

**EDWARD BRYNE JUSTICE ASSISTANCE GRANT PROGRAM
CDFA #16.738**

PROGRAM NARRATIVE

1. Statement of the Problem:

The Thurston County Superior and District Courts are in the middle of system improvements designed to: 1) reduce delays in court proceedings related to a lack of timely information provided to either the defense or prosecution and/or judges; 2) reduce the number and size of paper files maintained by all parties in the county's criminal justice system; and, 3) increase efficiencies and professionalism in information exchanges during pre-trial, trial and sentencing proceedings. An internal work group comprised of the Prosecuting Attorney's Office, the Office of Assigned Counsel (Public Defender), Superior Court, District Court, the County Clerk and Thurston County's Information Technology department, has been working for two years to increase the courts' use of technology to streamline court functions, reduce duplication of effort and reduce costs associated with delays due to lack of available, timely information..

In 2006, the Thurston County Superior Court alone had almost 4,068 continuances (more than double all of the 2,432 cases filed in Thurston County Superior Court during that year). Since each continuance delays a case by a minimum of one week and requires at least one additional hour of time for judges, attorneys and staff involved in the case, this represents a significant loss of time and money due to duplication of effort in the court system.

To achieve the goals of increasing court efficiency and reducing delays in court proceedings, the Prosecuting Attorney's Office and the Office of Assigned Counsel have agreed to purchase and use a shared case management application that includes a discovery module. This discovery module tracks the exchange of discovery documents either in electronic form or in paper, and allows for the electronic transfer of discovery between the Prosecutor's Office and both the public and private defense attorneys. The ability to track the transfer/delivery of discovery packages is beginning to reduce continuances granted by the court related to discovery issues.

In order to make the software modules most effective and realize efficiencies during court proceedings, we determined that courtrooms throughout the County must have wireless interface capability. The Thurston County Courthouse was constructed in 1978 and therefore was not wired to accommodate information technology. Phase II of the Court Delay Reduction Project (funded with a Byrne grant) has enabled us to retrofit the courtrooms for wireless connections to allow a wireless laptop user the ability to connect to the counties' network while in court.

The next phase of the Court Delay Reduction Project is to develop e-forms for court hearings, in both District and Superior Court, in order to reduce and eventually eliminate the use of pre-printed multi-part forms. This phase is designed to:

- Decrease jail and court staff time currently used to interpret handwritten documents
- Reduce cost and space of storing paper documents
- Reduce need for continuances of hearings due to lack of availability of paper documents

- Reduce need for use of “runners” who transport paper documents between the jail, the courts and the Clerk’s Office

2. Proposed Program Activities:

The goals of Phase III of the Court Delay Reduction Project are to:

- 1) Reduce delays and continuances in court proceedings; and
- 2) Reduce costs of personnel time used to process paper documents.

These goals will be met by implementing the following strategies:

- 1) Develop e-forms to be used by Superior and District Court for arraignments, preliminary hearings, warrant hearings, sentencing and other hearings; and
- 2) Develop procedures for transmittal of forms from attorneys to court to the clerk’s Office through electronic transmission;
- 3) Purchase hardware to enable capture of signatures for electronic forms.

Phase Three of the Court Delay Reduction Project will include the following activities:

- Research and agreement of the Law and Justice Information Technology Committee as to the preferred e-form software to purchase and install;
- Purchase E-Form software from selected vendor;
- Hire contract staff to install E-Form software and adapt current forms, such as the 3.2 order, No Contact orders and others;
- Purchase required hardware such as printers, scanners and electronic signature keypads;
- Purchase ongoing maintenance and replacement components for court wi-fi system.

3. Coordination

Thurston County has an existing Information Technology Committee which reviews technology needs and recommends technology improvements and upgrades to the Board of County Commissioners. There is currently an ITC sub-committee for law and justice agencies. This sub-committee has representation from Superior Court, District Court, the Sheriff’s Office, the Prosecutor’s Office, the Office of Assigned Counsel, the Clerk’s Office and the county’s Information Technology department. This group will guide the activities of the project listed above and ensure coordination and completion of project activities.

4. Timeline:

Activity	Responsible Party	Time Period
Develop RFQ and Bid process for E-Forms Software	eForms Evaluation and Implementation Team	October 2009
Select most competitive vendor and execute contract	eForms Evaluation and Implementation Team	By January 10, 2010
Select staff members to be trained on e-form software	County Law & Justice Departments	December 2009
Acquire server(s) and Install software	Thurston County IT team/vendor	February 2010
Conduct training	Vendor	March 2010
Develop e-forms	County Law & Justice Departments – designated staff	April – May 2010
Purchase and install hardware needed to support use of e-forms	Thurston County IT team/ County Law & Justice Departments	May 2010
Develop protocols and procedures for use, distribution and storage of e-forms	eForms Evaluation and Implementation Team	February – April 2010
Conduct training on use of e-form protocols for judges, courtroom staff, Clerk’s Office staff and attorneys/paralegals	Vendor and eForms Evaluation and Implementation Team	June 2010
Institute use of e-forms in Superior Court	eForms Evaluation and Implementation Team	July 2010
Institute use of e-forms in District Court	eForms Evaluation and Implementation Team	September 2010

