide input. Their collective suggestions ensured that the modernization funding was used to maximize the benefit to the public and to align with the judicial branch's technology goals.

The Court Technology Modernization Funding has enabled the trial courts to improve access to justice through the use of technology. An example of the public comments on the updated Judicial Council self-help website, part of the Trial Court Digital Services Program, stated, *"This is the most helpful and well-designed government website I've ever used. So thorough, clear and intuitive. Answered all my questions. Thank you!"* Another person stated, *"This was very helpful! I have been so confused this whole time and I got it in one sitting."*

Summary of funding and reports

A summary detailing the funding distribution between the direct allocations to the trial courts (\$12,205,542) and the branchwide programs (\$11,837,681) is found in Attachment A. Courts submitted their first and second quarterly reports regarding the use of their direct allocations March 1, 2021, and June 1, 2021, respectively.

Funding successes

Courts and the judicial branch have demonstrated early success in using the Court Technology Modernization Funding as approved. All 58 courts executed agreements within six weeks following Judicial Council approval, and an additional 41 agreements supporting the branchwide programs were also executed. Furthermore, the Judicial Council was able to provide direct project management support to 23 courts that requested it to implement their modernization efforts.

Additional accomplishments and findings from early progress reports (submitted as of March 1, 2021) include the following:

- The public was able to save time and access court documents from the safety of their homes at a time that was convenient for them while satisfying pandemic physical

distancing protocols. Nearly 8 million documents have been digitized by the 20 courts that were awarded direct allocation funds, thus enabling remote access.

- Court customers were able to continue receiving access to justice by using remote appearance technology. These technologies have been widely implemented and were indispensable in sustaining court services, with courts conducting over 172,000 proceedings, and 13 of the 36 courts that expanded use of remote appearance technology are already reporting full implementations with their funding.
- Litigants, attorneys, and law enforcement agencies used digital evidence solutions implemented with the funding to support proceedings in 287 court cases.
- The public could connect with court assistance promptly and efficiently by using real-time online chat; users accessed the courts via chat over one million times to get answers to questions and receive guidance without the need to travel to a courthouse, wait in line, or wait on the phone.
- Court customers appreciated and benefited by being informed of appearance dates and other court services via short and timely automated text reminders; one court sent more than 1,141,000 text reminders to its customers during this reporting period. More metrics will be available as this program advances into branchwide service.
- Courts are making their services more reliable and more resilient in the event of natural disasters or other disruptions (such as wildfires) through the transition to next-generation data center and cloud solutions. More than 505 physical servers were transitioned to more advanced hosting solutions during this period.
- The judicial branch has made the public's access to court information via the internet easier and more consistent by enhancing the experience for smartphone users and by launching upgraded court websites using newly designed templates that ensure ADA accessibility standards. Six courts went live with upgrades during this reporting period.

Fiscal Impact and Policy Implications

Because the allocations were funded from the court modernization appropriation, there will be no direct fiscal impact on any other funds. However, unless the modernization funding becomes a permanent feature, many courts will likely lack the ability to maintain and support the tools they have built.

Next steps

The Technology Committee and Judicial Council staff will continue to track project implementation plans and measurable outcomes, and will provide the council with regular progress updates. The Court Technology Modernization Program implementations are expected to demonstrate substantially more success metrics in the fourth quarter of fiscal year 2020–21 and beyond, with court implementation schedules showing final deliverables in the next fiscal year.

Additionally, planning for the fiscal year 2021–22 funding cycle is underway, which includes refining processes from the initial year and forming a Technology Committee-led branchwide workstream of judges and court leaders. This new workstream will assist with refining the program category requirements and success metrics, reviewing court applications, recommending projects to the Technology Committee, and reviewing the courts’ progress reports. The team of branch leaders has already begun its work, and will provide input in future updates.

Attachments and Links

1. Attachment A: Court Modernization Funding Program Fiscal Year 2020–21, Distribution of Funding

Attachment A: Court Modernization Funding Program Fiscal Year 2020–21, Distribution of Funding

| Program Category | Direct Allocation | Branchwide Programs | Totals |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| Remote Appearance Technology | \$3,673,396.00 | \$2,580,372.17 | \$6,253,768.17 |
| Digital Evidence | \$233,649.00 | \$0 | \$233,649.00 |
| Automated Messaging | \$80,401.00 | \$200,000.00 | \$280,401.00 |
| Data Driven Forms | \$0 | \$178,560.00 | \$178,560.00 |
| Digitizing of Documents | \$1,413,807.00 | \$800,000.00 | \$2,213,807.00 |
| Virtual Customer Service Center | \$1,175,324.00 | \$334,267.94 | \$1,509,591.94 |
| Trial Court Digital Services | \$1,026,421.00 | \$2,322,932.41 | \$3,349,353.41 |
| Statewide Case Index | \$0 | \$214,512.00 | \$214,512.00 |
| Building a Digital Ecosystem | \$0 | \$1,606,707.20 | \$1,606,707.20 |
| Judicial Branch Office of Information Security | \$0 | \$704,203.49 | \$704,203.49 |
| Next Generation Data Center and Cloud Solutions | \$4,194,021.00 | \$733,992.84 | \$4,928,013.84 |
| California Courts Protective Order Registry Mobile Access & Modernization | \$0 | \$1,102,008.64 | \$1,102,008.64 |
| Data Governance | \$408,523.00 | \$1,060,124.80 | \$1,468,647.80 |
| Total | \$12,205,542.00 | \$11,837,681.49 | \$24,043,223.49 |