

# COURT MANAGER

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Volume 32 Number 1 Spring 2017





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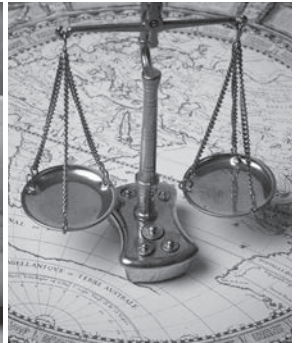
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A PUBLICATION OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR COURT MANAGEMENT

Court Manager Volume 32 Number 1 Spring 2017



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# President's Message

SCOTT GRIFFITH

In my last message, I reflected on how vital partnerships are both to our association and to our work as court professionals. I noted that organizations, like courts, that are part of complex public systems can sometimes default to operating in isolation from partners who can potentially add value to their work. In that message, I also reiterated my commitment to the idea that the broader and more robust our networks, the better we can deliver justice.

Living out this commitment is, of course, something that most of us do (or try to do) every day, and doing so has obvious and important implications for courts and the communities they serve. We see this in the way jurisdictions are approaching civil justice reform to assist self-represented litigants and to ensure timeliness and reduced expense generally; in the changes that jurisdictions are making to the way legal financial obligations are imposed and enforced; in the way pretrial detention decisions are being made; and in the way judges and other court leaders in several states are going “beyond the bench” to engage citizens in conversations about the role of courts in our communities.

We know that these efforts highlight the importance of court administration and promote more accessible justice. We also know, however, that these efforts can be time-consuming and difficult to institutionalize. While we often have little choice but to involve ourselves in projects and initiatives that advance the principles for which we stand, in planning, implementing, and trying to sustain them we may experience fatigue and encounter an understandable weariness in our partners in what may seem like the pursuit of a never-ending reform agenda.

We find our sources of motivation to stay committed to projects like these from different sources. For me, NACM is chief among them. Not a week goes by that I don't feel grateful for the professionalism, insights, and accessibility of my NACM colleagues, since it is from within this community that I have found some of my most important mentors and friends.

Our next major opportunity to motivate each other will be here in just a few short months. This year's annual conference, which will be hosted in conjunction with the International Association of Court Administration, is expected to be one of our largest conferences ever, and we have an impressive lineup of speakers on topics that I'm sure you will find timely and useful. Please consider joining us, and on behalf of our Board of Directors, thank you for the opportunity to support you in your work. You can register for the conference at <http://www.nacmconference.org/>.

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## Editor's Notes

PHILLIP KNOX

The **future** cannot be **predicted**,  
but **futures** can be **invented**.

Dennis Gabor

*Inventing The Future, 1963*

Welcome to our first volume of *Court Manager* for 2017. The articles in this issue provide us a glimpse into the future and how to better prepare ourselves, our staff, and our constituencies for things to come.

In our opening work, Peter Kiefer explores a particular technology, its implications for improving service delivery, and its challenges. Although not a new technology and one with clearly defined benefits, the electronic issuance and documenting of law-enforcement-issued citations has not realized an easy embrace from many jurisdictions. Peter has spent the last five years examining a number of scenarios that may or could impact courts. Through a release of surveys to court professionals he has compiled a database of responses to a series of questions. Inquiry and analysis on topics such as the use of e-tickets reflects the diversity in respondent views. There is an obvious polarization between effective application and the challenges to successful implementation. The article leaves us with a road map on how to improve the effectiveness of a successful e-ticket program with the help of lessons learned from some of our colleagues who have paved some of the road for us.

Have some of us born before the CD player, the Commodore 64 8-bit home computer, and computer animation in the movie theater (1982) wondered about how best to communicate with our younger employees? Alfred Degrafinreid II proudly exhibits the best qualities of his cohort Millennials and shares his insights with us. Do not be afraid for our future, even if you had a hand in raising this lot. They are us, and after you read Alfred's article, you can have much faith in turning over to these young professionals all of your hard work and responsibilities, knowing that it is in good hands.

Fashioned first as a much longer piece of the same title, Dave Spridgeon has compressed his ICM paper and provides us

with a working knowledge of best collection practices. There is a vast amount of research that is provided and displayed in a succinct fashion. The imposition of fines and fees as penalties and the associated collection and enforcement of judicial orders are practices that have come under much scrutiny lately. Striking a balance between the statutory obligations and the individual's ability to pay have presented additional challenges for many jurisdictions. In this work, we are provided with some ideas and options through the findings of best practices.

Does your court or organization have a well-developed emergency operations plan? If so great, but do you have access to the plan when you are at an off-site training, at a meeting away from the office, or when you are at home? If you and your colleagues spent hours or days developing the plan, shouldn't you have it at your fingertips whenever it may be needed, likely when you least expect it? There are solutions that can provide this access, and the authors of "How Prepared is Your Staff?" offer us one way to improve our ability to be prepared and respond that might be in our hands right now.

As I write this, there are only four months until the NACM Annual Conference in Washington, D.C. NACM's International Subcommittee, organized to strengthen the connection with other countries and international court professionals, has been working overtime in preparation of this joint conference with our international colleagues. A short article provides us with some knowledge of the International Association for Court Administration (IACA), the organization's mission, and history. I hope that after learning more about the international court administration group that you are inspired to attend the conference in July, which is themed *Excellence on a Global Scale*.

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# The Future of Courts: The Next 10 Years

## What Is the Future of eTickets?

Peter Kiefer\*

It has been more than 15 years since electronic traffic citations (eTickets) were first introduced.<sup>1</sup> Within a few years one or more law-enforcement agencies in over two dozen states were using systems to electronically issue traffic citations. In 2003 infrastructure work began with the Global Justice Information Sharing Initiative standardizing data-exchange formats for a number of functions, including traffic citations. This evolved into work on the National Information

Exchange Model (NIEM), which paved the way for more standardized data transfer from law enforcement to the courts and statewide databases, such as state departments of motor vehicles (DMV).<sup>2</sup>

Examples of actual eTicket conversions include the San Jose Police Department and the Indiana State Police in 2007;<sup>3</sup> several Alabama law-enforcement agencies, the State of Maryland, Florida's Miami-Dade County, and Oklahoma City all by

2008;<sup>4</sup> numerous municipalities in Cook County, Illinois by 2011;<sup>5</sup> and the Seattle Police in 2014.<sup>6</sup> Issuing eTickets is now commonplace.

### Benefits

There are some obvious benefits of eTickets that help both law enforcement and the courts.<sup>7</sup>

- Officers spend less time on the side of the road, which is one of the



most dangerous spots for an officer to be. Indiana State Police officers have cut their roadside stop time by a third,<sup>8</sup> and Seattle Police said officers have reduced the time it takes them to complete a collision report from three hours to 30 minutes.<sup>9</sup>

- Courts dismiss fewer citations for transcription errors, illegible handwriting, or incorrect information (e.g., a violation written to have occurred at an intersection of two streets that do not actually intersect), mismatched ordinance or statute numbers, misspelled drivers' names, or incorrectly written driver's license numbers. For example, law-enforcement officers in Indiana can swipe a driver's license across their handheld device and accurately obtain the driver's name, license number, home address, height, weight, and hair color.<sup>10</sup>
- Data can automatically upload to the court and (optionally) to a statewide database system (e.g., DMV). Clerks save time, and court data are more accurate, since there is no more manual data entry into the court's case management system (CMS).<sup>11</sup>
- Traffic-violation and traffic-accident data can be instantly verified.
- Drivers can quickly be on their way; they could conceivably drive directly to the courthouse and pay their fine (if eligible). They might even be able to pay directly from their SmartPhones without ever traveling to the courthouse. This added convenience and efficiency was noted in the 2005 COSCA Position Paper "The Emergence of E-Everything."<sup>12</sup>

The eTicket trend has been sweeping the nation for a decade and half, so why haven't paper traffic citations gone the way of three-by-five index cards? Why are so many jurisdictions still buying those leather-bound ticket books and officers still scrawling out paper citations?

## Challenges

First, converting to eTickets means local law enforcement, courts, and usually the DMV must jointly commit to a long-term coordinated objective, one that usually takes months and sometimes years to achieve. It requires finding money to purchase the new equipment; selecting a vendor; entering into contracts; modifying and testing computer systems; training officers, staff, and judges; drafting new procedures, policies, rules, and occasionally laws; and finally launching, reviewing, and refining a new multi-agency operation.

Second, economies of scale enjoyed by large-volume departments are often not realized by smaller agencies, many of which may be hard pressed to recover costs within the standard three-to-five-year return-on-investment (ROI) break point. Typical examples of agencies with low ticket volumes might include transit police issuing bus-riding tickets, local college police issuing tickets to students, animal control issuing barking-dog tickets, and local code enforcement agencies issuing tickets for violations such as standing water, improper recycling, or construction site litter.

A recent analysis revealed that nearly six in ten courts in the United States are one- or two-judge courts.<sup>13</sup> Smaller courts may also be challenged to see a reasonable cost-recovery period.

Third, even when there is no outright animosity between different government organizations, relations between the different branches (judicial and executive) and between different levels (local, county, and state) can seem independent and indifferent to an enterprise that needs a united front to succeed. Frequently, law-enforcement agencies apply for substantial grants to get over the conversion "hump." A single handheld device, for example, could range from \$1,000 to \$4,500.<sup>14</sup> Annual software license renewals and upgrades can run into the thousands of dollars. Though many newer court computer systems come with the capability to accept eTickets built in, this software feature is by no means universal. If a court needs modifications to its CMS, those costs may not even enter into the overall financial equation. If all stakeholders are not advocating for generally the same goal, the chances for funding success decrease.

Fourth, to enjoy optimal efficiency, courts need to employ automated payment systems so violators can pay electronically by credit or debit card without ever coming to the courthouse. Many courts do not have automated payment systems, and others believe that physically travelling to the downtown courthouse to pay a traffic fine is part of the retributive, therapeutic deterrence process.

Various law-enforcement agencies need to run their operations as they see fit. Yet, if some agencies remain attached to paper tickets, courts may be saddled with multiple, parallel ticket-processing methods, which require more staff. Differing operations must be managed; differing policies and rules must be remembered and applied; differing payment procedures must be used; and, basically, differing ticket-handling methods confuse the public.

Both the police and the court **enjoyed cost reductions** from more **efficient** operations. Canyon City Police eTickets are electronically transmitted to the court overnight, **allowing** drivers to pay their fines the next business day using the court's ePayment system.

## The Scenario

It is Monday morning, January 5, 2026. Once again, Jess reluctantly prepares to battle the county over her latest funding request for yet another court computer modification. Jess is the court administrator for the Outland County Justice Court, which receives citations from a variety of law-enforcement agencies. The court gets half of its tickets from the Canyon City Police (Outland County's main city); 20 percent come from the Outland County Sheriff's Office, which patrols unincorporated areas; another 20 percent comes from the Centreville Police, a village 40 miles from Canyon City; and 10 percent come from County Animal Control for violations like barking dogs.

Following national trends, the Canyon City Police converted to eTickets five years ago. Both the police and the court enjoyed cost reductions from more efficient operations. Canyon City Police eTickets are electronically transmitted to the court overnight, allowing drivers to pay their fines the next business day using the court's ePayment system. Courthouse foot traffic has dropped off significantly, and court staff no longer have to manually enter traffic-citation data into the court's CMS. Dismissals due to illegible handwriting or incorrect

ticket information have declined, and drivers with suspended licenses are now instantly identified from the state DMV database.

The downside? Jess went to the county five years ago requesting funding to modify the court's CMS to accept, process, display, and dispose of electronic citations. Courtdyne Industries has been the court's vendor for quite a while, and their price tag for the modification was not cheap. The county demanded demonstrable cost reductions in return for their \$40,000 "one-time-only" allocation.

Jess was able to show real cost savings after the first round of funding, but she is skeptical she will find enough savings this time to match the \$25,000 she needs to complete the conversion. The county sheriff and animal control both have "homegrown" computer systems, which are incompatible with the court's CMS; Centreville police still write their citations by hand and mail them to the court twice a week. The court is forced to maintain both an electronic and a manual citation-processing system. Operating dual systems wastes staff time, is confusing, slows workflow, and confuses the public. None of the three agencies write enough tickets to show a convincing cost recovery, yet combined they are annoying. Undaunted, Jess pushes through the swinging door to the

budget meeting, PowerPoint flash drive in hand, and prepares to make her pitch to the finance people.

## Court Professionals Say this Scenario is Likely

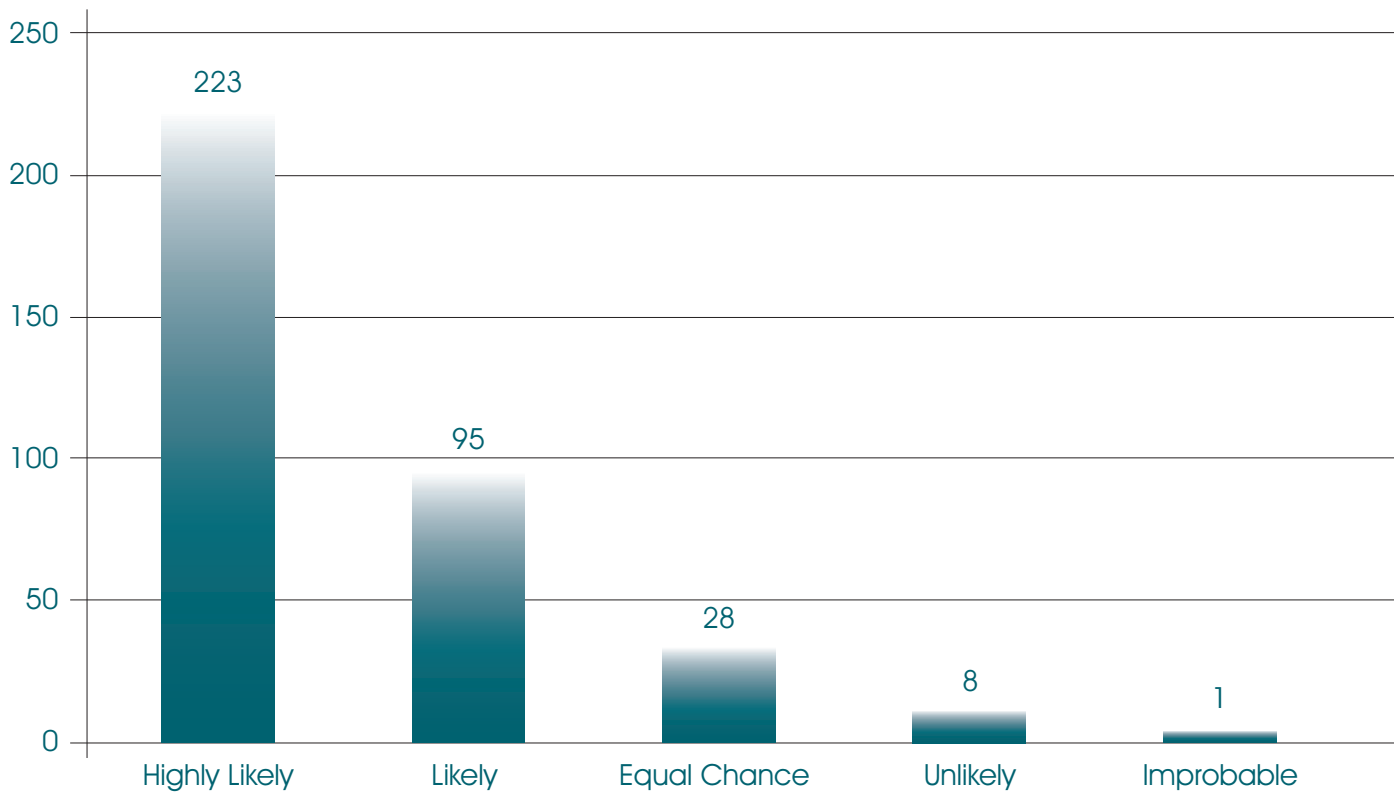
The winter 2016 Future of the Courts survey received 355 responses. Respondents assessed law-enforcement agencies moving to eTickets in the next ten years as *Highly Likely*. The overall average was 1.5 on the five-point scale with 1 being *Highly Likely* and 5 being *Improbable*.<sup>15</sup> This assessment was basically reflected across jurisdictional levels, with the general-jurisdiction-court respondents averaging 1.6 and limited-jurisdiction-court respondents averaging 1.4. *Baby Boomers* (born between 1945 and 1964), *Millennials* (born between 1965 and 1979), and *Generation Xers* (born between 1980 and 1994) all assessed the scenario at 1.5.

## The Respondents

To respond to the above scenario and the likelihood that eTickets will become the accepted method of issuing traffic citations in the next ten years, we reached out to a number of court administrative professionals to share

## WITHIN THE NEXT TEN YEARS LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES WILL MOVE TO ETICKETS

Mean = 1.5 Winter 20216 N = 355



their jurisdictions' experiences. This group included Tim Leger, judicial administrator for Lake Charles City Court in Louisiana; Tim Guesman, business systems analyst and acting department systems administrator for the Las Vegas Justice Court in Nevada; Angela Graddy, court administrator for the Yuma Municipal Court in Arizona; David D. Beach, director of court services for the municipal court in Findlay, Ohio; Gerry Durfee, court administrator for the municipal court in the City of Maryland Heights, Missouri; Sharon Yates, deputy court administrator for the Coconino Superior Court, in Flagstaff, Arizona; Cheryl Stone, court administrator for the municipal court in Eugene, Oregon; and Albert De La Isla, principal

administrative analyst for criminal operations at the Orange County Superior Court in California.

### How Well Does the Scenario Predict the Future?

Despite the optimistic assessment of the Future of the Courts survey results, many of our responders thought it likely that we would still have handwritten tickets ten years from now. Tim Leger (Lake Charles, Louisiana) agreed that the scenario of courts receiving some paper tickets is highly likely. Changing operating-system platforms, planned software

obsolescence, and a lack of uniformity of existing networks will all play a part in this.

Lake Charles City Court is a hybrid court. Eighty percent of the traffic and 40 percent of the criminal matters originate from the Lake Charles Police Department (LCPD) and are handled by the city prosecutor. Roughly 20 percent of traffic and 60 percent of criminal matters are handled by the district attorney.

More than eight years ago, LCPD bought their officers ten handheld eTicket writers. The intent of the initial project was to eventually issue all citations by handheld eTicket writers. The city court even pledged money to buy the police more eTicket writers as needed. After six years, the project

never got off the ground, and LCPD abandoned it. One of the main reasons was the cost of the software.

Last year, the Louisiana Supreme Court gave the city court a \$10,000 grant to import citation data from the police database to the court's database. The grant was used to build a software interface for the LCPD's AS400 mainframe and export the data to the court's SQL-based server.

Tim Guesman (Las Vegas), Angela Graddy (Arizona), Albert De La Isla (California), and Gerry Durfee (Missouri) all could see some tickets still being handwritten ten years from now. Angela and Tim thought the eTicket/handwritten divide would be because of cost. Courts may have multiple law-enforcement agencies filing cases, and there may need to be multiple integration points if each agency is using different eTicket hardware and software. For example, one agency may use handheld writers, another agency may have the eTicket equipment installed in their patrol cars, and yet another agency may only transmit data to the court from their CMS at the stationhouse. Multiple entry points mean multiple methods of accepting data, which means more money needed for computer conversions.

Tim and Albert both considered it likely their courts would still be receiving some handwritten tickets from lower-volume agencies where conversion costs would be prohibitive. Angela declared that unless state and local law-enforcement agencies assist smaller courts, jurisdictions will still have paper tickets and, of course, handwritten tickets would still need to be a backup in case of a system outage.

Gerry thought more serious tickets, like DWI, will still need to be handwritten because prosecutors should be able to see the citation as the issuing officer wrote it.

On the other hand, David Beach (Ohio), Sharon Yates (Arizona), and Cheryl Stone (Oregon) all hope to see courts receiving only eTickets within ten years. Cheryl and David both thought it was highly likely that all citations will be eTickets within that time frame.

## Does Your Court Receive eTickets Now?

Gerry, Cheryl, and Albert said their courts receive eTickets. Gerry said the Maryland Heights Municipal Court receives eTickets for nonmoving violations, but tickets for more-serious offenses (e.g., DWI) are still handwritten. Cheryl said the Eugene Municipal Court receives electronic data from handwritten tickets; the court then matches the data with the submitted paper tickets. Albert said the Orange County Superior Court has an interface with three different eTicket providers that support multiple police agencies, but the court still receives handwritten tickets from smaller agencies, for direct filed misdemeanors (eTickets that are electronically filed are currently only for infractions), and from officers who are not normally assigned traffic and do not have a handheld device.

Angela said that the Yuma Municipal Court currently receives eTickets only from the Arizona Department of Public Safety (city police), and not all officers write eTickets. The court still receives handwritten tickets from the college police, fire department, railroad police, and city code enforcement. Her court just applied for funds from a statewide justice system improvement account to obtain 30 eTicket writers for the local police department. The 30 writers cover only a portion of the police civil-traffic unit.

Sharon responded that one justice court receives eTickets from the Coconino County Sheriff's Office; all four justice courts receive eTickets from the Arizona Department of Public Safety.

Tim Guesman said that Las Vegas Justice Court still receives handwritten tickets.

As Tim Leger previously noted, at one time a small number of tickets the court received were electronically based. The eTicket writers at that time were clumsy and did not fully interface with the existing police servers. No electronic data was ever streamed to the court. Over the last year, the court has been importing data from the police into the court's CMS. Even though the police import 80 percent of citations, they still deliver handwritten citations to the court for filing. All matters from the district attorney come as paper bills of information.

David said that the Findley Municipal Court is not yet receiving eTickets. Their CMS vendor is working right now on conversion. Local law enforcement is willing to proceed with it and anticipates a 2017 "go live" date. The court expects to still receive a limited number of handwritten tickets perhaps for a year or two. Some very small police departments will still need to get on board.

## Can Parties Pay Their Fines Electronically in Your Court?

David, Gerry, Cheryl, Sharon, and Tim Leger all said that parties can pay their fines electronically in their courts. David's court uses GovPay Net; Gerry's court uses nCourt; Cheryl's court uses InCode; and Tim said litigants can pay through a third-party vendor via his court's website.

## Is Your Court's CMS Vendor Hosted or "Homegrown"?

RESPONDENT AND LOCATION	COURT CASE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM
Tim Leger (Louisiana)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Homegrown. Currently in discussions with Microsoft to redesign the court's existing system into a more current platform.</li> </ul>
David Beach (Ohio)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vendor-based system, although there have been a number of customizations made.</li> </ul>
Tim Guesman (Las Vegas)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vendor-based system: Odyssey by Tyler Technologies</li> </ul>
Angela Graddy (Arizona) Sharon Yates (Arizona)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AOC-based system. It was originally produced by AMCAD, but the AOC has since taken over maintenance. The court will be migrating to a newer system in 2018.</li> </ul>
Gerry Durfee (Missouri)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vendor-based system run on the court's server: offered by Public Safety Software.</li> </ul>
Cheryl Stone (Oregon)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vendor-based system: InCode by Tyler Technologies</li> </ul>
Albert De La Isla (California)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The CMS was purchased, and the court has full access to make modifications to the software in-house with no vendor involvement. The original vendor, in the 1990s, was KPMG.</li> </ul>

Albert and Tim Guesman both said customers can currently pay traffic fines via their court's website or on the phone through an integrated-voice-response system. Tim's court rolled out online and phone payments for criminal fines on December 1, 2016.

Angela said currently customers can pay electronically only through the FARE program (Arizona Fines, Fees, Assessment, and Restitution, Enforcement), but they are working with the city's IT to provide this service.

### What Is the Biggest Obstacle to Your Court Receiving Only eTickets?

Change is always difficult, and there are always going to be some bumps in the road, in David's opinion; when implementing a new process,

folks prefer to stay with what they know. "The biggest roadblock I think (since I started requesting in 2006) was that the police department did not see the benefit until they suffered a shortage of officers and new staff in records." There also seemed to be a lack of communication from the state regarding the court's CMS and the host vendor.

Angela and Tim Guesman both thought that cost is by far the biggest obstacle. Angela cited the cost of the handheld ticket writers, the software upgrades, the licenses, the training, and annual support. Tim could see that it would be difficult to convince smaller, lower-volume districts on homegrown systems and paper tickets to pay \$1,000 to \$4,500 per officer for the equipment, software upgrades, and licensing costs to make this change. "Las Vegas Justice Court has facilitated the process of converting the eTicket data to integrate into our case management system

within our own budget. Regarding how law-enforcement agencies have funded their conversion from handwritten tickets to eTickets, I cannot answer that one, as each agency has its own budget independent of the court."

Albert believed that cost and the infrastructure to support the electronic interface are the main roadblocks. Officer acceptance has also been slow, but new eTicket legislation will eliminate a big concern regarding issuing citations. "The bill allows an officer to provide the defendant a citation without the defendant's original signature. Meaning, they can print out a copy of the citation in their car, approach the vehicle for the signature, and provide the defendant the printed citation. Today, after getting the signature, they have to go back to their vehicle to print the signed citation, creating one additional trip or contact with the defendant."

Sharon, Cheryl, and Tim Leger saw computer software conversion as the most significant obstacle. Sharon noted that the platform her court uses needs to be updated before they can expand to other courts. Cheryl said that her court finds that vendors are not as willing to work with one another on automated interfaces. “If a fully integrated system is not purchased up front for law enforcement, courts, defense attorneys, and prosecutors, some vendors are unwilling to create the necessary interfaces to integrate systems that create the needed efficiencies.”

Data quality and integration concerns are additional roadblocks nearly as big as cost. With the potential of multiple agencies filing into a court with different eTicket hardware and software, courts need to develop integration points for each. This will inevitably result in data-quality issues that must be tested before each department goes live with the court. If data quality is compromised, trust and confidence in the courts will be lost.

Tim Leger commented that it was taking an average of one-and-a-half to two years to fully implement new software to accept the handheld-ticket-writer data. As the life cycle of most software solutions is under two years, by the time the new software is implemented, it is almost outdated.

## What Will It Take to Make eTickets Universal by 2026?

Tim Guesman imagined that jurisdictions will have to mandate that all agencies submit only eTickets. It may also be necessary for courts or larger jurisdictions to financially assist smaller agencies to convert to eTickets. “This could be seen as a long-term investment to eliminate the court’s

cost of processing and handling of handwritten tickets.”

Angela, Sharon, and Albert all cited the need for adequate funding. Angela and Sharon said money was needed to successfully integrate their court’s CMS with law-enforcement agencies and other courts. Albert pointed out the need for funds to build the technical infrastructures (court and law enforcement) to support a single portal for all agencies and vendors to upload eTickets.

Courts will need to standardize case management systems and law-enforcement agencies will need to standardize eTicket systems. This will allow for one integration point between courts and citing agencies, which will allow for easier implementation. In addition, costs for the implementation of eTicket systems, including building integration points with courts, must decrease for eTickets in smaller courts to become feasible. Tim Leger said that uniformity and conformity of courts, police, and the prosecutor are needed.

Cheryl cited greater cooperation between vendors and greater flexibility between justice partners.

Future technological innovations are an unforeseen dynamic. Currently acquiring even a modest number of eTicket writers can cost well over \$100,000. However, we have all seen the trend toward technological innovation becoming less expensive. Could innovations in eTicket writers and data interfaces be on the horizon? “The Square” now allows vendors to swipe credit cards on their SmartPhones; could it soon be used to swipe drivers’ licenses? Small mobile portable printers sell for just a few hundred dollars; could they be installed in patrol cars? It takes only a little imagination to envision these devices replacing existing expensive handheld eTicket writers.

## What Should Courts Be Doing Now to Prepare for eTickets?

Tim Guesman and Gerry Durfee said courts need to ensure they have case management systems that can interface and handle electronic data. It would also be helpful to have parameters in place, so law-enforcement agencies moving to eTickets have an understanding of the eTicket data format they need to send as they make the transition.

Cheryl and Albert thought courts should be either developing new systems, or upgrading their existing electronic infrastructure with multiple justice partners, to include a systemic view of all partners. Courts will need to find the most robust and yet most efficient system for the future that can easily integrate with other technologies.

Courts need to create an infrastructure able to accept eTickets. This means changing their case management systems, along with an electronic document management system aligned with national standards to store and display imaged citations. Courts also can work through their local committees that focus on countywide programs for all law enforcement to reduce costs and allow courts to work with just one vendor to make implementation and support easier.

Tim Leger brought up the advantage of the court, police, and prosecutor having developed a central strategic plan. This is particularly perceptive advice since many courts interviewed did not have one. One court had a full plan; three courts had informal plans (not written down — one court had a plan only to comply with state AOC requirements); and two courts did not have plans.

Certainly a goal such as implementing eTickets requires a robust strategic plan. The kind of plan envisioned here would need to be more than a typical single-agency “to do” list; it would have to involve all organizations with a stake in the success of such a program. It would have to realistically lay out practical goals and objectives, and it would need to discuss strengths, weaknesses, threats, and opportunities from all perspectives.

Such a plan also cries out for a committed champion, an individual above any single agency or organization. A champion could bring together the various independent entities and demonstrate the power of a united campaign. A champion would need to devise new arguments beyond simple ROI cost recovery. The community would be safer because officers would spend more time patrolling; a modern justice system could be more like a 21st-century business and less like a 19th-century relic; justice would fully respect the citizens, whose time is valuable. These could be viable

arguments to elevate discussions with funding bodies beyond questions like “how soon can we see cost savings?”

Sharon, Angela, David, and Tim Leger all emphasized having courts, law enforcement, and other integral agencies working together to the central goal of integration. David underscored law enforcement and courts striving to nail down the procedures before implementation. Angela pointed out the need for research and talking to the other agencies. Sharon agreed that having conversations with local jurisdictions around the use of technology and cost avoidance of the system as a whole is a huge benefit. “Every agency is entering similar information into their own case management system, which leaves room for error. We should be able to have one agency enter the information and the other agencies benefit from the data entry instead of paying additional costs for someone to reenter the information.”

To prepare for eTickets, courts need to begin working with law-enforcement agencies, determine their needs,

and build support for implementing eTickets. Early support will allow the court and law-enforcement agencies to request funding as a coalition. In addition, courts should begin researching how eTickets will integrate with their CMS and begin looking at potential data-quality issues and concerns. As courts move forward with implementation, they should thoroughly test and audit data to ensure it is correct to maintain trust and confidence in the judiciary.

## We Want to Hear from You!

Write to us at the following email address for a copy of the entire combined list of survey results and send your comments to [courtutures@gmail.com](mailto:courtutures@gmail.com)

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\* Considerable thanks goes to Keith B. Kaplan, Jeff Barlow, and Ridge Franks, who made significant contributions to this piece.

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Andra Motyka graciously agreed to conduct the editing work on this article. The author of this article and the editor of the *Court Manager* have worked on the Future of Courts survey for several years. Andra formerly served as editor for this journal, and she provided an unbiased view and offered Mr. Kiefer beneficial input and suggestions for his work.

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13. An analysis of the Bureau of National Affairs, 2014 *Directory of State and Federal Courts, Judges, and Clerks* (Arlington, VA: Bureau of National Affairs), estimated that 58 percent of all U.S. courts were one-judge courts.

14. Lackey, *supra* n. 4.

15. In all the surveys we asked respondents to assess scenarios using a 1-to-5 scale (1: Highly Likely, 2: Likely, 3: Maybe [50-50 Chance], 4: Unlikely, 5: Improbable). The probability labels are based on averages of the responses: (1.0–1.9: Highly Likely, 2.0–2.4: Likely, 2.5–2.9: Maybe [50–50 Chance], 3.0–3.4: Unlikely, Above 3.4: Improbable).



# Court Management 101

## The Millennial Perspective

Alfred Degrafinreid II

*Many government employees have bounced around the local, state, and federal divisions of government. They have also crossed from one branch of government to the next. Government positions are transient because they provide employees with flexibility and access to a decent quality of life. It is no secret, however, that careers in government commonly begin in lower-hierarchy positions and, if done right, may progress to mid- or high-level positions by the time retirement age nears. That was certainly the tagline for Baby Boomers and for Generation X.*

*By 2020, it is expected that Millennials will make up nearly 50 percent of the global workforce.<sup>1</sup> How should an early career professional proceed if he or she lands a high-level position in court management? What if the early career professional has limited experience in courts? How would you deal with the complexities of managing a staff of people who have been working in the justice system longer than you have been alive?*

*My route into court management was, to say the least, a circuitous one. I plan to provide suggestions to those who are “new” to court management and offer methods that will hopefully keep early career professionals engaged in our profession.*



Over the past two years I asked many court professionals how they were introduced to the justice system. The most common response was that they were offered a job after high school or college and have progressed into various court-related positions based on personal interests. This was not my story. I soon learned that having a Masters in Public Administration and a Doctor of Jurisprudence degree prepared me for a career in court administration — but it was not the be-all and end-all. Because I am much younger than most of my colleagues in court administration, I decided to write a short rundown on how I became acclimated with my new career, which I hope will provide guidance to future colleagues who land an unexpected job in court administration.

## First Day

On my first day as the chief administrative officer in the Office of the Criminal Court Clerk (Nashville, Tennessee), I was certain that working in court management would be a challenge but not difficult, because I was a decorated public administrator with work experience on the local, state, and federal levels of government. I was confident that my legislative and lobbying skills would be transferable to how I would interact with the public, the judges, and other players in the justice system. Admittedly, I was nervous because I knew that I was limited on court operations. My educational background, however, provided me with enough experience to know my way around the courthouse. In addition to the preceding, I had only been 30 for two weeks, and I quickly learned that 80 percent of the staff were many years my senior. Because of my age, there was an expectation that I

would operate as a “typical” Millennial and shake things up without consulting with the long-term employees. I immediately challenged myself to learn the names of the entire staff within the first month, and I decided that I would learn the office culture before suggesting any major substantive changes.

## Build a Relationship with Your Predecessor or a Seasoned Court Professional

I was fortunate to overlap with my predecessor for nearly two weeks. We packed our calendars, and I was introduced to most of the stakeholders in our local justice system. We spent a great deal of time going over our departmental budget, and we discussed past and future information technology (IT) plans for the department. Because I am not an IT person by trade, I quickly learned that I needed to hone in on court technology — particularly from a records management perspective. I was told that I would be “putting out fires every day” and that my main goal was to “make sure that the judges were happy.” That assessment was fair, but working in court administration is so much more than pleasing the judges. Frankly, I did not know enough about the subject matter to “put out fires” in this new role. I was certain that the knowledge would come with time. My leadership team had several “brain dump” sessions with me, and those sessions proved to be most helpful. I also engaged a veteran court administrator, and he became, and continues to be, a good sounding board for me two years into this position. As a Millennial, it is very important to develop strong relationships with veteran court administrators. Often,

they can bridge the gap for you because many of the same issues will reappear with time. As such, we will eventually become veteran court administrators, and we will be in a position to help new court administrators along the way.

## Don't Say Yes or No Too Soon!

Be mindful that requests are repeated when you are the new kid on the block. You should be familiar with operational facts about your organization before confirming that you will change processes for another division of government or fix a problem for the judge, mayor, or county executive. Once you say that you will handle or resolve the issue, there is an expectation that the issue will be resolved. I have learned to respond by saying, “I’ll look into that for you and get back to you as soon as the issue has been properly vetted.” Many improvements require IT work, which equates to delays because most enhancements do not occur instantaneously.

Be realistic about the breadth of your knowledge. It is noticeable if you do not know what you are talking about. You are not expected to know all of the answers when you are new to court administration. The six-month grace period should be used to acquire as much about your organization as physically possible. Do not put too much pressure on yourself, as it is nearly impossible to learn an entire department within the first several years of employment. It is useful for you to ask questions, take notes, and restate the action items before ending a meeting.

Although leather-bound journals may seem archaic to some Millennials, they have been valuable to me



because all of my work-related notes are stored in one place. Each month I transcribe my notes into a cross-platform application (i.e., Evernote or OneNote) in the event that my journal is misplaced. Once all of your notes are reconciled and after thorough review, the decision to say yes or no becomes easier. I encourage all Millennials, as well as people new to court management, to properly vet requests before making process changes. Following the preceding instructions will save time and prevent future headaches.

## Join Court Organizations and Learn Court Operations (AOC)

At the time of first employment, my boss was a member of the Board of Directors for the National Association

for Court Management (NACM). He knew the benefit of being a NACM member and strongly encouraged me to join so that I could see court trends from both local and national perspectives. NACM provides a platform to enhance careers in court administration by offering educational and networking opportunities.

I read through past editions of the *Court Manager* and was interested in several of the topics that were covered. Because of our involvement in NACM, we subsequently hired a court consultant to provide us with an operational assessment. The assessment was extremely helpful because we were able to enhance operations and build upon our well-managed areas — many times without affecting the budget. If your budget allows, I would strongly recommend hiring a consultant to assess your communication techniques (internal and external), staffing resources, training, and customer access, and to analyze the use of

technology to ensure that your caseload management is up to par.

I also participated in the Tennessee Clerks of Court conferences and the State Court Clerks Association. While membership is only for the elected clerks in Tennessee, I learned valuable information about court operations from the plenary and breakout sessions. While I was one of the few Millennials at these conferences, participation provided in-state networking, enhanced intergovernmental relations, and provided for a cooperative information-sharing environment.

It is probably most important to make contact with the administrative offices of the court (AOC) or the office of court administration (OCA) in your state when you are new in court administration. At minimum, become familiar with the AOC's website to access forms, publications, guides, resources, and statistical reports. In my state, the AOC provides great information, and it is a good idea to

have the direct numbers and email addresses for the director's office, the general counsel, and the director of information technology. Any and all questions that may arise can be answered by those in the preceding positions.

## We've Always Done It That Way!

I decided after my first week on the job that I would not make any suggestions that would significantly affect our internal and external processes until I had a good handle on our department. Whenever processes were unclear to me, I would inquire into the origin of the process. After asking pointed questions, the response would usually be: "We've always done it that way!" In my book, unfortunately, that explanation does not pass the smell test. All processes must be logical, and the most logical processes can usually be improved through technology.

Create an atmosphere that allows for constructive criticism. I am usually the first person to say that I do not have all of the answers, and I do not expect my subordinates to have all of the answers. As a team, however, I am certain that we can reconcile any issues to benefit the organization as a whole. I truly enjoy calling ad hoc meetings to tackle the most difficult issues. As a result of calling these meetings, our team has become stronger and operates more efficiently. In true Millennial fashion, however, I do not like to have meetings for the sake of having meetings. I enjoy having meetings because I like good results. As a born problem solver, I enjoy pressing through the toughest issues, including improving processes that have been the same for over 40 years.

After attending CTC 2015, I was motivated by the keynote speaker to be intentional about technology. We were charged to not allow technology advances to be placed on the shelf until we had time to adequately address technology. Because good ideas can occur at the wrong time, whether it is due to funding or staffing shortages, technology can serve as a conduit to help jurisdictions get through difficult and unforeseen issues. I have seen technology improve archaic processes, as well as assist employees with strenuous tasks inside of the courts. For example, the Justice Integration Services Division of Metro Government helped our department design a citation processor for the busiest courtroom. As a result of technology, many of our court processes were automated and our in-court clerks were able to use the saved time for other tasks inside of the office. We immediately noticed a better work ethic from the staff because of this innovative process. We continue to think of ways to improve how our courts operate through technology. I strongly encourage Millennials and new court administrators to spend a few hours a week thinking about how to improve court processes through technology.

## Thoughts to Consider

I have come to know that people employed in court administration are very hard workers. It is probably a fair assessment to say that our profession can join other hardworking professions by being referred to as a profession that knows how to make things happen with limited resources. It is a common practice to acquire new duties when someone retires or is relieved of their services. We may be required to stay

late or be available by phone at odd times of the night. We may be subjected to high levels of stress. Often, our jobs fall prey to politics because of elections, appointments, or retention votes for the judicial branch of government. We are resilient. Take a deep breath and know that we work in one of the most important and rewarding professions in the world — the field of court administration.

Think back to when you were new to court administration. Share those thought processes with early career professionals in your court. Mentor those individuals who have promise in our profession. Help them become better court professionals. This profession, like all others, will have Millennials in the forefront in the coming decades. Your guidance and direction will provide us with the knowledge, skills, and abilities to make a positive impact on the judiciary, as well as in the field of court administration. NACM's Mentoring Program is a flexible program designed to connect seasoned court professionals with newly appointed court professionals. This program is initiated at the request of the mentee and it lasts for one year. You may contact the NACM Membership Committee for more information.

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### NOTES

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# Best Practices for the Collection of Fines and Costs

Dave Spridgeon

*Editor's Note: The following article contains edited excerpts from a paper, "Best Practices for Collecting Fines and Costs," written as part of a research project for the Institute for Court Management's Fellows Program (2016). Although the recommendations of this project apply to the Findlay Municipal Court (Ohio), other jurisdictions could derive benefits from them.*

This project focused on the best practices for collecting fines and costs. Since the Findlay Municipal Court is in Ohio, the research needed to be tailored to fit within its jurisdictional venue. The project explored regional best practices in an effort to maximize

collections with the court. Since 2014, increased jail costs have been passed on to defendants as a court cost. This shift has caused the amount of debt owed to the court to rise dramatically. Fines and costs collections have not risen at the same rate as the debt. The court has

in the past used hearings in an effort to collect, but changed course and began using a third-party collection agency in 2010. The agency adds 30 percent to the current debt owed by defendants, which, in turn, increases the total debt owed.

In meeting with court leadership, it was discovered that there is a “general idea” of how well the court collects fines and fees, but no empirical data has ever been extracted to make certain it is being done well enough. There is an increased expectation from the public that all government operations, including those of the courts, should be efficient, accountable, and cost-effective (Klaversma and Matthias, 2009).

## Collection Templates, Tools, and Techniques

Collection of fines, fees, and forfeitures has been seriously on the minds of court administrators for the past 70 years. One of the first contemporary studies of how best to collect fines and fees was performed by Karen Wick, who examined delinquent traffic payments (Wick, 1988). Since then, there have been scores of studies dealing with the phenomenon of failure to pay (FTP). Some of the more recent studies have attempted to create templates for effective collection practices.

In “Compliance with Judicial Orders: Methods of Collections and Enforcing Monetary Sanctions” (1991), Lynch et al. addressed the issue by determining that in Virginia, the collection policies fell into three categories: 1) those requiring immediate payment, 2) those allowing for deferred or installment payments, and 3) matters of indigence. Within those three categories, the authors gave attention to the resources required, the problems with each approach, and management considerations that needed to be addressed. The second part of their research focused on 13 collection techniques, including computerized records, telemarketing, and the use of private collection agencies.

*Current Practices in Collecting Fines and Fees in State Courts: A Handbook of Collection Issues and Solutions* (2nd ed.) yields highly valuable information, such as attributes of a successful collections environment, designing a court collection program, combining internal and external resources, payment options, payment alternatives, coercive enforcement measures, and use of technology (Klaversma and Matthias, 2009).

Nielson and Ard, in their presentation at CTC 2009, “Use of Workflow Automation and Other Technologies to Improve Compliance and Collections of Court Ordered Penalties,” claimed that “lack of compliance in paying court fines and fees denies a jurisdiction revenue and, more importantly, calls into question the authority and effectiveness of the court and justice system.”

Judge John T. Rohrs III, of Defiance (Ohio) Municipal Court, has created a bench card that addresses the collection of fines and court costs. His experience lies in the enforcement of Ohio Revised Code 2947.14, which gives the authority to collect to the courts. The bench card is a quick reference guide for judges that includes a guide for enforcing fines by imposing jail time, imposing court costs, addressing limitations of contempt, and allocating court costs, fines, restitution, and reimbursements. It summarizes the permitted and non-permitted methods of collecting fines and costs. Included in the document are alternatives for cancellation and discharge, community service as payment, and a community-service schedule of served-hours limitations.

“Evaluating Collection Practices in Small-Volume Texas Municipal Courts,” as researched by Bonnie Townsend (2012), has some invaluable information from which conclusions

can be drawn. Townsend’s conclusions are similar to those of this paper as the courts researched are similar in size to the Findlay Municipal Court. She concluded that there needs to be staff dedicated to collections, an application for an extension of time to pay, and staff verification of the defendant’s financial information.

The National Center for State Courts’ report regarding a “Study of the Effectiveness of Collections in the Florida Courts” (Raaen, Matthias, and Kim, 2012) contains information in which collected data are broken down by need and recommendations made to increase the effectiveness of collections in those courts. The study lists the key elements of an effective collection program, including:

- judicial and administrative support
- clear roles and lines of responsibility
- short time periods for compliance
- clear expectations for compliance
- establishment and adherence to procedures
- goals and performance monitoring
- immediate responses to non-compliance
- use of a range of effective sanctions
- communication between clerks, judges, and other stakeholders

This research included a survey of clerks who, among other things noted some significant barriers to success of collection programs. Clerks participating in the survey were asked to identify what they perceive as various barriers to success. Their responses indicated that greater coordination is needed between clerks and judges and with other criminal justice agencies, in particular state and county probation. More robust information systems are

needed in some jurisdictions to improve the efficiency of collection management and enforcement. The 15 responses also show that some jurisdictions have unique problems. One clerk reported that over 30 percent of the county criminal cases involve homeless individuals. Many counties have large migrant populations that pose unique challenges (Raaen, Matthias, and Kim, 2012: 2-3.). Some 20 recommendations were produced, including development of strategies such as:

- consistent assessment practices
- consistent enforcement practices
- local collection policy work groups
- local pilot programs
- court collection plans
- write-off standards
- fine amnesty programs
- credit bureau referrals

Additionally, the study recommended a set of important collection tools, such as:

- payment plans as a condition of probation
- nonrenewal of vehicle registration for failure to pay
- garnishment
- denial of applications for professional licenses
- prison account sweeps
- denial of recreational licenses such as hunting and fishing

The full set of recommendations in this report make an excellent checklist for use in evaluating any court's collection efforts.

Past research by Laura Klaversma (2009) indicates the states of Texas, Arizona, Michigan, and California appear to excel in collections. Outlined below is what she found.

## Texas

- expectation that obligations are due at the time of sentencing or pleading
- defendants unable to pay complete an application for extension
- payment plans are established for those who qualify for extension
- alternative enforcement options available for those who do not qualify
- close monitoring for compliance
- prompt action for noncompliance

## Arizona

- reminder notices
- delinquency notices
- web-based and IVR credit-card payments
- electronic skip tracing
- state tax intercept program
- vehicle registration holds
- credit bureau reporting
- outbound phone calls

## Michigan

- orders to remit prisoner funds
- delinquency notification software
- show-cause process
- court-ordered wage assignments

## California:

- issue monthly billing statements
- make telephone contact with debtor
- issue warning letters
- request credit reports to assist in locating debtors
- access employment development department

- generate monthly delinquent reports
- participate in tax intercept program
- use Dept. of Motor Vehicles information to locate debtors
- use wage and bank account garnishments
- file liens on real property and proceeds of sale
- file claims of objection in bankruptcy
- coordinate with probation department to locate debtors
- suspend driver's licenses
- accept credit-card payments
- participate in court-ordered debt programs
- contract with private debt collectors

The duplication seen here when compared to the Florida study shows what appears to be an increasing consensus on the menu of tools available to courts. The Ohio Attorney General's Office has a program to enhance collection of fines and costs that includes some of the methods described above. The Findlay Municipal Court has not used this program. However, interviews with their staff yield some pertinent methods that may be useful to the court. The program lays out some important debt-collection business rules, including the ability to attach gambling winnings and state tax refunds.

Atlanta Municipal Court judge Gary Jackson took a practical approach to collections in "Collecting Delinquent Fines" (2011). Judge Jackson stated he is guided by three things that have become somewhat of a philosophy:

- (a) You can get a judgment some of the time;

- (b) You can collect some judgments all of the time;
- (c) You cannot collect every judgment all of the time.

The judge continues his discussion by laying out several options that are legal within the state of Georgia, but can be applicable in other states and courts. He mentions the use of a Writ of Execution, liens, driver's license suspensions, garnishment of wages and bank accounts, third-party collections, and the seizure of state tax refunds.

## Comparative Collection Results

Although there is widespread interest in the collections problem, there have been no comprehensive studies of the magnitude of the collections problem or national trends. However, there have been numerous studies of individual jurisdictions that can assist in identifying the results courts are realizing through their efforts, supplementing the research of this project and providing the Findlay Municipal Court with additional information for answering the "How well are we doing?" question. According to a recent NPR News investigation, 48 states have recently increased criminal and civil fees, added new ones, or done both.

The number of Americans with unpaid fines and fees is massive. In 2011, in Philadelphia alone, courts sent bills on unpaid debts dating back to the 1970s to more than 320,000 people — roughly 1 in 5 city residents. The median debt was around \$4,500. And in New York City, there are 1.2 million outstanding warrants, many for unpaid court fines and fees (Shapiro, 2014). For many courts, this has exacerbated the collections problem

and even resulted in charges that courts are running "debtors' prisons" for those incarcerated for nonpayment of fines and fees. Nonetheless, it is instructive for present purposes to look at the collection rate experiences of other courts for comparison purposes.

### Virginia

According to recent information, collection rates have generally gone up in the Virginia courts. Overall, Virginia courts collected 59 percent of fines, fees, and assessments that totaled \$429 million during the fiscal year ended June 30, 2015, the Compensation Board reported. That is up from 52 percent in fiscal year 2014, the low point in a three-year slide from the old pattern of collection rates that had ranged around 75 percent for most of the previous decade (Ress, 2016). Rates ranged from a low of 43 percent in Gloucester County to a high of 70 percent in Isle of Wight County.

### Pennsylvania

The overall collection rates for Pennsylvania's courts are a bit higher for 2014, the most recent available year. The statewide average is 76 percent. This ranges from a low of 62.7 percent in Venango County to a high of 95.9 percent in Fulton County.

### Brevard County, Florida

More detail is available by looking at a single jurisdiction. In Brevard County, Florida the results for fiscal year 2013 were as follows for two important limited-jurisdiction case types. Criminal traffic has a performance standard for collections of 40 percent. Actual performance was 38.9 percent. Civil traffic has a performance standard of 90 percent. Actual performance was slightly less at 80.25 percent.

### Lockhart Municipal Court, Texas

In a study of small municipal courts in Texas, Townsend found that the collection of monetary penalties was 59 percent for preliminary compliance and 65 percent for overall compliance in 2007. Those numbers rose to 62 percent and 84 percent, respectively, in 2008 after a collections improvement plan was put in place. So, the overall compliance rate went up by 19 percent after new collection practices were put in place (Townsend, 2012).

### Arizona Municipal and Justice Courts

In 2007 Dybas examined the collection practices of eight Arizona limited-jurisdiction courts. There were six justice courts and two municipal courts in the study. The average preliminary compliance rate for the eight courts was 69.7 percent. The overall compliance rate was 70 percent, ranging from a low of 60 to a high of 99 percent (Dybas, 2007).

## Recommendations

As can be seen from these five examples, the range of court success in collecting fines, fees, and forfeitures is very wide (a low of 38.9 to a high of 99 percent). However, there is also evidence from this small pool that thoughtful collection plans and strategies can have a positive impact on collection rates. All of the aforementioned literature is helpful in determining if the court can replicate these success stories or should it diverge from them, creating its own. If diverging from them, the court must be careful to do so ethically and legally. It is clear that personnel need to be dedicated to collecting fines and fees; there also needs to be definite expectations with regard to the dates by which fines

and fees need to be collected and an application used if an extension of time for payment is needed. Further, alternative enforcement options should be explored, as well as the use of vehicle-registration blocks, driver's license forfeitures, and failure to appear for hearings.

There are limited options legally and realistically. Legally, the court is bound by how fines and fees can be collected. Realistically, the court is bound by several factors, such as the defendant's ability to pay, what message is provided to them upon conviction, and what collection efforts are conducted. The following conclusions and recommendations appear to be the most efficient and complete way to collect outstanding fines and fees. It is imperative that all defendants' questions are addressed at sentencing and that they are told what is expected of them in meeting their payment obligations. The judge is viewed as "the last bastion of sanity" and, therefore, what he or she states on the record is the final decision. If the defendant is told the monetary penalties of the case are due at time of sentencing, the foundation gets laid for the future.

### **RECOMMENDATION 1: The court must adopt a forward-speaking attitude with defendants.**

The judge should address defendants at sentencing, informing them that the expectation of the court is that their debt to society is due in full that day. Any variance from the policy must be communicated to the defendant with a clear set of guidelines as to what and how it will be handled should they not be able to do so. Those guidelines should include the following instructions:

- On date of adjudication, all fines and costs are due.
- Should defendants not be able to pay in full, they may make a request of the judge that they enter into a written payment agreement that is made on the record.
- If a defendant does not pay in full within 30 days, a status conference with a magistrate will be held to determine why the debt is unpaid as agreed upon. A license forfeiture and registration block would be issued at this time.
- If after 90 days the debt is not settled, the case would be referred to the Ohio Attorney General's Office for collection efforts for 150 days.
- If after that period there still remains debt, the case would be forwarded to a private third-party collection agency for an additional 150 days.
- If after that period of time there still remains debt, the defendant would be brought before the judge for a status conference.

### **RECOMMENDATION 2: All court staff need to convey the same message throughout the collection process.**

Once an established guideline is determined, all staff need to be able to convey the message in the same manner, and each time there is communication with the defendant. No variation from this the guideline should be made except by the judge or a single designee.

**Fines are separate from court costs.** Court costs, restitution and fees are civil, non-criminal obligations and may be collected only by the methods provided for

the collection of civil judgments. Sole authority exists under R.C. 2947.14 for a court or magistrate to commit an offender to jail for nonpayment of fines in a criminal case. An offender **CANNOT** be held in contempt of court for refusal to pay fines. Accordingly, unpaid fines and/or court costs may neither be a condition of probation, nor grounds for an extension or violation of probation (Ohio Supreme Court, 2015; emphasis in original).

### **RECOMMENDATION 3: The Ohio Supreme Court (2015) bench card should be referenced to at all times when collecting fines and costs.**

The card is clear and easy to follow. All court staff should be copied on the card so that they have full understanding of the legal aspect of the collection process.

### **RECOMMENDATION 4: Cases should be sent to a third-party collection agency.**

This process has multiple layers. First, once the defendant has failed to abide by the court's guidelines at 90 days from adjudication, the case should first be sent to the Ohio Attorney General's Office for collection efforts for the next 150 days. If sent for these additional collection efforts, the defendant will realize a 10 percent additional collection fee. Any remaining balance from the 150 days would be forwarded to a private contracted vendor for an additional 150 days at a 30 percent additional collection fee. This system gives the defendant the opportunity to pay at a lower rate with the AGO, possibly inspiring them to pay early.



## RECOMMENDATION 5: Dedicate staff to the collection of fines and costs.

Whether it is a judge, a magistrate, or a clerk acting in the capacity of a bookkeeper, it seems to make sense that having the collection effort centralized would stop any confusing messages the defendant may receive during the process. This individual would be solely responsible for ensuring that the tracking of the defendants and their payments are taken care of for the court.

## RECOMMENDATION 6: Institute a Payment Agreement and Pay or Appear notice.

## RECOMMENDATION 7: The court should not use community service or amnesty days as a form of payment.

## RECOMMENDATION 8: Explore and deploy any and all possible ways for defendants to make payment.

The court must make the acceptance of fines and costs payments as convenient as possible.

- Accept all forms of payment: Visa, MasterCard, Discover, American Express, Apple Pay, cash, check, etc.
- Accept all forms of payment in person, by phone, by mail, by fax, by electronic means.
- Make accessible to the defendant credit-card machines for their use.
- Make accessible to the defendant an alternate payment center for after-hours payments other than Internet use, or a kiosk that expands access to 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

The banking industry has moved to ATM use and so should the court in some fashion.

## RECOMMENDATION 9: The court should create a collection plan authored by all the relevant actors in the collection process.

The major lesson from the courts described in the literature review is that collections improve when the court focuses on the process by creating, executing, and monitoring a strategy for the collection process.

## Conclusion

These processes in tandem can positively affect the collection process for the court. They are intended to bring all staff together in an effort to send a clear, defined set of expectations for defendants to take care of the financial aspect of their debt to society. Two questions were sought to be answered:

- Is the court performing as well as it can and if not, what needs changing?
- Are we attempting to collect fines and costs in a legal manner?

Each recommendation brings forth a common theme: There is an expectation of payment at time of sentencing and any deviation of that expectation must be tracked and answered for in all steps of the process. Finally, there must be a “top-down” commitment from judge to deputy clerk if a court intends to be successful in advancing collection rates. It is my belief that these recommendations must work in tandem. Standing alone will not produce the affect the court desires.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dave Spridgeon is the clerk of courts for the City of Findlay, Ohio. A former deputy sheriff and probation officer, he is a 2016 graduate of the Institute for Court Management’s Fellows Program. He can be reached via email [dspridgeon@findlayohio.com](mailto:dspridgeon@findlayohio.com), or phone at (419) 424-7805.

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# How Prepared Is Your Staff?

Patrice Evans, Winnie Webber, and Bob Zastany\*

According to the Pew Research Center, 64 percent of American adults own a smartphone. That figure is well supported by most court organizations when it comes to judges and staff members. In addition, it is common practice to carry a smartphone every day and, as is often the case, glued to our ears. Since it appears that the workforce has embraced this technology, why not develop this resource into a tool to assist court leaders in preparing for emergency

operations and to assist staff in responding effectively to nearly all emergencies?

The general practice is to assess preparedness and make adjustments while looking in the rearview mirror. Although the unpredictable nature of emergency situations makes it difficult to know for certain if everything will go as planned until after a specific incident has occurred, relying only on seeing what happens when a crisis hits to assess policies, procedures, and training

efforts is unwise for the court leader. The actions taken during those initial minutes of an emergency are most critical.

Most plans, regardless if they are operational, strategic, tactical, or contingency in nature, are built upon a solid command, control, and coordination of the content, policies, and procedures that shape and govern those plans. Moreover, the success of this planning structure is based on thorough communications and ready

**Court leaders** spend an enormous number of hours developing elaborate plans, like continuity of operations plans and emergency **evacuation** plans. While these plans effectively manage critical incidents, they are often not in the **hands of** all judges and staff members.

access to the appropriate information.

Can you relate to this observation?

For over 30 years, I have heard the following comments each time an emergency drill was conducted: No one knows what to do; few have the correct contact phone numbers; where do we assemble; my plan is out of date; I never was given a plan; I wasn't told the plan; my dog ate it. Becoming very frustrated, something had to be done once and for all.

Court leaders spend an enormous number of hours developing elaborate plans, like continuity of operations plans and emergency evacuation plans. While these plans effectively manage critical incidents, they are often not in the hands of all judges and staff members. Extracted portions are usually copied and disseminated to appropriate individuals, but more often than not, once disseminated, those portions are no longer current, especially key telephone numbers. And so goes the story — on and on and on.

The task that was undertaken was to search, develop, and implement a solution that could be on a smartphone or tablet and available to every member of the court organization, along with other key officials within county government.

## The Story

There is better than a 75 percent probability that when a crisis or disaster strikes your court organization that you will not be in your office or at your desk and you will not have your organization's emergency operations plan in your hand. So what good is that two-and-a-half-inch binder doing that holds your organization's emergency operations plan? Not only will you not have it at your fingertips when you need it most, but all of the other individuals that also have it throughout the court organization may have never read it, probably do not remember it, or worse, possibly do not understand the plan!

ANOTHER ISSUE: The dreaded three-ring binder. For the approximately 90 percent of organizations that are proactive enough to have an emergency operations plan, paper and three-ring binders are the current status quo. Having these binders sit on a bookshelf, serve as a doorstop, or placed in a drawer somewhere in the staff meeting room is only one segment of the problem. The binders also make it difficult to be at the ready to respond without notice to any type of emergency situation. If you are part of a court organization and can answer yes to any of the following statements, you

might have an issue with emergency preparedness of the organization.

1. You have never seen the emergency operating procedures (EOP).
2. The EOP is not distributed beyond the executive staff.
3. You only hear about the EOP at an annual review meeting.
4. You have a copy of an EOP from 2012 or even earlier.
5. You have never been involved in any emergency training or drills

All is not hopeless. Emerging technology that is capable of displacing the binders, or at least providing key information at your fingertips, is here and ready for prime time. There are mobile-application-based emergency operation plans that can be used on your smartphone. A key benefit of a mobile application that stores your organization's plan onto your smartphone is immediate access to your critical emergency information. If you are responsible for ensuring the safety of judges and staff, the greatest benefit of this type of application is that once your plans are synced to the application, your entire plan — contacts, teams, floor plans, along with the ability to communicate — is always available,

even when Internet and cellular service are interrupted. Additional benefits include saving court managers tons of time and effort in updating and communicating plan changes, streamlining operations, and saving lots of trees.

These smartphone applications are light years better than paper-based plans. So, the next time stuff happens, and it will, which item will you have with you, your smartphone or your two-and-half-inch binder?

## Our Solution

In our search for a better solution to the two-and-a-half-inch binder, we found My-EOP, developed by Guest Communications Corporation (GCC). There are other solutions available in the market that will provide different tools and different presentation formats. The My-EOP application provides full custom content for your organization in a quick-reference format that is similar to a tiered (flip-chart) format.

We have found this solution to be easy to set up, simple to use and understand, and affordable. Since going live with the application in our organization, we have experienced two emergency (non-drill) situations requiring evacuation and one situation in a specific focus area that required immediate attention.

Here are some of the testimonials that were forwarded since the implementation of this My-EOP app.

*“[T]his mobile app is great. All the critical items that I need to know are laid out nicely and I do not need to look for it.”*

*“The My-EOP app is easy to use. As a matter of fact, I have a need to call Judge for an important item and it was easy because that is listed in the My-EOP. It saved me a lot of time.”*

*“[W]e have a situation one weekend in the Pretrial Office of a water leak and I needed to contact the Director of the Division. The My-EOP app saved me and was able to call this person without panicking as to how to get in contact with this person.”*

The adoption of the My-EOP tool provides access to the up-to-date emergency operations plan anywhere, anytime, whenever it is necessary. The contents in this app are made available for the safety and security of all judges, key personnel, employees of the 19th Judicial Circuit and the public we serve.

### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Patrice Evans is business process analyst; Winnie Webber is director of judicial information and technology services; and Bob Zastany is executive director, 19th Judicial Circuit, Lake County, Illinois.

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## 19th Judicial Circuit EOP

My-EOP
Medical Emergency
General Shelter in Place
General Evacuation
Assembly Areas
Explosions
Bomb Threat Call Procedures
Bomb Call Checklist
How to ID Suspicious Packages and Letters
Safety Stand Off
Active Shooter
Hostage Situation
Severe Weather Tips
Flood Safety
Power Outage
Earthquake
Snow Emergency
Demonstrations
Phone Numbers
Judges
Emergency Phone Numbers
Court Reporter Numbers
Staff Directory by Division
Adult Probation & Pretrial Services Division
Judicial Administrative Services Division
Judicial Information Services & Technology Division
Judicial Operations Division
Juvenile Probation & Detention Services Division
Legal Research Unit
Psychological Services Division
Senior Management
Courtroom Phone Numbers
Sheltering Locations
Adult Probation
Depke
RLB Shelter
Mundelein
PC
Mass Arrest
Judiciary Mass Arrest Response Plan & Resources
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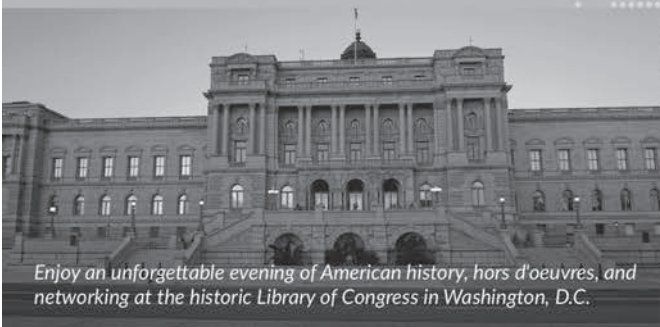
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# International Outreach

## Coming Together and Sharing Our Experiences

Marcus W. Reinkensmeyer and Michele Oken

In promoting the Rule of Law, the National Association for Court Management (NACM) recognizes the importance of outreach to international partners for adoption of modern court administration worldwide. To organize those efforts, NACM has created an International Subcommittee to serve as a point of contact with other countries, with project leaders and administrators available to provide specialized technical assistance. Additionally, the subcommittee reaches out to international associations and

organizations to foster effective court management, encourage partnership with NACM, and increase international membership.

The role of the International Subcommittee also includes assisting colleagues in other countries; improving the capacity of their legal institutions; assisting NACM members interested in developing international relationships with courts abroad; providing resources and materials available on the International Outreach page of the NACM website (<https://nacmnet.org/internationaloutreach.html>); and

maintaining a roster of court managers/administrators who can work in the international arena and act in an advisory or consultant capacity.

With the 2017 annual NACM conference in Washington, D.C. fast approaching, it is an opportune time to recognize and learn more about NACM's conference cohost, the International Association for Court Administration (IACA), <http://www.iaca.ws/>.

The partnership of these two premier professional associations will

The **partnership** of these two premier professional associations will bring us an International conference based upon the inspirational theme of “**Excellence on a Global Scale.**” Conference planners from both organizations project attendance of over 750 court **leaders**, including administrators and judges from the United States and more than 50 other countries.

bring us an International conference based upon the inspirational theme of “Excellence on a Global Scale.” Conference planners from both organizations project attendance of over 750 court leaders, including administrators and judges from the United States and more than 50 other countries.

Created in 2004, IACA is a not-for-profit global organization dedicated to promoting the effective administration of justice. The IACA mission is threefold:

- to promote professional court administration and management in emerging democracies and other countries pursuing the rule of law;
- to sponsor international conferences, forums, and education and training programs on court administration and management; and
- to serve as a resource for judges, court administrators and managers, and other government officials in

search of ways in which to evaluate and improve court justice systems.

Organizationally, to ensure a genuine international perspective, IACA is built upon a global governance framework. The association’s leadership (president and president elect) are assisted by an Executive Board with vice-presidents representing geographically defined regions, as well as an Advisory Council composed of senior-level justice-sector leaders.

IACA brings together court leaders for international and regional court administration conferences. IACA also has a far reaching online publication, *The International Journal for Court Administration*, <http://www.iacajournal.org/>. This publication includes thoughtful articles on best practices and judicial system improvement efforts, court research projects, and model rule-of-law initiatives. Contributors to the journal represent many different countries, providing valuable insights

about local legal cultures and diverse systems of justice.

Through a Dual Membership Program, NACM offers discounted membership fees for those who join both NACM and IACA.

NACM’s Conference Planning Committee and International Subcommittee are grateful for the opportunity to work with court leaders from abroad, in large part through our association’s partnership with IACA. We look forward to meeting new colleagues from across the globe at the annual conference in Washington, D.C., July 9 through 13, 2017.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Marcus W. Reinkensmeyer is past president of NACM, a member of the NACM International Subcommittee, and director, Court Services Division, Administrative Office of the Courts, Arizona Supreme Court.

Michele Oken is past president of NACM, chair of the NACM International Subcommittee, and administrator for Civil Operations at the Los Angeles County Superior Court.



# Jury News

PAULA HANNAFORD-AGOR

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## Using Debit Cards to Pay Jurors

Twenty years ago, one of the biggest challenges for jury managers was ensuring that jurors were paid in a timely manner. Juror compensation procedures often involved sending a detailed report of fees owed from the jury office to the court or county finance division, which then processed, printed, and mailed the checks to jurors as part of its regular fund disbursement process. In a reasonably well functioning court, jurors could generally expect to receive their juror fees within two weeks of completing jury service, but in some jurisdictions, the wait could be up to eight weeks. Any subsequent communications about juror compensation, such as reports of lost checks or checks returned as undeliverable by the U.S. Postal Service, also involved a lengthy back-and-forth between the jury office and the finance division.

Oh, how times have changed! Today court and local finance divisions are often at the forefront of efforts to streamline the juror compensation process to reduce costs, especially staffing costs related to check reconciliation. Many courts now have authorization for jury managers to calculate and distribute checks to jurors directly from the jury office using financial software packages that interfaced directly with the jury automation software. The jury office then sent reports to the finance division documenting the fees that were paid. Other courts were able to adapt ATM kiosks to permit direct cash payments to jurors. I have received sporadic questions over the past decade whether courts have used prepaid debit cards to compensate jurors, but only recently learned of a court that has successfully implemented this approach. The Gwinnett County Superior Courts in Georgia began using prepaid debit cards in 2014. I spoke with Abigail Carter, the jury manager for the Gwinnett County courts, in February to learn more about the program.

## The Gwinnett County Juror Debit Card Program

The Financial Division for the Gwinnett County Courts, which historically managed the juror compensation process, initiated the change to prepaid debit cards. Under the previous process, the Jury Division forwarded a weekly report to the Finance Division specifying the amount owed to each juror with the juror's mailing address. The Finance Division printed and mailed checks to jurors, usually within one week of service. The Finance Division was also responsible for following up on checks returned by the U.S. Postal Service, reconciling the check-cashing process, and managing the state-mandated escheatment process for checks that remained uncashed after five years. The Finance Division estimated that the administrative costs for the juror compensation process at approximately \$5 per juror. The court initiated the transition to prepaid debit cards by issuing an RFP specifying conditions for awarding a contract with a financial institution, including a limitation on fees imposed on jurors using the debit card.

Chase Bank was awarded the initial contract with the court, but was replaced by Key Bank in 2014 after Chase announced its intention to leave the prepaid-debit-card market. Implementation of the prepaid-debit-card program involved a \$500 start-up fee plus a \$2 charge for each deposit credited to the prepaid card (a \$3 per juror savings over the previous process). As before, the Jury Division sends a weekly report to the Finance Division with amounts owed and the mailing address for each juror. The Finance Division then sends a report to Key Bank, which deposits the amounts on MasterCard-issued debit cards and mails them to the jurors with instructions for activating the debit card. Again, most jurors receive their debit cards within one week of completing jury service. Key Bank also manages the escheatment process on behalf of the Finance Division.



Many courts now have **authorization** for jury managers to calculate and distribute checks to jurors directly from the jury office using **financial** software packages that interfaced directly with the jury automation **software**.

After jurors activate their debit cards, they can use the cards like any debit or credit card with MasterCard-participating vendors or financial institutions. Once the debit cards are activated, jurors have up to one year to exhaust the funds; after one year, however, Key Bank charges a fee of \$1 per month until the funds are completely exhausted. Once the funds are exhausted, the debit cards are not converted to credit accounts, nor do they result in additional fees for jurors.

### A Few Complications

For the most part, the Gwinnett County Courts have been very satisfied with the debit-card program, but like most program innovations, they have experienced a few bumps along the way. One complication involves the information provided to Key Bank about each juror. Normally, banks issuing debit cards have access to the recipient's Social Security Number, which is used for identification purposes if the recipient needs to contact the bank's customer-service office for any questions or problems involving the card. The Gwinnett County Jury Division does not collect jurors' Social Security Numbers as part of its summoning-and-qualification process and, thus, is not able to provide that information to Key Bank. Instead, it provides the seven-digit Juror ID number plus a two-digit appendix and the juror's date of birth as unique identifiers. Many jurors do not know or will not remember their Juror ID number after completing jury service, however. When jurors need to contact Key Bank regarding an inquiry about the debit card, the Key Bank customer-service representatives are supposed to ask for the juror's date-of-birth and Zip Code in lieu of the Social Security Number, but jurors often report that the Key Bank representatives do not appear to be aware of this alternate mechanism for verifying the juror's identification.

Another complication arises when jurors opt to withdraw cash from the debit cards. In Gwinnett County, which employs a one-day/one-trial term of service, jurors are paid \$30 per day for juror fees. Consequently, most jurors receive debit cards that are credited with only \$30. As most ATMs disburse cash in \$20 increments, jurors can only withdraw \$20 from the ATM and are left with a \$10 credit on the debit card. No fees are imposed if the juror withdraws cash from the debit card at a Key Bank-affiliated ATM, but a \$2 fee is imposed on withdrawals from ATMs that are not affiliated with Key Bank. To avoid the \$2 fee, jurors may forgo use of an ATM and instead ask for cash directly from a teller at the bank. Financial institutions participating under a MasterCard agreement are prohibited from charging a fee for converting a MasterCard prepaid debit card to cash, but some Gwinnett County jurors have reported that banks are nevertheless charging those fees unless the juror is already a bank customer.

Finally, because debit cards are mailed by Key Bank rather than the court, many jurors mistakenly assume that the mailing contains a "junk mail" solicitation, rather than their juror fee, and discard it. Key Bank assumes responsibility for replacing lost debit cards. No fees are incurred for replacing the first card, but a \$5 fee may be charged for replacing subsequent debit cards.

### Best Practices for Courts Contemplating Prepaid Debit Cards to Compensate Jurors

It appears that Gwinnett County was able to avoid some of the most common complaints about using prepaid debit cards to compensate jurors through a thoughtful RFP solicitation that specifically articulated restrictions on the fees that could be imposed on debit-card recipients, thus avoiding some of

In addition, the federal **Consumer Financial Protection Bureau** has recently finalized federal protections for prepaid-account **consumers** that limit fees and other practices that harm consumers, which would govern such **arrangements** in the future.

the most common complaints about the use of prepaid debit cards.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the federal Consumer Financial Protection Bureau has recently finalized federal protections for prepaid-account consumers that limit fees and other practices that harm consumers,<sup>2</sup> which would govern such arrangements in the future. In the meantime, Ms. Carter offered the following suggestions for courts investigating the option of prepaid debit cards for jurors:

- Take the time to document the costs associated with the existing juror-compensation program, including staff time to print, mail, and reconcile checks and to manage the escheatment process.
- Understand the customer-service practices offered by the financial institution managing the debit-card program, including alternative procedures in place to verify the debit-card holder's identity in the absence of a Social Security Number.
- Understand contractual limits on the use of debit cards and ensure that jurors receive timely and accurate information about those limitations during juror orientation and in the information provided with the debit card.

## Postscript

Recently, Gwinnett County has learned of other vendors offering prepaid debit cards for courts, including one that sends blank debit cards to the court and allows the Jury Division to load funds and distribute prepaid debit cards directly to jurors before they leave the courthouse, thus saving postage costs and reducing the potential for cards being lost in the mail or mistakenly confused with junk mail.<sup>3</sup>

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### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Paula Hannaford-Agor is director of the Center for Jury Studies at the National Center for State Courts. Contact her at [phannaford@ncsc.org](mailto:phannaford@ncsc.org).

### NOTES

1. See, e.g., Christian Berthelson, *JPMorgan Accused of Nickel-and-Diming Jurors on Debit Cards*, BLOOMBERG NEWS (Feb. 8, 2017), available at <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-02-08/jpmorgan-accused-of-nickle-and-diming-jurors-on-debit-card-pay?ncid=newsltushpnews>.
2. See [http://files.consumerfinance.gov/f/documents/201610105\\_cfpb\\_Final\\_Rule\\_Prepaid\\_Accounts.pdf](http://files.consumerfinance.gov/f/documents/201610105_cfpb_Final_Rule_Prepaid_Accounts.pdf).
3. The vendor is CourtFunds (see its website at [www.courtfunds.com](http://www.courtfunds.com)), which reportedly has an existing contract with the Cherokee County courts to compensate jurors using prepaid debit cards. The NCSC Center for Jury Studies does not endorse commercial vendors offering technology or other services for jury operations.



# A Question of Ethics

FRANK MAIOCCO

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## The Visible Exercise of Citizenry Rights

One of the things that initially piqued my interest in a career in court leadership, years ago, was the notion that, wherever I might choose to work, I would find myself in a position in local government that was unique to others in my community. Certainly, the position would function like many other executive- and legislative-department directors in managing a uniquely defined set of public services. However, the field was set apart because it was rooted in the much-less-understood third branch of government and would, therefore, be limited to similar positions in other, distinctly created courts. The uniquely visible court-leadership positions, framed by the public's expectations for integrity, fairness, and justice, and second only to judicial positions, were fundamentally inviting.

Candidly, it never occurred to me that this inherent and unique rubric might actually have some adverse impact on my rights as a U.S. citizen. In fact, it was only just a few short years ago that I realized, as I listened to the informal, ad hoc "orientation" that a senior judge provided a newly appointed judge regarding the use of social media, that "judges and court leaders are called to a much higher ethical standard. Check your First Amendment rights at the door."

To be clear, NACM's Model Code of Ethics, and most other local and state codes of conduct, asserts that every court professional maintains and protects his or her legal and constitutional rights, and the exercise, thereof. But what are the practical implications when, considering the unique positions that we hold, we exercise those personally held rights in our communities? Certainly, we retain our individual rights as private citizens, but what does that mean in the context of our professional and much more publicly visible roles as our courts' de facto public information officers? Importantly, how do our local constituents perceive us, professionally, in the context of these canons, when publicly exercising our rights as citizens:

## *NACM CANON 1.2* *Avoiding Impropriety*

A court professional shall avoid impropriety and the appearance of impropriety.

A court professional shall avoid activities that would impugn the dignity of the court.

## *NACM CANON 2.1* *Independent Judgment*

A court professional shall be vigilant of conflicts of interest and ensure that outside interests are never so extensive or of such a nature as to impair one's ability to perform court duties.

## *NACM CANON 4.1* *Refraining from Inappropriate Political Activity*

Engaging in political activity is done strictly as a private citizen and only in accordance with state law or court rules.

## The Scenario

David Allen has been your assistant trial court executive for the Atwood Judicial District for the last eight years. Among his assigned duties, David has served as the district's de facto public information officer. In this capacity, he has established a very good rapport with both print media and video reporters, and he is in the habit of providing advance notice of upcoming, high-profile court events. He is also regularly contacted, off-the-record, to assist reporters in understanding unique or complex facets of the law and legal procedure.

David's role as public information officer, while not officially assigned, has increased his media exposure and recognition to citizens in the district.

As the presidential election swings into high gear, David watches with great fascination as the ongoing campaigns continue to overtake the airwaves with stranger and more unbelievable rhetoric. Generally, he is humored by the unrealistic and hyperbolic assertions made by the candidates. Simultaneously, he is intrigued at the seeming influence that some of the campaigns have on public polls and political alliances. David's political views have always been personally held and privately safeguarded, and he has traditionally been careful about separating his personal convictions from his professional responsibilities with the court. And then the candidates decide to take on immigration.

The first-generation son of an immigrant, David is intensely frustrated by what he deems to be simplistic, one-dimensional positions proliferated by the various campaigns. From David's perspective, the candidates offer unrealistic and insensitive solutions derived from stereotypes and biases, and their proposals seem conjured more to rally greater political fervor, than to effectively address the reasons that drive so many who seek immigration, refuge, or asylum. To be clear, David focuses on immigration from a humanitarian perspective, rather than for its political expedience.

Through his church, David learns that one of the candidates has scheduled a campaign stop on Friday at a local community college in his judicial district. He also learns that an immigration-advocacy group has made plans to gather outside the candidate's venue to protest his positions on immigration issues. With plenty of vacation time on the books, David sees this as an opportunity to have his voice heard and schedules himself out of the office to participate in the demonstration.

On the day of the event, David gathers peacefully with other demonstrators on campus. David raises placards, chants in unison with others, and anonymously exercises his right to free speech. However, when the candidate arrives, the event takes a sudden turn and devolves into pushing, shouting, chaos, fighting, and arrests. David tries to avoid the melee and attempts to leave campus. However, as he is working his way through the crowd, one of the network reporters recognizes him and approaches David for an eyewitness account of the chaos that has erupted. David politely declines, but not before his voice, image, and title are flashed on live "breaking" television news.

On the following Monday morning, you arrive in the office to a voicemail message requesting David's and your presence in the office of Chief Judge McDonald, your boss for the last three years. Judge McDonald informs the two of you that Judge Steve Armstrong, the senior judge on the bench, is calling for David's dismissal due to behavior that Judge Armstrong deems "unethical and in extremely poor judgment." Judge Armstrong points out that at 9:00 a.m., he is scheduled to preside over the daily criminal calendar on which several of the protestors are to make initial appearances, and that David's appearance on the news places the court in a very precarious position. David is instructed to return to his office and await further direction so that Judge McDonald can talk with you independently.

After David leaves, Judge McDonald shares that Judge Armstrong is an ardent supporter of the candidate that David chose to protest on Friday. Judge McDonald acknowledges his support for David's desire to exercise his constitutional rights, including his right to free speech and to private political activity, even though he may disagree with David's personal political positions. However, Judge McDonald also confides that, even before Judge Armstrong contacted him, Judge McDonald had already been contacted by his court reporter, the elected county clerk, the chief juvenile probation officer, the sheriff, and the state court administrator — all of whom saw David's brief appearance in the live video feed on Friday night.

Judge McDonald asks you to consider David's conduct in the context of the prevailing ethical code and to return to his office at 1:30 p.m. with one or more recommendations for addressing this situation. Judge McDonald notes that while David appeared to try and exercise appropriate discretion by protecting his identity and his position with the court, the network reporter ultimately identified him publicly by name and court position when the video footage aired on the Saturday morning news.

## The Respondents

Karl E. Thoennes III, court administrator for the Second Judicial District in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, and Eric Silverberg, court administrator for the Cochise County Superior Court in Bisbee, Arizona, agreed to review this month's scenario and offer their individual responses to the questions that follow.

## The Questions

**Judge Armstrong seeks to have David’s employment terminated for conduct deemed “unethical and in extremely poor judgment.” Do you agree that David has acted unethically? Do you agree that David’s conduct is sufficiently egregious to warrant termination? Why or why not?**

Karl agreed with Judge Armstrong and felt that David had, in fact, acted unethically because “David’s actions could very well damage the public’s perception of the fairness, neutrality, and the unbiased character and obligations of the court.” Karl noted that even if David was not formally assigned as the court’s public-relations officer, as a matter of both habit and practical reality, David had established a close relationship with the media on the court’s behalf and should have known that the event he attended would likely draw media attention. In essence, he should have predicted that, in view of his working rapport with the media, he should have expected no modicum of anonymity at such an event. “His media relationship and public profile is not something he can switch on and off when he walks through the courthouse doors.”

Further, Karl believed that a termination decision would depend on the extent to which the court’s personnel rules and policies integrated either NACM’s or the court’s code of ethical conduct. Karl opined that David exercised poor judgment in this situation, but he also demonstrated the good sense to discretely exit the event once he recognized that the situation was deteriorating. Karl acknowledged that David declined to comment, an indication that he understood the precarious position in which he found himself. David also followed the letter, though not necessarily the spirit, of the NACM Code of Conduct in reference to appropriate political activity by court employees — an additional, mitigating factor in considering termination.

Eric disagreed that David had acted unethically, and he asserted, “Termination is not appropriate.” Rather, Eric characterized this situation to be a good teaching opportunity for both David and the whole organization, and he suggested that it should be used as such. In drawing his conclusion, Eric noted that David had not affirmatively raised or disclosed his position with the court, and he had not been subjected to any criminal charges against him. Instead, David simply “exercised his first amendment right to express himself.”

However, in considering the court’s response, Eric pointed out that the scenario did not offer any information regarding the nature or known history of the group that organized the

protest. For instance, it was unknown whether the protest organization had a known history of aggressive tactics, civil unrest, or individual arrests. Eric concluded that David’s participation in a protest with an organizing group that had this unsettling history should warrant significant discipline because he knew or should have known of this potential and how his participation might reflect poorly upon the court.

**As a court employee and a court leader, did David have an ethical obligation to consider his public recognizability or media notoriety before choosing to attend the demonstration? Did he have an ethical obligation to seek and obtain the permission of you or the chief judge before engaging in political activity? Why or why not?**

Eric did not feel that David had an obligation to consider his professional capacity, or that he had an obligation to provide notice or seek permission to participate in the protest, as long as the advocacy group had no known history of civil unrest or public arrests.

Karl disagreed, even though nothing in NACM’s Code of Conduct specifically required David to seek permission. He suggested that seeking permission or providing notice of his intent to participate would have been a much better practice for David. Despite this suggestion, Karl offered that he, like David, probably would not have done so, and that reconciling one’s deep-seated convictions with one’s professional obligations to the judicial branch is something all court leaders are expected to do regularly. “On the day we can no longer serve both with a clear conscience, we have to make a choice.”

**Canon 4 of NACM’s Model Code of Conduct suggests that a court professional shall participate in political activity “strictly as a private citizen” and “only during non-court hours, using only non-court resources.” Is it relevant that David engaged in political activity during work hours, while drawing vacation pay? Why or why not? Was it relevant that he was not formally assigned to serve as the court’s public information officer?**

Karl responded, “It would be nice if we could draw neat, clear time-of-day boundaries around public perceptions, but the news cycle and resulting public images and impressions just don’t work that way.” Further, he noted that while the current NACM code sets forth language about time of day and even the “private-citizen” clause, this distinction has lost most of its meaning over time. In this regard, Karl suggested that it was

the public's perception of David's presence, and not the leave status which David occupied at the time, which is relevant.

Eric wholeheartedly disagreed and argued that the time of day was irrelevant. David followed the court's leave policy and was on his own time when he participated in the protest.

Karl and Eric agreed that it was irrelevant that David was not formally assigned to serve as the court's public information officer. Eric indicated that as long as David was perceived by the public to serve in this capacity, it was not relevant whether the court formally assigned him to perform this function. In concurring, Karl reminded that "we all do tasks every day that are not neatly or specifically assigned to us." He concluded that court employees are not absolved from their ethical obligations simply because they are performing a task that is not, otherwise, formally assigned to them or established in their job descriptions.

**As the assistant trial court administrator, a court leadership position by definition, David will have greater exposure to local and state leaders in all three branches of government. Does David's position create a higher ethical standard to consider when thinking about engaging in political activity? Why or why not?**

Karl believed that David had an obligation to adhere to a higher ethical standard due to the nature of his position, and especially due to the more frequent media contact that he regularly had. Karl reminded that "the more media contact that you routinely have, the more your actions and opinions will be noticed." He also suggested that the more visibility that a court position has, the greater the likelihood that the press will take notice. For instance, "If a deputy court clerk is arrested on a DUI charge, it's less likely a single case like that would make the news. On the other hand, if I were arrested on a DUI charge, or any of the judges, it would most definitely make the local news. That's simply the reality."

Eric agreed, and argued that David's role in executive and interdepartmental circles places a high responsibility on him to instill and maintain the public's trust and confidence in the courts.

**Given this scenario, what suggestions or guidelines do you recommend to other court leaders to assist them in managing political activity among their court staff? In your opinion, do court leaders have any role in managing political activity by court employees beyond regular work hours, and outside the use of court resources? Why or why not?**

Eric recognized the difficult challenges raised between a court employee's personally held rights and her ethical and professional responsibilities to the judicial branch. In this regard, he promoted topic-specific training, using scenarios similar to this one, to engage court employees in a discussion and show them what can happen. At the very least, Eric felt it was important to remind staff that individual conduct should not be publicly perceived as a poor reflection upon the judiciary. He also emphasized the need to remind employees that courts routinely adjudicate cases that are drawn from community controversies and conflict. Court leaders and their employees should be perceived as fair and unbiased, despite potentially having differing personal values or opinions.

Karl responded that court managers and leaders do have roles beyond the courthouse doors to the extent that political activity by court employees influences the public's perception of and confidence in the courts. However, Karl, too, acknowledged the difficulty in balancing political activity against the public's perception of the courts — as discerned through the actions of court employees. As examples, Karl cited lawn signs, political bumper stickers on employees' cars in the courthouse parking lot, and political contributions by court employees as areas in which a careful balance between individual rights and specific, well-crafted codes of conduct is necessary. Karl suggested that court leaders should simply ask themselves, "If a member of the public knew I was a court employee and saw me doing this, what would it make her think of the court's fairness and impartiality?" He added that answering this question will help in writing local codes of conduct or applying the NACM code to ensure this balance.

**When you return to Judge McDonald's chambers at 1:30 p.m., what recommendations will you make to address this situation? How will you reconcile your recommendations with Judge Armstrong's direction? How will you reconcile your recommendations in the face of David's insistence that he acted within the parameters of the ethical code, and in the spirit of his constitutional rights?**

Karl offered a sequential process for considering David's conduct in this scenario. First, he reminded that Judge Armstrong's conflicting political and individual viewpoint should have no bearing on how this situation is handled and that to allow otherwise just compounded the ethical problems here. Second, Karl noted that David seemed to follow the letter of the code of conduct, so he would not recommend termination. Rather, he recommended that 1) David ought to be removed from his de facto media role for the court and the responsibilities should be clearly reassigned to the court administrator or someone else who has a better sense of caution and boundaries, and 2) the court should spend some time engaging its employees on the complex topic of balancing personal and political convictions with our obligations to the court and the public.

Eric, again, noted the importance of knowing whether the protest group had a known history of violence, unrest, or individual arrests. Assuming the group did not, Eric suggested administrative leave with pay for a few weeks to ensure that no charges will be filed against David. He also believed the court administrator should immediately assume PIO duties and advise the employee to disengage with the media on this issue and have nothing to do with any of the cases involved, nor any contact with the persons involved. Eric again promoted the need for training and, in this situation, employee counseling so that David will gain the necessary understanding of the inherent professional risks that may accrue due to a court leader's decision to publicly exercise his individual rights. Within this, Eric highlighted the need for court employees to consider the consequences of their actions before engaging in public conduct that might jeopardize the role they play in the court. Eric concluded that David's actions, even if unintended, reflected poorly on the judiciary, and that if he fails to understand or "own" it, his future advancement as a court leader may be called into question.

Karl offered a few final thoughts in responding to this scenario. He acknowledged that just because we're court employees does not mean we surrender our constitutional rights — a sentiment contrary to the expressed thoughts of the senior judge in the introduction, above. Simultaneously, the public must have profound confidence that the courts, and the people who work for them, are not biased in any way. Ultimately, the extent to which courts succeed in fulfilling this responsibility is measured by public perception; the public seldom distinguishes between judicial officers, who have the authority to exercise judicial discretion and determine case outcomes, and court administrative professionals, who have little-to-no actual influence but are perceived to have it. While court leaders and employees have a good understanding of our roles, the general public does not recognize or understand the same distinctions. And, as Karl reminded, "The public watches us, probably more carefully than we ever imagine, and we need to be mindful of their attention."

As postelection, political debate continues to overwhelm our local airwaves, I applaud Eric's and Karl's courage in reviewing this issue's ethical scenario and providing such thought-provoking responses. In a nation that values free speech and has historically embraced the foundations of passive resistance, Karl's and Eric's thoughts really struck a chord. Notwithstanding NACM's Model Code of Conduct, and the fundamental assertion that individuals who work for courts retain their individual rights just as other citizens, to what extent ought a judicial-branch employee participate in a public rally with the full intent of getting arrested in the name of passive resistance? Perhaps, we should save that for another day.

As always, I welcome your thoughts, feedback, and further discussion regarding this scenario. Also, should you have an idea for a future ethics article or would like to be contacted to respond to a future scenario, please let me know at your convenience, at [fmaiocco@co.kitsap.wa.us](mailto:fmaiocco@co.kitsap.wa.us). Finally, I encourage you to consult the National Association for Court Management's ethics webpage, at [www.ncsconline.org/Nacmethics](http://www.ncsconline.org/Nacmethics), for other ethics scenarios, which may be used for training of local court staff.

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#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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# IJS Exchange

A COLUMN DEDICATED TO THE EXCHANGE OF IDEAS ON INFORMATION SHARING IN JUSTICE

Over the past few years there's been a lot of buzz about an "up-and-coming" technology called **online dispute resolution (ODR)**. Even though we're just starting to hear more about ODR in courts, a recent *Resource Bulletin* published by the Joint Technology Committee reminds us that it has been around in some form since the early days of ecommerce (think eBay, Amazon, and other e-merchant sites).<sup>1</sup> In the cyber-shopping world, ODR is used to settle disputes between online sellers and buyers where it's not only about online transactions but also about communication between the parties, which is *facilitated* online, hence the "O" in this type of dispute resolution. Another gray area for some of us is the difference between ODR and ADR (alternative dispute resolution), and the *Resource Bulletin* gives a great explanation and a thorough history of each (see the JTC page at NCSC.org). In this column, we'll concentrate on the *Resource Bulletin's* definition of ODR in the courts as an *online medium for resolving disputes from beginning to end, using artificial intelligence and communication technologies* to ensure due process and that legal boundaries, local rules, and court preferences are followed.

## Why ODR?

In a word, ODR is all about **efficiency**. It facilitates faster outcomes, costs less, and alleviates a lot of hassle for court customers. As the *Resource Bulletin* reminds us, court benchmarks include metrics on access, case age/progress, time to disposition, cost, etc., and courts that are using ODR are seeing tremendous improvements in each of these areas. For example, the ODR system implemented in several Michigan district courts has reduced the time to resolution for disputed cases from months to *days*, a significant improvement in caseload and disposition rates, and with all parties still "at the table" — the offender, law enforcement, and the judge or magistrate. As these courts and their customers are finding, ODR isn't about discarding procedure or cutting corners; rather, it reinforces court rules while adding conveniences that help to ensure people follow them.

ODR technology incorporates artificial intelligence (AI) to help guide the customer through options, route information automatically, and arrive at outcomes driven by the data. That means that efficiency is enhanced even further by an **increase in accuracy**; less manual intervention and handling simply decreases any opportunity for error. Another gain

when we let the rules drive the process? Court staff develop into **knowledge workers**, moving away from performing routine tasks and toward helping their court evolve by using information and expertise.

## Why Now?

Because of the efficiencies inherent in ODR, we have a real opportunity to reduce (and perhaps even eradicate?) the factors that make it too expensive for many people to have their dispute resolved through the court system. Even if ODR is focused primarily on minor violations and straightforward matters involving small-claims, landlord/tenant, or domestic disputes, we stand to dramatically increase accessibility and affordability for thousands who might not otherwise have "their day in court." When we make the system more available and easier to understand, when we move cases more precisely and faster, when we decrease the administrative resources needed to handle cases, the outcome tends to be greater efficiency at lower costs for everyone.

Think about the benefits when all case participants perform their role online, rather than having to coordinate calendars, travel, arrange child care, or take time from work or other obligations. The *Resource Bulletin* reminds us that many cases may require multiple trips to the court, multiplying the burden each time. Even video conferencing cannot eliminate all the challenges, especially for the parties themselves. Per a Court Innovations study, almost 40 percent of people who used Michigan's ODR system reported they would not have been able to appear in court in person. Not only has ODR made court accessible to these folks, the study shows that they paid their fines and fees faster and that collection rates rose dramatically. Is it possible that when people are satisfied that

### TOP ODR BENEFITS (so far)

- Faster case resolution
- Reduced costs to participants and jurisdictions
- Increases in overall accessibility
- Higher overall customer satisfaction, as well as greater satisfaction with outcomes

"Online Dispute Resolution and the Courts," *JTC Resource Bulletin*, November 30, 2016.



“. . . the online traffic dispute system implemented in several Michigan district courts has reduced the time to resolution for disputed cases from months to days, though all parties still ‘came to the table’—the offender, law enforcement, and the judge or magistrate.”

“Online Dispute Resolution and the Courts,”  
*JTC Resource Bulletin*, November 30, 2016.

the court has “heard” them they are more motivated to clear up their own obligations? (That is a rhetorical question, friends.)

## ODR Expansion Is Underway

Several courts are now piloting ODR around the globe, including small claims in British Columbia and the United Kingdom and divorce in the Netherlands. Several U.S. courts have implemented ODR for small claims, traffic, and landlord/tenant, and are considering other case types as the technology continues to mature and opportunities are uncovered. The *JTC Resource Bulletin* includes implementation overviews and outcome statistics (where available) for several of these projects, including:

- Small claims in Ohio
- Traffic and parking in Michigan
- Landlord/Tenant in Utah and New York

The *Bulletin* also offers several points to consider as you embark on your own ODR journey.

1. No matter where your court is located or the types of cases you handle, you must consider integration, security, privacy, and ongoing support requirements, as well as the impact of ODR on existing policy and procedure.
2. Even cases that are not suitable for full-on ODR may benefit from certain elements. Consider whether *any part* of a dispute is resolvable online. Break the process down into pieces and perhaps automate some of them through ODR.
3. Who is the appropriate audience for which models of ODR in your court? It doesn't have to be an all-or-nothing approach; maybe ODR is used exclusively for certain cases and as an option for others. You will also need to consider whether ODR will serve parties who are self-represented or those with legal counsel (or both) and how that may affect certain processes.
4. Think about how to make ODR available to as much of your audience as possible by including access via

desktops, laptops, smartphones, or kiosks. Remember that the user experience must fit the device and the people most likely to use that device, so insist on solutions that are responsive to device and user nuances.

5. Perhaps the most important consideration is ensuring that your ODR platform facilitates fair, just, and timely outcomes. It does no good to simply automate a frustrating or confusing process that doesn't move the parties toward an agreeable resolution. Your ODR system must be intelligent enough to distinguish which cases can be resolved through ODR and which should take a more traditional path, no matter where they are in the process.

As noted throughout this column, the *JTC Resource Bulletin* is packed with additional information and is a “must read” for any court interested in exploring online dispute resolution. Even if you remain unconvinced that ODR has a place in your court, you'll find the *Bulletin* a great source of information to share with others inside and outside of your court.

## Join our Team

One of the best ways to stay informed about court initiatives is to get involved with the IJIS Courts Advisory Committee. Whether you work for a government agency or in private industry, we make it easy to join ICAC:

- Visit <https://ijis.site-ym.com/?page=Membership>
- Email [membership@ijis.org](mailto:membership@ijis.org) with the subject line “I want to join ICAC”

### NOTES

1. “Online Dispute Resolution and the Courts,” *JTC Resource Bulletin* (November 30, 2016). Online at <http://www.ncsc.org/~media/Files/PDF/About%20Us/Committees/JTC/ODR%20QR%20final%20V1%20-%20Nov.ashx>.

## EXCHANGING IDEAS

If there's something you'd like to see covered in an upcoming IJIS Exchange, let us know!

Email [sue.humphreys@equivant.com](mailto:sue.humphreys@equivant.com) with your suggestion.



## Thinking Out of the Box to Provide Exceptional Customer Service

Interview conducted and edited by Matthew Kleiman

# Courtside Conversation

STACEY MARZ

## Background

Director, Self-Help Services at Alaska State Court System

ICM Fellow – 2016

### *How did you get started in court administration?*

My first real job after law school was as a clerk for the Alaska Supreme Court. After two years I left the court system and worked half-time as an environmental lawyer and half-time as legal-services lawyer doing poverty law. And then in 2003, Katherine Alteneider, whom I had job-shared with at Alaska Legal Services, invited me to job-share with her again running the first self-help center in Alaska. When she left the court system, I ended up staying on as the director of the self-help program and getting deeply involved in Alaska's access-to-justice initiatives. Katherine now directs the Self-Represented Litigation Network.

### *What is unique about Alaska's self-help center?*

The self-help center, created in 2001, is the first, completely remote delivery self-help center in the United States. A staff of four "facilitators" answer a toll-free helpline. The facilitators do not give legal advice, but they provide callers with an abundance of information and options, as well as forms. The focus in our self-help center is primarily family law, because that is where the need is greatest. Two staff attorneys manage special projects, including settlement calendars in our Early Resolution Program. This is a triage program where newly filed contested divorce and custody cases involving two self-represented parties get assigned either unbundled volunteer

attorneys, mediators, or a settlement judge to help resolve their disputes. Eighty percent routinely resolve by agreement in one hearing. Remote appearances of parties by phone or video at the hearings and remote assistance by attorneys and mediators are routine.

Alaska is an incredibly large state with a very spread-out population. And the majority of the communities in Alaska are not located on road systems. They are only accessible by plane or snow machine in the winter, or plane or boat in the summer. This makes it very difficult for people to physically go to a courthouse. The remote model meets our unique challenges here in Alaska.

### *Can you provide an example of how the self-help center assists court users?*

We might get a caller who says, "I just got served with divorce papers from my husband. He cleaned out the bank account. My heat's about to get shut off and I have no money to buy food for my kids." The facilitators will follow up with a series of questions to better understand the current situation and context.

The end result might be, "Okay. We'll talk about how to address that divorce complaint in a moment, but why don't you get a pen right now and let me give you the food bank resources for your community. Let me give you the contact information for energy assistance." I like to think of the process as containing the hemorrhage of what their life could become at that moment if all the things go wrong. Once the non-legal issues have been addressed, the facilitator might say, "Okay, let's talk about your divorce case and what's involved with answering that complaint and the timelines and the forms and the process." We try to have a more holistic approach to addressing what the people present to us when they call in.

**Granted**, I'm not drawing or painting or doing things that I might have historically thought were really creative, but I get to **think outside the box a lot**. I would have never thought working for a court would be a **creative adventure**, but I really feel like it has been.

### *What strategies do you employ to build better teamwork?*

I encourage my staff to consult with each other when challenges come up, especially when they are working with customers. Because we are working with all of our customers on the phone, my staff are able to put somebody on hold and go seek out some assistance from their colleagues about how to approach a particular caller. They are able to help each other a lot, which also builds their knowledge base in how to address situations and helps create a free-flow-of-information environment.

I also seek out the advice of my staff on a regular basis when I make program changes or develop content or forms or website information. Because they are dealing with our customers on a daily basis, they understand their needs much more intimately than I do. By seeking their input, I hope that it makes them feel valued, because I very much value the expertise that they bring to this office.

### *How would you describe your management style?*

I think it is really important to find the strengths that individual staff members have, and let them use those strengths. When there is latitude to develop special programs that are of interest to individual staff members, I give them the opportunity to pursue them. Of course, staff need to get their core jobs done. I also place an emphasis on creating a collaborative work environment. I have limited control over how much my employees are paid, but I can do a lot to create a good working environment.

### *How does your background shape the way that you do work?*

I went to college for graphic arts, and I thought I was going to be an artist. I didn't think I was going to be a lawyer. The thing that I like most about the work that I currently do is that I get to be really creative and innovative. Because of my creative background I am able to identify innovative solutions to access-to-justice issues in ways that others might not be able to see. Granted, I'm not drawing or painting or doing things that I might have historically thought were really creative, but I get to think outside the box a lot. I would have never thought working for a court would be a creative adventure, but I really feel like it has been. And I feel really lucky and fired up to come to work every day because I get to work on so many interesting and innovative programs.

### *What makes you good at what you do?*

I think I am effective at what I do because I am a creative thinker. I look at challenges in terms of "How can we make this happen?" as opposed to "No, we can't do this." And so I'm always searching for ways that we can change things to improve our operations or how we serve the public, because that's the end goal. My passion is providing access to justice. And I look at all of court operations through that lens.

Never lose **sight** that, ultimately, we serve the public — many of whom do not have attorneys or **experience** in the court system.

*What do you think distinguishes a great employee from the rest?*

I would say it's openness to change. Openness to thinking about things from different perspectives. Having a willingness to try new things and learn from what isn't working out perfectly. Adapting. This includes continued evaluation and analysis of how to meet the goals that we're setting. And being willing to try new things.

Also, a great employee must have the ability and willingness to provide exceptional customer service. This involves having empathy because customers often interact with the court because something isn't going well in their lives — whether it is because their family is falling apart, there was a domestic violence incident, they lost a loved one, they've been charged with a crime, or the state removed a child from their home. I feel strongly that we need to go to great lengths to make sure all customers have the best experience possible and feel like they are treated well by staff who show respect, listen, and provide as much assistance as they can.

*What advice do you have for new or incoming court professionals?*

Never lose sight that, ultimately, we serve the public — many of whom do not have attorneys or experience in the court system. I think it is really incumbent upon court managers to look at court operations through the eyes of the users. All of them. And take as many steps as possible to enhance access to justice.

*What are some the biggest unanswered challenges that currently face the courts or that will be facing the courts in the next 10 to 15 years?*

I worry that courts aren't changing quickly enough to meet user needs. I think courts have been very slow to change in terms of recognizing that so many people are representing themselves. For many years, I approached self-help traditionally, like a lot of places do, which is trying to teach litigants how to be lawyers during the life of their case. And a few years ago it struck me that this was really ridiculous and unlikely to be very successful.

When you are talking about some case types that approach 90 percent of the people who are representing themselves, it seems ludicrous to me that we are not changing the system to meet the users' needs. And by that, I mean simplifying processes so that they make sense to the people that are using them. I really think that courts need to simplify and break the existing mold and say, "If I was going to create a new system today, what would it look like?" And start there and see how to build something that makes sense for today's users.



# Management Musings

GIUSEPPE M. FAZARI

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## Smart Company

We all know how easy it is to become complacent, to settle into the places and routines that make us comfortable, but what about the people with whom we choose to keep company? In the first season of *True Detective*, Rust Cohle, played by Matthew McConaughey, laments the monotony of his career as a detective, “Days of nothing . . . that’s what it’s like, you work cases. Days like lost dogs.” It is quite the revelation Detective Cohle has and not because he’s mostly right or entirely wrong, but because it illuminates the import of the environment we create for ourselves. Such reflection necessarily requires tapping into a consciousness that exists outside the primitive parts of the brain. What strikes me most about his epiphany (and is relevant here) is that until you’re challenged, you’re too smart for where you are and to be a “lost dog” translates to me to being in the wrong line of work or, at best, the wrong room.

There are variations to the adage, which is often cited without attribution, “If you’re the smartest person in the room, then you’re in the wrong room.” It highlights the importance of one’s network and perhaps not entirely in the way we traditionally think. In a 2015 *Forbes* article, “Why Being the Smartest Person in the Room Is Overrated,” Alastair Dryburgh discussed an “aha moment” he had while working for one particular boss he called Simon. During a training retreat, the team of four managers and Simon were completing an aptitude assessment, or what could be referred to as an “intelligence test,” when he noticed that Simon was laboring through the evaluation. Each manager of the team got through it with comparative ease and with no subsequent work to complete, they sat at the table and waited for Simon to finish. For many bosses, this kind of scenario playing out would have made them more than a little red in the face, but it hadn’t for Simon. It was then that Dryburgh realized the secret to Simon’s success — he was very comfortable seeking out and

hiring managers who were smarter than him. The author goes on to explain how over the next 20 years, Simon would go on to have not only an extraordinary career in the industry, but one in which was more successful than any of the ostensibly smarter people sitting at that table. Seems simple enough then — surround oneself with the smartest people one can associate with and allow success to manifest itself — but it’s easier said than done because it has more to do with Simon’s persona than merely a strategy.

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Bzzz . . . bzzz. Bzzz . . . bzzz. I could hear my mobile buzzing in the car’s cup holder as I began pulling into my driveway. As I put the car into park, I picked it up and saw that it was Toni.

“Hey Toni!” I greeted.

“I’m sorry. I remembered that you were traveling for work this week, but I couldn’t recall when you were getting back.”

“No worries — I’m actually just pulling into the driveway.”

“We’ve been missing each other as of late, but I have you on my calendar for tomorrow to meet up at the new coffee shop in Meyersville.”

“That’s right. I didn’t forget. I’m having a cup of their cocoa mint tea as we speak. You being the connoisseur of tea, I’m curious to know what you think.”

“That fusion of cocoa peel and peppermint would actually hit the spot with the weather being what it is.”

“You’re not kidding. It’s a good thing I remembered to keep my fleece and jacket with me on the plane because there was a 40-degree difference in Phoenix.”

“Is that where you were?”

“Yeah — for a couple of days. I flew back today so I didn’t have to take the red-eye yesterday.”

“The meeting ran that late?”

“Well, by the time it was done, it would have been very difficult to make the last flight — and that one had a short layover in Charlotte. So I got dinner with some colleagues who were also staying back and then caught up with some email.”

“The same folks attending the meeting?” Toni asked.

“Right,” I confirmed.

“How was it?”

“The dinner or the meeting?” I asked.

“The trip — generally.”

“Dinner was good. The meeting was intense.”

“How so?”

“Well, I’m using intense as a euphemism to say that I was probably the least qualified person sitting in the room.”

“I doubt that,” Toni retorted.

“No — I’m serious. I’m okay with it, but if you added up the years of experience of the dozen or so attending the meeting, they probably had close to four hundred years’ worth.”

“I gather you were the youngest then?” Toni asked.

“Probably. But it wasn’t just that — individually, they are very sharp, which complements the great experience they have.”

“I envy you,” Toni stated.

“Me! I envy you. I also envy the colleague sitting across from me at the meeting. She was telling us about a recent delegation from Morocco she hosted so that they could learn about her court’s state-of-the-art e-filing system. She’s quite accomplished — trilingual and was at one point an administrator at The Hague.”

“Sounds like you made some good connections.”

“I did. Her court is driving distance from mine, so she also invited me to coordinate our schedules so that I can see their e-filing system in practice.”

“Like I said — I envy you,” Toni reiterated. “It’s not everyone who gets to sit . . .” She stopped short of making a point and asked, “Was this a national committee that you were appointed to?”

“Yes.”

“Even better. Not everyone avails themselves to the opportunities that are presented to them. And sometimes when folks do take the opportunities, they still don’t make the most of them.”

“So being the most inexperienced and probably least informed is not always bad?”

“Indeed — best possible position as far as I’m concerned, considering where you are in your career. Just make sure you make the most of your exposure.”

“Any suggestions on how to do that?”

“Nothing beyond what I already know you do—learn from them, ask questions, listen, think, and be guided by some of the wisdom they are generous enough to share. And don’t be intimidated just because you’re not on par with them. You’re smart enough to be in the room, so they’ll spot you the strokes if you know what I mean.”

“I don’t play golf, but I know enough that it’s more than a few strokes,” I quipped.

“Whatever the gap is, it doesn’t matter. In fact, I’ll take it a step further and tell you that you’ll know when it’s time to move on from this group or any career position in life when you’re no longer in learning gear. When everyone but you is learning, then you’ve probably already overstayed your visit.”

“I see that you’ve switched to a car analogy in the hopes that your advice makes more sense to me. So stay out of neutral is what you’re saying.”

“Neutral! If you’re in neutral, depending on the topography, who knows where you’ll end up. I’m talking about being in fifth gear in the left lane with no one else around you—and the folks you passed are miles behind you. It’s time to slow down, plan on taking an exit, and make your way onto a different road.”

“So downshift and go onto a road where you have lots of folks around you and ahead of you?”

“You got it. You’ll be navigating new terrain and not just learning, but exercising your mental gymnastics. That’s how you stay engaged, get better — smarter.”

“You do realize that most people would be discomforted by leaving a team where they’re the all-star?”

“Yes—many choose to remain tethered.”

“Tethered?” I asked.

“Yes — like an elephant.”

“Okay — no idea what you’re talking about, so you’ll have to explain the analogy.”

“It’s not as complicated as you think. When I was about five or six, the circus came to a neighboring town where I was living. Before the first show the following day, my parents took me to see all the animals outside the tents. I recall how incredible it was seeing all those exotic animals for the first time, but the thing that stands out most was how frightened I was when I saw the elephants.”

“Why the elephants? I thought it would have been the clowns.”

“No — the elephants. They had about ten of them lined up next to each other and they weren’t pleased to see all the onlookers. They roared and rumbled and I remember being completely terrified.”

“But why? How close were they?” I asked.

“Not too close — maybe a hundred feet. But the thing that frightened me was that we were in an open lot. There were no barriers separating us from them, and the only thing keeping them on their end of the lot was this tether in the ground that was shackled to their ankle.”

“Are you sure? Were they fully grown, because those must have been some strong chains?”

“They were fully grown, and that’s exactly it. Even as a child I knew they were strong enough to easily break through and stampede us.”

“Hmm. But they didn’t obviously.”

“No they didn’t — and it wasn’t until many years later that I learned why.”

“Probably has something to do with training,” I guessed.

“Yes — but there’s more to it. It’s a classic case of conditioning. The tether is first used by trainers on young elephants who chain one of their legs to a stake in the ground. Because they are still small and not strong enough to break it, the tether keeps them in place. As they age and grow bigger and more powerful, their minds become conditioned to think that they aren’t strong enough to break the tether and make no effort to breach it.”

“Incredible.”

“Make sure the same doesn’t happen to you.”

“I guess I’m the elephant in this story?”

“The point is to not get tied down to one place because you’ve been conditioned to think that you belong there. That you’re not strong enough — smart enough — to be in a different place with different people. Understand?”

“I do,” I acknowledged.

“What you come to understand and are able to teach others is obviously also important. But you can’t allow yourself to be tethered so to speak to the same environment and people simply because that’s what you’ve grown accustomed to and you’re very comfortable. You’re doing yourself an injustice — no pun intended.”

“Good one, Toni. But I’ll go back to my point where I said what you’re saying is not realistic.”

“Why not?” she asked.

“Because when individuals work hard to get to a certain point in life and other people are looking up to them, some — many people — like to stay on that perch and coast.”

“True. But if they’re not learning from those around them than they’re not contributing to their own growth and they’re wasting their time. Of course, not everyone has the privilege of these kinds of choices, but I’m talking about your typical, educated professional who’s lucky enough to be in this position.”

“So don’t become tethered to the same circle of people simply because you’re unchallenged by them.”

“Remember what I’ve always told you — the people in your life become a part of your experiences. Everyone becomes the sum of their experiences. When you have a choice in the matter, choose wisely.”

“That’s why I’ll choose to have some of that cocoa peppermint tea with you tomorrow,” I said.

“Thank you for that, but I too learn a great deal from you.

“It’s pretty lopsided on who’s the benefactor of our discussions, but thank you for the kind words.”

“I’m not sure you’re entirely correct, but we can argue about it more tomorrow. I’m going to let you go but before I do, remember that even though many may avoid it, one of the important ways to reach that higher plane of living and thinking — and not just at work — is to develop a healthy

As a court **administrator**, having this understanding enables her to be a **better** allocator of talent by **recruiting** the right blend of managers who can complement each other's **growth and learning**.

confidence in your own talents and abilities to not just be in the presence of smarter people, but to seek them out. That's how you'll continue to learn in what should be your quest to meet your full potential."

"Words to live by Toni — thank you."

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In their book *Heart, Smarts, Guts, and Luck*, authors Tjan, Harrington, and Hsieh discuss a number of topical areas related to business leadership and personal development. Among the essential ingredients they address is the ability to recognize one's strengths and weaknesses and then surround oneself with individuals who can mitigate your shortcomings. On any given day, a court administrator may deal with a diverse variety of issues including finance, human resources, emergency management, caseload matters, and operational crises. It is not likely that any one administrator can be (or should be) the smartest person in the room when it comes to all of these professional areas of expertise. As a court administrator, having this understanding enables her to be a better allocator of talent by recruiting the right blend of managers who can complement each other's growth and learning. Tjan and associates contended that while this commonsense principle is not revolutionary, it is not commonly followed because individuals are not always intellectually honest and active in pursuing the truth.

Ideas transform reality, but before these thoughts become material, the genesis of that idea often comes from our experiences with people. People — those colleagues with whom a manager chooses to be surrounded by — are no less important than the court she reports to and the responsibilities she manages. Complacency then extends beyond places and daily activity to the network of people in which she elects to interact with during the course of her career. Her network

can be a source of inspiration and growth or can shackle her in the same way other circumstances might. Toni's point is a transformational one; that being, personal and professional growth are more likely achieved when you are not surrounded by individuals who have the same limitations and narrowness of experience and knowledge as you. Moreover, to avoid stagnating means to make a conscious effort to network and develop relationships with those who are smarter than you in various realms of life — people who are more charismatic, more technologically savvy, more analytical, more business minded, or are better at writing or speaking. In professional circles, this can be done through networking; in organizations, managers can accomplish this through collaborations, partnerships, and team building; and in one's personal life, opportunities for growth can evolve through our relationships with family, friends, and community members. Any discomfort from not being the "most gifted" will be short-lived and is outweighed by one's accelerated learning and heightened creativity engendered from these groups of people. Compromises that are made so that we always feel like the smartest person in the room may eventually make us feel a lot like Detective Cohle in the end.

And those are just some of my musings on management.

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