

Basic Steps in Planning Self-Help Assistance Activities

American Judicature Society
South Central Regional Pro Se Conference
Houston, Texas
Friday, February 2, 2007
1:00 pm

Panelists

- Judge Stephen George, Louisville, Kentucky
- John Greacen, Regina, New Mexico
- Granvette Matthews, Fulton County, Georgia
- John Specia, San Antonio, Texas
- Judge Neil Thomas, Hamilton County, Tennessee

Developing a Plan and a Strategy for Self Help Assistance in Your State

A Planning Process

- Call together the persons most committed to the idea of programming for self-represented litigants
- Include representatives of other organizations, including the bar, legal services, law schools, and libraries
- Develop a plan
- Develop a strategy for selling the plan

Contents of a Plan

- In what case types do self-represented litigants encounter the greatest problems? E.g.,
 - Family law matters
 - Landlord/tenant
- What are the most pressing programmatic needs? E.g.,
 - Forms
 - Assistance with service of process
 - One on one assistance
 - Legal advice

Contents of a Plan

- What are the goals for your program? E.g.,
 - Reduce the number of incorrect and incomplete papers filed with the court
 - Reduce the number of failed hearings because of lack of adequate preparation by self-represented litigants
 - Create more realistic expectations about likely case outcomes
- What policies will guide the effort? E.g.,
 - Services to both sides of a dispute
 - Equal access to services for persons throughout the state

Contents of a Plan

- What are realistic programmatic responses to address the needs and meet the goals? E.g.,
 - Products
 - Delivery mechanisms. E.g.,
 - Self help center in the courthouse
 - Phone-delivered one on one assistance
 - Web-based services
 - Video conferenced services

Contents of a Plan

- What resources must you have to implement your program? E.g.,
 - People
 - Money
 - Space
- How will your approach grow to scale? E.g.,
 - How will you cope with large responses to the availability of services?
 - How will you deliver services to persons in small and rural courts?

Strategy for Implementing the Plan

- Identify sources of support
 - Other judges
 - Other entities, including libraries
 - Other lawyers
- Identify sources of resistance
 - Other judges
 - Other entities
 - Other lawyers

Strategy for Implementing the Plan

- Mobilize support
 - Gather and marshal information
 - Obtain endorsements
- Neutralize opponents
 - Gather and marshal information
 - Build it and they will come; they're already here
 - Get them all lawyers; they can't afford lawyers
 - We can't afford programs; they pay for themselves
 - Co-opt them

Strategy for Implementing the Plan

- Neutralize opponents
 - Enlist the support of people the opponents admire, e.g., legislative leaders
 - Go where they ain't
- Ensure that you will have initial wins
- Document the initial wins
