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OREGON COURT OF APPEALS REEXAMINES JUDICIAL WORKLOAD

The Oregon Court of Appeals recently completed a workload assessment with support from SJI (SJI-09-T-133); with technical assistance provided by the National Center for State Courts (NCSC). The workload assessment was required to assist the Court with achieving operational efficiencies in response to increasing caseloads, additional demands on staff and judicial resources, and budget constraints.

In order to guide the process of developing workload assessment tools and interpretation of the results, an advisory committee comprised of Court of Appeals judges and staff was created. The advisory committee approved the methodology for the workload assessment, and the timeline for creating and adopting the workload model. NCSC consultants employed a 5 phase process to: define the work of judges and staff; conduct a self-report time study on work activities; evaluate reported times against court activities; review findings in relationship to desired improvements and established benchmarks; and develop a workload assessment model based on input from the advisory committee and the workload data.

Results of the assessment supported the conclusions from an earlier internal review that the Court of Appeals is chronically underfunded, despite greater need for more resources as measured through caseloads and filings. The assessment further acknowledged that more judgeships are required, since the number of judges has remained the same since 1977 – while other justice system partners have expanded staffing and administration between 1977 and 2004. The assessment also noted the importance of continuing a strong track record of technological advancements and reviewing commitments to new initiatives, including enactment of an appellate reference judge, two-judge appellate panels, statutory amendments, and expanded use of the voluntary certification of Court of Appeals cases for the Supreme Court.

The Court of Appeals will continue to review the workload model, and communicate the needs of the judiciary to the Oregon Legislature as they enter the FY 2012 budget cycle. The final workload assessment report from this SJI-funded grant, and more information about Oregon Court of Appeals, is available on their [website](#).

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COCONINO COUNTY, ARIZONA COURTS: CHARTING A COURSE FOR SUCCESS



With SJI support, the Coconino County Courts (based in Flagstaff, Arizona) recently completed a long-range strategic plan (SJI-09-T-158), and also validated a survey tool currently being utilized by Coconino County's Pre-Trial Services Agency (SJI-09-T-069).

Like many courts across the country, Coconino County faced emerging social and economic trends over the past decade that challenged taxable incomes and presented greater need for specialized services. These trends included a substantial increase in population and diversity, as well as an aging population. In addition, the unemployment rate continued to rise; and the percent of individuals in poverty remained higher than the state average.

The strategic planning process included judicial officers, court administrators, and staff, in addition to other county justice stakeholders and community agencies. Input from those individuals and organizations external to the Courts has proven invaluable to long-range planning, especially as decisions are made regarding programming, services, and new initiatives that will require collaboration throughout the county. The Coconino County Courts created 5 strategic goal areas: 1) maximizing the efficient flow of information and interaction among people in the justice process via use of advanced technology; 2) focus on court structure and administration to promote organizational efficiency in the operations of Courts and other justice system partners; 3) ensuring all people have quality access to justice in the resolution of disputes; 4) foster active partnerships among the Courts, justice institutions, and the community at large; and 5) use of state-of-the-art facilities and operations to support the delivery of justice. A copy of the final report is available on the Court's [website](#).

In addition to the new strategic plan, the Coconino County Pre-Trial Services Agency, which is a part of the court system and serves the Superior Court, validated a questionnaire developed by the agency shortly after its creation in 1990. The tool is used to develop release recommendation reports that judges receive on each felony and some misdemeanor defendants, based on the following two pretrial risk factors: 1) appearance for court; or 2) commission of new crimes while on release. The Pretrial Justice Institute (PJI) performed the evaluation and presented the findings to the County's Criminal Justice Coordinating Council. The final report generated for the Council and agency staff included a sophisticated multi-variable analysis and tested simulations on a new instrument that would help improve efficiency in the risk assessment process. The report also concluded (through simulations) that an increase in release of some defendants not currently released under the existing assessment instrument presents less risk than originally anticipated.

SEATTLE, WASHINGTON MUNICIPAL COURT EVALUATES PROCEDURES AND SERVICES



The Seattle Municipal Court, located in Washington state's largest city received a grant (SJI-10-T-089) to evaluate existing administrative procedures and needs of justice system-involved persons. The goal of this project was to seek ways to improve the operations, staffing, and performance of the Court's criminal processing systems in light of shrinking resources, a reduction in the number of judges, and the desire to promote best practices in adjudicating limited jurisdiction cases.

NCSC accepted the grant for the Court and performed the technical assistance services associated with the project. The final report generated 21 recommendations ranging from administrative considerations, including master calendaring, Presiding Judge authority, and use of in-house criminal caseflow expertise, to timely technological advisements regarding courtroom paperwork processing and information system software upgrades.

Also highlighted in the evaluation of this limited jurisdiction court operations were recommendations that many traditional criminal and civil courts across the country are confronted with including reductions in judgeships, specialty court implementation, probation/community corrections reporting, and optimizing the sharing of court facilities between judges, attorneys, and staff. The final report from this grant is available on the SJI [website](#).

SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENTS

- Next grant and scholarship application deadline: **February 1, 2011** (2nd Quarter, FY 2011).
- The Board will meet on April 22, 2011, to make grant awards for the 2nd Quarter.
- SJI continues to operate under a Continuing Resolution. Grant awards from FY 2010 and prior are eligible for reimbursement.

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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 state courts, and foster innovative, efficient solutions to common issues faced by all courts. SJI is governed by a Board of Directors appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate.



SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENTS

- Effective October 1, 2010, grantees who have finished their projects must submit final grant reports and products under a new procedure that requires 3 hard copies sent to SJI by mail; and 1 digital copy (PDF or MS Word preferred), including all attachments and appendices. Grant products and final reports can be submitted electronically to Kathryn Tuck, Program Analyst, at kathryn.tuck@sjj.gov. Project Grant final reports are no longer required to be sent to each state law library. The NCSC library is the new clearinghouse for all SJI Project Grant final reports.
- **SJI is moving** – effective February 22, 2011, the State Justice Institute will relocate its office from Alexandria to Reston, Virginia. The new mailing address for SJI is as follows:

State Justice Institute

11951 Freedom Drive

Suite 1020

Reston, VA 20190

(the main phone and fax numbers will not change)