

SJI Newsletter

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SJI Approves FY 2020 Fourth Quarter Grants

The SJI Board of Directors met virtually on August 31, 2020 to make decisions on quarterly [grant applications](#), and approved a total of 15 new grants.

Ten (10) Strategic Initiatives Grants were approved in support of SJI's [Pandemic Response and Recovery Request for Applications](#) (RFA). More information about these innovative projects will be released soon. SJI received over \$4.8 million in applications for the RFA in the first round. SJI is now accepting applications on a rolling basis. Potential applicants are encouraged to closely review the requirements. Visit the [Virtual Learning](#) section of the Funding Toolkit for State Courts and Justice System Partners to learn more about SJI funding, including a podcast about this funding opportunity.

Email contact@sj.gov with questions regarding this [solicitation](#).

Five (5) [Technical Assistance Grants](#) were approved: the Tennessee Administrative Office of the Courts to develop and implement a pilot Online Dispute Resolution (ODR) platform to resolve medical debt disputes in Hamilton County; the Iowa Judicial Branch to implement a landlord/tenant ODR pilot in Story County; the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) to provide technical assistance to several jurisdictions that will assess the quality of master jury lists, including inclusiveness, representativeness, and record accuracy; the North Carolina Administrative Office of the Courts to provide a specialized online orientation video for the Custody and Visitation Mediation Program in both English and Spanish; and the New Hampshire Supreme Court for the redevelopment and design overhaul of the Judiciary's website.

The next deadline for grant applications is November 1, 2020 (FY 2021, 1st Quarter).



Rural Justice Collaborative Seeks Nominations

The [National Center for State Courts \(NCSC\)](#), in partnership with [Rulo Strategies](#), is launching a Rural Justice Collaborative (RJC).

Supported by SJI and the [Opioid Response Network](#), the RJC is seeking nominations for Advisory Committee members, as well as for cross-sector programs or initiatives based in rural communities that involve courts and stakeholders in the justice, child welfare, and behavioral health systems.

[Learn more](#) about the RJC.

[Submit](#) your nominations by October 16th.



CCJ/COSCA RRT Technology Workgroup Releases Resource Paper, Endorses Technology Principles

The coronavirus pandemic has led to inconvenience, unprecedented case backlogs and issues that the nation's state courts haven't faced since the influenza pandemic of 1918-19. It has also led to opportunity.

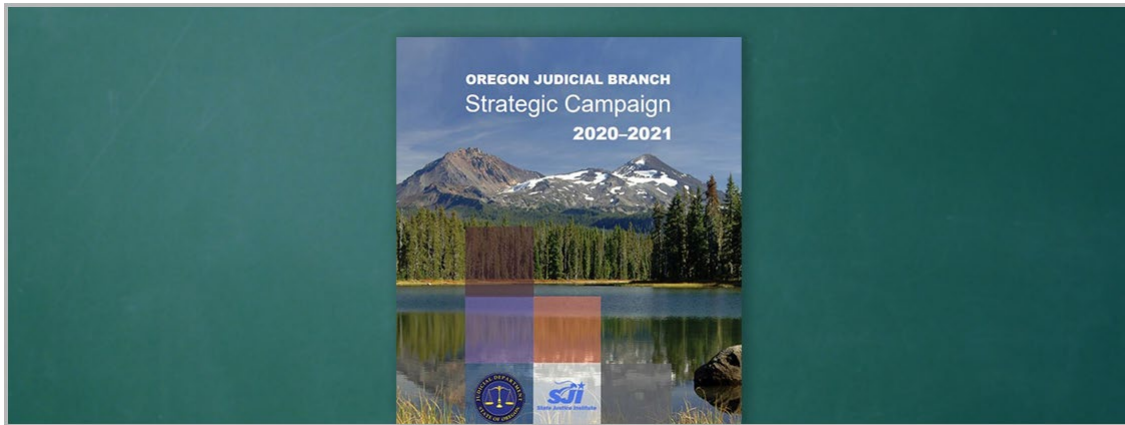
The [Conference of Chief Justices \(CCJ\)](#) and [Conference of State Court Administrators \(COSCA\)](#) urge state court officials to view the pandemic with a glass-half-full perspective, and they recommend that state courts consider six principles related to their use of technology going forward.

“The COVID-19 pandemic is not the disruption courts wanted, but it is the disruption that courts needed to re-imagine and embrace new ways of operating and to transform courts into a more accessible, transparent, efficient, and user-friendly branch of government,” CCJ and COSCA’s RRT Technology workgroup wrote in a recently released [resource paper](#).

Here are the six principles, and some steps court officials can take to implement them:

- **Ensure principles of due process, procedural fairness, transparency, and equal access are satisfied when adopting new technologies.** Make sure litigants receive proper notice of hearings. Use plain language to present legal information. Design systems that connect litigants with legal help. Review online dispute resolution agreements prior to hearings.
- **Focus on the user experience.** Make it easier for people to use court services by expanding online opportunities and communication channels with users, including underserved communities and people who are less than proficient in English.
- **Prioritize court-user driven technology.** Identify problems in order to select the best technological solutions and get input from all stakeholders, including lawyers and litigants.
- **Embrace flexibility and willingness to adapt.** Test and adapt, try and fail, and move on from technology that isn’t solving problems. Start with a viable product that doesn’t impact fundamental due process. Examine and re-examine the product. Be open to public-private partnerships to refine it.
- **Adopt remote-first (or at least remote-friendly) planning, where practicable, to move court processes forward.** Move as many court processes as possible online. Allow for remote attendance at hearings using telephone or video. Ensure that staffers and users have the training and resources they need to participate. Figure out how to involve users with no or limited access to the internet.
- **Take an open, data-driven, and transparent approach to implementing and maintaining court processes and supporting technologies.** Collect data at frequent intervals and ensure it helps court leaders accurately assess the technology’s impact. Protect personal identifying information.

Technology has played a critical role in the courts’ response to the pandemic. As courts begin to resume some in-person proceedings and to consider a post-pandemic world, courts must not leave the technological advances behind, but instead use these guiding principles to build upon the success of the past months to better serve court users and provide greater equal access to justice for all.



Oregon Launches Two-Year Strategic Campaign to Improve Court Services

January 2020 marked the start of the [Oregon Judicial Department's](#) two-year [Strategic Campaign](#), developed with SJI support and technical assistance provided by the [National Center for State Courts \(NCSC\)](#).

This new approach, recommended by the NCSC and focused on identifying short-term, achievable goals – appealed to Chief Justice Martha L. Walters and State Court Administrator Nancy J. Cozine. The campaign, as opposed to a longer-term strategic plan, spans 2020-2021 and employs a more flexible and open-ended methodology to mobilize judges, court staff, and justice partners in the development of vital improvement themes and initiatives. This revised approach reflects the reality that courts often need to pivot quickly in the changing landscapes of social welfare, budget challenges, and local and national policy priorities.

To develop the campaign, the Judiciary engaged in a four-month process of gathering stakeholder input, starting with the creation of a Strategic Campaign Advisory Committee, comprised of judges and administrators from across this state. Working with consultants, the committee developed an engagement and outreach plan to learn where the Judiciary should focus its efforts in the coming years. This resulted in numerous focus groups and outreach meetings with a variety of stakeholders – judges, staff, public defenders, prosecutors, family law attorneys, legal aid leaders, civil practitioners, businesses, state and local government agencies, Bar leadership, and others. The feedback was then presented and discussed at a two-day summit where more than 40 judges and administrators considered where the Judiciary should focus its energy and resources over the next two years.

Four key themes emerged, which became commitments to the people of Oregon, and all who encounter the state justice system:

1. We will join with community partners to improve services and outcomes for people who are underserved, vulnerable, or marginalized; and we will develop effective, supportive, and creative solutions to respond to their legal needs.
2. We will improve access to justice by eliminating barriers; continuing to simplify and streamline our processes and forms; enhancing service options; leveraging technology; improving interpreter services; and advocating for resources to keep courts open, safe, and secure.

3. We will enhance the public's trust and confidence in Oregon's state government, including the judicial branch, by listening and responding to the needs of those we serve; holding ourselves to high standards; and communicating the role of our courts in providing justice for all.
4. We will create a workplace and courthouse culture that is supportive, inclusive, welcoming, and affirming; that embraces diversity; and where all people can thrive and are treated with respect and dignity.

Each of these commitments is supported by several initiatives designed to carry the goals forward, led by judges and administrators from all over the state. "We face many challenges in our constant effort to provide justice for all Oregonians," said Chief Justice Walters. "It is my hope that, by undertaking specific commitments and initiatives, we can better address those challenges, increase public trust and confidence in our courts, and improve our services for all."

This two-year campaign approach proved to be the correct course as Oregon's judicial branch soon found itself facing unapparelled circumstances in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, rising social and economic disparity, and the renewed demands for justice. This required some retooling of these initiatives and, fortunately, the campaign structure allowed for needed modifications.

While some of the initiatives may take more time, as new budget challenges and cuts to programs loom on the horizon, nearly all have been launched, finding renewed purpose in this time of change. For example, the initiative team to advance fairness in the imposition and collection of court fines and fees sprang into action, providing immediate relief from collections for those who found themselves suffering from economic hardship during the pandemic. The Judiciary's efforts to emphasize diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging in the court system led to the rapid development of staff conversations and trainings during the pandemic. The increased demand for remote hearings brought new focus on building technological tools, accessible forms, and best practices for court participation from remote locations.

For questions about this project, or to learn more, please contact Erin M. Pettigrew, Access to Justice Counsel, at Erin.M.Pettigrew@ojd.state.or.us.

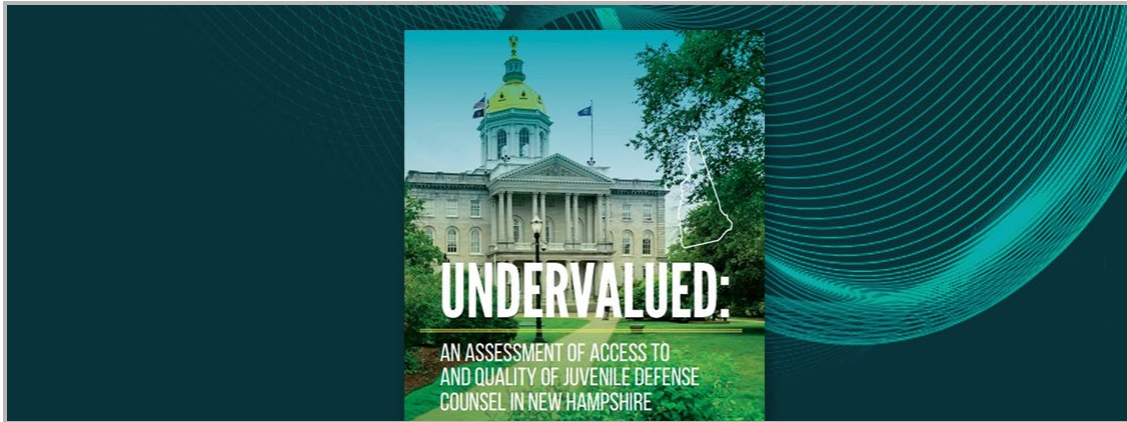


National Recovery Month Serves as Opportunity to Review Resources

September - designated nationally as an annual observance, educates Americans that substance use treatment and mental health services can enable those with mental and substance use disorders to live healthy and rewarding lives. Now in its 31st year, [Recovery Month](#) celebrates the gains made by those living in recovery.

It is also a time for state courts to examine resources that make them stronger partners in the recovery community:

- The [National Judicial Opioid Task Force \(NJOTF\) Resource Center](#) – Cataloged by the [National Center for State Courts \(NCSC\)](#). This national clearinghouse of information pertaining to the work accomplished over the past five years provides courts with both current and historical sources, training, and programs/strategies.
- [National Summit on Opioids and Children in State Courts](#) – Held in August 2020, as a primer to the national focus on recovery, this SJI-supported online Summit hosted by the [National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges \(NCJFCJ\)](#) is archived and accessible online, with registration.
- Opioids and the State Courts Response – Much of the local and national research, programming, and literature, developed specifically for courts, was done so under this [State Justice Institute Priority Investment Area](#). SJI is proud to collaborate with other federal funders to help courts gain valuable resources and technical assistance, so that they may be leaders in partnerships that promote recovery.



NJDC Releases 26th State Assessment of Juvenile Defense Systems

The [National Juvenile Defender Center \(NJDC\)](#) is pleased to announce the release of its most recent assessment, [Undervalued: An Assessment of Access to and Quality of Juvenile Defense Counsel in New Hampshire](#). It is a thorough examination of New Hampshire's juvenile defense delivery system.

The report was featured in New Hampshire's largest paper, the [Union Leader](#), and represents the culmination of an 18-month process of research, site visits, data analysis, writing, editing, and stakeholder outreach.

The assessment found that an absence of dedicated juvenile defense practitioners in New Hampshire leads to many youth waiving their rights and facing long-term consequences. Nearly every aspect of the defense system is set up to devalue juvenile delinquency cases, often leading to youth receiving constitutionally deficient counsel.

This report is the 26th state assessment NJDC has released. Every previous NJDC assessment report has spurred reforms in states juvenile defense systems. The NJDC encourages the New Hampshire Judiciary to consider:

- Implementing a strong, well-resourced, specialized system of juvenile defense.
- Establishing and supporting juvenile defense leadership and requiring specialization in juvenile defense.
- Establishing state standards for juvenile defense attorney qualifications and performance.
- Automatically appointing counsel for all youth prior to their first court appearance and ensuring youth are represented throughout their involvement in the juvenile legal system.

All NJDC's state assessments can be found [online](#).



WEBINAR: How to Make Great Legal Content for the COVID-19 Era

Strategies and Advice from Legal Aid Orgs and Courts
Thursday, October 1, 2020 at 3:00 PM (ET)

Join a free webinar to learn how lawyers can create cutting edge and impactful legal content.

Participants will learn how to:

- launch great-looking (and great sounding!) content projects;
- develop a content strategy and choose target audiences; and,
- navigate potential pitfalls – so that you can avoid mistakes when launching your own projects.

Participants include:

- Jeffrey Dillman, Co-Director of the [Fair Housing Project of Legal Aid of North Carolina](#)
- Susan Ingles, Consumer Law Unit Head, [South Carolina Legal Services](#)
- Diana Colon, Assistant Deputy Counsel, [NYS Unified Court System, Office of Court Administration, Division of Professional and Court Services](#)

[Register today!](#)

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