

Technology in the Courts: Enhancing Access, Increasing Safety, and Improving Efficiency

Technology can be used to increase access to courts and to improve access for litigants in the courtroom. This worksheet will help judicial officers and court personnel consider how technology can be used to enhance access, increase safety, and improve efficiency.

This worksheet is broken into three sections that can be done individually or as a group. The first section provides questions to help you think through issues within your jurisdiction and to identify possible solutions. The second section provides additional ideas that you may want to consider as you work through your solutions. The third section provides a framework to create “SMARTER” goals and develop a plan to improve your court’s response to cyberviolence.

Section 1: Issue Spotting

- *What technology, if any, are you using in your courtrooms that helps the day-to-day functions and efficiency of your courtroom?*

- *What challenges are raised by cyberviolence cases in your jurisdiction? Considering those challenges, what are ways in which your court might use technology to enhance access, increase safety, and increase accountability for litigants in cyberviolence cases?*

- *What are a few strategies for you and other judges in your jurisdiction to keep up-to-date on information related to emerging technology?*

Section 2: Additional Ideas

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Please use the below as possible ideas to add to your answers to the questions and topics presented above.

- **Technology Considerations for Accessible Courts:**
 - Consider what policies you can implement to help make the courthouse and courtrooms more accessible.
 - Offer e-filing options to help ease the burden on litigants (and attorneys).
 - Provide language access and other accessibility requirements for people with disabilities.
 - Protect sensitive information by installing auto redaction technology.
 - Safeguard files and documents with the use of digital storage of files and documents.
 - Respond promptly to requests by using technology to remotely approve and sign warrants and orders of protection.
 - Allow appearances via video or other technology.
 - When considering creating or modifying smartphone policies for the courthouse and the courtroom, consider how this technology can be important for evidence and accessibility.

- **Roles for Judicial Leadership in Confidentiality and Privacy:**
 - Maintaining survivor privacy and safety is critical. While technology can provide a wide variety of evidence, this must be balanced with a victim's right to privacy and confidentiality. Survivors should be informed of where their evidence is stored and who will have access to that information. This is especially important for self-represented litigants.
 - Consider ways to protect evidence entered in a case when you have determined that access to evidence in the case file could lead to negative consequences. Sealing records can be appropriate, although it is also important to weigh constitutional rights and limitations when considering sealing options.

- Educate court staff about technology and confidentiality issues.
- **Judicial Leadership in Under-Resourced Courts:**
 - While courts have varying access to information and resources, there are steps available for courts of all resource levels.
 - Knowledge of your community and the groups of people that live in your community can help you think through potential issues and devise creative solutions.
 - Communities and the people in your community may have different access to technology (e.g. the “digital divide”).
 - Rural communities may have limited access to technology such as high-speed internet, but may have increased access to other kinds of technology such as mobile devices. Knowledge of how technology is used in your community can help you to identify the best way to leverage the benefits of technology.
 - Don’t forget about national technical assistance providers (like NCJFCJ and NNEDV) who can assist you in increasing court technology capacity.
 - Federal grants have also been used to increase technology in the courts and increase technology options for litigants. Be on the lookout for these and apply!

Section 3: Goal Setting and Action Planning

This section will help you set a “SMARTER” goal and to develop a plan to accomplish that goal. From your answers above, chose one or more issues that you identified as a problem in your jurisdiction. Using the acronym below, write out what goal you would like accomplish to better address that issue. A description of each letter is provided on the next page.

S _____

M _____

A _____

R _____

T _____

E _____

R _____

S = Specific

A goal has to be specific in order to know when you've achieved it.

M = Measurable

Having a measurable goal allows you to track your progress and stay motivated.

A = Attainable

Your goal also needs to be attainable to be successful. In other words, it should stretch what is possible within the confines of available time and resources.

R = Realistic

Your goal should be a realistic response to the problem you are trying to solve. It should have a real impact on the issue. There are many great goals, however, consider what is most impactful within your sphere of influence.

T = Time-bound

Every goal needs an end date. Set a realistic time frame for accomplishing your goal.

E = Exciting

You should select a goal that you are personally invested in. System change can be a difficult and slow process.

R = Relevant

The goal should not only matter to you, but should also be meaningful to other stakeholders in your community.

Action Planning:

What is the issue that you want to solve?

What steps will help you accomplish your goal?

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