

## **Appendix A: Grant Application Program Narrative**

### **California Trial Courts Caseflow Management Technical Assistance Application T-25-033**

#### **Statement of Need**

Timely, cost-effective, and procedurally fair justice are the hallmarks of effective caseflow management and aligns with the State Justice Institute's (SJI) priority investment area to improve procedural justice through better practices and outcomes for litigants. While caseflow management is not a new topic and over the last several years in California there have been individual efforts in California trial courts to analyze and improve caseflow management, the timing is right to undertake a statewide effort to examine ways to enhance caseflow. In her 2024 State of Judiciary address, California Chief Justice Patricia Guerrero highlighted caseflow as one of her priority projects that would increase transparency, improve efficiencies, and increase productivity without sacrificing quality. And, as California enters a period of budget uncertainty and all courts are experiencing budget reductions, there is even more reason to find ways for courts to operate more effectively within resource constraints.

California trial courts are incredibly diverse. There is a trial court in each of fifty-eight counties, ranging from small, rural courts serving populations around 10,000 residents up to Los Angeles, the most populous county in the nation, serving about a third of the state, or just under 10 million residents. Another fourteen California counties serve populations that are equivalent to those of other U.S. states. On the other end of the range, fifteen counties are small enough that they have the minimum number of authorized judicial positions (two full time equivalents) in their jurisdictions. One of the challenges of undertaking a statewide study of any type in California is that smaller counties do not have the analytic resources and tools that are necessary to undertake research studies. Another challenge is that there is turnover in court leadership roles; in many courts, the presiding judge role rotates every two years and all courts must regularly plan for succession in administrative leadership roles.

The project proposal attempts to overcome these challenges by creating a framework and self-assessment tool for courts to study and understand caseflow in their courts. The framework will establish an agreed-upon set of key workload indicators and caseflow management metrics for all casetypes (civil, criminal, family law, juvenile, mental health, probate). The proposal will leverage recent legislative investments in modern case management systems that will make it easier to access the data needed to analyze and understand caseflow. The self-assessment tool would allow courts to independently evaluate their caseflow management, identify areas of needed improvement, and make changes as needed. The training component of this proposal will help sustain this work

over the long term and aligns with one of SJI's priority investment areas for this year—building an adaptable and innovative court workforce through training, education, and workforce development.

SJI and the National Center for State Courts have done numerous studies of caseflow management over the years, but more recent activity (2020 onwards) is limited. An SJI grant on this topic was awarded in 2020 (Caseflow Management Maturity Model, though the study subject was not California courts. In California, Santa Cruz and Orange courts (separately) received SJI technical assistance grants in 2013 for criminal caseflow management projects; the Stanislaus Superior Court received an SJI grant to study criminal caseflow management in 2021. These court-specific grants were very useful to the individual jurisdictions but are not comprehensive across case types or generalizable to the state as a whole without additional study.

The Judicial Council does not have dedicated funding for statewide research projects. Proposed budget reductions for the current and subsequent year prevent the Council and courts' from undertaking this much-needed study without supplemental grant funding.

### **Project Description and Objectives**

A joint subcommittee drawing from the court oversight leadership bodies (the Court Executives Advisory Committee and Trial Court Presiding Judges Advisory Committee) is being formed to guide caseflow management policy development and coordinate this study, if funded. The grant would be used to hire a consultant with expertise in court caseflow management to work with the newly-formed subcommittee to create the framework and self-assessment tool. A consultant has not yet been retained for this work and would be procured through the standard Judicial Council procurement process. The in-kind portion of the match will be provided in the form of Judicial Council staff time for data collection, data validation, meeting coordination, and other administrative activities.

The data that will support the problem statement is aggregated court workload data that is reported by courts to the state via the Judicial Branch Statistical Information System (JBSIS). This data includes workload indicators such as filings and disposition counts and percentages of cases that are disposed within certain timeframes. While additional data may be available at the local court, the concept is to create a framework using data that are consistently available and reported across all courts statewide. The consultant will be asked to conduct diagnostic studies in volunteer courts to determine the relationship between indicators such as time to disposition and measures such as average number of hearings per case, continuances, etc. These workload measures correspond to national court metrics of workload promulgated by the National Center for State Courts (NCSC). The consultant will consider the impact of court organizational strategies and will approach this issue from both the judicial officer and court perspective.

The consultant will review available data and work closely with court leaders to develop the framework. While it is expected that a consultant could draw on prior studies of caseflow management conducted in other states and/or supported by SJI grants, it is also expected that the consultant would anchor the framework in the contemporary California courts' context, including recent impactful legislation such as the Racial Justice Act and recent criminal justice reforms that affect post-judgement workload. The consultant should be expected to convene focus groups, hold meetings with court leaders, and conduct site visits to courts if needed. Using a train-the-trainers model, the consultant will also deliver an initial set of trainings to court leaders that could later be replicated by Judicial Council trainers.

The concept of this proposal is to create a sustainable framework that can be replicated in all courts in the future. The consultant will be asked to provide recommendations for implementation and user adoption best practices. As the Chief Justice has made this a priority project, it is expected that she will receive regular updates on implementation from the joint subcommittee. Further, as court leadership changes, new leaders can maintain continuity of focus on caseflow management by receiving this foundational education, repeating the self-assessment, and continuing to implement the framework. The final products will be shared with all California court leaders at no cost.

### **Project implementation**

The joint subcommittee will oversee the project implementation, supported by Judicial Council staff to manage the project plan and administer the program. The approximate project timeframe is as follows:

<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Activity</b>
January or February 2025	Retain consultant through Judicial Council procurement process.
February 2025	Project commencement
March 2025	Kickoff meeting with court oversight committee; Initiate bi-weekly status meetings between applicant and consultant
April 2025	Submit first quarterly progress and financial report
May to September 2025	Meetings with oversight committee; interviews with key stakeholders at JCC and in courts.
July 2025	Submit second quarterly progress and financial report
August 2025	Project update at statewide court leaders' meeting

September to December 2025	Finalize research and deliverables (report, framework, self-assessment tool, training plan).
October 2025	Submit third quarterly progress and financial report
January 2026	Submit fourth quarterly progress and financial report

### **Staff capacity and organizational capacity**

The Judicial Council has the internal capacity to monitor grant funds, including tracking expenditures and reporting on grant outcomes. The Judicial Council’s Office of Court Research staff will have primary oversight for the project funds, supported by the accounting and budget units. While the Judicial Council has not received an SJI grant in the last three years, it receives grant funding from other sources and has well-established processes in place for grant management. Leah Rose-Goodwin, the Judicial Council’s Chief Data and Analytics Officer, would be responsible for managing and reporting on the financial aspects of the project.

### **Evaluation**

As part of developing the framework, the consultant will also design an evaluation plan to determine whether the project was effective at promulgating effective caseflow management principles in California and/or resulted in a change in caseflow management metrics. Other units of measure include numbers of courts implementing the framework or numbers of trainings held.

### **Sustainability**

The project includes several factors that will contribute towards its long-term sustainability. For one, the primary output of the project is a framework rather than a study, and, by design, a framework’s design should remain relevant beyond a one-time study or effort. Also, it includes a train-the-trainers approach to ensure that the framework endures beyond the immediate project timeline. Further, the project is sponsored jointly by the Trial Court Presiding Judges Advisory Committee and Court Executives Advisory Committee; having support within the Judicial Council’s committee structure will help ensure its longevity beyond the project. And finally, the project will be sustainable over the long term because caseflow management directly aligns with the branch’s strategic plan in that it impacts timely and effective access to justice, uses resources effectively, and modernizes management and administration.