



Technical Support Application Form

County Requesting Support:		Date of Request:	
Collin County		October 26, 2020	
Address:		Contact Information	
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Project Name:	Time Period:
Collin County Technical Support Grant	2021-2022

Brief Description:

Collin County's population increased 96% since 2000, from 491,772 to an estimated 1,034,730 in 2019 as stated in the U.S. Census Bureau and Collin County continues to grow with court cases mirroring this growth and increasing day by day.

Please refer to the following number of request for court appointed counsel:

- 2018: 10,991
- 2019: 12,699 and
- 2020: 12,000, the number will be over 12,000 by December of 2020. Need to take into account COVID-19 did bring numbers slightly down.

The Texas Indigent Defense Commission Technical Support Grant will improve indigent defense services in Collin County District and County Courts.

The purpose as well as a primary goal is to process indigent applications in a more opportune, efficient, and cost saving manners to keep within State requirements and to timely address complaints made by defendants. Automation of the application for court appointed counsel will help ensure complete and accurate information. – The Affidavit of Indigence (Refer to Attachment A). This affidavit is used to request counsel and determine if the defendant qualifies for a court appointed attorney. We would like the application to be automated, so that the user, (Indigent/client) will be required to answer all fields before being able to submit. The fields include the following but are not limited to Name, Social Security, Phone Number, Address, City, State, Zip Code, etc...Automation would also prevent issues experienced with illegible handwriting. This Affidavit is not only routed to indigent defense for determination, but also shared with the Judge. The Judge uses the Affidavit for many reasons, one of them being to determine bond for each case using the information provided by clients. Please refer to Attachment A.

The overall objective is to assure that the basic needs of each individual is reacted upon in a fair, timely, and proficient manner.

Additionally, Collin County requests assistance with developing a tracking system for complaints to promote compliance with the Fair Defense Act and implementation of this enhancement will allow detailed documentation of compliance. This will enable the county to track complaints throughout the process and identify attorneys who may need mentoring or additional training.

The following are the number of complaints made by defendants by year:

- 2018: 186
- 2019: 340
- 2020: 500, the number will be over 500 by December of 2020. Need to take in account COVID-19 did bring numbers slightly down.

By updating the manual tracking system used for complaints and automating applications, more assistance can be devoted to processing applications and complaints in a timely manner. Collin County has a need to implement an updated and much needed tracking system for indigent defense complaints, which are currently handled manually and are incredibly time intensive.

Issue to Be Addressed:

Issues that need to be addressed:

Many requirements contained in the Fair Defense Act are time sensitive, and dependence on manual processes often increases the time required to complete two or more tasks.

The first issue deals with automation of the application for court appointed counsel. The application deals with the request for counsel, screening for indigence, to appoint of counsel. This process is at times incomplete and very hard to understand which takes 30 to 45 minutes per application. When completed manually, the applicant may skip fields or miss completing fields and/or provide incomplete information. The applicants may also be illegible.

The following are a few of the means by which applications are submitted:

- US Postal Service
- Walk-in
- Magistration

The process is time intensive and requires multiple steps to complete. The process is further slowed down if the application is illegible and information must be researched to accurately review.

The second issue deals with complaints and currently there is not a system in place and the complaints are tracked manually. Complaints come from multiple sources.

The following are only a few of the sources:

- Emails.
- US Postal Service.
- Walks-in: (The individual completes a form or leaves the minimum, which is not enough to assist and/or understand).
- Kiosk at the jail.

In order to track complaints from defendants, route them, resolve them, and use the data for decision making as to which counsel is having the same complaints or there is concern that they need to be removed from the wheel, it is a multi-step process.

The following is the manual process:

- The complaint is converted to a scan, if it comes from the kiosk we have to go the application, cut, and paste it to our documents.
- We create a document, which provides details about case status such as court dates; dates counsel has seen the client, court, arrest date, filing date.
- On that document, we code it by complaint type, determine how it should be routed and ultimately code the resolution.
- The info is then plugged in to a spreadsheet.
- The original docs are scanned to the counsel file.
- The spreadsheet data is used to let the courts know what type of complaints are being received, volume of complaints and resolution.

The process takes 25+ hours a week, which takes away from assisting clients and working on the applications. This is why it is so imperative that it be automated in order to reduce the man hours involved.

Proposed Project to Address Problem:

Applications for Court appointed counsel would be converted to an electronic format. The user would be required to complete fields and the automation would direct the defendant to the next field based on response. For example if the defendant selected unemployed, the next prompt might be "how long have you been unemployed" and if the defendant selected employed, the prompt would then ask questions regarding pay, employer and length of time employed. The step-by-step/systematic process will be in both English and Spanish.

The tracking system would be developed to track complaints/grievances through the system more quickly. It would eliminate the need for repetitive cutting and pasting. One of the documents manually created requires staff to research the case and note jail visits, court hearings, etc... This task could be entirely automated. Further, the process would be reduced to a format, which would allow search by defendant or attorney and would enable reports to be generated automatically.

The installation of a tracking system will begin the elimination and the need of spreadsheets (hard copies).

The overall objective is to assure that the complaint of each defendant is answered in a fair, timely, and efficient manner.

Specific Assistance Needed from the Task Force:

Collin County requests \$27,786.00 for the complaint tracking system and the automation of The Application for Court Appointed Counsel.

Summary Report

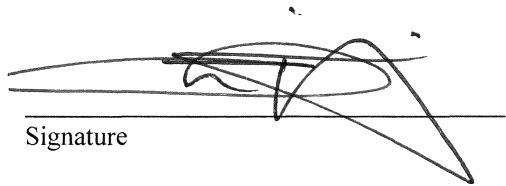
Monthly/Quarterly progress reports as well as Final Project Report will be submitted upon agreed dates. Reporting measures could include: presentation to groups, number of attorneys managed on the list, number of complaints filed, compliance with Fair Defense Act report results, and new functions used in tracking system. Each case will be assured of timely, efficient, and accurate processing with the creation of the new tracking system.

Additional Documentation if Applicable (describe here and attach to this Application)

Attached please find the following:
Attachment A: Affidavit of Indigence/Application for Court Appointed Counsel (hardcopy)
Attachment B: Proposed Budget for Request (hardcopy)

Collin County requests the above Technical Support from the Texas Indigent Defense Commission (Commission). We understand that:

1. The above requested technical support is subject to approval by the Commission.
2. This application does not constitute an agreement until approved and accepted by all parties.
3. Commission reimbursement will only be made for expenses incurred during the period indicated in this request but in no case may it be for expenses prior to the beginning of this agreement or after the end date agreed in writing with the Commission.
4. The county may not obligate Commission funds or staff without a specific written agreement.
5. Disbursement of funds is always subject to the availability of funds.



Signature

CHRIS HILL
Printed Name

24 NOV 2020
Date

COUNTY JUDGE
Title