

E-SJI News

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BOARD AWARDS GRANTS FOR THE 4th QUARTER

On June 26, 2009, the SJI Board of Directors met to award grants for the 4th quarter of FY 2009. A total of \$374,456 in new grants were awarded. Awarded grants included a Project Grant to the Maryland Judiciary for a comparative evaluation and cost analysis of three teen court models in the state. Teen courts provide an alternative program for first time teen offenders and are growing in popularity across the United States. However, evidence of their effectiveness is inconclusive. Therefore, this project will provide an understanding of how teen courts function in Maryland, and their effectiveness in impacting outcomes for at-risk teens. Another Project Grant was awarded to the New Mexico Administrative Office of the Courts for Phase II of their Justice System Interpreter Resource Project. This project will continue to improve the use of interpreters in the state, in addition to the pooling of limited interpreter resources across the justice system.

Five (5) Technical Assistance (TA) Grant applications were awarded, including a strategic planning project for the Coconino County, Arizona, Superior Court; a case flow management project for Shelby County, Indiana; a county-wide justice system collaboration project for Troupe County, Georgia; and an Electronic Document Management System planning project for the 5th District Court of Appeal in California. Four (4) Curriculum Adaptation and Training (CAT) Grant applications were awarded, including emergency management training for the 18th Judicial Circuit in Florida; support for the National Judicial College's water law education programs; a D.C. Bench/Bar/Media education program to be conducted by the Council for Court Excellence; and Court Management Program training for the 20th Judicial Circuit and Ottawa County, Michigan, Probate Courts.

FY 2009 was another successful year for SJI. In addition to continuing to support individual state courts through numerous grants, SJI continued its focus on national court issues, such as immigration in the state courts and court budgeting, through the Strategic Initiatives Grants program. SJI is committed to continuing these efforts in FY 2010.

Inside

Update on Efforts to Assist the State Courts
with Budget Issues **2**

Legal Services Corporation and SJI
Finalize 4th Year Partner Grant **2**

New Handbook will Assist Journalists
in Reporting on the D.C. Courts **3**

UPDATES ON EFFORTS TO ASSIST THE STATE COURTS WITH BUDGET ISSUES

In FY 2009, SJI awarded a Strategic Initiatives Grant (SIG) to the National Center for State Courts (NSCS) to provide direct technical assistance to state courts facing severe budget shortfalls. The current and projected fiscal conditions for state and local governments are extremely dire; having a significant negative impact on the state courts. SJI has already received grant requests to assist state courts in these difficult times. For example, in FY 2009, SJI awarded a grant to the Vermont Supreme Court to re-engineer the court system as a result of budget shortfalls in that state. This SIG project is providing the technical assistance needed to assist the state courts in adapting to budget cuts, while maintaining service delivery and access to justice. The assistance includes: documenting and analyzing the experiences at selected sites for general guidance for courts; and assistance to the sites in defining and prioritizing their options, and re-engineering processes.

NSCS is currently working in Vermont, Oregon, Minnesota, and Utah. As an example, NCSC has assisted the Salem, Oregon, Municipal Court on their Collections Improvement project. The Court and the City of Salem have worked collaboratively to document current collections processes and procedures in both the Court and City offices; document collections rates and receivables based on available information; and develop processes and procedures that improve collections. NCSC is also monitoring several states (where it is not working) who are responding to the fiscal crisis with innovative solutions.

Also as part of the SIG re-engineering project, NCSC conducted a budget survey of the Conference of State Court Administrators (COSCA). The results of this survey, and information on the ongoing work in the state courts, are available on NCSC's Budget Resource Center website. The website includes an interactive map of state activities that provides information on what the state courts are doing to address the fiscal crisis.

LEGAL SERVICES CORPORATION & SJI FINALIZE 4th YEAR PARTNER GRANT



LSC and SJI began working to tighten the bonds between courts and legal aid providers in FY 2006. SJI provides additional funding for LSC to make awards for projects that have a court component in their Technology Initiative Grants (TIG) program. LSC and SJI work together to determine appropriate projects for joint funding.

In FY 2009, LSC and SJI are continuing these efforts by recently finalizing a Partner Grant totaling **\$660,000**. This 4th year Partner Grant will fund a slate of innovative technology projects designed to promote full access to justice through the use of technology. The partnership uses LSC's existing Technology Initiative Grants (TIG) program to support these innovative projects. SJI's share, \$330,000, is fully matched by LSC, and will provide additional resources to develop collaborative efforts between the courts and legal service programs in order to better serve self-represented and low-income litigants across the United States. Between FY 2006 and 2009, LSC/SJI Partner Grants have supported **\$2.6 million** in TIG projects. More information on the FY 2009 Partner Grant will be available in the future from both LSC and SJI. In the meantime, those interested in LSC's TIG program should visit the program website: <http://tig.lsc.gov/>.

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The State Justice Institute is a private, 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.



NEW HANDBOOK WILL ASSIST JOURNALISTS IN REPORTING ON THE D.C. COURTS



In September, the Council for Court Excellence (CCE) released the *Journalists' Handbook to the Courts in the District of Columbia*. The development of this handbook was supported by a SJI grant (SJI-07-N-058). The handbook is a result of a two-year effort by a diverse and highly experienced cross-section of journalists, judges, court public information officers, media attorneys, and the civic community to develop the first guide for members of the press who cover the local and federal courts in D.C. The handbook is designed to assist journalists in covering the courts accurately, fairly, comprehensively, and with respect to the processes and participants. It includes frequently asked questions, definitions, and terms, and details on the roles and processes of the courts in D.C.

SJI has been focused on improving the relationship between the courts and the media, and this project has been an important component of those efforts. In addition to its justice system reform efforts, CCE has a long history of publishing other law-related education guides for the D.C. community – to the foster care system, the probate system, the jury system, and the adult juvenile system. CCE recently finalized a guide to the juvenile justice system; which was also supported by a SJI grant.

The *Journalists' Handbook to the Courts in the District of Columbia*, in addition to other court-related publications, is available on the CCE website: www.courtexcellence.org.

SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENTS

- Next grant and scholarship application deadline: **November 1, 2009** (1st Quarter, FY 2010).
- The new SJI Grant Guideline for FY 2010 will be available on the SJI website in October 2009.