

# SJI NEWSLETTER

Volume 26, No. 2

## SJI Awards FY 2016 First Quarter Grants

### Promoting Our Work

SJI not only uses [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) to promote the work of its grantees, but also shares information of interest to the entire state court community. If your organization's work complements ours, let us know and we will share it!



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The SJI Board of Directors met on November 16, 2015, at the Supreme Court of Louisiana in New Orleans to make decisions on quarterly grant applications and awarded a total of fourteen (14) new grants.

Two (2) Project Grants were awarded: support to the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) to update the Managing Notorious Trials for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century; and the National Association for Court Management (NACM) for educational sessions on critical court management topics.

Ten (10) Technical Assistance (TA) Grants were approved, including: assistance to the Louisiana Su-

preme Court for a court costs and fees collection improvement plan; support to the North Dakota Supreme Court for a caseload management project; strategic planning for the 7<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit of Maryland; and support to the Council for Court Excellence for a cross-jurisdictional review of remote public access to electronic court records.

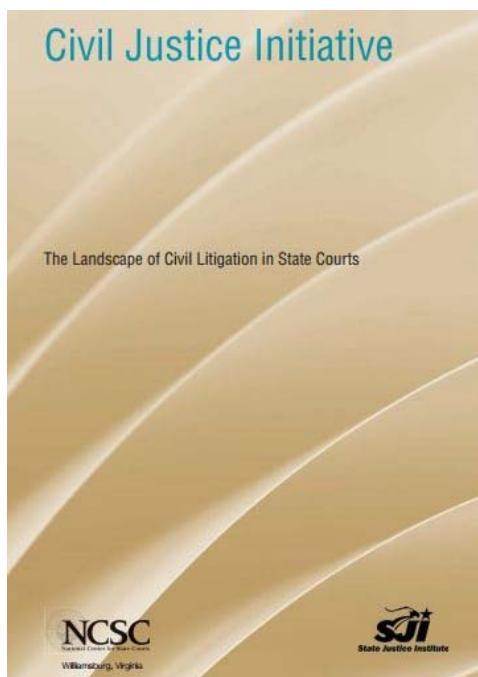
Two (2) Curriculum Adaptation & Training (CAT) Grants were approved: support to the Guam Judiciary for a Working Interdisciplinary Network of Guardianship Stakeholders (WINGS) Implementation and Guardianship training project; and the Merced County, California, Superior Court for online courthouse security training.

## New Report on the Landscape of Civil Litigation in State Courts

The National Center for State Courts (NCSC) recently released a report titled, [The Landscape of Civil Litigation of State Courts](#), which examines case characteristics and outcomes for 925,344 civil cases disposed during a one-year interval from courts exercising jurisdiction over civil cases in 10 urban counties in the United States. These 925,344 cases comprise approximately 5 percent of state civil caseloads nationally.

Among the report's key findings:

- More than half of the *Landscape* cases were low-value debt collection, landlord/tenant, and small claims cases.
- For the civil caseloads, three-quarters of the judgments entered were \$5,200 or less.
- Most cases were resolved through an administrative process rather than an adversarial proceeding.



- At least one party was self-represented in more than three-quarters of the cases.

*Landscape* is the first significant multi-jurisdiction study of civil caseloads since the 1992 *Civil Justice Survey of State Courts*, and is more comprehensive than the 1992 study insofar that it examines the entire civil caseload, rather than just cases filed in general jurisdiction courts.

With SJI support (SJI-13-P-201), the NCSC undertook the *Landscape* study to inform the deliberations of the Conference of Chief Justices (CCJ) Civil Justice Improvements Committee. The CCJ Civil Justice Improvements Committee is expected to release its final report and recommendations for addressing these challenges in early 2016.

## Vermont Completes Judicial Officer and Court Staff Caseload Study

With SJI support, the Vermont Judiciary worked with the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) to complete a [weighted caseload assessment](#) that established workload standards for the trial courts in Vermont (SJI-14-N-007).

All judicial officers and staff participated in this caseload assessment, which included the Civil, Criminal, Family and Probate Divisions, as well as the statewide Environmental Division and Vermont Judicial Bureau.

The report makes specific recommendations regarding:

- optimal numbers of judges and staff, by divisions;
- opportunities for updating the standards annually on the basis of case filings; and
- advancing the qualitative aspects of the study over time, as conditions change.

Vermont Trial Court System  
Judicial Officer and Court Staff  
Weighted Caseload Study, 2015

Final Report  
August 31, 2015



## New Report Highlights Risk and Needs Assessment at Sentencing



### Using Risk and Needs Assessment Information at Sentencing: Observations from Ten Jurisdictions

In 2011, the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) developed a [report](#) summarizing guidance from a National Working Group on how courts use offender risk and needs assessment (RNA) information to inform corrections-related decisions.

The Conference of Chief Justices and the Conference of State Court Administrators subsequently endorsed the report, and passed *Resolution 7* recommending that “offender risk and needs assessment information be available to inform judicial decisions regarding effective management and reduction of the risk of offender recidivism.”

A new report that explores how ten jurisdictions from across the country have been using defendant risk and needs assessment information at sentencing is now available. This report, [Using Risk and Needs Assessment Information at Sentencing: Observations from Ten Jurisdictions](#), offers examples of how these jurisdictions have implemented the nine guiding principles for using RNAs to inform sentencing and probation revocation decisions. It also captures themes in stakeholder perceptions of RNA information and its use at sentencing, experiences in adopting these reforms, and lessons learned.

Visit the NCSC’s Center for Sentencing Initiatives [website](#) for more details on the project and additional resources on the sentencing of offenders in the state courts.

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The State Justice Institute is a federally-funded, non-profit corporation established by federal law in 1984 to improve the quality of justice in the state courts.

