

Grant Title/Project Name:	Office of Court Administration -- District Court Backlog Grant
Department:	Williamson County District Courts
Requestor:	Ronald Morgan
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Start Date:	7/1/2022
End Date:	12/31/2024
Please select request category:	Asset, Personnel, Service
Describe the purpose of the grant in detail to include all requirements.	<p><b><u>Action Item #1</u></b>  The Williamson County District Courts have a backlog of 2487 cases as of February 28, 2022. This is a significant concern for the Courts and our ability to provide access to justice.</p> <p>Case age is a significant factor: 1,467 of our pending cases were filed before 3/1/2020, including: 788 Criminal Cases, 474 Civil Cases, and 704 Family Cases. This represents 17% of the total docket.</p> <p><b><i>Action Plan</i></b>  We developed a two-pronged action plan to address both the number and the age of backlogged cases.</p> <p><b><i>Strategy 1: Expedited Trial Docket.</i></b>  We will reduce pending felony and civil cases utilizing an Expedited Trial Docket.  Ideally a specific senior judge will manage this Expedited Trial Court. The court will hold one criminal jury trial and one civil jury trial each month. This Court would also have two criminal docket days and one civil docket day each week during non-trial weeks to hear motions, summary judgments and otherwise resolve cases. The plan results in 21 additional jury trials and 100 additional District Court docket days in the year between July 2022 and June 30, 2023. This Expedited Trial Court will result in (a) more cases being tried to a jury; and (b) more cases being resolved short of trial because of the real likelihood of being reached on a trial docket. The Expedited Trial Court will serve all District Courts and all case types.</p> <p><b><i>Strategy 2: Impact Docket.</i></b>  We will reduce the backlog by creating an Impact Docket to increase the speed of case resolution. When a matter is ripe for resolution (i.e. uncontested disposition, plea or sentencing), there is often a delay in getting set on the Court docket due to previously scheduled matters. Using a Senior Judge/Retired Judge, we will hold an additional 2 full days (or equivalent) each week each week for uncontested matters. This would make 100 court days available for pleas and sentencings in criminal cases, divorce prove-ups, self-represented case management, discovery issues, status hearings, and uncontested civil matters. The Impact Docket will allow for contested matters to be the focus of the trial courts' attention by diverting matters that may be handled by any Judicial Officer to this docket.</p> <p><b><i>Goal for Change</i></b>  Using the plans set forth above, we will set a goal of resolving the backlog (2,487 cases) by December 2024.</p> <p>July 2022 through December 2023: Our attainable goal is to reduce the docket by 1,380 cases (or 55.5% of the backlog). Included in that calculation is resolution of roughly 30% of the cases that have been pending since before 2021 (440 cases).</p> <p>January 2024 through December 2024: Our attainable goal is to reduce the docket by a further 1,107 cases (or 44.5% of the backlog). This would</p>

result in the total resolution of the backlog that has accumulated during COVID-19. Included in that calculation is resolution of an additional 30% of the cases that have been pending since before 2021, or 440 cases, resulting in the disposition of 60% of all cases pending since before 2021.

Our goal is to be rid of the entirety of the backlog by December 2024.

**Action Item #2**

Of the 8,243 pending cases in Williamson County District Courts, almost 13%, (1,069 cases), involve one or more self-represented litigants. Because of the involvement of individuals who lack formal training in the law, these matters often use more court time and resources than the ordinary case.

**Action Plan**

In Action Item #1, we proposed using an Impact Docket for a variety of uncontested matters. This impact docket could be utilized to assist with self-represented case resolutions.

In addition to the resources needed to staff the Impact Docket, we propose a partnership with the law schools at the University of Texas and Baylor University where provisional practice law students can work with self-represented parties to prepare uncontested matters for presentation at the impact docket. The plan is to set two to three half day sessions of "office hours" per month for the provisional practice law student(s) to work with the self-represented parties and the cases would be set on the impact docket at that afternoon's setting.

Each academic year of the program (September to April), the plan is to have 24 half-day office hours sessions, staffed by two students per session. The cases would be reviewed and cleared for court by the law students in the morning session, proceeding to the Impact Docket that same afternoon. This schedule would minimize the time commitment of both the students and the self-represented litigants. Oversight will be provided by Supervising Attorneys, who will also be compensated.

**Goal for Change**

We project each office-hour session is able to prepare 5 self-represented litigants for the Impact Docket. This would resolve over 11% of our pending self-represented litigant cases (120 cases) within 1 year.

Select the type of grant your department is applying for:

State

What is the amount of the grant?

\$1,794,792.45

Please provide a breakdown of the total cost above.

Personnel (FTE & Compensation for Self Represented Litigant Clinic):  
\$1,098,971.45

IT Assets/Licenses: \$70,821

Funds for Indigent Defense: \$625,000

Is there a match requirement?

No

What is the source of the match?

n/a

Does the grant cover the cost of the request 100%?

Yes

If not, how much is left unpaid?

n/a

What is the plan to obtain grants/funds for the remaining amount?

OCA has separate funds set aside for visiting judge time, which is not included in this request. OCA will calculate and fund the visiting judge

	expenses.
List other similar assets in the County and/or region and if they are available for use?	n/a
How is this asset request different from any similar assets currently in the County and/or region?	n/a
What types of events/purpose would this asset be used for that cannot be accomplished with a current County asset?	n/a
How often do these events occur?	n/a
Identify the number of personnel required to operate this asset and/or be available for the function where it is to be used? How much time is required of those personnel? What is the cost of the personnel?	n/a
Where will the asset be stored?	n/a
What is the useful life of the asset?	n/a
Will a replacement be requested from general funds when useful life has been exhausted?	No
Will other agencies be billed for the use of this asset (e.g. vendors paid, employee worked hours and paid, inventory costs etc.)?	n/a
Does this asset require insurance coverage?	No
If yes, what is the estimate of asset insurance coverage?	
Will this asset require on-going maintenance? Please describe the maintenance required along with an estimate for these costs.	n/a
How will this asset be funded when the grant ends?	There will be no need for funding, as the backlog will be cleared.
What is the impact if the grant is not received?	A backlog will exist in the courts for a longer period of time.
New Personnel position is:	Full Time
Where will this position office?	Justice Center --we project that we will utilize space currently occupied by Regional Presiding Judge and current District Court offices.
Who will this position report to?	Generally, the personnel will report to the Local Administrative District Judge, and routine oversight will be provided by the Director of District Court Administration
What tasks will this position perform? Include the five primary functions and the percentage of time spent to be spent on each function.	<p><b>The Court Administrator will:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manage the dockets for the Expedited Trial Docket Court</li> <li>• Manage the dockets for the Impact Docket</li> <li>• Set hearings</li> <li>• Perform data entry</li> <li>• Serve as administrative support to the f/t and p/t judicial officers staffing the two dockets.</li> </ul> <p><b>Full Time Court Reporter will:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Serve as Official Court Reporter for the Expedited Trial Docket,</li> <li>• Transcribe Hearings</li> <li>• Transcribe Trials</li> <li>• Transcribe jury selection</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Swear in Witnesses</li> <li>• Receive evidence</li> <li>• Produce and certify records</li> </ul> <p><b>Part Time Court Reporter will:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Serve as Official Court Reporter for the Impact Docket,</li> <li>• Transcribe Hearings</li> <li>• Swear in Witnesses</li> <li>• Receive evidence</li> <li>• Produce and certify records</li> </ul> <p><b>Deputy District Clerk will:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attend court</li> <li>• Manage clerk's record of cases assigned</li> <li>• Receive and file documents</li> <li>• Certify filed documents</li> <li>• Create and distribute documents related to the disposition of cases</li> </ul>
Will this position take over tasks from current County employee?	Yes
If yes, please explain the impact to current employee.	The intent of these positions is to reduce the current backlog of cases in the Williamson County District Courts. Accordingly, they will perform duties that are currently performed by Court Administrators, Court Reporters, and Deputy District Clerks in the trial court. Because these positions are designed to give extra bandwidth to the Courts, they will mirror the work of other, similarly-titled staff.
How will this position be funded when the grant ends?	n/a -- this is a limited purpose grant designed to eliminate the current case backlog. We project that the backlog will be cleared when the grant is concluded.
Does this position or a similar position currently exist within the department?	Yes
If "yes" how many of these similar positions exist	5 Court Administrators, 5 Court Reporters (one for each existing District Court)
Describe any alternatives considered to achieve desired outcome in lieu of a position (i.e. equipment, software, technology or change in business practice).	<p>We have explored technological options, however we believe that, other than some modifications to Odyssey which are roughly 18 months off (implementing Case Plan system), we have maximized technological solutions. We are now at the point where case resolution is going to depend on 'manual' (i.e. non-technological) techniques, which may only be accomplished by people.</p> <p>Accordingly, we examined changes in business practices, including the possibility of using existing Court Reporters, Court Administrators, and assigning Associate Judges to perform duties noted, however because of the workload of existing staff, this is not possible.</p>
Describe how workload will be accomplished/re-allocated should grant not be approved.	The courts will continue to work through their dockets and it will take a longer period of time to eliminate the case backlog. This will accelerate the need to add a 7th District Court in Williamson County.
List other similar items in the County and/or region and if they available for use?	n/a
How is this item request different from any similar assets currently in the County and/or region?	n/a
What types of events/purpose would this item be	n/a

used for that cannot be accomplished with a current County asset?	
Identify the number of personnel required to operate this item and/or be available for the function where it is to be used?	n/a
Please explain how this item will create the need for more or less personnel (or mark n/a for no change)?	n/a
Where will the item be stored?	n/a
What is the useful life of the item?	n/a
Will other agencies be billed for the use of this item (e.g. vendors paid, employee worked hours and paid, inventory costs etc.)?	
Does this item require insurance coverage?	No
Will this item require any form of licensing?	Yes
Will this item require on-going maintenance? Please describe the maintenance required along with an estimate for these costs?	n/a
How will this item be funded when the grant ends?	n/a -- There will be no need for funding, as we project that the backlog will be cleared when the grant is concluded.
What is the overall budgetary impact? (i.e. revenue generation, expense reduction, etc.)	Expense reduction will be realized through reducing the district court case backlog, which will impact jail bed days used and which will result in added efficiency in the justice system.
Please identify any additional equipment needed/required (now or in the future) should the grant/asset is awarded.	We will need to work to identify locations for Court to be held as well as space for the Judge(s) and Court Staff to work. The Director of District Court Administration will work on this with Facilities on behalf of the Courts.
What is the cost and frequency to maintain/update the additional equipment?	n/a
What is the impact of this grant application on other internal/county departments?	Our request includes 1 FTE for the District Clerk's Office. It is possible that this grant could impact the Sheriff's Office and the DA's Office.
If yes, what is the estimate of that license fee?	Software licenses are included in the grant funding request
If yes, what is the estimate of insurance coverage?	
Will a replacement be requested from general funds when useful life has been exhausted? (OR)	No
If yes, how much is the match amount?	
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