

California Self-Help Centers' Self-Assessment Tool for Quality Programs

2018

**Superior Court of California, County of Butte
and Judicial Council of California**



Acknowledgments The California Self-Help Centers' Self-Assessment Tool for Quality Programs is a collaborative project of the Superior Court of California, County of Butte SHARP Program, and the Judicial Council of California, Center for Families, Children and the Courts. Thank you to the following people for their work in the development, revision, and testing of the tool:

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A special thanks to:

All of the contributors to the Judicial Council reports that informed and guided the foundation of this planning tool. Your leadership and vision paved the way for actionable steps to be implemented.

Jeff Davis, Executive Director of the California Afterschool Network for sharing the tool format of the California After School Network's Self-Assessment Tool for Quality Programs.



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Introduction

The California Self-Help Centers' Self-Assessment Tool for Quality Programs was developed as a strategic and tactical planning template to promote quality Self-Help Center Programs across California. The tool is designed to connect a wide range of initiatives within the Judicial Branch, and to intentionally develop systems to interconnect the larger court system with self-help programs.



The Tool is designed to:

- Support the development and refinement of a planning template that identifies immediate actionable steps as well as ongoing, and long-term program goals to support program quality.
- Engage key-stakeholders in the community, local court staff, and self-help center staff to facilitate important conversations about program quality and continuous program improvement.
- Serve as a self-assessment planning tool and not an external program evaluation tool.
- Support newly hired Self-Help Attorneys and Family Law Facilitators.

The Tool can be used:

- During staff meetings to facilitate professional development and inform ongoing planning needs.
- To facilitate internal court communication and planning, and collaboration efforts within the community.
- As a driver of program innovation and design.
- To inform multi-year strategic and annual tactical plans for self-help programs.

❓ **The tool was developed based on the significant work of partners and leaders throughout the state who authored the following Judicial Council of California Reports:**

❓ **[Statewide Action Plan for Serving Self-Represented Litigants, 2004](#)**

❓ **[Guidelines for the Operation of Self-Help Centers in California Trial Courts, 2011](#)**

❓ **[Strategic Plan for Language Access in the California Courts, 2015](#)**

▪ **[Commission on the Future of California's Court System, 2017](#)**

❓ **[Information Technology Advisory Committee, Strategic Plan for Technology 2014-2017](#)**

❓ **[Information Technology Advisory Committee, Tactical Plan for Technology, 2017-2018](#)**

The Tool Includes 12 Program Quality Components:

Component 1	Operations, Integration with the Court
Component 2	Scope of Services
Component 3	Education
Component 4	Ethics
Component 5	Staffing
Component 6	Professional Development
Component 7	Technology
Component 8	Language Access and Cultural Competency
Component 9	Access for Litigants with Disabilities
Component 10	Cross-Court and Statewide Collaboration
Component 11	Community Collaboration and Volunteers
Component 12	Program Innovation and Future

The Need

Providing access to justice is the core foundation of California’s publicly funded self-help centers. Self-help centers currently provide services to self-represented litigants through various service delivery methods, including: one-on-one appointments, workshops, self-help computer labs, and live-answered phone and email services. The demand for services has steadily outpaced our capacity to provide service with current funding allocations. By most estimates, between 70-90% of all litigants in family law are self-represented, and the emerging data is reporting that 70% of litigants in civil law are self-represented. This has created a tidal wave of changes across the entire court ecosystem. Self-help centers were initially tasked with providing assistance and services within family law, assisting with areas such as: dissolution, request for orders, guardianships, and restraining orders. Now there is a consistent demand for civil law assistance in areas such as: unlawful detainers (tenant/landlord disputes and evictions), small claims, debt collection trial preparation and expungement to name a few.

These changes coupled with significant demand requires us to think strategically about the entire state model, the framework of services, our collaborative partners and commitments, and the tools and technology we use to provide higher quality programs and greater access to assistance for litigants. These services can be provided by designing an educational framework that provides a foundation of services to all self-help centers, provides services to litigants remotely via technology and accessible from home, and effectively design a thoughtful system to train staff at each center through one-on-one coaching and remote workshops. This also requires self-help centers to assess where they currently are and where they are planning to go. This self-assessment tool will provide a frame for developing a thoughtful programmatic plan.

COMPONENT 1: OPERATIONS, INTEGRATION WITHIN THE COURT

		Yes/No In Progress	Examples:
1	The Self-Help Center is located in the courthouse or in an adjacent building.		
2	The Self-Help Center is easy to find and accessible to the public. (Includes multi-lingual signage, assistance within Court, directions to center on website)		
3	The Self-Help Center has regular hours of operation that are posted at the center and easily accessible on the Court's website.		
4	The Self-Help Center staff is included in regular meetings with court administration, judicial officers, and other operational staff to discuss administrative and general issues facing self-represented litigants.		
5.	Self-Help Center staff have established systems and support to communicate with Court Clerks to troubleshoot concerns between the two departments.		
6.	The Self-Help Center collaborates with existing courthouse programs. (Law Libraries, Mediation Services, DCSS Commissioners, Court Administration, etc.)		
7.	The Court Self-Help Center provides a basic group of core self-help services and makes available a list of those services to the public. This information is available on the Court's website and on flyers.		

Action Plan:	Technical Assistance/Support needed:

COMPONENT 2- SCOPE OF SERVICES

		Yes/No In progress	Examples:
1.	<p>Self-Help Centers provide legal information services and assistance with Court forms, processes, and procedures to self-represented litigants such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview and assessment • Assistance with pleadings and fee waiver applications • Document review • Procedural information • Assistance with understanding service requirements and methods • Preparation for hearings • Completion of orders after hearings and judgments • Drafting stipulations 		
2.	<p>Additional services should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Readiness reviews for calendar appearances • Case status meetings • Settlement assistance • Providing remote delivery of legal services (email, phone, internet) 		
3.	<p>Courtroom assistance is provided including but not limited to: answering questions from litigants, explaining procedures, preparing orders after hearing, and otherwise assisting litigants without making an appearance or advocating on their behalf.</p>		
4.	<p>Courtroom assistance is coordinated with judges and courtroom staff.</p>		
5.	<p>Self-Help Centers assist litigants to the extent possible whether or not the litigants live in the county where the self-help center is located or have a case in that court.</p>		

Action plan:	Technical Support/Assistance needed:

COMPONENT 3- EDUCATION

		Yes/No In progress	Examples:
1.	<p>Delivery methods of service have been determined based on an assessment of local needs. Methods may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshops • Individualized personal assistance • Document assembly programs • Interactive web platforms • Walk-in services • Appointments via phone • Appointments via video-conference (remote) 		
2.	If facilitating workshops, staff use pre-developed curriculum, and employ instructional strategies that not only assist litigants with procedural instructions, but also provide an overview of the legal content.		
3.	Staff are provided with training in customer service principles and education strategies for people under stress.		
4.	The Self-Help Center program coordinates regularly with Court programs to ensure litigants are receiving adequate information to prepare them for their legal process.		
5.	The Self-Help Center routinely collects data via surveys/intakes to assess for program quality and efficacy of delivery of services.		

Action Plan:	Technical Support/Assistance needed:

COMPONENT 4- ETHICS

		Yes/No In progress	Examples:
1.	All Self-Help Center staff and volunteers are aware of and comply with Self-Help Center and Court staff ethical guidelines.		
2.	Self-Help Ethical Guidelines include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Independence and Integrity - Role as Representative of the Court - Impartiality and Diligence - Respect and Patience - Bias and Prejudice - Competent Legal Information - Full Notification of Limits of Service - Public Comment - Gifts or Payments - Communications with Bench Officers - Communication with Represented Litigants - Volunteering in a Self-Help Center 		
3.	General Court Ethical Guidelines include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Impartiality - Personal Integrity - Professionalism - Confidentiality - Impropriety - Appearance of Impropriety - Prohibition Against Giving Legal Advice - Public Resources - Service and Competency - Discrimination - Harassment - Technology 		
3.	The Self-Help Managing Attorney ensures compliance with ethical standards by reviewing practices and procedures within the center, and confirms that all staff have been trained and receive ongoing professional development.		
4.	The Self-Help Center gives notice that the services are not intended to give one side of a case an advantage over the other, and that no attorney-client relationship exists between the self-help center personnel and the litigant using the center.		
5.	The Self-Help Center may not provide assistance on any issue in which a litigant is actively represented by an attorney. The center has a written protocol to avoid providing		

	service to litigants who are currently represented by an attorney on that issue.		
6.	Self-Help Center staff and volunteers must not make any public comment about a pending or impending proceeding in the court as provided in the canons of judicial ethics.		

Action Plan:	Technical Support/Assistance needed:

COMPONENT 5- STAFFING

Managing Attorney

		Yes/No In Progress	Examples:
1.	The Managing Attorney: is an active member of the State Bar of California and has a minimum of five of the last seven years working as a Family Law Facilitator or in another Self-Help Center, or practicing law in an area of law relevant to the services of the center, such as family, probate, landlord/tenant, or consumer litigation.		
2.	Ensures an attorney oversees the legal work of non-attorney staff who provide direct legal information and provide oversight of all the legal assistance education provided to the public.		
3.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attends management meetings within the court as required. Serves as liaison with other divisions within the court. Works with judicial officers on effective case flow management and on other matters as directed. 		
4.	Participates in continuing education opportunities and facilitates workshops and training for staff and others.		
5.	Oversees and evaluates Self-Help Center staff and volunteers.		
6.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develops programs and materials for the public; Provides direct services to the public; Works with other community legal services providers and local bars to coordinate services and establish collaborations; and Conducts community outreach and education programs. 		
7.	Managing Attorneys are allowed sufficient time to perform their administrative duties, attend meetings, and attend educational trainings and conferences necessary to meet continuing		

	education requirements and to maintain high professional standards for the Self-Help Center.		
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Action Plan:	Technical Support/Assistance needed:

COMPONENT 5- STAFFING

Staff Attorney

		Yes/No In progress	Examples:
1.	The Staff Attorney: is an active member of the State Bar of California and has a minimum of two of the last three years working as a Family Law Facilitator or in another Self-Help Center, or practicing law in an area of law relevant to the services of the center, such as family, probate, landlord/tenant, or consumer litigation.		
2.	Provides direct services to the public.		
3.	Conducts research and updates legal materials for the public.		
4.	Participates in continuing education opportunities and facilitates workshops and training for staff and others.		
5.	The staff attorney is allowed sufficient time to attend educational trainings and conferences necessary to meet continuing education requirements and maintain high professional standards for the Self-Help Center.		

Action Plan:	Technical Support/Assistance needed:

COMPONENT 5- STAFFING

Non-Attorney Self-Help Center Legal Support Staff

		Yes/No In progress	Examples:
1.	<p>Non-attorney legal support staff duties include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides direct services to the public • Maintains and updates materials • Maintains supplies and equipment • Answers phones, makes appointments, directs calls • Compiles statistical data based on intake and evaluation forms • Provides the public with general information about the court • Provides case status information • Assists the public with technology and distribute educational materials 		
2.	<p>Self-Help Centers strive to recruit non-attorney Self-Help Center staff with at least one of the following qualifications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A juris doctorate, but not an active member of the California State Bar • A certificate from a paralegal program certified by the American Bar Association (ABA) • A Bachelor’s degree and either one year of experience working with a licensed attorney or providing self-help services under the supervision of an attorney • A high school diploma or GED and three years of working for a California court, plus a minimum of 20 hours of additional training in the areas of substantive and procedural law, as well as legal and judicial ethics • Customer Service experience or education 		
3.	Staff is allowed sufficient time to attend educational trainings and conferences necessary to meet continuing education requirements and maintain high professional standards for the Self-Help Center.		

Action Plan:	Technical Support/Assistance needed:

COMPONENT 6- PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

		Yes/No In progress	Examples:
1.	The Self-Help Center has a professional development plan for staff that is updated annually. Professional Development is offered in areas such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal Issues • Customer Service • Supporting Litigants under stress • Cultural Competency and Language Access • Local Court procedures • Education strategies • Technology • Managing stress 		
2.	Professional Development opportunities are available in multiple formats including: coaching, observation, peer-learning, cross-county collaboration and workshops.		
3.	Staff participate in regularly scheduled staff meetings, and there is collaboration with other Court programs.		
4.	Staff participate in statewide and regional conferences.		
5.	New staff receive a thorough orientation, including overview of policies and procedures, and areas outlined in area 1.		
6.	All staff receive regular and ongoing training on Ethics.		

Action Plan:	Technical Support/Assistance needed:

COMPONENT 7- TECHNOLOGY

		Yes/No In progress	Examples:
1.	Self-Help Center staff have access to computer workstations with printers and software that includes access to the Court's public online records and any other appropriate access to Court records that can help them perform their duties competently and efficiently.		
2.	Self-Help Center staff have additional access to information such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internet (including access to a numerous sites: Google, Kelly Blue Book, Zillow, etc.) • Court email • Support from Court IT • DCSS guideline child support calculator 		
3.	Self-Help Center information is clearly articulated on the Court's website: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Days/times of operation; • Services provided • Referral information for services not provided • Scheduling information • Access to local forms • Information regarding local procedures such as ex-parte procedures • Access to legal information • Online document assembly programs • E-filing information • Link to California Courts Self-Help Website 		
4.	Self-Help computers are available and accessible to litigants.		
5.	Self-Help Center has adequate broadband capacity for self-help computers to access cloud-based resources.		
6.	Staff have been trained in video conferencing technology such as: Zoom or Skype to collaborate across partner courts.		
7.	Self-Help Center staff provide services via technology driven programs such as: email, webinars, videos, etc.		
8.	Document assembly programs such as <i>Law Help Interactive</i> and <i>Guide and File</i> are recommended and utilized on Self-Help computers.		

9.	Self-Help Center staff have been trained on current e-filing procedures to provide support to litigants (if applicable).		
10.	Self-Help Center staff are included and participate in Court technology professional development offerings.		

Action Plan:	Technical Support/Assistance needed:

COMPONENT 8- LANGUAGE ACCESS AND CULTURAL COMPETENCY

		Yes/No In progress	Examples:
1.	A plan is in place to assist users who need services in a language in which staff is not fluent. Language need is documented in the Court's case information system to alert staff of language assistance needs. Assistance is provided to complete the Request for Interpreter forms when appropriate.		
2.	Self-Help Center staff know who the Court's designated language access coordinator is for all court users.		
3.	Critical Self-Help Center materials are available in languages most prevalent in the county and are translated by qualified personnel.		
4..	Contract translation services are available.		
5.	Interpreters are made available to the Self-Help Center.		
6.	Staff share forms that are available in other languages		
7.	"I speak" language access cards are available to litigants to identify their language needs.		
8.	The Self-Help Center is connected with neighboring courts to access multilingual staff and share resources.		
9.	Self-Help Center strives to recruit qualified bilingual staff in languages most common in that county.		
10.	Self-Help Center staff have been provided with Cultural Competency Training.		

Action Plan:	Technical Support/Assistance needed:

COMPONENT 9- ACCESS FOR LITIGANTS WITH DISABILITIES

		Yes/No In progress	Examples:
1.	The Self-Help Center is physically accessible pursuant to the Americans with Disabilities Act.		
2.	ASL interpreters are made available in the Self-Help Center.		
3.	Self-Help Center staff understand how the court's disability accommodation request process works and are able to instruct disabled litigants on how to make requests.		
4.	Self-Help Center staff know who the Court's ADA Coordinator is and how to reach that person.		
5.	Self-Help Center web content is accessible according to WCAG 2.0 AA standards.		
6.	The Self-Help Center has developed systems to assist persons who have difficulty coming to court.		

Action plan:	Technical Support/Assistance needed:

COMPONENT 10- CROSS-COURT AND STATEWIDE COLLABORATION

		Yes/No In progress	Examples:
1.	Self-Help Center staff collaborates with neighboring county courts to share resources, provide joint services and/or exchange ideas to improve program quality.		
2.	Self-Help Center staff participate on Judicial Council Advisory and Steering Committees.		
3.	Self-Help Center staff participate in Judicial Council sponsored professional development webinars and informational meetings.		
4.	Self-Help Center staff is subscribed to the Equal Access Listserv hosted by Judicial Council.		
5.	Self-Help Center staff review the Judicial Council's Equal Access Website and Self-Help Website prior to developing new materials to minimize duplication of efforts.		

Action Plan:	Technical Support/Assistance needed:

COMPONENT 11- COMMUNITY COLLABORATION AND VOLUNTEERS

		Yes/No In Progress	Examples:
1.	Self-Help Center maintains a current and complete referral list to community resources and is accessible on the Court's website and in the center.		
2.	Self-Help Center staff participate in meetings with other legal-aid providers within the area to collaborate and leverage community resources.		
3.	Self-Help Center partners with the Local Law Library to leverage community resources.		
4.	When a litigant cannot be effectively assisted in the Self-Help Center, a prompt referral to appropriate legal assistance is made.		
5.	If Self-Help Center uses volunteers, protocols are in place to provide for their screening and training. Self-Help Center staff attorneys provide oversight of volunteers, and their work is routinely be evaluated by the managing attorney.		

Action Plan:	Technical Support/Assistance needed:

COMPONENT 12- PROGRAM INNOVATION

		Yes/No In progress	Examples:
1.	Self-Help Center reviews the types of services it offers to assess effectiveness at least once per year.		
2.	Self-Help Center provides services remotely via technology platforms.		
3.	Self-Help Center provides e-assistance and services (email, web inquiries).		
4.	Self-Help Center provides online chat representatives to provide legal services remotely.		
5.	Self-Help Center provides remote video chat with litigants via appointment (Skype, Zoom) and/or access to live video-conferenced workshops.		
6.	Litigants can sign-up for workshops and/or appointments online via the Court's website.		
7.	Self-Help Center facilitates webinar workshops for litigants to participate in remotely.		
8.	Self-Help Center has developed and implemented interactive educational materials (videos, step-by-step online tutorials) or has implemented those developed by the Judicial Council and other courts.		

Action Plan:	Technical Support/Assistance needed: