

E-SJI News

October 2007

The Voice of the State Justice Institute

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DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE PARTNERS WITH SJI TO PREPARE STATE COURTS FOR FUTURE CHALLENGES

The Department of Justice (DOJ), Office of Justice Programs (OJP), Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) and SJI recently finalized a FY 2007 Partnership Grant to the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) to support an Executive Session for State Court Leaders at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government (KSG). KSG, with the support of DOJ, has conducted similar efforts for Community Policing, Drugs and Community Policing, State and local Prosecution, and Public Defense. This effort will produce supporting documents to be used for a select group of State Court leaders to develop practical approaches to improving the role of State judiciaries in government. Furthermore, it will focus on how State judiciaries ensure adequate resources, improve accountability



and efficiency, while at the same time become instruments of democratic governance in the 21st Century.

The role of State judiciaries in democratic governance must be addressed and there is a national interest in

maintaining courts that are fair, impartial, and efficient. As the third branch of government, the State judiciaries have tremendous impact on the daily lives of millions of Americans. This Partner Grant will enable a select group of State judicial leaders to define the roles State judiciaries play in democratic government, and improve State court responsiveness to the public. SJI is very pleased with this opportunity to partner with DOJ, and looks forward to continuing this relationship. For more information about KSG's criminal justice and policy programs, please visit the website: <http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/criminaljustice/index.htm>. More information on NCSC can be found on their website: <http://www.ncsconline.org>.

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STATUS OF FY 2008 APPROPRIATIONS



On July 26, 2007, the House of Representatives passed the FY 2008 Commerce, Justice, Science (CJS) Appropriations Bill (H.R. 3093); which included SJI's request of \$4.64 million. On October 16, 2007, the Senate approved the CJS Bill (S. 1745); which included \$3.5 million for SJI. As always, SJI appreciates the continued support of Congress.

The next step in the appropriations process is both the House and Senate negotiate in conference committee the funding levels contained in the two versions of the CJS Bill. Following those negotiations, the House and Senate will produce a joint conference bill, which must be taken back to both chambers for final passage. Once both chambers pass the conference bill, it is sent to the President to be signed into law. After this is complete, SJI and the other departments and agencies

in the CJS bill will have their full appropriations for FY 2008.

The fiscal year started on October 1, 2007. However, no appropriations bills (including CJS) had yet to be signed into law by that date. Therefore, Congress passed, and the President signed, a Continuing Resolution (CR) to avoid the shutdown of Federal agencies. The current CR (P.L. 110-92) expires on November 16, 2008, and there may be another CR to provide more time for action on the appropriations bills.

SJI will continue to provide updates on the FY 2008 appropriations process in future versions of the E-SJI News.

PARTNER GRANTS

Partner Grants were established in FY 2006 as a way for SJI to work with other agencies and organizations to provide grants that address court needs on a national level. These partnerships give us an opportunity to leverage our funding to increase support for courts. One of our first Partner Grants with Pew Charitable Trusts increased the involvement of State courts in foster care issues. This \$1,207,000 Partner Grant allowed State courts to take on major new roles and responsibilities as part of the foster care system in the United States.

The partnership between SJI and the Legal Services Corporation (LSC) began in FY 2006, and was designed to improve access to justice for pro se and

other low-income litigants. In the first year, SJI and LSC provided a total of \$637,734 to support a slate of innovative technology projects. The partnership continued in FY 2007, providing a total of \$672,758 for another slate of legal services and court collaboration projects. This successful partnership continues to benefit both agencies. Combining the funding and interests of both agencies results in more resources being made available across the United States, and encourages more joint court and legal service projects.

The SJI and Open Society partnership examined the fairness and diversity efforts of courts across the country. This was a small project to examine access to fairness programs being adopted in various states. SJI also

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HELPFUL HINTS FOR GRANT APPLICANTS

A number of issues may cause SJI to either deny a grant request, or encourage the applicant to revise the application to avoid problems in the use of Federal funds. Therefore, SJI will be highlighting some of these issues periodically in the E-SJI News. The goal is to provide useful information for potential applicants, so that their grant requests meet SJI requirements.

A common issue encountered is the purchasing of equipment. SJI's Grant Guideline states that grant funds may be used to purchase or lease only that equipment essential to accomplishing the goals and objectives of the project. The written prior approval of the Institute is required when the amount of automated data processing (ADP) equipment to be purchased or leased exceeds \$10,000, or software to be purchased exceeds \$3,000. Therefore, SJI funding may not be used **solely** to purchase equipment.

SJI is well aware that many projects include equipment purchases where courts seek to improve their information technology (IT) capabilities, or improve IT processes. Please keep in mind that, in these instances, the applicant should commit to using matching funds to purchase the necessary equipment, while SJI funds would be requested for other project requirements.

In addition to equipment, any product developed with SJI funds must be placed in the public domain. This includes IT projects that generate software, databases, or other systems. Applicants are strongly advised not to submit grant requests to SJI that assume a contract will be signed with an outside vendor to develop software or systems that will not be available to the public. In other words, all grant products (including software and databases) must be made available to other courts across the United States upon request, and to SJI and the SJI Libraries, at no charge. This must not be overlooked since many IT and software companies are not willing to release their proprietary work free of charge.

If you have questions about the use of SJI grant funding, we encourage you to call and discuss with SJI staff before spending a lot of time developing an application that would be difficult for the Board to approve.

PARTNER GRANTS

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entered into a FY 2007 partnership with DOJ/OJP/BJA, which is described in more detail in the lead article of this month's E-SJI News.

SJI is in the process of finalizing a new partnership with Pew Charitable Trusts' Public Safety Performance Project. The goal of these activities will be to promote fiscally sound, data-driven policies and practices on sentencing and corrections that protect the public safety, hold offenders accountable,

and control correctional costs. The National Center for State Courts, the Crime and Justice Institute, and the National Judicial College will be working together to provide technical assistance, education, and training to State courts and key stakeholders in justice systems, such as prosecutors and probation officers. These efforts will be coordinated with Pew's Public Safety Performance Project activities being carried out by the Council of State Governments Justice Center

and the Vera Institute. The participating organizations are pleased to be working together on this partnership activity.

We are looking forward to the opportunity to work with other organizations in addressing these national scope projects, while at the same time supporting traditional Curriculum Adaptation and Training Grants for State and local courts.

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The State Justice Institute is a private, non-profit corporation established by Congress in 1984 to provide financial support for projects to improve the quality of justice in State courts. SJI is governed by a Board of Directors appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate.



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